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On the Cover: Cornell in the Coachella Valley in the 1920s. Ralph D. Cornell Papers. Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Above: Front steps of Bridges Hall of Music, Pomona College, c.1940s. Photo courtesy of Claremont Colleges Photo Archive, Honnold/Mudd Library Special Collections, The Claremont Colleges Library: http://ccdlibraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ccp/id/176

Opposite: Clark and Smiley halls at Pomona College, viewed from the south. Photo courtesy of Claremont Colleges Photo Archive, Honnold/Mudd Library Special Collections, The Claremont Colleges Library: http://ccdlibraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ccp/id/580
Ralph Dalton Cornell, FASLA
Marie Barnidge-McIntyre

Ralph Dalton Cornell, the Nebraska boy who became Southern California’s Dean of Landscape Architecture, was born in 1890 and grew up in Holdrege, Nebraska. Few may know his name now, but hundreds of thousands have been touched by his work. Working continuously for 54 years, the influence he wielded upon the land—enhancing architecture and framing views—set a precedent for those who followed.

In Nebraska, Cornell’s father had multiple businesses, ranging from lumber mills to small ranches. It was the ranching life that appealed to the boy, who learned to ride a horse before he was five and became an accomplished horseman. He roamed the wide-open spaces of his native state on horseback, later writing, “You could look as far as the eye could carry to the horizon line across the prairies … and the time was measured by how far a horse could go in a day.” The boy would explore the prairie and its inhabitants—the prairie dog colonies, individual buffalo wallows, resident birds and their migratory brethren, and the plants they all depended upon. This immersion in the natural world, as well as a recognition of the value of native habitats, became intrinsic to the man he would become.

At age 17, Cornell graduated with honors from Holdrege High School and was registered for Nebraska University. His goal was to become a stock farmer or nurseryman, but these plans changed when his father decided to relocate the family to Long Beach, California, for a new business venture. In Southern California, the Cornell family met with financial disaster when the eucalyptus lumber business they had invested in went bust. Without money, Ralph couldn’t return to Nebraska for university. Instead he enrolled in the more affordable “local” Pomona College in 1909, and there he met two men who would shape the course of his life.

In Cornell’s freshman year at Pomona a new president joined the administration, Dr. James Blaisdell. His tenure, which lasted from 1910 to 1928, was a pivotal time in the development of the campus. It was Blaisdell who founded a consortium of institutions based upon Oxford and Cambridge, a path no other American institution had followed. It was also Blaisdell who engaged Cornell in developing the landscape for the campus. Cornell wrote of Dr. Blaisdell that “he was an inspirational, visionary man … [who showed me that] you never have a dream come true unless you have a dream first … he set the pace of my thinking.”

Cornell studied plant biology under Professor Charles Baker, who taught (continued)
biology from 1908 to 1911, before he moved to the Philippines to concentrate on improving agriculture on the islands. Pomona lacked a landscape architecture program, so Professor Baker created a unique course to meet his student’s needs. Cornell learned the rudiments of design while studying plants and biology. Cornell would later write, “Professor Baker shaped my destiny … he had the knack of inspiring young men.”

The delight the young Cornell took in nature was stimulated by California’s environment. It offered no prairie, but the diverse geology and ecosystems had him exploring whenever school and work allowed—and collecting plant specimens from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara to build a herbarium that grew to more than 800 specimens.

In 1911 Cornell went to work for the Chuckawalla and Palo Verde Irrigation Association, which wanted to develop Coachella and Imperial Valleys for agriculture. Cornell rented a horse and rig in Palm Springs and drove through Indio, Thermal, and Coachella down into Brawley, and then over to Yuma, Arizona. When his research was completed, he turned in his report and co-authored a 30-page booklet titled *Date Culture in Southern California* with George Marston and Paul Poponoe. His next job was working as foreman and propagator at the Popones’ West India Gardens. While working there, he designed and installed the landscaping around the nursery office as well as the nursery’s exhibit at the Pasadena Flower Show. By this time he knew what he wanted to do—design.

His first landscape design job was for Fremont Place, a subdivision on Wilshire Boulevard. Although he always maintained the job involved more tree planting than landscape design, it was needed paying work, (he had dropped out of college for financial reasons). At about the same time, Dr. Blaisdell asked him “to take the situation of Blanchard Park on the Pomona campus into your care and interest.” Cornell was back with the Popones the following summer, this time working out in the desert at their nascent West India Date Plantation where he planted thousands of date seedlings. He earned enough to return to Pomona College for the fall semester and graduated in 1914.

It was Professor Baker who steered Cornell to Harvard, viewing it as the best option for landscape architecture. To make this possible Cornell had been propagating subtropical fruit trees, hundreds of which he was able to graft with popular varieties. The sale of these plants in combination with a university grant enabled him to finance his way to the next phase of his education. Cornell flourished at Harvard and credited the instructors there for teaching him that the sky itself is one of the basic elements of a good landscape design, and as such, an integral part of any finished landscape. He learned that “a good design meets a number of prerequisites … must be functional to its intended purpose. It must work. It must be appropriate to its environment. And then, as a landscape architectural concept it must be beautiful.” Cornell took Harvard’s top honor, the Topirian Trophy, an annual competition for landscape design.

After graduating from Harvard, Cornell declined a position in the Olmsted office. The Olmsted name attracted many a graduate, so the prestigious firm could be selective and did not offer applicants generous wages. Cornell went to work for Hall and Harries in Toronto, Canada, and after
much negotiation he ultimately got double the figure Olmsted offered—the munificent sum of $30.00 a month. But when the United States declared war on Germany, he enlisted in the U. S. Army and saw constant action, first in France and then Belgium. Upon being mustered out in 1919, Cornell chose to go “home” to California. He escaped to Yosemite, taking with him a little Kodak camera for capturing casual images of its pristine landscapes. Enroute to Glacier Point, he stopped to photograph Half Dome. That chance shot pleased Cornell so much that photography became an avocation he would pursue far beyond a hobby status.

On July 1, 1919, Cornell opened his landscape architecture office in Los Angeles. His first client was his alma mater, Pomona College. He had already done modest work for the campus, but this was a major step up. “It was an unheard of thing to have a college landscape architect . . . the profession itself was hardly known and so it was very bold and very far out and daring.” At Pomona he is remembered as the man who built a “college in a garden.” Cornell’s placement of structural trees that framed the views of nearby mountains and his lush plantings created “a setting which is a pride of all who come under its inspiring influence.”

From 1919 to 1923 Cornell joined forces with Englishman Theodore Payne, a longtime friend. The two formed Cornell & Payne Landscape Architect and Wild Garden Specialist. He described Payne, a nurseryman and expert on native California plants, as the “greatest plantsman I ever knew.” But work was scarce for the partners, so Cornell started teaching landscape architecture at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles.

Miss Ellen Browning Scripps engaged Cornell to develop a way to preserve a unique tract of land near San Diego. His work on Torrey Pines so impressed Miss Scripps that in giving the preserved Torrey Pines Grove to the City of San Diego as a public park, in her will she “commends the views expressed by Ralph D. Cornell in his report . . . to all those who may be entrusted with the care and development of the park.”

In 1924 Cornell was invited to partner with established landscape architects Wilber D. Cook Jr. and George D. Hall, who were active in city planning and subdivisions. Cook, Hall & Cornell were partners until 1933, when Cook and Hall joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. The nine-year association brought a different level of work to Cornell’s drafting table: subdivisions in Montebello and Claremont; educational institutions, including Honolulu Territory Normal School and Claremont High; Fullerton and Claremont Colleges; and ongoing work at Pomona. He was also supervising landscape architect for the University of Hawaii until 1941. His work on the Pomona campus led to his appointment in 1937 as supervising landscape architect at UCLA, often cited as one of his crowning achievements. Cornell consulted on UCLA’s award-winning Westwood campus until his death in 1972.

Cornell felt strongly about the need to make green space available to every resident within a community, so it is no surprise that when designing parks he looked at how they were going to be used by the people who lived nearby. His parks included Beverly Gardens Park, El Segundo City Park, Doheny State Park, and later the 1939 master plan for Griffith Park. In that master plan, Cornell designed not just a multi-use public space, but also the roads to get the public to it. At the time it was the second largest municipal park in the nation, with an elevation change of 1,200 feet and a river, canyons, and mountains. “The master plan of Griffith Park is an effort to achieve coordination, articulation and use efficiency for this vast playground crucible in which our city dwellers react from the vitiating effects of too much urbanity, traffic congestion and nerve tension,” he wrote. “Our chief purpose of the

(continued)
master plan is to protect Griffith Park and save it for the people, from the very ones who use it.” The plan and accompanying report strongly recommended that the hills of Griffith Park be left as natural as possible. Cornell stipulated that “nothing but native trees and shrubs shall be planted over what is now chaparral covered slopes; that nature shall provide the cue from which the planter proceeds.”

In 1935 Cornell was appointed Landscape Architect Consultant in the Federal Relief Administration of Public Works, Housing Division. He wrote, “My duties would be to represent the government, as a consultant, in checking up and reporting on housing developments. It will be my first experience in governmental affairs and I am hoping that the red tape will not eclipse all the joy and satisfaction that might be gotten out of such work.”

Cornell promoted sound design and conservation in articles and lectures and became known as a photographer of note, generously sharing prints of plants, flowers and even people for various publications. His lectures were so well received that he hosted a radio program called the Chaparral Club for about five years. In his broadcasts, he covered plants, design theory and techniques, and encouraged his listeners to experience places like Torrey Pines and Presidio Park not only for the horticultural interest but for the history of each place.

With the onset of the Second World War, Cornell’s work shifted again. There was to be no more work in Hawaii, and Uncle Sam had him designing “simplified planting and erosion control” plans for government housing on military bases. Few residential jobs were available as the war raged, but Cornell was selected to handle the American Potash & Chemical development in Trona. With that job and a few other city jobs, Cornell was able to keep his doors open and employ assistants. Cornell was generous to young landscape architects just getting started, giving them work when he could and encouraging them to blaze their own trail.

Post-war development created more work opportunities for Cornell, as bedroom communities sprang up to accommodate an influx of veterans who wanted to stay in California. The private residences Cornell designed ranged from modest city lots to multi-acre estates. Parks, cemeteries, businesses, hospitals, and more educational institutions filled the jobs list. With the influx of work came the opportunity to expand the office, and in 1955 Cornell made Samuel Bridgers and Howard Troller partners. In 1969 Jere Hazleet joined the firm. The selection of partners with modernist leanings shows how forward-thinking Cornell could be.

Cornell’s work extended beyond California’s borders, but the bulk was in Southern California. He helped start the California Arboretum Association and was instrumental in forming the Los Angeles County Arboretum, the South Coast Botanic Garden, and Descanso Gardens. He eventually became the consulting landscape architect for Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

Cornell planned many of the communities we live in, designed the landscapes for many of our schools, and the parks where generations have lived and played. He championed the creation of open spaces and urged conservation and preservation of both historic and natural features for the generations to come. He promoted the use of California native plants—their integration into cultivated landscapes and preservation in situ. He campaigned for street trees and the beautification of our cities because he felt “that the average apartment dweller needed a place where he can put his feet on the ground, sit in the sun and relax.” Long before Ralph Cornell passed away in 1972, his influence upon the land and those who followed in his footsteps had transformed the way we view the built and natural landscapes around us.

Endnotes
2. Ibid., 31.
3. Ibid., 38.
4. James Blaisdell letter to Ralph D. Cornell, January 9, 1912.
6. Ibid.
10. Ralph D. Cornell, Griffith Park Six Square Miles of Recreation Area, ca. 1940, 2-3.
11. Ibid., 3.
12. Ibid.

Marie Barnidge-McIntyre is widely acknowledged as an authority on the life and work of Ralph Cornell. As the horticulturist at the historic Rancho Los Cerritos in Long Beach, California, since 1992 she has been responsible for maintaining the gardens, which Cornell designed for Mr. and Mrs. Llewellyn Bixby in 1931. Marie also operates Gardens by Design, a consulting firm, from her home in Thousand Oaks, California.

Opposite: Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls, Yosemite National Park, in a photo taken by Cornell in 1923. Ralph D. Cornell Papers, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

The 1920s in Southern California were a transformative period in the history of the West. Between WWI and the Great Depression, the region saw tremendous, unparalleled growth. In addition to the birth of the entertainment industry in Hollywood, people migrated West because of the quality of life and promise of health afforded by its warm, Mediterranean climate. The idea of California was intoxicating, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to experiment in a dramatic natural backdrop. Newly engineered aqueducts and riverbed manipulation created the illusion of an endless water supply for a landscape in which seemingly anything would grow and anything was possible. As newcomers flooded into Southern California, it grew to be a complex economic, political, cultural, and architectural melting pot.

On the heels of the Panama-California Exposition, when San Diego was celebrated as the first protected American port north of the newly constructed Panama Canal, Torrey Pines Park (“Torrey Pines”) emerged as a rare landscape gem along a coastal strip in La Jolla, north of the city of San Diego. The park had been established through the persistence of a few well-educated, civic-minded philanthropists who wanted to ensure the longevity of the rare Torrey pine (*Pinus torreyana*) in its pristine native habitat. The park soon became a popular tourist stop, strategically located along the old coast road, the only direct route to Los Angeles.

As highways replaced railroads between the burgeoning metropolises, urban encroachment threatened the integrity of the park. A young landscape architect was hired to develop a program for safeguarding Torrey Pines. In 1922, Ralph Dalton Cornell completed a long-term management plan that called for preservation of this “unimitated” place. His report not only demonstrated his extraordinary understanding of this unique natural landscape within the cultural context of the region, but also highlighted his pioneering ideas on city park planning, environmental consciousness, and regional appropriateness. Cornell’s far-sighted vision foreshadowed the quiet strength and profound restraint that would permeate his work in a half-century as a landscape architect, and it continues to shape our collective memory of Southern California today.
in southwestern Nebraska. At an early age, he developed a lifelong wonder about the sacred “out-of-doors” and found he needed a “lonely communion with nature” to refresh his soul. Cornell often explored the Midwest prairies on the back of a horse, which brought him “compulsive joy” and influenced how he perceived his natural surroundings. Here, his curiosity for plants came alive and he learned to keenly observe the role that sky, weather, and other environmental elements played within the harmonious composition of the natural landscape.

Cornell carried this curiosity for the natural world with him when his family relocated to Long Beach, California, in 1908. He enrolled the following year at Pomona College, where he met professor and “man-maker” Charles Fuller Baker. Baker cultivated Cornell’s talent in botanical studies and landscape design by encouraging him to build his own herbarium, learn photography as a method of documentation and later a creative outlet, sketch surveys and develop plans, and experiment with profitable agriculture in the deserts of Southern California.

In the highly specialized Pomona College Journal of Economic Botany (1911-1913), Cornell, then 22, began to champion unprecedented ideas on what he coined a “dry ground park”:

> What could be more interesting and educational... than a public park devoted to plants indigenous to our dry and semi-arid lands, and representative of the many forms of plant life that are found along our coast slopes? A dry ground park, planted only to native trees, shrubs and flowers, would be one of the greatest possible assets to Southern California....

Cornell argued that Europeans had a better understanding of the wild plants found on our own soil. He believed struggling to make our parks artificial replications of Old World elements wasn’t “restful,” rather a “living advertisement of what man can do if he has time, water, and ample funds.” He urged us to embrace the authentic qualities of our dry climate and define our land — urging us to embrace the authentic qualities of our dry climate and define our land —

> Cornell's plan was unprecedented, calling strongly for “RESTRAINT” in a three-part plan that outlined restrictions against altering the original landscape, introducing non-indigenous plants and features, and over-cultivating the Torrey pine to the exclusion of open spaces. Cornell promoted both aesthetic and ecological functions, arguing for gradual, mindful forestation in a natural, picturesque cadence. He also proposed a trail system that would invite and confine pedestrian traffic to clearly delineated areas of the park. In this report, Cornell stated:

> (The) impression that stands out eminently above all others... is the distinctiveness of this one spot... Torrey Pines is not a place of typical scenery; it is not representative of...
the primitive, natural landscape of San Diego County, or of any other place in the world. It is itself, alone, unimitated.

While Cornell envisioned a native landscape park that differed from Fleming's proposal for a recreational area and regional botanic garden, he was not a purist. He argued against the introduction of foreign plant material and overplanting, yet also advocated for establishing the "apparently indigenous" ice plant (Carpobrotus spp.) and Australian salt bush (Atriplex semibaccata) for erosion control throughout the park. While Cornell acknowledged that the saltbush was "more at home there than some of the natives," research concludes that taxonomists at the time might have believed the ice plant was a native species.

Scripps commended the views of Cornell's 1922 report. Following her death and subsequent deeding of Torrey Pines to the City of San Diego in perpetuity for a public park, Cornell's vision to preserve the natural landscape has been strictly pursued. Cornell was invited to make further recommendations for Torrey Pines in 1931 and 1949, which aligned with the long-term management goals for preservation set forth in the original report. During this time in Southern California, the united efforts of Scripps, Fleming, and Cornell represented a new and innovative direction in the management of natural habitats and native plants.

**Foresight and Vision**

Cornell seemed to anticipate radical change following WW1 in Southern California, as evidenced by his 1922 preservation plan for Torrey Pines. He saw opportunity within the staggering growth and malleability of the developing region and, in a pivotal moment, he demonstrated remarkable foresight and vision in several key ideas.

First, Cornell was a strong proponent of intelligent planning and integrating public park space into the early layout of cities, when the most desirable land could be acquired readily and cheaply rather than as an afterthought. This was still a new paradigm in the development of American park space, only beginning to gain momentum in the West. Cornell firmly believed that providing beauty, breathing space, and places for retreat within parks for the general public was essential to cities destined for urban greatness. He recognized this potential in Southern California and called upon his fellow landscape architects during this time to support these values. In his report for Torrey Pines, Cornell stressed that protecting this public park space was vital to the public welfare of future citizens.

Cornell also championed early ideas on environmental consciousness and conservation within Southern California. At a young age, he formed a deep appreciation for his natural environment and, with a rigorous understanding of plants and landscape ecology, challenged us to consider the values inherent in a dry ground park. Cornell seemed to believe our native plant communities and exceptional natural landscapes were worthy of celebration and that designers had a moral responsibility to protect them, which guided his thoughtful, restrained treatment of Torrey Pines. As he witnessed the rapid loss of native landscapes to urbanization, Cornell developed a long-term management plan to preserve the indigenous plants and fragile ecosystems within the park, touching upon concepts of what came to be known as sustainability.

Finally, Cornell recognized a distinct lack of regional identity and demanded a cultural shift to develop an authentic style that was relevant to Southern California. The essence of California is steeped in the landscape, not only as the fullest expression of ideals in indoor-outdoor living, but also in the constant struggle between our conquest of the natural world and Mother Nature taking it back. Cornell found balance amid this tension and chaos in his report for Torrey Pines. With site-specific sensitivity, he developed a preservation plan that revealed the wonders of our natural landscape and served lasting cultural purpose. His vision for Torrey Pines demonstrates a shift from the highly manipulated municipal park landscapes of the time—it was a genuine response to the nature and culture of that place.

**Enduring Legacy**

Ellen Browning Scripps wanted Torrey Pines to be held in trust for public education and recreation, serving as an outdoor museum of native plants in their natural environment. Cornell's 1922 long-term management plan helped her to achieve that today, fulfilling the cultural need for a public park while preserving the rare pine in its distinct natural landscape. Torrey Pines, in a sense, became Cornell's dry ground park, requiring little more than intuition and thoughtful execution. In 1959, the nearly 1,000 acres of cumulative parkland officially were transferred to the state and became Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve. Torrey Pines still serves as a natural gateway to San Diego, as well as a snapshot of the collective ideals imposed upon the native landscape of Southern California.

Throughout his life, Cornell quoted 18th century English landscape gardener Humphry Repton:

> Insult not Nature with absurd expense, Nor spoil her simple charms by vain pretense; Weigh well the subject, be with caution bold, Profuse of genius, not profuse of gold.

Cornell had a propensity to consult the genius loci in each of his designs, revealing distinct, authentic qualities that foster a deep sense of place for all inhabitants and visitors. Southern California changed
immensely during the arc of Cornell's long career, but he consistently returned to his early farsighted ideas on city park planning, native plant conservation, and regional authenticity in landscape architecture. Torrey Pines and many of his other landscapes have endured and serve as vital contributions to the collective identity of Southern California.

Endnotes
5. Ralph D. Cornell, “For the Love of Horses” (formerly titled “True Love in the Gay Nineties”), UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, Cornell Coll. #1411, box #36 (n.d.): 1-16.
9. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid. While Torrey Pines drew leading botanists who studied the rare plants and original landscape, Fleming’s caretaker home also took on conservation significance in that it became an important cultural command center for the newly expanding state parks system.


28. *Genius loci*, or spirit of place, is a common design principle made popular by 18th century English poet Alexander Pope.

Larkin Owens, ASLA, is a designer at Colour Studio in San Francisco. She is also co-chair of the Northern California Chapter of the Historic American Landscapes Survey, contributes writing to The Cultural Landscape Foundation, and volunteers in the native plant garden at the San Francisco Botanical Garden. Larkin holds a BS in Environmental Policy from the University of Michigan, as well as an MLA with graduate certificates in Historic Preservation and Urbanism from the University of Southern California. She is a director at large of CGLHS.
It is hard to overstate the historical importance of world’s fairs. Before the age of mass communication, they served as the primary conduit for the diffusion of ideas, technologies, and innovations. Telephones, Ferris wheels, X-ray machines, zippers were among the myriad products that first made their formal appearance at these events.

Each fair had a substantial garden component that was visited by literally millions of spectators. How influential were the horticultural elements of these expositions and in what ways did they contribute to changing practices and ideas in the wider world?

This book addresses these questions through a close examination of the gardens at nine world’s fairs held on US soil over the period 1870 through 1940 (“the Golden Age of American Exposition landscapes”). It argues convincingly that there were many powerful impacts—both direct and indirect—on horticulture, landscaping, and other allied fields.

Among the most obvious of these was the elevation in the status of the landscape designer to at least that of equal partner of the architect and the engineer in the development of projects. The author cites the Chicago 1893 Columbian Exposition as pivotal in the emergence of landscape architecture as a profession. (Several of the key players were founder-members of the ASLA six years later.) This fair was also notable as an inspiration for the “City Beautiful” movement and much subsequent US city planning through its emphasis on the ideal of an integrated composition of buildings, landscape, and infrastructure. In particular, Daniel Burnham, chief architect for the fair, and Frederick Law Olmsted, who was commissioned to design the grounds, were key to the spread of such philosophies to many other cities.

Another of the more obvious impacts of the fairs is their physical legacy in the form of urban public parks and green spaces that otherwise may never have been created. In several cities, the original sites—commonly wasteland—are still enjoyed today. Examples include Philadelphia’s Fairmont Park, Buffalo’s Delaware Park, Audubon Park in New Orleans, Forest Park in St. Louis, and Flushing Meadow in New York.

Most fairs were the end result of a lively, often murky political process. Civic leaders, commercial interests (often railroad companies), city boosters, and developers vied to win the right to host the event; then they fought over site location, choice of designers, and issues such as the configuration of transport infrastructure. Host cities strove to surpass previous efforts.

Though fairs were ephemeral and costly to create, their promoters were normally acutely aware of the economic spin-offs, in particular the improved prices that would result from the conversion of marginal land into prime real estate.

World’s fairs also offered specific technical challenges that often spurred inventive technical solutions. For example, the need to create sites that would offer the illusion of mature landscapes often within a matter of a few months; the need to securely transport materials from far-flung lands and to accommodate the demands of diverse and competitive international delegations in unfamiliar climatic conditions.

Not surprisingly in this period of intense industrialization, the pace of innovation was rapid; advances in technologies included improved shipping methods for live plants in transit and better cold storage. Tree transportation techniques became more efficient as flatbed trucks replaced horse-drawn carts and methods of digging and wrapping trees were perfected. All these improvements were tested at the world’s fairs and then adopted in day-to-day commerce.

Above all, these expositions provided great opportunities for knowledge sharing. Professionals in horticulture, seed, florist, and landscape design enterprises could compare notes, and the imagination of the general public was fired by new gardening ideas and by exposure to the works of many of the finest talents in their fields.

From a Californian perspective, it is a pity that only the 1915 San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition receives a detailed review—a consequence of the decision to focus on a sample of nine fairs over a seventy-year period rather than try to cover all of the almost fifty that occurred. The 1915 San Francisco Exposition represented a triumph on several fronts. Not only did it celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal the previous year, it also marked the resurrection of the city from the ashes and devastation of the earthquake and fire of 1906. After some debate, civic leaders opted to locate the fair at Harbor View, now known as the Marina district. The site required considerable engineering prowess as it was created by use of “excavation-and-fill” techniques to reclaim land from the San Francisco Bay. This feat set a precedent for future fairs. Much of the fair’s success is attributed to the overall block plan of Edward Bennett, a disciple of Olmsted, and to the successful plantings of John McLaren.

Overall, this book makes a persuasive case that world’s fair gardens had many significant impacts on the development of horticulture and landscape practices. These showcases exposed new ideas to the widest audiences and thereby accelerated the transfer of knowledge and rate of change in daily practice.

World’s Fair Gardens: Shaping American Landscapes
Cathy Jean Maloney
University of Virginia Press, 2012, 244 pp, $39.95
www.upress.virginia.edu
As supervising master landscape architect for over 40 years at Pomona College, Ralph Cornell played the key role in developing the landscape of his alma mater. Entrusted with the goal of transforming the campus into a “college in a garden” in 1919 by its then-president James Blaisdell, Cornell, more than any other individual, was responsible for putting this concept into practice.

When Cornell first entered Pomona College as a student in the fall of 1909 after his family moved from Nebraska to Long Beach to start a eucalyptus business, the campus was a far cry from what it is today. It consisted of fewer than five buildings, and there was no sign of the carefully manicured grounds that would come later. Blanchard Park (or the Wash) was “something of a jungle” where the boys used to “to have a real wicked smoke,” and was still quite wild, with shooting stars, mariposa lilies, conchalagua (Centaurium venustum), yellow violets, purple nightshades, yellow wallflowers, and showy penstemons. “Even ten years ago it could still truthfully be said that Claremont lay in the sagebrush belt,” recalled Cornell of this period, “for she was bounded on the north by sagebrush, on the east by sagebrush, on the south almost by sagebrush and on the west by encroaching orchards.”

Cornell’s academic and extracurricular life at Pomona revolved around plants. In his first semester, he registered for a course in botany and soon fell under the sway of biology professor Charles Fuller Baker. Upon meeting him, Baker quickly “decided that maybe [Cornell] was a landscape architect in embryo” and encouraged him along those lines, sending him out to sketch gardens and prompting him to collect 800 sheets of pressed, dried and mounted sheets of pressed, dried and mounted garden plants while working for the professor over the summer. Professor Baker established an independent study in landscape architecture for Cornell, although he knew almost nothing about the subject, and instructed him in plant propagation. Baker also organized the Pomona College Journal of Economic Botany, and published some of Cornell’s early writing.

Cornell had a number of other botanical and horticultural adventures during his time at Pomona. In his first year, Cornell imported 1,000 avocado seeds from Mexico at a time when the fruit was just beginning to come to the attention of American horticulturists. Later, after Professor Baker recommended him to George Wharton James, the manager of the Chuckawalla and Palo Verde Irrigation Association, Cornell spent a summer in the Coachella Valley studying date culture. He also became friends with fellow student Wilson Pope-noe, and worked at his father’s company, the Altadena-based West India Gardens, where the Popewaes were busy introducing the fuerte, pueblo, and Hass avocados and working to develop better varieties of a number of crops for the nursery trade, including sapotes, feijoa, and guavas.

In 1910 Professor Baker introduced Cornell to nurseryman Theodore Payne. He would remain intimate friends with Payne for some 55 years, referring to the Englishman as a “disciple of the outdoors” with a “great love for California’s native plants and wild flowers.” At the time Payne was primarily selling eucalyptus seed, but he would later steer his nursery toward the production and sale of native Californian flora, many of which he saw quietly disappearing as Southern California became more and more developed. Cornell remembers spending days with Payne, “looking at everything, taking pictures, gathering specimens to identify or to mount, gathering seeds.” The two would later become partners in a landscape architecture firm for almost five years in the beginning of Cornell’s tenure as Pomona College’s landscape architect in the early 1920s.

Perhaps owing to his relationship with Payne, Cornell contributed “Wanted: A Genuine Southern California Park” to the Pomona College Journal of Economic Botany in 1912. In his essay, Cornell remarked upon the “abundant wealth of [native] flower and foliage lying on all sides” in Southern California, “inviting recognition and adoption,” and suggested the design and planting of a native plant garden in the region. He decried the fact that “it seems to be our general tendency to make parks as artificial as possible,” and described how “a city very often purchases dry hillsides or rugged slopes for park purposes.” No sooner is this done than “an elaborate water system is installed at enormous expense, and plants entirely foreign to such an environment are grotesquely perched where they must serve a life-long sentence of struggle for existence under conditions entirely adverse to their development.”

Instead, why not use California plant life, already adapted and ready for use, in its native environment? What could be more “interesting and educational to the people at large,” Cornell asked, than a “public park devoted to plants indigenous to our dry and semi-ard lands, and representative of the many forms of plant life that are found along our coast slopes?” While most Southern Californians at this time were striving to grow imported plants, both horticultural and agricultural, Cornell suggested that Southern California’s native flora was worthy of recognition and adoption in the garden landscape.

In 1912, Cornell was brought onto Pomona College’s campus planning committee to join noted architect Myron Hunt, faculty member “Chem” Jones, and President Blaisdell. Cornell stated later that he “felt increasingly … that [it] was a courtesy to me [in order] to fan a little flame of interest and enthusiasm, because at that stage I could have had nothing to contribute, still being a student.”

When Cornell returned to Southern California in 1919 after studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and Army service in World War I, Pomona College offered him an annual retainership to develop and expand the campus landscape before he had even officially opened his own landscape architecture office. President Blaisdell brought Cornell on board as supervising landscape architect for a single reason—to transform Pomona College into a “college in a garden.” In Cornell’s words, Blaisdell thought “the beauty of the environment” was “terribly important for a youngster going to college.” But Pomona’s president and trustee George Marston knew little about plants. As Cornell remembered, “they may not have been too clear in their visualization of the outcome [of the ‘college in a garden’ idea].”

Thus, Cornell was free to conceive of the Pomona College “garden” as he wished, within limits. Cornell agreed with Blaisdell’s belief in the importance of the college environment to the education of its students. “You are born with or without certain capacities,” he said in a 1970 interview, “but environment develops or inhibits those capacities depending upon what it may be…. If you’re raised with a culture and surrounded by beauty, then that’s... (continued)
where you’re comfortable. And that’s why
this youth business is rather important.”11
We “should live in beauty and its environ-
ment,” he continued. “The environment
has to do with the development of [one’s]
capacities.”
Ironically, despite his love of Califor-
nia’s native plants, Cornell’s realization of
Pomona as a “college in a garden” began
with the destruction of native vegetation
and its replacement with turf and other
carefully selected plant materials. In a
1921 essay written for the
Pomona College
Alumni Quarterly, “Ten Y ears of Increas-
ing Verdure,” he explains: “The work
that has seemed, to some, like unneces-
sary destruction of existing plant life has
been sanctioned only after very deliberate
thought and consideration for the future
constructive development of the college
grounds.”12 Whereas before, “not a tree, not
a shrub, not a flower rose to break” the one
“expans of artificial turf” in front of the
College’s library, Cornell speaks proudly
in his essay of the “increasing verdure” for
which he was mostly responsible, designed
to “soften the rigid form of architecture”
and to “give enframement to the setting.”
Central to his vision of a greener Pomona
was Marston Quadrangle (for which
George Marston secretly gave $100,000).
Cornell’s plan was for a “main, central
ground-area … planted to green turf …
and flanked by strong boundary plantings
of trees and shrubs … so as to properly
enclose the oval and give it a feeling of
unity.” The “thought is that Pomona is
to have an aesthetically developed, free,
open, central campus-unit about which
the college buildings will be arranged in
accord with a definite plan, and in which
the students can gather for moot affairs,”
he continues. “Other campus units will be
developed in accord with their relation to
a larger campus plan built about our oval
quad.”15
Both Blaisdell and Cornell agreed
that creating a beautiful environment was
essential for Pomona College’s educational
mission and its success as an institution.
Indeed, Cornell saw the goal of the art of
landscape architecture—beauty—as a key
attribute for healthy and economically suc-
cessful communities. “Where a community,
through accident or foresight, has achieved
beauty in any form it has reaped its reward,”
he wrote in an essay entitled “Civic Beau-
tification.”16 Blaisdell certainly thought so:
some years after Marston Quadrangle was
installed, Cornell recalled, “Dr. Blaisdell
told me… that he felt, dollar for dollar,
[Marston Quad] was the best investment
the college had ever made because it created
a beauty spot, it attracted interest, people
came out there because it was beautiful.”17
Thus, Cornell saw order, neatness, attrac-
tive appearance, and civic beautification as
intrinsic elements in the design of Pomona
as a “college in a garden.”
Almost all of Cornell’s landscapes
included native California species, includ-
ing Nevin’s barberry, mountain mahogany,
Catalina cherry, and toyon. His two favor-
ite tree species, the most numerous on
Pomona’s campus, were native to South-
ern California—the California sycamore
(Platanus racemosa) and the coast live oak
(Quercus agrifolia).18 His other plantings,
having, were uniformly cosmopolitan.
In “Decorative Settings for Pacific Coast
Schools,” which he published in The Nation’s
Schools in 1935, he recommended the use
of plants from all over the world, including
cotoneasters and pyracanthas, strawberry
trees, the Chinese photinia, Raphiolepis
umbellata or Y eddo hawthorn, the abelias,
some of the buddleias, the elegant camellias,
boxwoods, jasmines, fragrant daphnes,
erica or heath, eugenias, Chinese holly,
both Portugal and English laurel, Roman
myrtle, and oleander, all of which “thrive
under widely differing conditions and can
be counted upon for true service” to the
campus landscape.19 Though he loved the
native flora of Southern California, to Cor-
nell “plant materials should be studied for
their landscape values, first of all, and their
horticultural adaptability only as a means
to an end…. In any institutional plant-
ing, the landscape or decorative values are
matters of first and last importance, since
school grounds are planted primarily to
achieve decorative effects.”20 In landscape
architecture, in his eyes, “plants become
a means to an end more often than they
themselves are the achievement one seeks.”
Cornell’s use of plants from all over the world reflected what Douglas Sackman referred to as a new “system of capitalism whose agents [penetrated] every corner of the globe seeking plants that, as if by bio-alchemical magic, may be turned to gold.” During this period, “America’s leisure class became ever more fascinated with the exotic” and “consumed with… orientalism.” While some, like Paul and Wilson Popenoe, searched for new agricultural varieties, Cornell and other Southern Californians cultivated landscape plants newly available to them from all four corners of the Earth to tell “garden stories” that said, “Come to California, which is Eden on earth, and you will live happily and healthily ever after.”

The Eden they spoke of was not Southern California as they found it, but one remade. Just as Pomona’s campus had “[flowered] as the rose from ‘nature in the raw,’” in Cornell’s words, residents of Riverside had made “a waste bloom as a garden” under their Governor Perkins, who proclaimed at the fourth annual Horticultural Fair in Los Angeles in 1881: “Look at the wonderful array of nature’s gifts spread before us, amplified and enriched by the effort of your Association…. The whole world lies before us here.”

Pomona’s “college in a garden” was thus conceived in a greater context of Edenic garden making in Los Angeles during the settlement and growth of Los Angeles, where gardens proclaimed a new, artificial order that “[created] a vision of the proper arrangement of nature” and celebrated an ability to import landscape plants from around the world, one that Cornell found not inappropriate but merely a means to create beauty.

The major features of Pomona College’s landscape today were conceived by Cornell as part of his design of a “college in a garden” based on two garden principles. The first was an eclectic approach to garden design made possible only by the “lavish use of imported water” and the importation of a “vast range of plants from the temperate, subtropical, and tropical regions of the world.” The second was an appreciation of the beauty of Southern California’s native flora and a desire to use native plant species in the garden. Today, both ideas can be discerned among current campus landscaping efforts, including the ongoing use of both exotic and native species. Ralph Cornell’s work lives on.

Perhaps Cornell’s greatest legacy from his work as Pomona’s master landscape architect is a set of questions: What role should landscape play in education? How can landscaping help to conserve native biodiversity, contribute to climate change mitigation and water conservation, create a backdrop for the daily life of a college, and itself play a role in the education of college students?

At Pomona College, one response is the Ralph Cornell Society, a student-led native landscaping group founded in 2010 that has involved nearly 100 students in the planting of hundreds of native plants across the campus. But other answers abound—at schools in California and around the country.
Endnotes

4. Ibid., 9.
5. Ibid., 47, 134.
6. Ibid., 133.
8. Ibid., 301, 304.
9. Ibid., 33.
10. Ibid., 63.
11. Ibid., 51.
12. Ibid., 16.
15. Ibid., 4-5.
20. Ibid., 44, 43.
22. Ibid., 256.
23. Ibid., 251.
24. Ibid., 252.
25. Ibid., 248.

Nicholas Tyack first learned of Ralph Cornell while studying at Pomona College from 2007 to 2011. Fascinated by Cornell’s love of native plants and the history of the college’s campus landscape, he was drawn to the idea of Pomona as a “College in a Garden” as the topic for his senior essay in history. Cornell’s early writings inspired Nik to co-found a student native landscaping club at Pomona, the Ralph Cornell Society, with some friends. After a stint as an environmental consultant in his hometown of Boston, he is currently enrolled at Charles University in Prague in a master’s program in economics.
I recently heard of a comment by a wise elder that went something like this: To lead a meaningful life, be a good ancestor. The idea took my breath away. It challenged me to think anew of the reasons I value, cherish, and celebrate CGLHS—and my privilege of having served a decade on its Board, four of those as president.

As I leave these posts, I think of the opportunity CGLHS presents to all of us to be a good ancestor. We are members of this organization because of our love of place—we love California, its landscapes, gardens, and its historic sense of hope, opportunity, and beauty. And we love those place-makers and the work they did in generations before our own.

We would like to see these places honored and preserved for future generations. As your president, I have had two recent opportunities to participate in preservation concerns. The first was to take an organizational stand on the proposed sale of the UCLA Hannah Carter Japanese Garden, which we believe violates the spirit with which this exquisite place was given. As the legal case continues, we continue to be optimistic regarding its ultimate fate. The garden is receiving ongoing care, and UCLA has invested in recent upgrades to its irrigation system and the teahouse roof.

The second was that, as president of CGLHS, I was asked to be a member of the jury for the 2014 Los Angeles Conservancy’s 33rd Annual Preservation Awards—an honor for us all. One of the award recipients was Rancho Los Alamitos, for its Barns area and Rancho Center, a project that culminates a quarter-century of effort to conserve and interpret the evolution of this significant historic landscape.

I was thinking of the amazing achievement of the Rancho Los Alamitos team, and wondering how CGLHS can assist in worthy preservation efforts like it. And it sparked my memory to think of the modest beginnings of the Los Angeles Conservancy itself—formed nearly four decades ago by a handful of people as part of the effort to save the beautiful Central Library of Los Angeles from the wrecker’s ball. Today, more than 6,000 people belong to the Conservancy. Nearly 700 supporters attended the July 31 Awards luncheon, and the Library, of course, stands.

There’s nothing to prevent CGLHS from leading similarly in the public awareness of the stunning, fragile, and disappearing beauty of the landscapes, gardens, and cultural heritage of California’s past and present. My hope is that CGLHS will, in the future, speak loud and clear to our communities, cities, and towns of our belief, as architect Brenda Levin has suggested, that historic spaces anchor us to place—and I would add, contribute to the meaning of our lives.

I urge CGLHS members to reach out to be good ancestors and to teach others in California about the places we hold dear.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to every single person in this organization. You have taught me so much. And our activities together—conferences, tours, lectures, Eden articles—have broadened and enriched my understanding of place and landscape as no other education could have. Thank you. It’s been an honor.

Judy M. Horton, CGLHS President
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SAVE THE DATE!
CGLHS is proud to be a Co-Sponsor of The Cultural Landscape Foundation’s What’s Out There Weekend Los Angeles
THE PUBLIC LANDSCAPES OF RALPH D. CORNELL
Friday, November 7 – Sunday, November 9

This What’s Out There Weekend focuses on the built legacy of Los Angeles-based landscape architect Ralph D. Cornell (1890-1972), who studied at Pomona College and Harvard University, and opened one of the city’s first landscape architecture practices in 1919. Cornell’s prolific career spanned the Beaux Arts and Modernist periods and includes such iconic landscapes as Beverly Gardens Park, Glen Haven Memorial Park, downtown LA’s Civic Center, the restoration of the historic grounds at the National Historic Landmark-designated Rancho Los Cerritos, and numerous places at UCLA. The What’s Out There Weekend plans a kick-off cocktail reception on Friday evening in the newly restored Municipal Gallery of the Beverly Hills Civic Center, which was designed by architect William Gage in 1932.

On Saturday morning the Department of Special Collections at UCLA will host a ticketed lecture by Brian Tichenor, founding partner of Tichenor & Thorp Architects, Inc., and professor of landscape architecture history and theory at USC. The lecture will be held in conjunction with the opening of an exhibition of Cornell’s life and work and a tour of the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden led by Lisa Gimmy, ASLA, and Leslie Cozzi, Curatorial Associate, Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts/Hammer Museum.

Free, expert-led tours of more than a dozen significant Cornell-designed landscapes in greater Los Angeles will take place on Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. The tours will reveal through anecdotes and stories Cornell’s life, career, and impact on Southern California and the field of landscape architecture.

Registration will be posted in October at tclf.org/event/wotw-los-angeles-ralph-cornell
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