

## Reflections

### Frances Cook: Witness to Hillsdale's transformation

By Valeurie Friedman



Frances Cook reflects on Hillsdale's past from the living room of her home on Sunset Boulevard, where she has lived for 63 years.

Frances Cook has an archive of photos from her life in Hillsdale

When Frances and her husband Richard bought the house in 1947, it was surrounded by orchards and dairyland. There was no phone service for several months. But a transformation had already begun that carved up the old homesteads and farms of Hillsdale to accommodate new suburban residents.



Frances's house (seen then and now in the photos) was built in 1922 as a vacation home for a family who lived in what was then far-away Irvington. But when Frances and Richard settled here, Hillsdale was becoming home to hundreds. Many took the privately-owned Raz bus to their jobs downtown. For many years Frances rode the bus, filled with her neighbors, to a job at US Bank.

City annexation came several years after the Cooks moved in, but it began with the 1949 vote to annex to Portland's water district. Streetlights and lower water bills were to follow. Yet Frances recalls that some residents were opposed to the replacement of the Raz buses with the city-operated Rose City Transit: "The Raz service had been so good and we knew all the drivers; they were a part of the community."



Hillsdale's continued growth called for more schools. When Robert Gray Elementary School opened in 1952, Frances' son, Donald, was among the first kindergarteners to attend the K-8 school. Donald '67, who died in 2003, graduated from Wilson, which opened in 1956.

Frances recalls that Wilson owes its existence to a chance encounter at a popular Sandy Boulevard drive-in. The School District's original plan had been to enlarge Lincoln High School to serve the entire West Side. As deliberations were going on, Portland PTA members and several school board members happened on each other at Yaw's restaurant on Sandy. Out of their table-talk, the idea of Wilson High School in Southwest Portland emerged.

Frances recalls that on Sundays, high school students would gather at Lynch's Market (early predecessor to today's Food Front) before hiking up to picnic at Council Crest, which is still a popular hang-out for youth.

Today's RE/Max Equity Group building sits on the site of a motel offering little cabins for motorists driving on Capitol Highway, a key section of the thorough-fare stretching from Seattle to California.

And on the corner of Sunset and Capitol Highway stood the Piggly Wiggly market, which Frances calls an early Enron because when Lynch's Market expanded in 1953 and Piggly Wiggly went under, many of its employees lost their pensions.

In the early days, Frances remembers, "If we needed to go anywhere we just walked in the streets. There wasn't that much traffic. But the traffic increased and in 1986 Frances became a victim of it when she was struck in the crosswalk in front of her house. The accident left her unable to walk. It hasn't slowed her down. She propels herself in an unmotorized wheelchair and cheerfully proclaims that it gives her plenty of exercise.

Frances spends much of her time in the sun room that was added to the house in 1990. She's assembling a book about C.S. Price, a well-know artist who was her uncle.

At age 95, Frances has mastered the Internet and keeps up an active internet correspondence often laced with detailed recollections from her decades in Hillsdale.