

Once Upon a Time in North Park

The Silvergate Masonic Temple

By Alex D. Bevil

The Silvergate Masonic Temple, located at 3795 Utah Street. In 1931, Silvergate Lodge 296, Free and Accepted Order of Masons, authorized the purchase of land on the corner of Utah Street and North Park Way in the neighborhood of North Park. The site of the new temple was only one block south of the 7 streetcar line along University Avenue, affording access throughout San Diego's extensive street railway system (discontinued in 1949).

Success in the lodge's efforts to obtain \$75,000 for the building's construction was attributed to its campaign chairman, Colonel Ed Fletcher. The architectural firm of Edward and Charles Quayle were retained. The Quayle Brothers had designed many noted homes, commercial buildings, factories and theatres in San Diego. They had recently completed the ornate Spanish Renaissance Revival style North Park Theatre (29th Street and University Avenue) in 1928.

Asked to design the new Silvergate Masonic Temple to resemble King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, (of which the lodge members trace the beginning of their lodge) the Quayles gave full reign to their architectural imagination. Since King Solomon's Temple would have been designed using imported building styles and methods, the Quayles hypothesized that the modern temple should be resemble a blending of Mesopotamian Ziggurat and Egyptian Temple features already found in the highly fashionable Art Deco style of the late 1920's -1940's.

Popularized by the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris in 1925, by 1929, Art Deco had become the favored style for detailing a myriad number of buildings-from skyscrapers to gas stations. Art Deco's use of zigzags, chevrons and other stylized and geometric forms can be found in the façade of the Silvergate Masonic Temple. A central five-story tower and the use of fluted pilasters, corbels, and other vertical projections above the roofline, give the four-story temple a vertical emphasis. An elaborate entryway leads into the temple's foyer where the visitor is led to several rooms decorated with Egyptian motifs-the most elaborate being the third floor lodge room. In 1989, the Silvergate Masonic Temple was recognized by the Art Deco Society of California as one of the most outstanding examples of Art Deco Architecture in the entire state.