

ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK

History Snippets of Pershing Avenue

By Katherine Hon

Pershing Avenue was Oregon Street in the early 1900's. The name was changed after World War I to honor General Pershing. Some of North Park's most famous designer-builders, including Dryden, Bryans, and Shreiber built houses along this street between Upas and Landis starting in 1912. Nikki Nicholas, a long-time resident of Pershing Avenue who has lived in the same house near Upas since her father bought it in 1941, shared some fond North Park memories in an interview for the NPCA Annual Meeting last April.

During the 1940's for ten cents at the Ramona Theater you could get:

Two movies

One serial

One cartoon

One newsreel

And an ice cream sandwich.

During World War Two, Morley Field became an Army camp. The area from Pershing and Upas towards where the tennis courts are now was filled with tents among the eucalyptus trees. Nikki's mom would always cook enough at dinner to feed several soldiers in addition to the family. Sometimes soldiers on a weekend pass would sleep on their porch. Nikki remembers exchanging comic books for nylons and bubblegum. The west side of Balboa Park, from the zoo to 6th, was under camouflage netting to make the area look like houses from the air, because there were turret guns in the towers. People could go to the zoo, but not the park, and Laurel Street Bridge was closed. After the war, about ten soldiers from the encampment came back to the neighborhood to visit.

Nikki had some interesting neighbors. One family was headed by Reverend Philip Sachs, a German immigrant who was pastor of the Immanuel Church of Evangelical Association. Reverend Sachs is listed in the 1919 City Directory at 3431 Oregon, one house north from Nikki's future home, with his wife Catherine. Also at this address is Alvin B. Sachs, a cashier for Union Oil Company, and Karl P. Sachs, a clerk at the Western Metal Supply Co. For you Petco Park fans, that's the building that was preserved at the baseball stadium.

Why are the Sachs' interesting? Because Karl shows up as the builder of 3424 Oregon in 1920, and 3425 Oregon across the street in 1922, both with Philip Sachs as the first owner. When the current owners saw that, they said – wow, so that explains why we always thought our houses were mirror images of each other.

Here is a cross section of Oregon Street/Pershing Avenue, based on federal census information and the 1927 San Diego City Directory (the first to include a listing by address as well as name).

In 1920, Richard A. Griffith, 76, and his wife Jennie D., 64, are living at 3439 Oregon, on the corner of Oregon and Myrtle. The house was built by JDN Griffith in 1912. In 1927, JND Griffith and RA Griffith are listed at 3611 Pershing in the city directory. This house was built by Griffiths in 1918. JND Griffith is also listed as the builder of 3727 Pershing, north of Landis.

In 1920, Mary E. Donald, a 64-year old widow, is living at 3544 Oregon with her sons Ralph, 38, a foreman at a laundry, and Harry, 27, a sales manager with a lumber company. In the 1927 city directory, Mary is still in the house, which was built by Bryans in 1913 for his own family.

In 1920, Rob Roy Bruce, 53 years old, and born in Canada of Scottish parents, is living at 3578 Oregon with his wife Sarah J., 53, born in Canada of English parents, and uncle George Woodley, 73, born in England. None of them has an occupation. RR Bruce is still listed in the house in the 1927 city directory. This house was built by RR Bruce in 1917.

Although there is no house pictured on the 1921 Sanborn Fire Map for North Park at 3635 Oregon, the 1920 census shows residents there: Arthur Palmer, 50 years old and secretary of a church, and his wife Dollie, age 55. In the 1927 city directory, Mrs. M.G. Thompson is the resident. In the 1930 census, she is still at this address, listed as a 59-year-old widow born in the District of Columbia of Irish parents. Her sister, Margaret A. Maloney, age 67 and single, is also at this address.