

# Feed, candy, music and pizza

Businesses through the years at 3089 University Ave.

## PastMatters Katherine Hon

The southwest corner of 31st Street and University Avenue hosted a wide variety of businesses before URBN Pizza established its successful eatery in 2010. Commercial activity at the corner began in the late 1920s, more than 90 years ago.

John D. Goss, a local builder, purchased the row of commercial lots along the south side of University Avenue between 31st Street and Grim Avenue from Mary Jane Hartley in 1923; he still owned this property in 1930.

City Lot Books show that January 1928 was the first year with improvements on the corner lot at 31st Street and University Avenue. The first long-term tenant was the Ideal Feed and Poultry House, which began advertising their "Feed, Fuel, Fertilizers and Garden Supplies" at 3089 University Ave. in the 1929 City Directory.

In the May 3, 1930 issue of the Evening Tribune, Ideal Feed and Supply Company joined other businesses on University Avenue advertising Dollar Days, an "Official Community Sale" sponsored by the North Park Business Club.

**AWFUL FRESH MacFARLANE**  
*The Scotch Candymaker*  
Announces the

## Grand Opening

Saturday, July 9th, of our  
New Permanent Home

**31st & UNIVERSITY IN NORTH PARK**  
**FREE SAMPLES!**



AWFUL FRESH MacFARLANE  
The Scotch Candymaker












**CHOCOLATES - - CREAMS & CHEWS 69¢ lb.**  
Paper Bag Special — Pick from Over 20 Flavors

My new building on the corner of 31st and University (three doors away from my temporary store) has just been completed — I want everybody in San Diego to come out and attend the opening of my new candy store.

COME OUT AND EAT FREE SAMPLES SATURDAY

STORE  
OPEN NITES  
AND  
SUNDAYS

## AWFUL FRESH MacFARLANE

*The Scotch Candymaker*

**31ST AND UNIVERSITY**

DOWNTOWN STORE AT  
1345 7th Ave.

Donald L. MacFarlane's large advertisement in the San Diego Union's July 8, 1949 issue offered sweet treats to celebrate his new store on the North Park corner. Note the reference to his temporary store "three doors away."

The store's advertisement stated, "We are prepared to serve you with the best of feeds, seeds, birds and fish" and offered singing canaries — regularly costing \$7.50 — at only \$5 each.

The store survived the Great Depression and left the location in 1938, when Arthur Twigg is listed in the City Directory as operating a feed store there.

From 1939 to 1943, Safeway stores operated at this address. During the later

1940s, other grocers, butchers and bakers offered their wares.

A sweet change occurred in July 1949, when "Awful Fresh MacFarlane, the Scotch Candymaker" announced the grand opening of his new permanent home in the North Park building. His quarter page advertisement in the San Diego Union's July 8, 1949 issue encouraged everyone to "COME OUT

AND EAT FREE SAMPLES SATURDAY."

Although MacFarlane had already opened a San Diego store at 1045 Seventh Ave. in June 1947, he noted in other advertisements that "Lots of folk in San Diego been reading my ads, but don't get Downtown to my store — I opened this one just for you — come out and 'C' me."

see PastMatters, pg 18



The original 1948 Awful Fresh MacFarlane sign for the temporary candy store at 3077 University Ave. was revealed in December 2013 during renovations for Hammond's Gourmet Ice Cream. (Photos by Katherine Hon)

FROM PAGE 16

## PASTMATTERS

The San Diego Union's July 10, 1949 issue documented the opening of his North Park location and explained that the store "occupies a corner site, 23 by 105 feet, in a new \$45,000 building at Thirty-first St. and University Ave. (sic) The candy shop ... began business in North Park last October in a temporary location three doors west of the present store."

That initial temporary location, from October 1948 to July 1949, is the current home of Hammond's Gourmet Ice Cream at 3077 University Ave.

One might think that "Awful Fresh" is a silly name for any food or food-maker, but Donald L. MacFarlane was no newcomer to the candy business. His father was a merchant with a candy store in Oakland, California.

By 1930, 26-year-old MacFarlane was working in the confectionary business at a nut company in Oakland. In 1940, he owned his own candy and nut business, and in the late 1940s he operated five stores in Oakland and 10 stores in Los Angeles. His North Park store continued operations until about 1975.

In July 1981, the next long-term tenant arrived at the corner location. Marcus Robbins — a 27-year-old auto mechanic who had moved from New Jersey to work and attend school in San Diego — opened Drowsy Maggie's. His alcohol-free, non-smoking,



URBN Coal Fired Pizza brings a lively and flavorful presence to the corner of 31st Street and University Avenue in 2010. (Photo by Katherine Hon)

acoustic-instrument-only folk cafe is lovingly remembered by long-time North Parkers fond of old-timey music.

Robbins modeled his cafe after the coffeehouses of the 1950s and named it after a 300-year-old Irish folk song. He did most of the tenant improvements himself, including installing the plumbing and wiring, as well as building the tables and benches.

The cafe held local shows, including Old Time Hoot Nites and Bluegrass Jamborees. Musicians played for donations from the crowd, and the crowd paid attention to the eclectic mix of music styles — ranging from Irish traditional and Renaissance to swing and jazz. The popular venue closed in April 1991 when Robbins' lease expired and the building owner more than doubled his rent.

Dark years followed for the

corner building after the music faded. A serious fire — resulting from a car hitting the gas meter at the back of the building — caused extensive damage. Unauthorized occupants in the boarded-up building increased the deterioration. Though the site was considered for a new North Park Library, nothing came from it.

But those brick bones are strong. Finally, another long-term tenant arrived. Today's neighborhood now salutes local pizza entrepreneur Jon Mangini for bringing his coal-fired pizza to North Park in 2010 with his restaurant URBN, re-activating this important corner.

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