



Episode 006 – University of California, Burbank (transcript)

Introduction

You're listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our collection of historic Burbank photos at burbankinfocus.org.

Announcements

September is National Library Card sign-up Month, a time when we celebrate the value of a library card. In addition to books, magazines, movies and music, with your Burbank Public Library card you have access to free ebooks and audiobooks, free online language learning, free digital magazines, free access to Ancestry.com, plus a whole lot more. Show us a picture of your Burbank Library card on Instagram and Twitter using the hashtag #getcardedburbank.

Story

And now for today's story.

What makes for a good university town? What are the characteristics of a community that foster an environment of learning and research? The answers to those questions are important when determining where to move a university that has outgrown its existing location. Such was the case in 1925 when the Southern Branch of the University of California was seeking to move from its increasingly cramped Vermont Avenue location.

The Southern Branch of the University of California had its origins in the Los Angeles State Normal School, a teachers training college. It became a part of the University in 1919, when Governor William D. Stephens signed legislation that transferred buildings, grounds, and records. Inheriting the rich academic tradition from the Berkeley campus, the institution met the needs of a burgeoning southern California. Very rapidly the student population expanded to three times beyond the capacity of the 25-acre Vermont Avenue campus. It was obvious to everyone that the Southern Branch was in need of a larger site.

The regents of the University of California established a site-selection committee and began the search for a new academic home. They didn't have to search very hard. Communities from all over southern California from Santa Barbara to San Diego practically begged the committee to choose their town for the new university site. All of the towns that asked to be considered believed that the site finally selected was destined to be the home of a great educational institution, one that would ultimately rank with the first in the nation. And they all wanted to capitalize on that eventuality. One of those towns with such dreams was Burbank.

Here are the seven qualities of Burbank the city boosters of 1925 said made it a great place for a university:

First, Burbank had "The absolutely essential combination of retirement, with proximity and accessibility to large centers of population." In other words, Burbank was perfectly situated at the gateway of growing development in the San Fernando Valley, while still being near enough to the major metropolis of Los Angeles. Boosters also boasted that Burbank was "and always will be a great transportation center", which is good when thousands of students had need of moving to and from the site throughout the year.

Second, Burbank offered an environment for a healthy student body. Being located away from the heart of a great city made for "better living and a higher moral tone." And the weather in Burbank was always excellent, with comfortable temperatures throughout the year, free from chilling fogs as found on the coast, yet with a "cool 'Burbank Breeze'" during the summer.

Third, Burbank offered "unusual inspirational value." The proposed site in the foothills portion of the town presented an "impressive and picturesque setting and magnificent views". This would linger on in the fond memories of students long after graduation.

Fourth, Burbank offered "surroundings of highest type." A new Civic Center was to be developed near the campus, which would guarantee that the character of other developments in the surrounding area would be "of a class not to detract from that which the entire city is paying to beautify" with wide boulevards and convenient transportation links to other cities.

Fifth, Burbank offered opportunities for student employment. With the growing industrial development in the valley portion of town, boosters expected stores, banks, offices and other commercial establishments to naturally arise in response. But the University Regents need not worry that all the industrialization would detract from the campus, as its site would be far removed in the "high class residential foothill section", and from many points of the proposed campus site the industrial development would not even be seen.

Sixth, Burbank offered agricultural environs. There was a faction of citizens in the region, who insisted the University include an agricultural department at its Southern Branch. Located in the bountiful San Fernando Valley, Burbank boasted several parcels of land suitable for agriculture that could be acquired at any time.

And seventh, Burbank offered enough land at its proposed site to accommodate ample facilities should the University become the world's largest educational institution.

With such terrific accommodations, Burbank certainly sounds like a great place for the Southern Branch of the University of California. And the site-selection committee thought so too. Burbank was one of the top five locations submitted to the board of regents for a final decision. Burbank, Palos Verdes, Fullerton, Pasadena, and what was called the Beverly site (now Westwood), were submitted by the site-selection committee to University President W.W. Campbell as more promising than other sites offered.

The story goes that to facilitate decision making the regents took a field trip to each of the five preferred locations. They chartered a bus and rode down to Fullerton, which they determined was "an awfully long way from Los Angeles". Then they visited Palos Verdes and a chilly fog from the Pacific covered the

landscape in grey. And when they visited both Burbank and Pasadena, the day was sweltering hot with the temperature hovering around 100 degrees. (So much for that "cool 'Burbank Breeze'".) But! When they visited the Beverly site, the sky was clear and the weather remained perfect all day. You can just imagine the sound of birds singing sweetly and a rainbow arcing overhead in a sort of sign from above as the regents tromped through the open fields thinking they had found the perfect location for their university.

The Beverly site ended up being the final selection. Though to be frank, it wasn't really a competition to begin with. When the regents first thought of moving the university, they already knew of and were interested in the Beverly site. The owner of the land had a connection to the university as he had served as a trustee when it was the Los Angeles State Normal School. But the regents thought it might be a good idea to stimulate competition by announcing publicly that they would be willing to entertain offers from other communities, as long as those offers came without cost to the university. So Burbank and the other submitted sites didn't really have much of a chance since the regents were pretty much set on the Beverly site from the beginning.

The university officially began classes at its new home in the fall of 1929. By that time, its name had changed to University of California at Los Angeles (later University of California comma Los Angeles), or UCLA for short. The old site on Vermont Avenue was purchased by the LA Board of Education for the creation of what is now Los Angeles City College.

Not giving up, Burbank sought to attract another university. Within months of losing out to the Beverly site, the land developer of Benmar Hills in the northwest portion of Burbank, was in talks with the president of USC, who was attempting to start a brand new university called the University of International Relations. The developer even went so far as to name streets after well-known colleges and universities, including Amherst, Cornell and Harvard, in an effort to showcase Burbank's enthusiasm for higher education. That new university endeavor didn't get off the ground and Burbank remained without an institution of higher education until Woodbury University purchased the former Villa Cabrini Academy on Glenoaks Boulevard in the mid-1980s. That school boasts on its website as residing in the heart of the region's thriving creative community, a quality the city boosters of 1925 neglected to put forth in their submission to the University of California. One can only imagine what the outcome would have been if they had.

News from Burbank

And Now for the news from Burbank.

Today's news comes from the September 25, 1986 Valley Edition of the Los Angeles Times.

Globetrotters Move Training Camp After Burbank Practice Site Is Sold

The Sherman Oaks-based Harlem Globetrotters moved their training camp from Burbank to Lake Placid, N.Y., earlier this month and may not return to the Valley next year, a team official said.

The Globetrotters, who leave Saturday on a three-month tour of Europe, had conducted a two-week training camp each of the last five years at L.A. Lutheran High School in Burbank. But last December, the Lutheran High School Assn. of Southern California—an organization comprised of 25 churches—sold the 32-acre site to Woodbury University.

Woodbury, a 102-year old business school with an enrollment of 950, is constructing a new campus and will move from its downtown Los Angeles location to Burbank next September.

"They're going through a year of rehabilitating the site," said Globetrotters spokesperson Marie Linehan. "It's a fabulous place, but I have no idea if the team will return to train there or if our offices will be in the same place next year. Nothing is etched in stone.

"The facilities in Lake Placid are good. We were familiar with them because the team had taped a television special there."

The Globetrotters moved their headquarters from Chicago to Sherman Oaks after the team was bought by Metromedia Inc. in 1976.

And that's the news from Burbank on September 25, 1986.

End Credits

rememBURBANK is researched, written, edited, and hosted, by Janae Kambestad, Local History Librarian at the Burbank Public Library. Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library.

The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find shownotes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at BurbankinFocus.org

Thank you for listening.