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Front Cover: *Postcard of the Avenue of Palms at the 1915 San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition. From the collection of Laura A. Ackley, Copyright Laura Ackley 2015 ©.*

Back Cover: *Alcazar Garden and the California Tower, Balboa Park, San Diego.*

Above: *Botanical building lily pond in Balboa Park, San Diego.*

Opposite: *Lily pond during the 1915 Panama-California Exposition.*

The Accidental Landscapers of San Diego's 1915 Panama-California Exposition

Nancy Carol Carter



The 1915 Panama-California Exposition changed Balboa Park forever. At the same time, the exposition took park development and landscape in a direction never anticipated by the creators of the park or its early designers. The exposition builders disregarded expensively purchased park planning advice when they inserted buildings and lavish plantings onto a pristine mesa of native coastal chaparral at the heart of the park.

The first three Balboa Park landscape planners—Kate O. Sessions, Samuel Parsons Jr., and John Charles Olmsted—shared a respect for regional landscape variations. This article discusses the similarities in their design philosophies and landscaping advice. It goes on to show how the important assignment of landscaping the grounds of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition unexpectedly fell to a pair of

“accidental landscapers.” These newcomers to Southern California, and to large landscaping projects, completely disregarded the advice of the experts who had come before, instead creating an exotic, lush, flowery, and water-dependent landscape within Balboa Park.

The design and plantings of the Exposition grounds entranced visitors and left writers scrambling for laudatory adjectives. A generous flow of public bond money¹ was the key to the success of the “Garden Fair”² landscaping that was as fanciful, improbable, and beautiful as the Spanish Colonial Revival buildings it showcased.

Although not widely recognized for this work, Frank P. Allen Jr. and Paul G. Thiene were the landscapers of the Panama-California Exposition.³ They are identified as “accidental landscapers” because each was hired at the exposition in a different

capacity, then propelled into landscaping responsibilities by the dramatic resignation of the Olmsted Brothers from the exposition in September 1911.⁴

The Founding of Balboa Park

Balboa Park was created from San Diego Pueblo land holdings in 1868. Known initially as “City Park,” it was a reserve of 1,400 acres. For decades, City Park remained in its natural state. Locals found many unbecoming uses for park land. The site of an open air abattoir became known as Slaughter House Canyon, dangerous explosives were stored in Powder Canyon, and stray livestock were rounded up in Pound Canyon. Unauthorized dumping was common, and a “Pest House” in the park was used to quarantine people with smallpox or other communicable diseases.



Misuse of park land and the complete lack of park development were sore points for many early San Diegans. Park supporters urged their city government to invest in park development and reclaim the land for public park purposes. Detractors became convinced that City Park was less an asset than a civic liability. The latter sentiment played into the hands of real estate speculators who persisted in attempts to carve off large parcels of City Park land for housing developments.

To a larger extent than is generally understood, the preservation and integrity of this open space hung in the balance during the last decades of the 19th century. Local plantswoman Kate O. Sessions helped bring City Park through this crisis-plagued period.

Kate Olivia Sessions (1857-1940)

Known today as the “Mother of Balboa Park,” horticulturist and nursery owner Sessions was an early and ardent City Park supporter. She and others advocated keeping every designated acre of land as a free public park. Twenty years after the park was established, Sessions officially proposed the first comprehensive planting plan for City

Park. Simple and inexpensive, it specified native and low-maintenance plants, including California poppies and bougainvillea. The city government turned down Sessions’ proposal, pleading poverty and refusing to commit any funds to park improvement.

In 1892, Sessions entered a lease arrangement with the City of San Diego⁵ that allowed operation of her commercial plant nursery on 36 acres at the northwest corner of City Park. Her lease payments were in the form of 100 trees planted annually in City Park and 300 boxed trees supplied to the City for other public locations. Sessions was named to the post of City Gardener. For the next 10 years, Sessions applied her experimental methods to tree selection and planting in public grounds. At the same time she cultivated her nursery growing fields within the park, producing colorful displays of roses, chrysanthemums, violets, and other blooming stock.

Along with tireless advocacy, Sessions’ contribution to the salvation of City Park was her practical demonstration of the park’s fecundity. Her nursery vibrantly showed the park’s horticultural potential. Hundreds of people visited it during the flowering season. By planting more than 1,000 trees in City Park over 10 years, she also illustrated how progress on park improvement could be made, if only the work was taken up and sustained.

In 1902, business interests, eager to promote San Diego through civic beatification, created a Park Improvement Committee within the Chamber of Commerce. Although this represented an end-run around a recalcitrant city government, officials did not object to privately funded work in City Park. The Park Improvement Committee quickly moved on the suggestion of Sessions and other park advocates to hire a professional landscape architect to create a comprehensive development plan for City Park. The well-known Samuel Parsons Jr. of New York City was hired.

Samuel Parsons Jr. (1844-1923)

Descended from a famous New York horticultural family, Parsons attended Yale University. Central Park’s designers, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, were major influences on his philosophy of public park design. Parsons held appointments as Superintendent of Planting for Central Park, New York Superintendent of Parks from 1894 to 1897, and Landscape Architect for Greater New York from 1901 to 1911. Before accepting a commission to design City Park, he had completed numerous park and cemetery landscape plans across the nation.

Parsons came to San Diego in December 1902.⁶ In the planning tradition of landscape architects, he “consulted the genius”

Above: *Vintage postcard of El Prado’s allee of black acacias.*

Frank Phillips Allen Jr.

of City Park to identify the attractive natural features that should be preserved and enhanced by his landscape plan. Parsons found the park with its glorious views of mountains and ocean to be both beautiful and unique. With a nod to regional sensibility, he suggested restrained planting and use of native or well-adapted exotics appropriate to the climate.

Parsons' plan aimed to "preserve and accentuate natural beauties of a very unusual kind, which we trust may be kept free from interjection of all foreign, extraneous and harmful purposes or objects."⁷ Like other landscape architects of the time who were witness to the unpleasant effects of the Industrial Revolution on cities, Parsons believed that bucolic and quiet urban parks were a necessary social safety valve. To provide a genuine retreat from city life, these parks needed to be naturalistic and free of man-made structures. San Diego was not a busy metropolis like New York City where Parsons worked, but his plan invited San Diegans to imagine a future in which growth would enhance the public value of the open space preserved in their City Park.

Parsons sent his business partner, George Cooke, to implement the San Diego park plan. Cooke was an English landscape architect and civil engineer. Under his supervision, work on City Park soon gained the attention and approval of locals. Cooke oversaw road building, tree planting, and the definition and landscaping of new park entrances.

Private funding organized through the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee paid for the Parsons plan and the park development work that followed. However, this private intervention brought about a change in public attitude toward City Park. In 1905 voters agreed to a set aside a small percentage of their property taxes to establish a permanent park fund. A Park Commission was appointed, at last bringing City Park into the realm of official city business. The Chamber of Commerce stepped aside, and park improvement continued at a modest pace under city supervision. Another turn in park history then derailed the Parsons plan.

In 1909 San Diego decided to hold a world's fair to celebrate the long-anticipated opening of the Panama Canal. A corporation was registered to raise capital and to build and manage the Panama-California Exposition planned for 1915. City Park was selected as the site for the exposition and San Diego voters approved bond issues dedicated to park improvement. These public funds eventually supplemented money raised by the exposition corporation, providing exposition landscapers with a generous stream of funding. The funds

Controversy erupted in 1911 when Frank P. Allen Jr. (1881-1943) was appointed Director of Works for the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Protesters thought his salary too high and that a local person should have gotten the job. Despite the uproar, Exposition organizers knew they had hired the right man for the job.

Allen had impressive experience in the narrow specialty of building world's fairs. He was a consulting engineer for Portland, Oregon's 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition and Director of Works at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle where he managed to complete construction months ahead of schedule.

Allen was born in Michigan in 1881. He served in the Spanish-American War and practiced architecture and engineering as an apprentice in his father's office. He later worked with well-known Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, then joined a Seattle architectural firm. By the time he launched a solo practice, Allen had developed creative ideas about standardizing and streamlining building construction. He merged the roles of architect, engineer, and contractor to achieve remarkable efficiencies. Allen eventually became exhausted by his business success. After taking a full year off, he worked on the Portland and Seattle expositions.

Soon after arriving in San Diego, Allen found himself in disagreement with the site chosen for the exposition and favored by the Olmsted Brothers who had been hired to design the grounds. Ultimately, Allen got his way, but the Olmsteds resigned. Allen agreed to take on landscaping responsibilities, along with his many other exposition duties. He put himself through a crash course of landscape reading and aspired to create an exposition landscape that would be as arresting as the striking architecture.

Allen was indefatigable, earning both admirers and detractors as he relentlessly pushed the project forward. The exhibition buildings were completed one month before the official opening date and the grounds were beautifully planted. The timely completion, said a newspaper, was "a tribute to the genius of that master builder of expositions, Frank P. Allen, Jr."

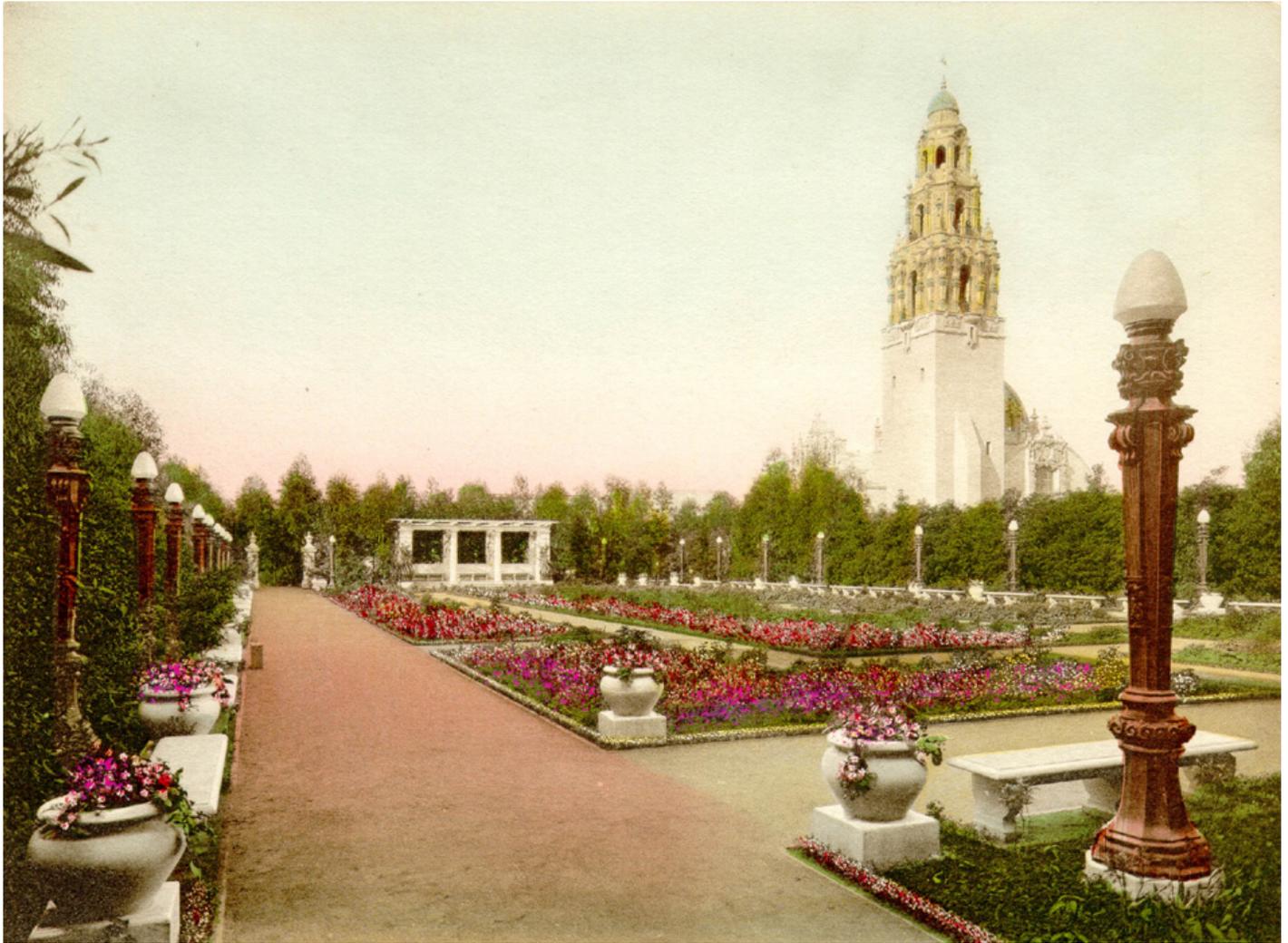
One of his beautiful and lasting architectural legacies is the bridge made necessary by the exposition site. Allen designed the Cabrillo Bridge to resemble a simple Roman aqueduct, producing a gracefully arched entry to the Exposition grounds and a San Diego icon. After the Exposition, Allen built San Diego's Park Manor Apartment Hotel and several other San Diego buildings. After experiencing business setbacks and the end of his first marriage, he moved to Los Angeles. In 1943, Frank P. Allen Jr. was killed in an industrial accident.

Author's note:

For a fuller account, see Kathleen Flanigan's article, "Frank P. Allen, Jr.: His Architectural and Horticultural Imprint on San Diego," *Journal of San Diego History* 42:1 (Winter 1996), 332-359 and my article "Meet Frank P. Allen, Jr.," *California Garden* 105:2 (March-April 1914), 19.



Above: Portrait of Frank P. Allen Jr., courtesy of the San Diego Public Library.



were overseen by the Park Commission, which contracted with the exposition corporation to carry out what were expected to be permanent landscape improvements to Balboa Park.

Parsons was brought back to San Diego in 1910 to assess progress on the park improvements, but as exposition fever swept San Diego, his plan for City Park slipped from public memory. Parsons' last contribution was a suggestion that City Park be given a more memorable name. Exposition officials and Park Commissioners agreed. City Park became "Balboa Park" in November 1910.

John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920)

Resolving to hire top professionals to create the exposition, the Panama-California Exposition's Building and Grounds Committee scored a public relations coup when

the nation's leading landscape architecture firm signed on. The Olmsted Brothers were in demand across the country and were experienced designers of exposition grounds.⁸

By early November 1910, John Charles Olmsted was in San Diego.⁹ Representing the firm throughout its association with the Exposition, he set to work designing grounds for the designated site at the southern edge of Balboa Park, near downtown San Diego.¹⁰ This site comported with the planning principles of both Parsons and the Olmsteds who agreed that if man-made structures were introduced into an urban park, the intrusion should be limited and kept to the park perimeter. Olmsted quickly developed a general plan for the Panama-California Exposition and specified new landscaping for areas of Balboa Park. He designed, built, and staffed a nursery to propagate and cultivate the millions of plants that would be needed for the exposition grounds.¹¹

Balboa Park was an ideal place to practice a new Olmsted planting technique that

preserved and enhanced natural chaparral lands. Underbrush would be cleared, leaving behind native flowering plants, young oaks, and hardwood shrubs. Then attractive native and compatible plants would be added to the semi-cleared chaparral lands. New plants might need some water to become established, but soon the entire tract would be self-sustaining and dry-farmed.¹² John Charles Olmsted specifically warned that English-style landscaping would be inappropriate for Balboa Park and that instead, inspiration should be found in the Mediterranean gardens of Italy and Spain, places where rainfall was also scarce and seasonal. These gardens were exemplars for San Diego, Olmsted explained, because they used flora indigenous to their climate, incorporated hardscape (stone and tile walls, terraces and arcades) and did not rely on "the lawn effect."¹³

Olmsted's exposition plan was fatally undermined by two other leading lights hired by the Exposition. Both disliked the location at the park's southern fringe, favoring instead the park's elevated central

Above: *Vintage postcard of the Montezuma Garden, Balboa Park, San Diego.*

Paul George Thiene

mesa as the building site for the Exposition. Frank P. Allen Jr., proven builder of world's fairs and Director of Works for the Panama-California Exposition, liked the additional space and more accommodating topography of the mesa. Lead architect Bertram Goodhue¹⁴ knew his buildings would be more imposing if placed on the higher ground of the mesa. Allen and Goodhue audaciously developed an alternative to the Olmsted Plan and lobbied Exposition officials to adopt their preferred location.¹⁵

The opposition to the Olmsted plan prevailed in a vote taken on September 1, 1911. John Charles Olmsted did not hesitate when informed of the new building site. As a matter of professional principle, the Olmsted Brothers firm resigned from the Panama-California Exposition. Olmsted believed that building an exposition in the heart of Balboa Park was a needless and irreversible sacrifice of San Diego's most unique and valuable civic asset. He accurately predicted that this incursion would be the beginning of a more widespread invasion into the park's once peaceful interior and refused to allow the Olmsted Brothers firm to be a party to "the ruin of Balboa Park."¹⁶

Less than one year after signing on with the Panama-California Exposition, the Olmsted Brothers severed all connections with the project and reassigned all their professional staff. The climate-sensitive landscaping plans of John Charles Olmsted had no afterlife at the Exposition.

Expert Consensus: Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted

Within the work of Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted, a general consensus about Balboa Park landscaping can be identified. All three celebrated the park's natural beauty and the region's native plants, but also endorsed the use of imported plants that could easily adapt to local growing conditions. They favored a regional design statement over efforts to impose a formal English or European landscape design on Balboa Park. They agreed on restrained planting of the park and the need for attention to the Mediterranean climate conditions of San Diego in landscape design and plant selection.

Sessions domesticated native plants and constantly experimented with exotic (non-native) plants in San Diego landscapes. She looked for new plants from parts of the world with a climate similar to San Diego's and for species that did not require irrigation. She consistently advised against lawns because of their water requirements. Her thinking was very much in line with the recommendations made by Parsons and



For Paul Thiene (1880-1971), four years of employment at San Diego's Panama-California Exposition were the beginning of everything. He had emigrated from Germany in 1903, seeking greater opportunities in his chosen field of landscaping. The son of a school superintendent in Marksuhl, Germany, Thiene received a sound early education as well as formal training and experience as an apprentice gardener.

Only fragmentary information has surfaced about his first years in the United States, but previously published biographical information reporting long-term employment with the Olmsted Brothers is unsubstantiated. Before arriving in San Diego, Thiene worked briefly with a New York landscape architect and was a partner in a nursery and florist business. He moved to San Diego in 1910 and purchased 10 acres of property in Old Town, where he established the Ramona Nursery. Despite hard work and the security of an initial nest egg, Thiene was soon struggling financially.

When his resources dwindled dangerously in March 1911, Thiene found employment as a sub-foreman at the nursery built by the Olmsted Brothers at the Panama-California Exposition. The standard biographical information describing Thiene as an Olmsted employee sent to San Diego to establish the exposition nursery is erroneous. In fact, his employment with the Olmsteds lasted fewer than 7 months, due to the firm's resignation from the Exposition in early September of 1911.

Thiene stayed on at the nursery as an employee of the Exposition and won promotion to nursery supervisor. Overseeing a nursery with hundreds of thousands of plants under cultivation was a big job, but within a few months Thiene was given even broader responsibilities. He was promoted this time to Supervisor of Landscape for the Exposition.

Thiene proved entirely capable of undertaking all his new responsibilities and at age 32 demonstrated impressive organizational and supervisory skills. In addition to planning and directing the work of scores of employees, he continued to expand his knowledge of local plants and growing conditions. He called on a wellspring of creativity to design attractive plantings for the vast acres of bare exposition land and forged a successful working relationship with the demanding and mercurial Frank P. Allen Jr. The Exposition landscaping was a popular triumph.

The Panama-California Exposition proved to be a staging ground for Thiene's productive life in landscape architecture. He had landed in the right place at the right time, but competence and an ambitious streak enabled him to capitalize on opportunities that propelled him into a highly successful career. Thiene received a few private landscaping commissions during the Exposition, taking the first steps that would carry him to the top of his profession as an interpreter of the Italian Revival landscape style during the golden age of estate building in Southern California.

Further reading:

John Blocker, "Collaboration Brings Balboa Park into Bloom, *California Garden* 105:2 (March-April 2014), 10-14.

Above, left to right: Paul G. Thiene on horseback in Balboa Park, Paul Thiene Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley; portrait of Thiene by Jere Stuart French from The California Garden.



John Charles Olmsted for Balboa Park—that landscape choices needed to suit the San Diego climate, soils and rainfall. The Parsons plan specified that much of Balboa Park remain in its natural state and that formal planting be kept to a minimum.

Olmsted, who had lived in California as a young man and worked on landscape projects across the country, aimed to create landscape designs appropriate to the place and its ecology. For the Panama-California Exposition, the Olmsted operation consulted with Kate Sessions, Los Angeles native plant expert Theodore Payne and the superintendent of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, John McLaren. The Olmsted's exposition nursery ingeniously asked San Diego residents to donate cuttings. Local gardeners responded generously with thousands of starts for roses, ferns, vines, shrubs, and other plants, providing the best possible information on the species and varieties of plants proven to thrive in San Diego.¹⁷ In addition, Olmsted nursery staff began to expertly propagate the native plants of San Diego and to move full-sized trees onto the exposition grounds.¹⁸ Olmsted's "new native park typology for the American West," the managed, naturalistic landscaping that Olmsted envisioned,¹⁹ aligned with Parsons' recommendation that

San Diego aim to make a unique regional statement with its naturally magnificent park.

Ironically, the ideas of these experts for the park's landscape—San Diego's preeminent horticulturist and the two most famous landscape architects of their day—the three people who had most carefully studied and considered what would be appropriate for Balboa Park, were largely ignored when it came time to execute the grandest design and planting project in the history of the park. Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted did not participate in landscaping Balboa Park for the 1915 Exposition, nor did their landscape ideas have a notable influence.

The Panama-California Exposition's Accidental Landscapers

Frank P. Allen Jr., the Director of Works for the Exposition, had promoted the central mesa building site in bald opposition to the esthetics and design plans of John Charles Olmsted. Yet Allen was caught off guard by the Olmsted Brothers' resignation and was surely mortified by his role in depriving the Panama-California Exposition of the talent and prestige of the nation's leading landscape architecture firm. Allen stepped up to assume responsibility for overseeing the landscaping of the exposition, adding substantially to his already heavy responsibilities.

While the Olmsted resignation brought consternation to Allen and other Exposition officials, one low-level employee saw opportunity. Paul G. Thiene had been working as a sub-foreman at the exposition nursery for 7 months when the Olmsteds resigned. Understanding that his supervisors would depart with the Olmsteds, he wrote to Allen, asking for a promotion.²⁰ Allen desperately needed help once he had agreed to take over the landscaping responsibilities. He promoted Thiene to Nursery Supervisor. Before long, in recognition of Thiene's ambition, supervisory abilities, and horticultural expertise, Allen promoted him again to Exposition Landscape Supervisor. Thiene proved more than capable of handling complex landscape projects and directing large crews of workers. Additionally, he had a designer's eye.

Originally hired for other jobs at the Exposition, Allen and Thiene thus became the accidental landscapers of the Panama-California Exposition. They had a mandate to landscape just the exposition grounds—a 640-acre island within Balboa Park.²¹ They were not urban park planners and did not have to consider the park as a whole or the long-term impact of their plant choices, although the landscaping, funded by City bond money, was to be one of the permanent enhancements left in Balboa Park after the Exposition.

Allen and Thiene approached their work in Balboa Park from a completely different

Above: *Formal garden and model orchard at San Diego's 1915 Exposition in Balboa Park.*



perspective than that of Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted. Unconstrained by well-considered principles of landscape design for urban parks or the environmental sensibilities of more experienced horticulturists, they relied on their own landscape references from well-watered parts of the country. Allen grew up in the upper Midwest and had lived on the verdant coasts of Washington and Oregon. Paul Thiene was a German immigrant who first lived in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and, immediately before coming to San Diego, had been a resident of Portland, Oregon.

Together Allen and Thiene changed the types of plants being cultivated at the nursery and began scraping away native vegetation on Balboa Park's central mesa. They called on the traditional park and garden aesthetics of English romanticism to create a densely planted, lushly green, vine-draped, flower-filled exposition with extensive lawns. San Diego's mild climate was celebrated with a lavish overlay of tropical accent plants, despite an absence of the rain levels that tropical plants need in order to flourish.

The work of these accidental landscapers was a great popular success. "Whoever loves flowers and trees will find it hard to leave this exposition," an enthralled *Sunset* magazine contributor wrote. "Never has there been such an exposition, one vast botanical garden, the finest, rarest specimens of plant life growing and thriving in

open air."²² Captivated visitors and writers used every superlative in praising the landscape beauty of the exposition.²³ Others simply declared that the gardens of Balboa Park were the product of a magic wand, a paradise on earth, a new Eden.

In creating this botanical wonderland, Frank P. Allen Jr. and Paul G. Thiene made plant choices and design decisions for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition that popularized a contrived and water-dependent landscape style—a style that has cast its influence over a century of planting in Southern California.

Endnotes

1. W. J. Palethorpe, *Report on the Panama California Exposition to April 30, 1916* (Los Angeles, W. J. Palethorpe [1916]), 7. Landscaping costs are delineated in this audit by a certified public accountant. In today's dollars, preparation and maintenance of the exposition landscape cost \$10 million.

2. An art professor from the University of California, Berkeley, coined this sobriquet in his book on the Panama-California Exposition. Eugen Neuhaus, *The San Diego Garden Fair* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916).

3. Although Frank P. Allen Jr. is credited in several sources with overseeing Panama-California Exposition landscaping and Paul G. Thiene receives an occasional mention in the literature, no published source focused on the dimensions of their task or told the story of their successful working partnership before John Blocker in his article "Collaboration Brings Balboa Park Into Bloom," *California Garden* 105:2 (March-April 2014), 10-14.

4. The Olmsted resignation prompted the Board of Park Commissioners to hire a new landscaping expert for park areas outside the exposition grounds. John Morley became Superintendent of San Diego Parks in November 1911 and retained this position for decades. Morley is vitally important to the history of Balboa Park, but his role is not germane to this article.

5. The Sessions lease terms are in Ordinance #153, San Diego City Common Council, Feb. 17, 1892.

6. For a fuller account of Parsons' work in San Diego, see Richard W. Amero, "Samuel Parsons Finds Xanadu in San Diego," *Journal of San Diego History* 44:1 (Winter 1998), 3-23.

7. Samuel Parsons, *Report and Plan of City Park*, 1905. Amero File on Parsons, San Diego History Center Library.

8. "Committee Selects Olmsted to Plan Park and Fair Improvements," *San Diego Union*, November 10, 1910, Sec. 2, 9:1.

9. Traveling to job sites was the province of John Charles Olmsted, one-half of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm and heir to the consummate reputation of his stepfather, Frederick Law Olmsted. The brothers undertook more than 3,500 commissions all across the United States and were, in 1910 and for many years afterwards, at the top of their profession. "Eastern Architect is Here to Plan Grounds for Exposition," *San Diego Union*, November 6, 1910, Sec. 3, 1:1.

10. "Director-General Outlines Plans for San Diego Fair," *San Diego Union*, June 19, 1910, 25:2-3.

11. This nursery eventually covered 35 acres of propagation beds and more than 100 growing beds. An inventory showed that seven million plants had been propagated. "Panama-California 1915 Fair is Magnificent Triumph of Art and Enterprise," *San Diego Union*, March 28, 1914, 11:2-5.

12. CGLHS members Christy O'Hara and John Blocker both have written in greater depth about the Olmsted plans for the San Diego Exposition and Balboa Park: Christine Edstrom O'Hara, "The Panama-Canal Exposition, San Diego, 1915: The Olmsted Brothers' Ecological Park Typology," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70:1 (March 1911) 64-81; John Blocker, "Olmsted Brothers' Vision for the Panama-California Exposition," *Eden* 18:1 (Winter 2015), 3-7.

13. "Olmsted Outlines Plans for Park Improvement," *San Diego Union*, November 11, 1910, 11:6.

14. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1869-1924) was lead architect for the Panama-California Exposition. He established his reputation as a New York architect by designing

Gothic Revival buildings, but his travels in Spain and Mexico inspired the extravagant Spanish Colonial Revival style he brought to the San Diego exposition. Photographs and descriptions of his work are found in Carleton Monroe Winslow, *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916).

15. Their persistent lobbying for the new location played into the hands of local businessmen, according to historians who believe that real estate and transportation interests of wealthy Exposition backers were aligned against the Olmsted Plan. Matthew F. Bokovoy, *The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwest Memory, 1880-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 56-58. A drawing of the new plan filled one-half page in the newspaper within days of winning a vote to move the Exposition. "Magnificent Exposition Site Laid Out," *San Diego Union*, September 6, 1911, 7, 1-7.

16. John Charles Olmsted sent his firm's resignation to the Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee of the Panama-California Exposition. Day Letter [Telegram] Olmsted Brothers to George W. Marston, September 2, 2011, Job#4051, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscripts Room, Library of Congress [microfilm inter-library loan].

17. O'Hara, "Panama-Canal Exposition," 72.

18. Frank Sessions, brother of Kate O. Sessions, was the large-tree moving expert for the Exposition. San Diegans donating unwanted landscape trees got a free tree removal service, and thus the Exposition's grounds were enhanced with mature specimens.

19. O'Hara, "Panama-California Exposition," 79.

20. Letter, Paul G. Thiene to Frank P. Allen Jr., September 7, 1911. Box 1, Folder 1-2. Park Commission Papers, San Diego Public Library Archives.

21. The size of the exposition grounds is listed at 640 acres in Richard W. Amero, "The Southwest on Display at the Panama-California Exposition, 1915," *Journal of San Diego History* 36:4 (Fall 1990). Different acreages were reported over the years. A 1914 newspaper reports on an exposition of 450-acres. "Landscape Garden in Park Wonderful," *San Diego Union*, June 14, 1914, 11:2-5. Florence Christman in *The Romance of Balboa Park* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1985) states that the Exposition covered 400 acres. The size dropped to 350 acres in "Magnificent Exhibition Site Laid Out," *San Diego Union*, September 6, 1911, 7.

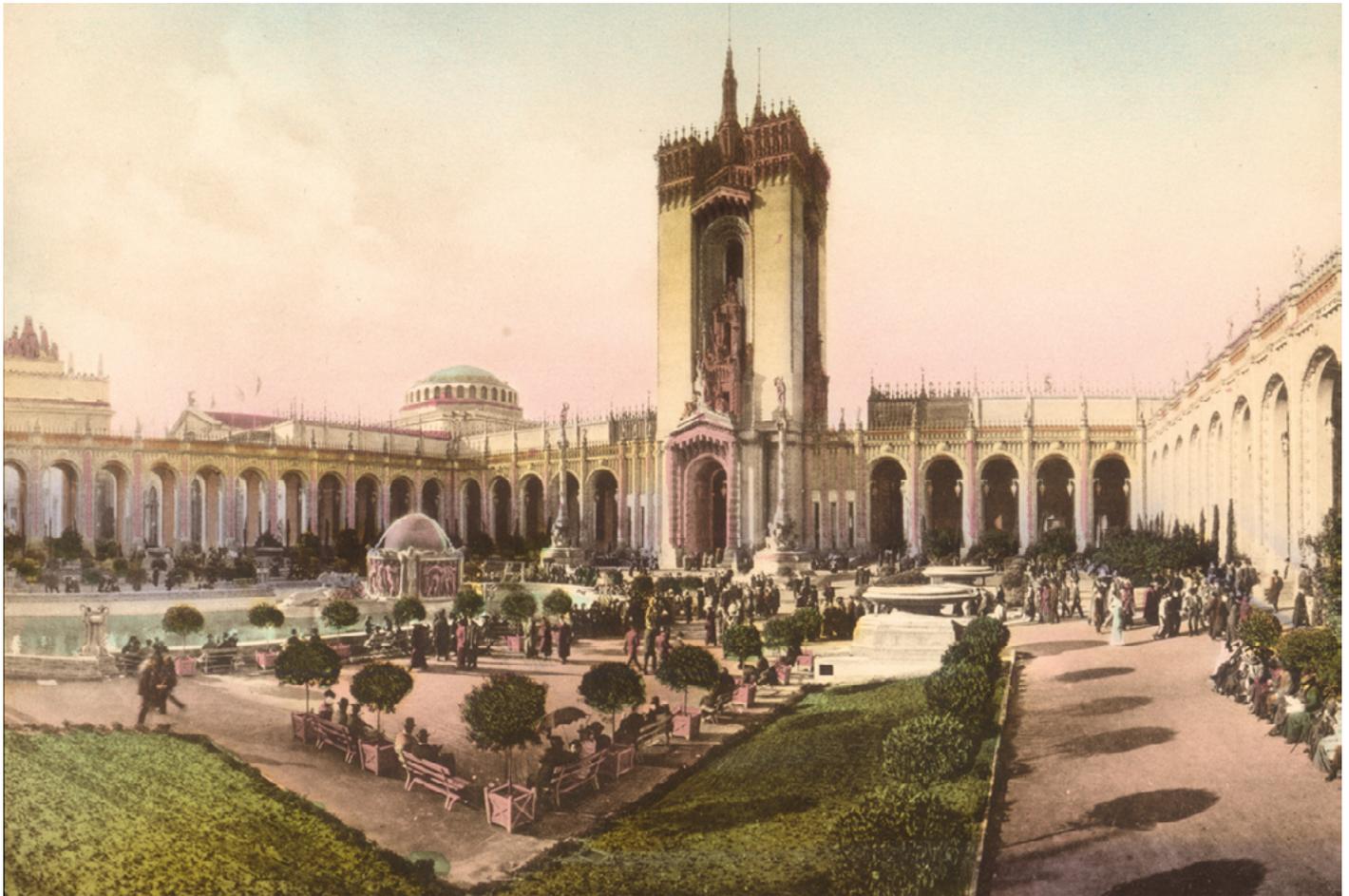
22. Walter V. Woehlke, "Nueva España by the Silver Gate," *Sunset* 33:6 (December 1914), 1130, 1127.

23. The exposition spawned a publishing boomlet of new books and articles in publications like *Colliers*, *Overland Monthly*, and of course the local papers. A news writer rhapsodized over Frank P. Allen Jr.'s work—the lushness of planting, blooming flowers, and "velvet lawns." W. C. Getty, "Exposition Tribute to Master Builder," *San Diego Union*, November 29, 1914, I:8. An eccentric publication praising the exposition landscape and the marvels of California was produced in a special edition to invite President Woodrow Wilson to visit San Diego. F. Weber Benton, *Semi-Tropic California The Garden of the World*, 2d ed. (President Wilson Invitation Edition 1915). Los Angeles: Benton Publishing Company, 1915. A flowery tribute to the exposition landscape appears in George Wharton James, *Exposition Memories Panama-California Exposition* (San Diego 1916. Pasadena: Radiant Life Press: 1917). "A carefully trained wilderness of tropical plants delights the eye," Bensel Smythe wrote in "The Fair at San Diego," *Review of Reviews* (May 1915) 88. The best descriptions of the gardens are found in the previously cited works: Carleton Monroe Winslow, *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916); and Eugen Neuhaus, *The San Diego Garden Fair* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916).

John McLaren

Landscape Magician of the 1915 Exposition

Laura A. Ackley



Fairgoers at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) enjoyed the mechanical and handmade marvels inside the exhibit palaces. But outside, they were enchanted by the spells a horticultural wizard cast in the gardens and courtyards. Immense beds of flowers in full bloom magically changed overnight. Trees nearly 70 feet tall stood where the San Francisco Bay had lapped months earlier, and a 20-foot-high wall of living green touched with delicate lavender blossoms served as the World's Fair's boundary for several blocks.

Sunset said that John McLaren, Chief of Landscape for the San Francisco World's Fair, needed to use the "technical training of an engineer, a gardener, and a botanist" to realize his astounding and revolutionary plans for the landscape design of the great celebration.¹

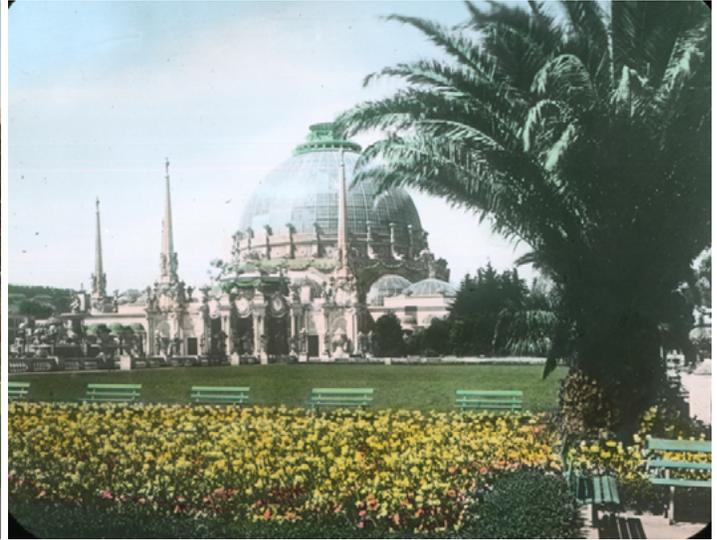
The scope of McLaren's wizardry is too great for a comprehensive review here, but this brief article will attempt to reveal the secrets behind three of his most daring and—to fairgoers—the most mysterious of his techniques.

From its earliest stages, McLaren partnered with the other designers of the 1915 Fair, also nicknamed "The Jewel City." He believed "the relation between a beautiful structure and its grounds... is a very definite one. At the great Exposition the

landscaping became as much a part of the general plan as were the architecture, the color, the sculpture, and the lighting." In addition to developing subtle landscapes to match the "moods" of the great central courts of the PPIE, he implemented several wholly new, spectacular landscape techniques that astonished viewers.²

On the gala Opening Day, February 20, the PPIE's flower beds flourished with golden color in homage to the Golden State. The 15-acre "South Gardens," designed in the formal French manner, greeted crowds streaming through the main entrance with a tapestry of several hundred thousand gilded blooms. A mass of bright upright daffodils covered the beds. Yet a few weeks later, when the daffodils were losing their luster, they mysteriously disappeared one night to be suddenly supplanted the next morning by a profusion of yellow tulips. And when the tulips were spoiled by rains, a cloak of bright pansies took their place overnight.

This ability to maintain the flower beds in constant bloom while changing their varieties with such rapidity was a major puzzle for PPIE guests. McLaren had conspired with Jules Guérin, Chief of Color, to plan a rotation of plantings in keeping with the colors of the Exposition buildings and the turning of the seasons. In the South Gardens alone, the plantings transitioned from the gold of Opening Day to brilliant red, then to palest pink as the 9



months of the Fair passed. Many of the necessary hundreds of thousands of seedlings were cultivated in Golden Gate Park, where McLaren had been Superintendent since 1887. Since then he had transformed great swaths of the park from inhospitable dunes into a verdant playground for San Franciscans, with bridges, lakes, waterfalls, trees, and fern-lined dells.

McLaren's secret was a system of planting that relied on his thorough knowledge of each plant's blooming habits. In the South Gardens, his large team of gardeners had planted the daffodils, tulips, and pansies simultaneously before the Exposition opened. The daffodils bloomed first, and as they wilted, the Chief sent his corps out at night to clip them off and pitch them onto trucks for removal, leaving the tulips, which had been sprouting beneath the daffodils, to burst forth seemingly instantaneously. Similar overnight removal of the tulips revealed the aureate carpet of pansies growing lower still. Each rotation required about 250,000 plants, and *The American Florist* estimated that approximately two million flowers were used in the South Gardens over the run of the Fair. The canny McLaren used the same quick-change technique not only through the cycles of the South Gardens, but also in several of the opulent courts.^{3,4}

Another bit of the Scottish-born McLaren's wizardry was more subtle—the placement about the grounds of hundreds of fully-grown trees, some more than 65 feet tall and weighing as much as 16 tons apiece. Many of these ornamented the central portion of the Exposition, which was built on the location of a former 71-acre saltwater lagoon that not been filled in until late 1912.

Where recently tides had inundated the site to a depth of as much as 20 feet, now lofty trees thrived. Many patrons simply did not believe they had not been planted there decades earlier. "Visitors who could not believe that the great palms and eucalyptus trees surrounding the Exposition palaces were transplanted had to be told gently and firmly that the Bay had covered the whole central portion of the site when construction began; especially where some of the largest trees stood. Some believed, but many lacked faith," wrote the PPIE's official historian, Frank Morton Todd.⁵

McLaren had recognized that early proposals to bank 30-foot-tall trees against the 65-foot-high walls of the palaces would cause the trees to look small and "out of proportion to their magnificent backgrounds." So he started a nursery of tree seedlings in Golden Gate Park in April 1912, later moving the plants to Tennessee Hollow on the Presidio.

The audacious Scot also sent a cadre of "competent men" out in early 1912 to canvas the surrounding counties for impressive

specimen plants, the owners of which were then asked to donate the trees. If they consented, which the proud landholders often did, a new version of "side-boxing" was implemented. A huge "knife," 7 feet long, was driven through the roots on all four sides of the tree. Three inches of soil were inserted between the cut side roots and the box sides that were driven down around the tree, and then the plant was carefully tended, allowing new systems of small side roots to develop before the tree was removed. Six months or more later, the box bottom was added and the trees were shipped to the Exposition site.

In November 1912, the eucalyptus and acacia plants for the Jewel City stood only 12 to 18 inches high. Two years later the eucalyptus trees had attained heights of 25 to 30 feet and the acacias, 15 to 20 feet. Starting in the summer of 1913 some of the largest trees were the first to be planted at the Fair. This allowed them to attain their full growth, some topping the high ivory walls by the time the Exposition was in full operation. Thus, said McLaren, the trees lent "an effect of permanency and long-established growth." Many of these hardy varieties were planted along the north walls of the Fair, where they were able to withstand the Bay winds without interfering with the marvelous vistas across the silver-blue waters. The eucalyptus trees were joined by pointed cypress, some of which were donated by San Jose's Oak Hill cemetery.^{6,7,8}

Parallel to the sheltered, southerly wall of the Exposition's palaces, McLaren created a splendid pedestrian esplanade, the "Avenue of Palms." This broad path was lined with 350 stately trees, most of which had been shipped to the site from the California Nursery Company in Niles, located about 28 miles east across the Bay. In the spring of 1914, trains of flatcars loaded with hundreds of palm trees arrived on the Jewel City's tracks. The legions of Canary Island date palms and California fan palms, leaning backwards to protect them from the winds of travel, appeared to lounge indolently against one another.

After each specimen was transferred to a wagon, teams of eight sturdy draft horses pulled it into position, the taller date palms

Opposite: Court of Ages landscaped with orange trees; photogravure by Robert A. Reid, the Albertype Company, Copyright Laura Ackley 2015 ©.

Above, left to right: Looking east down Marina from the California Building; lantern slide of the Palace of Horticulture, with the South Gardens in the foreground, Copyright Laura Ackley 2015 ©.

All images are from the author's personal collection.



alternating every 20 feet with the smaller, fuller fan palms. For added tropical effect McLaren planted passion vines at the base of the trees. These twined up the trunks and dropped festoons of brilliant flowers from the branches.

As San Franciscans well know, it's nearly impossible to grow oranges in the foggy city with its sometimes biting winds. Fully aware of this, McLaren planned one last feat using the delicate citrus trees. He had more than 100 mature orange trees grown in the more benevolent climate of Cloverdale, about 76 miles north of the city, side-boxing them using the same innovative method as he had for the other transplanted trees. He waited until December 1914, just 2 months before the Exposition opened, then brought them to the Fair with their fruit carefully tied and protected. Only two of these verdant 10-foot-high, 8-foot-diameter trees would fit on each railroad car.

The orange trees were arrayed, still in their boxes, in orderly rows about Mullgardt's opulent Court of Ages, where they evoked the courtyards of Moorish Iberia. Those who had visited the palaces of southern Spain recognized the influences of the Aljafería, the forecourt of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and the Patio de los Naranjos of Seville Cathedral. All through the spring of 1915, those taking their evening stroll around the great Fountain of Earth in the calm, sheltered Court of Ages were greeted by the sweet scent of orange blossoms and ripe fruit.

The most talked-about feature of the grounds was undoubtedly the wall of living greenery that served as the boundary of the Jewel City for nearly a quarter of a mile (1,150 feet) along the Chestnut Street façade of the Exposition. Most of the wall stood 20 feet tall, but at the Main Entrance at Scott Street, it shot upwards above the turnstiles into nine exuberant arches, each 36 feet high.

Since no ordinary hedge could have been grown with such speed, size or perfection, it was again McLaren's sorcery on display. To create the looming green barrier, he had ordered a variety of small ice plant, *Mesembryanthemum spectabilis*. These were planted in 8,700 large, flat trays—each 6 feet long, 2 feet wide, and filled with soil 2.5 inches deep. The fronts of the trays were enclosed with wire mesh, creating a building unit of freely growing ice plant that would not lose its form when eventually mounted vertically. The plants grew quite abundantly in the trays, which were placed on the ground beside the Palace of Horticulture while their future framework was assembled along the façade of the Fair.

When the ice plant was mature, the trays were affixed to the tall wooden armature, which actually consisted of two parallel walls 8 feet apart, lending an illusion of thick solidity to the wall. *Mesembryanthemum spectabilis* blooms with a pale purple flower, so based on meteorological conditions, the fence would be brushed with flecks of gauzy color, contrasting against the background of the dark green succulent. The Hedge Fence was a huge hit, though

fairgoers were left wondering how it was done.

A thorough description of McLaren's achievements in landscaping at the PPIE would require an entire tome, but the few, remarkable effects described here reflect his ingenuity and mastery of the arts and sciences of horticulture and landscape design.

"To John McLaren, nothing is impossible," declared the *New York Tribune*. And shortly after the Jewel City's closure in 1916 a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline asserted, "John McLaren's Work at the Exposition Entitles Him to the Name of Magic Gardener."^{9,10}

Yet the ever-taciturn, self-effacing Chief of Landscape declined credit, saying at a Commonwealth Club luncheon where his work was lauded, "The California climate did it. We just looked on."¹¹

Endnotes

1. "Interesting Westerners," *Sunset*, 1913: 1215.
2. John McLaren, "California's Opportunities in Artistic Landscaping," *California's Magazine*, 2, 1916: 139.
3. "John McLaren's Work at the Exposition Entitles Him to the Name of Magic Gardener," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 1916: 39.
4. Leonard Carpenter, "Panama-Pacific Exposition: Some of the Horticultural Features," *The American Florist*, August 14, 1915: 149.
5. Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921, 1: 161
6. John McLaren, "California's Opportunities in Artistic Landscaping," *California's Magazine*, 2, 1916: 140.
7. Donald McLaren, "Landscape Gardening at the Exposition," *Pacific Coast Architect*, July 1915: 13.
8. John McLaren, "California's Opportunities in Artistic Landscaping," *California's Magazine*, 2, 1916: 140.
9. Alice McGowan, "Exposition's Pastel City a Dream of Soft Color," *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1915: 3.
10. "John McLaren's Work at the Exposition Entitles Him to the Name of Magic Gardener," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 1916: 39.
11. "Preserve Boulevard Link, Says P.P.I.E. Gardener," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 17, 1915: 35.

Laura Ackley holds graduate degrees in Architecture from Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley. Her interest in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition was captured by a Cultural Landscapes course during her undergraduate years. She has worked for such diverse firms as Lucasfilm, Bechtel Engineering, and Autodesk, and taught 3D computer modeling for more than a decade. Her book, San Francisco's Jewel City: The Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, co-published by Heyday and the California Historical Society, recently was awarded a Gold Medal by the California Book Awards, sponsored by the Commonwealth Club.

Above, left to right: Postcard of the Avenue of Palms with the Tower of Jewels; postcard showing the hedge forming the boundary of the Jewel City, with from top left, the Palace of Horticulture, Faville's Italian Towers, and the Fountain of Energy, Copyright Laura Ackley 2015 ©.

MEMBER NEWS

DONNELL GARDEN TOUR

Michael Coleman and Mark Keeney were the lucky winners of the CGLHS raffle at the 2015 San Francisco History Expo, which took place at the historic San Francisco Mint in March. Here they are touring the Donnell Garden in Sonoma with CGLHS President Kelly Comras (left) and Sandra Donnell and Justin Fagioli (right) on April 25.

Photo by Mike Lofchie.



GAMBLE GARDEN EVENT

Staffing the table at the event are CGLHS Board member Cecily Harris and Editorial Board member Phoebe Cutler.

Photo by Virginia Kean.



2015 PITSCHEL PRIZE WINNERS

In May 2015, CGLHS member Judith Taylor, the creator of the prize, presented awards to Patricia Fillingame (first prize), Ildiko Polony (second prize), and Tara Whitefield (third prize) at City College of San Francisco. The prize is jointly sponsored by the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society and the San Francisco Garden Club.

From left: Tara Whitefield, Patricia Fillingame, Judith Taylor, and Ildiko Polony. Photo by Katie Gelardi.



FRIENDS OF BALBOA PARK 2015 AWARD

Congratulations to CGLHS Vice President Nancy C. Carter, named to receive the Friends of Balboa Park 2015 Millennium Award honoring “commitment to the betterment of the park.”

Nursery Order for the Avenue of Palms

Janet Barton



In 1915, the year of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), the California Nursery Company founded in 1865 by John Rock and R.D. Fox in San Jose, California, was celebrating its 50th year. Since 1884, the large, well-established nursery had been supplying plants throughout California from their operation in the East Bay town of Niles. John Rock died in 1904, and W. V. Eberly managed the nursery after his death and through the years when the Exposition was being landscaped, until 1918.¹

The nursery's 1915 catalog, a semi-centennial edition, was quite different from the usual text-only catalog of the period. Many of its pages featured one or two photographs of the nursery's stock, workers, buildings, and grounds. Most surprising was a photograph that showed railcars loaded with palm trees, waiting to go to the 1915 Exposition. This intriguing image sent me looking for the history of the California Nursery Company and the palms it supplied to the PPIE.²

Searching the Nursery Records

By the time John McLaren was appointed Landscape Engineer of the Exposition in February 1912 and his son, Donald McLaren, assistant Landscape Engineer in May 1913, the two were already familiar with the California Nursery Company.³ Donald McLaren's company, the MacRorie-McLaren Company, was a frequent customer, placing regular orders at least as far back as 1910.⁴

The nursery's shipping records for 1913 to 1915 reveal that the California Nursery Company provided trees, shrubs, and vines, as well as labor (men and horses), materials, manure, and irrigation for the Exposition. Between March 1913 and December 1914, there were 30 orders for over 12,000

plants, large and small. The March 12, 1913, order alone filled eight railcars. Records from September 25, 1913, include charges for 175 palms and 882 other trees and shrubs. One notation, "boxed here by your people," probably indicates that the Exposition landscaping department sent their staff to box the trees, including the 71 *Phoenix canariensis* and 104 *Washingtonia robusta*. The bill totaled \$2,672. Thirteen additional *P. canariensis* were ordered on July, 10, 1914.⁵

Shipping and Planting the Palms

According to Frank Morton Todd, historian of the PPIE, "most of the large trees for the Avenue of Palms were boxed [in 1913] ... 350 Canary Island date palms and California fan palms, which were set alternately. Most of them were shipped from Niles, on the east side of the Bay, in the spring and summer of 1914."^{6,7}

Nursery records from May and June show full month charges for California Nursery Company men (one to two) and horses (two to six). But whether the nursery sent the men and horses to the Exposition construction site or whether the Exposition landscape team came to Niles, or both, is unknown.

In the July 1914 issue of *Pacific Service Magazine*, Donald McLaren explains the process of preparing the palms for shipping:

"In boxing our large specimen trees the following method has been followed. The trees are side boxed and after the roots have been cut, three inches of space is allowed between the ball and the sides of the box and this 3 inch space is secured with good surface soil so as to start side root action. The plants are mulched and watered for a period of some four to six months when the

bottom of the box is put on. We have found this method most successful in transplanting large palms and trees in general."⁸

The palms' 30-mile trip to San Francisco started from the nursery at the Western Pacific siding (known as the Eberly siding) of the Western Pacific Railway line, which ran through the nursery property and was often used to ship nursery orders. The palms continued up to the Western Pacific Oakland mole. From there the rail cars were loaded onto barges and towed to the Exposition's freight ferry slip, where they were transferred to the Exposition Terminal Railway—11.5 miles of tracks used to move construction materials, exhibits, and plants.⁹

If you look carefully at pictures of the Avenue of Palms during and after construction, you can see that the palms were planted in double rows of alternating Canary Island palms and California fan palms. These images are as awe-inspiring now, in 2015, as the actual placement and planting must have been in 1914.

Endnotes

1. Catalogs for the California Nursery Company (1906-1918). W.V. Eberly is listed as manager from 1906 to 1918.
2. California Nursery Company, *Ornamental and Fruit Trees, Semi-Centennial Edition, Descriptive Catalog*, 1915.
3. Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition: Being the Official History of the International Celebration Held at San Francisco in 1915 to Commemorate the Discovery of the Pacific Ocean and the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 1921, 1: 307-308.
4. California Nursery Company, List of Clients 1905-1910. Alameda County Library, Fremont Main, in Fremont, California.
5. California Nursery Company, Shipping records (1913-1915). Alameda County Library, Fremont Main, in Fremont, California.
6. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 1: 310. Todd does not mention the California Nursery Company by name, just "Niles." Shipping records verify that he is talking about the California Nursery Company.
7. The 1912-1913 California Nursery catalog has *Washingtonia filifera robusta* listed as "California Fan Palm."



However, the PPIE *Planting Plan, Main Exhibition Section, 1914-1915* (on view at the California Historical Society) specified *Washingtonia robusta* for the Avenue of Palms. Today, however, *W. robusta* is known as the Mexican fan palm. So which palm was it? The 1915 nursery catalog explains: "The utmost confusion has existed as to the species of this genus and their correct names. As in our latest edition, we have adopted those published in an article by S.B. Parish in the *Botanical Gazette* of December, 1907, which satisfactorily accounts for all of the species and varieties known at present." The nursery sold *Washingtonia filifera robusta* (California fan palm) and *W. gracilis* and *W. sonorae* in the 1912-1913 and 1915 catalogs. The naming was inconsistent throughout California. The 1915 catalog also says that *Washingtonia filifera* "has been known in Southern California as *Washingtonia robusta* and in Northern California as *Washingtonia sonorae*."

8. Donald McLaren, "Gardening Features of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *Pacific Service Magazine*, July 1914, 39-45.

9. The California Nursery Company could ship plants either by Southern Pacific or by Western Pacific. In photographs, the flatbed rail cars are Western Pacific at the Niles and at the Exposition locations.

Janet Barton is working toward a degree in Landscape Architecture at Merritt College. She lives near the California Nursery Historical Park in Fremont and volunteers in the garden and the [historical archives](#). She created the exhibit "The Niles Palms at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition" for the park. Janet worked in plant pathology for several years and in software engineering at IBM for 30 years. She blogs at [illustratedplantnut.blogspot.com](#).

Opposite: Canary Island date palms line the entry to the California Nursery Company, 1914. Courtesy of the Roeding Collection managed by Math Science Nucleus archived at the City of Fremont's California Nursery Historical Park.

Right, top: At the nursery, eight horses hauled this 30-ton Canary Island palm to be shipped via Western Pacific Railway to the San Francisco Exposition. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Local History, Fremont, California.

Right, bottom: Installation of a Canary Island palm in front of the Palace of Liberal Arts at the Exposition. Photo courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



Horticulture at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition

Marlea Graham

In “Horticulture at the PPIE,” G.A. Dennison noted “It was found necessary at this exposition to devote an entire department to its portrayal—a recognition which has never before been accorded to horticulture at an international exposition. The comprehensive scope of this exhibit, the plan underlying it all, and the artistic presentation of the ‘best of the best’ from the horticulture of the many nations participating will make it historic as well as vastly entertaining and instructive to all who join the exposition’s throng.”¹ As the Exposition’s Chief of Horticulture, Dennison was hardly impartial, but it does not follow that he was exaggerating.

The general plan of the horticulture exhibit had three divisions: outdoor, conservatory and economic display. For Dennison the garden displays around the various state and foreign pavilions were part and parcel of the outdoor horticultural exhibits, not simply landscaping, because each entity would employ plants indigenous to their own lands. England and Germany dropped out of the Exposition when war was declared. This left France and Japan occupying the two largest properties in the foreign section, comprising nearly 4 acres each in adjacent lots.

The French Pavilion was a replica of the Parisian Palace of the Legion of Honor and required formal gardens to match its architecture. France awarded the commission to Achille Duchêne, a garden designer well-known for “his work in that country’s grand manner.”² Duchêne was already here in 1912, working on his design for “Carolands,” the 554-acre Hillsborough estate of Frances Carolan and his wife, railroad heiress Harriet Pullman Carolan. The Japanese-style garden encircling that Pavilion was designed by Hannosuke Izawa, “the greatest of Japan’s landscape architects,”³ already known for his design work in England. Izawa and a contemporary, Keijiro Ozawa, landscaped two gardens for the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition in London. As in London, everything used in the construction of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) garden was shipped from Japan, including rocks (some weighing several tons), gravel, turf, and several thousand plants.⁴

The Netherlands display was smaller, but famous landscape architect Dirk Tersteeg (1876-1942) provided a design that

used 60,000 Dutch bulbs, azaleas, rhododendrons, clipped conifers, and more—10 carloads in all. Holland also donated 50,000 Dutch bulbs to the Exposition for landscaping those grounds. Only 25 of our (then) 48 states participated in the Exposition. Among the most notable for their landscaping was the Massachusetts garden made by California nurseryman Carl Purdy and Stephen Child (1866-1935), a Boston landscape architect who had established a practice on both coasts (Boston and Santa Barbara), then resettled in San Francisco to focus on city planning projects. The Eastern Garden was a combined effort by several states—Rhode Island, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—but no landscape architect was named in connection with it.⁵

Purdy was best known for his work with California native bulbs, but he also had some landscaping experience. He was made responsible for the California Building’s gardens. Chief of Landscape Gardening John McLaren first envisioned this landscape as the recreation of a “California canyon” that would use California natives as far as possible, including madrones, California lilac (*Ceanothus*), and manzanitas (later dropped from the plan). Existing stands of mature eucalyptus were left in place. On natives, McLaren wrote:

Free use was made of the Monterey cypress, *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoia gigantea*, *Thuja gigantea*, *Libocedrus*, etc., in addition to which a small cactus garden was created, while native California bulbs and flowering plants were used for a ground covering ... For formal specimens throughout the corridors and formal garden work [non-native] *Acacia latifolia* [*A. longifolia*] and *Acacia lophantha* [*Albizia lophantha*] were utilized [as boxed standards], the plants being from three to twelve feet in diameter....⁶

The Horticulture Gardens, which Purdy also managed, were originally to comprise 25 to 50 acres but were cut back to 9. In this area, nursery stock from American and foreign companies competed. Rose breeders from five foreign countries and four American firms, including Howard & Smith of Los Angeles, vied for the \$1,000 prize offered for the best new, unnamed rose. Ireland’s Hugh Dickson received the award for a yellow Hybrid Tea named

‘Lillian Moore’ after the Exposition President’s wife.⁷

The Palace of Horticulture had the largest glass dome of any building in the world, under which the usual tropical garden plants, fruit-bearing shrubs, vines, and trees could be found. In addition, Henry A. Dreer, Inc. of Philadelphia created an aquatic display, and the MacRorie-McLaren Company of San Francisco contributed a display of some 400 varieties of orchids, which supplemented the 500 varieties on display in the Philippine Pavilion.

The Economic Department contained exhibits of horticultural tools, methods, and appliances; objects for ornamenting gardens (benches, fountains); natural and artificial methods of combating insect pests, fungus diseases, and parasitic growths affecting ornamental trees and plants; glass houses and their accessories; plant aquariums and ferneries; and a display of landscape gardening that included plans, drawings, models, books and pictures, many related to the Exposition’s landscaping. “Luther Burbank, the wizard of horticulture, and Carl Purdy ... will have headquarters at this palace during the entire Exposition, ready to answer and help those who apply to them.”⁸

To increase attendance at the Exposition, the PPIE’s Department of Congresses solicited groups to hold conventions at the fair, including a number of horticultural associations. It was a given that California societies would serve as event hosts and hold their own conventions here, but they were also expected to encourage other societies to visit. Special events were planned for nearly every month. The National Park Service, the new organization dedicated to preserving such natural monuments as Yosemite Valley, arrived in March. Three flower shows were held (in March, May, and October). In June the American Sweet Pea Society and the American Seed Trade Association came to town, and local grower C.C. Morse & Co. produced the largest single exhibit of sweet peas ever seen in America, with 135 varieties showing the evolution of the flower’s breeding.

August brought the largest influx: the Association of Agricultural Colleges & Experiment Stations, California Association of Nurserymen, Pacific Coast Association of Nurserymen, American

McLaren's Wizardry at the PPIE

Rose Society, Society of American Florists & Ornamental Horticulturists, American Association of Park Superintendents, and the Society for Horticultural Science. The September Dahlia Show proved so popular that visitors had to be shepherded out of the building so it could close for the night. The October flower show featured a special display by the Chrysanthemum Society of America. October 21 was "Horticulture Day." Exposition attendance exceeded 92,000, doubling the average. A first for expositions was November's Winter Shrub and Berry Show, "thought to be the most interesting and beautiful of the whole series of special horticultural events."⁹

In conclusion, one may safely say that Dennison was not exaggerating and that the Horticulture Department succeeded in providing displays that appealed to tourists, students, businessmen, and investors alike.¹⁰

Endnotes

1. G.A. Dennison. "Horticulture at the PPIE," *Gardeners' Chronicle of America* 19, no. 3 (March 1915): 137-139.
2. Wikipedia.org: "Achille Duchêne;" Archive.org: "Catalogue Officiel de la Section Française."
3. Dennison. "Horticulture at the PPIE."
4. Architokyo.wordpress.com: Sagarwala, Shabbar. "Japan-British Exhibition of 1910."
5. Web.mit.edu: "Stephen Child (1866-1935)."
6. John McLaren. "Garden to Exhibit California Flora." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 1913: 11; "Landscape Gardening at the Exposition." *The Architect* 10, no. 1 (July 1915): 11-14.
7. Beverly R. Dobson and Peter Schneider. *Combined Rose List 2015* (Mantua, OH: Peter Schneider, 2015); Tommy Cairns, ed. *Modern Roses XI* (San Diego and London: Academia Press, 2000).
8. Juliet James, *Palaces and Courts of the Exposition* (S.F.: California Book Company, 1915).
9. Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 5 vols. (New York.: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921).
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John McLaren (1846-1943) worked 56 of his 97 years for the San Francisco Parks Department—first as Assistant Superintendent (1887-1889) and then as Superintendent (1890-1943). He took part in three California International Expositions. At the PPIE, New Jersey nurseryman Charles H. Totty became so annoyed at the constant references to McLaren as a horticultural wizard (the same phrase used to describe Luther Burbank) that he grumped, "The wizard that accomplished this transformation [from salt marsh to 'Garden of Eden'] was money, and then more money, coupled with wonderful climatic conditions, which render possible many things, horticulturally, that could not be attempted in another state." Never one to brag about his own achievements, John McLaren unfailingly credited California's mild climate for the horticultural wonders he accomplished.

For "San Mateo Day" at the Fair (February 25, 1915), McLaren devised a special display of masses of violets:

Every visitor that day was given a small bunch as a memento... It was seen as a piece of horticultural wizardry, but it was also a magnificent beau geste made to the memory of Mrs. Bowie ... It was also, not incidentally, a tribute to the San Mateo nurserymen who had long made a specialty of growing and selling violets to the San Francisco flower market. (Aikman)

"If [McLaren] could be said to have a favorite flower, it was the rhododendron," wrote J. Lawrence Toole in the *San Francisco Call Bulletin* in 1943:

He planted 7,000 of them in the Court of the Universe alone. As the closing of the Exposition approached, McLaren wanted the rhododendrons badly for the park. He had them lifted bodily and carted away to the park, giving the Exposition in exchange a host of blooming hydrangeas. That, the Exposition people were told, was a fair bargain, and it wasn't 'til a long time after that they awoke to the fact that canny John McLaren had the best of the bargain... he'd laugh like a boy if you reminded him... and change the subject.

While we may delight in the idea that McLaren was putting one over on the officials, it was his job to have flowers

constantly blooming at all times during the event. McLaren himself noted that rhododendrons of assorted species could only provide bloom from February through July. At this point they would have to be replaced with other blooming plants, and this work of replacement was routinely done at night when there were no visitors.

Who was really responsible for what turned out to be the most notable landscape feature of the exposition? The Floral Wall was hailed by one writer as the only new idea in landscape gardening since Roman times. San Francisco architect W.B. Faville took credit for it. Bliss & Faville were assigned the task of creating a unified appearance for the outer walls of the Exposition with travertine texture and red tile, but architect Bernard Maybeck wanted a green moss effect on the section backing his Palace of Fine Arts. John McLaren said the wall was his idea, and his son, Donald, was also sometimes cited as the originator. John D. Barry, author of the 1915 book *City of Domes*, seems to have arrived at the best approximation of the matter—that it was a joint effort. Faville may have first *stated* the idea of making a wall of growing plants, but according to architect Hart Wood (1880-1952), then employed as chief draftsman for Bliss & Faville, *he* was the one who actually came up with the idea and worked closely with John McLaren to design the scaffolding that held the boxes of ice plant. The McLarens claimed the idea as theirs because it was they who spent one-and-a-half years experimenting at the exposition nursery grounds with various types of plants and vines until they came up with something that performed as needed, then collected and propagated the thousands of plants it took to fill the boxes.

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CGLHS Conferences and Me

Thea Gurns

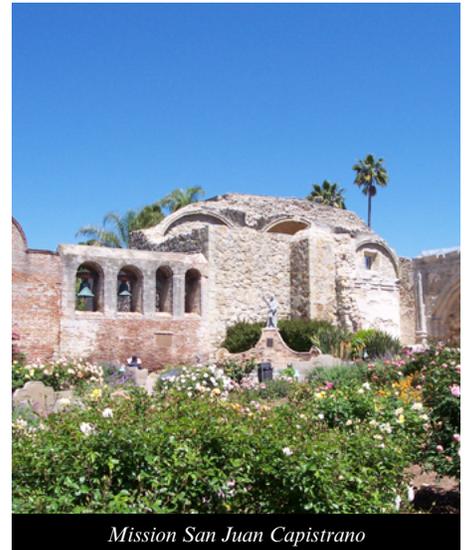
Until 1995, I was a person happy in my spot; indeed, a person who believed her spot was just the best, no question. I viewed San Diego the way that famous *New Yorker* cover viewed the world—mapped in detail for several blocks, then perspective narrowed and shortened until the illustration took a quick dive off an edge.

The far southwestern corner of the Golden State held everything for me—coast, flat lands, “back country,” mountains, desert. Beach cliffs, tide pools, coastal sage, streams, lakes. I thought San Diego lacked for little.

When Bill Grant founded the California Garden and Landscape History Society, I went along for the ride. Soon I was hearing names unknown to me—McLarens, father and son; Farrand; Yoch. Who were these people? What had they done? Gardens were mentioned—Bancroft, Saratoga, Val Verde. Where were they? What did they contain?

I began learning from the first meeting I attended, in November 1996, Botanic Heritage Gems of San Diego. Lucy Warren arranged a visit to archived wonders tucked in the basement of the San Diego History Center. Then we gathered in one of Balboa Park’s “secret” meeting places not often open to the public. When we went around the room to name interests, the answers intimidated: botanist, landscape designer, garden researcher, horticultural librarian, historian. “I want to look at pretty places,” I said.

Over the following fifteen years traveling the state to CGLHS conferences. I have looked a plenty at pretty places. Come travel along.



Mission San Juan Capistrano

1999 ARTISTIC LEGACIES

Unlocking the Treasures Behind the Garden Gates

All about the ranchos, Los Alamitos and Los Cerritos, still here in fiercely urban/suburban Long Beach. David Streatfield gave a talk in a newly restored barn where some of us were seated on prickly hay bales. Once home, I immediately went to his book, *California Gardens: Creating a New Eden*, and learned more.

2000 GARDEN HISTORY OF THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

I remember walking through whitewashed adobes, their thick walls holding silence. From the preservationist herself, I scored a Frances Grate geranium. It still flourishes in our garden.

2001 GARDEN HISTORY OF SONOMA COUNTY

Ah, this was the time the historian Tom Brown threw back his head and proclaimed, “There were no mission gardens.” Since then, I never have looked at those misleading things, mission courtyards, in the same way. Here we enjoyed a great dinner of locally sourced sausages and vegetables plucked fresh from a plot up the street and drank the esteemed local wines.

2002 CULTIVATING CAPISTRANO Historic Valley Gardens and Landscapes

Those assembled enjoyed the happiness of wandering adobe-lined Rios Street at dusk, a magic hour that called forth days now vanished. The mood continued through dinner in Carol MacElwee’s original adobe—thank you, Virginia Gardner!—as we listened to songs of early Californios. Gary Lyon treated us to an impromptu tour of the historic

O’Neill ranch, showing us a coastal sage vista that stretched forever and an extraordinary cactus garden he’d planted to surround the house.

2003 EARTHLY PARADISE Garden History of the San Francisco Peninsula

At the Cantor Center for the Arts we admired Betsy Fryberger’s exhibition on the evolution of garden art that was every bit as fascinating as she had promised. On this, my first visit to Stanford, you could see the way the school grew out of the family estate. Rudolph Ulrich’s Victorian Arizona Garden was a highlight. Former Filoli Director Lucy Tolmach toured us through the Gentleman’s Fruit Orchard there, and we also visited that Craftsman triumph Green Gables. The view of the Santa Cruz hills bewitched.

2004 THE EMPIRE THAT CITRUS BUILT

Landscape History of Old San Bernardino County. We wandered over the Mission Inn’s crenellations and enjoyed taste-testing at the UC Citrus Research Station, guided by soon-to-retire Tootie. My friend Beki was so taken by citrus she discovered here that she has now propagated 500 to 600 lime varieties and is well on her way to a commercial 1,000. At Fairmont Park we learned dilapidation teaches, too.

2005 BEYOND VINEYARDS Landscapes of the Napa Valley

Sandra Price sat us down in the St. Helena School auditorium and speakers related how before the grapes, a variety of crops were farmed in the valley. We toured six private gardens set among ubiquitous vineyards. A late afternoon wine reception at historic

Spottswoode estate deepened the spell of this famed part of the state. As I’m claustrophobic, I held back as you all descended into Schramsberg wine caves, but I still learned enough to prefer Schramsberg Brut Rose with buttered popcorn.

2006 CALIFORNIA’S SARATOGA Springs, Orchards and Gardens

Tucked away in hill country, Saratoga revealed itself as a fine retreat for those seeking restoration in the spring waters of a resort town. In the picturesque historic village we met in Old Fireman’s Social Hall, then toured estate gardens, including the impressive Villa Montalvo, and Japanese-style gardens. At Hakone Garden’s moon-viewing pavilion, we participated in the ritual of Japanese tea—an exceptional treat.

2007 CALIFORNIA JAPANESE-STYLE GARDENS Tradition and Practice

Because of this conference, I now drive modest postwar suburban streets hoping to spot remnants of Japanese-style pruning. The lectures were intense forays into American manifestations of Japanese garden styles: estate, teahouse, bungalow, and friendship. We learned about the gardeners who created and maintained them. My friend Nancy Carol Carter used her lunchtime wisely: She darted into an old hardware store and came out with a Japanese grass sickle she uses to slice through thick succulent leaves. As we ate dinner on the garden terrace of the New Otani Hotel, we listened as mystery writer Naomi Hinahara read from her latest novel.

2008 SPIRIT OF LANDSCAPE California’s Lower Owens River Valley

The conference celebrated the beauty and

diversity of California's Eastern Sierra landscape, and few of us there will forget this dramatic mountain, desert, and river valley region, and especially the gardens created by Japanese Americans interned at Manzanar during World War II. Each time we turn on a spigot in these drought-conscious times we'll remember the changes wrought on the land by the diversion of water from the Owens River into Los Angeles aqueducts.

2010 SANTA CRUZ Land of 1001 Wonders

For me, this conference was dominated by our honoree and founder Bill Grant who orchestrated activities in boom-voice fashion. UC Santa Cruz is renowned for its native plant collection. From those around at the creation, we heard how its wonders came to be and over the years evolved. The UC Santa Cruz Arboretum has a plant store, where I picked up the 'William Grant' rose, which is named for Bill.

2010 KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

Beatrix Farrand's Southern California Gardens

Garden historian Judith Tankard discussed Farrand with an emphasis on her little-known work in SoCal, including the director's house at the Huntington (where her husband was library director), and at the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden. Then our own Ann Scheid showed us around the Farrand-designed portions of Caltech and Occidental College. The lagniappe for me was a stop at Hale Solar Observatory, a Spanish Colonial Revival gem of reinforced concrete with chimney, mission tiles, rough plastered walls, and deeply set windows. Given National Historic Register status, it is now owned and maintained by the architect couple who saved and beautifully restored it.

2011 RANCHOS TO CASTLES A Tour of San Luis Obispo County

We traveled by bus down the coast past beach towns and up through a valley of farms and vineyards. Dining in the dramatic setting of a hilltop vineyard, we were entertained by historian Victoria Kastner's illustrated talk about Hearst Ranch. For me the defining moment was realizing at the Dana Adobe that to preserve the original viewscape is as important as saving the house and garden and that an historic vista can be equally worthy of national registration and preservation.

2012 PLANTS, PASSION, AND PROPAGATION

A Horticultural Tour of Sonoma County

For me, the high point came on a sweltering day as we sat in the Quarry Hills greenhouse enthralled by tales told by a plant

hunter who travels to discover seeds and brings them back to the lab for propagation. Again, our backseat filled with plants, this time from the impressive native plant nursery, California Floral.

2013 A FRESNO FROLIC

Third-generation inhabitant Bob Boro's passion shone as he showed us around the Fig Garden area and entertained us in his own Tower District home. I especially remember strolling in Kearney Park under a tunnel of century-old olive trees, imagining how it would feel to ride through the allée in a horse-drawn carriage. The Clark Center of Japanese Art and Culture in Hanford, now closed forever, impressed with its Torii gates, stroll garden, and fabled art collection.

2013 BECOMING PUBLIC Design, History, Plants and Preservation in East Bay Gardens

The draw for me was the Ruth Bancroft Garden. What an avid gardener and record-keeper! What she created was exceptional in her time, and with its many water-conserving plants is especially relevant today. At 105 years of age and from her wheelchair, Bancroft was still planting up pots to be sold to help maintain the property. Richard Turner showed us around as he recounted the story of his discovering the garden and how the non-profit Garden Conservancy sprang from a need to preserve this horticultural treasure.

2014 SANTA BARBARA AND THE LANDSCAPE LEGACY OF LOCKWOOD DE FOREST

As we hurried to the opening lecture on our first evening, moist night air carried the scent of coastal sage scrub characteristic of this landscape. With hills hugging close to the sea, Santa Barbara is plain air in real time. All the de Forests knew the magic intimately and showed its gentle beauty and strength on canvas and on the land. Sidney Baumgarten inherited the de Forest "Buffalo" roadster and had it on special display in her driveway. The walk through her house to get to the back garden jolted me. I remember reading 1980s' design magazines showcasing her work, and now I realize how much my décor is stamped with her influence



UC Santa Cruz Arboretum

As I read through this list of conferences and tours-and-talks, memories tumble, ideas emerge. Was it at Sonoma that the Luther Burbank house garden grew or was that Jack London's house I remember? The evening reception in a WPA-built clubhouse: Was that in Monterey or somewhere outside San Luis Obispo? Enlightenment came on journeys to and from sites—vivid orange poppy fields on the way to Lompoc, golden September hills around Walnut Creek, surfers wave-riding Mussel Shoals' white water.

And then there are all those CGLHS folks who took me in hand and taught me—Marlea Graham, Laurie Hannah, Margaret Mori, Susan Chamberlin, Glenda Jones, Judy Horton: thank you! The backseat plants expand our garden in diversity, a match for my expanding knowledge of the state's diversity. When a news item names a city or section of California, that name resonates because I can recall where that place is, what it looks like now, and a little bit of times past.

What does my California now feel like? Enlarged. Enriched. My part of California is still the nest, but now other parts—*your* part—look pretty fine, too. Through these conferences, as a group, we've stitched together patches of my, your, *our* California into one big state garden and landscape quilt.

We still answer David C. Streatfield's call to arms at our first conference. California's gardens and landscapes are worth our passion and celebration. This year in San Diego!

Thea Gurns maintains she is a charter member of CGLHS, as it's not her fault the application was lost in the mail and she missed the 1995 organizational meeting!

She invites readers this year to San Diego, October 2-4, 2015, for a CGLHS conference and fine rumpus. Come see what our southernmost corner of the state looks like now and hear about its evolution. [Sign up today!](#)

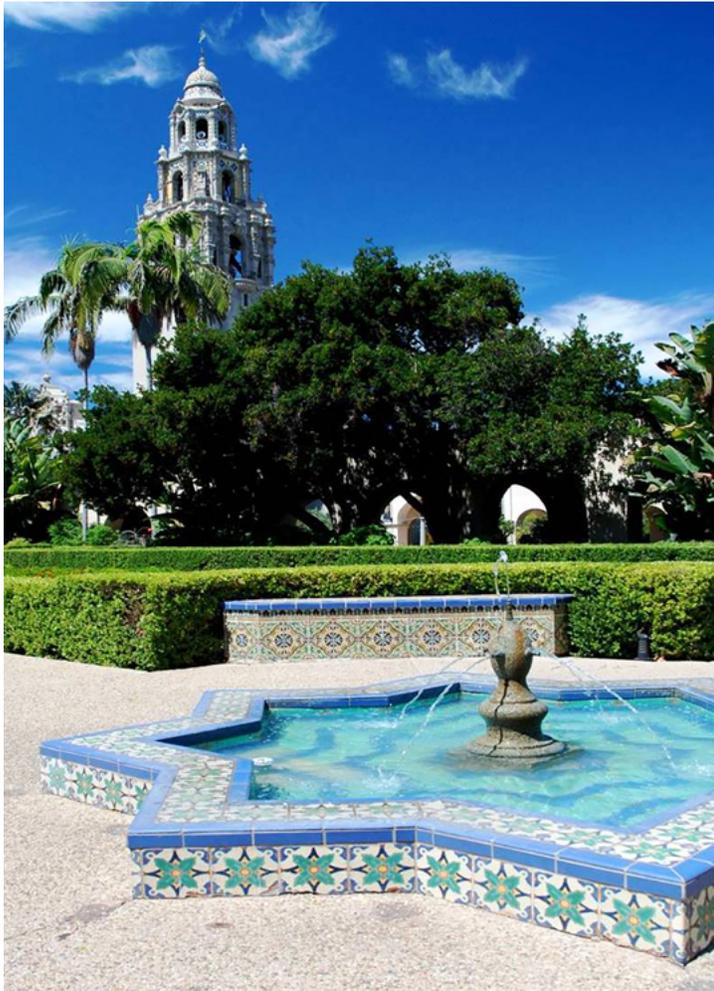


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