

Once Upon a Time in North Park

North Park Recreation Center

By Karon Covington

In 1913 permits were issued for construction that transformed a neighborhood play yard into the University Heights Playground (UHP) on Idaho between Lincoln and Polk. A map of the day designated this site as a point of interest on old Street Car Route #7. In 1935, 4044 Idaho became its present street address.

The UHP was an early home to Boy Scout Troop #22 and to a very active girls' club: The Chez Nous. When the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, ending World War I, Chez Nous joined the Daughters of Liberty, the War Camp Community Service and other groups in inviting the families of enlisted men to a Thanksgiving dinner celebration. The girls of Chez Nous also joined the girls' clubs from the Rose Park and Golden Hills Playgrounds in planning a Victory Dance to honor local servicemen. According to the San Diego Union, that occasion had to be postponed until "the first Saturday after the Quarantine." The 1918 influenza epidemic struck San Diego with a vengeance just after the war ended, necessitating a strict quarantine that curtailed church services, business, entertainment and social events for a time.

The Victory was eventually celebrated with a dance held at the Golden Hills tennis courts. Six years later the UHP acquired its own courts. The *North Park News* reported in 1924 that, "Work is in progress at the University Heights Playground, cementing three tennis courts, which will be used also for dancing as the weather gets warmer." The North Park Business Club held many popular community dances on those courts in the following years, and some of San Diego's finest tennis players learned to play there.

In 1969, the playground gained a more appropriate name: The North Park Recreation Center. The new name made little difference to the staff as they went about their daily business of continuing the long-established tradition of meeting the mercurial recreational needs of North Park residents of all ages. The friendly staff, the basketball court, tennis courts, park area, meeting rooms, classrooms, and baseball fields of "The Rec" have been regarded as many as the heart of the community for nearly 80 years.