

## THE KIDS' READING ROOM



# 'Touring Wilshire Boulevard'

## Part 1

By SHERRILL KUSHNER  
Special to The Times

**T**HE students piled onto the school bus.

"Class, this is Susan. She's a volunteer from the Los Angeles Conservancy. She'll be leading our tour today," said Mrs. Kelly, their teacher.

"What's the Conservancy?" asked Emily.

"We help keep the Los Angeles area's history alive by saving historic buildings, signs and other structures from being torn down," explained Susan. "When you ride in a car, do you ever pay attention to the neighborhoods you pass?"

"Not the way my mom drives!" said Billy. "She goes way too fast."

Everyone laughed.

"Well, we'll go slower today and take a good look at Wilshire Boulevard, one of our city's longest and most important streets," said Susan.

The bus driver pulled out of the school lot.

"We go down Wilshire on the way to school," said Emily.

"But you see only a small part of it,"

said Susan. "Wilshire starts in downtown Los Angeles, continues through Beverly Hills and ends at the ocean in Santa Monica."

"I bet that's about 10 miles long!" said Billy.

"More than that! It's almost 16 miles," said Susan. "Los Angeles was one of the first modern cities to have wide, straight streets designed for car travel."

"And the buildings you'll see were built at different times during the last 100 years," added Mrs. Kelly. "Touring Wilshire Boulevard will be like a mini history lesson."

The bus departed near Union Avenue and Wilshire. After a short ride, it crossed Alvarado Street and stopped next to MacArthur Park. People were sitting on the grass around a lake.

"So why is it called Wilshire Boulevard?" said Billy.

"It's named for Henry Gaylord Wilshire. He moved here from Ohio in the 1880s and bought land near this park. He built a street through his property, named it after himself and donated it to the city of Los Angeles," Susan said.

"Starting in the 1890s, smaller streets began to connect to Wilshire and used the same name. By 1934, Wil-

shire became one long street running from downtown to the beach."

"Where are we going now?" asked Emily.

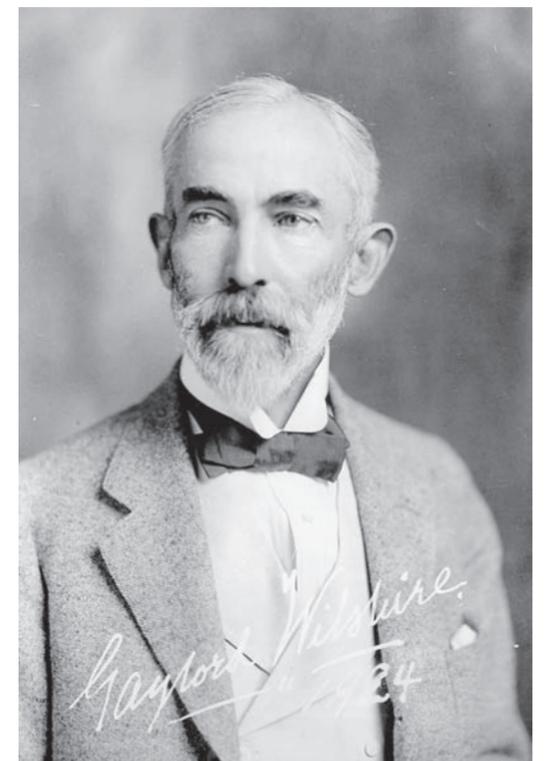
"That's a surprise," said Mrs. Kelly.

**Tuesday:** What will the class see next?

*Author's note: The Los Angeles Conservancy will host a self-guided architectural tour of Wilshire Boulevard on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. All the places described in this story will be open to the public during that time. For more information and to get a free guidebook for kids, call (213) 430-4219 or go to [www.curatingthecity.org](http://www.curatingthecity.org). Thank you to Catherine Gudis, director of education for the*

*Los Angeles Conservancy, for fact-checking this story.*

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SECURITY PACIFIC COLLECTION Los Angeles Public Library

**HE STARTED IT:** Henry Gaylord Wilshire.



LARRY UNDERHILL

**BUSY ROAD:** Wilshire Boulevard is 16 miles long and is bordered by high-rises in Westwood.



STEPHEN SEDAM Los Angeles Times

## THE KIDS' READING ROOM



# 'Touring Wilshire Boulevard'

## Part 2

The story so far: Mrs. Kelly's class is taking a bus tour down Wilshire Boulevard to learn about the history and architecture of the Los Angeles area.

By SHERRILL KUSHNER  
Special to The Times

**N**EXT the bus stopped at an 11-story building across from MacArthur Park.

"What's this building?" asked Billy.

"What do you see over the door?" asked Mrs. Kelly. "That will give you a clue."

"Looks like the head of a moose or a deer," said Billy. "Is this a pet store for really big animals?" he joked.

"Actually you're partly right. It's the head of a large deer called an elk. This used to be the Elks Club," said Susan, their tour guide.

"It was built in 1925 as a club for men who got together for fun and to help people in the community. It had 165 rooms, a gym and a pool for members and their guests. Later it became a hotel."

"Wow, look at the statues that decorate the front wall of the building," said Carla. "They look Egyptian."

"Many different architectural styles are combined in this building," said Susan. "The main ones are called Beaux Arts and Art Deco. These styles were used for large buildings like courthouses, government buildings and museums and are known for having lots of decoration. They often have a lot of columns too."

"I see angels at the top of each corner of the building," said Emily.

"Not only are there angels, but you'll also see soldiers and nurses dressed in World War I uniforms," said Mrs. Kelly.

"Elks Club members were very patriotic and donated money during the war. Now only the first two floors are open and you'll see that they're still beautiful today. The grand ballrooms are often seen in movies."

The class returned to the bus and the driver carefully steered into the traffic of Wilshire Boulevard. Cars, city buses, tow trucks, delivery vans and mail trucks filled the street.

"This was once just a dirt road between fields of beans and barley," said Susan. "That all changed when streetcars and automobiles came on the scene. As downtown became more and more crowded, the city started growing toward the west."

"That's toward the ocean," said Billy.

"Yes, and that's the direction we're headed," said Mrs. Kelly.

**Wednesday:** The school bus continues its tour of Wilshire Boulevard. Where will it stop next?

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GLENN KOENIG Los Angeles Times

**CLUB:** The onetime home of the Wilshire Elks features a golden emblem above the entrance.



Tom Zimmerman collection

**VINTAGE:** The 1925 building became a hotel.



STEPHEN SEDAM Los Angeles Times



## KIDS' READING ROOM



# 'Touring Wilshire Boulevard'

## Part 3

The story so far: Mrs. Kelly's class has visited the old Elks Club near MacArthur Park and is headed west on Wilshire Boulevard.

By SHERRILL KUSHNER  
Special to *The Times*

**"L**OOK at that sign," Jill said.

"It's in Korean," Mrs. Kelly said. "This part of Wilshire Boulevard has many stores owned by people who came from Korea. We'll be passing neighborhoods that have people from different backgrounds and other parts of the world. If we were walking, you would hear people speaking English, Spanish, Korean, Tagalog and many other languages."

The bus crossed Normandie Avenue. "We're now coming to the part of Wilshire Boulevard that has the most historic churches, temples, and other religious places in one area," said Susan, their tour guide.

"On the right you'll see St. Basil's Catholic Church. This modern building is made of concrete towers with steel and stained glass sculptures. It replaced an older wooden building that burned down."

"What's this?" asked Clara as the school bus stopped in front of a large building with a dome.

"This is the home of the oldest Jewish congregation in Los Angeles, and one of the oldest in the United States," Susan said.

"The congregation's first temple was built in another location in the 1870s closer to downtown Los Angeles. But when the congregation grew, it moved into a larger building. When it outgrew that one, it moved again to this spot. They constructed this building in 1929 and named it Wilshire Boulevard Temple."

"Let's go inside," Mrs. Kelly said.

"It's very quiet in here," Clara said.

"This is the sanctuary where people pray. See the gold decoration, black marble, stained glass windows and rare woods?" Susan asked. "On the walls are paintings that show scenes from Bible stories."

"Look up!" Emily said. A beautiful domed ceiling covered the sanctuary.

"The dome is one of the temple's unique features. It rises 135 feet from the street level to its top," Susan explained.

Suddenly the class heard organ music. "That's the organist practicing,"

Susan explained. "The organ has 4,100 pipes which are enclosed in five soundproof rooms." The children listened for a few moments.

"Time to go," Mrs. Kelly said. They walked back through the synagogue's big wooden doors and onto the bus.

**Thursday:** Where will Mrs. Kelly's class go next?

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**Look for Thursday's Kids' Reading Room in the middle of Weekend Calendar with the comics. This story will be on The Times' website at [latimes.com/kids](http://latimes.com/kids). The regular Kids' Reading Room features will return next week.**



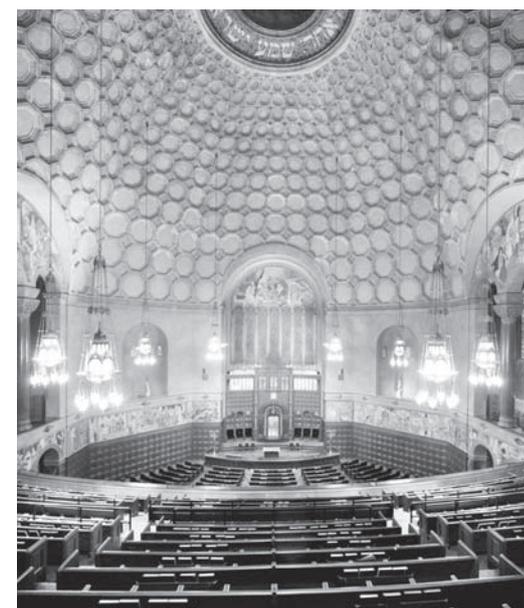
ANNE LASKEY

**MODERN:** St. Basil's Catholic Church replaced an old building that burned down.



GLENN KOENIG *Los Angeles Times*

**ORNATE:** The Wilshire Boulevard Temple, above, was built in 1929. Its dome, below, is 135 feet high from street level to its top.



Laszlo Regos Photography



STEPHEN SEDAM *Los Angeles Times*

## THE KIDS' READING ROOM



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## Part 4

The story so far: Mrs. Kelly's class has visited MacArthur Park, the Elks Club and Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

By SHERRILL KUSHNER  
Special to The Times

"HEY, this is a restaurant," said Clara. The bus crossed Fairfax Avenue and stopped in front of a building with a tall, slanted, blue-and-white striped roof. "I thought we were supposed to bring our lunches."

"We're not eating here," said Mrs. Kelly.

"Then why are we stopping?" Clara asked.

"Johnie's Coffee Shop Restaurant is the kind of coffee shop that was popular in the 1950s and '60s," explained Susan, their tour guide. "It was named for the owner who thought it would be more distinctive if he spelled the name with only one 'n.' This style of architecture is called 'Googie' and it began in Southern California."

"Googie?" repeated Billy. "Sounds like baby talk!"

"The name came from another coffee shop built in the 1940s named Googie's. This one looked like it," said Su-



you-are-here.com

**GOOGIE-STYLE BUILDING:** Many coffee shops in the 1950s and '60s looked like Johnie's Coffee Shop Restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard.

san. "They kept using the name for any building that had lots of glass, a slanted roof, geometric shapes and large neon signs."

"It looks kind of like a spaceship," said Emily.

"That's the whole idea," said Mrs. Kelly. "Googie started when space travel was just beginning. It was supposed to give people an idea of the future."

"Can we go inside?" asked Billy.

"I'm sorry, but it's been closed for five years," said Susan. "It's only used once in a while for filming a movie or TV show."

The students peeked into the restaurant windows and saw booths with bench-style seats facing tables, and vinyl stools around an L-shaped counter

where people used to eat their hamburgers and fries.

"Many of these Googie-style buildings have been torn down," said Mrs. Kelly. "Groups like the Los Angeles Conservancy are trying to save the ones that are left and help people find new ways to use them."

"I'd make it into new restaurant and serve tacos," said Clara.

"I'd make it a toy store and change the name to Billy's," said Billy.

"No, you should keep the old Johnie's sign. That's a cool part of the building," said Emily.

"Time to go," said Mrs. Kelly. "The last stop is in Santa Monica."

**Friday:** The tour ends in Santa Monica, a city by the Pacific Ocean. What will the class see there?

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# 'Touring Wilshire Boulevard'

## Part 5

The story so far: Mrs. Kelly's class has visited very different buildings along Wilshire Boulevard and has learned a lot about the history of Los Angeles. The last stop is Santa Monica, a city that borders Los Angeles.

By SHERRILL KUSHNER  
Special to *The Times*

**T**HE bus traveled through a canyon of high-rise buildings on the way to Santa Monica.

"We are now going through Westwood," said Susan, their tour guide.

They passed Sepulveda Boulevard. "Here's the oldest building on Wilshire," she said. "It's the Wadsworth Chapel, built in 1900. It once served Protestant and Catholic war veterans."

The bus crossed Centinela Avenue and entered Santa Monica. "This city now has strict laws on how tall a building can be," explained Susan. "So you won't see as many tall buildings here."

Gray clouds hid the sun as students stepped off the bus at Christine Emerson Reed Park.

"It's colder here than in Los Angeles," said Clara, pulling on her sweater.

"Yes," said Mrs. Kelly. "Santa Monica

is often cooler because of clouds and sea breezes from the Pacific Ocean."

Billy saw people playing tennis and basketball on the park courts when they turned onto 7th Street. Kids were swaying up and down on swings and climbing a jungle gym. "Are we going to play in the park?" he asked.

"Not today," said Mrs. Kelly. "We're going into Miles Memorial Playhouse. It's around the corner on Lincoln Boulevard."

"This is a place where they put on plays," explained Susan. "A man named J. Euclid Miles gave money for this building to be used as a theater for children. It was badly damaged by the Northridge earthquake in 1994, but it's been repaired. It's now used for art, dance and theater classes as well as performances."

"It looks like an old California mission," said Emily.

"Yes, you're right," said Susan. "This style of architecture is called Spanish Colonial Revival. It has plain stucco walls, tile roofs, arches, courtyards and wrought iron decoration."

The students stepped inside. Small children were rehearsing for a dance recital. A lady played piano.

"We'll walk back to Wilshire and then go seven blocks to where it ends at Ocean Avenue," instructed Susan.

"There we'll take a quick stroll through a part of Palisades Park which was created in the 1890s. It stretches 14 blocks on top of a big bluff above the Pacific Ocean. The park has lovely gardens, picnic tables and many interesting sites."

When they got to the park, the children got a spectacular view of Santa Monica Bay.

"If you look to the left you can see where Colorado Avenue ends at the pier," said Susan.

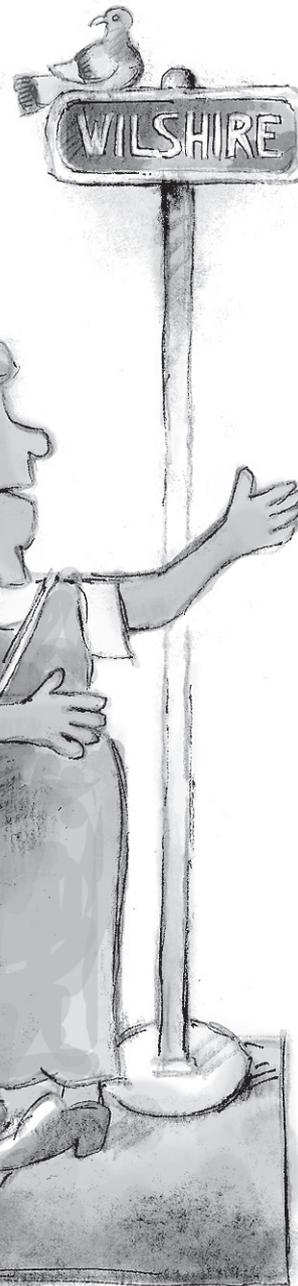
"I've been to the pier," said Billy. "There's a Ferris wheel, roller coaster, carousel, bumper cars and lots of other fun rides. It's awesome!"

"Someday maybe you all can come

back here with your families. You can be the guides and show them some of the special places you've learned about on Wilshire Boulevard," said Mrs. Kelly.

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JACQUES GARNIER

**THEATER:** Miles Memorial Playhouse.



LAWRENCE K. HO Los Angeles Times

**AMUSEMENT:** Santa Monica Pier.