

# *Eden*

Journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society

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# Eden

Journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society

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Front Cover: *View of Palos Verdes Estates, 2016. Photo by Kelly Comras.*

Above: *Puerta del Norte garden area (north entrance) designed by the Olmsted Brothers, 1926.*

Right: *Fountain in Farnham Martin's Park, at the head of Via Corta, Palos Verdes Estates, ca. 1929. All historic photos courtesy of Palos Verdes Library District Local History Collection.*

# A Radical Vision for Palos Verdes Estates

## Early Sustainable Planning on the West Coast

Christine Edstrom O'Hara



Palos Verdes Estates was the largest new American town designed in the 1920s. The Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm of Boston, city planner Charles Cheney, and Pasadena architect Myron Hunt planned the new community on a spectacular coastal site in southern Los Angeles County. The Palos Verdes Project was conceived as early as 1914, and it developed during a period of critical regionalism when its creators sought to express not only American values, but also to create a distinctly Californian design. Their aim was to showcase the native California landscape and to demonstrate a new approach to design in architecture and planning specific to the history and ecology

of California. With an initial design area of 16,000 acres, the Palos Verdes Project was the most extensive suburban community commission the Olmsted Brothers firm ever undertook, and it became a long-term project in which the firm continued in an advisory role through 1948. Upon seeing Palos Verdes for the first time, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. is reported to have remarked:

How often are men given such an almost untouched great area...the cliffs, the beaches, where the ocean once was, the canyons, the hills and the ocean. May we who are now responsible, place parks, open

spaces, roads, not for racing, but to look at the beauty, and may the generations who follow keep this in their minds and plans.<sup>1</sup>

The Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm was named after John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957), the children of renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., who retired from practice in 1896.<sup>2</sup> Along with both brothers, firm associate James "Fred" Dawson (1874-1941) managed their Pacific Coast projects. While the firm was prolific, ultimately designing or consulting on over 4,000 projects throughout the United



States, Palos Verdes Estates was not simply a commission, but became the personal home of both Olmsted Jr. and Dawson. In a 1922 contract, developer Frank Vanderlip ensured a fluid oversight of Palos Verdes' design and construction phase when he required that "during the continuance of this contract at least one member of the firm of the Olmsted Brothers shall at all times be resident at or near Palos Verdes... and Frederick Law Olmsted and James F. Dawson shall both be so resident and available for as much of the time as continuously as they find necessary for the proper direction and prosecution of the work."<sup>3</sup> In October 1922, the firm opened its first West

Coast office in Redondo Beach. Through their residence during the 1920s, Olmsted Jr. and Dawson were able not only to influence the community's taste and control the long-term development of the city, but also to infuse their professional and personal values into the design.

Each designer, as well as the developer of Palos Verdes, had a specific concept and agenda for the community's design. In response to the site's southern Italian ambience, Vanderlip envisioned an exclusive residential community based on Mediterranean design. Similarly, the Olmsted Brothers intended the design to

be in accord with the semi-arid Southern California climate. Incorporating ideas of regionalism first tested by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. at Mountain View Cemetery (1865) in Oakland and at Stanford University (1883), their vision followed the firm's unbuilt proposal for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, a design that endeavored to showcase the native California landscape. City planner Charles Cheney helped develop the Palos Verdes' villages, mixing Mediterranean prototypes with new American planning models. Attempts to develop a regional California architecture based on the missions (Mission Revival Style) began in the



late 19th century. By the 1920s the style, which borrowed from Europe and Mexico and incorporated Italian, Moorish, Spanish, and Mexican elements, had developed into California Mediterranean or Spanish Colonial Revival. Myron Hunt called it “Californian,” and as chief architect at Palos Verdes, he waged a campaign to have the Californian style recognized as the official style for the new community.

As Directors of Design, the Olmsted Brothers began with a rigorous study of the new region in an attempt to understand the complexities of the semi-arid and steep site. Principal Fred Dawson began intensive

research in January 1914, hiring outside consultants to create detailed topography maps and to conduct hydrology, soils, and temperature studies in Palos Verdes. Dawson contacted California native plant expert Theodore Payne regarding the hardiness of particular plants in the region and purchased seeds from Payne’s store. Propagation of appropriate plants suitable to the climate was made a priority. An on-site nursery was established, and nurseryman Louis Horner was hired to care for and propagate plants full time.<sup>4</sup> Horner experimented with propagation techniques, including dry farming, and also gathered seedlings in the wild as starters

for his nursery stock of acclimated plants.

Palos Verdes became the largest unirrigated development in the country at the time through the use of regionally appropriate plants. Realizing that new California residents might not appreciate the dry native

Above (left to right): *On horseback at Malaga Cove, north entrance, 1926. Malaga Cove School, an example of California architecture designed by architecture firm Allison & Allison, 1928. All historic photos courtesy of Palos Verdes Library District Local History Collection.*



and Mediterranean plants, John Charles Olmsted wrote:

We believe it would be advantageous to do a great deal of landscape planting on lots and residence tracts before they are sold, especially ornamental trees and fruit trees, not only to assist in rapidly bringing large areas into attractive home-like condition, but because so many prospective purchasers know so little about the planting of residence grounds, especially

in Southern California where the climatic and soil conditions are unfamiliar to many.<sup>5</sup>

Not only did the firm reduce lawns in their residential design, but commercial areas and parks were lushly planted primarily with native and adapted plants. Park designs drew from Mediterranean regions, such as Moorish prototypes for Farnham Martin Park with its copious amounts of local Palos Verdes flagstone and fountains. Peripheral understory plantings and plants in pots comprised the vegetation, and lawns were limited to spaces for recreational needs. The chosen plant palette blurred the design into the borrowed landscape. The intentionally restricted use of water—in fountains, pots, and the unirrigated adjacent native landscape—constituted a non-pastoral park design for a low-water region.

As a resident of Palos Verdes, Frederick

Law Olmsted Jr. understood the normal patterns of flood and drought in Southern California, and designed in a way to accommodate both conditions. While the planting design was a low-water one, storm water management for heavy inundations was also a priority. Open space in Palos Verdes was carved out of the valuable hillside and shore-bluff lots, fulfilling multiple functions. Storm water drainage flowed into open space, minimizing the need for storm drains by diverting water into canyons and other natural drainage channels. Preplanned open space not only preserved the native California landscape, but also mitigated the effects of the region's heavy winter rains.

The design of Palos Verdes was completely driven by the existing landscape and climatically compatible forms of urban design and architecture. Calling its architecture and landscape architecture “Californian,”

Above (left to right): *View along Via Campesina, with the George and Florence Gibbs residence visible at near right, 1929.*

*La Venta Inn, built in 1925 to entertain realtors and prospective landowners, later served as the sales office for Palos Verdes Estates and was an architectural prototype for the new community.*



Palos Verdes Estates exemplified a regional approach in its architecture, plant use, water management, and integration of buildings and landscape. While the design expressed new standards and ideals in modern American subdivision planning, at the same time it created a community that functioned ecologically with the site. Mixed among the “appropriate” aesthetics were new American needs and values—for the automobile, active recreation, and open space within the city. It was a radical approach to design in a new region and an early example of sustainable design on the West Coast.

#### Author's Note

*Special thanks for the exceptional archival support to Monique Leahey Sugimoto, Archivist and Adult Services Librarian at the Palos Verdes Library District. The local history collection at the Palos Verdes Peninsula Library contains a rich photographic assemblage of historic imagery, from early construction of Palos Verdes to later built projects, and is a goldmine for researchers.*

#### Endnotes

1. Dwight L. Oliver, *Landscape Architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.: Extraordinary Careers* (Oakhurst, CA: Nelson Press, 1991), 7. Oliver quoted the late Mrs. Romayne C. Martin, who in the 1920s arrived in Palos Verdes with her husband Farnham Martin, an associate with the Olmsted Brothers firm in charge of all horticultural oversight. Mrs. Martin is credited for remembering this conversation with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
2. According to Susan L. Klaus in “All in the Family: the Olmsted Office and the Business of Landscape Architecture,” *Landscape Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1997), when John Charles Olmsted died in 1920, Olmsted Jr. maintained the Olmsted Brothers’ name “both for sentimental and business reasons, believing that the many changes in the name of the Olmsted office in the past were rather unfortunate” in preserving the firm’s historical identity (Olmsted Jr. to Arthur C. Comey, March 24, 1920, Job #20-(3), Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Room at the Library of Congress).
3. Draft of Proposed Contingent Agreement between Olmsted Brothers and the Trustee, 9 October 1922, Job #5950, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Room at the Library of Congress.
4. Describing that work to W.H. Kiernan, Vanderlip’s Western representative, the Olmsted Brothers wrote that the plantsman was “to study local plants and conditions and to collect and raise nursery stock chiefly of hardy native kinds of shrubs and trees requiring little or no care after they are established for restoring the beauty of arroyos and precipitous hillsides which have become more

or less bare and ugly in some places owing to pasturing, fires and other interference by man.” (John Charles Olmsted. Letter to Kiernan, 25 September 1914, Job #5950, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Room at the Library of Congress.)

5. John Charles Olmsted. Letter to W.H. Kiernan, 19 October 1914, Job #5950, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscript Room at the Library of Congress.

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# Chico State Arboretum: A Legacy of Trees

Joan Walters and Phoebe Cutler

Going north from Sacramento, the driver has the choice of four different routes to reach the town of Chico. Two of those four involve the old State Highway 99. By opting for those two, the traveler will pass through or near the city's three great tree preserves—the Chico Seed Orchard, Mendocino National Forest; Bidwell Park; and, the focus of this essay, Chico State University (CSU) and its closely connected Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park. With these outstanding assets, this Northern Valley agricultural and educational center boasts a long and distinguished history of trees as crops, adornments, and experiments.

The campus of Chico State University lies at the southwestern end of the long finger of Bidwell Park. The school's 119-acre grounds proudly boast over 200 diverse and unique species of woody plants from around the world. Prominent among the 6,000 individual specimens are many legacy trees dating back to the second half of the 19th century. The couple primarily responsible for this last horticultural bounty—John Bidwell (1818-1900) and Annie Kennedy Bidwell (1839-1918)—were, and by virtue of their enterprise and lasting generosity, still are, Chico.

In a remarkable career that included running for U.S. president as a prohibitionist, John Bidwell started out as the business manager for John Sutter of Sutter's Mill fame. Then, after a run of successful prospecting on his own, he invested his fortune in agriculture, culminating in the purchase of the 26,000-acre Rancho del Arroyo Chico. In 1870 he bought the neighboring ranch south of Big Chico Creek, which land he commenced to plat for the town of Chico. In 1888 the State of California

Right: Professor Wes Dempsey standing in front of an American chestnut during a campus tree tour in 2014. Five remain of the many planted by Bidwell, although this young specimen is an offspring, probably planted by squirrels. Photo by Jason Halley, University Photographer, California State University, Chico.

Opposite top: Campus, 1965. Big Chico Creek on the right, European lindens behind the students.

Opposite bottom: Students at the Chico Normal Training School, n.d. Trees thrive in the rich soil and high aquifer.

All photos, unless noted, courtesy of Meriam Library, Special Collections, California State University, Chico.



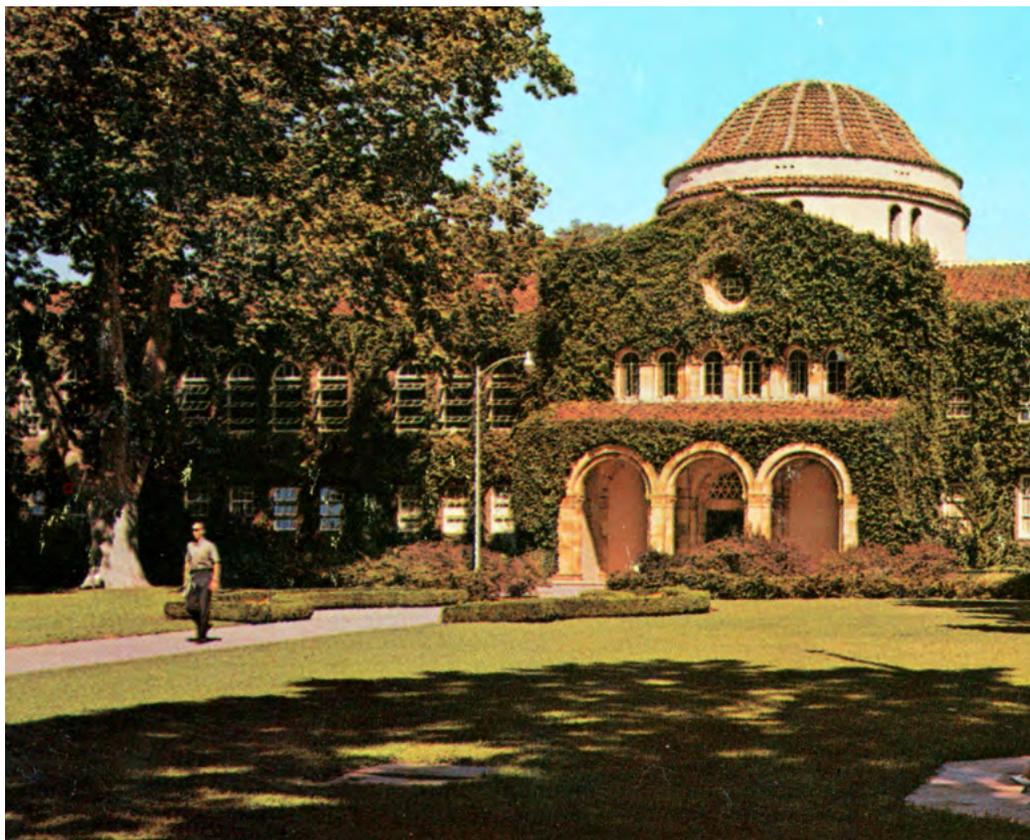


decided to establish, in the Bidwells' new town, the second normal school for the education of teachers (the first one was founded in San Jose). John and Annie, the high-minded daughter of a U.S. congressman and director of the U.S. Census, donated their eight-acre cherry orchard for the school.

In the 1970s the preserve of specimen trees and native planting that had expanded from that eight-acre kernel was at risk. The pressure of development, along with neglect and mismanagement, were contributing to the deterioration of the campus greensward. The specter of new landscaping heightened the threat. A group of professors and students resisted the changes. The botanist and professor Margery Anderson, borrowing an idea from Fresno and Fullerton, led an initiative to designate the campus an arboretum. In 1982 the conservation move was approved and the arboretum established.

Consciousness among the citizenry of the area's horticultural riches runs high. A decision to remove one of the campus's legacy trees is not taken lightly. Any course of action is likely to become fodder for the front page of the *Chico Enterprise Record*. In 2004 the fate of an ancient Italian cypress with "about as much foliage as a stalk of celery" was such a topic. After its excavation, Professor Mark Stemen, a member of the Arboretum Committee, intoned, "This was clearly a Bidwell tree. There are certain trees, when they are taken out, you pause and take a moment."<sup>1</sup> In this case the rings of the cypress clocked it at 143 years. In other words, the founder of Chico would have planted it in and around 1861.

Foremost among the defenders of the arboreal glory of CSU is Wesley Dempsey, professor emeritus of biology. Turning down offers from Monsanto and UCLA, Professor Dempsey came to teach at Chico State in 1954. Raised on a pre-Revolutionary farm in Lexington, Mass., his father was an assistant professor of horticulture and garden editor for the *Boston Globe*.<sup>2</sup> Wes knows every CSU tree, its lineage and habitat. Moreover, throughout his



retirement he has been faithfully leading tours of the university arboretum. To the visitor he apologetically explains that in the too brief time allotted to his tours he almost never gets through his complete list of trees.

His standard itinerary begins near the Bidwell Mansion, the Victorian home of John and Annie. The spreading limbs of a magnificent southern magnolia from 1863 still gracefully frame the front entrance. The lemony scent of its huge white flowers fills the air in spring. The master of the house planted this specimen five years before the completion of the home, with the intention, Dempsey suggests, of shading the front porch. The guided ramble continues to a 148-year-old tulip tree and a possibly even older ginkgo that drops its leaves in a single November day.

A true aficionado of trees, Bidwell planted them along his roads. From these allées a few survivors still stand. These veterans include some California incense cedars that, according to an 1870 city map, once bordered a buggy ride that extended west from the Bidwell porch a quarter of a mile to still-extant railroad tracks. A farm road that led to the creek (the remnant of which is now identified under the Miwok name of "So-Wil-Len-O") behind the mansion was

lined with American chestnuts, planted in about 1860. One hundred forty years after the chestnuts were first harvested, passing students snack on their fallen nuts. Some other survivors were originally part of a row of Louisiana water oaks (*Quercus nigra*) that Bidwell experimented with south of Chico Creek.

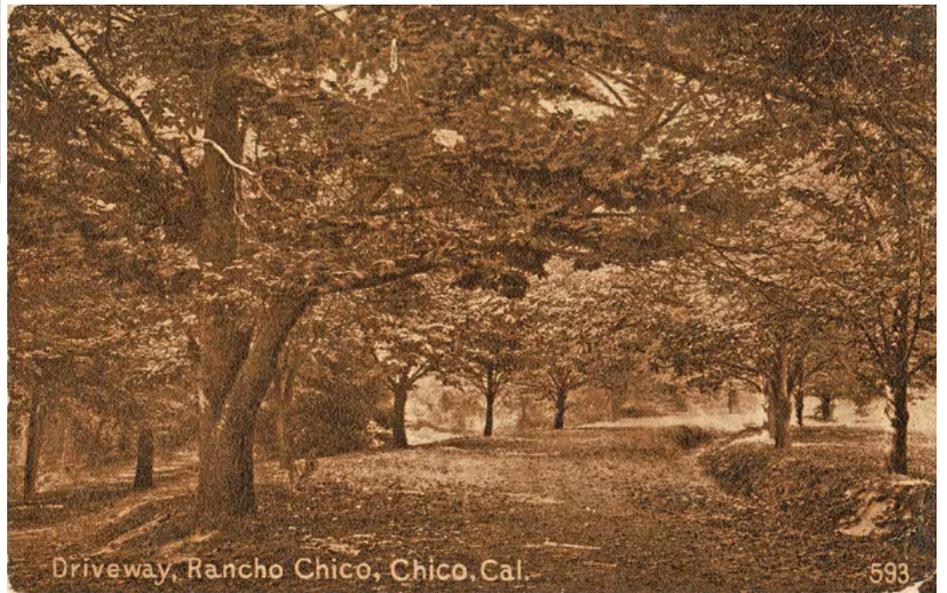
On the campus proper, the tour highlights an imposing plane tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*) that appears in an old photo showing it standing near the founding administration building. It now graces Kendall Hall, the impressive Romanesque-style building that replaced the original when it burned down. Its title of "Founders' Tree" champions the stature of all the campus trees.

The campus's offerings alone would more than suffice to qualify Chico for a high ranking on any potential list of cities with historic tree plantings. Yet that's not all. Dempsey and the sizeable plant-loving community of the area are quick to point out that a complete tour of Chico's botanical history would also take in Bidwell Park's "World of Trees," also known as "Chico's lost arboretum." The Bidwells donated the land in 1888 where remnant groves of Italian cypress, redwoods, and cork oaks of the State's second forestry experimental station still stand. The complete tour would finish

Above and opposite from top: Kendall Hall, the new administration building, and the Founder's Tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*, planted in the late 1800s), 1969. Annie Bidwell in front of the hydrangeas at the Bidwell Mansion, 1916.

Oak-lined driveway into Rancho Chico, ca. 1914.

California Normal School, Teacher's College, building and grounds, ca. 1935. Founded in 1888, Chico followed San Jose (1857) as the state's second teacher's college.



up with the ranks of well-grown evergreens of the mysterious Chico Seed Orchard, Mendocino National Forest. Following John Bidwell's pioneering example, generations of horticulturists have been eager to take advantage of the climatic and geologic conditions of this North Sacramento Valley aerie to test promising trees for use in other, less favored places.

**Endnotes**

1. Heather Hacking, "Bidwell Tree Removed from Campus," *Chico Enterprise-Record*, March 7, 2004.
2. Wes Dempsey's place in the pantheon of California landscape history is reinforced by the fact of his being a second cousin of Pearl Chase, the duenna of Santa Barbara's downtown planning.

*Joan Walters lives in a small community in the foothills of Northern California and writes about gardening and the natural world. For 20 years, she cultivated a quarter-acre cutting garden, selling fresh flowers to the Chico Farmers' Market as well as designing bouquets for weddings and other events. A retired elementary school secretary, she holds a B.A. in English from UC Santa Barbara.*

*Phoebe Cutler serves on Eden's editorial board and is a frequent contributor. She is chagrined to realize that her single main contribution to landscape history, The Public Landscape of the New Deal, is 30 years old.*



# Marin's Hidden Gem

## The Marin Art & Garden Center

Nanette Londeree

Traveling east or west on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in Ross, you may speed by wavy brick walls that frame striking gardens right in the heart of Marin. Open free to the public from dawn to dusk, the Marin Art & Garden Center (MAGC) is known to many as a beautiful site for weddings and gatherings or simply as a nice place to stroll. Resplendent with heritage trees and abundant varieties of plants and punctuated with interesting historic buildings, it hosts varied programs and activities related to the arts, history, horticulture, and environmental conservation.

Entering the Center along the main pathway, you are immediately enveloped in beauty and tranquility. A sense of timeless graciousness pervades, and the inherent peace of the site is intermingled with a bustle of activity. A plethora of ever-changing events take place in assorted settings, including a theater in a renovated barn, an outdoor amphitheater in a grove of redwood trees, an art and horticulture library in an octagonal house, a playground for tiny tots, and simple meeting rooms with enchanting garden views. These form the framework for an extraordinary venue where diverse and multi-generational members of the public come to create and experience art and culture, participate in forward-looking topical programs for growing gardens and conserving natural resources, or simply bask in the serene beauty of the place.

MAGC had its origin in the 1940s when two members of the Marin Conservation League, Caroline Livermore (1885–1968) and Gladys Smith (1900–1975), using the Allied Arts Guild in Menlo Park as a model, envisioned a self-supporting colony of artists and craftspeople creating and selling their wares within a parklike setting. As America was embroiled in a world war at the time, they also saw it as a “living memorial” to those who had sacrificed their lives in the service of the country.

Livermore was a champion of local planning for parks and open space. She helped form the Marin Conservation League in the 1930s and was the prime mover in acquiring land for Samuel P. Taylor State Park and in saving Stinson Beach, the Marin Headlands, and Richardson Bay Sanctuary from developers. She was also a founder of the Marin Audubon Society, the Richardson Bay Foundation, and the Point Reyes National Seashore Foundation. Her first son, Norman (1911-2006), served as Secretary of Resources in the Reagan administration, and the second, Putnam (1922–2015), co-founded the Trust for Public Lands and was the first attorney for the Nature Conservancy in the Western United States.

The Center's land was once owned by James Ross<sup>1</sup> who gave the property to his daughter Annie and her husband George Worn<sup>2</sup> in 1863. While their house, “Sunnyside,” was being constructed, the Worns lived in an octagonal-shaped building and began planting extensive gardens, bringing back many specimen plants from their trips abroad. By 1882, faced with financial difficulties, they sold their beloved property to the Kittle family. The Kittles expanded the house and lived there for the next 50 years. After a fire in 1931 destroyed much of the house, the Kittles tore it down and the property remained idle for the next 10 years. In 1941, Livermore rallied to preserve the property with its lovely though languishing gardens



and irreplaceable trees, and within two years, had brought together eight autonomous groups and purchased the property. The Center was incorporated in 1945 as a living memorial, its primary mission to promote appreciation and education of the arts, horticulture, and environmental conservation. MAGC became a reality.

Many Marin residents associate the Center with the early days of the Marin County Fair. Created in part to help fund the Center, The Marin Art and Garden Fair was launched in 1946 as a place where Marin residents could share ideas and techniques related to fine arts, gardens, growing edibles, and arranging flowers. Small gardens, designed by some of Marin's finest landscape architects, decorated the grounds. From its humble beginnings, the Fair became a highlight of the summer months for the next three decades. As you meander through the grounds today you'll find remnants of the Fair, such as the timber and brick Bottle House built by Ray Olesen in the timbrick style popular in Scandinavia in the 15th century.<sup>3</sup> Japanese-style garden ornaments from the Fair are tucked in planting beds. In 1975, having outgrown the space, the Fair relocated to the Marin County Civic Center, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and nominated as a World Heritage Site in 2015.

Livermore realized that a fund-raising auxiliary would be needed to maintain the Center and in 1947 held a luncheon with community members donating goods for sale. The event raised \$15 and was the unofficial beginning of Laurel House Antiques. Today the cherished antique store continues to do a brisk business.

Like many nonprofit organizations, MAGC has had some significant financial challenges over the last 70 years. “I first visited

Opposite: *The majestic giant sequoia (Sequoiadendron giganteum) was brought from Yosemite Valley as a small tree and planted in the 1880s. Photo by Gary Scales.*

Above: *The serpentine walls bordering two sides of the Marin Art & Garden Center were modeled after the "crinkle-crankle" walls found in England. Photo by Saxon Holt/PhotoBotanic.*



MAGC nearly 10 years ago while working at the Garden Conservancy,” reflects MAGC’s Executive Director, Antonia Adezio. “At that time, there was an urgent need for help in planning for the future of the Center and rescuing it from financial instability. Thanks to the dedication of the MAGC Board and the leadership of two exceptional volunteers, this crisis was resolved and MAGC is once again thriving as a gathering place for the community.”

The horticultural bounty of the nearly 11-acre grounds is made possible in part by coastal California’s mild Mediterranean climate and the tall trees that buffer afternoon winds. A seasonal stream, Kittle Creek, bisects the property, resulting in a riparian habitat, and wild lands frame the eastern boundary. The serpentine walls that border two sides of the Center were modeled after English-styled crinkle-crinkle walls,<sup>4</sup> similar to those built by Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia. Forming the framework for the garden spaces are dozens of varieties of mature trees, native and ornamental, evergreen and deciduous. In 1870, Worn planted a small magnolia tree (*Magnolia grandiflora*) in the center of the property. Growing for more than 135 years to 60 feet tall, the tree was the centerpiece of the Center until it was removed in 2006 due to disease. Today, a ring of 25 daughters of the mother tree stand tribute to it.

A towering dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), planted in 1947 from seed collected during an archeological expedition to China, forms a canopy over a Victorian-styled gazebo and flower-filled planting bed. A majestic giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), brought from Yosemite Valley as a small tree in the 1880s, serves as a sentry for the garden. The spectacular

English oak (*Quercus robur*) in the Habitat Garden is thought to be one of the largest of this species in California. Native valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*) grow along with evergreen coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*), white oaks (*Quercus Alba*), and young red oaks (*Quercus rubra*).

There are varieties of mulberry (*Morus*), elm (*Ulmus*), and honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), and many cultivars of Japanese maples (*Acer japonica*) as well as a fine example of *Ginkgo biloba*,<sup>5</sup> also known as the Maidenhair tree. Dogwoods (*Cornus* ‘Kousa’) provide a glorious show in the spring along with a multitude of flowering fruit trees. A pear tree (*Prunus communis*) near the large fountain was started as a graft from one of the last remaining pear trees in the orchard of the former mission of San Rafael, which was built in 1817. On the north perimeter of the gardens, a glorious stand of crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*) put on a brilliant display of color in late summer.

Encircled by decorative wrought-iron fencing laced with fragrant blooms is the Rose Garden, which was designed and installed in 2004 by members of the Marin Rose Society. It showcases over 150 varieties of climbers, hybrid teas and floribundas, English roses, and miniature, shrub, and old garden roses—all protected from marauding deer and maintained without the use of pesticides.

To the northeast of the Rose Garden is the Memory Garden, a circular glen sheltered by a quilted canopy of leaves. Created by the Marin Garden Club in the early years of the Center as “a place of quiet beauty for remembering,” this garden is the home of two sculptures (*The Reclining Lady* and *The Standing Lady*) by American sculptor Adaline Kent Howard (1900–1957).<sup>6</sup>

Areas across the site feature different types of plants. The Sun Garden showcases colorful ornamental plants that require low to moderate water use and that are deer resistant, low maintenance,

Above and opposite: *The early days of the Marin County Fair featured small gardens designed by some of Marin’s finest landscape architects. Photos courtesy of Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.*





and often fragrant. The eastern hillside is planted with California natives, and a basketry garden embellished with woven fences, giant baskets, a reed boat, and old-fashioned bee skeps house several colonies of bees. The Habitat Garden contains a bountiful collection of larval host plants that attract butterflies, bees and hummingbirds, while the mixture of California natives and Mediterranean climate perennials, annuals, and grasses creates a kaleidoscope of colors during the peak of bloom summer to fall. In “Exploring Habitats” field trips to this garden, produced in conjunction with Marin Master Gardeners, first and second graders learn about worm composting, oak tree and various plant and animal habitats.

The Herb Garden includes edible plants, native plants, and sweet-scented herbs that help enrich the soil and attract pollinators. MAGC’s latest garden addition is the Edible Garden, a hands-on demonstration and exhibition garden for all ages. This fully accessible garden with its raised beds and a “learning shed” is one of six stops in an educational program for third and fourth graders entitled “Dig It, Grow It, Eat It,” which exposes children to the process of growing healthy food.

Two buildings remain today from the original “Sunnyside” property. While Sunnyside was under construction, the Worns made their home in the “Octagon House,” which was built in an architectural style fashionable in the 1850s. In the late 1960s, this building was moved to its present site. It received a new foundation, the interior was remodeled, and the house was renamed the “Jose Moya del Pino Library” in honor of one of the founding members, artist Jose Moya del Pino.<sup>7</sup> Today, the library houses Moya’s collection of fine arts and gardening books and hosts the Ross Historical Society.

The barn, also built in 1864, was offered by the Kittle estate in 1939 to the Ross Valley Players, a local theater group that jumped at the chance for a permanent home. After much needed cleaning and renovations, they held their first performance in 1940 and recently launched their 86th season!

Within the boundary of MAGC, Pixie Park was founded in 1952 by Elizabeth Terwilliger (1909–2006),<sup>8</sup> known to generations of Marin residents as “Mrs. T,” and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) as a safe place for the children of MAGC volunteers to play while parents were working at the Center. The pro bono Pixie Playground design project was completed by Robert Royston (1918–2008), a landscape architect known for designs that focused on the use of space in private gardens, planned communities, urban plazas, and children’s outdoor-play areas by a wide range of users, including families, very young children, and the elderly. The Pixie Playground project featured Royston’s signature organic forms for planting and play areas and innovative play structures. In 1958 Pixie Playground became autonomous from the AAUW, as membership in the playground had increased, and was incorporated as Pixie Parents.

This spring, an art gallery built in the 1940s by the Marin Society of Artists, will be dedicated. With its distinctive modernist character, “The Studio” is to be a center for year-round lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and performances.

Opposite from top: *The spectacular English oak (Quercus robur) is thought to be one of the largest of its species in California. Photo by Gary Scales.*

*A view of the setting of the main house at Sunnyside and the bucolic and sparsely developed Ross Valley of the 1880s. Photo courtesy of Ross Historical Society.*

With a view to the future, Adezio notes that “MAGC is poised to become a vibrant public garden and a hub for educational and cultural activities for audiences from throughout the Bay Area. The grounds have never looked better, and it is beautiful at every season.” So, next time you’re traveling by those wavy brick walls, take some time to come in, park the car, and stroll through this public jewel. You’ll find magic in the beauty and tranquility.

#### Endnotes

1. James Ross (1812–1862) was born in Scotland and came to California via Australia to seek his fortune in the 1849 Gold Rush. In 1859 he purchased 10,000 acres in central Marin. The town of Ross was named for him.
2. George Worn (1826–1895) was a business associate of James Ross. He married Annie Ross, James’ daughter.
3. One side of the house has glass bottle bottoms imbedded in cement, hence the name.
4. S-shaped curves joined in a continuous ribbon or serpentine form that stiffens the wall, enabling it to be less thick than a straight wall would have to be for stability. James Stevens Curl, *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, 2006, 211.
5. Species of this tree are considered a living fossil, with true fossils related to modern *Ginkgo* dating back 270 million years.
6. American sculptor Adaline Kent Howard (1900–1957) was the daughter of Elizabeth Thacher Kent and U.S. congressman William Kent. She studied at the Academy de la Grand Chaurmiere with Emile Antoine Bourdelle, a disciple of and former assistant to Rodin, and created abstract sculptures with forms inspired by the natural landscape.
7. Jose Moya del Pino (1881–1969), artist and statesman, was born in Spain and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid. In 1925 King Alfonso XIII appointed him Director of the “Spanish Artistic Mission” to foster appreciation of Spanish art and culture in America. By the time Moya reached San Francisco, the Spanish government was in a state of collapse and he chose to remain in the United States.
8. Terwilliger devoted over 50 years of her life to teaching others about the environment. She helped to preserve Angel Island and the Audubon Richardson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary in Tiburon. She also helped establish many of the county’s bike paths, which have become a model for communities throughout the nation.

*Nanette Londeree planted her first garden at age five. This passionate life-long gardener and self-proclaimed plant nerd retired from a career in the pharmaceutical industry. A garden writer, Master Gardener, and Master Rosarian, she has been on the Board of Trustees of MAGC for the last nine years, serving as acting co-Executive Director for the past three years.*

## CGLHS MEMBERS NEWS

### CGLHS AT THE S.F. '16 MINT

Over the weekend of March 5-6, CGLHS shared a room at San Francisco's Old Mint (1870) with a postcard club and a Niles-based silent film museum. All exhibitors vied for the attention of the 6,500 people who streamed into the History Fair, a fair number of whom paused to read our poster, “The ‘Wood’ in St. Francis Wood.” That enclave involved Duncan MacDuffie, John Galen Howard, and the Olmsted Brothers, not to mention 175 acres of Adolph Sutro's forest. Many thanks to Peggy Darnall, Sandra Price, Keith Park, Meg Starr, Stafford Buckley, Eleanor Cox, Phoebe Cutler, and Marlea Graham for bringing CGLHS alive for a new audience.

## SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 20, 2016 • 7:30 PM

### “RUTH SHELLHORN: MIDCENTURY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA”

Documentary film, lecture and book signing by Kelly Comras—a CGLHS event in partnership with the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens. Free with RSVP to [info@cglhs.org](mailto:info@cglhs.org)

# Trees in Paradise: A California History

Jared Farmer

Book Review by Suzanne Goode

**T***rees in Paradise: A California History* illuminates the post Gold Rush history of California through a kaleidoscopic examination of the exploitation, commodification, and glorification of four iconic tree groups: the redwoods, the eucalypts, the citruses, and the palms.

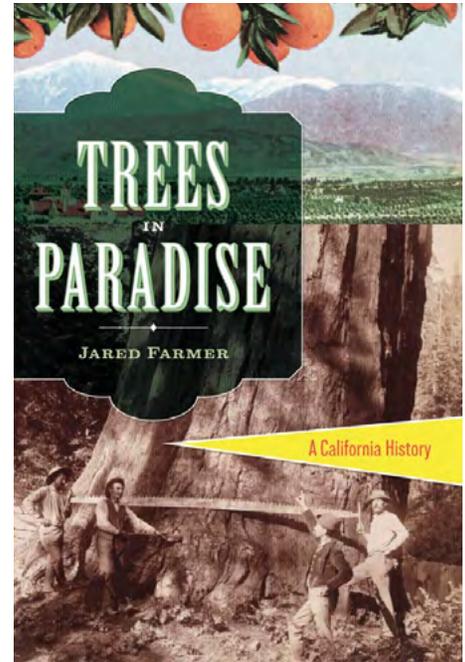
The extraordinary size and age of the coast redwoods and the giant sequoias engendered among the Anglo-American Gold Rush arrivals to the state the notion of California as a realm apart from the rest of the world. The utility and economic value of the clear, straight-grained and tannin-rich wood of the coast redwood in particular quickly overcame any reverence inspired by the initial “discovery” of the forests. The shockingly wasteful mining of the old growth coastal trees, which fell to the axe by the millions, proceeded unabated even as the movement to preserve them gave birth to institutions such as the Save the Redwoods League, the Sierra Club, the State Board of Forestry, the U. S. Forest Service, and California State Parks, as well as many of California’s environmental laws.

The coming of the eucalypts in the late 19th century marked recognition of the unsustainable harvest of old growth redwoods and other natives, and the beginning of the horticultural movement, the afforestation of California, and the shift to a more pastoral economy. New Californians, who mostly hailed from eastern locations, found the native landscape lacking in trees. The fast-growing eucalypts, particularly the blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), played into the belief that nature could be improved for the betterment of human existence. The trees, promoted for their ability to provide near-instant shade, shelter from the wind, and improvement of the general health and well-being of the populace, rapidly vaulted into cult status in the first wave of “eucalyptus frenzy.”

As the trees reached maturity however, disillusionment set in as the promised benefits failed to materialize, and they fell out of favor. A second, commercial wave followed a few decades later. Eucalypts were seen as the answer to all perceived pending ecological disasters: timber and water shortages, lack of rainfall, desertification, and erosion. The promise of an unlimited sustainable lumber supply led to massive plantations throughout the state in public parks and on many University of California campuses. This phase dissolved with the realization that only old growth, properly seasoned eucalyptus wood made suitable lumber. The hope for a quick solution to the lumber problem was dashed. In more recent years, eucalypts have come to be thought of as dangerous, fire-prone invasive exotics by conservation biologists and some homeowners.

The arrival of two citrus cuttings shipped from Washington, D.C. to Riverside in 1872 began the transformation of horticulture from an endeavor of moral, almost patriotic, environmentalism to an industrial, agricultural one. The Washington navel soon became the driving force of growth in southern California long before freeways and the post war baby boom. The gentleman’s orchard, represented on orange crate pictures by comely lasses harvesting fruit with snow-capped mountains as a backdrop, was in fact a well-crafted fantasy disguising an industrial enterprise that exploited a large non-white labor force and required massive use of oil and toxic chemicals, the re-plumbing of the state to deliver water, and intensive horticultural manipulation to nurture a plant that was, in fact, completely unsuited to grow in the climate of California. By 1920 the citrus empire occupied entire valleys in southern California from the Oxnard plain to the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains. Yet, by the end of the 20th century, this vast orchard was virtually gone, a victim to rising land values and the high cost of replacing tapped-out trees in the face of introduced pests and pathogens.

The history of California trees is a story of harvested commodities, horticultural experiments, and industrial-scale agriculture. With the palms, that history turns finally to trees with no inherent utility (edible date palms aside) except for their symbolism and use as images. Palms have at various times functioned as landscaping shorthand for the good life, the south Pacific, the Mediterranean, the imagined Spanish past, Hollywood glamour,



*Trees in Paradise: A California History*  
Jared Farmer

W. W. Norton and Company, 2013  
552 pages

new money, modernism, and tackiness. It is hard to imagine Los Angeles without palm trees. Palms can be easily propagated, dug up, transplanted and used as instant landscaping. Their popularity has waxed and waned over the years, but the appetite for them seems inexhaustible.

The redwoods, eucalypts, citrus, and palms had profound and long-lasting effects on the railroad, oil, water resource development, agricultural, entertainment, tourist, and advertising industries. Their history is intertwined with the history of the labor movement, the anti-labor movement, the conservation movement, architecture, arts and crafts, literature, and pop culture. The author warns, however, that the riches bestowed on California from the utilization of exotic plant life came at a brief time of benevolent climatic conditions that may now be ending, and that California may have reached the end of botanical boom times.

# The Tree: Meaning and Myth

## Frances Carey

Book Review by Margaretta J. Darnall

In each tree group Californians saw the potential for the instant fulfillment of aspirations, whether they were moral, spiritual, or financial. Human attributes were projected onto the trees and replaced with new attributes as each tree became fashionable, fell into disfavor, and then became fashionable again. The three non-native groups became vehicles for the manufacture and maintenance of California's image as a green paradise where nature provided the good life for the taking.

*Trees in Paradise* is an absorbing chronicle of exploitation, environmental ignorance, hubris, greed, racism, boosterism, ingenuity, industriousness, environmental activism, progressivism, eugenics, and social engineering. Illustrated and filled with wry commentary, odd facts, and humorous quotations begging to be read aloud, this is a book to be savored. Detailed notes derived from books, scientific journals, magazine and newspaper articles, government reports, and political speeches, as well as a 10-page list of reading suggestions, provide a generous guide for further study.

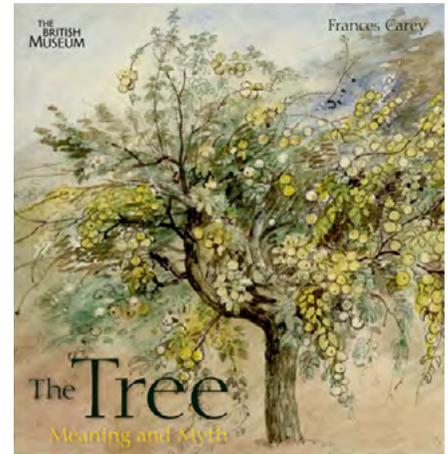
*Suzanne Goode, a native of Virginia, has been a California resident for 44 years. After receiving her M.S. in biology from California State University, Los Angeles, she conducted chaparral research for the U.S. Forest Service. An employee of California State Parks for 26 years, she is currently a Senior Environmental Scientist and is responsible for the oversight of 40,000 acres of Mediterranean ecosystem land in the Santa Monica Mountains of Southern California.*

The British Museum's beautifully produced book *The Tree: Meaning and Myth* differs from other books of the same title. It is not a guide. It is not a poetic meditation. Rather it is about the tree as art and about the meaning of the tree in art. Frances Carey, former Deputy Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the museum, begins her introduction with a quote from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*: "Once upon a time trees were temples of the deities...." She concludes that "Trees do indeed reveal a lot about a person, a society or a country's soul." These two quotes summarize the work.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is general and discusses "The Knowledge of Trees" and "Myth and Metaphor," primarily the tree of life. The introductory chapters provide brief histories of scientific inquiry, plant exploration and migration, and trees as objects of worship. Stanford professor Robert Pogue Harrison's thought-provoking 1992 book *Forests* enters into Carey's arguments.

The second part forms the bulk of the book. Called "An Arboretum," this is a magnificently illustrated catalogue of 25 trees, organized alphabetically by their Latin names. The arboretum is cross-cultural and refers to plant hunters and art from around the world. Carey is particularly eloquent on *Cedrus* (cedar), *Cupressus* (cypress), and *Malus* (apple), three trees with potent symbolic meanings in many cultures. *Buxus* (boxwood) has lent itself to microscopic carvings, much like ivory, and is accompanied by pictures of a 14th-century English citole (an early guitar), a 16th-century Flemish miniature altar, and a page of William Blake's engravings from a boxwood block. The *Prunus* family showcases Chinese and Japanese traditions.

*The Tree* relies almost exclusively on prints, drawings, paintings, and objects in the British Museum's collections. The illustrations, which are representational and inspirational, include objects made from trees. Their range is astonishing, encompassing archaeological finds, herbarium specimens, botanical illustrations, costumes, sculpture, and coins. In the process of learning about trees, we are



### *The Tree: Meaning and Myth*

Frances Carey

The British Museum Press, 2012

192 pages

[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

introduced to the history of British collecting, science, and literature.

Short, focused notes and the bibliography at the end of the book refer to important treatises and essays on trees. This sort of book leaves specialized readers frustrated and wanting more on every subject. Only the epilogue falls short. Here Carey asks where all the forests have gone and asserts that "human history has been one of constant deforestation." This basic environmentalist assumption has been seriously questioned and shown to be less than accurate. Nevertheless, *The Tree: Meaning and Myth* will delight and inspire any garden-lover.

*Oakland native Margaretta (Peggy) Darnall graduated from U.C. Berkeley in architecture and received a PhD in Architectural History from Cornell. She was Eden's book review editor for many years and has written for Pacific Horticulture and the Journal of the Garden History Society.*



# California Garden & Landscape History Society

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## **TOUR AND TALK**

### **An Architecture and Horticultural Walking Tour of Malaga Cove (1922-1933)**

#### **Palos Verdes Estates, June 5, 2016 with Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, Associate Professor Christine Edstrom O'Hara**

This walking tour, led by Professor O'Hara, will examine the Mediterranean hill town typology of Palos Verdes Estates through stops at Malaga Cove Plaza, Farnham Martin Park, Malaga Cove Library, Malaga Cove School, Palos Verdes Beach and Athletic Club, and the Haggerty Estate (now the Neighborhood Church). Details forthcoming by email and will be posted on the CGLHS website around May 1.



Above: *Palos Verdes Estates garden, photo by Meghan O'Hara, 2016.*

## **SEPTEMBER 23-25, 2016 CGLHS ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN CHICO**



The town of Chico is an agricultural center, brewing capital, and artists' haven, indebted to the early generosity of the Bidwells. Visit the verdant Chico State University arboretum and campus, huge park, and centurion trees. Tour the Sierra Nevada Brewing Company. Take tea in a geologically important and other-worldly canyon. Discover the little known allure of the Northern Valley.

Reserve your hotel now: Hotel Diamond (530-893-3100 x7109) or Chico Quality Inn (530-343-7911). Mention California Garden & Landscape History Society for group discount.

Above: *Vintage postcard of California Normal School, Teacher's College, building and grounds, ca. 1935. Courtesy of Meriam Library, Special Collections, California State University, Chico.*