

Downtown Then is Still Downtown Today

By Paul Dorpat

This is the hub of the Madrona Neighborhood, the intersection of Division and Carroll looking south on Carroll -- if I have counted the blocks correctly in the 1893 street name index by my desk. If I have not bumbled then Division is now Union Street and Carroll is 34th Avenue. With city ordinances in 1895 and 1901 many of the historical street names were discarded for the efficiency of numbers and so also their benumbing. The name Carroll Street at least promises a good story. Thirty-fourth merely follows 33rd and comes before 35th. What can you do with that except find it?

The original names were probably given by George and Emma Randell who developed this Madrona Ridge in 1890 and built their home one block west at Drexel Avenue, or 35th now – I think. They did well, especially after the Union Trunk Line trolley to Madrona Park reached this intersection by 1893. The park first and then the neighborhood soon after got its name from the trees (arbutus) that were also residents. Thereon the Randall barn became Randall School and stayed so until 1904 when one of the typical frame box schools designed by school architect James Stephen opened at 33rd Avenue (aka Alvan) and Union and was also named Madrona.

If the tax records can be believed the frame structure that survives on the right of both views was constructed in 1907 and so is about to fulfill its own century. The historical photo dates from circa 1940 when the trolleys, like this car No. 376 on the No.11 Cherry Street Line, were traded for busses and, here also, trackless trolleys. The 1938 Polk Directory (also by my desk) lists the same businesses that show in the photograph – the pharmacy on the corner, followed by a barber, a shoe renewer, a luncheonette and a fish market – all of them named Madrona, except the café. Vernon and Anna Herrett who run the luncheonette, live upstairs, and Walter Cort, the cobbler, lives behind his store on 33rd.

Perhaps some reader will write and share the Carroll or Drexel or Alvan Stories. One likely storyteller would be Junius Rochester who wrote “The Last Electric Trolley,” in part

a history of Madrona. But that lucky historian is often away conducting tours on Columbia River cruise ships and may not be reached.

Then and now captions together: Only about 65 years separates these two looks south on 34th Avenue from Union Street through part of the Madrona Neighborhood's principal commercial hub.

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