



City of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society P.O. Box 875, San Bernardino, CA 92402

LIBRARY NEWS DECEMBER 2009

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

IS INTERSTATE 215 A GREAT BARRIER WALL TO THE WEST SIDE?

Retired Caltrans engineer Don Weaver visited the Heritage Library several weeks ago and while talking about the early years of his tenure with what was then known as the State Division of Highways, he mentioned that when the I-215 was built in 1959, it was seen as a traffic facilitator. This goes against the conventional wisdom that the freeway served as a sort of Berlin wall, directing traffic away from the west and thereby killing the Mt. Vernon business district. Manuel Ruben Delgado takes this view in his recent book, *The Last Chicano*, stating that the freeway severed the city in a way that the Santa Fe Railway never did.

It is true that the freeway ramps turned to the east, which was necessitated by the proximity of the railroad. When a major rebuilding project kicked off in 2007, County Supervisor Dennis Hansberger stated that the freeway “was a wonderful new thing.... What we didn’t know was what it could do to us...the damage it created to our city.” Furthermore, some people believe the alignment was done purposely due to racism at the higher decision-making levels.

No matter what the alignment, however, once traffic was diverted to the freeway, the Mt. Vernon businesses would suffer, just as others had wherever a new freeway was built. Businesses catering to freeway travelers cropped up at off ramps, which means there would be a gas station, restaurant and motel located as close to the freeway as possible, such as the cluster of businesses at Sixth Street. If somehow the off ramps were located on the west side of the tracks, Mt. Vernon was still doomed.

Actually, travel to the west side of town was greatly facilitated by the freeway overpasses. Prior to the opening of the I-215 in 1959, road crossings over the railroad tracks were a major problem for local east-west traffic. Earl Buie wrote a column about how vehicles on Highland Avenue often backed up for a mile in each direction due to slow-moving freight trains. The only crossing that was elevated over the tracks was at Fifth Street, and that bridge only dated back to 1948.

News accounts from public hearings on the freeway’s proposed alignment seem to bear out the view that the new Interstate would be a benefit instead of a hindrance. Mayor George C. Blair is quoted as saying that “the overpasses at Ninth Street and Base Line and Massachusetts Avenue will be of immense benefit to the City in furthering closer cooperation between the east and west.” He did not mention the three other overpasses at Highland Avenue, 27th Street and 16th Street, all of which made east-west traffic gridlock a thing of the past.

I think Mayor Blair had it right: for the first time since the railroad was built in the 1883, traffic could flow freely in the east-west direction.

ARROWHEAD PARK TRACTS

Several months ago I tried an experiment at the library in which I instructed a few interested parties on how to research old homes and buildings, in hopes they would volunteer for the cause. The only one to take up the program was Carol Covey, who was already accomplished in investigating the history of old structures. It was during her research that the name Alexander H. Reid surfaced, and it turned out that he and a Mr. Frank Sweeny were partners in four tracts, Arrowhead Park Unit No. 1 through No. 4, in the northern part of town. The first subdivision was between Arrowhead and Mt. View Avenues, and between 27th Street and the Santa Fe Railway station at about where the crosstown freeway is now. The other units were farther to the north extending above Marshall Boulevard.

Alexander Reid, originally from Seattle, came to Los Angeles in the early 1920s, where he bought and sold land for a brief time before moving his operation to San Bernardino during the midst of a big boom. Seth Marshall, quite the real estate promoter himself, was still alive at the time, and Reid and Sweeny bought at least some of their land from him, built a major east-west artery from Little Mountain to the Arrowhead Country Club, and named it Marshall Boulevard after the old pioneer.

Reid had 25 years experience in the business and specialized in small homes. It is a tribute to the firm's design abilities that its four tracts, despite being modest in size, were long considered to be some of the more desirable areas in which to live. They were upscale homes for the middle class, and the schools, stores, churches, etc., were quick to follow.

Reid and Sweeny were very successful while the market held, but when the Great Depression came to be felt in San Bernardino, probably in about 1931, it became difficult to continue in the business. Reid had been active in civic affairs and had many friends in the city, and it came as quite a shock to them when it was announced in the June 30, 1934, *Daily Sun* that Reid had taken his life. The note he left shows that continued business failures had broken him:

I'm taking this action because I'm tired of taking losses; tired of waiting for the return of a decent real estate market, and tired of life in general.

Frank Sweeny, although a much younger man, had died in London four years earlier.

The *Daily Sun* told of the firm's activities in the north end of town and opined that its "program of development gave San Bernardino one of its greatest realty booms in history." It is interesting that the author of the article gave such credit to Reid and Sweeny, because it seems more likely to me that the demand for new homes came first, and then Reid and Sweeny provided for it.

I had been accumulating information on Reid and the Arrowhead tracts, and it was with some excitement that I discovered an Ebay auction offering a July 17, 1924, *Evening Telegram* supplement advertising Arrowhead Villa, the name of Reid's model home, and Arrowhead Park. A successful bid was made by President Steve Shaw, and the item arrived shortly and in great shape, given that it is an 85-year-old newspaper section.

The interior is full of information on the features of the homes being offered, and they are impressive. Many of the local contractors and merchants advertised building services and supplies, making it an excellent historical source of the day. The front and back covers are shown below, and as can be seen, are handsomely done.



SAN BERNARDINO, CALIF.



San Bernardino
EVENING TELEGRAM
AND THE EVENING INDEX

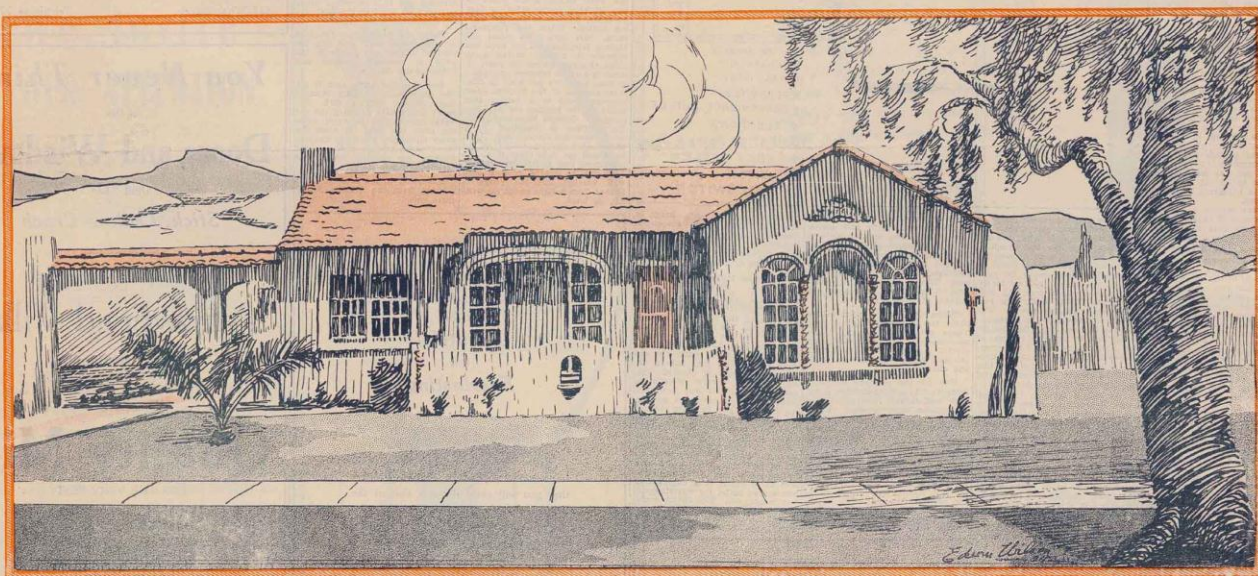
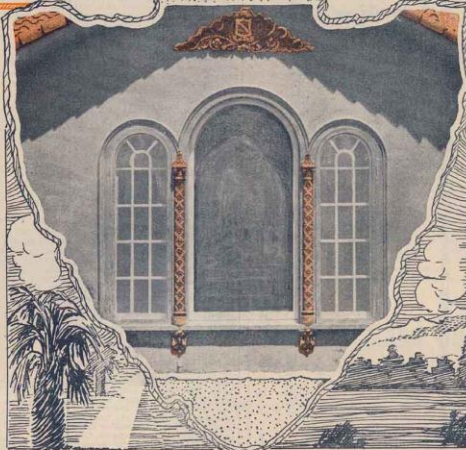
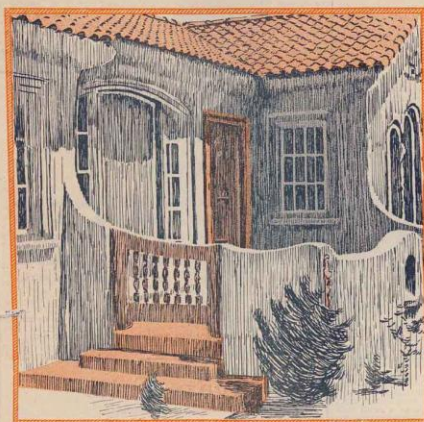


THURSDAY, JULY 17, 1924



Arrowhead Villa

The Reid House Beautiful



REID-SWEENEY & CO. invite you and your friends to visit Arrowhead Villa, the House Beautiful, the model Electrical Home.

This "House Complete" has been produced purely in the interests of better homes and will be open to visitors every day from 3 to 5 and 7 to 9 p. m., for the next two weeks.

You and your friends are not only most welcome, but cordially urged to visit this Model Home; to study and enjoy it, for it is the finished picture of beauty, comfort and convenience, uniting as it does under one roof the latest thoughts and ideas of the architect, designer, builder, decorator, home furnisher and electrical engineer.

Come not once but often, for one could spend days studying its many interesting and novel features.

REID-SWEENEY & Co.

A. H. Reid
President

Frazer Sweeney
Secretary



Arrowhead Park

The Place of Beautiful Homes



A. H. REID



RESIDENCE OF MR. D. G. PIERCE

(Hollis Built)

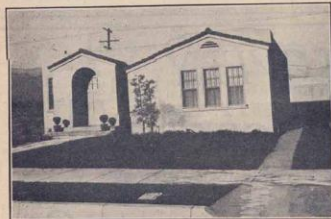


RESIDENCE OF MR. H. W. HOLLIS

(Hollis Built)



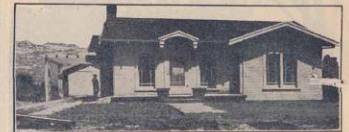
FRANK SWEENEY



MR. C. B. WIRCHING



RESIDENCE OF MR. FRANK SWEENEY



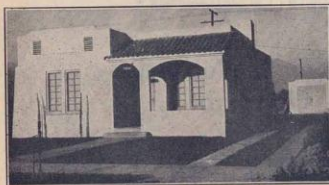
MR. H. W. SCOTT



MR. A. M. MICHELSEN



MRS. ARLINE COY



MR. V. O. BRUMBACK

Arrowhead Park

The Place of Pretty Homes

—Of Happy, Pleasant Neighbors
—A Children's Paradise

Out where it is higher, healthier and cooler; where your home is surrounded by beautiful tree-bordered boulevards and where the friendly mountains rear their protecting heights.

You only build the home of your dreams once in a lifetime. Why not build it where your lovely home of today is still the lovely home of tomorrow? Where restrictions that protect will keep your neighbors and your surroundings all that is desirable for your family.

It costs no more to build in Arrowhead Park, and the lot, more desirable than probably any other, will cost you less.

Arrowhead Park, the desirable place today, is the ONE place tomorrow. The value of the home you build here is not only protected, but will greatly enhance in value, for it is close to the schools, transportation, and is only ten minutes from downtown.

From every standpoint, property in Arrowhead Park is a sound, safe investment.

One of our courteous, responsible representatives will only be too glad to show you Arrowhead Park property and explain to you the reasonable, convenient terms upon which this property can be bought.

REID-SWEENEY & Co.

Owners - Developers

ARROWHEAD PARK



MR. H. W. HOLLIS



MR. FRED ROY



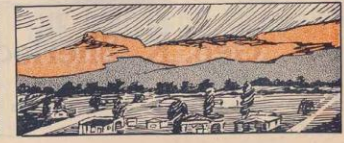
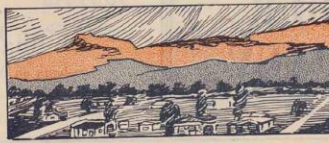
HOLLIS & DRAKE



MR. JOS. T. HATHERLY



NEWEST REID-SWEENEY MODEL Just Finished



Saving the past for the future since 1888