

Historical Context

Islenair is a small, working class, early auto-oriented suburb that reflects the small house movement which took hold following World War I and became a national standard of development in the wake of the Great Depression and the Post-World War II housing shortage. In order to provide a foundation for our analysis and place the development of Islenair in a larger national and regional context, this historical context statement will first look at national and local patterns of suburban development leading up to and through the introduction of automobile suburbs. With that broader understanding in place, the context statement will focus on the history and development of Islenair, how it relates to overall patterns of development, and why it is significant to the development history of San Diego.

EARLY SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

By the early to mid nineteenth century, the increasingly crowded, noisy and polluted nature of the city created a growing desire among Americans for a life in a semi-rural environment which brought nature and community together within a daily commute to and from work in the city. Inventions in building technology such as balloon-frame construction, which provided flexibility in design and allowed quicker construction with cheaper materials and less experienced labor, coupled with transportation technology, which made daily commutes possible and affordable, allowed this American ideal to become a reality for an increasingly wide range of socio-economic classes over time.¹

National Patterns²

The evolution of American suburbs from 1830 to 1960 can be divided into four stages related to advancements in transportation technology which allowed development to extend beyond the historical limits of human mobility. The early stages of suburban development in America from 1830 to roughly 1928, include Railroad and Horsecar Suburbs (1830-1890) and Streetcar Suburbs (1888-1928), which resulted from increased mobility within the boundaries of established transit.

Railroad and Horsecar Suburbs

The Railroad Suburb began in 1830 as railroad companies began to seek new sources of revenue by building passenger stations along their routes connecting cities with outlying rural villages. These stations became the focal point of villages that developed along the railroad lines and attracted land development companies which would lay out semi-rural residential communities. Also beginning in 1830's, the Horsecar Suburb developed as horse-drawn cars provided the first mass transit systems by offering regularly scheduled operations along a fixed route. The evolution of the horsecar to horse-drawn omnibus and then finally the horse-drawn streetcar allowed the perimeters of cities to slowly expand from 13 to 30 square miles. The cost of this newfound transportation began to determine where people lived, with middle and working classes settling in neighborhoods accessible by horse-drawn cars, and the upper and upper-middle classes settling in railroad suburbs.

¹ *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs*. See Bibliography for complete citation.

² This summary of national patterns of suburban development was compiled from the *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs*, and may contain direct or abridged quotes.

Streetcar Suburbs

The electric streetcar, introduced in 1887, quickly fostered a tremendous expansion of suburban growth, allowing people to travel in ten minutes as far as they could walk in 30 minutes. In cities of the emerging Midwest and West, streetcar lines influenced the initial pattern of suburban development. In many places the development of real estate would closely follow the introduction of the streetcar, with developers platting rectilinear subdivisions within a five or ten minute walk of the streetcar along its numerous stops. By keeping fares low, streetcars attracted a wide range of socio-economic classes, drawing middle and working classes to the city's periphery where land was cheaper, and became the primary means of transportation for all income levels.

San Diego's Early Growth and Development³

The urban and suburban development of San Diego, led by a number of civic leaders and entrepreneurs over time, is characterized by several great boom and bust eras which influenced San Diego's population and pattern of development.

Railroad Envy

San Diego developed as a frontier town in the mid nineteenth century and followed the model of frontier expansion with emphasis on land speculation, promotion, and railroad construction, the latter of which was considered the linchpin of successful urban development, generating population growth and commercial activity. In the case of San Diego the railroad would be used not for suburban expansion, but rather the creation of an urban center. New Town San Diego, located on San Diego Bay, was first platted in 1850 with the hope of establishing a railroad following the Mexican-American War. New Town experienced two years of growth before key financial backing dissolved and businesses were forced to relocate to Old Town or out of San Diego entirely. Despite some gains in the effort to build a railroad and additional land speculation in the Middletown area, development stalled until the end of the Civil War in 1865 when settlers began to move west once again.

Alonzo Horton, a seasoned urban pioneer and land speculator came to San Diego in 1865 and by 1867 had purchased 800 acres east of New Town and Middletown. He began an aggressive promotional campaign, offering free lots to anyone who would build a house worth \$500 on it. Horton's successful promotion attracted other speculators and developers to San Diego, and within the next five years 15 new subdivisions were laid out around Horton's Addition. 1868 and 1869 were boom years, with steady growth over the next three years until the economic panic of 1873. By 1875 the population had dropped from a high of 4,000 in 1873 to just 1,500. San Diego's civic leaders continued to focus on the development of the railroad. Construction of the Santa Fe Railroad began in 1880 and the first trains arrived in San Diego in 1882, leading to period of renewed and steady growth.

Local Streetcar Suburbs

This period of steady growth was followed by another boom that resulted in a population of 35,000 and a full-fledged land investment and speculation frenzy which created 30 new real estate tracts county-wide by 1888. These new tracts included the areas of Hillcrest and University Heights, located roughly two miles outside of the downtown core and accessed by new streetcar lines

³ This summary of early San Diego Development was drawn from the "Uptown Historic Context and Oral History Report". See Bibliography for complete citation.

running along Fourth Avenue and Switzer Canyon into the Uptown area. These and other first-ring subdivisions located on the periphery of downtown became San Diego's first Streetcar Suburbs. The boom resulted in over \$10 million in new improvements, including paving, electrical street lights and railways, sewage systems, and new construction before ending suddenly when the bottom fell out of the real estate market in the spring of 1888. By the 1890's the City's population settled to around 17,000.

The dawn of the Twentieth Century brought steadier development for San Diego, which experienced modest growth as a health and tourist resort. The economic promise of the Panama Canal, which broke ground in 1903, created yet another boom beginning in 1906. John D. Spreckels launched a major building campaign downtown to modernize the City and introduce multi-story concrete commercial buildings. As downtown began to change, families began moving in greater numbers to the first ring "streetcar suburbs" created during the boom of the 1880's. George Marston, a Progressive and advocate of City Planning, which attempted to provide a rational control over the urban environment, invested heavily in civic improvements through the Nolen Plan and the creation of Balboa Park through the Parsons Plan. The Parsons Plan was superseded by the development of the 1915 Panama California Exposition, which would draw thousands to San Diego in celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal and the promise of the future.



*Streetcar at the intersection of University Ave & Euclid Ave, 1931
San Diego Historical Society Title Insurance & Trust Collection*

AUTOMOBILE ERA: SUBURBAN EXPANSION DURING THE 1920'S AND BEYOND

National Patterns⁴

The later stages of American suburbs from roughly 1908 through 1960 include Early Automobile Suburbs (1908-1945) and Post-World War II and Early Freeway Suburbs (1945-1960), which resulted from greater mobility for the individual through the use of the increasingly affordable and popular automobile, allowing development to extend beyond the limits of conventional mass-transit.⁵

Early Automobile Suburbs

In 1910, Henry Ford began producing his Model T automobile on a massive scale. His assembly-line operation greatly reduced the cost of automobile ownership, resulting in a sharp increase in the

⁴ This summary of national patterns of suburban development was compiled from the *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs*, and may contain direct or abridged quotes.

⁵ *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs*. See Bibliography for complete citation.

number of automobiles in operation nationwide from 500,000 in 1910 to 9.25 million in 1920. This rise in automobile ownership stimulated an intense period of suburban expansion between 1918 and the onset of the Depression. Suburban development began to fill in the areas between streetcar lines as the popularity of the automobile spurred the development of new streets, parkways and boulevards. As new roads were built, suburban development became decentralized, creating fringes of increasingly low densities. With commuters no longer needing to live within walking distance of the streetcar line, residential suburbs could be built at lower densities to form self-contained neighborhoods. This trend in suburban development further stimulated the construction of additional infrastructure, laying the groundwork for the highway system that would shape suburban development following WWII.

Post-World War II and Early Freeway Suburbs

The most dramatic stage of suburban development occurred as a result of increased automobile ownership, advances in building technology, and the Baby Boom following the end of WWII. Critical housing shortages, new low-cost long-term mortgages and use of the GI Bill greatly spurred the development of single family homes. In addition, the Highway Act of 1944 would provide increased connectivity to and between cities and outlying subdivisions.

San Diego's Suburban Expansion

During the decade of the 1920's the growth envisioned by San Diego's early pioneers was realized as the City's population doubled from 74,683 to 147,897. This was due in large part by a concerted and focused effort to attract the Navy and its resources to San Diego, which resulted in the construction of several Navy installations between 1917 and 1930. The Navy provided the population and the economy to allow the city to develop throughout the inter-war period and served as a major catalyst for the development of the harbor. To accommodate the rapidly growing population, development began to stretch outwards in all directions from Pacific Beach to East San Diego.⁶

Impact of the Automobile

Automobile popularity and ownership in Southern California and across the country continued to reach new heights in the mid-to-late 1920's. Monies raised through the Gasoline Tax funded the construction of new roads throughout the United States. The *San Diego Union* estimated in 1926 that San Diego County had approximately 50,500 registered automobiles in a population of 202,000 people, or one car for every four people in San Diego County. In that same year the City Council approved funds for the purchase of San Diego's first traffic control signals (semaphores) as a traffic calming measure in the increasingly chaotic streets of downtown. The rise in automobile ownership did not escape the attention of San Diego's boosters, who released a "San Diego" booster plate that attached to the bottom of vehicle license plates.⁷

This rise in automobile ownership decreased dependency on the trolley line as a means of transportation outside of the City's core, and development began to spread and intensify in San Diego's peripheral communities, including East San Diego, which saw limited development during the era of Streetcar Suburbs.

⁶ This summary of San Diego's Development was drawn from the "Uptown Historic Context and Oral History Report". See Bibliography for complete citation.

⁷ *San Diego Union*, "New San Diego Booster Plate Colored to Match 1926 California License". 3 Jan 1926 and "Officials O.K. New System for Local Traffic". 8 Jan 1926

DEVELOPMENT OF ISLENAIR

East San Diego and City Heights

City Heights saw its beginning in the speculative land boom of the 1880s during which several large subdivisions were platted and some improvements installed. However, the boom would soon bust, and development progressed slowly through the 1890's. By 1906 San Diego was gearing up for another boom in development, and John D. Spreckels announced that his San Diego Electric Trolley Company would extend its streetcar line out along University Avenue to City Heights. In an effort to promote development in City Heights, Columbian Realty sponsored some of the extension work and constructed a five-story observation tower to allow prospective buyers to look



*East San Diego Annexation Celebration, 1923
San Diego Historical Society Title Insurance & Trust Collection*

out over their potential purchases. In 1906 Columbian Realty re-platted the City Heights subdivision to accommodate the extension of the new trolley line, and over the next few years City Heights would continue to grow steadily as San Diego's eastern-most "streetcar suburb". Just six years later, City Heights had over 500 new residences, which prompted them to take advantage of the "Municipalities Act" passed by the State Legislature the previous year allowing communities with 500 residents or more to incorporate. In 1912 the community petitioned the County for incorporation and voted the City of East San Diego into existence.⁸

Development in East San Diego was predominantly comprised of modest homes, many of which were built in the Spanish styles, especially following the Panama California Exposition in 1915. The homes were small and often clustered near the trolley line for easy access and mobility. The neighborhoods themselves were often small and featured curved, rather than grid-pattern streets.

In 1923 the City of San Diego annexed East San Diego, an indicator of its growth and prosperity. Prior to the mid-1920's, expansion to the east ended largely at the intersection of University Avenue and Euclid Avenue, the end of San Diego's eastern most trolley line. Sporadic development northeast and southeast of the intersection just above the natural limits of what we now know as the Auburn Creek branch of Chollas Creek, but was then known (and will be referred to in this history) as Chollas Valley, was present. Such development included subdivisions east of Euclid Avenue along University Avenue, such as Oak Park (map 1732); and along Euclid Avenue just south of University Avenue including Fairmount Addition (map 1347) and Fairhaven Acres (map 1490). However, all of these

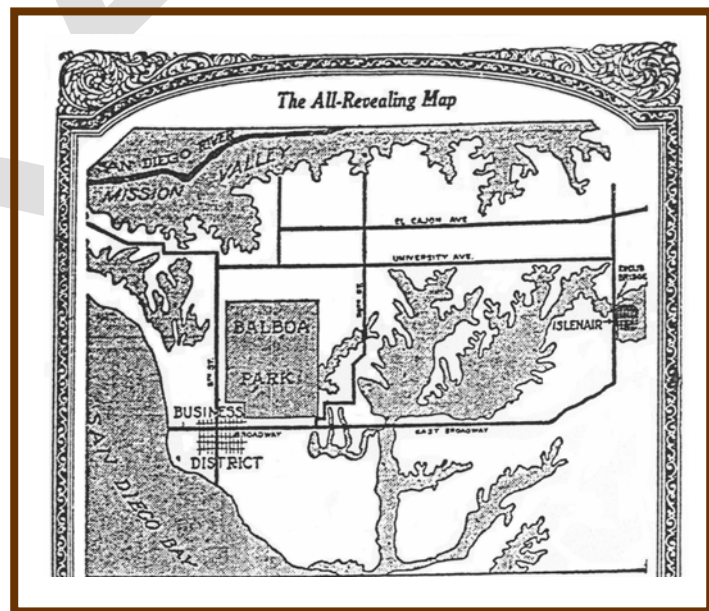
⁸ Newland, James D., M.A. "Historical and Architectural Report for Nomination of the Quartermass-Stensrud House and Carriage House 5602 Adams Avenue Community of El Cerrito to the City of San Diego Historic Site Register". 2002.

prior subdivisions were accessible by foot from the streetcar stop or by car through on-grade improvements which did not require significant investments in infrastructure to connect the areas divided by the numerous canyons and valleys that cut through the central mesa area. Due to the ever increasing popularity and affordability of the automobile, new infrastructure projects would be undertaken to open these previously undeveloped areas to suburbanization. Such infrastructure projects included the paving of University Avenue east of Euclid Avenue and the construction of the Euclid Avenue extension and bridge, which, at the time, would provide the only north-south connection between East Broadway and University Avenue east of 30th Street. This new infrastructure would make possible East San Diego's first auto-dependent suburbs, including Islenair.

The Euclid Avenue Extension

The development of Islenair, which, at the time developers James Love and William Touhey received approval had no means of vehicular access, was contingent upon the completion of the Euclid Avenue extension. The extension of Euclid Avenue from University Avenue south to East Broadway was publicized as the "next great cross-town highway", one of only five north/south highways in San Diego and the only north/south connection east of 30th Street. The project involved the paving of three and one half miles of road and the construction of four bridges, the largest of which would be directly north of Islenair and would allow access to the subdivision.⁹

The progress of the planning and implementation of the project was closely followed in the press and promoted in Love and Touhey's advertisements for Islenair beginning in March of 1926. On April 18, 1926 the *San Diego Union* reported that Love and Touhey announced that final plans and specifications for the Euclid Avenue extension were promised within the next few days. In May, completion of the project was scheduled for fall. However, it wasn't until August that the San Diego Board of Supervisors approved the \$220,000 needed to fund the project.¹⁰ Bids would not be accepted until September, 1926. At the September Board of Supervisors hearing, proponents of the expansion project ran into an unexpected roadblock when residents living north of University Avenue entered the chamber of the Board of Supervisors to protest bearing the financial burden for infrastructure that would not directly benefit them. The Board passed a resolution in response to citizen protest, which called for a re-evaluation of funding sources that would place the burden of expense more on property owners living on or near the Euclid Avenue extension.¹¹



Map taken from a newspaper advertisement for Islenair showing Islenair adjacent to the new Euclid Extension

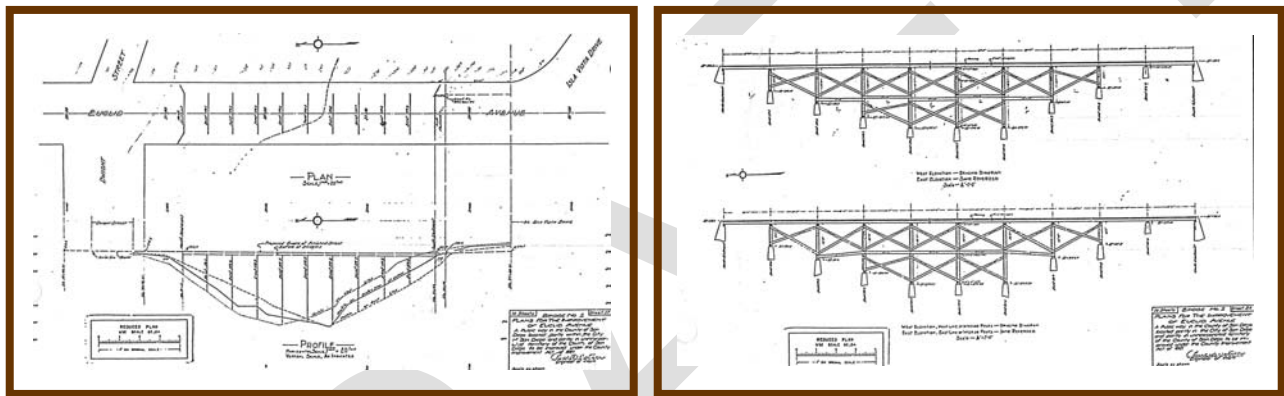
⁹ *San Diego Union*, Advertisements for Islenair. March through August 1926

¹⁰ *San Diego Union*, "Five Mile Paving of Euclid Avenue to Cost \$220,000". 17 August 1926

¹¹ *San Diego Union*, "Protest Against Euclid Extension". 14 September 1926

In November the Board of Supervisors finally awarded the contract for the Euclid Avenue extension to David H. Ryan, who put in a bid only seventy-five dollars lower than Ben Pearce Construction Company. The firm of Watson, Valle and Gough served as engineers on the project.¹² Although no evidence has been found in *San Diego Union* articles, it appears that Ryan may not have actually done the work on the extension project. Sidewalk stamps along Euclid Avenue indicate that Ben Pearce did the paving in 1927. Why David Ryan was unable to complete the contract he was awarded is still unclear.

The construction of what is known as the “Euclid Avenue Bridge” was an element of the expansion project that was particularly vital for the development of Islenair. The bridge covered a 250-foot span that divided the area around the intersection of Euclid Avenue and University Avenue (north of Dwight Street) from the area that would become Islenair, allowing access to the new subdivision. The task of designing the bridge fell to Paul R Watson of Watson, Valle and Gough, who designed a wood truss bridge that was most likely completed in early 1927.



Engineering drawings for the Euclid Avenue Bridge directly north of Islenair.

In December of 1941 the *San Diego Union* reported that the City Council approved \$16,000 for the demolition of the Euclid Avenue Bridge to be replaced with a fill. According to the Union, the nearly fifteen year-old wood bridge was rotting and had to be demolished completely. The contract was awarded to the Macco Construction Company who was to start work on the project only ten days after the contract was signed. It is unclear when the bridge was actually demolished. The 1956 Sanborn Map shows the existence of a 250-foot wood bridge, which should not have been there if indeed the rotted bridge had been replaced with a fill in 1941. The outbreak of World War II one week before the Council’s approval of funds may have de-railed the slated demolition until a later date.

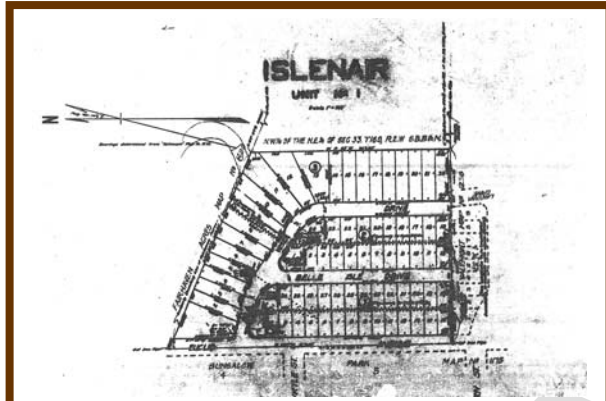
Love & Touhey

As San Diego’s population continued to increase during the 1920’s and the proliferation of the automobile expanded the reach of suburbanization beyond the limitations of Streetcar Suburbs, real estate investors James Love and William J. Touhey set out to capitalize on this increased personal mobility and the wealth of undeveloped land in San Diego’s periphery communities when the subdivision map for Islenair Unit 1 was filed in early 1926. The unit included the area on the east side of Euclid Avenue, the area north

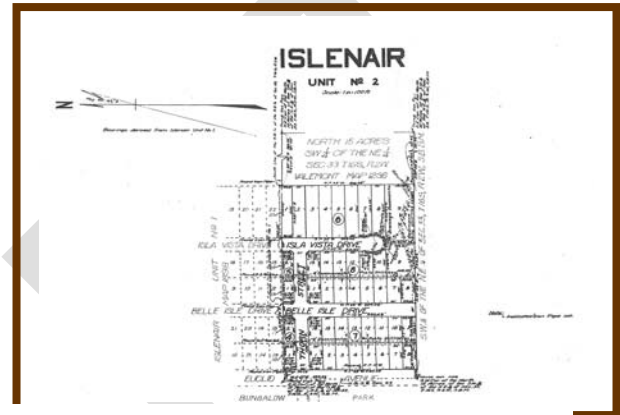


¹² *San Diego Union*, “Supervisors Let Euclid Avenue Paving Contract”. 2 November 1926

of Thorn Street, and the area along Isla Vista Drive to the north and east. The City adopted the map for Islenair Unit 1 on March 22, 1926. Soon after, on July 6, 1926, the City adopted the subdivision map for Islenair Unit 2, which contained the area on the east side of Euclid Avenue, the area to the south of Thorn Street ending at 3203 and 3204 Belle Isle Drive, and the area along Isla Vista Drive to the east. Islenair Unit #2 had previously been surveyed and subdivided as Valemont (Map 1236) in 1909, however the subdivision had never been improved or developed, in all likelihood due to the canyon to the north and the need for infrastructure improvements which would not come until the construction of the Euclid Avenue bridge in 1927.



Map 1898 for Islenair Unit #1



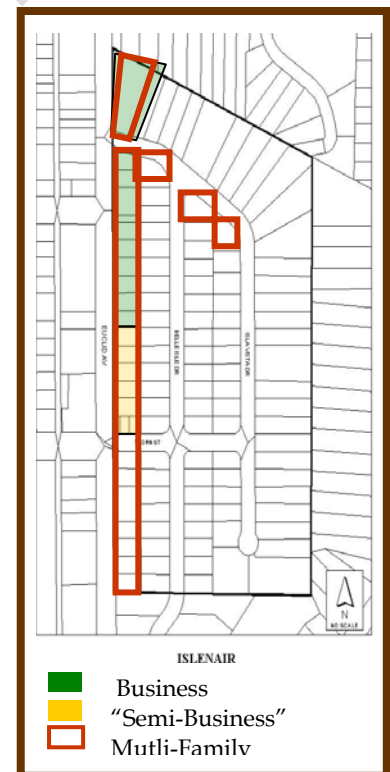
Map 1925 for Islenair Unit #2

The Vision

For their development's location, Love and Touhey chose a stretch of land high above Chollas Valley surrounded on three sides by open canyon space. The picturesque location provided the inspiration for the subdivision's name, Islenair (or Island-in-the air). Lots along the east side of Isla Vista Drive would include portions of the canyon nearly half-way down the slope. Due to the limitations of grading and engineering technology, many of these lots would not be developed until the third period of development in Islenair following World War II, and the canyon continues to be a character defining feature of the subdivision.

In addition to its aesthetic quality, the location selected by Love and Touhey was particularly suited to the transitional time in which the subdivision was developed. Advertised as a "Hub-Division" by the two developers, Islenair was only three blocks south of the eastern trolley terminus at University and Euclid Avenues; and yet at the same time the development of Islenair was a product of and was contingent upon the construction of new infrastructure necessitated by the increase in automobile ownership.

Love and Touhey planned Islenair as a self-contained, mixed use subdivision, taking advantage of their location on Euclid Avenue by allowing a variety of uses including business, "semi-business", and multi-family uses along the new high-profile thoroughfare. The interior of the subdivision would contain single family residential uses with some multi-family use permitted on large, high-profile corner lots.



Today: See a Comedy Filmed, a Spectacular Fire, and the Homesite of Your Dreams!" As an added bonus, the film's director, Mr. George deKirby, agreed to take moving pictures of those in attendance and release them locally.

Love and Touhey's advertising ingenuity led to the complete sale of Islenair Unit 1 in 90 days and anticipated the sell-out of Unit 2 in just 45 days. However, build-out of the subdivision would come slowly over the next 25 years, as individual property owners and small scale spec builders began to develop their parcels between the lean years of the Great Depression and World War II. Homes in Islenair would be built by a wide variety of contractors and designers. Some builders appear only once in Islenair's history, while others have many examples of their craftsmanship throughout the neighborhood. Such builders include: The Dennstedt Company, Cummins Brothers Construction, San Diego Building and Remodel Service, and R R West, who built at least ten of the homes in Islenair. The most noteworthy of the Islenair builders is Mr. Charles Tifal, who built five homes in Islenair and has been established by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board as a Master Builder. Tifal worked both independently as a contractor and with his business partner, architectural designer Ralph Hurlburt. Together, Hurlburt and Tifal built an impressive resume of homes throughout San Diego, publishing a brochure of their work entitled "Distinctive Homes." Apparently working independently either for hire or as a spec builder, Tifal's work in Islenair expresses his quality craftsmanship in a more modest, "small house" scale.

First Period of Development: 1927-1931

The first period of development in Islenair, beginning with first sale of lots in 1927, was reflective of both the small house movement of the 1920's and the popularity of Spanish Revival or Eclectic architecture that swept San Diego following the immense success of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego's Balboa Park, which attracted thousands of people to San Diego and resulted in one of the greatest local building booms in San Diego History.

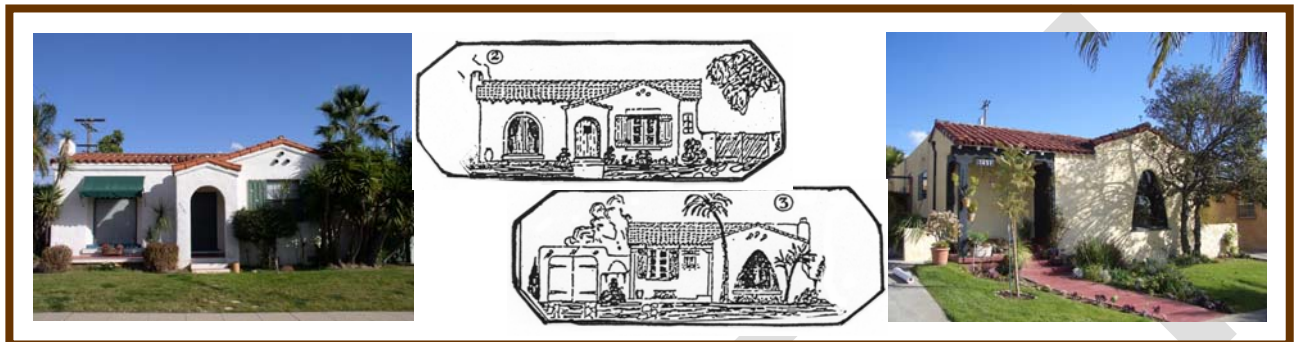
After World War I, focus shifted to improving the quality of American domestic life through home ownership, standardized home building practices, and improvements. The small house movement focused on quality design and construction in a compact, efficient layout containing no more than six rooms. Small houses in the 1920's varied in style, with different regions promoting local trends.¹³ The small house movement was also aided by the growing popularity of the automobile. The personal mobility afforded by the automobile often meant that people spent less of their leisure time at home, and therefore required less space for living and entertainment. Guest rooms often became a thing of the past as guests chose to stay in nearby hotels.¹⁴ Homes in Islenair, which were constructed as single-



¹³ *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs*. See Bibliography for complete citation.

¹⁴ Brilliant, Ashleigh. *The Great Car Craze*. Santa Barbara: Woodbridge Press, 1989.

story, modest residences, reflect the small house movement and the influence of the automobile, with just enough room for a middle class family to live comfortably. The vast majority of homes have porte cocheres or detached garages designed in a style consistent with the architecture of the home.



In addition, homes built during this first phase were built exclusively in the Spanish Eclectic style, wildly popular throughout San Diego and actively promoted by leading architectural figures including Richard Requa, who published trade pamphlets such as *Old World Inspiration for American Architecture*. Development progressed steadily beginning in 1927 with the construction of twenty homes in just four years before the full effects of the Depression were felt. Construction in Islenair came to a halt by the end of 1931.

Second Period of Development: 1935-1941

As the United States entered the leanest years of the Great Depression in the early thirties, new construction in Islenair ceased. As the Depression deepened and housing construction declined



sharply, discussion of the ideal small house took on new urgency with the collapse of the home building industry and the rising rate of foreclosures. The 1931 President's Conference for the design of residential neighborhoods resulted in recommendations from the Nation's leading experts on how to achieve the objectives of reforming the Nation's system of home financing, improving the quality of housing for moderate and lower-income groups, and stimulating the building industry. This meant establishing a new national priority of improving the design and efficiency of the American home while lowering its cost. This was achieved in large part through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) established in 1934, which, through its approval of properties for mortgage insurance and publication of housing and subdivision standards, instituted a national program that would regulate home building practices for decades to come.

FHA's first publication of *Planning Small Houses* in 1936 featured five house types which offered "a range in comfort of living" while maintaining FHA's principle of "providing maximum accommodation within a minimum of means". The simplest FHA design, known as the "FHA minimum house", was designed for a family of three adults or two adults and two children and



Elevations and floor plans from the 1940 edition of FHA's "Principles of Planning Small Houses."

measured 534-624 square feet with a kitchen, a multi-purpose living room, two bedrooms and one bathroom. By 1940 *Planning Small Houses* provided a more flexible system of design based on expandability, standardization, and variability. The simple one story "minimum house" could be expanded as needed to accommodate growing families and design could be influenced by individual taste through the addition of simple architectural features and elements such as gables, porches, materials, roof types, windows and shutters.¹⁵

As building resumed in Islenair in 1935, likely through the use of government funding and assistance, the work of the FHA and the emphasis on the "minimum house" could be seen in the introduction of a new architectural style. The Minimal Traditional style, characterized by a simple floor plan; stucco exterior; hipped or gable roofs with composition shingles; and simple, single pane, 1-over-1, and 2-over-2 wood frame and sash windows, began to grow in popularity as the Spanish Eclectic style was slowly phased out. Modest design elements and features were added to personalize these Minimal Traditional homes based on the preference of the owner. Moderne elements can be seen in the use of simple horizontal detailing and emphasis, round portal windows and glass block. Early Ranch elements can be seen in the use of low-to-medium pitch roofs, wood clapboard in the gable end, decorative "birdhouse" vents, and shutters.



Construction of both Minimal Traditional and Spanish Eclectic homes continued in Islenair during much of the second period of development through 1937 when the last of the Spanish Eclectic style homes were built. Construction of Minimal Traditional homes continued until the onset of World War II, when resources were shifted to the war effort and construction once again came to a stop. By the end of the second period of development, an additional 47 lots had been developed over a period of seven years.

¹⁵ This paragraph was drawn from the *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs* and may contain direct and/or abridged quotes. See Bibliography for complete citation.

Third Period of Development: 1945-1952

Following the end of World War II, the lack of adequate new housing, continued population growth, and the return of young veterans looking to start families sparked an unprecedented boom in suburban development. Increased housing affordability through the FHA and the GI Bill put homeownership within reach of many Americans. Thanks to advances in mass-production during the War, new homes and subdivisions could be built at a much faster rate, reaching a high in 1950 with the construction of 1,692,000 new single family homes nation-wide. By this time Cape Cod and Ranch design influences had begun to re-shape the “minimal house”.¹⁶

When the War ended and construction in Islenair resumed in 1945, the Minimal Traditional style again proved fast, efficient and affordable. Moderne design influences gave way to

stronger, more updated Ranch influences, with slightly larger and longer floor plans and increased visibility of the

garage. It was also during this time that one-half of the lots fronting Euclid Avenue were developed. Only three had been developed during the first two periods of development and the remaining lots would be developed following the third period of development. Despite allowances for multi-family and business related uses, only single family homes were developed along Euclid Avenue until 1948 when the first commercial building was developed and 1950 when the first multi-family building was developed. By the end of the third period of development in 1952, an additional 37 lots had been developed and Islenair was nearly built-out with only a few lots remaining.



Remaining Development: 1957-1979

A handful of development occurred in the late 1950's through the 1970's, consisting almost exclusively of multi-family and commercial buildings along Euclid Avenue with the exception of one single family Ranch style home located on Isla Vista. These structures are not reflective of the character and quality of development in Islenair and occurred outside of the three main periods of development, and therefore are not contributors to the Islenair District.

¹⁶ This paragraph was drawn from the *National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs* and may contain direct and/or abridged quotes. See Bibliography for complete citation.

THE COMMUNITY OF ISLENAIR

Population Characteristics

A community is characterized not only by the built environment, but by the people who live, work and play there. Readily available historic Census data was limited, and proved problematic for detailed analysis due to Census tract boundaries which changed over time and data that would include large portions of tracts at times and only portions of tracts at other times. However, the data which has been collected for the years 1930 through 1960 reveals the following:

- ◆ Population: steady growth, with generally around 1.5-3.0 people per dwelling unit.
- ◆ Occupation: predominantly working class, with occupations such as “Professional/Technical” (roughly 10%), “Mgr-Off-Prop” (roughly 10%), “Clerical” (roughly 20%), “Sales” (roughly 10%), “Craftsmen” (roughly 20%), “Operatives” (roughly 15%), “Pvt. Household” (roughly 2%), “Service” (roughly 10%), and “Laborers” (roughly 3%)
- ◆ Income: middle to lower range income
- ◆ Education: generally completed high school
- ◆ Race/Ethnicity: nearly exclusively Caucasian through the 1950’s and 1960’s.

The limited representation of minority and ethnic groups during the first few decades of development in City Heights and Islenair in particular was due in large part to deed conditions and restrictions which prohibited sale, transfer, lease, rental, use or occupancy of any portion of the premises to any person or persons other than of the Caucasian race, except as a servant of the occupant. Such restrictions based upon race were deemed unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1948. In recent decades, City Heights has risen above its discriminatory past to become one of the most ethnically diverse and inclusive communities in San Diego. Census data from 2000 indicated that of the 78,843 people living within the City Heights Community Planning Area, 31% are white, 14% are black or African American, 1% are American Indian, 17% are Asian, 7% are of two or more races, 30% are of “some other race”, and of the total population, 53% are of Hispanic origin. This data closely reflects statistics for the census tract in which Islenair is located.

The ethnic and cultural diversity in City Heights and Islenair can be attributed to a number of refugee arrival trends in San Diego. According to data provided by the San Diego Chapter of the International Rescue Committee, refugee groups in East San Diego include:

- ◆ Vietnamese, who began arriving in 1975 following the fall of Saigon and now number in excess of 80,000 county-wide, with a large concentration in East San Diego.
- ◆ East Africans, including Ethiopians and Eritreans, who began arriving in 1981 until the Ethiopian program ended in 1991 following the removal of Ethiopia’s dictator. The program was reopened in 1998 and new arrivals began to increase. East Africans now number in excess of 7,500, most of who are in East San Diego.
- ◆ Somalis, who begin arriving in 1991 in response to the Somali Civil War, and now number between 2,500 and 3,000, most of who are in East San Diego.
- ◆ Sudanese, who began arriving in 1992/93 and now number approximately 1,500, including 100 Lost Boys of Sudan. Most of the Sudanese refugees settled in East San Diego.

Islenair reflects the diversity of City Heights as a whole, and includes property owners and renters from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, illustrating the ethnic and cultural evolution and integration of City Heights and San Diego as a whole.

Community Spirit

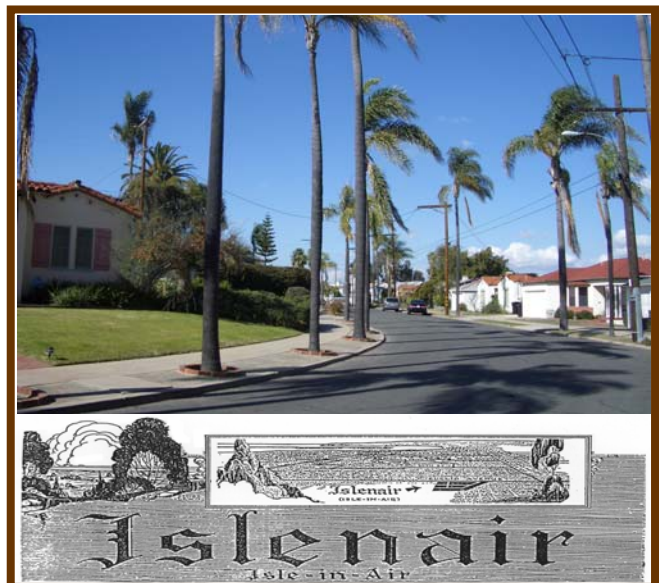
Throughout its history, residents have held a tremendous sense of community pride and spirit, and have worked to maintain Islenair's unique qualities and sense of place. This has been accomplished through informal social contacts and block parties as well as through more formal community organizations. Islenair community member Charlotte Crowley formed Charlotte's Neighbors Club on April 16, 1936, which met regularly at various homes in Islenair, as an informal gathering that grew to bi-monthly meetings where women of the community could sew, play games, socialize and participate in charitable endeavors. Even members who moved out of Islenair remained in contact with members of the club and the Islenair community. Their scrapbook of memories and meeting records remains today, entrusted to a member of the community to keep the history of the neighborhood alive.



A number of years ago, when the community's characteristic palm-tree lined parkways were threatened with the proposed undergrounding of overhead utilities, community members rallied to save the trees, which are a distinct feature of the neighborhood. The undergrounding was delayed, and a key character defining feature of the community was preserved. Today this tradition of community pride and spirit is as vital as ever, as residents pursue the distinction of designation as a Historic District in an effort to protect the unique environment, history and character of Islenair.

CONCLUSION

Typical of subdivisions throughout the United States, Islenair developed as demand for a semi-rural, community-centered way of life grew and advances in transportation technology made development in outlying communities both affordable and practical. Its location marks a new stage in the City of San Diego's expansion away from the city core and beyond the limits of natural topography as increases in mobility and population propelled the creation of new infrastructure and the use of previously unreachable and underutilized land to the east. Development in Islenair reflects the small house movement which began in the 1920's and evolved through the Great Depression and World War II. The neighborhood serves as a microcosm of architectural trends from Spanish Eclectic to Minimal Traditional and Ranch styles, visually illustrating and encapsulating the booms, busts, and trends in working-class suburban development in San Diego from 1927 through 1952.



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