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Inglewood in preparations to mark centennial in 2008

By OLU ALEMORU, Staff Writer 25.JAN.07

INGLEWOOD — The milestone is still a year away, but the city is gearing up to celebrate its 100th birthday on Feb. 14, 2008 with an array of events and activities.

A Centennial Committee, headed by city Recreation Superintendent Sabrina Barnes, has been formed to oversee the plans. The Web site inglewood100.com came online last month and will be updated regularly, providing historical facts and volunteer and sponsorship information for anyone — whether they are Inglewood residents or not — interested in being part of next year's events.

"There will be a variety of volunteer opportunities for people 16 and above," said Barnes. "As far as sponsorship, that will be open to any company or agency to support us through sponsorship, cash or in-kind. I encourage people to visit the Web site and look at the entry forms."

The Forum, LAX and the Hollywood Park Racetrack are all major landmarks in or near Inglewood, but some believe that what is perhaps the city's most important historic site doesn't receive the attention it deserves.

That is certainly the view of Diane Sambrano, a volunteer docent for the Centinela Adobe, a dwelling made out of mud and straw that was the first house built in the Centinela Valley. It is now a museum of sorts that chronicles Inglewood's beginnings.

Inglewood's rich history begins with the Centinela Adobe, which was built in 1834 by Ygnacio Machado, son of one of the soldiers protecting the first settlers of Los Angeles on their way from Mexico.

After several additions and owners, two land grants — Rancho Aguaje de Centinela and Rancho Sausal Ranando — were bought by Sir Robert Burnett of Scotland, and leased and later sold to Daniel Freeman from Canada.

Influenced by Charles Nordoff's "California for Health, Pleasure and Residence: A Book for Travelers and Settlers," Freeman settled in Centinela Ranch, where he believed the cool sea breeze would benefit his wife's health.

There he built a vast empire through dry farming and shipping millions of bushels of barley from his wharf in Playa del Rey.

In 1888, shortly after a railroad station had been built in the area, Daniel Freeman decided to sell off portions of his vast 25,000 acre ranch to create a town that he would call Inglewood. According to Sambrano, it was named after a place in Canada Freeman was fond of.

In 1905, Inglewood recovered from a nationwide financial crash after

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establishing a Poultry Colony in the present northern part of Inglewood. Later, Inglewood Park Cemetery was developed and the street car line brought coffins and mourners.

With a booming population of 1,200, Inglewood applied to become a city on Feb. 8, 1908 and was ratified electorally on Feb. 14. However, it was the earthquake of 1920 that put it on the map. People came to see the damage and stayed because of the temperate climate.

From 1920 to 1925, Inglewood was the fastest growing city in the country. The Air Age began in 1927 when the Andrew Bennett Ranch was leased by Los Angeles and converted it into Mines Field (later LAX).

Until World War II, Inglewood had been the hub of an agricultural area. Defense industries transformed it into an urban community when industrial activity, stimulated by the war, brought new workers and their families to the city.

During the 1960s and '70s, Inglewood continued to grow and develop, taking on a metropolitan look. The city became racially integrated in both its residential and business communities; It was now the home of two major hospitals — Centinela and Daniel Freeman — and the Hollywood Park Race Track and the Forum, former home of the Lakers and L.A. Kings.

Today, the Centinela Adobe stands behind a large gate on a quiet residential street at 7634 Midfield St. overlooking the San Diego (405) Freeway at Manchester Boulevard. Aside from the Adobe, the complex also houses the Freeman Land Office and the Centinela Valley Heritage and Research Center, which were dedicated in 1980.

"It's amazing to think that we have the first town in this entire area," said Sambrano, on a recent tour she gave to a reporter. Tours by docents are between 2 and 4 p.m. Sundays and by appointment during the week. "When you look at the maps you'll see there was nothing else around, it was farm and ranch land. This is an important part of our history, something we need to remember to teach our children about the joys of where this community began."

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