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Newman Avenue's Beginnings

Linda Allen

Newman Avenue was created in 1924 by the platting of the Moorman-Newman Addition from a portion of land which was bounded by California Street on the east, Locust Avenue on the north, Adams Street on the west, and roughly the edge of the California Street Park on the south. Moorman was Marion R. Moorman who was an eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist who lived on West Holmes Avenue. Newman was William W. Newman, a cotton merchant with offices on Madison Street, who lived on Williams Avenue in the Eleanor Hutchens house. The Newman family had purchased a portion of the land in 1885, while Moorman had bought two acres from W.W. Garth in 1919.

The subdivision included all of the north side of Newman Avenue between California and Adams and all but the four westernmost lots on the south side. The west end of the south side still belonged to the Nance family who had originally purchased the land in 1859. They continued to reside in the old house at 715 Adams. The Moorman-Newman lots were approximately 25 feet wide and buyers were given the option of buying any number for their new home.

By 1928 seven homes had been built facing Newman, predominately on the north side, and two were built fronting Adams. By 1940 there were 16 houses on Newman and by 1948 all the present houses in the Moorman-Newman Addition were in place, although several vacant lots remain today. At one time the city had intended to put a street through where these vacant lots are, but then abandoned the idea. In 1947 the city sold the two south lots to the Pizitz family who owned the adjoining house. The two lots on the north served as the garden plot for a house on Locust.



Map showing the boundaries of the Newman Avenue area added to the Twickenham Historic Preservation District—The area includes the Moorman-Newman Addition and some of the lots from the divided Belle Nance estate. Courtesy Huntsville Planning Department.

The four lots on the west end of Newman remained in the Belle Nance estate until 1949 when an unrecorded plat divided that property into five lots, four of which faced Newman Avenue, with the fifth (where the old house stood) fronting Adams. By 1950 three of the Newman lots had been sold and houses erected on them, while the fourth lot was not sold until 1956.

The houses built during the late 1920s on Newman were a varied lot although all were influenced by the bungalow craze; they were modest houses with low gabled roofs accented by a smaller front gable over the porch or doorway. They mostly displayed grouped windows and generous front porches. Several were true craftsman bungalows,

several displayed vaguely English cottage features such as shouldered chimneys and arched doorways while others had no strong stylistic features. They were constructed of wood, brick, stucco, and manufactured block—truly a fascinating diversity in a population of only nine samples. Two of them were apparently duplexes. These first generation homebuilders on Newman included a dentist, a surgeon, an insurance agency owner, a builder, and the circulation manager for the Huntsville Times.

The houses built during the 1930s were predominantly of brick construction, retained the one to one-and-one-half-story height, still favored gabled roofs with one street gable, but front porches began to diminish in importance. House design in the 1940s in this neighborhood continued the trend of moderate sized houses but they demonstrated a slight shift to more formal, symmetrical facades evoking colonial antecedents. They were evenly split between brick and wood construction with the exception of one house in coursed uncut stone under a half-timbered gable, while another hinted at the lingering popularity of the English cottage. The last of these houses were constructed in the early 1950s and demonstrate a continuation of the trends of the earlier decades.

The Newman Addition to the Twickenham Historic Preservation District nicely meets the district statement of significance defined in 1972 “to encompass a living architectural museum of structure built over a period of time from 1814 to 1972...” The Newman block contributes to the tradition with its clearly defined examples of middle-class housing choices between 1925 and 1950—the last building phase before Huntsville was propelled into a new life as the Rocket City.

Linda Allen works for the Huntsville Planning Department. This article is adapted from a talk she gave on January 31, 2000.