

BERKELEY WOODS

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Since incorporation as a city (town) in 1878 Berkeley has expanded incrementally, generally in a northerly direction in Alameda County. In early 1959 two areas, Berkeley Woods and Park Hills, were annexed to Berkeley. This concluded an expansion period of 80 years which has resulted in the Berkeley boundaries that we know today. For historical background on how Berkeley Woods became part of Berkeley see the attachment. Also see a copy of the Berkeley Daily Gazette article which discusses the annexation.

Since the geographical area of Berkeley Woods was located in unincorporated Contra Costa County an accurate accounting of the history of the name has been elusive to date. The earliest subdivision maps that have been discovered are one dated August 29, 1917 signed by C.L. Huggins, Civil Engineer and the other dated January 12, 1927 entitled "North Cragmont and Berkeley Woods," Harold Havens Co. Inc., Subdividers.

The walk in Berkeley Woods begins at Summit Reservoir. A history of the reservoir and of EBMUD is included in the attachments. At this point we can look to the southeast to analyze the former Contra Costa County boundary with Alameda County. The boundary ran along the back lot lines of homes on the east side of Grizzly Peak Boulevard to about Rosemont Avenue, then along back lot lines of Creston Road homes to Shasta Road and beyond.

Across the street from Summit Reservoir is the Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran church built in 1960. Here once was located a lumber mill for harvesting some of the large stands of eucalyptus trees which dominated the Berkeley ridgeline. Here also is the site upon which the late Louis Stein once proposed to build a drugstore; neighbors objected. A short walk along Wildcat Canyon Road takes us to the north end of the Selby Trail; following this trail to the south takes one by The Brazilian Room, the Tilden Golf Course, and to the south end at Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Centennial Drive. Look down Spruce Street and up Woodmont Avenue for examples of the dramatic improvement in appearance brought about by the undergrounding of utilities.

In the Mexican period in California three great ranchos had common boundaries at the Summit Reservoir saddle. These were the Rancho San Antonio, Rancho San Pablo and Rancho El'Sobrante. Here also is the terminus of Wildcat Canyon Road, called Spruce Street on the Havens map. Wildcat Canyon Road was originally known as the Wagner Road, built by Orinda area cattle ranchers seeking a* route to avoid the difficult and dangerous roads to Oakland. This dated to the 1870's. Cattle would be driven up the Wagner Road and then down what is now Spruce Street to market.

The heart of Berkeley Woods is Woodmont Avenue. Two blocks long, Woodmont Avenue connects Wildcat Canyon Road on the north with Sunset Lane on the south. Vistamont Avenue lies between Woodmont Avenue and Wildcat Canyon Road. As we traverse the two avenues of Woodmont and Vistamont and the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary the history of Berkeley Woods will unfold.

The 500 Block of Woodmont Avenue

The earliest homes on this block were built in the 1930's. At this period the street was unpaved. The first paving was done at the expense of the neighbors. One of the earliest homes on the lower end of the block is #540 which can be seen on a 1935 aerial photo of the area. At the corner of Vistamont and Woodmont Avenues was the beginning of the old Carbone Orchid Nursery. Before paving of the street broken pieces of orchid pots would be thrown here to alleviate muddy conditions. The Carbone Orchid Nursery moved to this location in 1929 from the old location on 5th Street in Berkeley. Caretakers were housed in a building on this corner. The nursery occupied most of the block bordered by Woodmont, Vistamont and Rosemont Avenues. The Carbone home, since sold to other owners, can be seen at #571. An aerial photograph from the 1950's shows how the lot looked at that time. After the owner John Carbone died the family continued to operate the nursery until changing market conditions encouraged them to sell the nursery property in the 1960's to a developer. Building of homes followed rapidly. Number 551 was the model home. Number 554 was built in 1938 on a large piece of property; the orchard of fruit trees planted by the owners largely survives. Woodmont Court was developed with one lot saved for a membership swimming pool.

At Number 570 is a Bernard Maybeck house built in 1937 for Isaac Flagg, U.C. Professor of Greek, as a "country house." Woodmont Avenue in its earlier days was a rural retreat for U.C. academics. Great views were available to homes in this area in earlier years when home density was low and before landscaping vegetation blocked the way.

Note the existence of sidewalks surrounding the exterior of the Carbone subdivision; these were required of the developer by the City of Berkeley. Elsewhere in Berkeley Woods sidewalks, as well as street lights, are largely missing.

The 600 Block of Woodmont Avenue

Continuing up the steep Woodmont Avenue hill and crossing Rosemont Avenue note that the south side of Rosemont was a Monterey pine forest until about the 1960's. These trees had been planted in the 1920's.

Proceeding uphill note #605. The nucleus of this house was built in England and shipped for the Pan-Pacific Exhibition of 1915 in San Francisco. When the exhibition was over the house was cut in half, floated by barge over the bay to Berkeley, and thence brought to this spot by mule-drawn wagon. Subsequent additions to the original house have been made. At one time the building was owned by the Episcopal Church. In recent years it was owned by the Fogarty family of Credence Clearwater note and sold in 1998 to the present owner for a reported #1,200,000. One could assume that this would be the first house in the area.

Number 600 was built by Professor Scheer, Chairman of the Agriculture Department at U.C. The home is still owned by family members.

Numbers 620 and 630 were built by Willard Durham, professor of English at U.C., and for whom a small theatre in Dwinelle Hall on the U.C. campus was named. His wife was the widow of the attorney Chauncey Goodrich.

Number 615 was once owned by the Horners, s prominent Berkeley family. The house was sold in 1999 for 41,200,000.

Number 633 was the home of Sidney B. Mitchell. Professor Mitchell was Chairman of the U.C. School of Librarianship in 1927. He retired in 1946 to tend to his extensive garden and to write books about gardening. He was a founder of the California Horticultural Society. Three lots now occupy his former property. A quote from one of his books will convey some feel for the rural character of this street in the 1920's..."When we first built here only one house was visible to the north of us and even now (1947) it is a rather rural area as the Salbach Gardens adjoin us on the south and the canyon and the mountains which form our view are part of the Regional Park and kept in a natural state."

Number 636. Behind this house are three lots which constitute a private park and open space. A large grove of mixed conifers covers the lot.

Numbers 647 and 651. These were once part of the Salbach Gardens. Number 647 was built by a Mr. Philibosian who managed the oriental rug department, a concession, at The Emporium in San Francisco. Caleb Foot., Professor of Civil Engineering at U.C. was the next owner. Professor Foot's son sold the property to Judge Brunn. Number 651 was built on a lot subdivided from the original property.

Number 657 was the original home of Carl Salbach, owner of the Salbach Gardens. Recently this home sold for 41,200,000. Carl Salbach grew iris and other plants here on 10 acres. He and John Carbone were friends. The property consisted of 4 lots plus the house and some land on the west side of the street. Plants were grown all the way to Wildcat Canyon Road. The death of Mr. Salbach's son while away on a business trip resulted in the discontinuing of the business and the subsequent sale of pieces of the property.

Numbers 660-664-666. Roger Lee homes. Mr. Salbach had sold this property with the understanding that only one home would be built. Dahlias were grown on this site.

Numbers 670-672. Homes built by Mr. Kloss, a minister at the First Congregational Church, in the 1920's. His daughter-in-law Gene Kloss became a well-known artist in Taos, New Mexico. Number 672 was sold to the Parsons family. The late James Parsons was a popular professor of geography at U.C.

Number 673. A former duplex now joined. Professor Haakon Chevalier of U.C. lived here at one time.

Vistamont and Woodmont Avenues. In 1998 there was a mountain lion sighting in this area.

PACIFIC LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Where Woodmont Avenue meets Sunset Lane the walk bears west to Creston Road, south on Creston Road to Marin Avenue and uphill to the left to reach the top of the street. Here at the Seminary is the highest elevation on the walk of about 1,100 feet.

The first building of the Seminary is reached at 2750 Marin Avenue, Sawyer Hall. This building was built by Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Dobbins in 1923. The location was north of the path of the 1923 Berkeley fire which is thought to have started just south of the area now occupied by Jewel Lake. Mr. Dobbins, an official of the Presbyterian Church of California, acquired wealth from the discovery of oil on family property in the San Joaquin Valley. Piano recitals were

held here and outstanding guest speakers were entertained in the patio. The wall of cobblestones was procured from San Francisco streets dating to the Gold Rush era. The rock pathway contains fossil-laden stones from Sonoma County. A sculpture of the prophet Moses striking the rock is in the patio. Inside the building are seven bathrooms with handmade tiles from Italy and four fireplaces. In later years the home and grounds were given to the Seminary. A sign at the front said "Thou Shalt Not Park-Here."

Proceeding uphill the next building is Beasom Hall, built in 1953. This is a dormitory for both single and married students.

At the top of the hill is Founders Hall, the former Nash-Clark home, built in 1931. Former Senator Borah of Idaho donated the massive doorways. The second owner, San Francisco lawyer Herbert Clark, sold the home to the Seminary. The library, which is downstairs in this building, houses 6,000 units and is reputed to be one of the top theological libraries in the United States. Pictures of the interior of this impressive building can be seen at the Berkeley History Center.

Behind Founders Hall is Geisy Hall which contains offices and classrooms. To the south is the Chapel of the Cross modeled after a building in Ronchamp, France.

This is the only Lutheran seminary in the western half of the United States. It is a member of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley which is the largest theological community in the United States. All degrees are offered. Enrollment in 1997 was 71 women and 62 men.

The walk continues past Geisy Hall and downhill through the garden to again reach Marin Avenue. The previous route is traced in reverse downhill on Creston Road to Sunset Lane, east to Woodmont Avenue and then north to the intersection of Woodmont and Vistamont Avenues.

Vistamont Avenue

Vistamont Avenue has two sections. The walk begins at the south portion. One could assume that there was very little development here during the period of the Salbach and Mitchell gardens. Where the street ends at a private driveway a city-owned dirt pathway begins. Normally the City erects street signs to mark paths but here the signs are missing at both ends. This is Pathway #35 in City records and named Vistamont avenue although most walkers refer to it as Vistamont Path, on the north end of the path a short set of wooden steps leads to the other end of Vistamont Avenue. At Rosemont Avenue a short street called My Way leads to a few homes downhill to the east. Proceeding north the more recent homes built on the former Carbone Orchid Nursery property are on the left and older homes are on the right. Two short dead-end streets are passed: Rochdale Way and Vistamont Court. Reaching the corner of Vistamont and Woodmont Avenues the end of the walk is reached. The walker will linger for a moment at this spot and try to imagine the scene 70 years ago when broken pieces of orchid pots helped the traveler to negotiate the earthen roadway.

This is the location of City Pathway #34, unnamed, and referred to as "Not Built, Impossible."

*Paul Grunland
October 6, 2001*

“Berkeley Woods and Park Hills Annexation to Berkeley”

On December 2, 1958 the parcel called Berkeley Woods voted by a count of 118 to 8 to become the sixth addition to the City of Berkeley. On December 16, 1958 the residents of Park Hills voted to become the seventh addition to the City of Berkeley. A special meeting of the Berkeley City Council arranged to bring both parcels into the city by February 1, 1959, the deadline date for third and fourth quarter fiscal year taxes. Thus, by 1959, having expanded seven times Berkeley would seem to have fulfilled its manifest destiny” in the extension of its boundaries from bay to ridgeline and from Oakland on the south to the Contra Costa County line on the north and east.

The Berkeley Woods parcel added 70 acres and 102 homes. The Park Hills parcel added 75 acres and 197 homes. The resulting Berkeley acreage was 6,145 acres, over 9 square miles. The City had expanded to twice the 1878 size. The 1878 incorporation papers outlined an area of 3,100 acres. This space was similar to a giant “Y,” joining the two separate but adjoining communities of “Ocean View” and Berkeley, the latter a small but bustling community south and west of the University of California.

Chronology of the first five Berkeley expansions:

1891 - 1,200 acres, South Berkeley

1892 - 160 1906 - 230 1908 - 380

1920 - 1930

Lorin

“, Claremont

“, Cragmont

“, Thousand Oaks, Northbrae

Source: Berkeley Daily Gazette, December 12, 1958

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