The Banning Block
511-513-515 S. Myrtle Avenue

The original building at this location was a two story wood frame structure with the high false front typical of the period. Two businesses were housed on the ground floor, and an outside stairway on the north side of the building provided access to rooms on the second floor. Since the building is on the 1888 Sanborn map, it must have been constructed shortly after Monrovia's founding. At that time an office was located in the north half of the first floor, while the south half housed a store which specialized in "toys and fancy goods". Monrovia's children were not neglected!

By 1892, the building's first occupants had moved. A butcher shop in the north half provided staple items, while a confectionery in the south half catered to the local sweet tooth. The Monrovia Office of First Interstate Bank has several greatly enlarged early photographs on display in their lobby. The photograph with the horse drawn trolley in the foreground shows this location as it appeared in the early 1890s.

Late in 1896 or perhaps early in 1897 one of Monrovia's largest fires occurred. The fire began in a drug store north of this location, but rapidly spread until the entire block north of the alley was involved. With virtually no fire protection available, the fire was free to consume everything in its path. Only the natural fire break provided by the alley prevented greater destruction. Additional excitement during the fire was the narrow escape by an invalid woman from a burning second floor rooming house. Since she was unable to walk, her rescuers carried her to safety using her bed sheets as a hammock.

Soon after the fire construction began on the present structure. Brick construction was used for this second building as protection against another destructive fire, and the new building was expanded to contain three store locations rather than the previous two. It was completed by November of 1897, and housed the Monrovia Post Office, a meat market, and Crews' Drug Store. Each of these had been burned out during the fire.
Circa 1935 the facade of this building was remodeled to reflect current architectural trends. The original stone trim was removed, and the brick was stuccoed and altered in the popular art deco style. Then in the early 1960s another remodeling took place. This time the original paired windows on the second floor were eliminated and the art deco trim removed to produce the present streamlined facade.

The second floor of this building has served a variety of purposes. Over the years it has housed professional offices, private lodgings, club rooms, the Monrovia Business and Professional Women's Club, and the Monrovia Elks Lodge. The Banning Block is possibly the second oldest business block on Myrtle Avenue.

This picture has fortunately been clearly dated. The first building on this site is to the left of the building having a flag pole. Monrovia's horse drawn trolley can be seen in the center of the picture below the flag.

This picture shows a Monrovia Day parade circa 1912. The Banning Block is the first complete building on the left side of the picture. The young man on horseback in the foreground is Julian Fisher, after whom Julian Fisher Park is named. The Wrigley's Spearmint Gum sign to the right of the Banning Block is an indication that large scale advertising is nothing new!