

# HOW WE BECAME BUNGALOW HEAVEN

BY BOB KNEISEL

I MOVED to this neighborhood in the fall of 1983 when all I knew was that it was full of interesting little houses in a variety of styles, colors, and states of repair. The house I bought on Catalina Ave. had been a rental for 15 years and was the worst house on the block (today it is the home of a City Councilman.)

Soon after I arrived, the City's Historic Preservation Department presented a slide show featuring neighborhood houses — stressing the significance of their lovely, home-grown architectural style. The City was just beginning the Bungalow Heaven Architectural Survey to identify the specific style and features of each home.

Along about 1985 a developer demolished a Craftsman bungalow on the southwest corner of Wilson Ave. and Washington Blvd. He then proceeded to erect a boxy, modern, stucco apartment building completely out of character with the surrounding houses. Our neighborhood was being changed, and it was all perfectly legal! We then discovered that the three lots south of Washington Blvd. were zoned for apartments.

Some of the more concerned neighbors set up a meeting to see what could be done. To keep neighboring bungalows from being demolished and replaced with apartment buildings we would have to push through a “downzoning” to zone the land back to single family use. So we circulated petitions, drew more and more people to meetings, insisted that other City Council members listen to us—and we showed them the new apartment building. After many months of discussion, hearings, arguing with landowners who hoped to bulldoze and cash in, we finally won. The City changed the zoning of the strip on the south edge of Washington Blvd. to three-units-per-acre. This made building apartments uneconomical, preserving the existing homes.

This victory gave us a new sense of power and community. We started to see our neighborhood as more than just rows of houses, but as our own turf, a place we all liked, we all shared in, and were now working to preserve. Some neighbors began to explore other ways to preserve our homes. Classic bungalows down the street were being stuccoed, or fitted with aluminum windows. We began to realize that some restrictions on this remodeling and “improvement”

could be a good thing. That meant becoming a historic district. A few objected: “these homes are not mansions, they’re modest, and do we really want to impose restrictions?”



So we polled the neighborhood to find out what our neighbors thought of becoming a Landmark District. I must admit, it was pretty awkward, and a little intimidating to knock on someone's door and ask them how they felt about more government regulations on their property. But we found that many people here thought the Landmark District designation was a good idea.

The staff of the City's Historic Preservation department helped us develop a “Conservation Plan” to specify which alterations to houses would be restricted. It took a year and a half to reach a workable compromise. Then the hard work began — getting 51% of the property owners to sign a petition accepting these regulations. Many volunteer hours were spent going door to door to the 962 houses within the proposed Landmark District before the goal was accomplished.

In canvassing the neighborhood and talking about the need to preserve it, we discovered a host of other issues concerning our neighbors. Some were alarmed at rising crime. Others didn't like all the traffic. The park was a mess. Abandoned vehicles (and houses) were problems. To deal with these issues, we needed a strong neighborhood association. Fortunately, after passing the Landmark District designation, forming the Bungalow Heaven Neighborhood Association was easy!

In 1989, we finally got 55% of property owners to sign the petition for the Landmark District. We took the petition to the City Council, which included two members representing Bungalow Heaven, Rick Cole and Bill Paparian. The City Council agreed to waive the onerous filing fee, and in October 1989 granted us Landmark District status. We were the first neighborhood in Pasadena (and so far, the only) to be granted this distinction. You might say we've been historic since 1989!