

Once Upon A Time in North Park

Shirley Ann Place

By University Heights Historical Society

On May 24, 2001, the city's Historical Resources Board presented Community Historical awards to Shirley Ann Place property owners for their support in the establishment of a historic district and continued preservation of Shirley Ann Place. Shirley Ann Place is a small one block narrow street, fronted by Spanish Colonial Revival bungalows built during the 1920s. The street (one block from Monroe to Madison just west of Texas Street) was designated the "Shirley Ann Place Historical District" last June, the first area of University Heights to receive historic designation.

Shirley Ann Place is a well preserved representation of a pre-planned post WWI speculative tract housing development. Initiated and developed by a single individual this "mini-neighborhood" is notable for its intactness and overall consistency of design utilizing a large number of Spanish Colonial Revival style bungalows (plus several late 1930s to late 1940s bungalows) laid out along a former central back alley. Two additional Spanish Colonial Revival style bungalows along the south line of Monroe Avenue near the Southeastern corner of Shirley Ann Place, and a local "Mom & Pop" grocery store at the Southeastern corner of Madison Avenue and Shirley Ann place are also included as part of the Shirley Ann Place Historic District because of their similar styling and having been part of the original development.

The 1920s was an era of unprecedented speculative real estate in Southern California and thousands of tourists and prospective residents were attracted to San Diego. This influx of prospective homebuyers saw a tremendous demand for middle-class housing here. For some decades before the War, a certain set of ideals for such housing had been evolving: a home should be owned and occupied by the family that lives in it. The home should be aesthetically pleasing but not overly ornate, and should blend in well with its immediate surroundings. It should also be soundly constructed, but economical and practical to live in.

The houses of the 1920s were built after a major technological leap in the building and outfitting of single family housing in America. They all have indoor plumbing, showers, electric lights and sockets, functional kitchens and either floor or wall mounted heating units. Semi-private front porches and private patios provide shade and extra space. In the 1920s, before air conditioning, these features were essential in Southern California.

The entire block in which Shirley Ann Place is located was purchased in 1924 by the Alberta Security Company from local landholder and real estate investor D.L. Pixley. Stylistically, the small bungalows built along these streets are variations of mid-1920s builder/contractor-designed and built spec houses. Taking advantage of the real estate boom, the back lots behind these units along a common alleyway were re-purchased by the Alberta Security Company and developed into a planned housing tract sometime

between 1925 and 1927. The former alleyway was graded, developed and dedicated as Shirley Ann Place in 1925. It was named after Shirley Ann Melhorn, the granddaughter of the company's founder Martin V. Melhorn.

The Alberta Security Company, a real estate investment and development company, was founded in 1913 by Martin V. Melhorn, who came to San Diego in 1911 from Denver, Colorado. He formed the Bay City Construction Company and began to design and build homes in the Mission Hills area. In 1913 Melhorn changed the name of his general contracting company to M.V. Melhorn & Son. Many other examples of his and his son William's earlier work can be found throughout the communities of Mission Hills, North Park and University Heights. In 1930, after the death of his father, William B. Melhorn became the company's owner and manager. In 1960 the company incorporated, with Melhorn's son William as its president. At present (February 2002), the firm's president, Martin W. Melhorn, continues to run one of the largest locally-owned and operated general contracting firms in San Diego, founded by his grandfather over 81 years ago.

Through its uniformity of design, setting, materials and craftsmanship, and its association with one of San Diego's oldest building construction firms, Shirley Ann Place conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness. Shirley Ann Place is a tightly knit neighborhood where homeowner residency is very high and pride of ownership and neighborhood maintenance responsibilities, actively pursue neighborhood public improvements through their elected representatives, and are willing and ready to get to work and build improvements in their neighborhood with their own hands if needed.

Congratulations to all the homeowners and residents of the "Shirley Ann Place Historic District"! What a great example they've set for the rest of our neighborhood.

Taken from the Statement of Significance, Planning Department, City of San Diego. Information compiled by M.Wayne Donaldson, FAIA, Inc. IS Architecture, and RNP/Roesling Nakamura Architects, Inc.