

Bards to Port: Two Writers Give Long Beach's Port Its Due

IN THE NEWS



George and Carmela Cunningham (Co-Authors of [Port Town: How the People of Long Beach Built, Defended, and Profited from Their Harbor](#)), Photos courtesy of Carmela and George Cunningham.

You think you know the Port of Long Beach. But longtime maritime experts George and Carmela Cunningham have produced a stunning and compelling history of the Port of Long Beach that reveals there is a lot more to port history than most people realize. Their new book, *Port Town: How the People of Long Beach Built, Defended, and Profited from Their Harbor*, provides a definitive history of the port and the city itself.

"I didn't grow up in Long Beach, but for years we covered the waterfront for *The Cunningham Report* [a publication covering maritime news]. So we had some knowledge about the Port. But we found a number of surprises in researching the book," says George.

"I grew up in Long Beach. My dad used to pile us into the car and drive down to the port," adds Carmela. "And I still discovered things that I wasn't aware of while working on the book. For example, many people don't realize how much the bombing of Pearl Harbor affected Long Beach. Overnight, there were 160 war widows living in Long Beach as well as 125 orphaned children. That's because the fleet was based in Long Beach, but was on an extended deployment to Pearl Harbor. And that's only one example."

Carmela and George provide a powerful combination when it comes to research and writing, particularly when it involves ports and history. George mentioned their now-shuttered publication, *The Cunningham Report*, formerly the definitive source for cutting-edge maritime news. They have since stopped publishing the report to write novels. But *Port Town* holds special meaning to them because of their connection to Long Beach and the maritime world.



"This was really a labor of love," says Carmela. "There has never been a book like this before. There have been coffee table books and Chamber of Commerce approaches, but never an in-depth history. But when we saw the request for proposal from the port, we responded immediately. Harbor Commission President Doug Drummond wanted a history of the port and its meaning to Long Beach. So this book is his brainchild."

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Throughout the book, the Cunninghams regale with stories, from five hundred years before the port's inception in 1911 to its modern incarnation. But they are quick to caution that these stories and anecdotes are not just for entertainment. They have present-day value. George gives a perfect example.

“There is a lot of talk about the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach merging. But I doubt that will ever happen. You can understand that better if you know the history of the port and what it means to the city. The subhead of our book says it all: *How the People Built, Defended, and Profited from Their Harbor*. Every year the port transfers funds *to the city*. It's totally self-supporting. Other West Coast ports are tax-supported. But here the port has helped finance, build, and develop the World Trade Center, the aquarium, the convention center, etc. Also, despite great pressure, the port has always followed its own path. Today, for example, it's one of the greenest ports in the world. The port is part of the heart and soul of Long Beach. And that's what we demonstrated in *Port Town*.”

You think you know the Port of Long Beach. But the real story has finally been written. In *Port Town: How the People of Long Beach Built, Defended, and Profited from Their Harbor*, George and Carmela Cunningham present the definitive history of the Port and its people. Now, you can enjoy that history, too, by ordering *Port Town* via Amazon.com in soft cover or Kindle. *The Long Beach Historical Society* is also offering a limited, commemorative leather-bound edition. And the Port of Long Beach has also made it available to download for free on iTunes.com.