



Episode 023 – Street Smarts (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 burbankinfo.org.

Announcements

Did you know that Wireless Printing is now available at the Burbank Public Library? From the convenience and safety of your home, office, or car (or anywhere with Internet access), you can send your print jobs to our printers using the PrinterOn mobile printing service. Then you can come to the library, pay for your printouts, and pick them up! This service is available at any of the three branches during open hours. Check our website or inquire with a staff member for instructions when you're ready to print!

Story

There are thousands of streets creating the grid that is Los Angeles County. Do you ever pause to wonder just how each street got its name? Well, this local history librarian gets asked from time to time how a Burbank street was named, so this podcast is dedicated to that...the exploration of street naming origins.

Odonomy is my new word of the week. It is literally the study of street names. It's an interesting process to contemplate...this responsibility of street naming. They can be chosen to designate landmarks, to recognize someone, for the sake of one's vanity, or simply because that's the name the developer settled on and the city officials concurred.

I bet the average Burbanker can take a wild guess what street I get asked about the most: the reference call goes something like this, "Hi, I just moved to Burbank, and I live on Lamer Street. Can you tell me if I'm pronouncing it right?" And yes, prior to becoming the city's local history librarian, I'd pass that street with the same quandary. So, to put your minds at ease, I'm happy to report that it is pronounced La-Mare. In the late 1890s, Amable Lamer relocated to Burbank from French Canada. He met and married a Los Angeles native, Clementine, whose father was a vintner. Amable got into the business and bought real estate for his vineyards in Burbank. In 1909, the Lamers donated the land at 5th Avenue and Orange Grove for the purpose of building Burbank's first Catholic church, which is currently St. Robert Bellarmine. Lamer Street got its name in 1917. It was a road carved into what had been a part of their vast property, with the main structures existing where the current street meets Clark Avenue. The first streets of Burbank were laid out and graded in April of 1887 by contractor W.B. Andrews. "Stakes driven into the brush and cactus-covered land were laid out in crisscross fashion to symbolize streets to come." Andrews employed 120 Chinese workers to complete the task of clearing and grading the thoroughfares. For the streets running north to south, the developers gave tree-themed names:

Cypress, Palm, Orange Grove, Magnolia, and Olive. The streets running east and west were numbered First through Ninth Streets.

As Burbank expanded and further developed, more streets were established and the need for names continued. Like Lamer Street, many of the city's streets were named after important men in the community. Both Burbank and Glendale have their own Verdugo Road because both cities were once part of the San Rafael Rancho owned by Jose Maria Verdugo. Born in 1751, he was a soldier with the second Spanish expedition through California. He has the distinction of being the first private landowner in the valley.

In 1857, Jonathan Scott bought land from the struggling Verdugo descendants. He later sold his portion of the rancho to David Burbank. Scott Road was named in his honor. Maurice Spazier was an enthusiastic town booster who helped convince Moreland Truck Company to choose Burbank for its headquarters in 1917. His local activism was acknowledged by a street named Spazier Avenue. Some other streets named after Burbank pioneers are Chandler, Reese, Parish, Shelton, and Sherlock. Walter Kenneth Dow inherited his father's land, which consisted of citrus groves that started at Central Avenue in Glendale and flowed west to Burbank. According to lore: in 1900, a local politician was up for reelection and visited the Dow's ranch seeking support; he asked if there was anything he could do for them. Walter jokingly requested that the dirt lane be called "Kenneth Road," after his middle name. A short time later, he found a brand-new street sign reading exactly that. No one knows if the tale is true, but the Dow family did live on what is now Kenneth Road. The Burbank portion of the Kenneth Road we travel today was formerly Eighth Street. Two more of the numbered streets ended up with different names as well: Glenoaks Boulevard and San Fernando Boulevard, in case you've ever wondered why Second and Fourth Streets are missing in the scheme. Speaking of San Fernando Boulevard...a funny fact: it is only a boulevard in Burbank proper. Once the street is in Glendale on the east side, it becomes San Fernando Road and, on the west, once it becomes North Hollywood, it is Road as well. It is unknown why Burbankers changed their portion to boulevard.

There is a grouping of streets that run north and south and are situated north of the 5 Freeway and south of the foothills. Uclan Drive is at its core and as the streets spread out east to west, they are named after famous universities. In 1919, developer Ben Marks hatched an ill-fated plot to have a college built here. All of the canonizations of college-themed street names was in the hope that UCLA would pick the city of Burbank for its campus. And we all know how that went. Barney Morris, a land developer who subdivided hillside plots in the early 1950s, named two streets after his children: Karen and Richard. Neither of whom were from Burbank. Another real estate developer, Earl White, who is also accredited with founding Magnolia Park, was responsible for creating and naming Hollywood Way. After developing tracts of land to create a neighborhood, he asked the city for one thing: "help in improving the connecting link to Cahuenga Pass from Burbank direct into Hollywood. However, when this help did not immediately come, he got out his own team of horses and equipment and he, himself, cleared the underbrush and graded the street. Even doing the work himself, this project cost him about \$1,200. Because his 'connecting link' was a direct way to Hollywood from Burbank, Mr. White named it appropriately Hollywood Way."

There are a handful of streets that have this librarian scratching her head. If you live on Hilton, Mansfield, Jolley, or Brown Drives, then I suggest you listen to my podcast about organized crime in Burbank. Because these are the names of the men on the city council who all had terms as mayor during the 1940s. These men were not only complicit to the crimes being committed but likely entangled with

the likes of mobsters such as Mickey Cohen, both personally and financially. Yet, their names are displayed on street signs as if they might have been heroes of the town.

Intermittently, there are a few other streets named after mayors: Bruce Lane, Gibson Court, Haven Way, Rudell Road, and Whitney Lane. And in the early 1980s, another developer named streets after that current city council: Ayres, Remy, Olney, Howard, and Stamper. The street named Stamper was changed to Mystic View and Howard changed to Viewcrest. Howard was the only street named after a female politician, Mary Lou Howard, the city's first woman mayor. Residents complained that Howard Way was being confused with nearby Haven Way, especially because both streets had 24 addresses with identical street numbers. Eventually, there was a minute cul-de-sac named Howard Court in the same subdivision.

Burbank is also fond of naming streets for local celebrities. One of the most famous Burbankers was James Jackson Jeffries. He was a heavyweight boxing champion of the world. In 1904, he bought 107 acres for a ranch at what is now Victory Blvd and Buena Vista. In 1931, Jeffries converted his barn from that of a cattle shed to a boxing arena. He operated training for young boys and staged amateur boxing matches every Thursday night. Today Jeffries Avenue runs through what was long ago the athlete's substantial property. Former Burbanker Debbie Reynolds had a street name changed in her honor in 1971 from Joaquin Drive to Debbie Reynolds Drive. A handful of residents put up such a fuss that it was changed back to its original name. In a 1972 Burbank Daily Review article, Debbie Reynolds was quoted as saying "I was thrilled when the city chose to honor me, so, I was quite chagrined to think my name is an embarrassment to the community. Please feel free to withdraw my name from the city streets because I wouldn't want to be the cause of embarrassment to anyone." A decade later, there was a small street named Reynolds Drive in honor of Burbank's sweetheart.

In the early 1940s, Priscilla and Rosemary Lanes were named after two of the Lane sisters who were popular actresses of that era. And the most prominent street name change happened in 1988 when the city council decided to rename a portion of Catalina Street as Bob Hope Drive. He famously was a long-time Toluca Lake resident, so he was really Burbank adjacent, not an actual Burbanker. But the city officials wanted "to commemorate Hope's long career in show business." At the street's dedication, Bob Hope joked "I can't help but think there's a lot of promotion on NBC's part in all of this, and that it's all a big put-on. I can't help but think that someday this is going to be Bob Hope Drive in the City of Johnny Carson, in the good old USA of Bill Cosby." (Oof, that joke doesn't land the same anymore). The street you live on, the street you work on, the street you grew up on...they each have a unique history to how they got their names. All it takes is an inquiring mind and a little research and you, too, can soon be a student of odonymy!

News from Burbank

Today's news comes from the July 6, 1924 Los Angeles Times.

New Artery Will be Forty Miles in Length And Will be a Valley Link with State Highway

Realization of paved Victory Boulevard as a memorial highway across the valley from the mountains beyond Owensmouth advanced a step this week when the right-of-way committee of the Burbank Valley Boosters' Association recommended in favor of a hundred-foot highway through Burbank to connect the Los Angeles Boulevard at the Burbank city limits on the west. This major highway, forty miles in length, will cross the entire valley not far from its north-south center. Its beginning point is on

Riverside Drive just to the west of the municipal golf links and the aviation landing field in Griffith Park, where a concrete bridge will span the Los Angeles River. Here it connects with Burbank's Crescent Avenue, taking a northwesterly course to a junction with Main Street and Central Avenue. Then it turns west and runs straight through as the crow flies across the valley, through Lankershim, Van Nuys, and Owensmouth to the mountains, forming the rim of San Fernando Valley on the west. Preliminary surveys have been made through this range of mountains, where an easy grade has been found to a connection with the State highway at Camarillo. Tentative plans call for the paving of the road as a twin highway, with the center space embellished with trees, shrubs, and flowers, with additional ornamentation in the form of light pillars, obelisks, memorial arches, and monuments. The proposed new road will provide an entirely new highway to Ventura County and the coast by easier grades than are to be found on any present road and, while relieving Ventura highway traffic congestion, it will connect Los Angeles with undeveloped tree-clad hills and a wonderful mountain region of scenic beauty. It will bring the Hueneme beach within easy reaching distance.

And that's the new from July 6, 1924.

End Credits

rememBURBANK was researched, written, and hosted by Carolyn Alves, recorded and edited by Marcos Alves. 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 burbankinfo.org.

Thank you for joining us today.