

The Special Character of the Boylan Heights Historic District

Excerpted from
Design Guidelines for Raleigh Historic Districts
available at www.rhdc.org

Before its development beginning in 1907, the property which is now Boylan Heights was once a large wooded site. From its apex at Montfort Hall, the land slopes steadily downward toward the east, south, and west. Instead of the right angle grid of streets common to Raleigh's earlier development, Boylan Heights was platted with the city's first curvilinear grid, designed to respond to the sloping topography of the site. At the neighborhood's request, and in recognition of the neighborhood's unique design and special character, City Council designated Boylan Heights as a historic district in 1984.

.... The extent to which streets were influenced by the hillside site is shown in West Lenoir and West South streets which are continuations from Raleigh's original grid. They begin as direct east/west connectors but curve sharply northward around the base of the hill.

In the middle of the southeast quadrant of the property was the Boylan Springs Park, which later became the school site (now Project Enlightenment). Designed as an essential feature of the suburb, its cool, spacious shadiness gives a welcome contrast to the density of the street facades in the neighborhood. The neighborhood has quite sharply defined borders: the railroad and Central Prison on the northwest; Rocky Branch, the Dix Hill grounds, and now Western Boulevard Extension to the south; a sharp grade change and industrial uses on the east. These boundaries have isolated the neighborhood over the years, yet they have also helped preserve the neighborhood and its innovative subdivision design from intrusion of industrial or commercial uses.

Large, mature deciduous and evergreen trees fill many lots. Shade trees line the street rights-of-way, which have also been planted with dogwoods or crepe myrtles. Front yards are generally lawns from street sidewalk to house, usually open without an enclosing fence. Boylan Avenue's prominence is reinforced by a deeper than average front yard setback. Front porches found on virtually every residence throughout the district link house to street. Foundation plantings are common. Because of the gently-sloping hillside location of the district, a few masonry and stone retaining walls can be found within the district adjacent to walks and alleys or between houses. To create the ideal middle class suburb of 1907, the original deeds of sale incorporated clauses that required adherence to a plan for the arrangement of homes. Building zones were created that placed a minimum value on construction costs.

Thus, there are tall, substantial (but architecturally conservative), large woodframed dwellings in Boylan Heights (predominantly Queen Anne/Colonial Hybrid, Colonial Box or Foursquare, and Dutch Colonial) along Boylan Avenue in particular, which as a result has an air of dominance in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, it might be said that Boylan Heights is the suburb of the bungalow. Generous numbers of this popular style of house descend the hillside flanking the Boylan Avenue spine. The bungalow's infinite variety of scale, size, shape, and detail can be seen in Boylan Heights and demonstrates the form's importance as a staple for housing the rising middle class.

.... The pedestrian scale of Boylan Heights, established by the original sidewalks, streets, trees, and service alleys, is still maintained. The wide, curving sweep of Boylan Avenue presents a promenade of trees and receding house facades. This sort of grand entry provides a focus for the neighborhood and reflects the ambitions of its original residents, to create a place of beauty and elegance, spaciousness and trees.



Each Halloween neighbors and their pumpkins line the Boylan Avenue bridge overlooking nearby downtown Raleigh. In December a juried Arts Walk brings together neighborhood and other artists displaying their works on the porches, in the living rooms, and along the winding tree-lined streets of this "hill-top" community.



Boylan Heights is both a National Register and local historic district. Properties within a National Register district that are deemed contributing historic structures may be eligible for State and Federal rehabilitation tax credits. The value of properties in a locally designated historic district is enhanced by the requirement that any exterior modifications must be approved by the Raleigh Historic Districts Commission.

Please contact me for the names of nearby neighbors who can describe community activities including an annual street party for graduating kids, numerous seasonal picnics and celebrations, baby sitting resources and much more. Check the neighborhood web site at www.boyلانheights.org.

Go to www.peterRumsey.com

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