

Once Upon a Time in North Park

New Life Laundry & Stern's Gym Building

By Ernestine Bonn

Have you ever wondered about that old two story brick building just south of University Avenue on the east side of Granada Avenue? The building dates back prior to 1925 but the first San Diego directory (1925) with street designations shows a second hand furniture store under the proprietorship of F.J. Crover which continued until 1937 when J. H. Osborne is shown as the new store owner. Then in 1938, Nathan Raitzas, who had a poultry store on 3822 30th Street, moved his store to this address. He remained at this location through 1945. The building was vacant until 1948. Then in 1950, L.J. Summers brought in a retail poultry business and continued until 1952 when West Coast Poultry and Egg took over and operated a business there until 1960. In 1961 The New Life Laundry, the present occupant moved their business from 3717 Fifth Avenue where they had been located since 1953. It would appear that all of these business endeavors occupied the ground floor of the building, the address being 3829 Granada Avenue. During 1947-49 there is 3829-1/2 address showing H.E. Summers Billiards as the occupant, which brings us to the possibility of this being the original address of the second floor.

However, since 1950, the San Diego City Directory has shown the address of the upstairs business as 3831 Granada, when Stern's Gym moved in as its long-time occupant. Leo Stern has operated his 5,000 square foot gym above the Chinese Laundry since that time. After serving in the Air Force in World War II, he came back again to San Diego and opened his gym. A simple blue sign points up a wide flight of wooden stairs on the left side of the building to this haven for muscle men. Stern's Gym is for men only, but women are not totally left out for his wife has a women's fitness salon around the corner. Stern also has a weight-lifting company next door to the gym which is operated by three of his four sons. The gym is still going strong with between 400 and 500 paid memberships. Some of the notables who have worked out at the gym are Steve Reeves, the movies "Hercules", Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bill Pearl, Mr. Universe from 1953 to 1971 and Lou Ferrigano, TV's "Incredible Hunk."