

SOUTHWEST AREA HISTORY

Originally “University Division”, Southwest Area’s origins begin in 1905 as an established division, with a station built in 1909. The original station existed at 809 West Jefferson Boulevard. The station’s officers patrolled the areas now known as University Park, Jefferson Park, parts of Leimert Park, Crenshaw District, West Adams Community. Wilshire Division had shared boundaries and patrolled areas along La Cienega Boulevard winding down the Santa Monica Freeway to Crenshaw Boulevard.

In 1962, University Division relocated and reopened at 1546 Santa Barbara Avenue. In 1973, the name was changed to “Southwest Division”, and the street which it was located on was later renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in 1983. This is its current location, and the building is the same one which was built in 1962.

On December 14th, 1963, the Baldwin Hills Dam disaster occurred. The dam which contained the Baldwin Hills Reservoir suffered a catastrophic failure and flooded neighborhoods surrounding it. The disaster resulted in five deaths, the loss of 277 homes, and the release of 250 million gallons of water. Vigorous rescue efforts are attributed to prevention of further loss of life.

During the 1984 Summer Olympics, which were hosted in Los Angeles, Southwest Area bore the responsibility of the safety and security of all attendees, athletes, coaches, and others who would be attending the Olympic Games at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. This was done with the assistance of their fellow officers from other cities and agencies through one of the Department’s first documented “Mobilization.” Employees who served during the time of the 1984 Olympic Games were awarded a ribbon to signify their service to Los Angeles.

In 1987, mobilization occurred once again. Southwest Area hosted Pope John Paul II at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum during his Papal Mass, which had over 100,000 attendees. A ribbon was awarded to employees once more for their service during this event.

On August 1st, 1988, Los Angeles Police Officers served a search warrant at numerous apartments near the intersection of 39th Street and Dalton Avenue, in Southwest Area. The warrant was served in connection with “Operation Hammer”, a citywide effort by Chief Daryl Gates to reduce gang violence and narcotics activity. Complaints of police brutality, damaged residences, and vandalized personal property committed by officers resulted from the search warrant service. The operation resulted strained community relations and heightened calls for police accountability in what is identified as a precursor to the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising.

On May 13th, 1968, Policeman Oscar Joel Bryant responded to an armed robbery at a dress shop on Western Avenue in University Division. After intervening, he was shot and killed by one of three suspects armed with a handgun, but not before returning fire and preventing the escape of the other suspects.

In the wake of his death, a meeting among African-American officers occurred in September of that year. These officers took a vow to stand against racism and discrimination and created the Oscar Joel Bryant Foundation in his honor. The Oscar Joel Bryant Foundation remains active to this day.