

The Community of Reseda in the Mid-1960's

Reseda is located at 34.201N, 118.535W. It is relatively flat and is approximately 740 ft. above sea level.
ZIP Code: 91335

A Short History

The area now known as Reseda, California was originally inhabited by Native Americans of the Tongva tribe that lived close to the Los Angeles River. The vegetation was plentiful, and the natives worked a mere two hours a day to support themselves.

The area was included as part of the Spanish Rancho del Encino when its boundaries were recorded in 1787. Later, it was included in Eulogio de Celis' post-secularization purchase of 121,542 acres from the Mexican government in 1846, as part of his Rancho de la Antigua Misión San Fernando. In 1869, de Celis and his partners, the Pico brothers Pío and Andreas, sold most of the Valley south of present-day Roscoe Boulevard to a group of San Francisco area investors, among them Isaac Lankershim and his son-in-law Isaac Van Nuys (Moses Sherman and Amos Haskell, two other developers had streets named in their honor as well.) The syndicate managed its 59,000-acre property under a variety of plans (and titles), the last of which was a series of six ranches operating as the Los Angeles Farm and Milling Co. (One, Patton Ranch, approximated the future site of Reseda.) Anticipating the bounty of water soon to come, LAF&M sold its holdings in 1910 to the Los Angeles Suburban Homes Co., which immediately began to subdivide. With similar subdivision going on in the north Valley, nearly 100,000 acres -- two-thirds of the Valley -- was in real estate development that year.

In 1911, a huge public auction of farm machinery and implements marked the end of the 40-year reign of King Wheat in the Valley. Four years later, William Mulholland's water surged through a network of steel and cast-iron pipe, and the Valley changed swiftly and radically. Immense reaches of dry-land farm suddenly became small-scale, mixed truck and garden crops, alfalfa fields, walnut and avocado groves, and citrus, apricot and peach orchards. (To avail themselves of Los Angeles' Owens Valley water, Valley residents had to agree to annexation, most of which took place on May 4, 1915.)

By 1917, with its irrigation system completely in place, the Valley had become a nearly contiguous expanse of small (2-to-3-acre) rural lots centered on farm towns -- Marian (soon to be renamed Reseda), Owensmouth (Canoga Park), Zelzah (Northridge), Girard (Woodland Hills) -- and somewhat larger, outlying farmsteads.

By the time the first pipe load of Sierra water arrived, Marian ("Marian" was the daughter of *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harrison Gray Otis, a director of the L.A. Suburban Homes Co. syndicate) had been a town site for three decades. Along with Van Nuys, it had established itself as a poultry-raising center. Its outer lands were mostly in sugar beets and other field crops -- lima beans, lettuce, spinach, melons, squash, carrots -- and alfalfa, grown to fodder dairy cattle and for chicken feed.



The name "Reseda" was given first to a siding on a branch of the Southern Pacific in the south Valley, named after a fragrant North African yellow-dye plant, *Reseda odorata*, which grew in the area (see photo.) In 1905, after Edgar Rice Burroughs bought 550 acres near the intersection of Reseda and Ventura boulevards and named it Tarzana (after his famous fictional character), Reseda came to refer more directly to an area farther north.

About 1920, Reseda -- -- replaced Marian as a designation for a stop on the Pacific Electric interurban railway running along Sherman Way.

The population of Reseda in 1930 was 1,805. In 1940, it was 4,147. By 1950 it had topped 16,000 -- but the Ventura Freeway lay 10 years in the future, and most Reseda residents still bought most of its fresh eggs, milk, honey and vegetables at stands along Ventura Boulevard, or at "The Big Red Barn" at Roscoe and Reseda Blvds, one day to be the site of Northridge Hospital.

After 1945, Reseda became one of the first suburban housing communities in the San Fernando Valley. Its large ranches were sub-divided and realtors developed the area just as the veterans of World War II were returning home.

The earliest families came to live among orange groves, which were successively plowed under in favor of housing. At the time, most of the jobs were in the Los Angeles basin, to the South, over the Santa Monica Mountains.

By 1950, the Valley's population reached 400,000. The Valley pioneered the post-war baby boom. The average new Valley home, in 1949, cost \$9,000. By 1955, that same house could be resold for nearly \$15,000. But even at that price, a household income only had to be \$6,000 a year, not at all difficult, considering Valley incomes continued to hover above the national average.



Beautiful downtown Reseda in 1963

The Los Angeles river was finally paved through Reseda about 1957. Until that time, during heavy rainstorms, it was impossible to travel across the treacherous muddy waters between the northern and southern halves of the town except by a narrow bridge at Reseda Blvd. Several years later, a bridge was finally constructed across the river at Lindley Avenue (in front of Reseda High School) so that east-west traffic could travel down Victory Blvd without having to take side streets around “the big dip.” Another Victory dead end at the railroad tracks just east of Winnetka was paved and connected in 1966, so that Reseda residents could travel to Pierce Junior College without taking the long way around via Vanowen Street (a bill hill at Victory and Winnetka was flattened to become the soccer and baseball fields used by local youth athletic groups ever since.)

By 1960, the average market value of a Valley home reached \$18,850. The Ventura Freeway was constructed across the southern San Fernando Valley in 1960 and the north-to-south San Diego Freeway opened four years later, bisecting the Valley in half and connecting the “grapevine” (later Interstate 5) and California’s Central Valley to the Los Angeles metropolitan area and West Side. Reseda residents only had to travel a few miles east or south to connect to these freeways, which in those days hardly needed their three lanes to accommodate their daily load of commuters and trucks.

Early in the 1960’s, as both the United States and the Soviet Union conducted nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific ocean, wind patterns occasionally brought “radiation warnings” to the Valley population. Bomb Shelters became all the rage in 1962 as the Cold War threatened to turn hot during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many houses in Reseda still have them in their backyards, although almost all were converted to playrooms or storage basements by the end of the 1960’s.

Also by the mid-60’s, air pollution was becoming a major concern in the Valley as large-finned and gas-guzzling cars filled the streets and highways. There were many days when the air was so brown in Reseda that you could not see across town. A demarcation between the dirty air and clean air above could be easily seen most days when

looking at the mountains to the east. Smog alerts became a common “weather report” and on many days the end of the decade children were not allowed to take recess or play outside. Tough pollution standards and more efficient blends of gasoline finally got the air above the critical mark by the mid-1970’s, although Reseda still gets a handful of smog alerts each year, even to this day.

Many of Reseda’s residents prospered during the aerospace boom of the mid 1960’s, as America geared up to place a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. Several firms in Canoga Park, principally Rocketdyne and Atomics International hired so many workers that Reseda became a “company town” for a few years. The business center of the West Valley was downtown Reseda, but in late 1964, Topanga Plaza, a major indoor shopping mall in nearby Canoga Park, opened for business and within a few years downtown Reseda began a long, slow business decline from which it has never recovered. After the US space program was cut back in the early 1970’s the economic base further declined and many families moved out of the area to new subdivisions at the edge of the city in Woodland Hills and Chatsworth.

Reseda in the Movies

Alas, Reseda’s only real claim to fame in the movies are:

- It is the location for the movie, *The Karate Kid*.
- It is also the home of John Conner’s ill-fated step-family in Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator 2* (a car chase scene in that movie was filmed down the paved channel of the Los Angeles River.)
- In *Boogie Nights*, the night club scenes were filmed at The Country Club on Sherman Way and Reseda Boulevard. The scene where Dirk prostitutes himself in a pickup truck was filmed in the Bank of America parking lot across the street from that club. Burt Reynolds’ character asks Mark Wahlberg’s character if he was from "Reseda? Canoga?" (in reference to neighboring Canoga Park, California).

Other Reseda Trivia:

- Reseda is home to the largest duck pond in the Valley, in the northern half of Reseda Park at the northeast corner of Reseda Blvd. and Victory Blvd, across the street from Reseda High School.
- Sequoia Junior High, at the southwest corner of Reseda and Victory Blvds, closed its doors in 1984 and became the Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies.
- In 1964 the Valley Music Theater “in-the-round” debuted on Ventura Boulevard in nearby Woodland Hills with high hopes for elevating the culture of the Valley. A staging of *The Sound of Music* opened the doors, but before the decade was out, the novelty of a round, revolving stage had run its course, and the theater began booking rock shows and boxing matches to bring in crowds. Nothing worked, and in 1980 the theater on Chalk Hill began new life as a Jehovah’s Witness hall. In 2004 that the church sold the 8-acre property for \$25 million to developers who plan to build condominiums and a retail center on the site.

About half of the above is based on an Internet article by Steve Springer, published 1/21/2003