



A SHORT HISTORY OF 652 N. MARENGO

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Pasadena

For Brad & Maggie Jones

25 December 2015

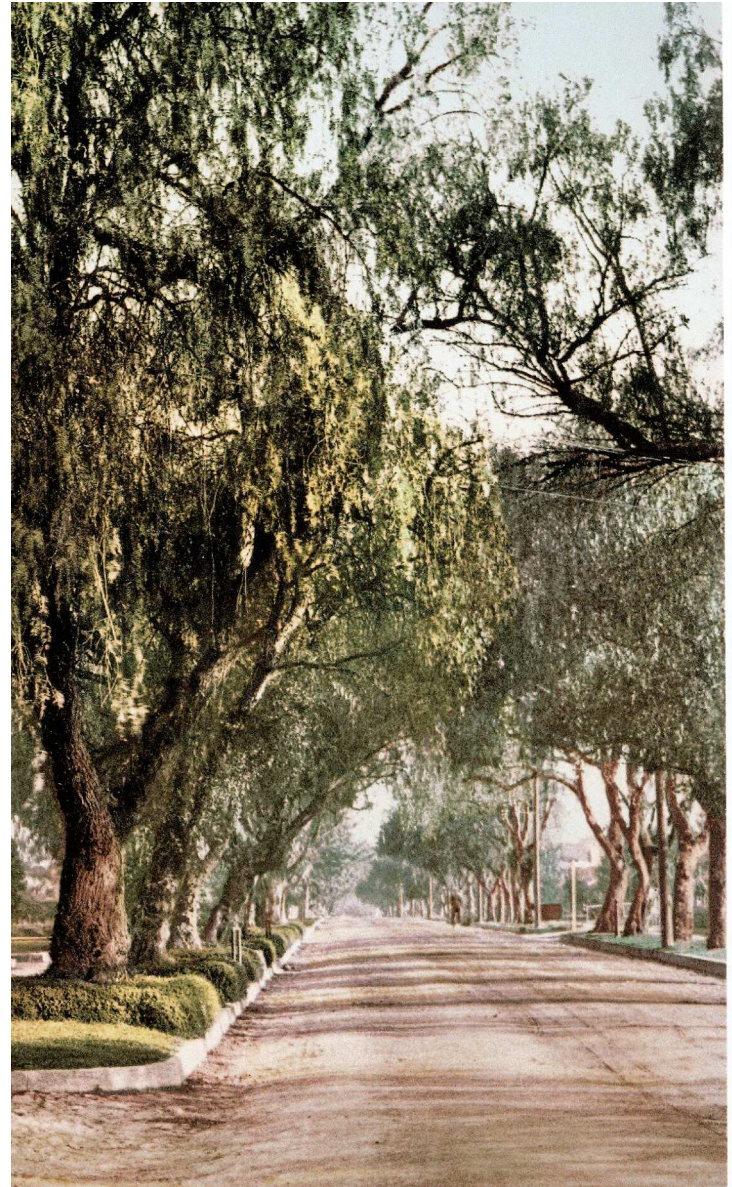


652 Marengo Ave. is shown in blue above

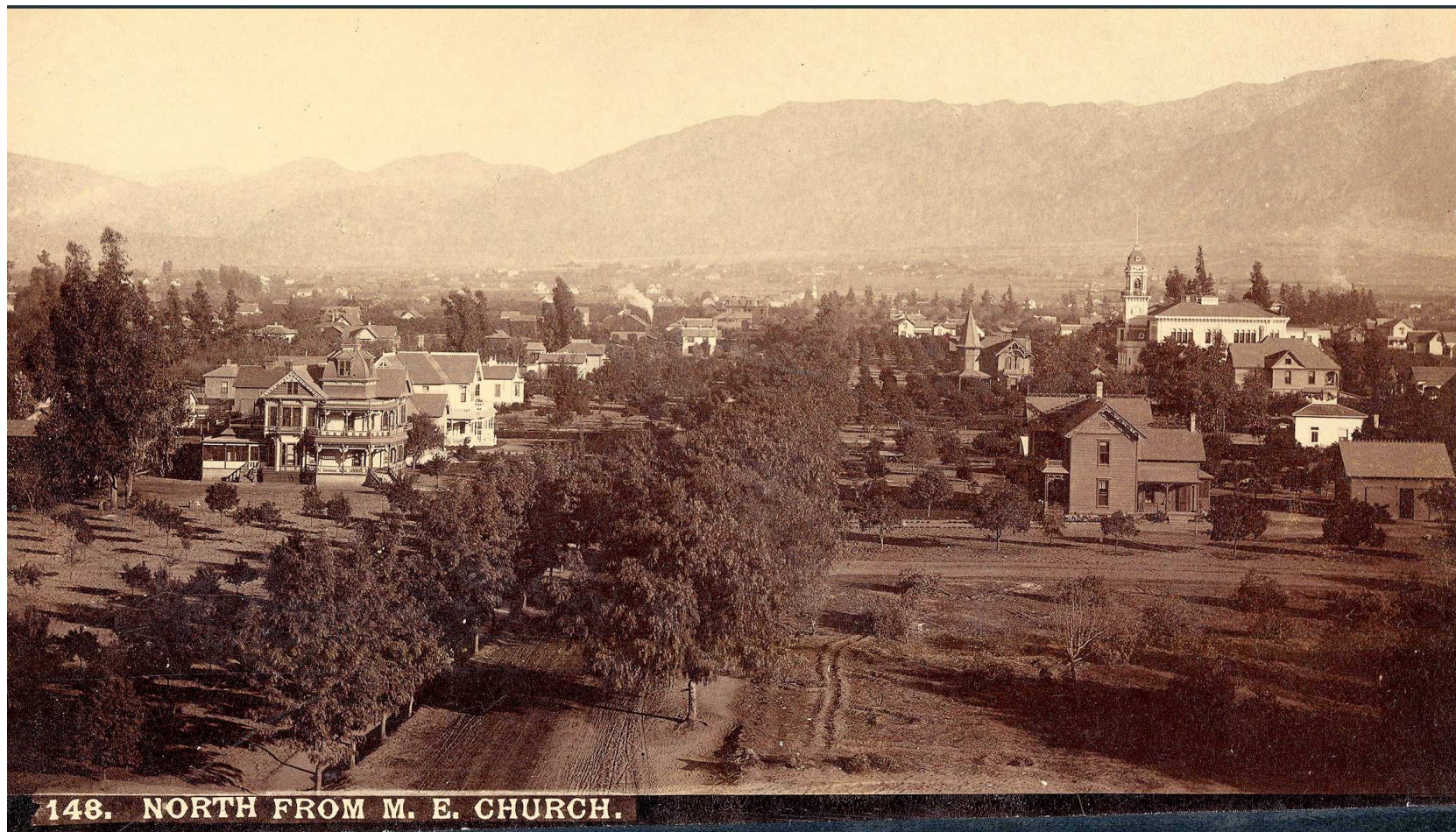
A NEW BEGINNING

It was 1900. Robert and Abbie Randall, after spending many years in Bushnell, Illinois where Robert had been a successful lawyer, were now living in an 11-room rooming house on S. Hope Street in Los Angeles, far away from the cold, harsh winters of Illinois. Their son and only child Henry had arrived in Southern California a few years earlier, marrying a California native Alice Hartley Bryant in 1891. An early real estate agent, Henry was active in Los Angeles land purchases in what was then known as the Nob Hill Tract, located in the Westlake area of Los Angeles. It was also the neighborhood where Henry and Alice lived and socialized. In 1895 Alice bore a son to be named Robert Shelby Randall.

In 1898, Henry and Alice divorced, based on Alice's claims of cruelty. So Henry's parents Robert and Abbie were no doubt pleased when Henry married again in 1902, this time to Miss Mary Bricker, a Pasadena girl some 10 years his junior. Henry and Mary took up residence in Pasadena, and the senior Randalls probably followed Henry to Pasadena, where they purchased and settled at 257 N. Marengo



*1898 Postcard of Marengo Ave. at Union St.
Three blocks south of 652 Marengo.
View looking north*



Taken from the tower of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Marengo and Colorado St., this view looks north along Marengo Avenue, with its stately pepper trees, towards Wilson School, orange groves, and the San Gabriel Mountains beyond. The ornate home at left was 79 N. Marengo Ave., then owned by Frank Stevens, who ran the local hardware store a few blocks away on Colorado St.

*The photo was taken about 1901.
(courtesy Pasadena Public Library Collection)*



1895 Looking east at Wilson School (1887-1924), located at the southeast corner of Marengo and Walnut, two blocks south of 652. The school was named for Benjamin Wilson, early landowner in Pasadena, former mayor of Los Angeles, and a grandfather of George S. Patton, Jr. Mt. Wilson is also named after him.



Wilson School on May 8, 1903, festooned for a visit by President Theodore Roosevelt later that day. The photo is taken from Marengo, looking east.

To honor Henry's new marriage, they gave him money to build their new house. The result was a beautiful home at 652 North Marengo Avenue, which was valued in a 1906 Los Angeles Herald newspaper article at the then princely sum of \$12,000.

Unfortunately, that same article in January, 1906 contained the following headline:

**SAYS HUSBAND IS PARSIMONIOUS
PASADENA WOMAN DEMANDS ALIMONY**

Domestic Troubles of Mr. and Mrs.
Henry L. Randall Aired in Court

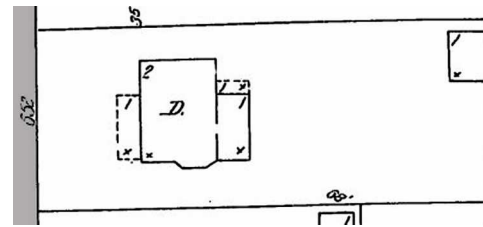
In the article the second Mrs. Randall is mentioned as filing a complaint accusing her husband of many acts of alleged cruelty, including saying she was "...using too much hot water and consumed altogether too much fuel in warm weather." As part of the divorce proceedings she believed she was entitled to a portion of the house, given that money for the house was a gift of Henry's parents for both of them. Henry's father, however, testified on the stand that "the home was purchased by the son, and denied that Mrs. Randall had any title to the place..."

Seven months later, Mary Randall was back on the stand, this time suing Robert S. Randall, for "recovery of property." More details about the house purchase came

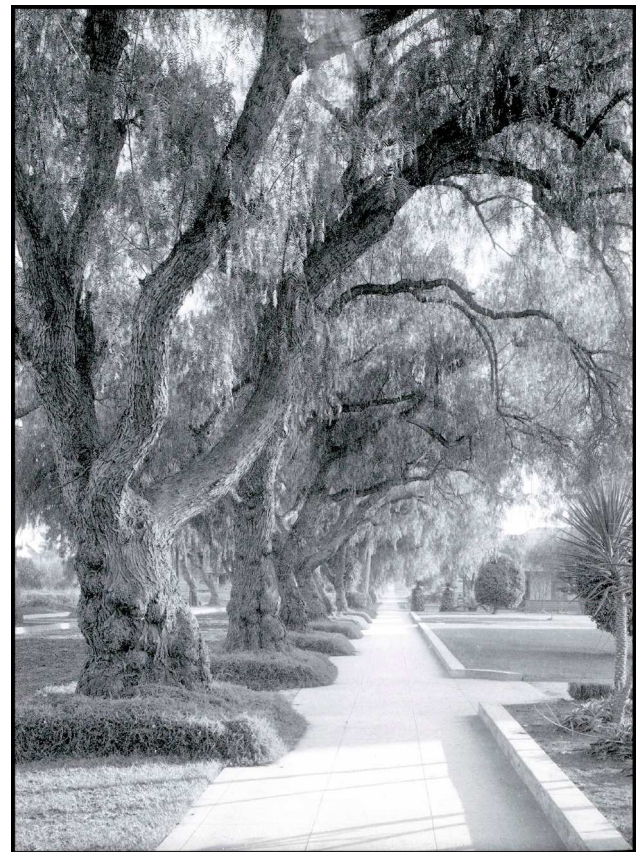
out. According to Mary, they received notice from the elder Randall, a retired capitalist of Illinois, that he would "send them a check for \$9,000 should they choose to build a home of their own. The home was built in the El Molino tract, in a fashionable part of Pasadena, the check came forthwith and the deed was registered in the husband's name." The first street directory of 1905 reported that the parents were still at 257 N. Marengo, and the second one, published in July, noted they were in the new home at 652 N. Marengo, while Henry still resided at 181 N. Marengo.

Regarding the house itself, when it was constructed in 1905 the outline was very similar to today's structure, with the main difference being that the second storey ended just past the bay window on the south side, with only a first floor continuing on to the rear. A 1910 Sanborn map shows the house outline clearly, with a small porch on the north side of the back of the house, and a small garage at the very back northeast corner of the lot.

The federal census of 1910 revealed that Robert and Abbie continue to reside in the house at 652, with Robert's occupation listed as "own income", that the house was owned "free and clear", and son Henry



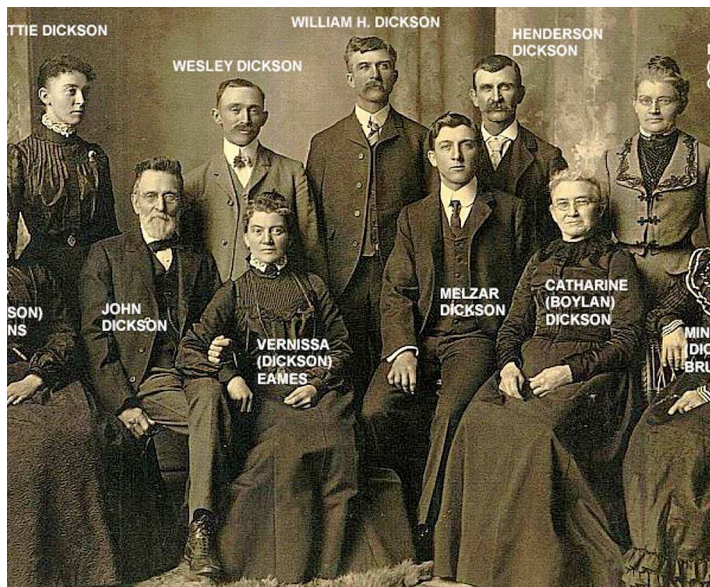
The 1910 outline of the house and lot at 652, as presented by Sanborn maps. The numbers inside the house outline indicate the number of storeys for that portion of the house.



A 1904 view of N. Marengo Ave.

Wood Shed—Frame, 282 S Los Robles Ave; 12.
W. Smith, own, 272 S Los Robles Ave; Wm. H.
Rice, bldr, 148 N Parkwood Ave; \$80
After Residence—Frame, 182 N Hudson Ave; E.
Sandstrum, own, 144 N Mentor; day work; \$100
Garage—Frame, 1 sto, 2 rms, rear 652 N Ma-
rango Ave; H. L. Randall, own, 652 N Ma-
rango Ave; Henry McKeen, bldr, 275 Center
St; \$250

Notice of the new garage
addition, 1916.



Melzar Dickson (1868-1947) in a family portrait
taken in 1902 at his parents' house in Marshalltown Iowa

resided there too, with his occupation listed as
"Agent Real Estate".

In 1913 Robert, now age 80, died, followed by his
grandson Robert Shelby the next year, at just 22
years old. As a side note, Robert Shelby the younger
was father to a third Robert Shelby Randall, who
went on to work in the movie industry--his most
famous appearance as an uncredited boat crew
member in the 1945 movie *They Were Expendable*.

Meanwhile, a few blocks away at 919 Garfield,
another midwest retiree was spending his winters
escaping harsh Iowa weather.

Autos were becoming the mode of transport in the
1910's, and in 1916 Henry Randall applied for a
permit to add a 2-car garage to the property. The
notice in the L.A. Herald even mentioned the name
of the builder. Pasadena, though growing
continuously, was still a small city that year with
42,000 citizens. By 1918 Henry married again, and
was living in the house at that time with new wife,
Flora. Meanwhile, Melzar and Florence Dickson, who
were the nearby Iowan neighbors escaping Iowa
winters, had moved to a new location, but remained
close by.

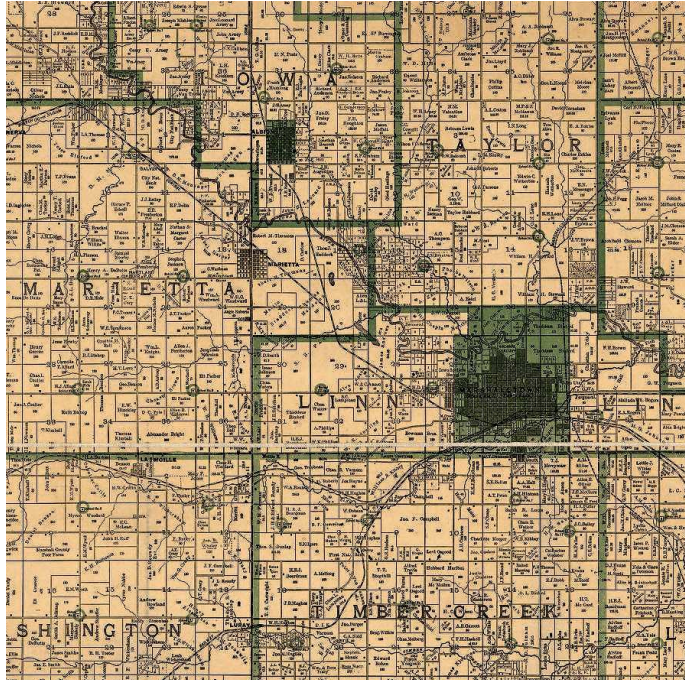
A NEW FAMILY MOVES IN

We don't know if Flora Randall didn't like the history of the house, or if Henry needed some quick cash--what we do know is that by 1920, the Randalls had moved out, and the Dicksons had moved in. And while the Dicksons kept their residence in Marshalltown, Iowa, they purchased this second home in Pasadena to probably keep from moving to a new place each winter. Son Glen Collins Dickson came out to Pasadena too, and started college at nearby Caltech, intending to major in Chemical Engineering.

The 1920 federal census bypassed the property that year. Perhaps the house had been sold right around that time. The new owners, Melzar and Florence Dickson, both grew up in Iowa near Marshalltown. Melzar attended the



*Looking south on Marengo Street in 1928, two blocks south of 652 N. Marengo.
From the photographer's location forward to the railroad crossing is today a bridge over the
Foothill Freeway (I-210). The railroad remains, however as it passes through a tunnel underneath
to arrive in the center of today's freeway.*



An extract of the Marshall County Pocket Map by Melzar Dickson, showing Marshalltown at lower right, Albion (Florence Dickson's hometown) at upper left

University of Michigan for three years, and practiced as a civil engineer after his college work.

At least one item of his legacy is still available for viewing--an 1896 Map of Melzar M. Dickson's township and sectional pocket map of Marshall County, Iowa (see at left), which can be viewed on the Library of Congress website. Evidently Melzar created a number of these maps, which showed in detail how the land was divided and who the owners were. He also had some mining interests via the M. M. Dickson Mining Co. Grandson David Dickson mentioned a gold mine in the Sierra Nevadas as well as one in Mexico, which was taken by the Mexican government. But the real source of Melzar's wealth according to David were large amounts of land in Iowa that grandmother Florence had inherited from her parents.

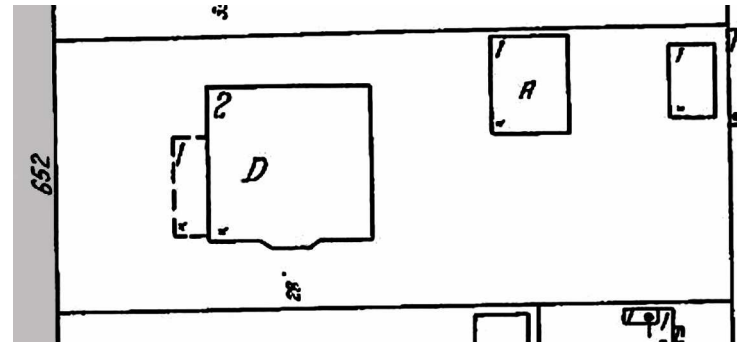
Son Glen transferred to Stanford, graduating in 1923. Upon his return he obtained employment in Hollywood, and by 1929 he was a sound engineer at Paramount-Publix, the predecessor to Paramount Pictures. In addition he joined the "He was to remain in the house through 1940--his wife Helen, whom he married in the 1930's, is documented to have lived in the house through at least 1950.

The 1930 census reveals that Melzar has now retired. Age 58, he and Florence now remain full-time in Pasadena, bypassing the Iowan summers. Son Glen is recorded as an "Electrical Engineer, Movies" while daughter Katharine is listed as "Teacher, Public School". Son John D., now 17, remains at home. And a new Sanborn map of 1931 reveals changes to the house and yard.

Son Glen is noted in the 1932 Stanford Alumnus Catalog as a Transmission Engineer for Paramount-Publix, and in 1936, the UCLA Summer Catalog notes that son John D. has enrolled. The next year the University of Michigan Alumnus Catalog provides a write-up for Melzar.

'93

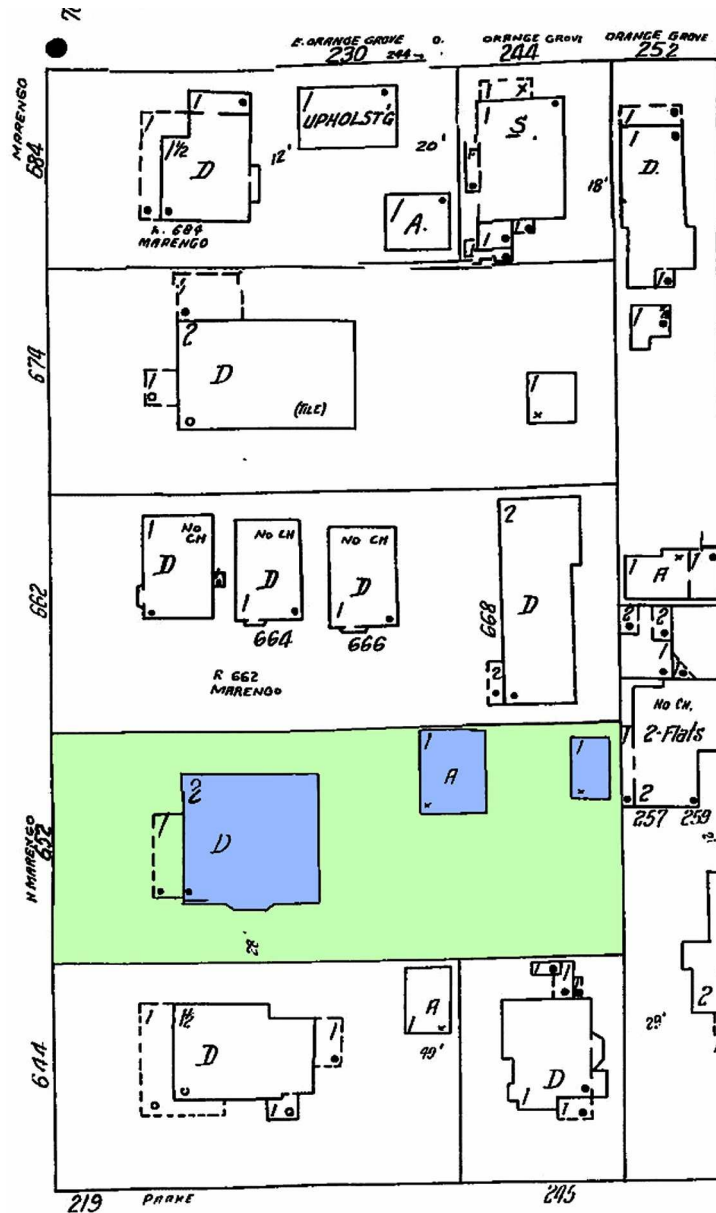
Melzar Monroe Dickson, '89 - '92, lives at 803 W. Main St., Marshalltown, Iowa, in the summer and at 652 N. Marengo Ave., Pasadena, Calif., in the winter. He is Director of Mammoth Mines Corporation, in Los Angeles, and the manager of several farms in Iowa and Nebraska. He has published a map of Iowa and various counties and has been employed in the Engineering Departments of the L.S. & M.S. Railroad and the C.B. & Q Railroad. His three children are grown. Mr. Dickson also attended Iowa College at Grinnell, Iowa.



Sanborn map for 1931

The house is now two storeys--front to back.

*The one-storey garage built in 1916 is denoted by the building marked 'A'
The outbuilding in the upper right-hand corner was described by David Dickson as a "barn"*



The block of Marengo Ave. in 1951,
showing the buildings on the east side.
652 appears relatively unchanged since 1931.

During World War II son Glen worked in the sound department for MGM Studios while he and wife Helen continued to live in the house. Son Gale passed away in 1943 while in Ventura, CA. Son John D. marries. By 1944 Melzar's health began to fail.

A grandson David was born to son John D and his wife Ruth in 1947, and within the year Melzar was to pass away. He was buried back in Marshalltown, Iowa. Florence, daughter Katharine, along with the two sons and their families remained in the house. Then in 1955 Melzar's wife Florence died, and in the next few years, son Glen and Helen moved to Overland Ave. near the MGM Studio in Culver City. Grandson David recalled that in 1959, blockbuster movie Ben-Hur was about to premiere at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, where it would play exclusively for over a year. Uncle Glen, now in management at MGM, secured tickets for the family to see the movie before the actual premiere.

Glen passed away in 1965. At the time of his obituary, an adult daughter Alice Ann (married to a Mr. Ladd) is mentioned. He was buried at Forest Lawn, Glendale. The house, according to David became a joint inheritance among the surviving children, John D. and Katharine.

In the 1970's while living at the house David recalled the layout of the back yard. He mentioned the driveway on the north side of the house had a large turnout available at the back, so a car could exercise a u-turn, without entering the garage. In addition to the small outbuilding at the northeast corner of the property which he described as a small "barn", there was also a tool shed along the east lot line, located at the approximate north-south midpoint. A couple of lots north at the corner at Orange Grove Blvd. was a drive-in dairy store, which was quite prevalent.

By the end of the 1970's, John D.'s family had moved out, and Katharine had moved to a hotel. Every other week John D. would come by to maintain the yard. And although no one lived there, the property remained in the Dickson family. The reason as per David? The city of Pasadena required existing houses be brought up to code before selling. In the early 1980's, the code was relaxed, and a neighbor had contacted John multiple times inquiring about purchasing the property. So in the early 1980's the house was sold and a 50+ year residency by the Dickson family came to a close. According to David, the price was \$100,000.



Looking north on Marengo in 1932, corner of Holly St. Looking to the right out of frame would result in a view of City Hall.

Below is a similar view in 2015.



A NEW ERA

At some point after the sale, the house began a new life as a multi-family rental.

Then in March, 2006, at the height of the "Flip That House" frenzy, 652 N. Marengo was put on the market. The then owner espoused in an online ad--good spelling was not a requirement--the benefits available to a new buyer.

2006 AD FOR 652 N. MARENGO

Highlights

*Condo conversion!!!!
tremendous upside potential
great value even as a 4 plex
great mix
high end projects adjacent to property being built
8 car garages*

Description

CONDO CONVERSION,Principles Only!! Here' is an excellant condo/conversion of an existing 4 unit building, in an up and comming community of North Pasadena to condos!! Seller has already started the tentative tract map and is about 6 months from completion. There are (2) two bedroom/ one baths and (2) three bedroom/ one baths. Property was recently remodeled with new kitchen/baths, central air/heat, new cooper plumbing and electrical.

This is a tremendous opportunity and Ideal for builders/developers who need a property to transfer their inclusionary housing requirements. Seller has found another property and needs to sell otherwise would wait and sell indiviually. Property is priced very well, other 4 unts are priced around a million without a conversion option. The best part is you can finance with 0 down. All units are rented, 3 bedrooms are rented at \$1400 and the 2 bedrooms are currently at \$1140 and \$1275, rents should be \$1350 for the 2's and \$1550 for the 3's. There are several high end projects currently under construction around the corner and this is walking distance to old town Pasadena. This is a tremendous opportunity, do[n't] let it get away, it won't last!

As we know, the house did not "go Condo", and remains a 4-plex, its current use today (2015). One hundred years old and still kicking!

The following pages feature photos of the house and yard.



The House in March 2006



The House in New Paint, June 2006



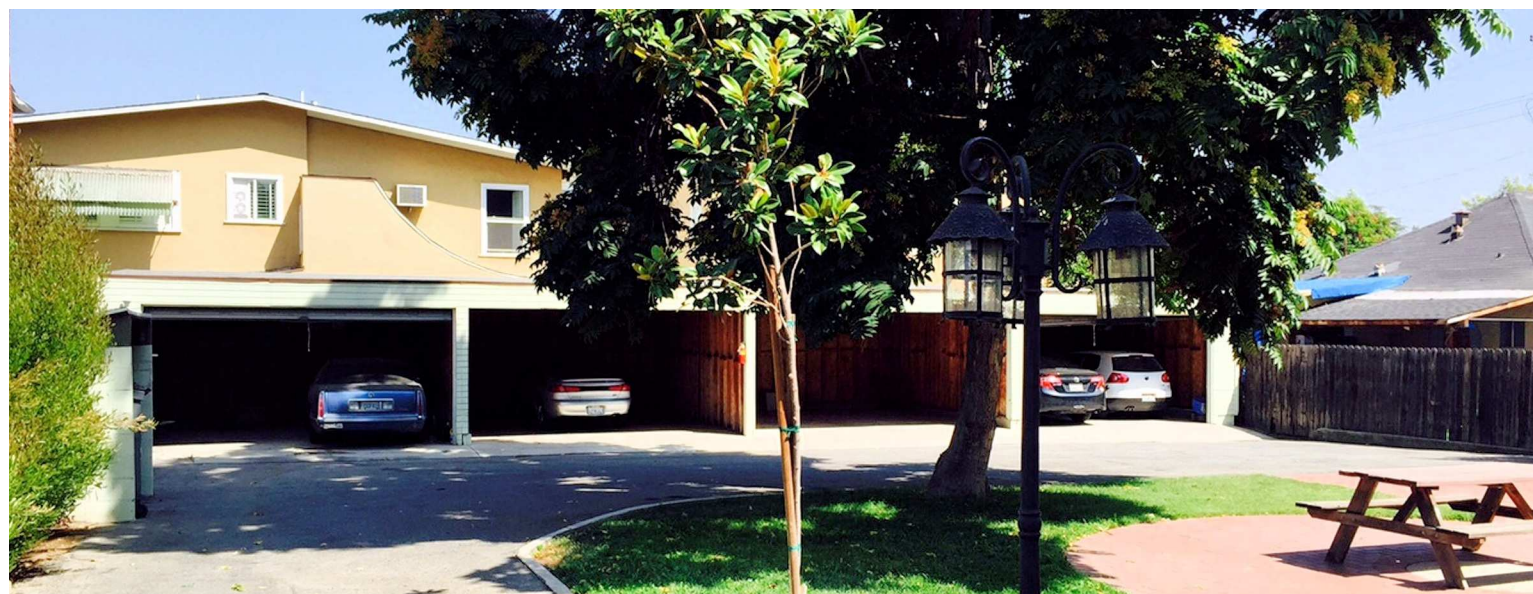
The Rear of the House in March 2006



The Rear of the House in June, 2006

The House Today





Descendants of Melzar Monroe Dickson*

Melzar Monroe Dickson*
b. 1868 Iowa
d. 1947 Pasadena CA
bu. Marshalltown IA

Florence Collins*
b. 1872 Iowa
d. 1955 Pasadena CA
bu. Marshalltown IA

Glen Collins Dickson*
b. Nov 1901 Iowa
d. Nov 1965 Pasadena CA

Helen Hill*
b. 1906 New York
d. 1984 Orange Cty, CA

Alice Ann Dickson
b. aft 1940
d. bef 2004

Ladd (---)

Gale Dickson*
b. 1906 Iowa
d. 1943

Katharine Dickson*
b. 1907 Iowa
d. 1990 Orange Cty, CA
bu. Marshalltown IA

John D Dickson*
b. 1913 Iowa
d. 2002 Magalia CA

Ruth Summerl*
b. 1914
d. Mar 2004 Magalia CA

David Dickson*
b. 1947

Robert Dickson*
b. 1949

* - known to have resided at 652 N. Marengo



A POSTCARD OF N. MARENGO AT UNION IN 1898

N. MARENGO AVENUE, UNION, ILLINOIS

UNION, ILLINOIS, 1898, BY
DETROIT PHOTOGRAPH CO.