

## **NORTH PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY APRIL 2020 MEETING SUMMARY**

**DATE: APRIL 16, 2020**

**TIME: XX PM**

These notes summarize information that was planned to be presented at the April 16, 2020 Business Meeting of the North Park Historical Society (NPHS) Board of Directors, and the activities discussion for the organization. These notes include updates as of April 26, 2020. The meeting was canceled in advance due to concerns about the novel coronavirus and resulting state and local restrictions on gatherings.

The next meeting scheduled for **THURSDAY May 21, 2020 starting at 6:30 p.m.** in a second floor meeting room at Grace Lutheran Church **WILL NOT OCCUR**. We will monitor state and local guidance, Grace Lutheran Church, and the opinion of the NPHS Board regarding when it might be appropriate to resume our public meetings this year.

### **1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

We hope all our members and friends are staying safe and healthy.

### **2. AGENDA REVIEW AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The latest Pacific Beach Historical Society newsletter(s) will be circulated for viewing at the next possible meeting. The April 2020 PastMatters column in Uptown News was about the long and complicated history of the North Park sign (see last pages of this summary).

### **3. MINUTES ACCEPTANCE**

The meeting summary from the cancelled March 19, 2020 meeting have been posted on the website.

## **BUSINESS PORTION OF MEETING**

### **4. TREASURER'S REPORT**

The financials for the period of March 19 to April 16, 2020 were sent to Board Members on April 16. During this period, two members renewed and provided extra donations (thank you Cia and Donna!). Total income in this period was \$100. There were no expenses in this time period. To minimize visits to the bank, Steve implemented the ability to deposit checks into the NPHS checking account via mobile (iPhone) deposit.

## **ACTIVITIES PORTION OF MEETING**

### **5. UPDATE ON PLAQUE FOR WATER TOWER**

Coordination with City Public Utilities Department staff regarding the feasibility of placing the plaque in a boulder or some kind of low wall next to the two-story building at the Water Tower site is pending return to some kind of normalcy.

### **6. UPDATE ON COUNTY COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

Coordination with County staff regarding the question of if we can apply the remaining \$1,250 from the 2019-2020 grant for water tower art to placement of the plaque is pending return to some kind of normalcy.

## 7. PLANNING FOR PAULY'S ADDITION WALKING TOUR

The team has developed a route pattern focusing on the southern part of Pauly's Addition from Dwight to Upas and Alabama to Texas streets. A draft table with information about each house and walking hazards has been compiled. A photo notebook has also been initiated including interior photos of houses that had been staged for sale. Our next steps are to choose the homes to highlight with more research, conduct a preliminary practice tour, adjust the route and guide notes, add pictures to the photo book, and then conduct another practice tour, pending return to some kind of normalcy. Homes that are candidates for highlighting include the following:



2140 Upas Street, Designated



3405 Texas Street, Designated



3435 Texas Street, Designated



3530 Mississippi Street

## 8. EVALUATIONS OF HISTORIC HOMES

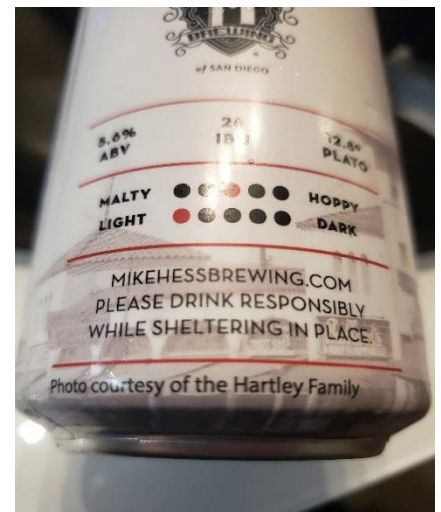
In April, NPHS provided evaluations of homes at 2830 Redwood Street and 2729 29<sup>th</sup> Street regarding their potential to be designated. Although both are charming and of historic age, there have been some alterations over time that could make individual designation challenging.





## 9. COMMUNITY COORDINATION

Mike Hess of Hess Brewing Company requested a historic photo of North Park they could use on the can of their “Pershing Pils” beer, which they named to honor Pershing Drive, the old wagon road from downtown to North Park. They have a limited supply (about 40 cases) of the beer at their building on Grim Avenue in North Park and are selling the rest through Trader Joes. Katherine provided the classic 1953 picture of the corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and University Avenue, courtesy of the Hartley Family, who were credited on the can.



The April 2020 PastMatters column in Uptown News about the history of the North Park sign featured photographs of the November 1993 dedication ceremony for the current sign in University Avenue near Kansas Street. The photos taken by Bill VanderMolen had been presented in the 1993 North Park News. In response to the article, the photographer, who now lives in Michigan, emailed Katherine saying the following:

Today I came across a story about the North Park sign that you wrote in San Diego Uptown News. I am Bill VanderMolen to whom you give photo credit for the photos taken in 1993. Wow. Interesting to see that my photos still are out there. I still have that two page spread in my archives. I found this article because once in a while I Google my name to see if any of my photos are being used. I still do some photography here in Michigan, and post some of my photos for public use and it's fun to see them in these stories. Anyway, just thought I would drop you a note.

Another interesting bit about that story ...President Bill Clinton was invited to that sign ceremony as kind of a "see what happens." It almost happened. Secret service showed up the day before and cased out the place with guys up on roofs checking it out. Unfortunately, an incident with Israel started and that took precedence.

See the last pages of these notes for how the article appeared in the Uptown News.

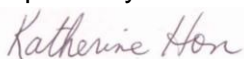
## 10. UPCOMING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Information regarding future events in 2020 is summarized below.

- Table in Lobby at San Diego History Center: August 2020. The History Center offered us another opportunity to display in August, when Katherine is scheduled to give a Tuesday Talk on "North Park and How it Grew." If life is back to normal by that time, we will do it.
- Festival of the Arts: Postponed to October 2020. The NPHS Board has already decided to skip exhibiting at the Festival of the Arts in 2020.
- Presentations for the Community: We have typically arranged for an outside speaker to make a free presentation in May, and have a few people in mind who could be quite interesting. However, given the current public health crisis, we will wait until it is safe to gather in groups before arranging a community meeting.

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Prepared by



Katherine Hon  
Secretary, North Park Historical Society



# A good sign: North Park's symbol of resilience

**PastMatters**  
KATHERINE HON

Although the duration of the current world-wide public health crisis is unknown, our community will certainly survive it. The history of the large neon North Park sign in University Avenue west of 30th Street demonstrates North Park's resilience. The sign we see today is only 27 years old, but the original sign's story started 85 years ago in the midst of the Great Depression.

The concept of a large electric sign stretching from sidewalk to sidewalk above the street originated with the North Park Business Men's Club, who requested city council permission "to illuminate the Thirtieth and University



This classic 1953 photograph of the neon North Park sign hanging above the intersection of University Avenue and 30th Street also shows what is currently the Western Dental building and annex that is now covered by a smooth false façade. (Courtesy of the Hartley Family)

Ave. corner with a brightly lighted sign at night," as reported in the Evening Tribune's February 27, 1935 issue. The minutes from the February 26, 1935 council meeting reflect approval for

the city attorney to prepare an amendment to the building code regarding electric signs.

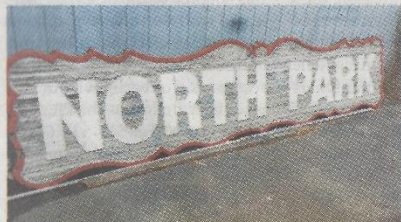
At the April 24, 1935 council meeting, an amendment to existing Ordinance No. 13375



The October 13, 1993 dedication of the replica neon North Park sign was attended by many, including fondly remembered North Park historians Don Covington (far right) and his wife, Karon (far left). (Photo by Bill Vanderمولen, courtesy of Tom Shess)



Also attending the October 13, 1993 sign dedication were (left to right) Councilmember John Hartley, A&B Sporting Goods owner Joe Schloss, and future Councilmember Christine Kehoe. (Photo by Bill Vanderمولen, courtesy of Tom Shess)



The wooden North Park sign was installed at Boundary Street and University Avenue in November 1987. Vandalism to the sign in January 1988 inspired its repair and fundraising for a full-size neon replica to replace the neon sign that had been removed in January 1966. The wooden North Park sign awaits a more visible home at Patrick Edwards' shop on Utah Street. (Courtesy of Patrick Edwards)



The neon North Park sign in the median of University Avenue west of 30th Street was installed on October 13, 1993. It is a replica of the neon sign that was originally hung above University Avenue at 30th Street on July 6, 1935. Tamarindo and Swami's restaurants are in the background. (Photo by Katherine Hon)

adding new section 5003-B PERMANENT SIGNS OVER PUBLIC PROPERTY (Ordinance No. 646, new series) was approved unanimously by the five attending council members. The new ordinance section allowed permanent electric signs to be erected "across the public streets and highways... provided that no such sign is used to advertise a particular company, concern, occupation, business, material, commodity or product."

Confident of city council approval, the business club announced a drive to raise money on March 28, 1935. The real estate office of W. J. Stevens at 2932 University Avenue served as campaign headquarters for the effort. But it was the women of North Park who took the lead on the fundraising task. The San Diego Union's March 31, 1935 issue reported under the headline "Women Go After Community Sign," that the "North Park Business club perhaps is the only club of its kind in San Diego that has an auxiliary. A group of women — a majority of them wives of members of the business club — have organized. At present the women have one objective — a large Neon sign at Thirtieth at University, so Expo visitors may know they are in the North Park district."

"Expo" referred to the California Pacific International Exposition held in Balboa Park from May 29, 1935 to November 11, 1935

and extended for a second year to September 9, 1936. The Exposition was organized to promote San Diego and help the local economy during the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929 to 1941.

Among other events, the North Park auxiliary held a benefit party at the "Tent" ballroom in the Nordberg building — now home of North Park Fitness — on April 24, 1935. Fundraising efforts were successful, the sign was created, and the San Diego Union's July 7, 1935 issue summarized the dedication event held the day before under the headline "Mayor Dedicates North Park Sign." Mayor Percy Benbough praised the North Park area for its "civic progress," and thousands of people joined in the celebration.

In an announcement of new officers for the business club and auxiliary, the San Diego Union's December 4, 1935 issue noted, "The auxiliary came into public notice less than a year ago when it raised \$400 to install the large Neon sign at Thirtieth st. and University ave." A new business person was quoted as coming to North Park because "they are up-and-doing folks. I wish that San Diego had more districts like the North Park go-getters."

Fast forward about 30 years, and the story takes a sad turn. The San

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## North Park sign

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Diego Union's January 15, 1966 issue showed a photograph of the venerable neon North Park sign being removed to "be replaced by a revolving sign." The change was noted as being a project of the North Park Business Club. For whatever reasons — perhaps because by that time local stores were losing business to regional shopping malls — the sign was not replaced. Decades of business doldrums passed.

During the 1980s, community efforts began for creating a replacement sign. In November 1987, a wooden replica of the scalloped shaped sign proclaiming "North Park — Home of the Famous Toyland Parade" was placed at Boundary Street and University Avenue. The 18-foot-long redwood sign was carved by Kent Johnson. The \$3,182 cost of the sign was funded by local merchants and the North Park Business Association (NPBA) — successor of the business club — managed at the time by Executive Director Karen Arter.

North Park lore of vandals damaging the wooden sign in January 1988 and the sign's subsequent repair by volunteers is documented by several news stories. The San Diego Union's January 7, 1988 issue reported, "Cops have suspect in vandalism of sign." The article noted, "Business owners who found their newly erected community sign splashed with red paint Saturday night have received several offers to repair or replace the damaged sign — at no cost." The report continued that although the damage to the sign was discouraging, "it also served to generate interest in its repair and has helped to start a separate fund for a larger, overhead sign similar to the ones that now mark the Hillcrest and Kensington communities."

The San Diego Union's February 7, 1988 issue announced "North Park sign fixed" and stated, "Volunteers from the North Park Business Association yesterday re-erected the community sign that vandals splashed with red paint on Jan. 2." In April 1988, a sign drive was initiated to raise \$35,000 for a new community sign to span University Avenue at 30<sup>th</sup> Street. That effort would take another five years.

By 1993, sufficient funds had been acquired from local, state

and federal sources. A new sign designed by Wieber Nelson Design and constructed by California Neon was officially lit in a joyful dedication ceremony on October 13, 1993. The sign was placed on an attractive pedestal in the middle of University Avenue west of 30<sup>th</sup> Street.

"Every TV station covered it in its news segments that evening and the San Diego Daily Transcript put the event on its front page that same day," according to the North Park News' November 1993 issue, which covered the event in a two-page spread with 13 photos by Bill Vandermolen. VIPs pictured included Mayor Susan Golding, Councilmember John Hartley, future Councilmember Christine Kehoe, NPBA Executive Director and sign committee chair Mark Hannon, NPBA President Dorothy Petree, and NPBA Vice President Joe Schloss.

The project resulted from the efforts of many. In the North Park News' October 1993 issue, Mark Hannon noted, "there are more than 100 persons out there that had something vital to do with the North Park Sign returning."

But what of the wooden sign at Boundary Street and University Avenue? Was it lost when the gateway art sculpted by Anne Mudge was installed at the intersection in August 1999? Amazingly, the story of the wooden sign continues to this day. When the wooden sign was removed, Patrick Edwards, long-time North Park businessman and community advocate, took it to his shop on Utah Street. He later convinced Union Bank to hang it on a wall inside their building at University Avenue and 30<sup>th</sup> Street along with their many framed photographs of historic North Park. The sign was removed when the bank re-decorated, and Edwards took it back into his care.

Wouldn't it be great if the Union Bank North Park branch re-mounted the wooden sign where it could be admired once again? This would be a wonderful gift to the community, especially now. That wooden sign and the neon sign in University Avenue both reflect the perseverance of the North Park business community through many challenging times.

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