Places matter. Their rules, their scale, their design include or exclude civil society, pedestrianism, equality, diversity (economic and otherwise), understanding of where water comes from and garbage goes, consumption or conservation. They map our lives.

- Rebecca Solnit

The Lay of the Land

The Center for Land Use Interpretation

UNOCCUPIED TERRITORY
UNVISITED EXHIBIT ABOUT UNVISITED PLACES

Palmyra Atoll, one of the minor outlying island territories of the USA, was transformed during World War II, and is now being reclaimed as a wildlife preserve.

Coast to Coast pairs historic and contemporary photographs along five miles of one Los Angeles road. The exhibit features an online program, printed field guide, and display at CLUI Los Angeles (which at the date of publishing remains closed to the public due to the pandemic).

COAST TO COAST: VENICE BOULEVARD Through the Lens of the Coast Realty Archive, a new exhibit at the CLUI, examines a stretch of roadway outside the front door of the Center's office in Los Angeles, with old and new images exploring modern changes to this sample of the Los Angeles streetscape.

The exhibit uses images from the Center's Coast Realty Archive, a collection of thousands of old real estate listings, acquired from Coast Realty, a former real estate office located next door to the

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Editor's Note

During this pandemic year, the Center has been working from home, using remote ways of seeing, as well as focusing our attention locally. This is reflected in two new exhibits produced for our Los Angeles space over this year: one about the most inaccessible, remote, and far-flung parts of the USA—its unoccupied island territories—and the other, an exhibit examining the neighborhood right outside our front door. One looks at the vestiges of America's global empire; the other looks at the minutiae of a (sort of) ordinary street. At the moment, though, the most immediate things are these words you are reading here, now, in the newsletter itself, which brings notions from the wide world, to your eyes and mind. For those of you reading this in its printed form, there is the additional tactile experience you are having with the physical material of this informational medium—paper—whose production throughout the land is also explored in this newsletter, in another dialogue about the local and remote. Whether you are reading an electronic or paper copy, it's in your hands now, and we are on the same page. Glad to share this immediate space with you, and wish you the best of all possible futures, when whatever is on the horizon finally arrives.
CLUI headquarters on Venice Boulevard. The listings cover a period from the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, and include a photograph of each structure for sale, taken from the street. These images, which have never been seen by the public before, offer a view of the city prior to Google Streetview and the serial street photography of Ed Ruscha and others. Collectively they provide a unique street by street photographic survey of the west side of Los Angeles, at that time.

For *Coast to Coast* we focused on the section of Venice Boulevard between the Coast Realty office (which is now a yoga studio), and the coast of the nation, five miles further west (hence the title, *Coast to Coast*). Photographers, including Nico Young, who was working on the project with the CLUI over the summer (with the support of the Getty Foundation’s Getty Marrow Undergraduate Internship program) were dispatched to take contemporary photos of each site, from as close to the same vantage point as the older image as possible.

Research was also conducted by Mr. Young and others, drawing information from local newspapers, historical society publications, Sanborn maps, historic aerial photographs, as well as public resources such as municipal building and safety department records, and research in the field. This, along with details from the real estate listings themselves, created a layer of information for the sites, and their regional context.

We gradually winnowed down the selection of sites from more than 150 to 30, enough to fill the exhibit space. The old image of the site was coupled with the contemporary image, to create a then/now rephotography display, with brief descriptive captions. These pairings show the transformation that took place from the early city, booming with post-war possibility, to the city of today, and were arranged from east to west, echoing the westward migration and development of the nation, meeting its end, at the coast.

### SOME SITES FROM THE COAST TO COAST EXHIBIT

#### 10526–10528 Venice Boulevard, 1964

Coast Realty Archive photo

This small commercial storefront office building was built in 1951, and though it is only 22 feet wide, it originally had two separate entrances, allowing for two separate businesses to occupy the building. To help make the businesses in the small building more visible, a large roof sign was added in 1970, and a pole sign in 1972. A makeover in the 1980s added rusticated wooden shingles and a stone veneer over the stucco façade, giving the building a bit more character. It is now occupied by Crash Space, a hacker/maker space established here in 2009.

#### 10526–10528 Venice Boulevard, 2020

CLUI photo

#### 11347 Venice Boulevard, 1960

Coast Realty Archive photo

This four-unit boxy modernist stucco apartment building is similar to several along Venice Boulevard. It was constructed in 1956, and while not a true dingbat, as it does not have parking space under the building’s second floor, it is decorated in a dingbat-esque fashion, with a medallion, graphic panels between the windows, and an exotic colonial name, in a tiki-style font. Curiously, listings from a year later show the same structure with the name changed from The Congo to The Conlee. The contemporary photograph shows that the exterior design features have been removed, which is common, as they complicate maintenance. The only distinctive feature remaining is the slightly space-age-y skewed-pitch roof.

#### 11347 Venice Boulevard, 2020

CLUI photo
This commercial storefront along Mar Vista's retail strip was constructed in 1952. It was Arco Electric, an electrician's shop, until 1961, when the building was listed for sale. It became a nursery school, then, in 1963, it became a beer bar. By 1968, the structure was vacant, and reopened as a pool and dance hall, which is how it has continued to be used, including as the Bikini Bar, and El Zacatecas Bar, with go-go girls, pool tables, live music, and beer. Around 2019 it became the ArtBar.LA, a gallery, bar, restaurant, and performance space that hosts artist talks, DJs, bands, and "over the top shows from burlesque to magic, and beyond." Next door, on one side, is a Japanese language and culture nursery school, and on the other, a mixed martial arts self-defense school.

This storefront had space for two separate businesses, and was built in 1950. When it was photographed for a real estate listing in 1962, it was occupied by a ladies hair salon called Opal's Beauty Shop, and the second door led to an owner-occupied bachelor apartment. Today the windows have been sealed up, and the exterior features have been erased, with the exception of the unmarked former bachelor apartment door. A battered sign floating above the building on a pole says "Roman Holiday 24 Hours." Roman Holiday is a "men's relaxation spa" that has been operating since the late 1960s. Inside are jacuzzis, a steam room, and private rooms that can be rented for a few hours.

This building was brand new when it was photographed for its real estate listing in 1965. Located less than a block from the beach, it had five apartments that each rented for around $100 a month. Its exterior lamps have been changed, and a small window has been added, but otherwise the building today looks much as it did more than 50 years ago—though rent is now considerably higher.

*View the complete exhibit on the CLUI website at www.clui.org. Read more about Venice Boulevard on page 15.*
FROM PRINTED BOOKS TO OFFICE reports, and from junk mail to newsletters like this one, paper is still a major communications medium. In other forms, like cardboard folded to make a box, paper becomes the way our purchases come to us, along with much of the supply chain behind them. Then there is the class of paper objects made to be disposed of after absorbing small amounts of moisture, the part of the industry known as tissue, such as paper towels, napkins, toilet paper, and diapers. All of this, and more, adds up to around 90 million tons of paper consumed every year in the USA, or around 700 pounds per person.

Although China’s production and consumption of paper surpassed ours more than ten years ago (they consume around 110 million tons a year, and produce 25% of the world supply), the USA is still the largest per capita consumer of paper. The US makes around 20% of the world supply, and generates much of what it consumes.

Despite the fact that we dispose of 16 billion paper cups a year (and 350 million magazines, and 24 billion newspapers, and…), domestic consumption has decreased most years, since a peak in 2006. Paper use globally, though, is going up, and US plants and companies supply much of it.

There are around 450 paper mills in the USA. Many of them are small or medium sized plants, using pulp supplied by others, to make rolls and sheets of paper. Specialty paper mills make different types of coated paper for specific applications, like glossy paper for magazines and advertising material using high-density color printing. Others make paper that is laminated with plastics for food product containers, like juice and milk cartons.

Paper of this type, as well as office paper, and paper used for quality book printing, is usually made from kraft paper, which is produced from chemically pulped wood. This process uses sulfates and other chemicals to dissolve the lignin in wood, which otherwise breaks down and causes paper to yellow, while preserving the cellulose fibers, which form the structure of paper when it is pressed and dried in the mill. In addition to bleach, which whitens the paper, calcium carbonate and other additives can make this paper harder, denser, and smoother—all better for high-density printing. Lots of wood is lost in chemical pulping, though, and more chemicals are used, making it more than twice as consumptive as the less common second process used for modern paper making, mechanical pulping.

In mechanical pulping, chipped wood is fed into vats of heated water, making a soup, which is ground up mechanically, then squished and squeezed to form paper. Less material is wasted, but the lignin stays in, and later reacts to light and oxygen, making the paper yellow over time. Also, the fibers of cellulose that form the basis of the paper are shortened through all the grinding, so the paper is rougher, less uniform, and structurally weaker. Though at less than half the cost of chemically pulped paper, this is the preferred method for applications that need less longevity, smoothness, and strength, such as cardboard, newsprint, and lower cost flyers and books (including the mass-produced paperback novels starting in the late 1940s, known as pulp fiction).

Paper is one of the most recyclable and recycled materials, with as much as 65% diverted from the waste stream in the USA to be reused, and accounting for as much as two-thirds of all recycled material. Used paper and cardboard is deinked, and separated from any metal, plastics, or other contaminants, then added to water to make pulp. Usually some wood cellulose is added to help provide fibrous structure for the paper. Though waste paper can be up-cycled to form higher quality papers by combining new virgin wood pulp with some percentage of post consumer waste, recycled paper is more often down-cycled from, say, a glossy magazine to cardboard.

The industry is producing more and more of this recovered paper, especially for packaging, by developing new types of paper-based impact absorption material that replace Styrofoam, plastic bubble wrap, and other unrecyclable petrochemical-based materials. The industry is also responding to an increase in demand for corrugated containerboard, as consumers in the USA order more from the internet. An added boost comes from the fact that a few years ago China closed its shores to the high volume of waste paper that came from the US, which was among the nation’s most exported material. China said it had enough of its own, and it no longer
Though wood and paper seem inexorably linked, they aren’t. Early forms of paper were made from smaller—and more quickly growing—plant fiber like hemp, and fibrous byproducts from plants like sugar cane. Before the invention of industrialized modern papermaking in the late 19th century, a lot of paper was made from old clothing—rags—which at the time were made of organic materials like linen (made from flax) and cotton. Some paper, including US currency, is still made from old cotton clothing. Making paper from these materials consumes less chlorine for bleaching, and contains no wood lignin, which, amongst other things, makes paper that is less acidic and lasts longer. Books and other paper records printed prior to the use of wood cellulose (prior to around 1900), are going to be with us longer than what we have made in modern times.

It could be that the future of paper will be more plant fiber-based, instead of wood fiber-based. Until then, though, the vast majority of paper continues to be made from trees, and around a third of all the trees harvested in the US are for paper. These trees come from private land, much of it owned by timber companies and large family holdings.

Though it recently sold off its paper production division, the wood products company Weyerhaeuser is the largest owner of US forestland: 12.4 million acres, about the size of West Virginia. Individuals and families that own large amounts of forest include John Malone, the former CEO of Telecommunications Incorporated, who is the largest private landowner in the USA, with more than 2.2 million acres (around 1 million of which is timberland in Maine). The second largest private landowner in the country, the Emerson family, owns the timber company Sierra Pacific. The Reed family, the fourth largest private landowner, has 1.4 million acres of timberland in the Northwest. The Irving family, ranked as the sixth largest private landowner in the USA, has substantial holdings of timberland in Maine, as do the Pingree family, number 11 on the list.

The harvest of trees and the delivery of postconsumer paper waste, along with some other byproducts that are added to pulp, like cotton rags, cotton linters, and straw, finds its way to the hundred or so pulping plants in the USA. Most of these pulping plants are next to, or integrated with, a paper mill, and some supply market pulp to the many domestic paper mills that don’t make pulp, or ship it overseas.

### From Plants to Paper: Paper Plants in the USA

Pulp mills in the USA are located close to timber sources. These regions are the Pacific Northwest, the Upper Midwest, the Northeast, and the Southeast—pretty much everywhere except the Great Plains and the arid Southwest. Historically, pulp and paper mills were located along the rivers of the Northeast. These rivers supplied the vast amounts of water consumed in the process (as well as providing a way to remove wastes, downstream). Energy was captured by damming rivers (in some places dams also flooded vast areas to move logs to the mill, regions known as flowage). Some of these old brick mills are still operating. Though Maine has one of the largest contiguous timberland forests in the nation, as well as a number of large mills still online, production in the Upper Midwest surpassed the Northeast in the early 1900s, and to this day there are more paper mills in Wisconsin than in any other state.

But it is in the Southeast where the biggest modern pulp and paper mills can be found, especially in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina. Six of the largest paper companies in the USA have their headquarters in the Southeast (three in Georgia, and three in Tennessee), including the biggest of them all, and the biggest paper company in the USA: International Paper.

Though paper companies change names as they are bought, sold, and consolidated, International Paper, now based in Memphis, has been around since 1898, when 17 mills in the Northeast joined forces to form the company. Since then it has maintained its status at or near the top of the list of largest paper companies. Today it supplies 20% of the US market for paper, and has a major presence around the world, with a total of 52,000 employees, and $22 billion in annual sales. Its purchase of Hammermill Paper in 1986...
made the company the largest producer of office paper, and the US government its largest customer. Over the years International Paper has sold off its coated paper and its beverage and consumer packaging businesses, while expanding its pulp and containerboard production by purchasing these divisions from Weyerhaeuser (which got out of papermaking by 2016, to focus on other wood products, like lumber).

Currently the second largest paper producer in the US is Georgia-Pacific, based in Atlanta, and owned by the Koch brothers (Koch Industries) since 2005. GP started out as a lumber company, and it still is. It moved into paper production by opening a massive pulp and paper mill in Toledo, Oregon, in the 1950s, then expanded further by acquisitions. Its purchase of the Fort James Corporation in 2000 moved it deeper into toilet paper and paper towel production, including producing the widely distributed Quilted Northern and Brawny brands. GP also makes office paper, paper plates and cups, diapers, commercial paper towels, and plywood.

Recently tied with GP’s 13% of the US paper products market is WestRock, based in Norcross, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. WestRock was formed by the 2015 merger of two other large paper companies, RockTenn and MeadWestvaco, two companies that, as their names suggest, were also formed by mergers. The company specializes in corrugated packaging, including pizza boxes, as well as paper for labels, leaflets, and inserts.

Though things change rapidly in the paper industry, with companies suddenly forming and disappearing by mergers and acquisitions, the other current major players, beyond the top three, all have 5% or less of the market in the US. These include two Montreal-based companies, Domtar and Resolute, both of which make a diverse array of paper products, from office paper to personal products, at large plants in the Southeast and Upper Midwest; Graphic Packaging International, based in Atlanta, specializing in food packaging, with a plant in Battle Creek, Michigan (home of Kellogg’s), and four large paper mills in the Southeast; Procter & Gamble, which has no pulp operations, but makes lots of paper consumer products all over the nation and the world; Sappi (whose name was derived from South African Pulp and Paper Industries), which is based in Johannesburg and operates two large paper mills in Maine, and one in Minnesota; the Packaging Corporation of America, based in Illinois, which bought Boise Cascade’s paper division in 2013 and operates two white paper mills and six containerboard mills; and hundreds of other companies, with anywhere from a dozen mills, to one.

The legacy of paper is left on the ground in many ways. First, in the transformation of forests into managed, replanted harvest-scapes. Second, in the industry’s massive physical and social footprint. Hundreds of operating and closed mills and leveled mill sites remain, next to dams, on rivers in the middle of small towns across the country, many of which formed to house the workers of the mill. Towns whose populace were immune to the distinct stench of pulp, so apparent to visitors. Towns that were dedicated and proud of their mill, despite the hazards of toxic dioxin emissions and chlorine bleaching agents, wastewater draining into rivers, and water treatment ponds leaching into groundwater. Third, in the mountainous landfills across the land, full of single-use paper products suspended in anaerobic entombment, that, through a century of their existence as a medium, slipped past insufficient efforts to divert them from the waste stream.

And, lastly, in all the archives and libraries of the world, where paper’s highest and best use, as information storage medium, remains effective for the foreseeable future, possibly outlasting its digital counterparts.

The exhibit itself was created by remote means, without the CLUI visiting any of the locations, which is unusual for us. The islands and atolls were presented as satellite images, of varying and relative size, framed and floating in a sea of continuous blue space.

Over the course of empire, most of these remote atolls and islets have been utterly transformed, by resource extraction and global wars. Now they are remnants of our history, where human visitation is restricted or banned outright, as they are being allowed to be reclaimed by wildlife, and to evolve in their own way. Their future is driven less by the national interests that transformed them, and more by the collective needs of the planet.

Navassa Island is an uninhabited island, less than two square miles in size, in the Caribbean Sea, between Jamaica and Haiti. Like many of these Minor Outlying Islands, it became a possession of the US as part of the Guano Islands Act, passed by US Congress in 1856, which allowed US citizens to claim any island with potentially mineable deposits of bird guano, not already claimed by another nation, as “appertaining” to the US (after Presidential approval). Within eight years, 59 islands in the Atlantic and the Pacific were claimed in this way, and over time these were mined for their nitrate-rich guano, if they had any, for use as fertilizer.

Navassa Island, also known as Devil’s Island, was mined for 40 years, beginning in 1865. The limited deposits of guano were augmented by deposits of tricalcium phosphate from ancient coral reefs. In the 1880s, mining activity increased, when the Navassa Phosphate Company of Baltimore built housing and brought more than 140 laborers and managers from Maryland to blast, dig, and bag the deposits, for export to the mainland USA. Harsh conditions induced a rebellion by black laborers, who ended up killing five white supervisors in 1889, resulting in murder trials in Baltimore. Officials visited the island and were alarmed enough by the conditions there that the murder sentences were commuted.

Mining ended in 1898, and the island was abandoned, until a lighthouse with a keeper’s residence was built in 1917. In 1929 the lighthouse was automated, and the island unoccupied again. Navassa saw some activity as an observation post in World War II, but then was abandoned again. In 1999 the Navassa Island National Wildlife Refuge was established, which covers the island and the surrounding 12-mile ring of territorial waters. US Fish and Wildlife Service manages the refuge as one of 14 official territories of the USA; although since 1857 Navassa has also been claimed by Haiti, which is just 35 miles away. It is off limits to the public.

Bajo Nuevo Bank (Disputed)

Also known as the Petrel Islands, Bajo Nuevo Bank is a 15-mile-long reef with some grassy island outcrops in the otherwise open Caribbean Sea, midway between Jamaica and Central America. It was claimed by the US in 1869, under the Guano Islands Act. Though most of the islands in the region claimed by this act were renounced by the USA in a 1972 treaty with Colombia, this atoll-like structure, as well as another, Serranilla Bank, 70 miles west, were not mentioned by name, unlike the others, so they continued to be claimed as territories of the USA, though not aggressively so.

Bajo Nuevo Bank has also, over the years, been claimed by Honduras and Jamaica—though Jamaica seems to have backed off since the 1980s. Nicaragua, however, still makes a claim that Bajo Nuevo Bank is within its territorial waters, and therefore belongs to it. An international court ruling in 2012 found that Colombia has sovereignty over Baja Nuevo Bank, as well as the nearby Serranilla Bank, though the US does not recognize the ruling.

The islands have no occupants and almost no structures. Low Cay, the largest island, is currently about 2.5 acres in size, with the highest point around six feet above sea level. An automated lighthouse was erected by the Colombian government there in 1982, and was rebuilt by the Colombian Ministry of Defense in 2008, as a 70-foot-tall metal tower that flashes once every 15 seconds.

Serranilla Bank (Disputed)

Serranilla Bank is 70 miles west of Bajo Nuevo Bank, and 220 miles from Nicaragua, in the middle of the otherwise open sea. Its physical attributes and jurisdictional status are like that of Bajo Nuevo Bank: it is a submerged atoll-like reef, around 25 miles long, with three small islands above water. The largest island is Beacon Cay, which has buildings, and is sometimes used to house a garrison of the Colombian Navy. There is also a 100-foot-tall metal lighthouse tower, which flashes every 20 seconds. It was built and rebuilt at the same time as the lighthouse on Bajo Nuevo Bank (1982, and 2008).

The US has claimed Serranilla Bank since 1879, as part of the Guano Islands Act. The US still claims ownership, though it has conceded administrative oversight to Colombia. Serranilla Bank has lingering claims by Honduras, Jamaica, and Nicaragua, too.

While the land is of little value, territorial waters usually extend 12 miles out from landmasses, and an “exclusive economic zone” can extend for 200 miles. These zones are important for controlling shipping, submerged resources, and fisheries.
Palmyra Atoll is part of the Line Islands, a remote island chain in the Pacific Ocean, more than 1,000 miles south of Honolulu. Palmyra was claimed by the USA as part of the Guano Islands Act in 1859, though it was reportedly devoid of any mineable guano. The islands of the atoll have been privately owned since then, changing hands often.

From 1939 to 1959, it was taken over by the Navy, which built it into the Palmyra Island Naval Air Station in 1941, dredging ship channels, joining islands, and building causeways that divided the lagoon, runways, and barracks. After the war, most of the buildings were destroyed, though the changes to the atoll's structure remain. In 2000, part of the atoll was purchased by the Nature Conservancy, for $30 million, and today it is a marine sanctuary, wildlife refuge, and environmental research center, administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Nature Conservancy. There are still a few parts of the atoll owned by other private parties as well.

Palmyra is the only one of the 14 official territories of the USA that is classified as an incorporated territory, which means it is an integral and permanent part of the USA, subject to all provisions of the US Constitution, as opposed to simply a possession of the USA. This makes the land of Palmyra more American, in a way, than the land occupied by the 3.3 million inhabitants of Puerto Rico, which remains an unincorporated territory.

This is because Palmyra was previously considered part of the incorporated territory of the Hawaiian Islands, but was omitted when Hawaii became a state in 1959. Palmyra became instead the only independent “unorganized (meaning no government), incorporated territory of the USA.” Without an official population, this meant less. But in 2004, several bungalows were built to house a few dozen visiting workers, researchers, and scientists. While these residents are considered temporary, if anyone was ever born here, their status would be unique.

Unlike the other Minor Outlying Islands, visitation to this island is permitted, with the prior approval of the Nature Conservancy or the Fish and Wildlife Service. Few make it there, though, as it is a journey of several days by boat from Honolulu, and there is no scheduled service by boat or airplane.

Johnston Atoll is an isolated and unoccupied atoll, originally with just two small islands, 3,100 miles from the coast of the continental USA, and 700 miles southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. It became US territory when it was claimed as a Guano Island in 1858 (though it was claimed by the Kingdom of Hawaii at that time as well). By 1890, most of the guano had been mined off it, and things were relatively quiet until the 1930s, when the Navy developed a seaplane base on one of the islands, dredging coral from the sea floor to deepen the landing area, and more than doubling the island’s size.

Over the years, starting in 1941, the main island was enlarged from 45 acres to 600 acres, with a large airstrip, barracks for hundreds of military personnel, munition magazines, and bunkers. Two additional islands, each around 20 acres in size, were made from scratch, by dredging the reef. At its peak, the atoll housed 1,000 military and contractor personnel.

Starting in 1958, the first of hundreds of high-altitude research rockets was fired from the island, including several carrying nuclear bombs that were detonated in space (as much as 250 miles up), causing spectacular auroral effects, and disturbing the electrical grid in Hawaii. Nuclear tests continued through 1962, including some that failed at a low altitude, and one that blew up on the launch pad, spreading plutonium around the island. After the 1963 nuclear test ban went into effect, non-nuclear rockets continued the research into anti-satellite technologies and space warfare for another decade or so.

In 1970, the primary mission of Johnston Atoll was changed to stockpiling and destroying chemical weapons. A prototype incinerator was constructed over a five-year period, and began destroying chemical weapons brought from US bases in Japan, Germany, and the Solomon Islands. The incinerator operated until 2000, and then a massive clean up operation began, collecting, removing, and isolating chemically and radioactively contaminated soils and seafloor. Nearly all the buildings were razed, and their remains buried.

The runway was closed after the last flight out, in 2004, and the island remains off limits to this day, co-managed by the US Air Force and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It is part of the Pacific Remote Islands Monument, a marine preserve established in 2009 that covers nearly 500,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean, and includes most of the other Minor Outlying Island territories.

Midway Atoll is in the Northern Pacific Ocean, 1,300 miles west of Honolulu, in the trailing edge of the volcanic arc of islands that includes Hawaii. It consists of an outer barrier reef ring with a five-mile diameter, two primary islands inside it, and a dredged channel between them.

Midway has been a US territory since 1859, after being claimed as a Guano Island, though there is no evidence that guano was ever mined there. After failed attempts to develop it into a steamship coaling station in 1871, change came to the island in 1903, with the construction of the first transpacific telegraph cable. The cable provided the first direct telegraph route from the US to the Philippines, China, and Japan. It extended from Ocean Beach, in San Francisco, to Honolulu, then from there to Midway, then to Guam, and Manila, ultimately covering 6,912 miles. Use of the cable was discontinued in the 1950s.

The two islands were completely transformed when the Navy developed the atoll into a naval aviation and submarine base, starting in 1940. It was second only to Pearl Harbor in importance as an outlying base to protect the nation’s west coast, and as a result it was attacked by Japan on December 7, 1941, along with Pearl Harbor, though much of the onslaught was repelled by US defenses. When Japanese forces came back several months later, they met an even more effective defense, losing four aircraft carriers in the three-day Battle of Midway, a major turning point in the war in the Pacific.

After the war, the base expanded as Midway Naval Air Station, with submarine detection facilities, Distant Early Warning line support, and support for US military activity in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The base was officially closed in 1993, though one runway is kept up as an emergency landing field for transpacific aviation, and for visitors. Between 100 and 200 Fish and Wildlife personnel are in residence there, but public visitation has only been allowed sporadically over the years, in very limited amounts, and has been suspended since 2012. Most of the structures, including the 1903 cable company buildings, a Pan Am hotel from the 1930s, and the modern military base, remain—abandoned, and surrounded by hundreds of thousands of nesting gooney birds.
Jarvis Island is a 1,000-acre island, 3,600 miles from the shore of the continental USA. It was claimed by the US in 1858 as part of the Guano Islands Act, and was mined for a few decades, when more than a dozen buildings were constructed, including a large superintendent’s house and a small railway for moving guano to the shore. American mining stopped in 1879, then was resumed by a British company a few years later, during a period when Britain claimed some of the USA’s underutilized guano islands as theirs.

Faced with the perception that Jarvis, and other unoccupied territorial islands in the Pacific, may not be recognized as US territory, the federal government took unusual action, establishing a program in 1935, known as the American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project. Since military occupation was not permitted by international law, and would have been too provocative, US civilians were secretly hired, and paid three dollars a day to reside on these islands. Most of the re-colonists were educated native Hawaiians and recent students recruited from a boys school in Honolulu.

After a year of continuous occupancy, President Roosevelt officially claimed the islands once again as US territories. The occupation continued for a few more years, with buildings improved, and a runway cleared, until the re-colonists were evacuated, on February 7, 1942, after which the runway, which probably was never used, was bombed by Japan.

Largely untouched since then, Jarvis, just under two square miles in size, and 25 miles south of the equator, remains abandoned, with some un-removed piles of guano, ruins of the tram, and other faint remnants. Like the others, Jarvis Island is part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and off limits to the public.

Baker Island was also re-colonized as part of the American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project, starting in 1935. Teams of four people, with Army officers sometimes accompanying them, were dropped off on the islands of Baker, Howland, and Jarvis, and tasked with building shelters, studying wildlife, recording weather observations, maintaining a daily log, and keeping a US flag flying. Ships came by every three months or so, bringing a relief team and more provisions of canned goods and water. This continued through 1941, when the war with Japan started.

During the war, Baker was used as a staging area for fighters and bombers, and a mile-long runway was built, as well as several concrete buildings, and a radio station. Today it is a treeless unoccupied island, its runway overgrown, with a few concrete ruins, and bits of machinery. It is part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and is off limits to the general public.

42 miles north of Baker Island is Howland Island, a remote island territory with a similar history. Slightly larger than Baker, but equally treeless and without fresh water, Howland was claimed by the Guano Act in 1858, and mined by the American Guano Company and others until depleted around 1878. In 1935 American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project teams arrived, set up their rudimentary habitations, and occupied the island over the next five years.

The team on Howland was also tasked with helping to build a runway, with the WPA, as these islands were being considered for possible civilian transpacific aviation. Their value for the US military was also growing, and civilian use served their interests as well. Amelia Earhart’s around-the-world flight, intended to help promote civilian aviation, was scheduled to land for fuel on the newly built field on Howland in 1937, and the excited colonists prepared a special room for her (the only room on the island with curtains, they said), as well as an outdoor shower for her. Already 22,000 miles into the eastward journey, which started in Miami on June 1, she took off from New Guinea on July 2, bound for Howland, to complete the remaining 7,000 miles across the Pacific. But she never arrived, and after an extensive search, was presumed to have crashed into the ocean.

Years later, the airfield, made famous by Earhart’s fateful journey, was bombed by Japan within hours of bombing Pearl Harbor in 1941, and two of the young re-colonists stationed there were killed. The remaining two re-colonists were trapped on the island until they were finally evacuated in February 1942, after being marooned for 53 days. In 1954 the remains of the two killed by the Japanese attack were disinterred, and buried in a ceremony at a military cemetery in Hawaii.

After the war, Howland was abandoned, and is now part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and off limits to the public. It, along with Baker, is close to the International Date Line, and the equator, making them the places with the latest time on earth.

Baker Island, 4,300 miles from the continental USA, and halfway between Hawaii and Australia, is less than a square mile in size. It was claimed under the Guano Island Act, in 1857, and guano was mined by the American Guano Company from 1859 to 1878. Ships loaded more than a thousand tons of guano at a time, often delivering it to ports in Britain. In 1886, the mining rights were transferred to a British company, which, assuming the US had lost interest in it, petitioned Britain to annex the island. For a few years it was officially considered a British territory, at least by Britain.

Baker Island, 4,300 miles from the continental USA, and halfway between Jarvis Island, is part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, piles of guano, ruins of the tram, and other faint remnants. Like the others, the runway, which probably was never used, was bombed by Japan.

Though its lagoon was used by flying clipper ships and other vessels, Kingman Reef was never settled or developed. In 2000 the Navy relinquished control to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and it is now part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.

The few acres or so that remain above the ocean, for now, make this perhaps the most minor of the Minor Outlying Islands, and of the rest of the 14 official US territories, as well. Public access on land there is not permitted.
Wake Island

Wake is an atoll in Micronesia, halfway between Midway and Guam, and 4,300 miles from the continental USA. It is one of the world’s most remote islands, 600 miles from the nearest inhabited island (an atoll in the Marshall Islands that is itself very small and remote). Its remoteness has made it an important place.

Wake was claimed by the US in 1898, though development was minimal until 1935, after it (along with other US territories Midway Atoll, Johnston Atoll, and Kingman Reef) were placed under the control of the Navy, in order to permit Pan American Airways to construct landing sites for island-hopping commercial air travel between the USA and China—sites which would, of course, also be of benefit to the military. An area was cleared in the lagoon for flying boats to land, and support and refueling facilities were prepared, including a 48-room hotel. The first China Clipper planes came in 1936, and continued until Japanese bombs started falling on the island in December 1941. By then the Navy had constructed an airbase there, which was taken and occupied by Japan until the end of the war.

After the war, the island was fixed up and turned back into a Naval Air Base. Pan Am service continued, until longer-range commercial jets took over transpacific flights years later. In 1972, with a decrease in civilian use, the Air Force took control of the airport from the FAA, and began developing parts of the island as an antiballistic missile test site, supporting missile activities at Kwajalein Atoll, 700 miles away. Though programs have shifted between the Army and the Air Force over the years, Wake still serves in this role today, and access to the atoll is restricted.

Wake is the only active fully militarized US territory. Its only residents are government and military personnel and contractors, whose numbers hover around 100, unless a major operation is occurring. It is administered by the US Air Force, as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service. The runway is nearly 10,000 feet long, and is an important emergency landing field, open to civilians in an emergency only.

### UNOCCUPIED TERRITORY

This year the CLUI finally got around to including the nation’s territories as part of our ongoing study of the landscape of the USA, with an exhibit about the unoccupied minor outlying island territories. The CLUI also made a study of the five occupied territories, and added sites on them to our online Land Use Database.

The 14 official territories of the USA are all islands of some kind or other. They are home to a total of 3.6 million people, though most of those people live in Puerto Rico. The rest, around 350,000, live in four other officially occupied and settled territories, with independent forms of government, on land that is officially part of the United States, but is in many ways still treated as foreign terrain.

Nine of the 14 territories are, technically, “unoccupied,” even if they are inhabited, though most are not, anymore. These are the Minor Outlying Islands, and they have been transformed in curious and dramatic ways (and are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter).

The five occupied territories of the USA also tell a history of US expansion, especially during the Spanish American War, and World War II. In the decades after World War II, the US relinquished most of its territorial islands, returning them to pre-colonial nations, or allowing them to become nations with self-rule, such as the Philippines, and much of Micronesia. The five occupied territories that the US retained, or that elected to stay part of the USA, remain important strategic locations for the country, especially territories in the Pacific, which provide forward positions for the US military in Southeast Asia.

### OCCUPIED TERRITORY

**Puerto Rico**

Puerto Rico, the largest and most familiar territory, is located in the Caribbean, between the Dominican Republic and the Virgin Islands. It consists of a main island 110 miles long and 40 miles wide, and a few outer islands. 3.3 million people live on the island, which is more populous than 20 of the 50 United States. Most of the population is in San Juan, the port city on its northern shore.

Puerto Rico has been a possession of the USA since 1899, when it was acquired from Spain, following the Spanish American War, during which most of Spain’s colonial holdings in the Pacific and Caribbean were seized and redistributed. In 1917 its inhabitants, born in 1888 and later, became US citizens, and in 1952 Puerto Rico became a commonwealth, with a governing constitution. Its residents elect a governor and a non-voting member of the US Congress. As with other territories, residents of Puerto Rico cannot vote for a president in federal elections, just in the primaries.

Notoriously battered by hurricanes and neglected by the federal government, Puerto Rico has a median household income lower than any state (less than $20,000), and the highest per capita concentration of Walmarts and Walgreens. It has served as a regional military outpost, housing as many as 25 separate installations over the years, including the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, and the bombing ranges on Vieques Island—though now, nearly all of them are closed, and slowly undergoing remediation and redevelopment.
US Virgin Islands

The US Virgin Islands are located immediately east of Puerto Rico, and west of the British Virgin Islands. They are composed of three primary islands, St. Thomas and St. John (which are next to one another), and St. Croix (35 miles south), and a few scattered small islands around them.

The islands have been claimed by the Dutch, French, Spanish, English, and Danish, when in 1800, 35,000 African slaves worked on sugar plantations. The United States purchased the islands, then known as the Danish West Indies, from Denmark for $25 million in 1917, at the onset of World War I. Due to fears that Germany might establish a submarine base there. Most of its residents became US citizens in the 1920s, and though the US Virgin Islands is considered part of the USA as an “organized, unincorporated territory,” it is still working on its constitution.

The population today is around 106,000, more than 75% of whom are of African descent. Tourism is the major industry, with resorts scattered along the shores. There are two cruise ship docks at the port of the city of Charlotte Amalie, the capital city of the US Virgin Islands, on St. Thomas. Up to 500 cruise ships come to the port every year, bringing more than a million tourists to the island annually.

St. Croix is the least touristed of the three islands, and is the most populated and industrialized. The port on its southern side is dominated by a fuel tank farm and one of the largest oil refineries in the USA, which is mostly closed now. Other sites around the port include a Captain Morgan rum distillery and production plant.

Guam

Guam is the largest of the Mariana Islands, which extend north from Guam for a hundred miles in the western Pacific Ocean, 1,300 miles east of the Philippines, and 1,400 miles south of Japan. It became a US territory in 1898, during the Spanish American War, when it was taken from Spain by the US Navy, without firing a shot, on their way to the larger prize, the Philippines. Since then it has been a major asset for US military control in Southeast Asia, referred to by some as “the tip of the spear.”

The first shots fired by the US in World War I were likely at Guam, in 1917, to take a German ship in the harbor (warning shots were all that were needed). In World War II, Japan took the island from the US by force in 1941, with an attack that started the day after Pearl Harbor. Japan occupied the island for 31 months, one of only a few pieces of American territory held by Japan in the war (others included islands in the Aleutian Chain of Alaska).

When the US took the island back in 1944, the battle took 26 days, claimed 1,700 American and 15,000 Japanese lives, and destroyed nearly all the buildings on the island. After the war, the US military took over a third of the 30-mile-long island, building what would become one of its most important global bases of operation.

Facilities include Andersen Air Force Base, a major nuclear bomber base at the island’s northern end; Naval Base Guam, with aircraft carriers, and nuclear submarines at Polaris Point; and a large inland ordnance depot. Marines from Okinawa are likely to move here, too.

The rest of the island, especially the main city of Tumon, is a military town and tourist destination, seeing a million tourists from Japan, as well as Russia and South Korea, coming to visit one of the closest American outposts to their shores, replete with the most popular American shopping and dining franchises. 168,000 people live on Guam, including more than 60,000 native Chamorros and 40,000 Filipinos, most of whom are American citizens by virtue of being born in the territory.

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Procter & Gamble
Cincinnati-based Procter & Gamble makes Charmin, the most popular consumer brand of toilet paper in the US. It is made at several large plants around the country, which also make the company's other paper products, including commercial toilet paper, Bounty paper towels, and napkins. Procter & Gamble is a multinational consumer products company, specializing in personal hygiene and cleaning products, with around $70 billion in annual revenue and 100,000 employees globally. Its brands include Crest toothpaste, Dawn dishwashing liquid, Tide laundry detergent, Gillette razors, and Pampers diapers.

Georgia-Pacific
One of the big three toilet paper producers, Georgia-Pacific is often ranked as the second largest overall paper producer in the US (International Paper is number one). Georgia-Pacific has several large tissue mills in the USA, making toilet paper for its consumer brands, including Quilted Northern, as well as for private label and commercial use. The company's tissue production grew through acquisitions, including Great Northern Nekoosa in 1990, and Fort James in 2000. In addition to pulp and paper products, the company makes building materials like gypsum wall board and plywood. It is based in Atlanta, has around 55,000 employees, and was bought by Koch Industries in 2005, for $21 billion.

LANDSCAPE OF TOILET PAPER
The Great Toilet Paper Panic of March 2020 made us wonder more about this form of paper that is so vital to the American psyche. Billions and billions of rolls are sold annually in the US, covering the nation in a dense and disposable security blanket. One tree can be turned into just a few hundred rolls, and estimated averages for individual use is 100–150 rolls per person per year.

With such a large volume, in numbers as well as in the physical size of the product, there is little buffer in the supply chain. Toilet paper flows from pulp to mill to plant to distribution center at a fairly constant and balanced rate (thus the empty shelves of the 800% consumer purchase spike of March 2020). It is also a very domestic product: 90% of what is consumed in the US, comes from the US (and of the 10% that is imported, most is from Canada and Mexico). And though there are more than 150 companies that make it, more than 80% comes from just three companies: Procter & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, and Georgia-Pacific.
Kimberly-Clark

Kimberly-Clark is a paper company that makes around a quarter of the toilet paper in the USA. Started in Neenah, Wisconsin, in 1872, it still employs more than 2,000 people in that area, at a few smaller production sites, and at its former corporate campuses. In the 1970s the company started divesting itself of its pulp and sheet paper mills to focus on manufacturing disposable paper hygiene products, and is now based in Irving, Texas. It has more than $20 billion in annual revenue, and employs around 40,000 people at dozens of manufacturing locations, including several plants making toilet paper for its Scott and Cottonelle brands, as well as commercial toilet paper for away-from-home suppliers.

**Parquer Paper Mill**

This paper mill, north of Savannah, Georgia, is one of the largest tissue plants in the country. It opened in 1986, built by the Fort Howard Paper Company, and was purchased by Georgia-Pacific in 2002. The facility has 75 acres under one roof. Almost 1,000 people work at the plant, making toilet paper, paper towels, and napkins, mostly from recycled waste paper.

**Chester Paper Mill**

Kimberly-Clark operates this toilet paper plant on the industrialized bank of the Delaware River, south of Philadelphia. It is one of a few older integrated paper mills it acquired when it bought Scott Paper in 1995. The plant employs around 800 people.

**Resolute Calhoun Paper Mill**

Kimberly-Clark’s Beech Island Paper Mill in South Carolina is the company’s largest production plant, and one of the largest single sources of toilet paper in the country. 2,000 people work at the plant, making Scott, Cottonelle, and other brands of toilet paper, as well as Kleenex facial tissue, Kotex feminine products, Huggies diapers, and paper towels.

**Beech Island Paper Mill**

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**Savannah River Paper Mill**

This Procter & Gamble paper plant in southern Georgia makes Bounty paper towels and Charmin toilet paper. It has around three million square feet under its roof.

**Mobile Paper Mill**

Kimberly-Clark operates this toilet paper plant on the industrialized waterway north of Mobile, Alabama. It is one of a few older integrated paper mills Kimberly-Clark acquired when it bought Scott Paper in 1995. The plant employs around 500 people.

**Albany Paper Mill**

This Procter & Gamble paper plant in southern Georgia makes Bounty paper towels and Charmin toilet paper. It has around three million square feet under its roof.

**Cheyenne Paper Mill**

Procter & Gamble opened this plant in 2011 to produce toilet paper and Bounty paper towels, in the western and intermountain regions of the US. It is located on the Arkansas River in Muskogee, one of five large tissue paper plants in the USA that produce toilet paper for the private label market.

**Broadway Paper Mill**

Located on the Green Bay River, it employs as many as 1,300 people. This Procter & Gamble paper plant in Green Bay, Wisconsin, produces Bounty paper towels, Charmin toilet tissue, and Puffs facial tissue. It is located in one of the major paper production corridors in the nation, along the Fox River, between Lake Winnebago and Lake Michigan.

**Resolute Calhoun Paper Mill**

The Montreal-based Resolute Forest Products company is one of the largest private label toilet paper producers in the USA. Its largest plant is this pulp and paper mill, located northeast of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which it bought from Atlas Paper in 2015. The company operates three other tissue plants in the USA that produce toilet paper for the private label market.

**Mehoosopy Paper Mill**

With a continuous roof more than a half a mile long, this is one of the largest of Procter & Gamble’s toilet paper production sites in the country. It is located on the Susquehanna River, in a rural part of Pennsylvania, west of Scranton. The plant makes Charmin toilet paper, Bounty paper towels and napkins, and diapers under the Pampers and Luvs brand names.

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**Other Private Label Manufacturers**

The remaining 20% of the market not captured by the big three is supplied by the rest of the 150 or so companies that make toilet paper in the USA. These include some large Canadian paper companies with tissue plants in the USA, like Resolute Forest Products, and Irving, and some US-based companies like Clearwater Paper and Solaris Paper. Many companies just have one plant, or cut and package toilet paper from large mother rolls of tissue supplied by other companies (the final part of production, known as “converting”). Without famous brands of their own, these companies supply stock for private labels, such as grocery store chains’ in-house brands, or for commercial away-from-home markets, such as janitorial supply companies.
Northern Mariana Islands

The 14 islands in the chain north of Guam are governed as a US territory known as the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The Marianas were first colonized by Spain when Magellan planted a flag there in 1521. After the Spanish American War of 1898, most of the Marianas were sold to Germany, which then lost them to Japan after World War I. The United States took them from Japan in World War II, after which they became part of a large group of islands in the north Pacific known as the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

Over the years after the war, most of the islands in the trust became independent states, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. After being rebuffed by Guam for decades, the Northern Marianas elected to become a separate commonwealth and join the USA in 1975. This became official in 1986, when the UN dissolved the Trust Territories, and the 50,000 residents of the islands became US citizens.

90% of the population lives on Saipan, which after becoming part of the USA, developed into a major global garment production center, attracting another 45,000 workers, mostly from China. Clothing for major brands, such as Gap, Ann Taylor, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Liz Claiborne, and J.Crew, were made in sweatshops that, while “made in the USA,” were done so with labor rates and conditions far below normal USA standards. Despite persistent lobbying by the garment industry in Washington, which was fighting to maintain the one billion dollars in annual production, media exposure and political pressure eventually had their effect. The national minimum wage came to Saipan in 2007, and now most of the industry is gone, as well as the Chinese workers.

Three miles south of Saipan is Tinian, the second largest of the Northern Mariana Islands. With a population of just 3,000, most of Tinian’s development are the remains of a World War II airbase. The US captured Tinian from Japan in August 1944, built six runways on the island, and made it the busiest US airfield for the remainder of the war. The last of the hundreds of missions that flew from here to Japan were the atomic bombings of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and Nagasaki, three days later. The loading pits for the oversized Little Boy and Fat Man bombs remain amidst the vestiges of the base at the north end of the island.

American Samoa

American Samoa is the only populated place in the USA south of the equator. Its population is around 55,000, and is 92% Pacific Islander. It has the lowest per capita income in the USA, one of the highest rates of service in the military, and there is a heavy missionary presence. As much as 80% of its revenue comes from a single StarKist tuna cannery in Pago Pago, on the main island of Tutulia, where 98% of the population lives.

The other sparsely occupied islands in American Samoa include the Manu’a Islands, and Swains Island, located 220 miles north of Tutulia. Since 1856 Swains Island has been claimed by the American settler Eli Jennings, joining American Samoa in 1925. It is a mile-wide ring of beach and land, surrounding a brackish lagoon, and is generally inhabited by around a dozen people.

The Polynesian islands of Samoa were colonized in the 19th century, and divided up. The larger islands in the west (called Western Samoa at the time) went to Germany, and the smaller ones to the east went to the USA, in 1900, by a deed of cession, approved by native chiefs. For the following 51 years, American Samoa was controlled by the US Navy, which built a refueling base in the harbor at Pago Pago. In 1967, a local constitution was adopted, and elections began, providing a further degree of self-rule.

Unlike the other four US Territories with populations and governments (CNMI, Guam, USVI, and Puerto Rico), American Samoans are not US citizens by birth, but American Nationals, instead. This gives them more autonomy at home, where 90% of the land is shared in a native communal system, and helps preserve other cultural traditions, but is less convenient when outside the territory, as not being citizens limits the types of work they are allowed to do in the rest of the USA. Though they can have US passports, the documents are stamped with a statement that the bearer is not a US citizen.

After World War II, Germany lost Western Samoa to New Zealand, and in 1962 it became an independent nation. In 1997, it officially changed its name from Western Samoa to Samoa, and the International Date Line was moved to the east, so Samoa would begin its day with New Zealand. This further separated Samoa from American Samoa, which is on the east side of the date line, making it the last part of the occupied United States to see the end of the day.
The Lay of the Land

Winter 2021

The last five miles of the continent. Starting here at Culver Junction, and heading to the coast, over let’s begin the journey southwestward down Venice Boulevard, the day said. All roads also must then depart from here, too, so junction, half way between Downtown Los Angeles, and the coast put his downtown Main Street here, in 1913, because of this rail junction, next to what is now downtown Culver City, a place that was born between the old and new interurban railways of Los Angeles, is Culver Junction, marking a temporal and physical intersection of Los Angeles’ light rail system, once again connecting the Downtown Los Angeles area to Santa Monica, by rail. Though it ceased running in 1953, the Air Line, which connected Exposition Park, near Downtown LA, then south to Redondo Beach; and the Santa Monica Air Line, which connected Exposition Park, near Downtown LA, with Santa Monica. Though it ceased running in 1953, the Air Line corridor was preserved, and in 2016 became the Exposition Line of Los Angeles’ light rail system, once again connecting the Downtown Los Angeles area to Santa Monica, by rail. Culver Junction, marking a temporal and physical intersection between the old and new interurban railways of Los Angeles, is next to what is now downtown Culver City, a place that was born out of this junction too. Its founder and developer, Harry Culver, put his downtown Main Street here, in 1913, because of this rail junction, half way between Downtown Los Angeles, and the coast at Venice. “All roads lead to Culver City,” his advertisements of the day said. All roads also must then depart from here, too, so let’s begin the journey southwestward down Venice Boulevard, starting here at Culver Junction, and heading to the coast, over the last five miles of the continent.

Los Angeles is largely a product of the jet-fueled electronic revolution of the 20th century, with much of the city’s bulk appearing in the latter half; though the clusters of structures that make up the city were hung on the skeleton of transportation corridors set in the first half of the century. These corridors, and patterns of the urban fabric, were based on an original network of railways, not highways.

Venice Boulevard began as a dirt track along the side of the railroad tracks laid down in 1902, which became part of Huntington’s sprawling Pacific Electric interurban network in 1906, with the infamous Red (and less famous Yellow) Cars. Known as the Venice Short Line, the route left Downtown LA at 16th Street, passed through the rail junction at the Vineland Station in Mid-City, then curved to the southwest near Fairfax Avenue, rounding the Baldwin Hills, into its final and straight six-mile run to the coast.

The first major stop along this straightaway was at Culver Junction, where two other railroad lines met the Venice Short Line: the Playa del Rey Line, which went down what is now Culver Boulevard to the coast, then south to Redondo Beach; and the Santa Monica Air Line, which connected Exposition Park, near Downtown LA, with Santa Monica. Though it ceased running in 1953, the Air Line corridor was preserved, and in 2016 became the Exposition Line of Los Angeles’ light rail system, once again connecting the Downtown Los Angeles area to Santa Monica, by rail.

Culver City Toward the Sea

Culver City’s Main Street is directly across Venice Boulevard from the offices of the CLUI, as is the Ivy Substation, once the source of electrical power for this stretch of the Venice Short Line. Culver City was incorporated as an independent municipality in 1917, and grew to cover nearly five square miles by the 1960s, through more than 40 annexations, creating a city with an irregular shape. It started here, at the one-block-long Main Street, laid out by Harry Culver in 1913. The city line between Los Angeles and Culver City runs through the north end of the street, making it actually more like three-fifths of a block long, and is thus referred to as “the shortest Main Street in America.” North of the city line is the Palms district of Los Angeles, an area generally bounded by the 10 Freeway, Venice Boulevard, and the 405 Freeway.

Palms has been a distinct neighborhood named on maps since the late 1800s, though its recognition as such has been limited, compared with other more centered and promoted places. Like other communities in the region, it defended its territory from Culver City’s expansionist grasp, which continued into the 1960s. The closest thing to a downtown commercial core of Palms is the area around the intersection of National Boulevard and Motor Avenue, several blocks north of Venice Boulevard. Palms’ southern front is along Venice Boulevard, where it pushes into Culver City territory on the opposite side of the street, sometimes by only a hundred feet or less.

The city line of Culver City, though, finally reaches Venice Boulevard itself west of Overland Boulevard. In 1950, a new commercial center was built at this point, taking advantage of Venice Boulevard as a well-traveled thoroughfare. Built on the site of a former boxing arena, it was called Culver Center, and was a drive-in shopping environment, more tuned to car culture, and among the first modern shopping centers in Southern California. The dry goods, dime stores, and soda fountains there have since given way to big box stores and chains, like Best Buy, Sit ’n Sleep, and Panda Express, and more parking lots. The classic Googie-style Ships Restaurant building was replaced by a blocky modernist retail mini-cluster with a Subway, Coffee Bean, and a smoothie joint.

Culver City’s terrain on the south side of Venice Boulevard continues west past the 405 Freeway, which is mostly elevated as it crosses through the area, and spans Venice Boulevard on a bridge. The 405 was finished in 1964, and is called the San Diego Freeway.
Mar Vista: Sea in Sight
Mar Vista started off as a separate community within Los Angeles County, until it voted to become part of the City of Los Angeles in 1926. As its name suggests, it is near, but not at, the ocean. Venice Boulevard passes over what remains of Mar Vista Creek at McLaughlin Avenue, where an open concrete channel disappears under the road. The channel is part of the Sawtelle-Westwood Channel system, which replaced all of Mar Vista Creek by 1956, and collects runoff from street drains for much of Mar Vista, Palms, Westdale, and other west side communities. The channel re-emerges from underneath McLaughlin Avenue at Washington Boulevard, and drains into the Ballona Creek Channel at the Mar Vista Village Apartments, a few blocks west of the 405. Ballona Creek is the principal drainage outlet for the west side of Los Angeles, collecting water from 130 square miles. The creek emerges from underground at the intersection of Venice Boulevard and Cochran, a mile east of Culver City, and continues along the base of the Baldwin Hills as an open channel growing wider with tributaries like the Sawtelle-Westwood Channel, until meeting the ocean at Playa del Rey.

The west side of McLaughlin Avenue at Venice Boulevard is the corner of an early development known as the Oval, which was built on a 137-acre former ranch in 1912, and then known as Palm Place. It was designed by landscape architect Wilbur David Cook, who once worked with Olmsted's firm designing the 1893 Exposition in Chicago. Cook came to LA in 1907, and worked on important developments like Exposition Park, downtown Beverly Hills, and the LA Civic Center. Palm Place was to be a “new aristocratic suburb,” and had an elliptical road pattern with large lots, to accommodate country estates. Little was built, however. By 1920 the large lots and large pretensions were downsized, and by 1927 there were 50 more modest houses. It was built out by the 1970s, with around 200 houses.

When it opened in 1961, the Mar Vista Bowl became a landmark on Venice Boulevard, on the east end of downtown Mar Vista. The bowling alley was designed by Armet and Davis, the firm behind other Googie landmarks in Los Angeles, like Johnny’s Coffee Shop at the corner of Wilshire and Fairfax, and Norm’s Diner on La Cienega. Unfortunately much of the Mar Vista Bowl’s distinctive features have been stripped away, inside and out, including its original tiki cocktail lounge. CLUI photo

ON VENICE BOULEVARD

This mini mall at the corner of Venice and Sawtelle was built in the early 1980s, and is home to Jelly Donuts and Fatburger. Many mini malls are found on corner lots like this one, as these sites were often former gas stations, as this one was. The oil crisis of the 1970s, followed by the trend towards larger stations with more pumps, led to the closure of many small independent gas stations, whose property, with buried gas tanks and other contamination issues, often sold for very little. The resulting proliferation of mini malls in the 1970s and 80s was so rapid that the City of Los Angeles passed an ordinance against them in 1988. Mini malls provide inexpensive store frontage for local businesses, and collectively house a wide variety of restaurants and services. CLUI photo

This part of Venice Boulevard was paved early on, as it was developing into the downtown commercial center for Mar Vista, especially the block between Grand View and Centinela. This block was built out between 1924 and 1960, and most of the old storefronts on the south side remain. There was a stop for the Red Car here, too, until 1950, when the Venice Short Line stopped running, and the tracks were removed a year later. The 60-foot-wide median left from the railway was a chaotic space, used for parking. In 1966 the road was widened into three lanes in each direction, with parking along the curb. The median remained to divide the eastbound and westbound lanes, but was narrowed to less than a car’s width in most places. Stores in downtown Mar Vista claimed there was a 25% drop in business when the central parking area went away. As part of beautification efforts in the late 1960s, especially in these retail parts of Mar Vista, power lines were put underground, trees were planted, street lamps installed, and sidewalks were widened.

A four-block-wide part of downtown Mar Vista between Centinela and Stewart Street is a region known as Mormon Hill, where many of the shops were originally built to serve the Mormon settlement extending north from Venice Boulevard to Windward. The tract, known as Mar Vista Park, was settled by Mormons starting in the 1920s, and is centered on Wasatch Street, a reference to the mountains looming behind Salt Lake City. The community is still anchored by a Mormon church at the corner of Windward and Centinela.

Despite the temperance of the Mormons in the area, downtown Mar Vista has had a boisterous past, that continues to some degree in the present, amidst the quirky gentrification that has come to

though it does not go to San Diego. It is an auxiliary bypass route for Interstate 5, disconnecting from the 5 in the San Fernando Valley, and reconnecting to it in Irvine. The 405 is the principal interstate serving the west side of Los Angeles, and is often ranked as the busiest interstate in the nation. On the north side of Venice Boulevard, the neighborhood changes from Palms to Mar Vista at the 405. Across the street, Culver City continues for another two blocks west on Venice, before giving way to Mar Vista.
town in recent times. Along Venice are a number of beer halls, bars, tattoo parlors, and seven liquor stores, at last count. At Beethoven Street, on the west end of the commercial strip, is the 12800 block of Venice Boulevard. The block was mostly built out in the 1950s, and has two small liquor stores. On the north side of the street is the former Ven-Mar liquor store, notable for being the second liquor store in Mar Vista to be robbed, in 1950. Next to it is the El Charro Mexican restaurant, which was featured in a scene in the 2005 film Crash, the Academy Award winning movie about racial tensions in Los Angeles. Across the street is another liquor store, which was featured in a scene in the 2005 film Crash, the Academy Award winning movie about racial tensions in Los Angeles. Across the street is another liquor store, next to a windowless storefront that was a men’s spa for many years.

One block further west on Venice Boulevard is Venice High School. The first Venice High School at this site was built in 1914, on land that was in Los Angeles, not Venice, though it was annexed to Venice two years later. A large and ornate campus, especially for a compulsory school, it was so badly damaged in the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake that it was torn down. Two years later the new Art Deco campus that is still there today opened. As a film location, it has been cast as various fictional versions of high schools in films that include Grease and Heathers, and many alumni were featured in films too, including Myrna Loy, Beau Bridges, and Crispin Glover. In the old days the school had its own stop on the Venice Short Line, and served students from Palms and other communities.

Venice's Backcountry
Walgrove Avenue, west of the school, is the eastern boundary of the community of Venice (with the exception of the annexed land under Venice High School). Entering Venice, the address numbering system changes from five-digit addresses ascending, to four-digit addresses descending, counting down to the coast. Venice was founded in 1905, and was an independent city until 1925. It was envisioned and developed by Abbot Kinney, who created the community on land he purchased. His vision was an American version of Venice, Italy, along with the school's motto: “rowing not drifting.” A sculpture in front of the main entrance shows a woman gesturing up to the sky with one arm, and towards the ground with the other. The model for this sculpture, unveiled in 1922, was a student who grew up to become the actress Myrna Loy. By 2000, the sculpture had deteriorated and was removed, and was later replaced with a replica.

The Lay of the Land Winter 2021

A black granite obelisk at the northwest corner of Lincoln Boulevard and Venice Boulevard commemorates this as the location where, in 1942, more than a thousand local residents of Japanese ancestry were processed and loaded onto buses that took them to the Manzanar War Relocation Center. They were among the 10,000 Japanese Americans sent to the camp, three hours north in the Owens Valley, which itself was one of ten camps holding 110,000 Japanese Americans for as long as three years during the war. The internees reported to locations like this across the western USA, bringing just what they could carry, and many lost what they had to leave behind, including their homes. This monument was erected here, in front of the corner’s car wash, in 2017.

The first major intersection on Venice in Venice is Lincoln Boulevard. This street is State Route 1, the famous coastal highway running for more than 650 miles from Orange to Mendocino County. It was designated as Route 1 when the state renumbered the highway system in 1964. At the same time a portion of Venice Boulevard, starting at this intersection, became a State Route (CA 187) and officially part of the National Highway System, which provides federal funds for its maintenance, as it’s considered critical to national defense needs. From here CA 187 heads east on Venice, connecting CA 1 to Interstate 10 at La Cienega Boulevard. In 1966 much of this stretch was widened into three lanes in each direction, befitting an urban street that is also a highway.

Venice, an independent city from 1905 to 1925, was administered out of its city hall on Venice Boulevard, a few blocks west of Lincoln, a Mission Revival-style building that was finished in 1907, when Abbot Kinney’s Venice was growing quickly. After Venice joined Los Angeles in 1925, its city hall was obsolete. For the past several decades the building has been the home of Beyond Baroque, a literary arts center and performance space.

Beyond Baroque, occupying the former Venice City Hall, has been an important creative hub and venue for local artists, musicians, poets and writers, including some who later rose to national fame.
Venice City Hall was on a stop on the Venice Short Line known as Tokio Station, located at a junction with the Inglewood Line, an older railroad line that connected Inglewood with Santa Monica. Tokio Station was named for the Japanese-inspired architecture of the small station building, which was relocated nearby after the Short Line stopped running in 1950. The Inglewood Line, originally a steam locomotive freight line dating back to 1892, closed in 1922; however, its tracks, running down what is now Electric Avenue, had already established the line between Abbot Kinney’s Venice and the “backcountry,” on the other side of the tracks.

Abbot Kinney Boulevard intersects Venice Boulevard just west of the Tokio Station site. Formerly a stretch of West Washington Boulevard, this portion was renamed after the founder and developer of Venice in 1990. Abbot Kinney started amassing land here with partners in 1891. In 1904 he began building his vision for an American Venice, inspired not just by Venice, Italy, but also in part by the lagoons at the Chicago World’s Fair. Building a network of canals, by digging watery pits and making buildable flattened piles, was also a good way to develop the swampy land he owned behind the dunes. Abbot Kinney may have imagined a place of European erudition, and a new American renaissance, but it became a west coast Coney Island instead. Kinney died in 1920, and what remained of his dream disappeared over the years that followed. After it was renamed Abbot Kinney Boulevard, the street north of Venice Boulevard evolved into an upscale retail corridor at the heart of gentrified Venice.

West of its intersection with Abbot Kinney Boulevard, Venice Boulevard’s median widens further, splitting into two separate streets, North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard. The median between the two has been developed in interesting ways, starting at the wedge-shaped split, and the Venice of America Centennial Park. The park was established in 2005, the centennial of the founding of Venice, and is located at the point where the original Venice Canals met Venice Boulevard, at what is now Grand Boulevard (named after the Grand Canal that the road sits on top of now). The canals were filled with dirt in the years following Venice’s 1925 consolidation with Los Angeles, and turned into roads at grade with the surrounding housing lots. The park has some stylized commemorative Red Car tracks, and a Venice history museum is planned for the site, as well as a replica of the Tokio Station building.

Venice by the Sea
West of the park, the median becomes one-block-wide, and continues in this way almost to the beach. This space, between North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard, has several buildings in it, including a public library, apartment buildings, and some old and new houses. Much of the median, though, is open lots, used for parking. The largest lot covers 2.7 acres, and is known as LADOT Lot 731. It is owned by the City of Los Angeles, and is one of the main parking areas for visitors coming to Venice Beach, which is one block further west. A proposal to build a structure covering the entire lot, with 140 apartments for low-income and transitional residents (meaning people who are currently homeless) is far along on the design stage, and is currently being reviewed, and debated. The structure, called the Reese Davidson Community, is a dramatic-looking structure, designed by the post-post-modernist architect Eric Owen Moss, who developed his craft in the 1980s and 1990s transforming many buildings in the Hayden Tract of Culver City. The project here has been referred to by opponents as the Monster on the Median. There are at least 1,200 people who are unhoused in Venice, many of whom already live near the beach.

The northern limit of the Grand Canal, looking north. In the foreground is a catamaran turned into a raft, next to a boat ramp. North Venice Boulevard travels east/west past the wall at the end of the canal. Underneath it the canal turns into a narrow underground drainage culvert as it continues north under Canal Street, which used to be a canal, not a street. CLUI photo

The lot is divided by a stub of the Grand Canal, the northernmost part of the remaining Venice canals. While the more famous and photogenic Abbot Kinney Canals north of Venice Boulevard were filled and paved over in the late 1920s, this second cluster of canals south of Venice Boulevard, remained. Known as the Short Line Beach Canal District, it has four residential canals and a long feeder canal connecting them to Ballona Lagoon. Although the canals were completed in 1906, only half of the lots were developed by the 1920s, and they became stagnant pools in what became a derelict part of Venice, even into the 1970s. By the 1990s an effective water circulation system was completed, and the canals, now fully built out, were preserved, and are a treasured landmark.

At the west end of the parking lot is Pacific Avenue, the last major road intersecting Venice Boulevard. Before Venice was created, what is now Pacific Avenue was known as Trolleyway, a rail corridor for the Lagoon Line, that ran on the back side of the dunes, between the beach and the swamp. The line went south from Santa Monica

The tracks of the Venice Short Line have returned, at least as a memorial sculpture, in the median strip that divides North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard, part of the Venice of America Centennial Park. CLUI photo
to Clubhouse Avenue (now at Westminster Park), establishing the node that later became Venice. By 1905 the line had extended south to Playa del Rey, and the Venice Short Line, bringing people from downtown Los Angeles, turned north towards Santa Monica on Trolleyway, stopping next at the station at Windward, the heart of the new Venice of America. From there, at a colonnade evoking St. Marks Plaza, visitors could head to the canals, on gondolas or a rideable miniature railroad circling them, or to the pier with its other attractions.

The last block of Venice Boulevard, between Pacific Avenue and Speedway, is split by the one-block-long road called Center Street. The street runs between North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard, and is more like an alley, with the garages and parking areas at the back of properties whose fronts are on North and South Venice Boulevards, one block from the beach. On the adjacent block of North Venice is the LA Louver Gallery, a commercial contemporary art gallery established in 1976, which represents some of the artists who participated in the creative swirl of the run-down and cheap Venice of the late 1950s to 1970s, among them Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Ed Moses, Ken Price, Don Suggs, and Terry Allen (some of whom were also swirling around the notorious Ferus Gallery on La Cienega Boulevard, which operated from 1957 to 1966).


Center Street ends at Speedway, the westernmost street of Venice, and this part of the continent. It was established as a service corridor for the homes and businesses facing the ocean along Ocean Front Walk, and is very narrow and slow, despite its zippy-sounding name. The large structure blocking Center Street’s path to the beach is an apartment building called One Venice. One Venice is both the name and the address of this cinderblock pile, located in the space between North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard. It is either the last or the first building on Venice Boulevard, depending on if you are coming or going. Built in 1980, it has 50 small apartments. It is a federal HUD building, built for low-income seniors, and is supported by the federal Section 8 program, where the government pays some percentage of the rent for the tenants, based on their income. For some of the fortunate retirees here, this home at the heart of Venice Beach comes with a balcony, facing the ocean.

Between the balconies and the beach is another parking lot and Ocean Front Walk, a pedestrian path along the beach. A few blocks north is the Venice Boardwalk, Muscle Beach, and Windward Avenue. The Walk is part of a continuous path along the beach that extends south to the wide mouth of Ballona Creek. North of Venice, the path continues for more than five miles, going under the Santa Monica Pier, and ending at the Bel-Air Bay Club, a members only country club on the north end of Will Rogers State Beach. North of that the beach disappears, and the coast becomes a wall of boulders protecting the Pacific Coast Highway.

North Venice Boulevard and South Venice Boulevard end as the entrance and exit, respectively, of a large parking lot at the beach. It is perhaps fitting, since what ultimately led to the end of Abbot Kinney’s visionary version of Venice was, more than anything, cars. His Venice was a pedestrian city, of over 10,000 people by 1920, regionally connected by electric trolleys. With the growth of cars as the way for people to get around, visitors—and residents—found Venice’s narrow streets and high density unaccommodating. Compounded by the loss of revenue during prohibition, the Depression, and a general decline in resources and infrastructure after Venice joined LA in 1925, Venice morphed into an extension of that sprawling metropolis. In 1929, the year the canals were turned into streets, oil was discovered at the beach, and hundreds of oil wells soon lined the shore and the inland coastal landscape. In 1950 the Red Cars along Venice Boulevard were replaced by buses, and the rails of the Venice Short Line were removed. The end of the road became a parking lot at the end of the American continent, and once you get there, all you can do—after a bit of surfing, perhaps—is turn around and look back.

The end of the road. Venice Beach, along with the rest of the beachfront of Santa Monica Bay, has been an engineered construction since at least the 1940s, when millions of cubic feet of sand from coastal construction projects, like the power plant at El Segundo, were dumped on the beaches, making them 150 to 500 feet wider than they used to be. Regular deposits of sand from elsewhere are now required to maintain the beachfront at its current size.
With nearly a billion of pieces of mail in the United States Postal Service system at any given time, tracing the route of a single item traveling across the country in the weeks before Christmas may seem like trying to follow a single snowflake in a blizzard. But many Americans did, regularly refreshing online country in the weeks before Christmas may seem like trying to follow a single snowflake in a blizzard. But many Americans did, regularly refreshing online

AT 4:30 PM ON NOVEMBER 27, 2020, the CLUI dropped off the landscape machine known as the US Postal Service.

Origin facility: the Miracle Mile post office in Los Angeles. CLUI photo

IN Into the Mailstrom

Into the Mailstrom

Watching a Piece of Mail Make its Way Across the USA

AT 4:30 PM ON NOVEMBER 27, 2020, the CLUI dropped off the day's outgoing mail at a post office in the Mid-Wilshire district of Los Angeles. The mail included an envelope containing a copy of the Center's Coast to Coast field guide, ordered online by a CLUI supporter, to be sent to his home in Ithaca, New York. The Click-N-Ship label on the three-day Priority Mail envelope showed an estimated delivery date of December 1, 2020. This, however, was not to be.

Stop 1: Los Angeles Central Processing and Distribution Center, Los Angeles, CA

Within a few hours, the package was on its way to the Los Angeles Central Processing and Distribution Center, where, according to tracking information, it arrived at 9:04 PM. This facility, on a half-mile-long site south of Downtown, is the Mothership of Los Angeles mail. Its thousand-foot-long, 750,000-square-foot main building has more than 200 loading docks, accepting and emitting incoming and outgoing mail from much of the city.

The Los Angeles Central Processing and Distribution Center is a type of mail processing center known as a Sectional Center Facility (SCF), which serves one or more three-digit zip code prefixes—in this case, zip codes beginning in 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 907, and 908, which is why the mail from the Wilshire post office, with a zip code of 90036, came here. There are eight other processing and distributing facilities like this in Southern California, though this is the largest, followed closely in terms of square footage to the Santa Clarita SCF, located at Castaic Junction, and serving much of the San Fernando Valley. There are more than 250 SCFs in the USA: 16 in California, 13 in Texas, 11 in New York, and so on.

Traffic flows directly between the SCFs, but postal circulation is also served by another class of sorting facilities, known as Network Distribution Centers (NDCs). NDCs act as a kind of backbone to the national system, especially for bulk mail and bundles of junk mail, which constitute the majority of the 150 billion pieces of mail the USPS handles every year. There are 21 NDCs in the USA. The one in Southern California is a 600,000-square-foot warehouse with 150 loading docks in Bell, in one of LA's primary intermodal and logistics zones. 650 people work on the labyrinth of sorting machinery there, at what several complainers on the internet call “The Black Hole of LA.”

Stop 2: Memphis Distribution Center Annex, Memphis, TN

Memphis is a national logistics node for business envelopes and packages, as it is the location of FedEx's World Hub, possibly the busiest and most sophisticated sorting facility on the planet. Located at the north end of the city's airport, the hub and auxiliary buildings cover millions of square feet, and more than a hundred FedEx cargo jets can be parked there at the same time, while being loaded and off-loaded. The airport area is home to a variety of logistics centers and corporate warehouses, in symbiosis with FedEx, including Nike's national distribution center and a large UPS cargo facility.

The USPS has one of its 21 Network Distribution Centers in Memphis, located a few miles north of the airport. But our package, bound for Ithaca, avoided the NDC. Instead it seems to have spent some time at the LA SCF, then more time in transit, likely by truck and not plane, to a regional facility in Memphis, Tennessee, known as the Memphis Distribution Center Annex, where tracking information said it arrived at 5:14 PM, on December 1, the day it was supposed to arrive in Ithaca. And this is where things get a little more interesting and mysterious.

Stop 3: Oxford Postal Facility, Oxford, MS

The Oxford Postal Facility, just an hour and a half from Memphis, is less than 25,000 square feet in size, and has a public post office in the front part. Even so, it is the largest USPS facility in Oxford, a town known best as the home of the University of Mississippi. Besides "Ole Miss," a major employer in town is a Winchester ammunition plant, north of the postal facility, where 1,000 people make bullets for the military and civilians. Next door to the postal facility is a small mosque. Across the road is the National Sedimentation Lab.

The package arrived in Oxford just after midnight, and left at 5:10 AM on December 15, after a stay of 29 hours. It headed out by truck and went to a processing and distribution center in Rochester, New York, where it arrived at 3:23 AM on December 16.

Being just one small priority mail envelope, our package, headed to Ithaca, avoided the NDC. Instead it seems to have spent some time at the LA SCF, then more time in transit, likely by truck and not plane, to a regional facility in Memphis, Tennessee, known as the Memphis Distribution Center Annex, where tracking information said it arrived at 5:14 PM, on December 1, the day it was supposed to arrive in Ithaca. And this is where things get a little more interesting and mysterious.

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The USPS has one of its 21 Network Distribution Centers in Memphis, located a few miles north of the airport. But our package, bound for Ithaca, does not appear to have gone there, but rather to the Memphis Distribution Center Annex, where the USPS uses part of a 1,200-foot-long warehouse as a transfer facility. Located less than a quarter mile from the FedEx hub, this USPS facility supports the relationship the USPS has with FedEx, where priority USPS envelopes and packages, and even regular mail, are often carried by FedEx planes. Lots of mail is carried as cargo on passenger jets as well, since the USPS has no planes of its own anymore.

It seems, however, that although our Ithaca-bound package was sent "three-day priority mail," it did not get a seat on any aircraft. Instead it sat at the annex from December 1 to December 13—12 days in limbo next to the fastest and most connected package hub in the country. However, at 10:04 PM on December 13, the package headed out the door on a truck to a small regional facility in Oxford, Mississippi.

Stop 3: Oxford Postal Facility, Oxford, MS

The Oxford Postal Facility, just an hour and a half from Memphis, is less than 25,000 square feet in size, and has a public post office in the front part. Even so, it is the largest USPS facility in Oxford, a town known best as the home of the University of Mississippi. Besides "Ole Miss," a major employer in town is a Winchester ammunition plant, north of the postal facility, where 1,000 people make bullets for the military and civilians. Next door to the postal facility is a small mosque. Across the road is the National Sedimentation Lab.

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INTO THE MAILSTROM

Stop 4: Northwest Rochester Distribution Center, Rochester, NY
The Northwest Rochester Distribution Center is located south of the old sprawling Kodak plant site, and is one of six regional mail processing centers in upstate New York. It is around 230,000 square feet in size.

The package sat there for a few days, and appears again on the tracking system on December 20, listed simply as “In Transit to Next Facility.” Its next appearance on the tracking system is two days later, December 22, at 9:56 AM, when it is listed as having “Arrived at USPS Regional Destination Facility.”

Stop 5: Rochester Distribution Center, Rochester, NY
Despite the indication that the package spent two days in transit, the “Regional Destination Facility” is the Rochester Distribution Center, which is just seven miles away from the Northwest Rochester Distribution Center. Located on the south side of town, it is a 415,000-square-foot Sectional Center Facility. The package stayed at the SCF for a few hours, before departing for a small postal facility in Corning, New York where it arrived at 6:50 PM, according to the tracking system.

Stop 6: Corning Postal Facility, Corning, NY
Like the facility in Oxford, Mississippi, this 20,000-square-foot building has a post office in front, and a small sorting area in back with just a few loading docks. And like the Oxford Postal Facility, it is less notable for its scale in the national USPS network than for its context—in this case the largest USPS facility in Corning, the hometown of the famous glass company, which has facilities all over the region, including a plant a few miles away in Big Flats, where they are currently making millions of vials for the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine.

After spending the rest of the evening in Corning, the package was back on the road in the morning, making the 45-mile trip to the postal facility next to the airport on the north end of Ithaca.

Stop 7: Ithaca Postal Facility, Ithaca, NY
Arriving at 7:05 AM, the package was listed as out for delivery just 11 minutes later—its shortest stop while in transit, and the last. The letter carrier dropped it off in the mailbox at the recipient’s house at 3:58 PM on December 23—one of 150 million addresses visited by 300,000 postal carriers daily across the country. It was three weeks late, but just in time for Christmas.

The Lay of the Land

Report on CLUI Regional Facilities

THE CENTER OPENED ITS OWENS Lake Land Observatory at Swansea, in California’s Eastern Sierras, in February 2020. Unlike other observatories, which examine the sky from the land, this facility examines the land from the sky, presenting views, objects, and forms not immediately apparent from the ground.

The Land Observatory is based in the Owens Valley in order to explore the visual characteristics and phenomenology of the region, especially Owens Lake itself, which is a new landscape, engineered to control the effects of desiccation. The technologies being employed on Owens Lake by water managers on the lake surface produce a new vocabulary of terrestrial structures and effects that are in many ways unique, and on the vanguard of future mitigations, seeking to manage the results of human interaction with terrain on a local and global scale.

The Land Observatory was open on weekends over a five-week period, before closing in mid-March. We look forward to opening it to the public again in 2021.
A second structure was added to the site this year as well, an office trailer supporting research led by Alexander Robinson, of the University of Southern California’s Landscape Architecture and Urbanism program, who is also the principal of the Office of Outdoor Research and the Landscape Morphology Lab, in Los Angeles. Robinson has led field programs with students at Owens Lake for many years, and we are pleased to support his ongoing research in the region.

In November 2020, some of the Center’s video landscapes of Owens Lake were put on display at the Metabolic Studio’s Walter Hopps Curatorial Space, in the Owens Valley town of Lone Pine, California. The display is in the windows of the storefront, and should be visible to the public for some time into 2021, at 123 Main Street. (Metabolic Studio’s space is named after the curator Walter Hopps, who founded the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, in 1957, and over his career, guided other regional and national institutions through innovative moments in contemporary art. He died in 2005, and is buried in the Mount Whitney Cemetery, north of Lone Pine.)

The Center’s facilities at Wendover, Utah, have been closed for the 2020 season, for the first time since being established in 1996, due to the pandemic. Some of the structures underwent maintenance in the summer, but otherwise there was little CLUI activity there at all this year (though the casinos of West Wendover remained open for much of the year, and one of the old airbase buildings next to the Center’s flightline compound burned to the ground).

Likewise at the Center’s Desert Research Station, near Barstow, California, which was closed in March for the remainder of the year, due to the pandemic. More surveillance cameras were installed to keep an eye on the place from afar, and it was clear that visitors still came periodically, if only to walk the closed interpretive walking trail on the grounds. Some even made it inside the visitor center, and signed the guestbook. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Physically, if not socially distant painters, working on the phys-plant during the 2020 pandemic year of closure at CLUI Wendover.

A pre-pandemic CLUI talk at the International Contemporary Art Museum in Lanzarote, the Canary Islands, in January 2020.

THE CLUI WAS ENGAGED IN a few exhibitions on the other side of the Atlantic in 2020. The first was in Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands, where a CLUI installation was on display from January 30 to March 31, inside an old church building known as San Antonio’s Hermitage. CLUI program manager Aurora Tang spent several days on the island, and gave a public presentation at the International Contemporary Art Museum there, too. She also gave a presentation at INLAND/Campo Adentro’s Centro de Acercamiento a lo Rural, in Madrid, Spain, where CLUI work was on display February 5 to March 15. From June 6 to September 13, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland, featured a CLUI Landscan as part of its exhibit The Penumbral Age: Art in the Time of Planetary Change.

Meanwhile, back home in Los Angeles, classes visited the CLUI for talks from staff and discussions, from January to March 2020, including groups from UCLA, USC, UC Berkeley, Rice, Elon University, and Claremont College. In-person visits stopped on March 14, due to the growing Covid-19 pandemic, and all CLUI facilities closed to the public from that time to the present. Online class presentations and discussions have continued, including visits with CalArts; the University of Redlands; and Portland State University.
BOOK REVIEWS
BOOKS NEW TO THE SHELVES OF THE CLUI LIBRARY

Stealth: The Secret Contest to Invent Invisible Aircraft, by Peter Westwick, 2020
Westwick, the editor of the seminal Blue Sky Metropolis: The Aerospace Century in Southern California, turns to the story of stealth in his latest book. He focuses, as one must, on the development of Lockheed’s F-117 and Northrop’s B-2, with their Have Blue and Tacit Blue precursors, and secret radar test ranges around the Southwest, where designs were tested. Stealth was a paradoxical assertion of dominance: the less visible these vicious bat-like planes were, the scarier they looked.

Upgrade Available, by Julia Christensen, 2020
Christensen, an artist, educator, and LACMA Art + Technology Lab Fellow, swims in a sea of hardware and software obsolescence and makes a series of dives into fundamental matters of matter, time, and space, sharing conversations she had with the likes of archivist Rick Prelinger, Media Archeology Lab director Lori Emerson, and Lori Welcher of the Long Now Foundation. She finally heads into space, with teams from JPL, designing a CubeSat that communicates with trees back on earth. All hail art and science!

Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America, by Christopher Leonard, 2019
Though lots has been said about the notorious Koch Brothers and their political opinions and influence, this 700-page book tells the story of their industrial empire in a big way, too. Based in Wichita, Kansas, Koch Industries is now the largest privately held corporation in the country. It has more than $110 billion in annual revenue, 130,000 employees, and operations around the world. (Its only equal in the private company arena is Cargill, which has more employees, but less revenue, sometimes.) Koch Industries started as an oil and gas production and refining company in the 1960s, and grew into an industrial conglomerate through acquisitions. The company, and its subsidiaries, refine oil and gas, and make fertilizer, glass, plastics, fibers, beef, paper, electronic components, and operate 4,000 miles of gas and other product pipelines, in the USA.

Holding Back the River: The Struggle Against Nature on America’s Waterways, by Tyler J. Kelley, 2021
In this nicely place-based book, the Brooklynite author travels the land and meets with locals and experts to illuminate large systematic issues within the Mississippi River watershed, producing a contemporary overview of the state of the engineering along the nation’s major waterways, and the floods that they both prevent, and precipitate.

The Not-Quite States of America, by Doug Mack, 2017
The affable and curious author provides an accessible firsthand account of his travels to ground truth the five officially occupied territories of the USA (Guam, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands). This is a vivid and topical accounting of the current conditions and recent histories of these usually overlooked parts of the USA.

Dingbat 2.0: The Iconic Los Angeles Apartment as Projection of a Metropolis, edited by Thurman Grant and Joshua G. Stein, 2016
This book covers the evolution, habitat, and form of the dingbat—the floating stuco apartment buildings found, especially, around Los Angeles, notable mostly for their simple, functional, rectilinear form, with slight, but not insignificant, graphic design embellishments like exotic names in tiki fonts and retro-spacey sunburst medallions. This book gets as deep and wide into dingbats as any ever has, or is likely to, even defining variants like the Drivebat, Hallbat, Hunchbat, Dumlabat, Sidebat, Cheesebar, Hillbat, Twinbat, and Double-ding, and makes dingbats seem like the smartest box on the block.

Sun Seekers: The Cure of California, Lyra Kilston, 2019
Kilston makes a lucid link from the mountain health resorts of Europe, through the curative cabins of the Adirondacks, to the proliferation of Southern California sanatoriums, connecting the emergence of an ‘indigenous’ modernism (a la Schindler and Neutra) to German nature-seeking proto-hippies in the desert, and the Beach Boys. Why not? It’s Southern California, where the possibilities for improvement are endless.

Bunker: Building for the End Times, by Bradley Garrett, 2020
The author, a well-known urban explorer (especially of the UK), and certifiable cultural geographer (PhD), takes on the global prep and bunker-sphere, with some notable stops in the USA. He gets to know the founder of Vivos (Robert Vicino), and spends a few nights in one of the 575 munition igloos at the former Black Hills Ordnance Depot, which Vivos is turning into a prepper community, and gets drunk on IPAs with the caretaker inside Vivos’ only “real” bunker in the US, in—or, I should say under—East Shellburn, Indiana. He also tours the Survival Condo complex, in a former Atlas F missile silo north of Salina, Kansas, likely the most sophisticated private underground community bunker site in the country, with several residence levels built inside the 180-foot-tall “earthscraper.” While many of the bunkered prepner community schemes fall apart long before they are realized, this dystopia seems real, in very profound ways.

How to Hide an Empire, by Daniel Immerwahr, 2019
This look at the USA’s historical terrain beyond the logo map of the lower 48 is all over the place, and reflects on the nation by examining examples of its extremities. The book includes places where the US has had a presence, even if just as a tenant, like Thule, Greenland; Guantamano Bay, Cuba; and Okinawa, Japan, as well as former colonial holdings, like the Philippines, and the many Pacific Islands obtained during World War II, most of which have since returned to self-rule.

This book is from the popular podcast 99% Invisible, which covers “Architecture, Infrastructure, Cities, Objects, Sounds, Visuals, Technology, and History,” in well-researched and professionally produced episodes. Its founder, Roman Mars, is now the Ira Glass-like host of an audio show made by a staff of researchers, writers, and producers. The publication—a “podbook”?—is divided into six chapters, each with subcategories composed of a few brief tales of objects and phenomenology around the built landscape that have been discussed on the show, covering things like those dots on highways, movie production signs, revolving doors, boundary stones, skateblockers, and much, much more. Illustrated with drawings. If the podcast is like an ephemeral feast for the ears, the podbook is like a smorgasbord of tasty cocktail party appetizers. (Though it would be nice if all these purported “field guides” being published of late were actually field guides.)

In Land: Writings Around Land Art and its Legacies, by Ben Tufnell, 2019
A collection of some of curator Ben Tufnell’s writing over the last 20 years, on artists he has worked with and considered, who deal with issues of land and landscape, including Thomas Joshua Cooper, Hamish Fulton, Cai Guo-Qiang, and Katie Paterson. Tufnell’s writing is modest and incisive, and elucidates surprising connective tendrils that, once expressed, seem obvious in hindsight, due to their soundness.

Third Coast Atlas: Prelude to a Plan, edited by Daniel Ibañez, Clare Lyster, Charles Waldheim, and Mason White, 2017
This 7.5-pound book covers a massive subject: the entirety of the Great Lakes waterfront region, both in the US and Canada. This megaregion, with 10,000 miles of coastline, is home to 35 million people, yet is integrated geographically by being a single drainage basin. The Atlas is very much a collective effort, originating as a series of graduate courses and research projects at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and the University of Toronto, with publication support from Chicago’s Graham Foundation and the Great architecture and landscape publisher Actar. Yes, there are lots of elaborate graphics, as one might expect, but they are generally more map-y than graphic-y, and thus more lucid and legible to us mortals than much of what flows out of academic design think tanks. There are also big photos, including some by TorontoEd Burtynsky and Cambridge aerialist Alex MacLean. Despite numerous essays on subjects such as industry, transportation, waste, the border, water quality, and the cities of the region, its aim is to be descriptive, not prescriptive, a prelude to a plan, as the title says, while we await the fugue.

CLUI Corps: Matthew Coolidge, Sarah Simons, Aurora Tang, Ben Loescher, George Vicino, TWICE Vicino, and Mason White, 2017
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