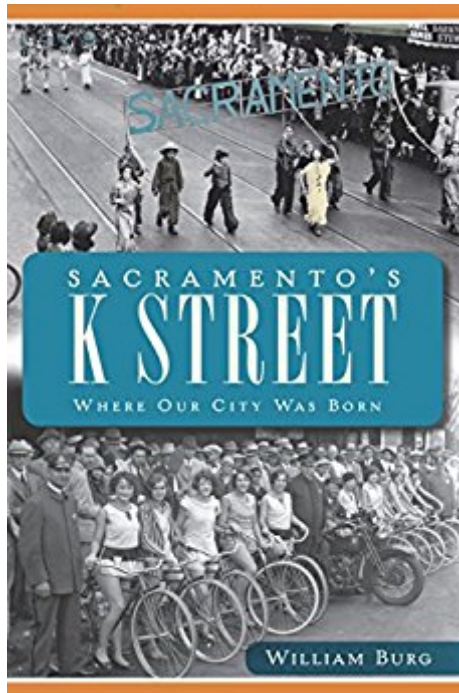




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Sacramento's K Street: Where Our City Was Born



Synopsis

From its founding, K Street mirrored the entrepreneurial development of California's capital city. Initially the storefront for gold seekers trampling a path between the Sacramento River and Sutter's Fort, K Street soon became the hub of California's first stagecoach, railroad and riverboat networks. Over the years, K Street boasted saloons and vaudeville houses, the neon buzz of jazz clubs and movie theaters, as well as the finest hotels and department stores. For the postwar generation, K Street was synonymous with Christmas shopping and teenage cruising. From the Golden Eagle and Buddy Baer's to Weinstock's and the Alhambra Theatre, join historian William Burg as he chronicles the legacy of Sacramento's K Street, once a boulevard of aspirations and bustling commerce and now home to a spirit of renewal.

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Customer Reviews

This book by local historian William Burg is important not just because it's good to know the history

of where you live. Burg also explains certain tactical errors made by the city of Sacramento in the last few decades which turned K Street from a thriving center of industry, into a ghetto. The book was written before the 2013 downtown arena plans were introduced. That aside, this is an interesting read for anyone interested in Sacramento history.

I liked this book on Sacramento's K Street. I grew up in Sacramento and yearn for the old days when everyone knew everyone, and there was K Street with all of the wonderful shops and good times. I had hoped to see more storefronts, but the history was there.

This book tells the story of Sacramento the way it ought to be told: from the standpoint of the neighborhoods. Because, at the end of the day, that's what makes Sacramento such a special place to live. Every couple of streets, it seems, you enter a new world. And William Burg does a great job excavating the worlds that were on and around K Street, before the all-powerful Chamber of Commerce that had a little too much Redevelopment money to play with put paid to all that. He tells us about the jazz scene in Japantown; the Whiskerinos (a citywide beard-growing contest held to celebrate California's Gold Rush or "Days of 49")--an event "topped with a grand march on K Street," about Chinatown, and the Sacramento Barrio. And about how the children from all these diverse communities would come together at the Lincoln School which, one student remembers as "not so much a melting pot as a griddle where Miss Hopley and her helpers warmed knowledge into us and roasted racial hatreds out of us." It's the story of the Labor Market neighborhood--home to men who worked seasonal jobs and were just on this side of homelessness. These men lived in cheap residential hotels in the Labor Market--and when those hotels were demolished to make room for a Macy's and a freeway, they were forced into the homeless shelters. And the streets. But of course K Street wasn't just made up of neighborhoods, though before redevelopment there were plenty of those. K Street was the entertainment and shopping center not just for the city of Sacramento but for the entire region. And I don't mean mall-like shopping; I mean pure, exciting urban shopping where you go to see and be seen as much as to shop. Maryellen Burns remembers that "You got dressed up to go down K Street; I remember having to put on my gloves and actually having to put on a hat; it was like going to San Francisco." And no wonder. For at Christmas especially, K Street was delightful. Every year, Hale's Department Store celebrated Santa's arrival with something a bit more improbable (one year, Santa arrived in a submarine) while Breuner's Furniture featured life-sized animated figures in quaint settings. If you were tired of shopping, there was always the Esquire and Times Theater or, if you wanted to go east a little, the Alhambra. And

then there were the jazz clubs: the Eureka on fourth and K and, most famously, the Zanzibar at 530 Capitol which (I have to quote this wonderful phrase of Burg's) "drew crowds that trampled Sacramento's color line under dancing feet." (The Chamber didn't like that at all and revoked Zanzibar's liquor license--effectively shutting it down.) And then there were the people. There were so many people on K Street that a new system called "the scramble" was introduced in Sacramento to manage all the people and cars. Everyone, just everyone wanted to play and work on K Street. Until, that is, Sacramento's business community decided to remake Sacramento's K Street into a pastoral, predictable (and rather boring) place that might attract suburbanites. Their experiment failed. But it demolished the life that was K Street. If you are interested in the story of this city, in one version of how a city can be impacted by redevelopment, in urban planning, in the gold rush or California's history, I highly recommend this book. All the more so because K Street is coming back. Maybe we won't be putting on gloves to go strolling there anytime soon but we may yet see the K Street Cruise. Want to know what that was? Read the book!

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