

**NORTH PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
APRIL 2018 MEETING NOTES**

**DATE:           APRIL 19, 2018**

**TIME: 6:30 PM**

The first part of this meeting was a Business Meeting of the North Park Historical Society (NPHS) Board of Directors, and the second part was the activities discussion for the organization. These notes include updates as of May 4, 2018.

The next meeting will be a **PIZZA PARTY** at Paesano Italian Restaurant at 3647 30th Street on **THURSDAY May 17, 2018** from 4:30 pm to 7:30 p.m. There will be no business, just free pizza and cookies to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the North Park Historical Society. **PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN LOCATION FOR THIS SPECIAL MEETING.**



**1.       WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The following members of the NPHS Board of Directors were present:

Steve Hon	Katherine Hon
Jody Surowiec	Claudia Watts
George Franck	Michael Thornhill
Paul Spears	Sharon Turner
Judy Ciampoli	Bob Bauer
Randy Sappenfield	

The following members of the NPHS Board of Directors were absent:

Hilda Yoder

Members Turner, Michael B., and Kelly also joined us. Welcome!

**2.       AGENDA REVIEW AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The latest Pacific Beach Historical Society newsletter was circulated for viewing. The latest PastMatters column in *Uptown News* was about neon signs, in particular the marching majorette that was at the Campus Drive-In many years ago. A scan is at the end of these notes.

The Friends of the Villa Montezuma will have interior tours of the beautiful Villa on August 18 and October 20. They will also do a tour of Mount Hope Cemetery on October 27. Go to the Friends of Villa Montezuma website at [VillaMontezumaMuseum.org](http://VillaMontezumaMuseum.org) for more info.

At the end of the meeting, Michael B. shared some interesting historical ephemera, including a history of early San Diego from 1542 to 1888 published in the 1920s as a promotional item.

**3.       MINUTES ACCEPTANCE**

The minutes from the March 15, 2018 NPHS meeting have been posted on the website.

**BUSINESS PORTION OF MEETING**

**4.       TREASURER'S REPORT**

The financials for the period of March 13 to April 14, 2018 were sent to Board Members before the meeting. During this period, we received a donation of \$80 (thank you, Margaret!). One member renewed for revenue of \$20 from dues. We sold three Burlingame books and four spiral-bound North Park history books to the San Diego History Center for their retail sale. Amazon made a net payment of \$7.47 for books sold. Total income was \$178.71. There were

no expenses in this time period. Katherine also reported we will receive a "bonus" of \$100 from our insurance company when we renew our insurance for being well managed and not having any claims.

The San Diego History Center has taken four tote bags on a trial consignment sale basis. **Update:** North Park Historical Society products are featured on their own shelf at the San Diego History Center Museum Store!



## **ACTIVITIES PORTION OF MEETING**

### **5. WATER TOWER PUBLIC ART PROJECT**

The artist team's concept proposal was emailed to our city contact, Christine Jones (now Chief of Civic Art Strategies for the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture), on January 11, 2018 with a request for input on the general feasibility of the concept as being acceptable to the City. On April 5, 2018, J. Noland, Civic Art Project Manager, called Katherine to relay the City's review comments from him and Christine Jones, based on their review of the selected Artist Proposal from Bhavna and Lynn. Their initial comments were regarding maintenance, potential vandalism/breakage, and the possible overhang above the sidewalk. Responses from the artist team were conveyed to the Board via email in advance and discussed at the April 19 meeting.

As a result of the discussion, there were some additional questions from the Board, including if the overhanging element of the installation above the sidewalk (public right of way) would be a fatal flaw issue and if a building permit would be needed, if wind could affect the overhangs such that they might move around, and who will be responsible for cleaning and how often would that have to be done. Also, Michael B. told the group there is a new City program for Placemaking that has just been approved by City Council. Board members wanted more information about this program, which could facilitate implementation of an installation within the public right-of-way.

**Update:** Katherine coordinated with Gail Goldman, our art consultant, and added some text to the draft contract to clarify that the artists must research what the installation limits are and adapt the design accordingly, and explain what permits would be needed. The artists will also have to consider wind effects and develop information in consultation with a California licensed structural engineer. The artist team is well aware that the installation's materials will have to be durable and the art must be designed so debris will not collect. If the City accepts the art, it will be as a 5-year loan from NPHS. So it will be our responsibility to monitor the installation and raise the funds we may need to maintain it. This would be part of the fundraising we have to conduct to have the art actually constructed and installed after we have a final concept design from the artist team.

Steve had a very informative phone conversation with Elizabeth Studebaker, Neighborhood Investment Manager and primary contact for the new Placemaking process. Based on this conversation, we think it is possible that the new process could facilitate the overhanging element of the art installation, because the new process addresses temporary use of public right-of-way that activates streetscapes. Shade structures and decorative lighting are two types of projects specifically mentioned as qualifying for placemaking in the new ordinance. A Process One (the simplest) approval process is the new allowable process for such projects. However, the NPHS art installation still must go through the Art Commission and we will continue to work with Christine Jones at the City unless Christine instructs us otherwise.

Based on the new information, the Board considered via email the question of moving forward with implementing a Design Development Agreement with the selected artist team. Nine Board members approved moving forward, one abstained, and no Board members objected. Therefore, the Agreement was sent to the Artist Team for their review and signature.

## **6. UPCOMING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

The annual events NPHS is participating in or organizing include the following:

- North Park Festival of the Arts: Saturday, May 12, 2018. We will be on University Avenue near Iowa Street in space D-23 from Festival opening to 5:00 pm. Sharon, George, Jody, Claudia and Judy have volunteered to help Steve and Katherine at the booth. Michael B. may also be able to come.
- North Park Car Show: Saturday, September 8, 2018, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The Balboa Tennis Club is hosting us in their parking lot at Morley Field. We will have traffic police staff on-site for the entire duration of the show, and we will end an hour earlier than in previous years (at 1:00 p.m. instead of 2:00 p.m.). The registration flyer was circulated at the meeting, and the group agreed it should be sent out. See the flyer at the end of these notes. **Update**: We already have eleven cars signed up!
- Presentation at meeting on Thursday, September 20, 2018. At the September NPHS meeting, Alex Bevil will present his paper entitled "A Neighborhood in Flames: The 40th Anniversary of the Crash of Flight 182 in North Park." His paper is based on the extensive research he has done about the crash that devastated the area at Dwight and Nile streets 40 years ago.
- Old House Fair - The date for this event is Saturday, May 19, 2018, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. There will not be a Street Fair, and the NPHS Board decided not to participate as an exhibitor at the Old House Fair with this format. **Update**: The Book Catapult, the independent bookstore that took over the space that The Grove used to be in on Juniper near 30th, is planning on featuring Arcadia books about various San Diego neighborhoods in their store on Old House Fair Day. They will include our *Images of America: San Diego's North Park* book, so if you don't have a copy that would be a fun time to go buy one.
- Toyland Parade: December 1, 2018. We expect the parade to be held the first Saturday in December like last year. More later.

## **7. 10TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF NPHS**

The next meeting will be an open house pizza party in the **back room of Paesano Italian Restaurant at 3647 30th Street on Thursday, May 17 from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** to celebrate our tenth anniversary as a stand-alone organization. Members and their households, friends on our distribution list, car show sponsors, and some other special friends have been invited. If you are reading these meeting notes, YOU ARE INVITED! Steve has confirmed the date with Joe Romano at Paesano. NPHS will buy pizza, iced tea, and cookies. Other beverages, including beer and wine, can be purchased by attendees on their own. Pizzas selected by the group from the Paesano menu are #1 (mozzarella), #5 (pepperoni), #11 (Italian sausage), #16 (mushroom), #27 (The Works), and #29 (The Vinnie-garlic ricotta and artichoke).

### **NEXT MEETING**

As explained above, the next meeting will be **THURSDAY May 17, 2018 from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m in the back room of Paesano Italian Restaurant at 3647 30th Street.** An invitation flyer has been distributed. If you want to come and haven't responded yet, kindly email [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) or call Katherine at 619-294-8990.

Prepared by

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Katherine Hon", written in a reddish-brown ink.

Katherine Hon  
Secretary, North Park Historical Society



# Flashy landmarks

## The history and art of neon signs

**PastMatters**  
Katherine Hon

They have been identified as eye-catchers, treasures and community landmarks, and described as tacky, garish, dazzling, cool and elegant. They appeared first in Paris in 1910 and came to America in 1923. They are neon signs.

French inventor Georges Claude is generally credited with creating the technology that allowed glass tubes filled with gas, such as neon, and brightly lit by electrification to be commercially viable signage. Claude's company — Air Liquide — was producing industrial quantities of neon as a byproduct of his air liquefaction business.

In December 1910, he lit an exhibition hall at the Paris Motor Show with two nearly 40-foot-long bright red neon tubes. Claude's associate, Jacques Fonseque, realized the possibilities for a business based on signage and advertising.

Over the next decade, signs began to appear in Paris, starting with a sign for Cinzano vermouth. In 1923, Georges Claude and his French company, Claude Neon, introduced neon signs to the United States by selling two signs reading "Packard" to a Los Angeles car dealership.

The color of neon signs initially came from the type of gas inside the sealed glass tube. Neon glows red/dark orange when electrified; argon, another commonly used inert gas, glows pale lavender.

A 1926 innovation by Jacques Risler in France involved coating the inside of glass tubes with a fluorescent material called a phosphor, which allowed the generation of an abundance of additional colors through a complicated process. Though signs often used gases other than neon, they all came to be known as neon signs.

The San Diego neon sign that has likely received the most press — and certainly is the only sign to receive a women's business award — is the baton-twirling, marching neon majorette who made her debut on the back of the Campus Drive-In theater screen tower at 62nd Street and

El Cajon Boulevard in 1947.

A combination of painted mural and neon, the rectangular sign measured 75 feet wide by 50 feet tall. It incorporated more than 1,930 lineal feet of colorful banded glass tubing. The sign highlighted a painting of San Diego State University (SDSU)'s hardy building and bell tower, a goal post, Cowles Mountain, and the famed majorette.

The infamous majorette was 42 feet tall, strutted in 6-foot-tall boots and twirled a 16-foot-long baton. She wore a multicolored feather headdress and short white skirt. Her story illustrates the complex process involved in bringing these signs to life and preserving them for the future.

In 1947, Sam Russo decided to build a drive-in theater near SDSU's campus and asked multiple sign companies to bid on making a sign for the back of the movie screen. Joseph Schmidth, a designer with Perry-Christensen-Campbell Co., created the winning design.

Predicting the drive-in would attract a lot of college students, Schmidth studied SDSU yearbooks and was inspired by the photos of marching majorettes. He prepared a quarter-inch-to-the-foot scale drawing on black poster board material, creating what was called a "Show Card" for the client.

Schmith added the campus buildings and outline of Cowles Mountain emblazoned with an "S" for his own last name. Russo accepted the design, and the company received the go-ahead to construct the sign.

The next step for Schmidth involved creating a full-size pattern for artists to trace and paint on the theater tower wall. He spent 30 days sweating and crawling on the floor of a vacant Convair factory building to make the big patterns.

Multiple-level scaffolding was built at the theater wall for artists to transfer the pattern and paint the mural. Other artisans hand-bent the glass neon tubing that was attached to the mural, completing the neon sign.

The sign lit the night at the Campus Drive-In until 1983, when the property owners closed the theater and demolished

the screen tower to create the Campus Plaza Shopping Center.

Luckily for neon lovers, that is not the end of the majorette's story. Thanks to community advocacy — especially artists Gloria Poore, Greg Calvert and Juliette Mondot, who created the nonprofit Save Our Neon Organization — the neon majorette was dismantled, carefully packed and stored in a warehouse for years until a new home could be found.

In 1988, the sign was installed without her background mural at the refurbished Marketplace at the College Grove Shopping Center adjacent to Interstate 94 and College Avenue. Except for a few years of downtime for repainting and repairs in 1998–2000, she has marched steadily onward at the shopping center.

The neon majorette had a banner year in 2001, when she received a special award at the San Diego Business Journal's annual Women Who Mean Business awards ceremony. She was honored for symbolizing a long-awaited economic revival and new era of community pride in the neighborhood of her new home.

Earlier that same year, the shopping center owners donated the neon majorette to the Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO) for her protection and preservation. She is expected to continue twirling and lighting up the night for many years to come.

—Katherine Hon is the secretary of the North Park Historical Society. Reach her at [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) or 619-294-8990.



Joseph Schmidth holds the "Show Card" with the winning design he created for the Campus Drive-In neon sign in 1947. (Photos courtesy of Mary Jo Grubbs)



The British apparently love the majorette too, having re-created the entire sign at The Roadhouse bar in Covent Garden, London, England, circa 1998.



When he was with the Cal Neon sign company, Joseph Schmidth designed the 100-foot-tall sign for the Dick Grihalva Buick dealership on El Cajon Boulevard. The sign was lit by thousands of yellow and turquoise bulbs. Schmidth also designed the original El Cortez Hotel "Sky Room" sign.





**9th Annual  
North Park Historical Society Car Show  
Hosted by the Balboa Tennis Club  
September 8, 2018**

Open to all years, makes and models. Pre-1990 encouraged. Limited to first 60 entries pre-registered.  
**Pre-register by August 31, 2018**

**Date:** Saturday, Sept. 8, 2018  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM  
**Place:** Parking Lot at the Balboa Tennis Club  
2221 Morley Field Drive  
San Diego, CA 92104  
**Time:** Arrive from 8:30 AM to 9:30 AM  
Exhibitors must stay until 1:00 PM

**Cost:** \$10 for one car, \$20 for two or three  
**Car exhibitor fee is non-refundable**  
**TROPHIES:** 1st, 2nd & 3rd People's Choice  
(All attendees and exhibitors may vote)  
**CERTIFICATES and ASSIGNED SPOTS\*\***  
for all pre-registrants  
Beautiful park setting --- Bring a picnic

For more information contact: [info@northparkhistory.org](mailto:info@northparkhistory.org) 619-294-8990 [www.NorthParkHistory.org](http://www.NorthParkHistory.org)  
*Our mission: To preserve North Park's cultural and architectural history through research, education, and outreach.  
Proceeds benefit the North Park Historical Society, an all-volunteer 501C3 non-profit organization.*  
**Fill out form below, Sign, Detach and Send with check made out to "NPHS" THANK YOU!**

**Mail to:** North Park Historical Society  
Attn: Katherine Hon, 2226 Dwight Street, San Diego, CA 92104  
We will confirm via e-mail or phone call

**Detach Here:**-----

**REGISTRATION/LIABILITY AGREEMENT FORM**

The undersigned hereby agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the North Park Historical Society, City of San Diego, Balboa Tennis Club, and all sponsors of the car show, their agents, officers, directors, members, and/or employees, from any known or unknown damages, injuries, losses, judgments and/or claims of any kind whatsoever that may be suffered by my person, guests, or property arising out of my participation in this event. I verify that any motor vehicle I exhibit at the car show has liability insurance of the minimum limits required by the State of California, and registration will be current unless there is a current certificate of non-operation. I agree to exhibit my vehicle(s) until 1:00 PM.

I have read and understand the above and have willingly set forth my signature below.

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Make/Model/Year of Vehicle #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Make/Model/Year of Vehicle #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Make/Model/Year of Vehicle #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Entry Fee Total Enclosed (\$10 for 1 vehicle, or \$20 for 2 or 3): \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*If you want to be parked next to another exhibitor, name them here:** \_\_\_\_\_