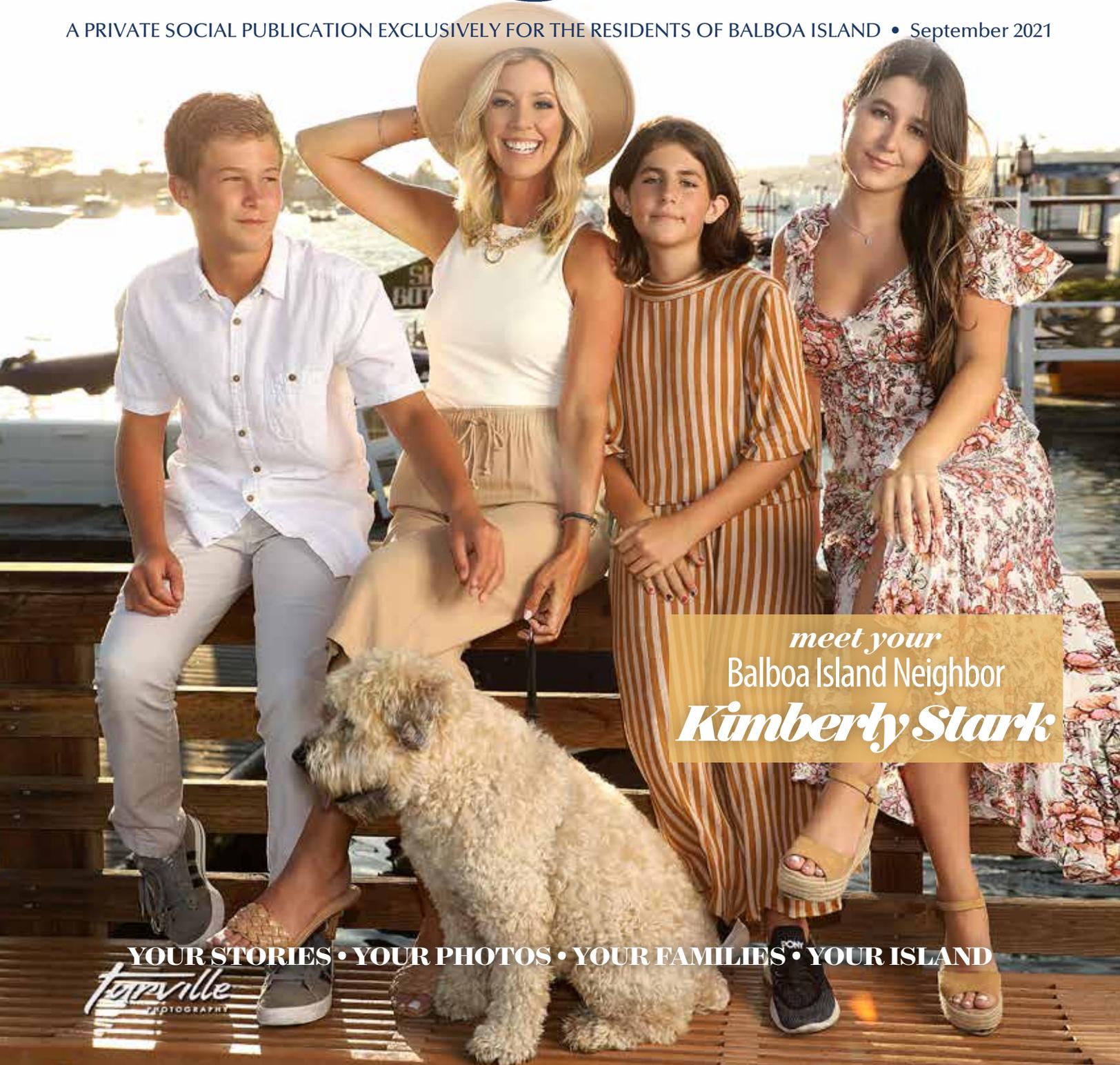


BALBOA



ISLAND LIVING

A PRIVATE SOCIAL PUBLICATION EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF BALBOA ISLAND • September 2021



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history The Legacy of Edward Spencer



By **Pete Weitzner** – Balboa Island Resident and Co-Producer, “The Golden Age of Newport Harbor”
| Photos (Lighthouse) courtesy of **Lowell and Nanette Wolfe**

Built Lighthouse, Masonic Camp on “Jewel of an Island”

Late in life, Bernice Spencer, daughter of Edward and Grace Spencer, told “The Spencer Family Story” in a sort of scrapbook. Much of Bernice’s younger years were spent on Balboa Island – in the island’s younger years.

An excerpt: “Edward and Joe Beek developed Balboa Island, built homes. Edward always said, ‘Balboa was a little jewel of an island,’ so Violet, Hazel and I would name a street as soon as houses were built on it... We looked up names of precious stones, chose ones we liked best.”

So now you know!

The gemstone names most of our streets bear were the inspiration of the ‘Spencer girls,’ Edward Spencer’s three daughters, Violet, Bernice and Hazel.

That’s one of many things you will learn from the new virtual exhibit on Edward “E.B.” Spencer and his family, at the Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach.

“Important person,” Museum Executive Director Tiffany Pepys Hoey said. “He built the lighthouse, ran the Masonic Children’s Camp.”

Edward Spencer married Grace Holden in 1897. They raised their family in Los Angeles, spent summers on the island. Edward sold lots for Developer William Collins, then built his first home on the Island in 1920. He’d build and sell many more.

Edward Spencer was head of the Masonic Home for Children in Covina. He loved to take the orphans down to Balboa Island in the summer.

Collins gave Spencer and the Masons land on Little Island for “Camp Collins” – bordered by Grand Canal and Abalone, and by Balboa and Park Avenue. Camp Collins was a busy place.

Seymour Beek, whose family has operated the Balboa Island Ferry for more than 100 years, recalls the Masonic camp.

“Kids crawling over the place, Beek said. There was a pier with a platform you could dive off—canal must have been deeper then.”

“Mother told me how much fun he had taking the masonic kids down there,” granddaughter Joanne Tatham Tatham said. Tatham lives in Irvine.

In 1944, the military shuttered the camp, and in its place built a school.

Meanwhile, Edward was building homes on streets named Diamond, Amethyst, and Opal.

Bernice and her sisters often asked Edward to build them a “summer house of their own ... a really tall house, with a light in the attic room so it will look like a lighthouse,” E.B. obliged in 1923.

The lighthouse at North Bay Front and Sapphire was four stories, with a light tower and widow’s walk. The “lighthouse house” was as much a party house. Bernice honeymooned there, so did her sisters. And the chef for the parties? Proprietor E.B. Spencer.

“He was just a lot of fun,” Tatham said. “I feel his smile, his laughter. Loved his grandkids.”

The lighthouse was torn down in 1972, and a home designed by Newport architect William Clapet stands there today, one of many tall homes on the island. But back in the day, “I think it was the only tall house,” Tatham said.

It’s a gem of a story. Edward Byron Spencer, 1871–1947.



Edward Spencer



Visit Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach – enjoy one of these upcoming events and discover Newport Harbor’s rich history. Monday–Thursday, 10am to 5pm, Friday–Sunday, 10am to 6pm. Free general admission. Become a member: balboaislandmuseum.org/become-a-member.



The lighthouse at North Bay Front and Sapphire and the current home at 901 North Bay Front



Masonic Camp Little Island



Edward and Bernice Spencer



Family in front of first Island home (1920)

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