



“Some of the history of North Park, like most older neighborhoods in San Diego, is literally cast in concrete.”

- Philip J. Erdelsky, North Park resident

Last week at several intersections in our neighborhood, construction crews rolled in on a whirlwind, jackhammered out all four rigid corners, and in a matter of days had poured and sculpted fresh concrete into kinder ramps with smiling yellow traction plates. Then, as quickly as they came, the contractors cleared out the busted rubble (at our corner apparently & mysteriously also carting off our beloved blue public mailbox) and were gone in a matter of days, leaving only a fresh block-lettered signature cast in the concrete as a calling card.



I walked over to examine the contractor's imprint to see who I could thank for the improvements, but to my surprise the fresh marking was dated December of 1926. The original contractor's stamp had been recreated (KING S HEATH 12-26), faithfully reproduced down to the offset "S" one is left to assume was an attempt to compensate for the lack of an apostrophe in the toolset of the day, or perhaps a prescient precursor to modern day [apostrophe massacre](#) .

A short walk through any part of North Park with eyes appropriately tuned is sure to reveal more than a few of these valuable historical records that lay engraved in many of the sidewalks that border North Park's streets. It is common to find sidewalk stamps dating back to the early 20th century, often documenting multiple contractors' efforts and spanning several decades within just a few blocks. Additionally, many curbs and corners are branded with their intersection's street names. While trying to unearth more information about these local fossils, I stumbled fortuitously across the admirable project of one longtime North Park resident dedicated to ensuring these historic sidewalk markings not be forgotten.

Philip J. Erdelsky has lived in North Park since 1976 and has no doubt seen the neighborhood change a bit during his tenure. In his photographic essay [The Sidewalks of North Park](#), Mr. Erdelsky leads the reader on a guided tour through a typical intersection of North Park, pointing out various examples of the markings and details one may find in local sidewalks, then goes on to note some of the delightful embedded idiosyncrasies that really bring the cemented history to life, such as street names that have been changed over time (Who knew Landis Street was once Castle Street?) and apparent spelling errors ("ARZANO ST" at an Arizona Street intersection). The fascinating tour concludes with a generous parting gift from the guide - a link to a sizable database cataloging over 2000 photographs of these North Park street markings, each archived by intersection, corner, text, etc. Visitors to Mr. Erdelsky's main website

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will also find other goldmines such as a directory of North Park businesses indexed by location and type, and numerous maps, and resources for San Diego cyclists.

Fascinated and awed by this undertaking, I contacted Mr. Erdelsky to find out a bit more about the project and learned that it was completed over a period of about 6 weeks from May to July of 2005, and solely by Mr. Erdelsky. He described his inspiration as follows:

I thought sidewalk marks were going to be destroyed, so I hastened to preserve them as well as I could. As it turned out, I needn't have worried. Current curb-cut projects and other sidewalk enhancements always require that old marks be preserved. In fact, the southwest corner of Ohio Street and Polk Ave., which I featured in my article, is now being given curb cuts.

Though clearly, as Mr. Erdelsky's essay documents, this requirement hasn't always been in place or perhaps just hasn't always been followed (at least one photo in the essay shows a street marker with the name cleanly severed by a new curb-cut). A call to the city's Field Engineering department confirmed that sidewalk upgrades in older neighborhoods must in fact preserve the original marks, although I did have trouble finding concrete evidence of this online. The only documentation I was able to locate suggesting that the concrete stamps must be protected by mandate is this [draft city council proposal](#) from 2003, which presumably was later adopted. This proposal outlines requirement that existing stamps must be preserved, that unpreservable (cracked, etc) stamps must be recreated (presumably the King's Heath mark in my area would fall in this category), and that new developments must include a dated stamp as well. I like this last one as suggests that we are creating new fossils for future generations to ponder.

With so much of our history these days endangered of fading and being replaced with ever-more homogenized structures more transient in nature by design or economy, one can never be certain when, where or what historical gem might be paved over next in the path of progress. Thus it is good advice which Mr. Erdelsky offers to fellow bloggers:

"Photograph what is likely to disappear! Record the time, date, and location."

It is reassuring to know that such efforts exist, both at a city level and through the painstaking dedication of individual residents such as Mr. Erdelsky, to ensure that if nothing else, our sidewalks will remain a literal pathway to local history.