

V101 - President Streets - AL

theme

KW: If you drive downtown Phoenix, there's a high chance you've heard this sound:

nat sound of GPS directions

KW: or even this sound:

more nat sound of GPS directions

KW: Phoenix famously has a grid system for it's roads. Roads running North to South are numbered and roads running East to West are named streets. We even have an episode about the grid system from last year if you want to go listen.

KW: But one of our listeners asked why the streets in Central Phoenix are named after U-S Presidents. They grew up on Portland Street, one street over from Roosevelt and always wanted to know why names of past Presidents adorned the street signs of Phoenix.

KW: Producer Amanda Luberto did some digging and found out why..

theme music fades

AL: The streets downtown being named after Presidents was never something I questioned. It was something that just seemed right. But when a listener asked *why* I reached out to Michelle Dodds, the Historic Preservation Officer for the City of Phoenix She told me that my feeling that it just seemed right was spot on...

MD - 1:24: at the beginning, you know, when the city was first founded, they decided to name them after presidents. And so that that is actually a fairly common practice, I think, especially for older cities to have some of their streets named after US presidents. And so, you know, the city started out kind of with Washington Street, our first president, and was doing this north south street naming.

AL: So naming the streets of a new city after Presidents was standard procedure. They started at Washington Street. Then one street North is Adams after John Adams and one street South is Jefferson after Thomas Jefferson. One street South of Jefferson is Madison and one street North of Adams is Monroe. And so on and so forth until they reached Theodore Roosevelt.

AL: Though if you're following along at home with your map or driving around downtown as you listen, you'll notice that a few Presidents didn't make it.. In fact 8 Presidents were excluded

between George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt including Grover Cleveland and Rutherford B Hayes.

AL: Also, this pattern of switching between north and south fell apart pretty quickly based on where the city was growing.

MD - 2:08: But eventually, I think the city grew to the to the north a little bit more to the south. So you see some of those those that order that that pattern was interrupted and you saw more go to the north.

AL: That's why there are more President named streets toward the North of downtown than the South: That's just the direction that Phoenix was growing in. So as the Valley kept growing and expanding, what did they name them after?

MD - 2:16 They were named after Native American tribes. And so you don't see much of that today because a lot of them have been renamed. But so there were important people or peoples and presidents and our Native American tribes were initially what the streets were named after.

AL: And after Tribes came other important Arizona landmarks like Indian School Rd named after the Phoenix Indian School or Camelback Rd named after the famous mountain silhouette. To know more about the Phoenix Indian School and its connection to the road, check out an episode we did back in April 2019.

MD - 3:04 But of course, there were other important people or politicians or others that streets started to be named after, but also in newer areas, you know, the developer developers come along through the city process to build their subdivisions or new places.

And so sometimes they were just brand new names chosen, depending on what the developer wanted to name within the community.

AL: I wondered then why the standard process of naming them after Presidents was never picked back up again. Why didn't Phoenix ever pick up where they left off once new streets were made? It's hard to be exactly sure because it was a long time ago and intentions aren't always documented.

AL: But Michelle says it's probably because naming the new streets after people, places and events that are important in Arizona's history just became the new desire.

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AL: What if Phoenix wanted to start the President's names over again? The city most likely isn't going to be adding any more arterial streets, those are the major ones that run through the city like Bell Rd or Baseline Rd, so in order to pick up where they left off at Theodore Roosevelt, they would have to rename some streets.

AL: Sandra Hoffman is the assistant director in the Planning and Development Department with the City of Phoenix and is the person you contact if you want to rename a street in the city. Because Phoenix is on a grid system it actually makes the process more difficult. Renaming something like Northern Avenue affects more than just the city of Phoenix because it passes through the West Valley too.

SH - 2:29: But if you were to say, well, this piece is Camelback and that piece is President So-and-so, then, you know, people are going to go, oh, they'll learn. Some of them will learn, you know, but it's an anomaly and we want it to be as simple as it can be.

AL: So it has to be consistent in order to keep up with the grid system we have in place. And renaming a non-major street in order to get Presidents 27 through 46 on the map isn't really the answer either.

SH - 4:25: For a president, you would think you'd want to have a big arterial collector street name, not, you know, that little little dead end street in a subdivision. You know, you just want to be acknowledging the honor.

AL: So I asked Sandra, what would it take to actually rename one of the major streets if someone wanted to make sure Presidents like Woodrow Wilson or Dwight D Eisenhower got recognized in Phoenix?

AL: Well... turns out it's a complicated process.

****music maybe?****

SH - 5:13 There's two ways to do it, the first way would be that a property owner decides that they want to try to get all these other property owners and residents to agree to rename a street. And so it's easier if it's a smaller level street and not across the whole valley type of a roadway because you basically have to get seventy five percent of those owners to sign off that they want to change that street name.

AL: 75 percent of the property owners on that street have to agree to a name change. This includes businesses and residents. A street like Camelback has a *lot* of businesses and residents...

SH: And then it goes through a process where we do analysis and we reach out to fire department, we reach out to Street Transportation and the US Postal Service and we we ask them, are you OK? If this were to change names? We do research, like I said, to see if it connects and has some alignment with another. The same street name is continuing off onto the other, you know, that same alignment in other cities.

AL: All of the other civil groups that are dependent on addresses like Sandra noted, the fire department and the Postal Service, have to sign off on it.

SH: Once they have that, we will go through a council action to have a change. And then they paid six hundred dollars for an application, by the way. So then if council approves it, we have to select a name and the name has to fit the criteria. There's Magg, Maricopa County Association of Government sort of guidelines for naming streets so they have to be easily pronounced and easily said. That doesn't sound really close to another name of a street.

AL: An important step I never considered. A new street can't sound like a street we already have. Which is why we'll never see a Franklin D. Roosevelt street, Teddy got there first. It also has to be a word or name that isn't offensive in any language.

SH - Then those neighbors may have to actually pay for the street sign to change and then they'll have all these different documents will have to change their driver's license, you know, all the important documents they have that have their address on it.

AL: Also, all of the businesses on the newly named road would have to change their advertising, website, business cards, social media...anything with the address on it because that street would no longer exist..

SH - If council approves it, then the city staff, we notify a variety of entities that you would be surprised about. I think we have, you know, the US Postal Service, fire department, city clerk, Maricopa County assessor's office, Maricopa County Recorder, we're notifying all the mapping services that you get. So all those systems, it's like all of a sudden now they've got to have that new data in there and update it and so that somebody can find you if you want that pizza delivery guy to find your house.

AL: That's option 1. And it's a lot of steps. This is the grassroots way. If a member of the community wanted to rename a street. But there's another way and it has less steps, but still isn't very common.

SH: The other option is for our Mayor, or three of our council people were to initiate a name of a street change and then they take it to council and they say, yeah, staff, we want you to look into this.

AL: This is what happened last November when Robert E Lee Street was renamed Desert Cactus street.

SH: And we had to talk to it through a community meeting. we just educated them on what might happen and the process that would occur and the support staff would provide. And we had the library department involved. It was great because we were there with a list of resources. We had a lot of staff willing to help individual neighbors as to answering questions, whether they were the owner or a tenant, a resident. And so those are pretty much single family homes. Because it was initiated by our council or by elected officials, we pay for the signage, change we pay. We do a little bit of reimbursement to those people, impacted the owners and or residents. So they're submitting their invoices to us of things that they had to change the name, the address for what they are, where they live. And so we try to help to minimize that impact for them.

AL: As you just heard, it's a long and time consuming process. So it's rare that a street gets renamed... thought not entirely impossible.

****theme music up + few seconds for music break****

AL: The streets downtown have Presidential names because that was standard practice in most budding cities. Once the city grew, Phoenix looked inward and named the roads after more local people, places, events and things that reflected our history and our surroundings.

KW: This was great information, Amanda. Thank you. I don't think we'll be seeing a Bush or Carter Road any time soon from the sounds of it. Though as Arizona continues to grow and more planned housing developments go in, it's still possible.

KW: Thanks for listening to this episode of Valley 101. If you have other questions about Phoenix in general, visit valley 101 podcast dot azcentral dot com. You can leave your tips for us there. You can also find us on Twitter at valley 101 pod.

KW : I'm Kaila White, signing off for this week. Take care.

