

Once Upon a Time in North Park

Park Boulevard

By Ruth Dahl

Park Boulevard, which is the dividing line between the Uptown Plan Area and the Greater North Park Plan Area, has an abundance of significant history identified with it.

Park Boulevard from El Cajon Boulevard south to Balboa Park had a featured role in the original University Heights subdivision. It was the only wide north-south street and probably was intended to serve as a grand avenue leading to its juncture with El Cajon Boulevard at the proposed University of Southern California campus, the neighborhood's central focus. Park Boulevard originally ended at this site, and the street north of here, Carolina Street, a road of standard width. This is why Park Boulevard narrows north of El Cajon Boulevard.

The commercial block between University and Robinson Avenue was located at a prime traffic juncture. The University Avenue/Park Boulevard intersection on the north was also the intersection for the trolley lines running on those streets. This stretch of Park Boulevard is also the site of the Park Boulevard Revival/Modern Historic District. It is the site of four Egyptian-style buildings, a type of architecture rarely found elsewhere in San Diego County.

Most of the Apartments in the southern three blocks of Park Boulevard were built primarily during the "Roaring Twenties", a period of land speculation nationwide. As the city expanded and land near the city (downtown) became more expensive, it made sense for landowners to build at higher densities. Also, the 1915-16 Panama-California Exposition focused a lot of attention on Balboa Park and made living close to it desirable. The width of Park Boulevard at this section, no doubt, created a sense of grandeur that would inspire landowners to erect architecturally ornate buildings. In addition, this area is a few blocks east of Marston Hills, a subdivision of mansion-size homes which was being developed by department store magnate George Marston about the same time.

Walter and Annie Broderick, owners of the Broderick Land Company which developed Wilshire Terrace, a converted abbey a few blocks east of Park Boulevard, also built the apartments at 3410-16 Park Boulevard. Their apartment building and adjacent style Craftsman-style home are near the Balboa Park Inn. Another big builder was E.F. Bryans. A wide range of people occupied these apartments, from school teachers to government employees and people involved in real estate and upper management in the business world. Quite a few Navy personnel are in evidence around 1930. A directory search reveals that the apartments built in this area served primarily as temporary housing, as many people did not stay for more than a year or two.