

Park Hills Walk

This walk was led by Paul Grunland on 1 April 2000. Route

1. Begin at Park Gate and Shasta Road
2. Park Hills Road to Muir Way
3. Descend steps to the east, which lead to an interior park
4. Proceed north and east to Woodside Road
5. North on Woodside Road to The Crescent
6. Explore interior park between The Crescent and Park Hills Road
7. South on Woodside Road to Hillview Road
8. South on Hillview Road to Fred Herbert Path
9. Fred Herbert Path steps back uphill to the starting point at Park Gate

Background

In 1938 the Mason-McDuffie company purchased around 70 acres of land from the East Bay Regional Park District (or the predecessor water company). This area was named Park Hills and was intended to be for higher quality single family homes. Prototypes were provided by predecessor Mason-McDuffie developments in Claremont and Northbrae. Deed restrictions were placed upon lots sold. To assure continuity a nonprofit property owners association was formed; control was to pass to owners when half of the lots were sold. The association continues to this day.

Roads were laid out in 1939. Development began in 1940. Planning was by the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, MA. Four acres of wildflowers were provided by Professor Shepherd. Native plants for landscaping were provided by James Roof of the Tilden Botanic Garden. William Wurster designed the beautiful gate and fountain at Shasta Road. There were some signature pathways---see Fred Herbert which descends in sections from this point to Wildcat Canyon Road. Some blocks contained large neighborhood playgrounds at their center. In early 1942 there were 167 lots in the tract, 18 occupied homes and 3 unoccupied homes.

By the 1950's problems began to arise. This area was greatly isolated from the county seat in Martinez. Police and fire services were inadequate. Berkeley residents were getting better services for lower taxes. Enrolling children in the Orinda School District was impractical.

In February, 1957 200 people from the property owners association attended the annual meeting at the Brazilian Room in Tilden Park. A committee of five was appointed to investigate the possibility of moving the Park Hills parcel from Contra Costa County to Alameda County. By July 1957 a bill making such a move possible had passed both the Assembly and Senate and had been signed by the Governor. In December 1958 an election was held for Park Hills and Berkeley Woods homeowners concerning annexation of these areas by the City of Berkeley; both areas elected to be annexed by wide margins. On February 1, 1959 both areas were officially part of Berkeley. In six months the committee of five had pulled this off at a total expense of \$195.

For those seeking more complete information see the MasonMcDuffie archives at the U.C. Bancroft Library and the July 1961 document available at the U.C. Institute of Governmental Studies entitled How Park Hills Moved the County Line: A Self-Study in Citizen Action.

Park Hills Annexation to Berkeley

On December 2, 1958 the parcel called Berkeley Woods voted by a count of 118 to 8 to become the sixth addition to the City of Berkeley. On December 16, 1958 the residents of Park Hills voted to become the seventh addition to the City of Berkeley. A special meeting of the Berkeley City Council arranged to bring both parcels into the city by February 1, 1959, the deadline date for third and fourth quarter fiscal year taxes. Thus, by 1959, having expanded seven times, Berkeley would seem to have fulfilled its "manifest destiny" in the extension of its boundaries from bay to ridgeline and from Oakland on the south to the Contra Costa County line on the north and east.

The Berkeley Woods parcel added 70 acres and 102 homes. The Park Hills parcel added 75 acres and 197 homes. The resulting Berkeley acreage was 6,145 acres, over 9 square miles. The City had expanded to twice its 1878 size. The 1878 incorporation papers outlined an area of 3,100 acres. This space was similar to a giant "Y." joining the two separate but adjoining communities of Ocean View and Berkeley, the latter a small but bustling community south and west of the University of California.

Chronology of the first five Berkeley expansions:

- 1891 - 1,200 acres, South Berkeley 1892 – 160 acres, Lorin 1906 – 230 acres, Claremont 1908 – 380 acres, Cragmont
- 1920 – 930 acres, Thousand Oaks, Northbrae

Source: Berkeley Daily Gazette, December 12, 1958