

## Once Upon a Time in North Park

### Ted William's Boyhood Home

By Alex D. Bevil

Both University Heights and neighboring North Park have many unique sites reflecting its history and development. Most are associated with important persons involved in the growth of the community. One site, an innocuous little California Bungalow under the towering water tank was the boyhood home of the greatest athlete to come out of San Diego.

Located at 4121 Utah Street, on the east side of Utah, between Howard and Polk Avenues, this typical California Bungalow was designed by Architect J. C. Cordrey for the B.K.S. Building Company and was completed in 1921. This local real estate development and building contractor was one of many which were involved with developing spec houses in the University Heights/North Park area.

The house became the home of Mrs. Envoy May Williams, the "Salvation Army Lassie," best known for her charitable fund-raising activities for the local chapter of the Salvation Army during the 1920's-1940's. Mrs. Williams, her husband, and two sons, lived in the house from 1924-1960.

Her eldest son, Theodore Samuels Williams, is arguably one of the greatest baseball hitters who ever lived. "Ted" Williams, a star player on the 1930's Hoover High School Baseball Team, was a member of the newly franchised San Diego Padres in 1936 before being signed with the Boston Red Sox in 1937. His illustrious and often stormy career with the Boston Red Sox lasted from 1937-1960, with time out for Military Services as a Marine Fighter Pilot in WWII and Korea. Williams lived in the house from 1924 until he left to go play for the Sox. His lifetime batting average of .344 is higher than Babe Ruth's. He was the last person to hit over .400, knocking in 162 runs in 1949, and again in 1949, a record still unbroken.

His mother spent much of her time doing charity work for the Salvation Army, and his father would rather work in his photo studio in Downtown San Diego. Ted would often spend his time practicing fly casting off the front porch or practicing his hitting on the playing fields of the old Horace Mann Junior High School, Hoover High School, or at the North Park Recreation Center. Still, May Williams loved her son and would talk about him all the time. She kept a scrapbook chronicling her son's career; every thing ever written about him would be included in the bulging scrapbook. Ted Williams does make rare visits to his home town, attending recent dedication ceremonies for both baseball fields named in his honor at Hoover and the North Park Recreation Center.

While filming a news feature at his old high school for network television in 1977, Williams was hitting line drive after another for the camera. Ted saw one that he really liked and the ball sailed up and over the 307-foot sign atop Hoover's twelve foot outfield

fence, over 46<sup>th</sup> Street, and knocked on the wall of the house across the street – nearly 400 feet from the home base. Not bad for a 59-year-old who retired from baseball when the kid on the mound was in diapers.

Note: This article appeared in the February 1992 issue of the NCPA newsletter. Ted Williams passed away on July 5, 2002.