

Eden



Eden

JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA GARDEN & LANDSCAPE HISTORY SOCIETY

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Opposite: Young Kellam de Forest, with baby brother Lockie, 1937.

Above: Santa Fe Railway, La Grande Station Los Angeles garden shortly after completion in 1894. Courtesy Kansas Historical Society.



Home Again in Santa Barbara

I NEVER KNEW MY GRANDFATHER, the landscape architect Lockwood de Forest, Jr. He died, too young, at 54, six years before I was born. Yet even in his absence he had a formative effect on me. The house on Todos Santos Lane in Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara that he and my grandmother, Elizabeth Kellam de Forest, had built the year after they were married, was a magical place for a child. Each room had its own specific function, from the spacious kitchen, with its cozy sofa and blazing hearth, to the shiny silver dining room, (only later did I learn my grandfather's trick: he painted them with radiator paint), to the library lined with intriguing sounding books like *The Social History of the Potato*. And each room looked out onto its own garden. Inside and outside flowed together.

BY ANN DE FOREST

And the outside was just as enchanting -- the broad squishy lawn of kukiya grass that turned golden yellow in the summer (perfect for practicing cartwheels), foreground to the framed magnificence of Mission Peak; the sequence of "outdoor rooms," intimate secret gardens to discover and explore; the walkway of lavender, perfumed haven for little orange butterflies. My affection for these places didn't wane as I got older. But for a long time I thought that the emotions these places aroused were tied to my memories of my grandmother. It's only recently I understand how strong my grandfather's presence was. It was his vision -- his exquisite sense of proportion, as my grandmother described it -- that shaped those spaces. It was his love of stirring up scents as he brushed past them in the garden that accounted for the abundance of lavender and rosemary. My grandmother cultivated those gardens and animated those rooms, and in doing so, kept his presence alive for herself, and for all of us.



Lockwood de Forest photographed Wright Ludington at the Villa d'Este on their 1921 trip to Italy.



Above: Rendering for the Residence of Herman Adler, Berkeley, 1932. Courtesy Lockwood de Forest, III Landscape Drawings, 1922-1949, Art Design & Architecture Museum, UC Santa Barbara.

Elizabeth Kellam de Forest, of course, was impressive in her own right. She was a published playwright while she was still an undergraduate at Vassar, then in grad school at Stanford, contributed research to the first Stanford-Binet IQ tests. A native Californian, she could recount in hair-raising detail her memories of the San Francisco earthquake. As a child, I was proud to say that my grandmother was a landscape architect. In the 1960s, it was still unusual for women to have professions, especially such interesting ones. But it was when she was in her eighties that she outdid herself. In that decade, she supervised the design of a now beloved public park in Santa Barbara, the Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden — *and* wrote a book on George Washington’s plans for the gardens and grounds at Mount Vernon..

I write this overflowing with gratitude. Thanks to the Library of American Landscape History (LALH) and their successful fundraising campaign, scholars and designers alike will now have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the life and work of this dynamic couple. The archives of my grandparents, Lockwood and Elizabeth Kellam de Forest, will soon be part of the impressive collection of the Architecture and Design Archives at the University of California Santa Barbara. Thanks too to all the generous donors who contributed to the campaign and made it possible for UCSB to acquire the archives.

Robin Karson, founder and executive director of LALH writes, “In its complexity,

poetry, and originality, the work of Lockwood de Forest never fails to astonish. I have been fascinated by this important landscape architect since 1990, when I first visited Santa Barbara and encountered Val Verde, his major work in the region. This remarkable estate later became the subject of a chapter in my own book *A Genius for Place*, and, since then, my appreciation for de Forest’s significance has only grown. It has been a privilege for LALH to lead the campaign to acquire the family archive so that it may be made accessible to every student, scholar, historian, and preservationist. Thanks are due to all who contributed so generously.”

My family’s gratitude extends to the California Garden & Landscape History Society as well. Finding a permanent home for the Lockwood de Forest archive marks the happy ending of a process that began three years ago when CGLHS held their annual conference in Santa Barbara, with a focus on Lockwood de Forest. The Summer 2014 issue of *Eden* featured several articles by Susan Chamberlin on Lockwood and Elizabeth’s designs and legacies, and my father, Kellam de Forest’s, reminiscences about his parents.

After foraging with my father for photographs to illustrate her articles, Susan Chamberlin wrote my sister and me in alarm about the sub-optimal storage condition of the historically significant materials. My family’s storage unit was at once an archivists’ dream and nightmare. On the one hand, its bureau



The “Buffalo” Lockwood de Forest, Jr’s Snazzy, Jazzy Roadster Truck

By Steven Keylon

In 1930 Lockwood de Forest needed a utility vehicle for use with his busy landscape practice. Not content with the dull, utilitarian vehicles offered at the time, de Forest decided to design a more dashing car himself. He ordered a new Model A Ford chassis, which was delivered with the standard motor, grill, fenders and hood. Working with the Hazard family (of Hazard’s Cyclery), de Forest created a custom body and rear deck, “cobbled” together from parts and pieces of older cars. He equipped it with stylish Woodlite headlights and parking lights, which were in vogue at the time, but usually for cars such as Duesenbergs, DuPonts and Auburns. It also had an altimeter on the dashboard. Never equipped with a top of any kind, Lockwood would simply wear a poncho on the occasional rainy day.

Instead of a gauge to measure fuel level, the gas tank, from an old Packard, was equipped with a gas pressure gauge. When the pressure gauge began to flutter, de Forest would know to pull over, go to the back of the car and flip a switch. This

engaged an auxiliary fuel tank, allowing de Forest to make it to the next gas station.

De Forest loved the car, and this jazzy roadster pickup remained his primary vehicle until the time of his death in 1949. Throughout his ownership, he continually tinkered with the car as new technology became available. The first in a series of V-8 engines was added around 1934. When hydraulic brakes were added, the wire wheels needed to be changed, so the fenders with distinctive dual side mounts were replaced. The chic (but impractical) Woodlite headlights were swapped out with the introduction of sealed beam headlights. The windshield changed after the old one was damaged. Originally two-toned, with darker fenders and frame, after World War II de Forest got some surplus navy paint and painted the car the single-tone it is today.

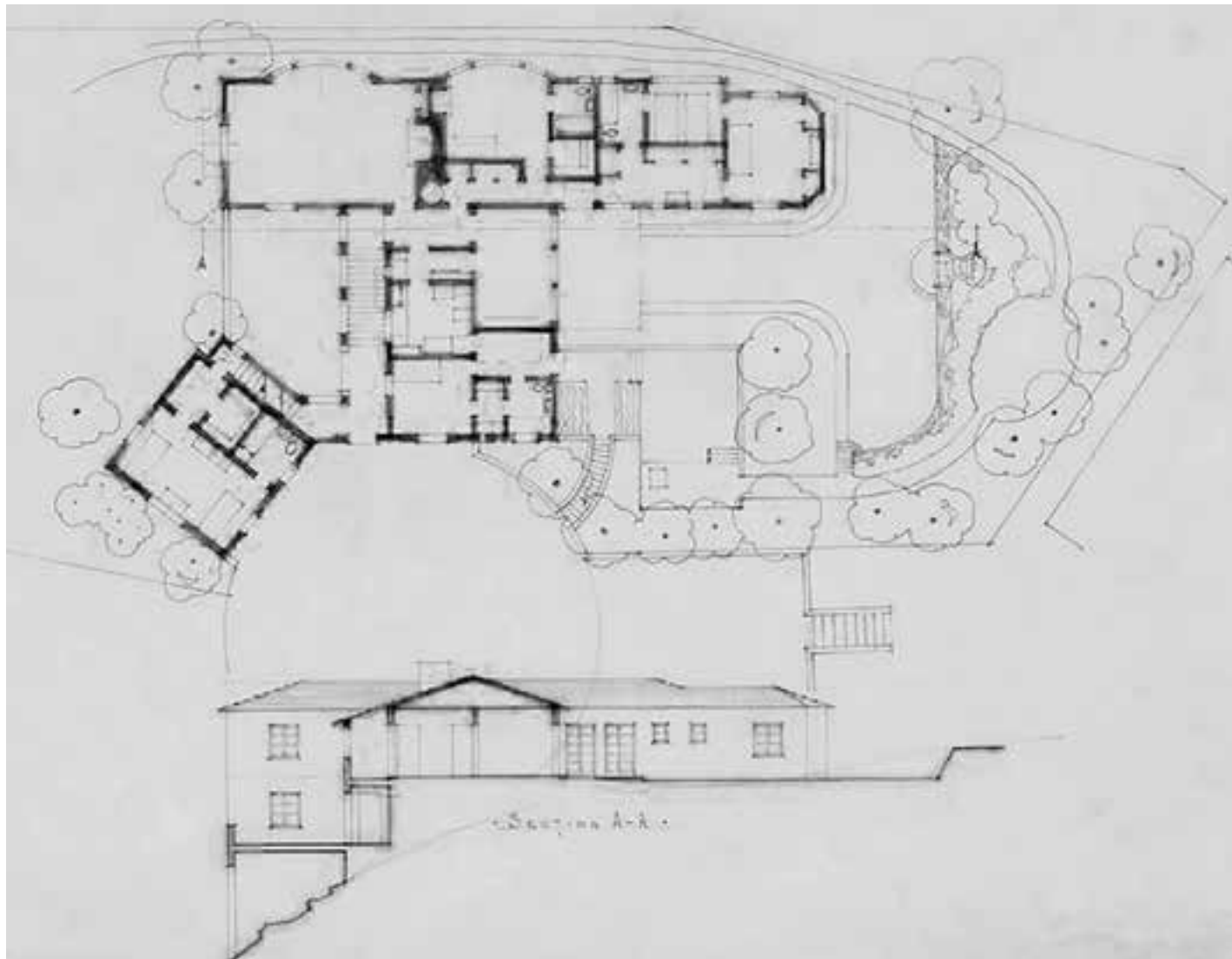
So how did the car come to be known as the “Buffalo,” a name de Forest himself never used? Lockwood de Forest, Sr. had a collection of exotic animal pelts, some of which were used as floor coverings at his stately



home at 1815 Laguna Street. When the original leather seats of the car needed replacing, Lockwood de Forest, Jr. took one of the old Buffalo hides and had the seats upholstered in the exotic fur. The neighborhood children then took to calling the car the “Buffalo,” and the name has stuck.

Many thanks to Kellam de Forest for his help in research.

Top left: In 1930 the annual de Forest Christmas card (design by Lockwood, text by Elizabeth) celebrated their brand-new roadster truck. **Above:** The Buffalo makes perfect launching pad for young Kellam, with baby brother Lockie, 1937.



Above and right: Rendering and site plan for the Residence of Herman Adler, Berkeley, 1932. Courtesy Lockwood de Forest, III Landscape Drawings, 1922-1949, Art Design & Architecture Museum, UC Santa Barbara.



drawers, bookshelves, file cabinets, battered trunks, and cardboard boxes held three generations worth of family stuff, an unsorted blend of treasure and trash (not to mention ephemera like account books, old bills, or shopping lists that, by virtue of their age, had turned to treasure, at least in a historian's eyes). On the other hand, the garage-style space on the Goleta coast was easily infiltrated by damp and dust. Mildew, termites, and other vermin do not discriminate between trash and treasure.

At the October 2014 conference a plan was hatched to save these deteriorating materials. Enter David Streatfield, the pre-eminent authority on Lockwood de Forest, with a key piece of information. Waverly Lowell, the long-time librarian at UC Berkeley, was retiring and had suggested to David that Berkeley's collection of Lockwood de Forest's architectural plans really belonged in Southern California. UCSB, she said, with its excellent Architecture and Design Collection was the logical repository.

At the time of my grandfather's death in 1949, there were no archives at UCSB. So my grandmother donated the plans for more than 1500 projects to UC Berkeley, where they were preserved for historians and designers to consult in the Environmental Research Library for more than 60 years.

Since then, the Architecture and Design Collection (ADC) at the University of California Santa Barbara, established in 1963, has become one of the largest and finest architectural and design archives in North America. The collection contains more than 1,000,000 drawings, as well as papers, photographs, models, decorative objects, and furniture, representing such luminaries of Southern California design as Irving Gill, Cliff May, Rudolph M. Schindler, Lulah Maria Riggs, George Washington Smith and Kem Weber. These archives, spanning the late 19th century to the present day, serve as an invaluable resource for historians as well as working architects, landscape architects and designers.

Lockwood de Forest Jr. was one local luminary missing from the Collection. When Curator Jocelyn Gibbs agreed to and arranged for the transfer of the project drawings to Santa Barbara, with plans to digitize them and make them accessible to the entire University of California system, the A&D Collection seemed like the ideal place for the family material as well.

According to Gibbs, "the Lockwood de Forest landscape drawings returned to UC Santa Barbara from UC Berkeley, after more than 60 years. What makes this gathering of original drawings and papers especially rich is the possibility of tracing landscape designs through the AD&A Museum's collection of the archives of Southern California architects.

When Curator Jocelyn Gibbs agreed to and arranged for the transfer of the project drawings to Santa Barbara, the A&D Collection seemed like the ideal place for the family material as well.

Lockwood de Forest designed landscapes for original and subsequent owners of houses by George Washington Smith, Lulah Maria Riggs, Carleton Winslow, Soule and Murphy, Roland Coate, Sr., Reginald Johnson and others, all represented in the museum's collection.

The historical connections continue in the work of contemporary designers. Architect Barton Myers designed one of his signature steel houses on the site of a Lockwood de Forest landscape in Santa Barbara, and we can trace de Forest's design in his landscape drawings and Myers' respectful response in his site plans in the Myers papers. After visiting the Richard Neutra archive at UCLA a scholar will benefit from a visit to UCSB to see Lockwood de Forest's unrealized landscape design for the famous Tremaine house in Santa Barbara. The synergy among all the collections is thrilling.

Scholars and students, homeowners and designers, now in the future, owe thanks to the de Forest family and the Library of American Landscape History for their attention and generosity."

So in April 2015, Kellam and I, with Susan Chamberlin's expert help, donned gloves and masks and began to fill archival boxes. I realized that a shift of consciousness had happened. Viewed as family stuff, those stuffed boxes, drawers, and trunks seemed overwhelming. Whatever was in there -- the correspondence between my grandparents when they were courting and then preparing

for their wedding, boxes of slides of camping trips to the High Sierra and the Southwest, sketchbooks, even old ledgers from the landscape firm and client files -- held sentimental interest, but I hadn't considered these materials worth anything to anyone else. Susan, then David Streatfield, and later Robin Karson, made us understand that these personal papers, including letters, sketches, paintings, and photographs, provided invaluable records and insights. These documents, photographs, and drawings illuminate the history of American landscape design, as well as the formation of 20th century Santa Barbara, after it was devastated by a 1925 earthquake. Lockwood and Elizabeth de Forest were part of a group of young adults whose public spirit and aesthetic sensibility helped give Santa Barbara its distinctive character.

Among the treasures now preserved at UCSB are:

- A hand-lettered scrapbook, illustrated with photographs de Forest took to document a 1921 trip through Italy
- An album of Carolyn and Edwin Gledhill's photographs of Val Verde showcasing the estate's antiquities in situ
- Extensive correspondence between Lockwood and Elizabeth Kellam deForest (1898–1984) about plans for their magazine, *The Santa Barbara Gardener*, and the house and garden they built in Mission Canyon
- A treatise by de Forest on the use of water in gardens accompanied by watercolors of European fountains

I should add that my father, Kellam de Forest, whom many of you know, has followed in his parents' footsteps. In November, he celebrated his 91st birthday. He is still agitating for the cause of preserving cultural landscapes, view sheds, and historic buildings, a cause he fervently embraced since he retired from his Hollywood research business a quarter century ago. The Library of American Landscape History, the Cultural Landscape Foundation, the Santa Barbara Independent, and other local and national groups have honored him time and again as a "preservation hero." The campaign for the Lockwood de Forest, Jr. Archives not only preserves my grandparents' legacy. It also helps sustain Kellam's ongoing advocacy work.

For me, the work involved in gathering these archives has been profoundly moving. The more I learn about my grandfather, the sadder I am that I never had a chance to know him. At the same time, through his written words, his sketches, his photographs, he has come more fully to life. I too hope to make good use of the UCSB archives one day so I can get to know him even better. ■



Wright Ludington and friends at Montefiascone,
photograph by Lockwood de Forest, 1921.

The California Railway Gardener

JOHANNES REIMERS AND
THE DEPOT LANDSCAPES
OF THE SANTA FE
RAILROAD.

BY DAVID LAWS

Santa Fe Railway depot and garden, Reedley California c. 1897.
Courtesy Kansas Historical Society.

SANTA FE DEPOT- REEDLEY, CAL.

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- 735 -

The day will come when one of the special features of travel in California will be the horticultural display at thousands of small railroad gardens scattered along every valley and mountain from San Diego to Siskiyou,”¹ predicted Charles H. Shinn, inspector of the University of California’s Agricultural Experiment Stations and author of the *Pacific Rural Handbook*, the first manual of advice for the state’s gardeners.

Shinn based his optimism on the work of Johannes Reimers, a landscape gardener for the San Francisco and San Joaquin Railway (SF&SJV) unit of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. In a talk given in May 1901 at the Pacific States Floral Congress in San Francisco, Reimers said:

“What better way is there of advertising our state than by laying out gardens along our far reaching, iron-clad highway – gardens of semi-tropical beauty, such as the greater number of men dare only dream of? It is probably with this in mind that the Santa Fe Railway Company has planted a garden at every station depot and every section house along its lines in this state.”²

RAILWAY GARDENS THRIVE ACROSS THE WORLD

Although little evidence remains today of these horticultural oases that brightened Central California depots a century ago, ornamental gardens were a popular feature supported by railroad companies worldwide. Frances Copley Seavey, horticultural columnist for the *Chicago Record Herald*, contributed a six-page entry, “Railway Gardening,” for Liberty Hyde Bailey’s four-volume *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture*, published in 1902. Seavey wrote “Many a tired traveler is cheered by the bright colors of a neatly-kept railroad station. They are always preferable to dirt, ugliness and a general air of indifference.”

In addition to their aesthetic value, gardens also delivered economic benefits to the railroad companies. Trees planted along rights of way were harvested for ties, poles and posts. Banks and cuttings covered in managed vegetation prevented erosion and slides. The Northern Pacific Railway Company planted belts of trees to act as snow fences across miles of windswept prairie between Minneapolis and Seattle.

These mitigations derived from European railway practices. For example, planting of annual and perennial flower beds and shrubs was widespread throughout the government-owned rail system of Sweden from the early 1860s. In Denmark the national railroad operated nurseries for propagating trees and shrubs for decorative and protective purposes. Beginning in the 1870s, privately-owned English operators encouraged the cultivation of



Merced had the largest garden in Santa Fe’s San Joaquin system. Courtesy Kansas Historical Society.



Above: The Vallejo adobe, as restored by Frederick Reimers, adorns the cover of the California Nursery Company's catalog. Courtesy Janet Barton, California Nursery Historical Park and the Roeding Archives.

ornamental flower beds on station platforms by offering cash prizes for the most attractive displays. Seavey reported on the planting of fruit trees in Holland and shade trees in warm climate countries, including Algeria, Siam, and Uruguay.

J. T. Johnston, president of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CRRNJ), ordered the planting of an ornamental garden along the line between Elizabeth and Bound Brook in 1869. This is one of the earliest official endorsements of the benefits of improving the appearance of railroad premises through horticulture in North America. Stimulated by popular acclaim for flower beds planted by the baggage master at the Newtonville, Massachusetts station in 1881, the management of the Boston & Albany Company established a set of guidelines for the development of similar gardens throughout the system. By the early 1900s, the Canadian Pacific Railway had also integrated garden design and maintenance into company policy.

The Southern Pacific Railroad began to follow the practice in California in 1885 and according to Seavey:

“expended large sums in beautifying choice spots along its route, as at Merced, Fresno, Santa Monica, Pomona, Pasadena and Riverside. The range of climate and soil is wide. At Los Angeles there are palms dating from the Spanish occupation, a collection of semi-tropical shrubs, and display of yuccas, cacti, and other curious vegetation from the Arizona desert. Roses in bloom all winter are the special attraction at several points. Along the ocean, where difficult horticultural problems are met, the use of mesembryanthemums, eucalypti, and other succulents is general.”

With the country mansions of several railroad barons located on the San Francisco Peninsula, it is not surprising that gardens at stations serving their estates enjoyed “a more finished aspect than any others in the state.” Castroville station, on the route to Charles Crocker's Hotel del Monte resort near Monterey, was described as a picturesque wilderness “overflowing at all seasons with fragrance and bloom.”

With financing from sugar mogul Claus Spreckels, the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley Railway was incorporated in 1895 to build a railroad from Stockton to Bakersfield. The Santa Fe Railway acquired the business in 1899 to complete its transcontinental route to San Francisco. The company hired Norwegian immigrant Johannes Reimers to build gardens at the depots of this new venture in competition with the Southern Pacific.

THE RELUCTANT GARDENER

Johannes Reimers was born into a wealthy Norwegian ship-owning family in 1856. After attending a German college of forestry, he landscaped parkland surrounding the family home in Bergen. With his father's business in decline, Reimers left Norway to seek his fortune overseas and, after a couple of years in Hawaii, moved to California. His fiancée Marie traveled from Norway and they married in Oakland in 1883. Settling in the Miacamas Valley (Reimer's spelling, but possibly Napa or Sonoma Valley in view of the Mayacamas Mountains), they struggled to make a living growing fruit while Marie worked “in every way to enable her husband to continue his literary work.”³ To improve their financial situation the family moved to Stockton in the 1890s, and Johannes joined the Santa Fe Railway as a landscape gardener.

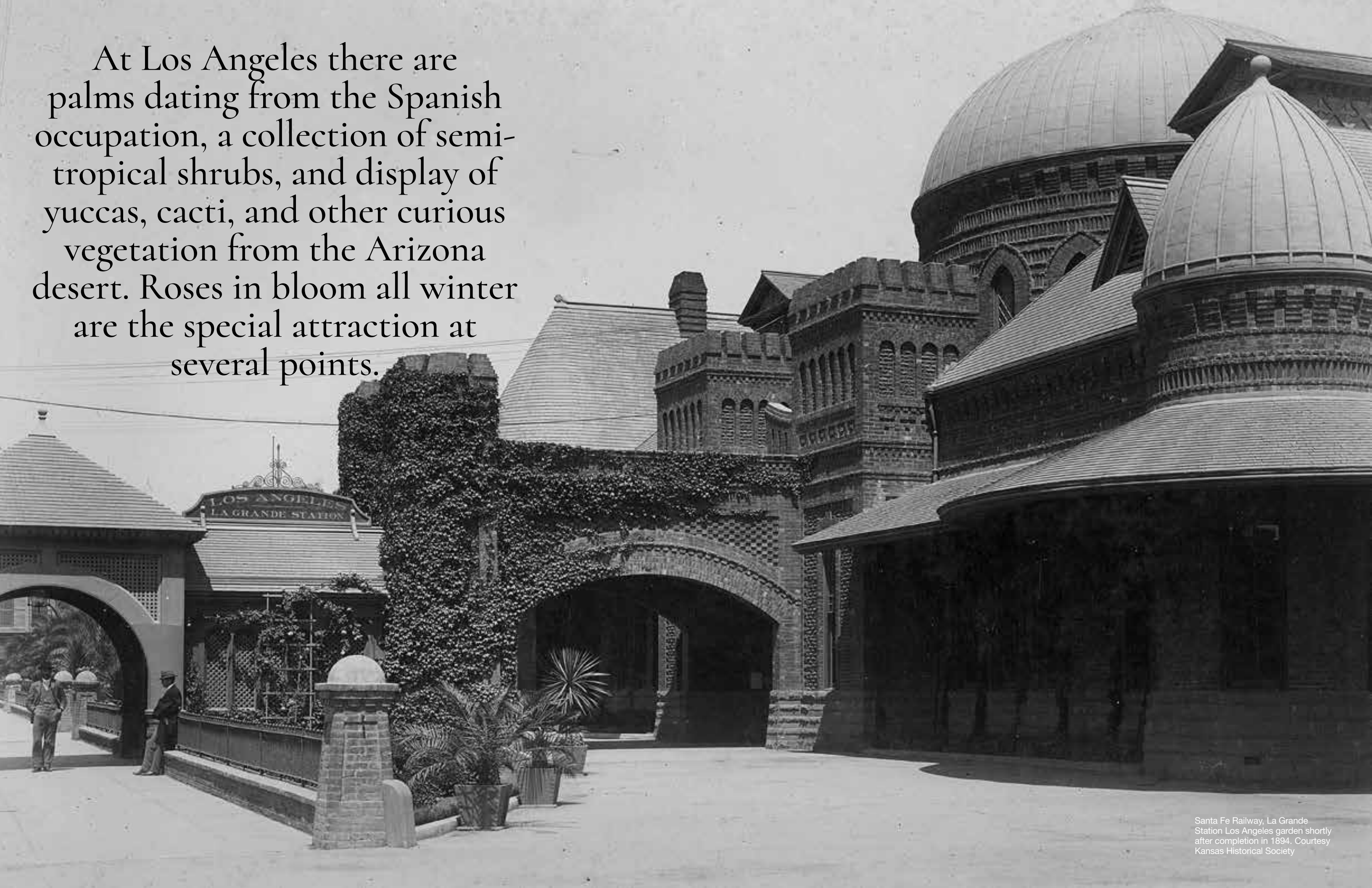
A profile in the *Overland Monthly* of 1898 accompanying the publication of a story by Reimers, “Courting at Grizzly Spring,” notes that “the work in which I am now engaged is absolutely killing my soul life. I cry from the depth of my heart for deliverance.” Looking back on his days as an orchardist he said, “I was poor but free. Now I have no sorrows for my bread but for my art, now I am free no longer.”³

Reimers wrote a semiautobiographical novel, *Unto the Heights of Simplicity*, “while travelling from station to station and on Sundays.”⁴ Published in 1890, the book received positive reviews but the meager royalties could not relieve him of his landscaping duties. In 1902 he met popular author Jack London who commiserated with the challenge of writing as a career by pointing to a stack of his own manuscripts. “Those are just your kind of stories, and nobody wants to buy them.”⁵



Top to bottom: Postcard of Santa Fe Depot, Stockton (1911). Photo: Newman Post Card Co.; The landscape of the La Grande Station in Los Angeles, 1905.

At Los Angeles there are palms dating from the Spanish occupation, a collection of semi-tropical shrubs, and display of yuccas, cacti, and other curious vegetation from the Arizona desert. Roses in bloom all winter are the special attraction at several points.



Santa Fe Railway, La Grande Station Los Angeles garden shortly after completion in 1894. Courtesy Kansas Historical Society



Santa Fe Railway depot and garden, Reedley California c. 1897. Courtesy Kansas Historical Society.

JOHANNES REIMERS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Despite frustration over the demands of his work, Reimers is remembered as a successful landscape architect both during his tenure with the Santa Fe and for later commissions. “Through his advocacy, parks were constructed at each station from Ashcroft in Arizona to Richmond, California.”⁶ He also designed large public parks in Fresno and Visalia and supervised plantings for Jack London’s property in Sonoma County.

In Reimers’ 1901 talk to the Floral Congress at the Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, he described the positive influence of attractive landscaping on passengers, employees and neighbors of the railroad. He recommended design criteria, desirable plants, shrubs and trees, maintenance procedures, and ideas for future development.

A typical garden on the San Joaquin Division route varied in size from 40 x 80 feet to 40 x 160 feet, with the Merced plot being somewhat larger. His preference for the “so-called natural” landscape style was tempered

by the small lot sizes and the desire to create the appearance of an oasis in the heat of a cloudless summer day. To break the monotony of the vast flatness of the valley he brought volcanic rocks from the mountains and created rockeries of creepers, aloes and cacti with sedums and varieties of ice plant.

“I have shunned as far as possible, the English idea of a stiff, closely-cropped lawn, upon which a lonely palm or two has been stuck out, or a shrub or two to shiver in awkward bashfulness at their own conspicuousness. Instead, I have tried to bring color, lots of color, into these little gardens, such as our cloudless summer will develop, at the same time being forced to use such plants as would thrive under the main care of unskilled hands. ... In my selection of trees and plants I have tried, as far as means permitted to imitate the gardens of *bella Italia*, so that as they grow older, they may own their southland charms of form, color, and fragrance, in preference to the cold passionless stiffness of the modern imitation the English garden.”²

Recommended trees included pepper, paulownia, catalpa, mulberry fig, casuarinas, carob, olive and Pride of China (*Melia*

azedarach) for its low spreading form providing shade around buildings. Pritchardia and Washingtonia palms are “as easily grown as onions” and are adapted to alkali soils. He emphasized trees and shrubs from the warmer climates of Australia and Africa in place of varieties common to the north. “A California railway garden ... must own another charm, more passionate, more intense in form and color; it must contain the superabundance, almost voluptuousness, of the southlands.”

In 1903, based on his experience with plants that thrive in hot, dry climates, Reimers was commissioned by the City of Fresno to landscape a new public park on 119 acres

of land donated by Frederick and Marianne Roeding. Here, Reimers had room to work in his favored “naturalistic style” that was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He graded to create varied elevations as well as a series of small ponds and a lake. Curvilinear roads connected group picnic areas named for the shade trees: Cedar Grove, Eucalyptus Grove, and Pine Grove. Many of the trees and shrubs were donated by the Roeding’s son, George C. Roeding Sr., from his nearby Fancher Creek Nursery.⁷ Now studded with large specimen trees, Roeding Park remains an important community space for family gatherings and civic celebrations.

Reimers designed a second space, Hobart Park, for Fresno in 1906, and in 1910 was commissioned to create a 100-acre park in Visalia, 45 miles to the south. Similar to his work in Fresno, Mooney Grove Park followed a naturalistic style with a boating lake and picnic spots shaded by ancient oak trees that the land donor decreed must never be cut unless they were diseased or dying. Although suffering from long-deferred maintenance, Reimers’ legacy survives as one of Tulare County’s most popular public spaces.

Reimers’ early friendship with Jack London extended to landscaping advice. He recommended plants for the grounds of Wake Robin Lodge, London’s home at Glen Ellen, following the 1906 earthquake. London’s wife, Charmian, wrote:

“Jack, with an eye to homebuilding, ordered fruit-trees of all descriptions suitable to the latitude, and seventy-odd varieties of table-grapes. ... Johannes Reimers tendered the benefit of his professional advice about the trees and vines, and ordered for us a hedge of Japanese hawthorne to flourish between orchard and house-space, which in time grew into a glory of orange and red berries alternating with a season of white blossoming.”⁸

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CALIFORNIA NURSERY COMPANY

John Rock, a nurseryman from San Jose, opened the California Nursery Company in Niles in 1884. Reimers knew Rock as early as 1900 when he expressed interest in purchasing several varieties of eucalyptus in lots of one thousand. His relationship with the company continued after George C. Roeding Sr., who had worked with him in Fresno, purchased the nursery in 1917 and expanded it from a mostly wholesale to a retail operation that ultimately became the largest firm of its kind in the West. George C. Roeding Jr., took control of the business after his father’s death in 1928. In the 1930s, he hired Frederick Reimers, architect son of Johannes, to restore the historic Vallejo Adobe on the site for use as a Guest Lodge for events and meetings. Johannes designed the garden around the adobe.⁹ Now owned by the City of Fremont, the site is preserved as the California Nursery Historical Park.

Living in San Leandro after retirement on “a poor railway pension,” Reimers continued to bid on Santa Fe and other landscaping projects. He explained in a letter to Roeding in 1937, his eightieth year, “After having held a steady position with its work and responsibilities, I now go about as if with a bad conscience for not being at work ... I had always hoped that I could be at work to the very last.” That year he purchased plants from Roeding for the Santa Ana depot in southern California and also embarked on a major commission to landscape the grounds of a new factory for the Friden Calculating Machine Company in San Leandro, as well as the country home of its owner Carl Friden in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The archive of the California Nursery Company holds a wealth of correspondence and business documents from this period.

JOHANNES REIMERS, ARTIST

In his later years, Reimers studied at the Institute of Art in San Francisco. Several of his watercolors are in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Reimers was also an active participant in the Ruskin Club of the University of California. He died in San Leandro in 1953.

For Christmas 1929 Reimers presented an illustrated copy of *Alice in Wonderland* to his granddaughter Betty. Inscribed in the front of the book, displayed at the Trotter Galleries in Pacific Grove, is the message, “There must be a wonderland somewhere. I have been looking for it up through many years before I found it. Wonderland is right here, all around us and above us, and I know you will see it, too. All you have to do is keep your eyes wide open.”

Reimers’s wonderland was indeed right there at all those dusty depots in Central California where “vacant spots have been transformed from barren cinders into beauty spots of lawns and flowers; hot platforms and sidewalks have had the spotted shadows of trees thrown over them; the cheerless has been transformed into jubilant symphonies of colors and cool shadows”.¹⁰ ■

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Special thanks to Terry Trotter of Trotter Galleries, Inc., Pacific Grove for introducing me to Johannes Reimers and to Janet Barton of Fremont for her exhaustive research into the history of the California Nursery Company.

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Poinsettia

UNCOMMON HISTORY OF A COMMON PLANT

BY JUDITH TAYLOR



Miss Peggy Pender stands on the running board of a car, her arms filled with poinsettias, pointing to fields of flowers at Paul Ecke's Poinsettia Field on Sunset Boulevard, 1920s. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



When this project began I asked a distinguished horticultural editor if he would like an article on the development of the poinsettia. Up until then he had put up with my peculiarities and indulged me, but here he drew the line. "Poinsettias," he said firmly, "are not plants any longer, they are a commodity." He truly believed what he said, but oh, how unfair.

The beautiful poinsettia, known for its scarlet bracts, comes to us encrusted with myth and legend, as befits a royal plant of the Aztecs.

The Nahua people in Mexico called it Cuetlaxochitl. ("Xochitl" is ancient Nahua for an ornamental flower.) As Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) was at high altitude, the poinsettia did not flourish there, but every winter the rulers imported thousands of the plants from warmer regions. Extracts of the plant were used to dye cloth, and its latex was used for medicinal purposes. The Spanish conquerors and missionaries used the poinsettia for religious ceremonies in the winter.

Once the Spanish friars took over they adopted the brilliant red plant as part of the Christmas ritual. The Spanish-speaking Mexicans named it *flore de nochebuena*, the flower of the Holy Night (Christmas Eve). The

vivid red bracts of poinsettia which emerge in midwinter have signified the festive mood at Christmas and the joy of the season for over 150 years in the United States and Europe. I hope to establish the actual story of its arrival in the United States and Europe and its extraordinary development, and will attempt to clear away all the accumulated misinformation and cobwebs.

The plant originated in southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. In its native habitat this species is a winter-flowering shrub that grows over three meters high and is a common landscape plant. The sap is milky and may produce dermatitis in susceptible individuals. The umbel-like cymes are subtended by many showy bracts, usually red, but breeders have used their imagination to produce many different colors including white, pink, and purple.

Almost all the stories surrounding the introduction of this dramatic flower to the United States one way or another involve the statesman Joel Roberts Poinsett. It has, for example, been generally assumed that Poinsett came across the gorgeous plant in Taxco in southern Mexico, and took it home to Charleston, South Carolina in 1828. From there he is said to have sent cuttings to Colonel Robert Carr, a nurseryman in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, whose wife Ann was the granddaughter of John

Bartram, the self-taught American botanist of the colonial era. Carr entered the plant as "a new *Euphorbia* with bright scarlet bractes or floral leaves, presented to the Bartram Collection by Mr. Poinsett, United States Minister of Mexico" at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's flower show in June 1829, where it was seen and admired by hundreds of people.

Poinsett's biographer J. Fredd Rippy takes on the myth of the plant's discovery and transmission. He points to Charles Stille's *Charleston Yearbook* of 1887. Stille, however, questions whether Poinsett discovered the plant or just introduced it. Rippy himself confesses that he has been unable to find any correspondence that documents Poinsett's purported role. In the end the biographer dryly concludes, "At all events, it is always known now as being named after him."

In fact, there is substance behind the myth. While in Mexico Poinsett carried on an extensive correspondence about horticulture, exchanging seeds and cuttings with friends and colleagues in the United States. He believed that the exchange of plants and seeds helped to promote stronger ties between the United States and Mexico. In recognition of his botanical work and his general attainments (Poinsett, who spoke French, German, Italian and Spanish, wrote a book about an earlier tour of duty in Mexico.), the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia elected him to membership in 1827. This position broadened his correspondence to include members of the society and other Philadelphia savants. (Fry, 1995)

Among the Ambassador's enlarged circle were William Maclure, the president of the Academy of Natural Sciences, and Thomas Say, a descendant of John Bartram. They visited Poinsett in Mexico for three months in January 1828, traveling both to Vera Cruz and Mexico City. Later that year, Maclure visited Poinsett again, and returned to Philadelphia in the fall with many seeds and plants. Say also collected more than 100 types of seeds but was not meticulous about identifying them. Number 65, a "Fine Red flower, perennial" could be poinsettia.

Finally a letter from one of our protagonist's Charleston friends provides the last word for Poinsett's pivotal role behind the arrival of four different collections of Mexican seeds and plants in Philadelphia — not Charleston — between 1828 and 1829. The letter discusses a woman from Charleston: "Mrs. Herbemont has *been very vexed* with you when she learned by the papers that several northern gardeners had received seeds and plants you had sent them from that land of vegetable beauties, Mexico, and that *you had not in one instance* remembered her..." (emphasis in original, Fry 1995).



The Poinsettia in Mexico

The specimen received in Philadelphia was not a wild plant but had been cultivated and modified for many years in its native Mexico. Doña Fanny Calderon de la Barca, wife of the Spanish minister to Mexico, commented in her letters home that her church courtyard was lit by these gorgeous scarlet flowers at Christmastide. For reasons which are not clear, Mexican growers still believe that Poinsett himself devised a hostile mechanism to prevent them from developing or benefiting from the plant's popularity, purely out of spite. Various publications in Mexico state that Poinsett obtained a "patent" in the United States, which led to this embargo.

Numerous scholars' exhaustive search through old patents and treaties has failed to turn up such an instrument. The United States patent laws began in 1795 to protect inventors against their mechanical devices being pirated.

Opposite: Ecke's Poinsettia Field, 1940s. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. Above: Portrait of Joel R. Poinsett, courtesy National Portrait Gallery.



Above: Paul Ecke sold poinsettias from stands along Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, 1920s. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

These laws did not cover plants. The first U.S. law that did protect new cultivars of plants, the Townsend-Purnell Act of 1930, excluded seed-propagated plants, tuber-propagated plants (to exclude potato), and wild plants.

At present, international protection for plants is controlled by treaty (International Union of the Protection of New Varieties, or UPOV, 1961). Seed-propagated plants in the U.S. are protected by the Plant Variety Protection Act of 1970, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Poinsett did negotiate a commercial treaty with Mexico as part of his ministerial duties, and it was ratified by the United States, but the poinsettia was not part of the treaty. Modern 20th and 21st century poinsettia cultivars are protected by patents, but these are relatively recent advances.

Mexican animosity to Poinsett has some basis in fact and this may have contributed to the myth of the U.S. patent. Poinsett was very upright in his attitude to his duties but tended to meddle in Mexico's internal affairs, supporting one party over another. At one point there were even death threats against him. All this contributed to his recall by the American president. The term *poinsettismo* is still in use today in Mexico to express arrogance and high handedness.

The Development of the Poinsettia in the United States

North American nurserymen began to propagate the poinsettia rapidly, and distributed it widely throughout the United States over the last part of the 19th century. The modern phase of poinsettia development took place in the United States by the early 20th century. Poinsettias have led the sales of potted plants year after year, and are now one of the mainstays of the commercial flower market. This phenomenal growth is associated with the Eckes, a German immigrant family that settled in Southern California in 1900.

Albert Ecke and his family stopped over in California in 1900, en route to Fiji where they planned to open a health spa. They saw such an excellent opportunity in California that they settled there instead, remaining through the present day. Albert began farming in the Eagle Rock Valley, near Los Angeles, but then moved to Hollywood. The family planted orchards and also large fields of chrysanthemum, gladiolus, and poinsettia for the cut flower market. By 1909, they had narrowed their floral crops down to poinsettia alone. Ten years later, both

Albert and his eldest son Hans had died, and the business was taken over by the second son, Paul Ecke. It was he who moved it south to Encinitas, where it remains today. Paul Ecke, Sr., found some valuable spontaneous hybrids in his open fields but it was his son, Paul Ecke, Jr., who initiated a scientific breeding program. At one point the business was sold to a Dutch horticulture firm but Paul Ecke III has bought it back and is restarting it.

The history of the poinsettia in the United States in the 20th century has some well-defined landmarks. Major advances came about with the discovery of photoperiodism in plants by Garner and Allard (1920) and the use of black cloth to shorten daylength and to induce flowering. Management of daylength permits synchronization of flowering in order to get plants to flower for the Christmas season.

Radically different cultivars of poinsettia became available over time and changed the direction of its development. Some of this was due to the establishment of a number of breeding programs across the country in the mid 1950s, including Pennsylvania State University; the USDA Research Center at Beltsville, Maryland; the University of Maryland; and the efforts of some private companies in addition to Ecke: Azalealand, in Lincoln, Nebraska; Mikkelsen in Ashtabula, Ohio; Earl J. Small, Pinellas Park, Florida; and the Yoder Brothers in Barberton, Ohio. One USDA geneticist, Dr. Robert N. Stewart, separated out the most desirable characteristics, such as large bracts, stiffer stems, new colors and the ability to last for a longer time and bred for these. The key cultivars were: 1923 'Oak Leaf'; 1963 'Paul Mikkelsen'; 1988 'Eckespoint ® Lilo'; 1992 'Eckespoint ® Freedom'; and 1998 'Eckespoint ® Winter Rose Dark Red.'

At first the Eckes began growing the only two cultivars of poinsettia available before 1920: 'True Red' and 'Early Red'. Their neighbors in Southern California used these plants

For reasons which are not clear, Mexican growers still believe that Poinsett himself devised a hostile mechanism to prevent them from developing or benefiting from the plant's popularity, purely out of spite.

to ornament their gardens. 'Early Red' was more useful for commercial purposes both as a cut flower and as a potted plant because it held its foliage longer. Three new cultivars were released in the 1920s, but just one of them, 'Oak Leaf,' introduced by a Mrs. Enteman in Jersey City, New Jersey, dominated the field for the next 40 years. It was the first cultivar suitable for growing in a pot and also retained its leaves and bracts for a longer time.

The other two, a 1920 sport, 'Hollywood,' with wider, more compact bracts than 'Early Red,' and the 1924 'St. Louis' from Louis

Bourdet in St. Louis, Missouri, did attain some popularity in their day. Paul Ecke devoted himself to selecting and developing better cultivars based on 'Oak Leaf.' His introductions included 'Henriette Ecke,' 1927, and 'Mrs. Paul Ecke,' 1929. The latter, a sport of 'Oak Leaf,' was shorter and had wider bracts than its parent. Poinsettias had now become a commercial reality, and several firms across the United States grew it successfully in greenhouses.

Two recent introductions from the Eckes have furthered the poinsettia's promotion from plant to commodity. Eckespoint ® 'Freedom' exhibited consistent branching and the all-important readiness to be shipped a week or two before Thanksgiving, or in ample time for the holiday marketing season. Another excellent quality was its ability to withstand careless handling by untrained staff at large non-specialty stores. 1998 Eckespoint ® 'Winter Rose Dark Red' was the first cultivar to have "curly" incurved bracts and very dark, incurved foliage. The public likes the traditional red poinsettia, but also finds new colors and styles very exciting.

Breeders have to respond to these needs and accommodate the public's slightly fickle reactions. The Eckes have not stopped at the deep tones of 'Winter Rose Dark Red', but have gone on to purple, darker red still, and pink with white flecks. Despite this long and impressive history of innovation by the Eckes and others, poinsettia is no longer grown in the continental United States on a large scale. Almost all cultivation is now done in Central and South America, with its tropical climate and associated lower costs. The poinsettia has returned to the region where Joel Robert Poinsett was arguably the first to find it. ■

Acknowledgements

Professor Jules Janick, Roberto G. Lopez and Christopher J. Currey of the Department of Horticulture at Purdue University all contributed to this chapter in an earlier presentation.

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Reliving the Leisure Life

**A Recap of the
2017 CGLHS
Annual Conference
in Palm Springs
BY THEA GURNS**

What a swell time we had, three days of immersion into the culture of leisure life! “Landscapes for Leisure,” CGLHS 2017 annual conference weekend, October 27-29, attracted sold-out attendance. We enjoyed a curated selection of sites, two sterling lectures, and mingle occasions that added to our understanding of Palm Springs’ call.

Our adventure began 5 pm Friday at Steven Keylon’s and partner John De La Rosa’s 1950 Modernist home designed by Herbert W. Burns. We received registration packets – and also had opportunity to register which of our friends were in attendance. Over the next hour we followed knowledgeable Renee Brown, Director of Education at the Palm Springs Historical Society, as she led a walking tour of Deepwell Estates. During our ramble through this pristine mid-century neighborhood with elegant Modernist homes, we learned Hollywood denizens who once owned here included Loretta Young, William Holden, Liberace, Jerry Lewis, and Carmen Miranda. If you’ve visited “Cactus Slim” Moorten’s still extant nursery, you’d recognize that collector’s designs and plantings in home landscapes. We watched the desert darken by degrees from afternoon to evening. By the time we made full-circle return, we had an enlarged sense of the ease and attractions of leisured life. A classic cocktail reception in the comfortable living room and back patio with turquoise pool accessory reinforced our new awareness.

As you might imagine, we had more pools to see. Saturday morning found our group touring the Sinatra Estate where the pool is piano-shaped and the home definitely not the singer’s first choice of New Jersey Regency. Designed in 1947 by architect E. Stewart Williams, in collaboration with landscape architect Tommy Tomson, the structure is a prime example of his persuasive architect’s mid-century modern and showed gorgeously in early morning sunshine. Yes, we did see the chipped crack in the bathroom sink where a champagne bottle landed tossed by a fired-up Ava Gardener. Those were the days ... and nights, evidently. Bonus: The house diagonally across the street caught our eye with its huge bright pastel robot figures.

Next on the agenda came the CGLHS Annual Meeting and Lectures. Steven Keylon in his capacity as president welcomed us and thanked those who donated service, time and ideas to CGLHS. He then went on as lecturer to enlighten us on the history of Coachella Valley’s designed and built environment. One of the first photos he showed captured the area’s

signature house style reflecting the qualities that made the area famous. Native Cahuilla Indians constructed their dwellings from indigenous materials, willow branches woven together to build living spaces laying light on the land, indoor rooms opening to outdoor spaces, style low and simple. Valley pioneers superseded those dwellings with boxy adobe designs evolving into stucco and wood structures which transitioned to sophisticated mid-century modern: still simple, indoor open to outdoor, and built with sensitivity to local materials. Historic preservation is now an important area value. »

Clockwise from opposite: Francis Dean’s landscape for the E. Stewart Williams-designed Koerner Residence, Palm Springs, 1955; Koerner Residence homeowner Allan Lamb, Steven Keylon, Beverly Schnur and Gary Johns; Dinner under the stars at the historic Palm Springs Tennis Club; Lunch on the patio of the O’Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs’ first golf course. All photos courtesy Steven Keylon.



Sandpiper Condominiums,
Palm Desert. Photo courtesy
Millicent Harvey.

Lisa Gimmy, ASLA, in her turn at the lectern, focused on “Poetics of Stone: From Material to Meaning,” a discussion of stonework in modernist buildings and landscapes. Her beautifully illustrated talk began with the influence of Japanese gardens and their use of stone on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and traced stone employment through the years to fresh examples in contemporary buildings and landscapes.

If you walked fast, you had time for a cruise through the Palm Springs Art Museum before heading next door for lunch. We admired from its stone patio Coachella Valley’s first golf course, the private O’Donnell Golf Club, still meticulously groomed. An oilman who came to Palm Springs in the mid-1920s, Thomas A. O’Donnell built this nine-hole course adjacent to the historic and now-vanished Desert Inn.

We worked off the lemon bar dessert with a quick walk to the next-door Willows. Dodd & Richards designed the adobe. House and garden were visited by such luminaries as Albert Einstein. It was a long climb to reach the scientist’s favorite sunning spot, each pathway turn upward offering an enlarged valley view. I can affirm Lisa Gimmy’s appreciation of stone underfoot and lining walls, and I can attest to what must have been Einstein’s delight at the final view unfolding far below.

In afternoon’s heat, a blessedly air-conditioned bus drove us to the Spanish-Colonial-Revival estate built in 1926 by local contractor Alvah Hicks. After the place passed through family hands, it landed with

Mary Pickford and her later husband Buddy Rogers. Still growing over the entrance are twin crossed palms representing the film star’s marriage to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Nearby over a service gate separated palms convey their divorce. The landscape was recently rehabilitated by Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects.

The residence of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Koerner spread over four adjacent parcels in Deepwell Estates. A 1955 post-and-beam modern house was designed by architect E. Stewart Williams for Canadians invested in the lumber business. The landscape by Francis Dean of the firm Eckbo, Royston and Williams tucked a small Japanese-style garden in one corner while an opposite border carried a wide elevated ledge planted with citrus trees. In between these features stretched lawn complete with pool and several seating areas.


After a short respite, we next assembled for cocktails and dinner at the Palm Springs Tennis Club. The club was built in 1937 at the base of the San Jacinto Mountains by Palm Springs pioneer Pearl McCallum McManus. Your correspondent later realized she’d missed her prime opportunity for a classic shot of herself lounging at the much photographed iconic pool. Savory and delicious describes nibbles and dinner from Spencer’s – “wow” for the terrific mushroom sliders.

On Sunday, we moved out to Palm Desert to tour the first condominiums in the Coachella Valley. The Sandpiper in 1957 offered a new way of living in the desert landscape. William Krisel designed a “family” of houses

gathered in groups of eight or so, all looking down on a central circle of golf tee, shuffleboard court, pool and ramada. Parking was restricted to a ring outside the homes. Group leaders led us through their turf while explaining how the larger landscape tied the development together and the role of interior gardens in offering community and social activities to individual neighborhoods. We’re grateful to the residents who chose to open their Sandpiper Condominium units and share archival materials, allowing us a glimpse and insight into a distinct way of life. Master architect Krisel produced site plan, architecture, landscape, interiors, and color palette for his environmental design. Even the marketing materials bore his stamp.

* * *

Steven Keylon almost single-handedly put the conference together. He provided a sense of the history, the inhabitants, the ideas and the materials influencing desert life in mountains’ shadow. Veterans of CGLHS tours will recognize we were allocated the right amount of time to encounter landscapes and designs offering refuge from native heat and wind, to appreciate the sun’s sparkle on precious pool waters and to find relief in the shade of trees and pergolas. We were granted opportunity to look around and appreciate community life. We had that rarity of time built in to chat with our friends.

Thank you and bravo, Steven, for a weekend in the landscape for leisure. 



Sandpiper, photo by Steven Keylon.

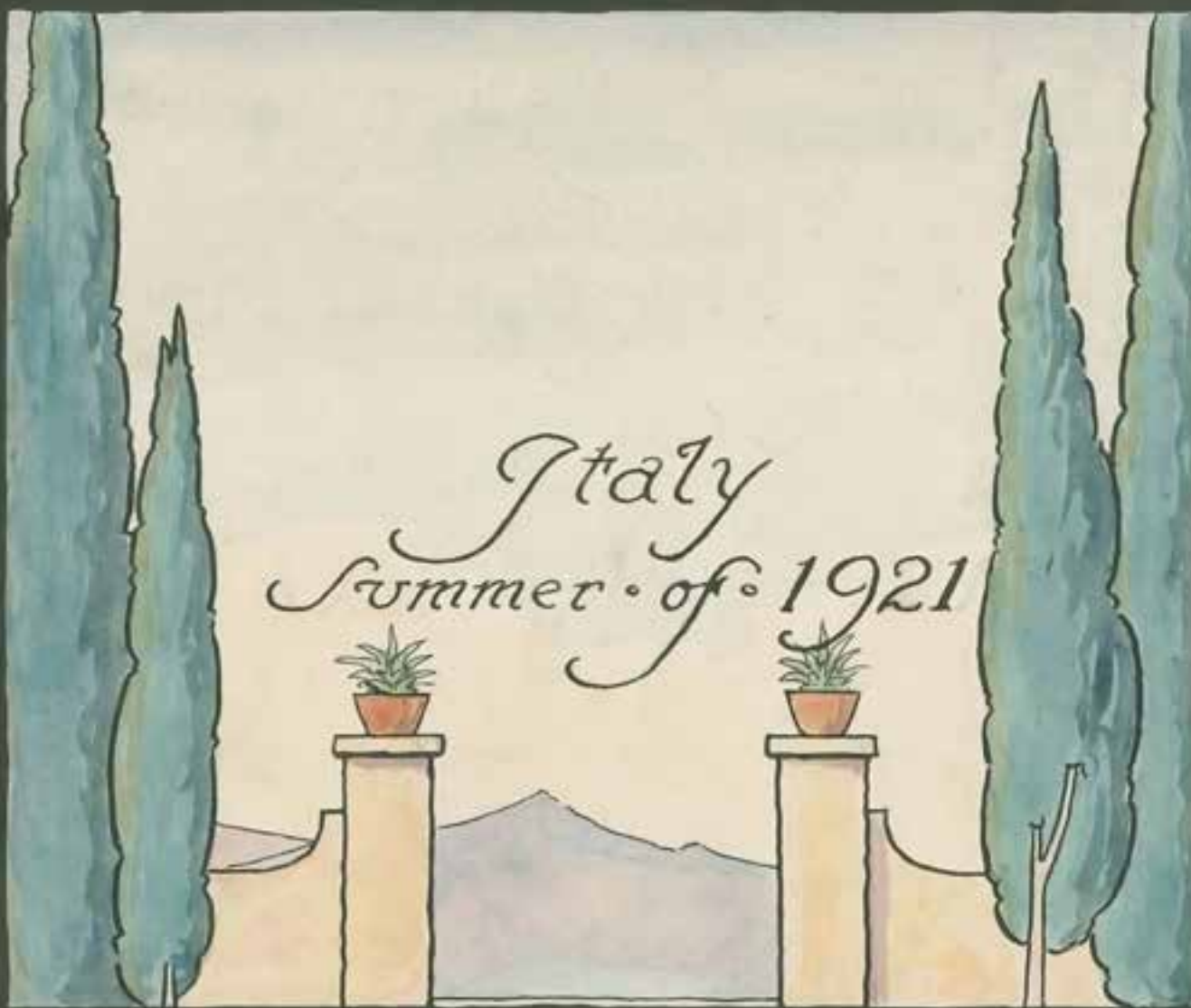
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Front Cover: North Pool, Val Verde, with Lansdowne Hermes. Photograph by Carolyn and Edwin Gledhill, n.d.

Back cover: The cover illustration of Lockwood de Forest's scrapbook commemorating his trip to Italy in the summer of 1921.