

Historical Ramblings

Skating Through Time

A blinding flash of light illuminated the plaza in front of City Hall. I stared transfixed at the brilliant orb. When the light dissipated, a small boy wearing a pair of old fashioned clamp-on roller skates stood alone with a puzzled look on his face. He wore a plaid shirt and well-worn blue jeans adorned with patches on the knees. A skate key hung around his neck on a piece of string. "Where am I?" he asked. "How did I get here? I was roller-skating in the park and suddenly I found myself here. "You are at City Hall," I explained. "But this isn't City Hall," he said. "City Hall is over on Walnut Avenue." I agreed that City Hall, at one time, was indeed on Walnut Avenue. Since 1979, however, it has been here where we now stood. The youngster looked around and with a glimmer of recognition said, "This must be the park, because there's the new swimming pool over there on the corner." I looked at the boy, who could be no more than 9 or 10 years old, and said, "New? That building was built in 1955 and it's been closed for several years. A new pool will open soon next to Lompoc High School." He looked puzzled and said, "A new pool? By the High School? On South L Street?"

Being a Twilight Zone fan, I recognized the possibility of some supernatural event being played out before my eyes. I quizzed the young man. "What year is this?" I asked. "Well, it's 1958," he replied. My interrogation continued. "Where do you live? Where do you go to school? In what park were you skating?" He proudly proclaimed, "I live a couple of blocks down the street and I go to Hapgood School. I come here to Floresta Park every Saturday and roller skate on the big cement slab. Sometimes I play on the merry-go-round, the monkey bars, the swings, or the big slide. I bring waxed paper from home to make the slide slippery! Most of the time, though, I skate. I'm pretty good too! During the summer the other kids check out kick balls, basketballs and horseshoes from the recreation staff in a little building over by the barbecue pits, and it's all free. But mostly, I skate."

This all sounded too familiar to me. The young man was correct. The property, which is now the home to Lompoc's City Hall, was originally Floresta Park. The park was bounded by Ocean Avenue on the north, Cypress Avenue on the South, C Street on the east and D Street on the north (D Street once was a through street). The park occupied the entire block, except for a small parcel on the southeast corner of Ocean Avenue and D Street, where the Glenn Schuyler family lived. The 3.3-acre parcel was donated to the City for a public park by Johns-Manville in 1951. The park was named by Mrs. Joyce Charlton in a "name the park contest" sponsored by the *Lompoc Record*. Mrs. Charlton's winning entry, which won her a \$100 defense bond, was chosen from hundreds that were submitted. Floresta was to become Lompoc's second neighborhood park (Ryon Park was the first). It featured the usual playground equipment, including a towering slide, apparently well lubricated by the neighborhood kids! Families utilized the large barbecue pit for private and public gatherings. Impromptu softball games were organized on the huge expanse of lawn and basketball was played on that big cement slab that also served as the neighborhood roller rink. The municipal pool was added to the landscape in 1955 at C Street and Ocean Avenue and the Parks and Recreation Department offices moved into the pool annex on the south side. In about 1959, the new Police Station was built across D Street, followed a few years later by the construction of the county building. Over the next 20 years, the park's many trees would mature, providing shady respite for its users. Floresta became more popular as Lompoc grew and residents discovered the park as an alternative to Ryon Park.

In 1979, a new City Hall was built, D Street was vacated and a Civic Center Plaza emerged in place of Floresta Park. The mature shade trees and turf were removed. The playground disappeared and the big cement slab was gone. Now, nothing is left of Floresta, except for the ghostly remains of the municipal pool and a few original trees in the lawn to the south of the building.

I turned toward the youngster to explain the concept of progress. He was gone. I asked others in the plaza if they saw where he went. Apparently, I was the only one who had seen him. So I went home, a couple of blocks down the street. I realized that the child was a product of my own memories. That child was me.

When I got home, on my front steps was a pair of old roller skates, a skate key and a piece of waxed paper.

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