

A HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY TOWN.

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As the question of annexing the suburban towns of Vernon, Rosedale, Pico Heights and University to the city of Los Angeles, has this month been put to ballot, a brief history of the little town of University may be of interest. Especially as the annals of our Historical Society do not contain a record of the inception and growth of this thriving little town.

As there is some confusion in the minds of many regarding what constitutes the town of University, some thinking the whole University precinct belongs to the town, a short explanation may be in order.

"University Tract," "University School District," and "University Voting Precinct" are not one and the same in the amount of territory, University town being the smallest in size. University School District includes a larger boundary and University Precinct covers an area of land about two and a half miles wide to about three miles long. It begins at the city limits and extends to what is called "Baldwin's Ranch," west of Western Ave., on the west, and on the north begins at Adams street and, including the Harper tract, extends to Vernon Ave., on the south. These are all situated in "Ballona township." There are two Justices of the Peace in Ballona township, one of whom has an office in University town.

"University," received its name from the fact that at this place the college known as the "University of Southern California," is situated. The town at first was called "University Place. As the town owes its beginning and name to the college, a brief reference to the origin of the school may be worthy of record.

Before any college or school is erected it must first be conceived of and plans matured for its future. The question naturally arises who conceived the idea of planting a college at this point?

A history of its inception was given in an address delivered before the annual council of the University, June 22, 1886, by its President, Hon. R. M. Widney. In this address which was afterwards published in the "Minutes of the First Session of the Annual Council," Judge Widney says: "The University in its origin was wholly disconnected from all other educational schemes The plan upon which it is organized has been maturing since 1868. The Hon. Don. Abel Stearns had with the writer (R. M. Widney), nearly matured a plan to put Laguna Rancho, embracing some 11,000 acres adjoining Los Angeles city, into a building and endowment fund for a University. Just before he left Los Angeles for San Francisco he came to my office and said that upon his return we would proceed and see if it could be put into a satisfactory and safe educational work. While in San Francisco sickness came upon him and death took away a grand and powerful man, and the educational plan remained in abeyance until the University was organized."

This was in 1868, and about eleven years afterwards, in 1879, Judge Widney and a number of shrewd business men, members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held meetings with a view to building a Methodist College or University in or near Los Angeles city. They had faith that Southern California was on the "eve of a great rise in real estate." They considered that the location of an institution of learning upon any tract of land would more than double in value and therefore the owner could, for business reasons, afford to donate at least one half.

Various offers were made by property owners in East Los Angeles, Boyle Heights, Temple Street and West Los Angeles. A majority of the trustees of the University were in favor of West Los Angeles, as the town site of University was called. In July 1879, 38 lots in West Los Angeles were deeded in trust to the Trustees for an endowment fund for the Methodist College. The present deed of trust "for the University school," was, on July 29, 1879, executed by Ex-Governor J. G. Downey, O. W. Childs and I. W. .

Hellman to A. M. Hough, J. P. Widney, E. F. Spence, M. M. Bovard, G. D. Compton and R. M. Widney. In addition to these lots about 40 acres of land was also donated by adjacent owners of land." In 1880 it was decided to sell 30 of these lots for \$200 each. "The market value of these lots was about \$50, each," but according to Judge Widney, "friends purchased the lots for \$200 each." The money that accrued from the sale of these lots was used in the erection of a frame building. This building is now the Music Hall of the College. Immediately afterward 243 lots were offered for sale at \$200 each, payable \$50 in cash, balance in five yearly payments, with interest at the rate of ten per cent, per year. Of the first building of the University on the campus it is recorded that, "the unfinished building in the midst of an unoccupied, uncultivated plain was a lonely looking object to those who only saw the present." This was in 1880. One good Methodist brother told me how he was lost and wandered around the desolate region one night, being unable in the darkness to guide his horse in the proper direction. For here the wild mustard grew for miles with an almost uninterrupted growth, a veritable thicket. In the Autumn of 1886 the present four story brick building of the University was finished. It was situated on Wesley Ave., between 34th and 36th streets. At that time the little college town called "University Place" began to look quite like a little village, situated as it was, about four miles south of the business part of Los Angeles, and not easily accessible, many strangers built homes in the town in order to send their children to college. When the brick building was erected it was during the days of the "boom" and there was also built a neat little M. E. Church one block south of the college. The town had become a post office town in 1883 under the name of "University Place." A horse car line running along on Wesley avenue made trips to the city every ten minutes running out as far as Agricultural Park, about one-half mile south of the college. At the Park the County Fairs were held, as well as unnumbered horse races that were considered by the inhabitants, the only drawback to the college town. In the course of time University was extended, LaDow School District was divided and one part was called "University School District." This district built a good two-story frame building just west of University tract. During the boom lots had "gone up" in value. For a good lot near the school we were asked fifteen hundred dollars, when we moved to University. Then came the collapse of the boom when realty depreciated, and, today,, the figures of the real estate frenzy have not been reached in University, although lots are rapidly rising in value. The building of the Grand Avenue car line three quarters of a mile from University, on Jefferson street, gave some impetus to the town, but the building of the electric car line with its closed car service connecting University with the heart of the city (Second and Spring streets) in twenty-five minutes, instead of forty minutes on the horse car line, was of the greatest benefit. It was at this time that all the streets running east and west were numbered to correspond with the numbers of Los Angeles streets, those in University continuing the numbers beyond those of the city. When the town was laid out in streets they had been named in honor of Methodist Bishops. For the most part the community is composed of Methodists, although on account of the college privileges members of other denominations have built homes in it. There is also a growing number of non-churchgoers dwelling in the village. Each year the town grows more varied in its inhabitants, but the morality of the town has never been questioned. Like most University towns the community is above the average in its intellectual activities. Heretofore University town has depended for water upon numerous wells pumped by windmills, but now the Pico Heights Water company has carried its pipes out to University. Fires are almost unheard of, and the question of fires in connection with the water supply, causes no uneasiness. There are several good business houses in the town and new ones building; an enumeration of the stores in University town shows a preponderance of some lines of trade with a scarcity of other lines of business that would be found in it but for its contiguity to the city of Los Angeles. There are five groceries, combining crockery and hardware departments in most of them, two butcher shops, one bakery, two drug stores, one dry goods and general merchandise, shoe store, ladies furnishing, book and

news stand, two barber shops, one shoemaker's shop; one tailor shop, millinery, two delicacy shops, a post.office, three real estate and insurance offices, a justice's office with a constable, and, a livery stable just outside University tract. There is one block of stores with rooms for lodges above the stores. There are six doctors including three surgeons and a dentist, not a block from the town line. In the southern part of the town at what is often called "Park Station" on Santa Monica avenue, is the Southern Pacific depot with telegraph office, Wells, Fargo & Co's express office, grain warehouse, lumber yard, and a hall used for public purposes, also a grain mill and a planing mill. These are not far from Agricultural Park, which contains a fine race track. The Redondo depot is about three fourths of a mile from the college buildings.

The University Courier is published in the interests of the school with a local column for the community, and a University printing office for job work is now a feature of the town. The University Public School is a large two-story building that contains six rooms, now full of pupils. There are six teachers in this school. The University school has a college academy and music school all on the college campus, with a dormitory and boarding school for young ladies. The only church that is situated in the town of University is the Methodist, but a new church has been built two blocks north of the town site, close to the Harper tract, it is a Baptist church. The number of physicians living in University may cause some surprise until the fact is known that these physicians do not depend upon the town patronage as there is a large area of country around the town. The same may be said regarding the presence of two drug stores in so small a place.