

# THE COOPER ARMS

455 East Ocean Boulevard · Long Beach, California



A historical report on the building, its deaths and crimes, its businesses and its photographs

Personal edition – not for museum use

Compiled September 2026 from archival newspapers, city directories, the National Register of Historic Places nomination and library photograph collections.

Cover: the Cooper Arms, c. 1924. Long Beach Public Library Digital Archive.

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# Key Findings

## Violent or sudden deaths documented at the Cooper Arms: six.

- **October 4, 1934: Samuel Katz, 17.** The Fremont High School basketball player died after jumping from the top floor of the building. No apartment was involved (see Section 3.1).
- **August 19, 1935: Mrs. Gladys Glenna Fair, 34.** A Naval Board stenographer, she was shot in the head in her own Cooper Arms apartment. Her body was found the next day draped over the bathtub. Her sister, Florence Boykin Dowling, 52, was arrested and declared insane at her sanity hearing (Section 3.2).
- **Late October 1935: John J. Toms, 79.** A resident, he collapsed and died in the lobby minutes after a neighbor struck him with a riding crop in a dispute over her dog. She was convicted of battery (Section 3.4).
- **October 7, 1948: Mrs. Eliza Knapp, 95.** She fell from the fire escape outside her fourth-floor apartment; police thought she stepped out for air after a heart spell (Section 3.5).
- **December 21, 1962: Mrs. Pernell Van Dercar, 58.** Owner of the Cooper Arms Beauty Salon, she fell from her seventh-floor apartment; police said the evidence pointed to suicide (Section 3.6).
- **April 28, 2005: Rex James Hickok, 40.** A resident, known in adult film as Rex Cabo and Lance Heywood, he died after a fall from his eleventh-floor balcony onto a parked police car (Section 3.8).

**Unit numbers.** None of the surviving sources found prints Mrs. Fair's apartment number. That includes nine Los Angeles Times crime-scene negatives with their sleeve notes, seven wire stories, and the 1935 and 1936 city directories. The Katz death involved the top floor or roof, not a unit. Section 3.9 names the records most likely to hold the number.

**Gaps.** The 1924–1969 record comes from digitized *Los Angeles Times* and weekend *Press-Telegram* pages; Long Beach dailies of the late 1930s and 1940s are not digitized. Most Long Beach papers from 1936 onward are paywalled or not digitized, and for 1978–2026 the *Press-Telegram*, *Los Angeles Times* and news databases were not reachable, so the absence of other incidents is an absence of evidence rather than proof.

# How This Was Researched

Page requests were spaced several seconds apart, and every 502/503/504, 429 or dropped connection was retried after an increasing wait. Sources searched:

- **Library of Congress, Chronicling America:** full-text OCR of digitized U.S. newspapers from 1922 to 1963. The news clippings in this report were cropped from these page scans.
- **Long Beach Public Library Digital Archive:** the Polk Long Beach City Directory (1899–1969), including the street-by-street householders' guide for 455 E. Ocean, and the historical photograph collection.
- **UCLA Library, Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive:** the 1935 crime-scene negatives, read from Calisphere captures and UCLA's image server.
- **National Park Service NPGallery:** the National Register nomination (Portia Lee, 2000) and its photographs.
- **Wayback Machine:** the homeowners association website as it stood in 2007–2013, including the scanned 1922 brochure.
- **Internet Archive:** OCR text of the Long Beach *Independent Press-Telegram* (mostly weekend issues, 1951–1977), searched for “Cooper Arms” and “455 E. Ocean.”
- **Web and news search:** Long Beach Post, AVN, LBPB releases, court opinions, obituary sites, Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons, Downtown Long Beach Alliance.

**How to read this report.** *Anything stated as fact comes from a named source. Where the evidence is indirect, the text says so. Nothing has been filled in by guesswork.*

# 1. The Cooper Arms at a Glance

The Cooper Arms is a twelve-story Italian Renaissance Revival apartment tower at the northwest corner of Ocean Boulevard and Linden Avenue. Completed in March 1924, it was Long Beach's first residential high-rise and, when it was sold, the largest "own-your-own" cooperative apartment building in the West.

It rode out the 1933 Long Beach earthquake without major damage, was named a Long Beach Historic Landmark in 1979, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. In June 2024 its centennial opened Long Beach Architecture Week.

## The building in brief

|                           |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Address</b>            | 455 East Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, California                                                             |
| <b>Site</b>               | Lots 29–32, Block 114, original Long Beach Townsite; a 100 × 202 ft corner parcel                            |
| <b>Architects</b>         | Alexander Curlett and Claud Beelman, Los Angeles                                                             |
| <b>General contractor</b> | Scofield Engineering Construction Company                                                                    |
| <b>Completed</b>          | March 8, 1924                                                                                                |
| <b>Cost</b>               | \$1,350,000, then the most expensive development in Long Beach                                               |
| <b>Construction</b>       | Steel-frame reinforced concrete with stucco-faced brick; twelve stories                                      |
| <b>Apartments</b>         | 159 apartments with 406 rooms on floors 2 to 12; shops on the ground floor                                   |
| <b>Motto</b>              | <i>Beata domus coniuncta sub tecto</i> , "a happy household under one roof"                                  |
| <b>Designations</b>       | Long Beach Historic Landmark (1979); National Register of Historic Places (December 28, 2000, ref. 00001538) |

## 2. History of the Building

### 2.1 Before the Cooper Arms (to 1922)

The site is Lots 29 to 32 of Block 114 of the original Long Beach Townsite: a 100 × 202 ft parcel at the northwest corner of Ocean Boulevard and Linden Avenue. It was part of a stretch of Ocean Boulevard “given over to fine homes.” Eight houses stood on the lot, all owned by Larkin Y. Cooper, a feed and grain dealer from Emporia, Kansas, who became a Long Beach land developer specializing in key corner lots.

Cooper and his wife, Effie B. Cooper, lived across Linden on the northeast corner. The 1922 brochure says they had repeatedly turned down offers for this corner, having dreamed “for years that some day an architectural masterpiece would be erected here.” When the project went ahead, a 1922 *Long Beach Daily Telegram* headline reported “Ten Buildings Being Taken From Site of ‘Own-Your-Own.’”



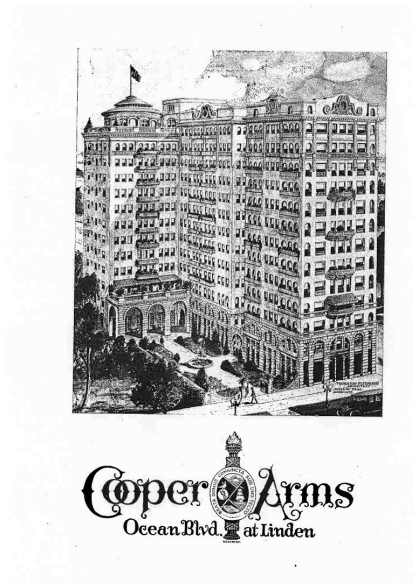
Ocean Boulevard looking west, c. 1919–1920. A note on the back of the print reads “Artaban only... Cooper Arms under construction... No Breakers.” Long Beach Public Library Digital Archive.

### 2.2 Planning and financing (1922–1923)

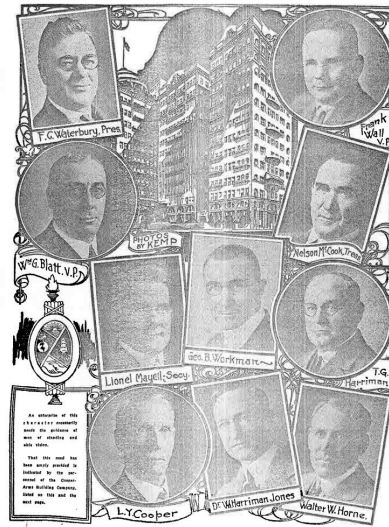
In April 1922 the *Daily Telegram* announced “Long Beach to Have Finest Apartments in Whole Southland.” The first scheme, a flamboyant L-shaped tower with a domed rooftop solarium, was called the Carma-Leon Grande (said to mean “beauty, strength and grandeur”). It was designed by Thornton Fitzhugh and Will Teal, with F. C. Waterbury as financial director. By July 1922 it had been renamed the Cooper Arms, and the Cooper Arms Selling Agency was taking reservations from floor plans. The agency issued the illustrated sales brochure reproduced here.

The Cooper Arms was sold as an “own-your-own” cooperative, the sixth in Long Beach and at the time the largest in the West. It was promoted by Lionel V. Mayell, secretary of the Cooper Arms Building Company, who had already built the cooperative Artaban and later developed the Villa Riviera. The board was, in the

homeowners' own phrase, a "who's who" of Long Beach: banker Nelson McCook, councilman and dairy manager George B. Workman, merchant Frank E. Wall, realtors Walter J. Horne and Val Lester, surgeon Dr. W. Harriman Jones, and the owners of both city dailies, William F. Prisk of the *Press* and J. J. Penny of the *Telegram*, which guaranteed the project good press. Apartments sold for \$3,800 to \$17,000, and more than \$1,250,000 had been sold before construction began. Ground-floor shops were planned from the start, with their rent meant to cover most of the building's upkeep. The idea was borrowed from Pasadena's Hotel Maryland and the Ambassador in Los Angeles.



1922 sales brochure, cover. Wayback Machine capture of [thecooperarms.org](http://thecooperarms.org).



Brochure page showing the Cooper Arms Building Company officers, including L. Y. Cooper, Lionel V. Mayell, F. C. Waterbury, Dr. W. Harriman Jones and Walter W. Horne.

## 2.3 Construction (1923-1924)

The general contract went to the Scofield Engineering Construction Company, builders of the Los Angeles Biltmore, and was announced on March 4, 1923, a few weeks after the city issued the building permit on February 10. The final design came from Los Angeles architects Alexander Curlett and Claud Beelman. Beelman later designed the Art Deco Eastern Columbia Building. Their scheme was a refined twelve-story Italian Renaissance Revival tower of steel-frame reinforced concrete with stucco-faced brick, Adamesque art-stone medallions, and neo-Egyptian lotus ornament. On March 25, 1923 the *Los Angeles Times* called it "one of the most imposing structures of its kind west of Chicago" and predicted it would "become a landmark that may be seen from ocean vessels miles away." The \$1,350,000 budget made it the most expensive development in Long Beach to that date. It was financed partly through a first-mortgage coupon-bond issue advertised in April 1923.

Work was completed on March 8, 1924, and the building opened that month as the city's first residential high-rise. On July 30, 1924 the *Long Beach Press* ran a full section on it, crediting everyone from the architects to the suppliers of "fully 400 tons of quartz sand."



Cars parked face-in around the new Cooper Arms, c. 1925. Photo by Ralph Morris (Wikimedia Commons).



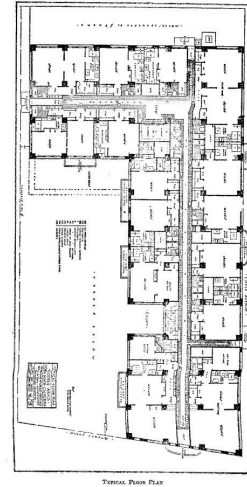
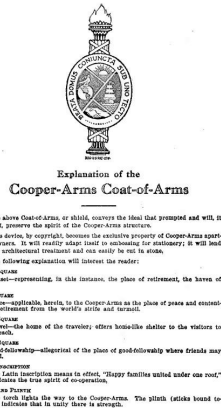
Ocean Boulevard front and garden, c. 1925, with the neighboring apartment building at left. National Register nomination, Photo 1; negative at the Long Beach Historical Society.

## 2.4 The building as designed

The plan is an L. A deep wing runs north along Linden Avenue and a shorter ell runs west, framing a private garden that faces the ocean behind a wrought-iron fence. Features recorded in the National Register nomination and the 1922 brochure:

- 159 apartments with 406 rooms on floors 2 to 12, in two-, three- and four-room plans plus bath. One "blue-print" owner combined a single and a triple apartment into a 12th-floor penthouse, which reduced the planned 160 units to 159. Buyers could customize bookcases, breakfast nooks and cabinetry.
- Steam radiators, a central vacuum outlet in every unit, tiled baths, gas kitchenettes, centrally refrigerated "Iceless Frigidors," "disappearing" wall beds and "dustless roller screens." Also high-speed elevators and a house telephone connecting every unit to the lobby.
- A 12th-floor solarium and ballroom with a domed ceiling and a sprung hardwood dance floor.
- A ground-floor arcade of shops running from Ocean Boulevard, a "Spanish loggia" through to Linden Avenue, and a main lounge (the "Grand Salon") furnished by Barker Brothers. The lounge has a Louis XVI marble fireplace and lotus-capital columns.
- A basement power plant, incinerator, and lockers and dressing rooms for sea-bathers. A planned salt-water plunge was never built.
- Over the Linden Avenue door, the building's coat of arms and motto: *Beata domus coniuncta sub tecto*, "a happy household under one roof."

- No on-site garage. Owners' cars were valeted to the Cooper Arms Garage at 80 Linden Avenue.



The Cooper Arms coat of arms, explained in the 1922 brochure. "Typical Floor Plan" from the 1922 sales brochure.

## 2.5 Timeline, 1924 to the present

| Year         | Event                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Source                                                           |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1924         | Building completed (March 8) and occupied. Cooper Arms Garage opens at 80 Linden Ave.                                                                                                                                                                                                  | NRHP; LBPL photo                                                 |
| 1926–1969    | Ground-floor shops listed in the city directory: beauty salons, millinery, confectionery, gifts, an artist's studio, art goods, lampshades, ladies' apparel, Nola Brooks's portrait studio, a grocery, and the Thomas Cook travel bureau (see Section 4).                              | Polk directories                                                 |
| 1925         | A fire alarm empties the crowded building when the incinerator flue chokes at the ninth floor (April 12). No injuries are reported.                                                                                                                                                    | LA Times, Apr 13, 1925                                           |
| 1929         | Photographed looking west along Ocean Blvd from the building (October 3).                                                                                                                                                                                                              | USC / Calif. Hist. Soc.                                          |
| 1931         | Directory lists it as "Cooper Arms Hotel Apartments."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Polk 1931                                                        |
| 1932         | All 159 apartment refrigerators are replaced with Seeger cabinets cooled by Frigidaire compressors, the first documented building-wide modernization.                                                                                                                                  | Air Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration News, Aug 17, 1932     |
| 1933         | Magnitude 6.4 Long Beach earthquake (March 10). Building "swayed from east to west, but it held together," with no major damage.                                                                                                                                                       | Press-Telegram 1974, via Wikipedia                               |
| 1934         | Death of Samuel Katz, 17, in a fall from the top floor (October 4).                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | UP wire                                                          |
| 1935         | Murder of resident Gladys Glenna Fair in her apartment (August 19). Retired Methodist minister Rev. Dr. John A. Davis dies at his home in the building (August 18). In late October, resident John J. Toms, 79, collapses and dies in the lobby after being struck with a riding crop. | LA Times photos and reports; AP/UP; Methodist conference journal |
| c. 1936–1960 | William C. Reith serves as the building's engineer for 24 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Press-Telegram, May 29, 1960                                     |