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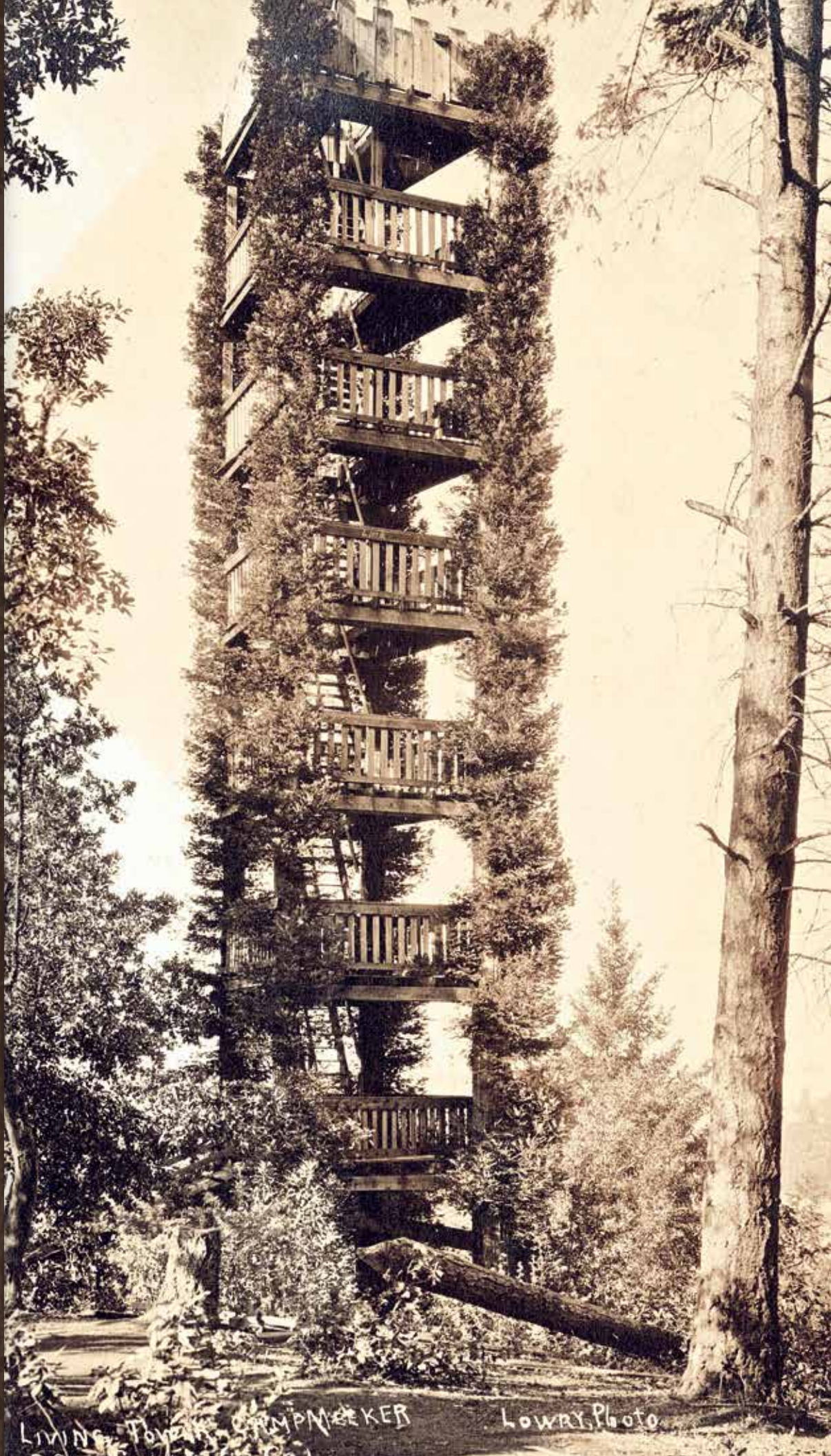

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The LA River at Glendale. Courtesy Wikimedia.

Eden

JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA GARDEN & LANDSCAPE HISTORY SOCIETY

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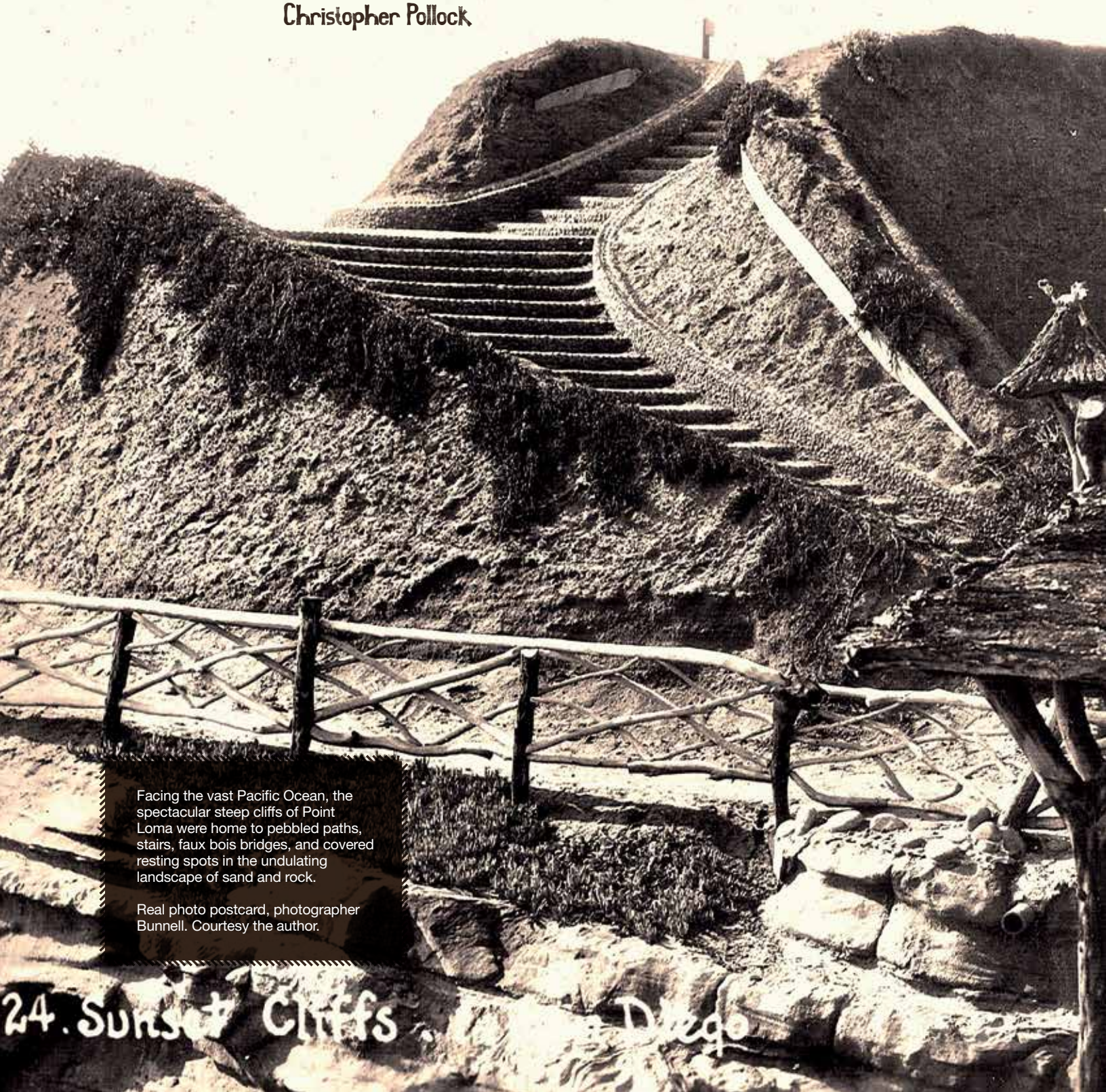
Above: A Rustic pergola, climbing with grape vines, covers the wishing well at the so-called "Ramona's Marriage Place," in the historic Old Town section of San Diego. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs.

THE RUSTIC LANDSCAPES OF CALIFORNIA

Christopher Pollock



Facing the vast Pacific Ocean, the spectacular steep cliffs of Point Loma were home to pebbled paths, stairs, faux bois bridges, and covered resting spots in the undulating landscape of sand and rock.

Real photo postcard, photographer Bunnell. Courtesy the author.


Bunnell
Photo Shop—
933 Sixth St

I have long been fascinated by the Rustic style and its ability to delight.

Considered by many to be old-fashioned, Rustic-appearing landscape features and details remain the height of wit when well-crafted. Rough-hewn log and stone structures continue to enchant us, while faux bois (concrete artistically crafted to imitate the characteristics of wood) still can amaze and deliver joy. While no longer in fashion, these relics of an earlier design era live on as beloved gestures from the past.

While carefully and thoughtfully designed, these places typically exuded a playfulness or evoked a sense of fantasy often sadly missing in today's landscape and garden design. These Rustic landscape elements were often crafted using natural materials such as tree logs, branches, or roots; boulders, rocks, and pebbles; or concrete (cement, a burned combination of limestone and clay or shale, combined with sand and water), or fired clay. Designers and craftspeople exploited these materials' intrinsic structural and aesthetic qualities, drawing on their ancient spirit to create fantastic structures and site furnishings that evoke a Picturesque rural vernacular style. Some Rustic-appearing landscape structures and objects may be functional and decorative; some may seem reserved and self-effacing (almost unnoticeable), while others are delightfully over-the-top. No matter the scale of their creations — from large landscape environments to small decorative objects, these properties hold part of our California landscape heritage, unique in their artifice and charm.

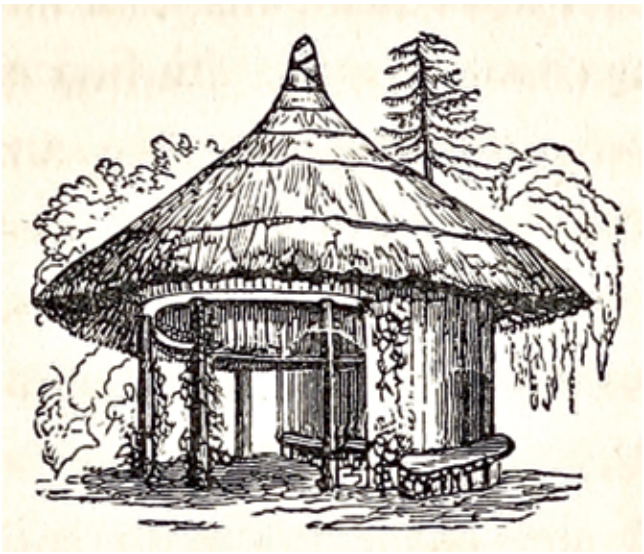
HISTORIC CONTEXT

The genesis of the Rustic Style emerged in early eighteenth-century British landscape design with a movement known as the *Modern British Style of Landscape Gardening*, more commonly known today as the *Picturesque*. This move, in Britain and on the European continent, away from large formal Baroque era gardens was in part due to the cost of maintaining these extensive and highly manicured landscapes. At the same time, a revolution in sentiment about the natural world led poet and amateur landscape gardener Alexander Pope to declare that "All Nature is a garden" (1713); he also had used the term "Picturesque" (as in appearing like a painting) in 1712. William Kent's proposed drawings for the landscape at Chiswick (ca, 1730) clearly showed the transition from Classical to Picturesque in the Rustic stonework option that Burlington selected for the head of the Chiswick cascade. In literature, we find William Gilpin's *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty,* published in London in 1792, and Uvedale Price's *An Essay on the Picturesque* in 1794. Subsequently, many European designers began designing landscapes in the Picturesque style at times employing Rustic-appearing embellishments in the form of site furnishings, fences, bridges, and summer houses.[1] Rustic detailing might imply an authenticity of structure, but this quite often was superficial, using a veneer of applied logs versus being built with logs. Many of these were decorated with natural pine cones or shells arranged in elaborate patterns. Today, such embellishments are identified as being in the Rustic style.

The Rustic style proliferated worldwide, often expressed with wood, a readily available material. In 1899, a Victorian-era magazine, *The Manufacturer and Builder,* stated, "There is nothing that so completely satisfies the sense of harmony by its very simplicity and naturalness as the Rustic pavilion fashioned roughly of tree stems and branches, snugly embowered with wild climbers."[2]

The Arts and Crafts Movement, established in England in the 1880s and later practiced in the US, sought to reunite people with nature. From a style standpoint, natural materials, the fruits of nature, were a source of inspiration. But this, too, was stylized. All forms, from housing to furniture, exploited the material's intrinsic structural and aesthetic qualities. Being part of a lifestyle, Rustic in all its forms was in its heyday during this period.

The idea of Rustic as carried out in the US comes from several different influences



Landscape practitioner A.J. Downing first published "A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening" in 1841. In it, he included many line drawings of examples showing what he was discussing.

surrounding the enjoyment of the countryside and rural nature. One is the written word, where individuals wrote in praise of nature and the simple life from a philosophical and moral standpoint, while others were pragmatic with specific ideas on how to enhance this experience through design. Andrew Jackson Downing's (1815-1852) *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* was published in 1841. Downing was America's first true landscape architect who considered all the facets of a landscape's design and construction. Downing placed Rustic within the Picturesque style, which was just one of the several design styles he examined — each appropriate to its landscape setting. In a chapter titled "Embellishments," Downing included suggestions on how to position and construct Rustic work. He compared the use of Rustic site furnishings with more formally architectural pieces, which are more appropriately situated close to a building. His instruction was that Rustic work belonged in outlying areas where "nature is predominant, (as the distant wooded parts, or walks of a residence) and appear but one remove from natural forms."[3] He considered the design of seating pieces and shelter buildings, including a prospect tower, constructed of branches, twigs, and sometimes moss. Rockwork was used to augment these constructions or to produce a backdrop skeleton where Picturesque plantings could grow.

A factor that contributed both to the rise of the Picturesque and of the Rustic was the emergent back-to-nature movement of the

time, a reaction to the shortcomings of the polluted and soul-destroying Industrial Age. Although the idea of expressing Arcadian ideals in architecture and other constructions had been around for some time, associations with wilderness came into full flower with the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), including "Nature" published in 1836, and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) with his work "Walden" published in 1854. Their works influenced John Muir toward the formation of the Sierra Club in 1892. The conservation of lands for public use was part of the concept that people reap moral and social benefits from close contact with nature. The intent was a whole-hearted and healing relationship between humankind and their surroundings -- to be in tune with nature. The objective was a lifestyle, not a style.

The following is an edited version of Henry David Thoreau's journal entry from November 11, 1850, where he muses about a stump fence:

> I am attracted by a fence made of white pine roots. It is light, white, and dry withal, and its fantastic forms are agreeable to my eye. One would not have believed that any trees had such snarled and gnarled roots. In some instances, you have a coarse network of roots as they interlaced on the surface perhaps of a swamp, which, set on its edge, really looks like a fence, with its paling crossing at various angles, and root repeatedly growing into root, — a rare phenomenon above ground, — so as to leave open spaces, square and diamond-shaped and triangular, quite like a length of fence. The different branches of the roots continually grow into one another, so as to make grotesque figures, sometimes rude harps whose resonant

Opposite: A stump fence consists of the uprooted tree stumps that are put closely side-by-side to create an enclosure, usually for a field. This spectacular example was part of the Shrine of the Pines, a museum devoted to the Rustic that is in Baldwin, Minnesota. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Above: On the warmer section of the San Francisco Peninsula is Burlingame, which is south of the often fog shrouded city. Situated inside this round Rustic shelter is a matching suite of chairs, settees, and central table. All are constructed of undulating tree branches; the table has an apron of small triangular pieces, giving the piece a softer look, as if like fringe. Newman Postcard Co., courtesy the author.

Left: A representative example of "Adirondack Great Camps" architecture is Camp Pine Knot located on Raquette Lake, New York. Among the exterior's many exuberant details is the bay window, on the left, which is clad in birch bark and a pattern of applied twigs. Photo courtesy the author.

> strings of roots give a sort of musical sound when struck, such as the earth spirit might play on.[4]

Encompassing nearly one-fifth of New York State, the Adirondack Forest Preserve is an early chapter in the conservation of wild lands by an act of the New York Legislature in 1885. By the late nineteenth-century, the region was one of the wealthy's most popular summer destinations in North America. The remote scenic beauty combined with a pleasant climate due to the high elevation drew many urban dwellers seeking relief from summer's heat, especially from nearby New York City. Here financiers and industrialists built the region's version of Newport, including all the amenities, although the civilizing features are not readily apparent. In some respects, these camps were pretend camping, whose only genuine inconvenience was the arduous trip via a combination of modes including boat, train, and carriage. But once they arrived, both owners and their lucky guests were treated to all the pleasures urban living offered. The camps had amusing names like Kamp Kill Kare, Camp Pine Knot, and Camp As You Like It. Here artisans let their imaginations take flight with every conceivable construct of Rustic, including elements in the landscape.

Informally named "Parkitecture," the style was developed by the United States National Park Service (NPS) to create a symbiotic dance with nature's rock, soil, and vegetation. The great public lodges constructed by the NPS are the largest and most exuberant Rustic constructions we have today. The initial idea of Parkitecture was not created by the government but rather the railway companies who made destinations along their tracks that led to far-off places. A benchmark design emerged when architect Robert Reamer designed the massive seven-story Old Faithful Inn in Wyoming's Yellowstone Park, funded by the Northern

Pacific Railroad. Built during the winter of 1903-04, the inn's architect wanted the asymmetry of the building to reflect the chaos of nature. Its design is an extravagant use of enclosed space and materials while maintaining a high-style rusticity. The hotel's lobby featured a soaring sixty-five-foot ceiling, conceived well before the urban Portman atrium hotels of the later twentieth-century and a focal point of a massive four-sided rhyolite stone fireplace. Railings and columns of the many balconies were made of contorted lodgepole pine. The following year the Fred Harvey Company partnered with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad to create a luxury hotel, El Tovar, sited on the south rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. The railroad retained architect Charles Whittlesey to design the 100-room structure, which opened its doors in 1905. In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson officially signed into creation the NPS with their dual mission of protecting park resources while accommodating the public.

Within the context of this overview of "California Rustic," we will see a few examples of Japanese gardens in California employing Rustic detailing. These gardens share a love of Rustic simplicity and use similar materials, construction, and design details. But the two approaches to "Rusticity" evolved differently, with the Japanese tradition grounded in cultural inspirations such as Buddhism and Shinto, versus the British Picturesque romantic reaction to the geometry and control of nature inherent in French formal garden design.[5]

What follows is an overview of numerous properties within California (primarily public, some still extant) that feature structures or furnishings constructed using crude or seemingly crude materials. Thus, this essay takes the reader on an episodic journey of California's Rustic landscapes, skimming across the geo- and topographically wide-ranging Golden State. The locations vary significantly from mountains and great valleys to deep forests and deserts to the ocean's edge. Our journey begins in Central and Southern California. In the Fall issue of *Eden*, we will continue our survey of California Rustic with examples in Northern California.

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

PEBBLE BEACH

In the state's coastal midsection is the well-known tourist destination of 17-Mile Drive on the Monterey Peninsula. A large project was started there in 1880 by the Pacific Improvement Company, an asset of the infamous Big Four consortium of railroad magnates Crocker, Hopkins, Huntington,

Opposite: The exterior of Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming features a dramatic porte cochere supported by battered log cribbing piers set on stone plinths. When the hotel's entry was later enlarged with a second parallel porte cochere, this detail was replicated, providing an open deck space on its roof. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Above: This shows another example of a destination grand hotel in the wilderness that was built, in this case, by the Great Northern Railroad. The Glacier Hotel is sited within the majestic landscape of Glacier National Park in Montana. The original east entry featured a gigantic tripart-form Rustic portal. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

and Stanford. The intent was to create an exclusive residence park — a resort enclave for the wealthy. An informal clubhouse was built in 1909 near the adjacent hotel, which served as a restaurant for guests and visitors and something to attract potential buyers. The Pebble Beach Lodge clubhouse was a large log cabin that showed San Francisco architect Louis Hobart's flexibility to design whatever was required for the project. He is best known for his formal hand in many Bay Area residences and commercial projects. The entire front of the three-segment building was a veranda with porte-cochère at one end. The veranda was supported by unpeeled pine log columns and the open roof of logs harvested from the surrounding forest. Blurring the distinction between indoors and out, the interior was created using exposed logs, down to the lighting fixtures. The adjacent (and simpler) Cottage Row of the Del Monte Lodge tipped its hat to Rustic with a more closed-in veranda with log columns only. After the Pebble Beach Lodge burned in 1917, Hobart again was tapped in 1919 to design the current building using more traditional materials. Today it is known as the Lodge at Pebble Beach.

FRESNO

Located in the Central Valley is an unexpected example of "cemetery Rustic." It is a grave marker in Fresno's Mountain View Cemetery that celebrates the life of Harry S. Van Meter, the first police officer to die in Fresno's line of duty. He was killed in 1907 at the age of twenty-nine. Van Meter was also a member of the fraternal organization called Woodmen of the World.[6] The non-profit was founded in 1890 by Joseph Cullen Root (nothing to do with the lumber industry), and the lodge used the symbol of the tree trunk as its logo. In the lodge's early years, part of the death benefit was to receive a grave marker in the form of a tree stump--a three-dimensional carved stone marker, usually about four feet high. Its design included sawn or broken limbs representing a life cut short, combined with an emblem symbolizing equality and commonwealth. A design variation illustrated a dove in flight holding an olive branch and logging tools, symbolizing artistry and cultural progress. Even though there were standard designs, there were many variations, ranging from simple to elaborate. The Latin phrase ***Dum Tacet Clamat*** appears on most stones and is translated to mean "Though silent, he speaks." This custom lasted until the 1920s when the cost of the memorials became prohibitive, and fashions changed. Created of symbolically eternal stone, these memorials can be found in many cemeteries across California and the United States.

Above: This is a typical representation of a carved stone Woodmen of the World grave marker seen in cemeteries across the United States. This one is in Fresno's Mountain View Cemetery and celebrates the life of organization member Harry S. Van Meter. Courtesy waymarking.com.

Fresno County's Shaver Lake, sited within the Sierra National Forest, features the Shaver Lake Trading Post, a commercial building first opened in 1927 by John Harshman. Until then, there was little reason to build anything in this remote place other than the structures built to support the logging and ranching. A dam was completed that year by Southern California Edison, creating a reservoir where there once had been a mill pond. The original town was submerged with the filling of the pool. The Trading Post building was constructed for multipurpose use and housed the town's post office, diner, store, and real estate office.[7] An unusual aspect of the building was its extensive pergola of logs that acted as an open canopy to visually enclose the area where an attendant filled your gasoline tank and checked the oil and water level. Today the building remains with its vertical log exterior cladding, as does the business, but the pergola structure and the ethyl pumps are gone.

MOONEY GROVE PARK

A county landmark in the Tulare County seat of Visalia is Mooney Grove Park, situated between Visalia and Tulare and surrounded by agricultural fields. The park was established because valley oak trees (*Quercus lobata*) that formerly covered the Kaweah Delta area rapidly diminished. Resident Hohn Tuohy championed the forested land's move into the public realm and convinced county supervisors to purchase the intact grove in 1909 for $15,000 from the Mooney family, who had owned the land since 1878. (Tuohy also participated in creating Sequoia National Park, created by an Act of Congress in 1890.) Known initially as Tulare County Park, the park had a Rustic ceremonial entry, sited on today's Mooney Boulevard, constructed in 1920 of oak limbs harvested from the park site.[8] The entrance was topped by a pediment and flanked by fences. The park also included rockwork in the form of a fountain, a vernacular picnic shelter, and (at one time) a Rustic boathouse. The boathouse recalled the form of a Native American bark longhouse with a barrel roof. One of its gabled ends faced the lagoon: d its exposed truss was filled with a decorative pattern of branches radiating from the center point. Today a sizable 1980s-dimensional lumber replacement boathouse sits on the lagoon's shore.

MANZANAR

A Japanese American World War II concentration camp might seem an unlikely place to find elements of Rustic landscape design. However, Manzanar National Historic Site, in the unforgiving bleakness of

the Owens Valley, retains some of the Rustic landscape garden elements designed and built by those interned there. [9] Internees were given access outside the camp to collect the wood and stone building materials, while the camp's administration sometimes provided other materials. Merritt Park, previously known as Pleasure Park, was the most elaborate of the constructions there. This community space contained an artificial pond with a waterfall, an arched wooden bridge, and seating – all in a setting of boulders and stone groupings placed in and around the pond. There was also a bridge of stepping stones placed across the water. Cherry Park, part of the Children's Village sector, had a rectangular wood gazebo and fences, with a freeform wisteria arbor. Another bridge spanned the Bairs Creek picnic area, also with fences. Several gardeners are known to have been involved with the gardens, but a trio of practitioners is cited for their specific work. Ryozo Kado's artistry was carried out in rockwork and faux bois. In 1973 he returned to Manzanar to construct a stone pedestal for the State Historic Landmark plaque.

Similarly, fellow detainee William M. Katsuki, a professional landscape gardener, worked on Cherry Park. George S. Takemura, a landscape artist from West Los Angeles, built a variety of Rustic constructions, including a shelter, bridge, chairs, umbrellas, and a wishing well, all of which were recorded. Faux bois tree stumps surround a white obelisk monument at the cemetery. Today some remnants can still be seen at the National Historic Site, designated in 1992. Exhibits there relate to the unnecessary and shameful removal of Japanese American civil rights. At the same time, the garden elements themselves attest to the internees' perseverance and desire for beauty during their years of internment in a harsh and hostile place.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

VENTURA

Foster Park in Ventura, flanking Ventura River, was originally dedicated as the Eugene C. Foster Memorial Park. The park was the gift of philanthropists Eugene P. and Orpha W. Foster in 1906 when they purchased sixty-five acres to commemorate a son who died at a young age. [10] The wooded park provides a lush backdrop of coastal native oaks in an otherwise semi-arid landscape. Large timeworn stones and boulders are scattered along the river's banks among the trees. A popular camping ground, the park was another project by the CCC carried out during the Great Depression. Despite

The large log cabin building, shown circa 1915, called Pebble Beach Lodge was on Monterey Peninsula's 17-Mile Drive, and was a destination communal space for development of the area by the "Big Four's" Pacific Improvement Company. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

The Rustic pergola of the Pebble Beach Lodge, designed by architect Louis Hobart, is shown in this circa 1915 view. Palm fronds on top of the open-air beams added an extra layer of shade to the outdoor transition space. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

The Shaver Lake Trading Post was a multi-functional building. Its exterior pergola gives enclosure to the pumps where a tourist could get some ethyl. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Mooney Grove Park in Visalia once had a Rustic boathouse sited on the park's shallow lake. The boathouse's form recalled a Native American bark longhouse with its barrel roof. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Within Manzanar's Merritt Park, a natural appearing pond was created that was surrounded by rockwork and spanned by a bridge. A pergola stood nearby as shade from the intense summer sun. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Ansel Adams, photographer, 1943.

One of the Rustic shelters constructed on the grounds of the WW II internment campin Manzanar was the object of photographer Ansel Adam's camera in 1943 in a photograph titled "Mrs. Nakamura and family in park, Manzanar Relocation Center, California." Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.

The wood plank top picnic tables at Foster Park in Ventura are mounted on large rocks to blend in with the landscape. The Great Depression era project was constructed by the CCC. Courtesy Dyrt photograph.

The stone and wood Bolton Hall in Tujunga was designed as a community center for use by the Little Landers, an agricultural cooperative. It was designed and built by local artisan George Harris who specialized in Rustic constructions. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library.

being utilitarian, each structure had its unique character. The picnic tabletop and wood seat slats were supported by artistically placed large stones, each chosen for its purpose without modifying its appearance.[11] The square vertical stone drinking fountain was built with battered sides and placed to overlap a neighboring boulder seat; it is a composition. Even the barbecue was made of large boulders to enclose the fire and support a grate above the flames. Fortunately, these and many other CCC projects were published as part of the documentation required for the program.[12]

TUJUNGA

George Harris (1867-1950) of Tujunga was virtually unknown as a designer of Rustic structures. Harris would be lost to time if it wasn't for an entry by architectural historian Esther McCoy in a Pasadena Art Museum exhibition book.[13] An undated handout promoting his work stated that he would provide "PLANS for RUSTIC ARCHITECTURE, Anything in cement imitation of RUSTIC WOOD construction." He is best known for his design and construction of Bolton Hall in Tujunga, built in 1913 of river rocks gathered from the Tujunga Wash and nearby hillsides. Harris attached a Rustic arbor on one side of the building (no longer extant). This homey building served as the social and civic community center for the Little Landers, a cooperative agricultural group. A 1929 newspaper article tells of Harris' work: "builder of Rustic bridges and furniture, stone fountains and fireplaces, anything, in fact, from a chair to an estate, but all fashioned from natural materials in a manner that is a copy of nothing except nature's own way of making things."[14] Unfortunately, few documented photographs exist of his work; however, a cursory review of Tujunga historic photos reveals that many works in the city and its environs have a similarity and possibly may be unidentified Harris projects. Harris's town of Tujunga made a splashy appearance in Pasadena's 1925 New Year's Day Rose Parade with a float representing the outdoor life of the town that featured a sizable Rustic arbor entwined with native flora including live oak, sage, holly, and wild cherry.[15]

SANTA MONICA

Santa Monica's Palisades Park is perched on a 1.7-mile narrow strip of land along the edge of the Pacific Ocean bluffs. Santa Monica's first municipal open space, it was originally known as Linda Vista Park (or Loma Vista Park): the name was changed to Palisades Park in the 1920s. The land was donated (initially in 1892, with an 1897

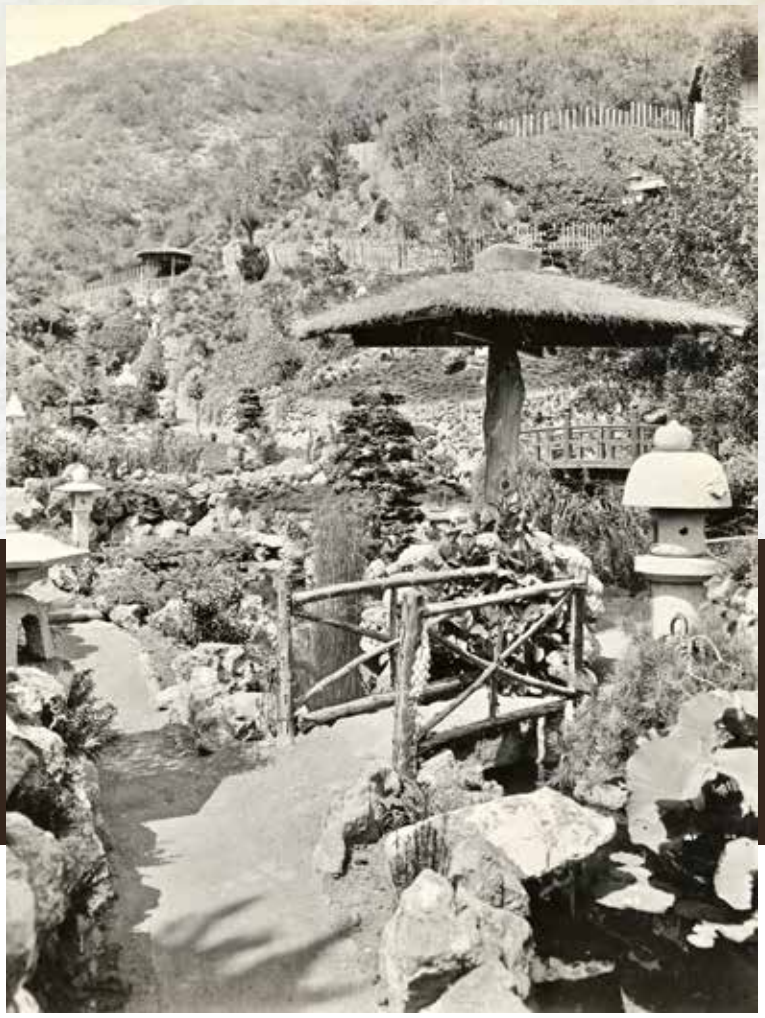
Above: On the Pacific Ocean's edge is Palisades Park in Santa Monica that, due to the steep drop-off along the edge, required a protective barrier. A Rustic fence was constructed along the many lineal yards of edge.

addition) by Arcadia de Baker (wife of Robert S. Baker) and the Comstock silver mine millionaire Senator John P. Jones.[16] An elaborate Rustic fence of tree branches ran along the edge to protect visitors from the steep drop. When seen from the beach below, the long-running fence added a lacy effect to the cliff edge's appearance. There was a significant drop to get to the roadway below from the cliff edge above, so a gently angled incline for pedestrians was graded in 1896 to connect the two areas. An extension of the lined one side of the pathway to the beach below. Railroad tracks once traversed this coastline beach where the Pacific Coast Highway was later built. There was a significant drop to get to the roadway from the cliff's edge above, so a gently angled incline for pedestrians was graded in 1896 to connect the two areas.

A decorated Rustic portal was placed at the incline's top with a sign proclaiming the romantic-sounding "Sunset Trail."[17] Over time the park was given cooling shade by planting palms, Monterey cypress, and exotic specimens. Additions included fashionable Rustic benches and a gazebo. By the mid-twentieth-century, this fashion was gone, the fences and site fabric were in disrepair, so concrete-based fences were installed. Adelbert Bartlett, a local commercial photographer working in the 1920s, captured moody images of the Palisades Park's Rustic incarnation, archived at UCLA. One set of her photographs shows the fenced cliffs as a background to the opulent and legendary Colonial Revival residence of movie actress Marion Davies on the beach below. The park was also a subject of many commercial postcards, which showed the early days there.

HOLLYWOOD

One unusual example of the Rustic design idiom was on the forty-nine-acre Hollywood estate of Gurdon W. Wattles (1855-1932), a financier of early Hollywood. The estate known as ***Jualita*** included a formal residence



Above: The Rustic portal of the Sunset Trail in Santa Monica, circa 1910, which leads to the incline taking a visitor to the beach below. Along the way a Rustic railing provided an edge to the ramp. Courtesy California Historical Society Collection at University of Southern California.

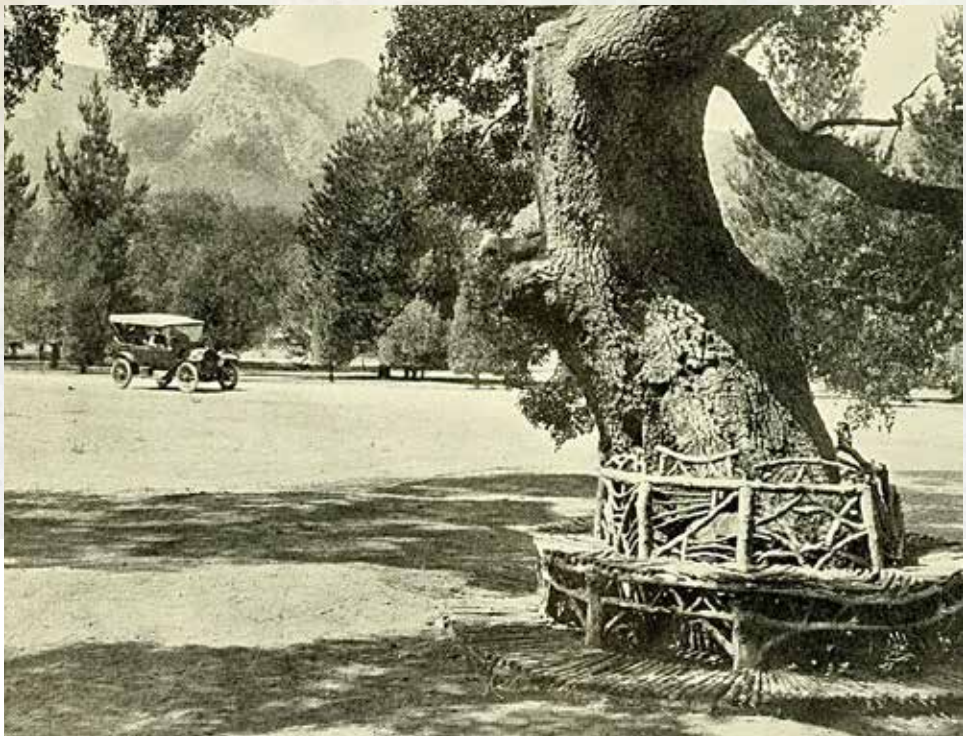
Right: The Japanese style garden at the Wattles Mansion in Hollywood is shown in this circa 1910 photo with an unusual rectangular umbrella form shelter roofed with dried grass. Courtesy California State Library.

and several elaborately landscaped gardens. One was a Japanese-style garden, created in the nineteen-teens, sited in a notch between the hills. With the signing of the Harris Treaty in 1858 (which opened diplomatic and trade relations between the US and Japan), all things Japonesque became a craze that lasted through the 1920s, including gardens. Landscape architect Kinzuchi Fujii designed the garden (he emigrated from Japan to San Francisco in 1903) who had made his mark in Southern California gardens, including the Storrier-Stearns Japanese Garden in Pasadena. All the shrubs, plants, and vegetation for this garden were brought from Japan. Like so many other Japanese Americans, Fujii was interned later during WWII. Wattles' Japanese garden's Rustic elements included bridges, bamboo fences, and shelters. One umbrella-like shelter had a wooden column as its central support; its roof was rectangular and thatched in grasses.[18] Another small Rustic summer house sat at the top of the garden. Today the residence, one of the few extant from early Hollywood, is part of a public park, but the Japanese Garden exists only in photographs.

GRIFFITH PARK

Los Angeles's vast Griffith Park is home to the Fern Dell, an early twentieth-century fern garden. Ferneries, as they were known, were just one of the many types of Victorian gardens. These collections often were housed indoors; however, in California, that was unnecessary, and many were created within public parks such as Golden Gate Park's de Laveaga Dell (begun in 1901).[19]

In 1910 Scottissh emigree Frank Shearer (1876-1971) assumed the role of acting Superintendent of Parks and Landscape Engineer for Los Angeles.[20] Early in the park's development in 1912, workers began planting native and imported ferns within "The Dell" – a twenty-acre natural canyon nestled in the park's southwestern quadrant. Early park amenities included Picturesque woodland footpaths, enhanced by Rustic wooden railings and bridges. Rockwork, in the form of paving, stairs, and retaining walls, sometimes was highlighted by moss.



Above left: Early in the 20th century Griffith Park was also home to a Rustic bench, set up on a plinth and built entirely around a mature tree. Another photo showed other similar but loose benches once surrounded the fixed one to create a grouping. Courtesy Staley's Views, Los Angeles, 1914-1915.

Above right: Deep inside Griffith Park's Fern Dell, a segmented faux bois railing echoes the path of the meandering trail set among the stream's lush foliage. Courtesy kayno919, Flickr.

Bottom left: Taken in 1890, this bridge in Echo Park, Los Angeles, features a balustrade of twigwork. Note the arrangement of the infill appears like a tree with branches, rather than a random spacing of the members. Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library.

The CCC added faux rock weirs during the Great Depression to control flooding. Some of the extant faux bois railings replaced older wooden railings. According to a 2014 report by PGAdesign, these were created using some sort of molding technique instead of by hand (a much more expensive and craftsman-like way of creating the faux bois texture). One Fern Dell attraction is the Soroptimists (an organization that works to improve women's lives) Picnic Area, dedicated to member Minnie Barton, where a pair of red granite drinking fountains are expressed as part of the retaining wall design. The Fern Dell was listed as part of the Griffith Park Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM 942) by the City of Los Angeles in 2009. An excellent and more extensive history of Fern Dell, written by Phoebe Cutler and Vonn Marie May, was published in *Eden* in 2017.[21]

MACARTHUR PARK

Just west of downtown Los Angeles is MacArthur Park (previously known as Westlake Park), which initially was ornamented with many Rustic rock and wood landscaping elements surrounding the lake. Building on what once was marshland, park construction commenced in the 1880s, followed by the park's official dedication in 1890. Its focal point was an amoeba-shaped artificial reservoir, created as part of the city's early potable

Right: A notable example of gazebo roof cladding was this polygonal raised gazebo in Westlake Park (now MacArthur Park). It was an imaginative and unusual example of an intricately decorated roof treatment of applied pieces. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Below: A circa 1905 stereoview shows an elaborately constructed bridge in Westlake Park, the balustrade created using mostly twig work. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs.

water system and fed from the Los Angeles River's *Zanja Madre* aqueduct. Visitors could rent boats to row upon the lake. While on the lake, they would see two intricate Rustic wooden bridges and an octagonal pavilion with a plain standing seam roof; later, this roof was embellished with swirling Rustic stick or straw work patterns. Wilshire Boulevard eventually was extended through the middle of the park, splitting the lake, and today the Rustic elements are gone. The park is City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #100.

SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

A steep canyon in the dramatic San Gabriel Mountains was once the home of "Switzer-Land," created as an early remote hiking camp during the Golden Age of Hiking in the late nineteenth-century. It was located ten miles north of Pasadena at the headwaters of the Arroyo Seco. The tongue-in-cheek name is derived from its founder, Los Angeles carpenter Commodore Perry Switzer who started the camp in 1884. (San Gabriel Peak, the summit of the San Gabriels, was originally called "The Commodore" for Switzer, but it was changed in 1894). Architect Arthur B. Benton is attributed as the designer of the Rustic camp's open-air chapel, known as Christ Chapel, which was perched on a cliff edge two hundred feet above Switzer Falls.[22] The chapel building was dedicated in June 1924 and was constructed of stone, seemingly as an extension of the impressive cliffs. With an open amphitheater (seating 200) as the traditional church's nave, the focus was on a semi-open chancel furnished with a log pulpit and various Rustic seating. Other camp structures

Left: View of the Switzerland Christ Chapel near Mount Disappointment, 1926. On the left, the semi-open-air chapel, no longer extant, is perched on a cliff overlooking a mountain gorge. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Below: Switzerland's Christ Chapel's chancel, enclosed by board-formed concrete, had a tour de force of Rustic furnishings including the pulpit and choir seating. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

were similarly Rustic in character. The camp was demolished to construct a dam downstream during WWII; today, all that exists is the Gabrielino Trail and the natural waterfall.

The pine forest of the San Gabriel Mountain's high country was a natural place for several residential enclaves featuring Rustic design elements. The year-round resort area of Big Bear Lake, nestled in the mountains of the San Bernardino National Forest, was originally called Pine Knot and was one of the few places where much of the town embraced the Rustic design idiom. From the 1920s to the 1940s, Pine Knot's main street was a delight to the Rustic senses. Virtually every building displayed some Rustic aspects. One resort was Bartlett's Camp, which had a Rustic pergola porte cochere; however, many cabins also had unique Rustic-themed porches with pergolas (some quite fanciful) and others Rustic design elements. Today all this has been replaced with modern structures called 'Rustic,' but with little to do with the craftsmanship, materials,

Top: The Town of Big Bear Lake, previously known as Pine Knot, as seen circa 1915. Most of the downtown was built in the Rustic idiom creating a special ambiance to lure travelers. Courtesy UCLA Library, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

Bottom: This is one of the many unique Rustic-themed cabins at Bartlett's Camp; this one was called Sunshine. The camp was built in the town of Big Bear Lake in 1916 by brothers George and Xellet Bartlett who were latecomers in the resort boom there. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

and character of historic Rustic design.

Forest Home Christian Conference Center, located east of Los Angeles in the San Bernardino National Forest village of Forest Falls, is another destination mountain retreat. This secluded family retreat is anchored by Roundhouse Square, which features an open-air chapel; there is an open Rustic bell tower instead of a spire. This four-square tower, capped by a hipped roof, is supported by tapering unbarked vertical logs and smaller members. The tower contains a large bronze bell that calls attendees. The Center started in 1937 when founder Henrietta Mears visited Forest Home, a privately-owned resort that was up for sale. After driving through the property, she declared to her traveling companions, "Don't even bother to stop…we can't afford all of this." But she did. There are other Rustic buildings on the site as well.

PASADENA

Pasadena architects Alfred and Arthur Heineman, practitioners in the Arts and Crafts Movement, designed a bungalow court named Bowen Court in 1911. The L-shaped tract housed thirty-six- living quarters, as well as a Rustic two-story playhouse. This open-air structure was constructed around a eucalyptus tree with log columns

Left: The Forest Home Conference Center camp belltower is part of the outdoor central meeting place nestled in the San Bernardino Mountains. Courtesy author's postcard collection.

Right: In Pasadena was the delightful Bowen Court club house that was part of a bungalow court designed by architect Arthur S. Heineman. A roof covering of palm fronds topped off the brilliant confection providing a fringe effect at the edge. *Western Architecture* journal, vol. 28, no. 2, February 1919, 14.

to support a porch, while its roof was clad in palm fronds. Log railings completed the scheme.[23] Today the building remains but is enclosed and used for storage, sans frond roof.

Further south and to the west in the Arroyo Seco was Pasadena's Busch Gardens, designed by Robert Gordon Frasier and opened to the public in 1906.[24] Anheuser-Busch co-founder Adolphus Busch built the elaborately landscaped and decorated estate gardens as part of his winter season property. The rolling landscape of terraced hillsides included bridges, pools, sculptures, and rockwork that used material harvested from the arroyo. Public access was later encouraged, and the grounds became a popular tourist spot. One Rustic folly element was the octagonal Mystic Hut, which featured horizontal split logs and a thatched roof. The large property was subdivided beginning in 1937 into residential properties, and several of the original faux bois Rustic features were incorporated into private parcels.

Railroad magnate Henry E. Huntington (husband of Arabella Huntington) signed a trust indenture document in 1919, transforming their 600-acre ranch into a public institution.[25] The Huntington opened as an institution in 1928, focusing initially on the library and portrait collection.[26] The institution became an internationally renowned collections-based non-profit that supports and promotes the humanities, the arts, and botanical science.

Under Huntington's garden designer and estate supervisor William Hertrich, the estate's specialized gardens had been developed on a grand scale and originally included both faux bois and some Rustic elements. In the nineteen-teens, a wood Rustic arbor graced the Japanese Garden. To the south, across the road from the Japanese garden is an arbor of one-hundred faux bois "trees" atop a concrete retaining wall that holds back the steep slope that rises up to the rose garden. Begun in 1915, the arbor provides views out across the road to the Japanese Garden. Also, it supports the meandering woody wisteria vines that bloom yearly with massive pendulous clusters of flowers. A second faux bois arbor – this one an arc – frames the north end of the rose garden through which visitors enter after climbing the stairs of the steep northern slope. Beginning in 2011, a significant renovation to the Japanese Garden took place, including restoring its faux bois trellis. Work on the trellis was conducted by faux bois craftsman Terry Eagan. (In France he is known as a ***rocailleur***; the French were entranced by the craft and carried it out in many parks, including Buttes Chaumont in Paris.) During restoration, Eagan found that some of the reinforcing iron was exposed, which was problematic and required work to arrest the development of rust.

To replace the rusting iron supports, Eagan identified twisted square rebar invented by California resident Leslie Ransome, which was also used to construct Alvord Bridge in San Francisco. With the vines removed during restoration, the trellis' form could easily be seen and renewed. Today, these extraordinary faux bois structures, with their hand-tooled natural-appearing trunks and branches, echo the vagaries of nature and design.

RIVERSIDE

In significant part, Rustic design expression in California reflects a climate where life can be lived much of the year outdoors. Thus, California landscapes often have

Top: The octagonal Mystic Hut, a playhouse for children, was clad in half-logs topped with a thatched roof of straw in Busch Gardens. This was one of several building attractions in the wooded ravine's delightful gardens. Courtesy The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.

Bottom: A Rustic arched stone bridge with wood railing was constructed within Pasadena's rambling Busch Gardens that was sited in a ravine. Courtesy Wikimedia.

Opposite top: A pergola, covered with wisteria, was in the Huntington Gardens Japanese Garden earlier in the 20th century. It surrounded a walkway and was constructed of real logs and branches, rather than the faux bois used elsewhere in the gardens. Courtesy The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.

Opposite bottom: The restored faux bois arbor in San Marino's Huntington Gardens is formed of 100 individual concrete trees. These are draped with wisteria and climbing rose vines. Faux bois craftsman Terry Eagan applied current restoration techniques and materials to repair the arbor. Courtesy The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, photographer: Tom Carruth.

elements that bridge the connection between the interior and exterior. One such element is the Southwestern vernacular structure known as a ***ramada*** or an open-sided structure. Architect Arthur B. Benton's theatrical Glenwood Mission Inn (1903) in Riverside, a hotel founded by Quaker twin brothers Albert K. (1828-1912) and Alfred H. Smiley (1828-1903). The Mission Inn reflected this type of indoor-outdoor transition. Visitors stepped from the Mission Revival interior spaces into the vine-entwined Rustic pergola and were gradually introduced to the sun's warm rays.

REDLANDS

Smiley Heights (a.k.a. Cañon Crest Park) in San Bernardino County's City of Redlands is not to be confused with nearby Smiley Park. This estate, encompassing the private homes of the Smiley Brothers, featured vistas of the San Timoteo Canyon, along with panoramas of extensive orange groves below and the mountains beyond. In 1889, the Smileys purchased an initial fifty acres of the hilltop property when there were just 150 houses in the Redlands settlement.[27] Soon after, they added another 150 acres where the brothers each built residences, escaping the harsh winters of New York State. With interest in horticulture, they had Chinese workers landscape the property with a host of exotic trees and shrubs, creating a private park. Pathways were lined with rockwork curbs and retaining walls. By 1897, the Smileys opened their manicured grounds, allowing the public to drive or walk the extensive network of roads and paths.[28] Along the way, a visitor would encounter several eye-catching Rustic summerhouses. Most common were shelters with conical-shaped roofs clad in palm fronds. These are sometimes known as ***palapas***, a common form of vernacular architecture in Western Mexico, but in a more straightforward square form. Albert Smiley also built the historic Mohonk Mountain House west of New Paltz, New York. That Catskill Mountain resort, begun in 1869, was a paradise of Rustic structures, including palm frond-roofed summer houses set within the dramatic landscape of a glacial lake with steep rocky escarpments. Today the ten-thousand-acre Mohonk resort remains virtually intact as a National Historic Landmark and is still owned by Smiley heirs. However, the original elements of their Smiley Heights homestead are gone, having made way for residential development.

SAN DIEGO

In the southernmost part of the state lies San Diego where the high bluffs of Point Loma Peninsula overlooking the Pacific

Ocean are far away from the urban downtown. The stretch known as Sunset Cliffs (a.k.a. Spalding Park) was an entire environment of Rustic elements that used the series of natural geologic formations high above the roiling water's edge—including caves carved by erosion—as a stage. An unknown Japanese architect constructed a series of stairways, pathways, bridges, and overlooks within this dramatic landscape. The paths were surfaced in labor-intensive pebble work, the bridge's balustrades were woven with unbarked branches, and there were matching fences. These features were augmented by Rustic light fixtures, benches, and umbrellas topped with palm fronds for shade. The park's construction was said to have cost $2 million. The many postcards of the site, which spread the word of the unique place, attest to its popularity.

A short distance from Sunset Cliffs was Lomaland, home of the Theosophical Society (a spiritual commune) and the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society (now the site of Point Loma Nazarene University). Baseball Hall of Famer Albert G. Spalding (1849-1915) built his residence here in 1901 as part of the community. The creation of Sunset Cliffs nearby was no accident: the far-flung landscape was developed during the much-heralded 1915 Panama-California Exposition that opened in what became the city's Balboa Park. This event hosted nearly four million attendees. Spalding was the second vice president of the 1915 exposition.

Above: A highly textured faux bois railing rambles alongside a pathway in today's Japanese Garden in San Marino's Huntington Gardens. Photo courtesy the author.

Right: A vine-entwined Rustic pergola at Glenwood Mission Inn in Riverside was a perfect transition between the interior and the exterior. This 1915 photograph shows support columns that are a stylized construction. A guest could while away an afternoon in one of the swing seats suspended from the roof structure. Courtesy California State Library.

Top: In Smiley Heights Park, Redlands, this was one of many resting points, located within the hilltop park's verdant landscape. Topped by palm fronds, the unusual roof form of a convex cone profile was also used on another Smiley owned project. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Below: Mohonk Mountain House in the Catskill Mountains of New York State was another Smiley project that used the Rustic idiom in the many shelters dotting the hillsides of the hotel's leisure-oriented landscape. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs.

A civic leader, he donated a portion of the fees associated with the residential development of the peninsula. However, over time the Sunset Cliffs park's maintenance was neglected. Spalding died in 1915, and a new property owner, John C. Mills paid for the park's renovation at the cost of one million dollars, only to have the same neglect happen. After the Great Depression, some of the park and its features eroded back-to-nature, and the bridges were removed in the 1950s. Today the historical park is now part of Sunset Cliffs Natural Park.

San Diego's Old Town State Historic Park tourist attraction includes a historic adobe block townhouse called La Casa de Estudillo. Completed in 1829, this was home to one of the state's most distinguished nineteenth-century families who occupied it until 1887. Over time, the adobe was abandoned and became dilapidated.[29] In a clever piece of product placement, La Casa de Estudillo was later used to lure travelers. California and Hawaii Sugar Refining Co. heir John D. Spreckels of the San Diego Electric Railway Company funded work on the property that opened to the public in 1910 as a key destination point on his expanding streetcar line. Otherwise, and incorrectly, known as "Ramona's Marriage Place," the building's "restoration" was designed by architect Hazel Wood Waterman and was based on the 1884 sentimental and romantic novel *Ramona* by author Helen Hunt. The novel was fiction, but Waterman used the book as an inspiration to create an "in the manner of" place during a time when atmosphere counted more than historical accuracy. Lining the courtyard was a reconstructed covered walkway using ***viga*** and ***latillas*** construction for this confection of a patio garden. The courtyard had fences, seating, and a grapevine-entwined arbor, all with a Rustic atmosphere. Today the building remains, but its Rustic courtyard enhancements do not.

Christopher Pollock Biography

Chris began his career as a designer specializing in interior architecture. With this experience, he changed gears to focus on historic preservation, specializing in historic research. A native of Connecticut, Chris has resided in San Francisco since 1979.

In 2016, Chris was tapped by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department to be their first Historian-in-Residence for all the city's parks, bringing a layer of history to the department. His initial project was to research and record the history of the department's some 230 real estate holdings.

With the 150th anniversary of Golden Gate Park in 2020, he launched the latest version of his book, first published in 2001, *San Francisco's Golden Gate Park: A Thousand and Seventeen Acres of Stories*. This publication, by Norfolk Press, is a hybrid of a history and tour guide of the park's many features. This was preceded by another book, *Reel San Francisco Stories: An Annotated Filmography of the Bay Area*, published in 2013, which covers some 650 movies filmed in the Bay Area since the beginning of talkies.

Endnotes

[1] In Holland in 1802, Gijsbert van Laar published a series of periodicals illustrating his ideas about projects in the rustic style. In England, T. J. Ricauti followed in 1842 with his "Sketches for Rustic Work" that showed many types of embellishment examples, including outbuildings.

[2] *The Manufacturer and Builder*. v.XXI, n.7, July 1889, 163.

[3] Downing, Andrew Jackson. *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841, 384.

[4] A less well-known literary contributor was naturalist John Burroughs (1837-1921), whose many essays discussed nature and encouraged his fellow humankind to experience the natural world around them. His works, published across four decades, were instrumental in the evolution of the American conservation movement by taking the American literary genre and infusing it with his unique perceptions about what he experienced in nature. Like Thoreau, he retreated among nature in simple surroundings during the Gilded Age. As an example, he and his son built his New York State haven, called Slabsides, in 1895. Scottish-born John Muir's (1838-1914) contributions to the conservation movement are the basis for the modern environmental movement in the U.S., focusing on California. In his many essays, books, and letters, he argued against commercializing and for the preservation of nature. He participated in creating a bill put before Congress in 1890, which put Yosemite's pristine wilderness under government control, albeit by the state, not the federal government. He assisted in founding the Sierra Club in 1892, and it was he who led Theodore Roosevelt Jr. (1858-1919) on an eight-day tour of Yosemite in 1903.

[5] Besides the rejection of the Formal design aesthetic, another contributing factor was as the cost of maintaining these great formal landscapes. Another influence in the Picturesque and Rustic traditions was the celebration of old Italian formal gardens seen in disrepair; and the popularity of dramatic landscape paintings by Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa and Nicolas and Gaspar (Dughet) Poussin. However, the British Picturesque does owe a debt to Chinese landscape and ceramic design (see Finnish design historian Osvald Sirén for examples in Europe. See his book *China and Gardens of Europe of the Eighteenth Century* (1950). Also see landscape architect Adolph Strauch for the United States. His primary inspiration was Prince von Pückler-Muskau and his *Hints on Landscape Gardening* (originally published in German in 1834). Japanese landscape design also owes a debt to China at least as early as Nara.

It is also true that some craftsmen architects, such as Greene and Greene, borrowed the other way - incorporating Japanese elements and construction techniques into their buildings,

The author wishes to thank Noel Vernon and Carol Roland-Nawi for these insights.

[6] *Fresno Morning Republican*, May 6, 1907, 8.

[7] *The Fresno Bee*, April 14, 1928, 2.

[8] *Mooney Grove Park, 20-year Conceptual Master Plan*. Kleinfelder, no date, 18.

[9] *Garden Management Plan: Gardens and Gardeners at Manzanar.* Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Jeffrey F. Burton, 2017. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, by the Japanese, the camp was created originally as a temporary detention camp, also known as assembly center. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive order 9066 in March of 1942 with the intent of forced isolation of Japanese American citizens who resided on the U.S. West Coast and who were thought to be a threat to national security. The camp continued until World War II ended in late 1945.

[10] *Ventura County Star and Ventura Daily Post*, February 12, 1932, 1.

[11] Good, Albert H. *Park and Recreation Structures, Part II*. Washington: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1938, 21.

[12] *Ventura County Star and Ventura Daily Post*, February 12, 1932, 1.

[13] *California Design 1910*. Anderson, Timothy J., Eudorah M. Moore, Robert Winter. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1974, 110.

[14] *The Whittier News*, June 22, 1929, 5.

[15] *The Pasadena Post*, January 1, 1925, 1.

[16] *City Landmark Assessment Report, Palisades Park,* Santa Monica, CA., City of Santa Monica Planning, Division, March 2007, 28. Robert Baker and John P. Jones were co-founders of the City of Santa Monica.

[17] This incline was further developed as a roadway in 1932 and is now known as the California Incline; it has been seen in many movies, usually in chase scenes, as a dramatic hairpin turn off the Pacific Highway to go up the steep beachside hill.

[18] This single center-post concept for small outdoor seating structures was a favorite of architect Calvert Vaux, co-designer of New York's Central Park with Frederick Law Olmsted. It shows up in several of his designs, one in an 1874 publication of his ideas. Vaux, Calvert. Villas and Cottages: A Series of Designs for Execution in the United States, 1874, 292.

[19] *San Francisco Call*, December 8, 1901, 11.

[20] *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, May 16, 1910, 1.

[21] Cutler, Phoebe and May, Vonn Marie. "Fern Dell," *Eden*, Spring 2017.

[22] Benton (1858-1927) also designed the Glenwood Mission Inn building in Riverside.

[23] *California Design 1910*. Anderson, Timothy J., Eudorah M. Moore, Robert Winter. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1974, 110.

[24] National Register of Historic Places, Nomination Form. "Upper Busch Gardens Cultural Landscape Historic District." City of Pasadena, October 4, 2012.

[25] *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1919, 17.

[26] *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1928, (Annual Midwinter Number), 21.

[27] *Los Angeles Herald*, January 12, 1899, 4.

[28] *Redlands Facts*, April 19, 1897, 4.

[29] National Register of Historic Places, Nomination Form. "Estudillo House." Patricia Heintzelman, April 24, 1979.

Top: The dramatic seaside edge of the Pacific Ocean shows eroded rock caves on Point Loma's Sunset Cliffs in San Diego. The walkway threaded in, out, around, and over the spectacular site. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Bottom: San Diego's Old Town Historic District was once the site of a Rustic grape arbor over a walkway leading to the well described in the 1884 fictional "Ramona" novel by Helen Hunt. Vintage postcard, courtesy the author.

Take Me to the River

A Review of Five Books (Mostly) About the Los Angeles River

PAULA PANICH

Bennett, Peter, photographer.
The Los Angeles River, 2021

Deverell, William.
Whitewashed Adobe, 2004

Gumprecht, Blake.
The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth, 1999

Kolstser, Michael, photographer, essays by F. Gohlke and D.J. Waldie.
L.A. River, 2019

Morrison, Patt, photographs by Mark Lamonica.
Rio LA: Tales from the Los Angeles River, 2001

"The Los Angeles Basin flood control today represents the most ambitious, expensive and concrete-intensive such project west of the Mississippi," writes historian William Deverell in his book, *Whitewashed Adobe* (page 124). A few pages later (page 127), he writes: "Maybe it is easy to pick on the Los Angeles River because it has always been puny and never all that reliable. It looks like a creek next to the other rivers of the American West. But it clearly once was something that it is not anymore."

Reviewed here are five books that describe, in various ways, the river that once was something that it is not. But all along, I was wondering --- from whence comes all that raging water that necessitated all that concrete? As any Angelena knows, the source of the Los Angeles River is in the San Gabriel Mountains. But that still does not satisfy.

Then I spotted this footnote to D.J. Waldie's essay in the Kolster book:

"The San Gabriel range has several peaks topping 6,000 feet. The mountain slopes have an average grade near sixty-five percent. Some slopes are essentially vertical. They drain onto a coastal plain that is less than fifty miles wide. The Los Angeles River drops 795 feet in the fifty-one miles from Canoga Park to Long Beach --- 190 feet more than the Mississippi drops in 2,350 miles from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico."

Ah.

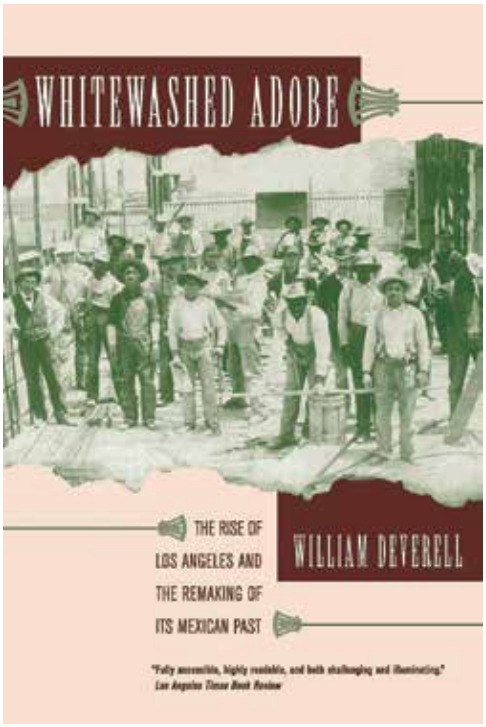
The San Gabriel Mountains provide Los Angeles with seventy percent of its available open space, and thirty percent of its drinking water. The San Gabriel National Monument, proclaimed by President Obama in 2014, is comprised of about 346,000 acres, and lies within ninety minutes' travel time of fifteen million people.

Water from mountains make the river and the L.A. Basin, and the basin makes the city. Or made the city, depending which moment in history captivates one, but then, the city made the river in its own image . . .

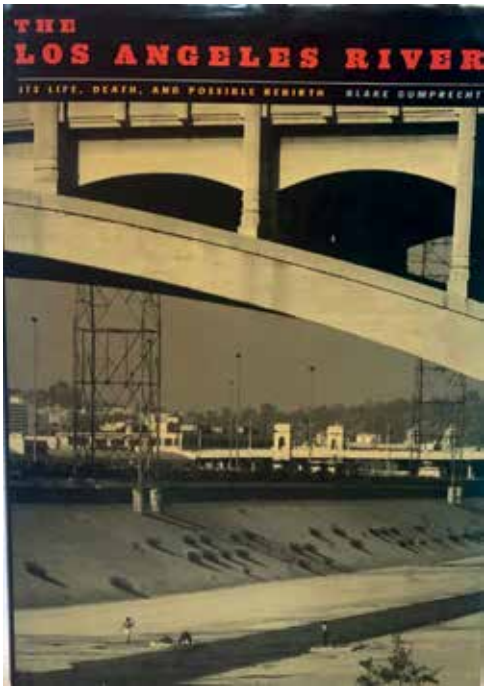
~

Blake Gumprecht's *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth* (1999) is the mother lode of research and writing about the L.A. River. Every writer on the subject since has referenced this rich, deep, detailed and fine book. Gumprecht holds a doctorate in geography and taught as an academic geographer for twenty years before returning to his first love, journalism, in 2017. Before that engagement with academia, though, he was a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times.* His book won the J.B. Jackson Prize of the American Association of Geographers, the Pulitzer of the profession.

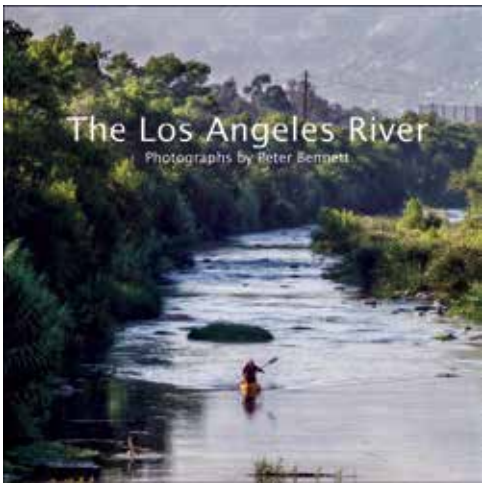
The writing of the book was an evolution in Gumprecht's thinking and research. Like most people, in his first years in Los Angeles, he barely noticed the river. "I was surprised to learn that the Los Angeles River had a palpable history and that the ugly, concrete gutter had once been so much more," he writes (page 5). Then he brought his deep geographer's mind and training to look at the river's geographical and human history, its role in the development of the "young pueblo," the industrial development that destabilized the river banks and drained the river, and the history of "the stream that could not be trusted," a hair-raising journey into the devastating floods of the period from



the mid-19th century through the first four decades of the 20th. Then – he digs in deep regarding the fifty-one miles of concrete that formed "the most extensive controls for a river of its size in the world." The final chapter, "Exhuming the River," brings readers to the cusp of the 21st century and new thinking about managing the watershed. **William**



Deverell, professor of history, environmental studies and spatial science at the University of Southern California, is a brilliant synthesizer and lyrical storyteller of history. His 2005 book, ***Whitewashed Adobe,*** is essential reading for all of us who are passionately engaged with understanding the cultural and political forces shaping the landscape of California. The book is focused on (as its subtitle suggests) "the rise of Los Angeles and the remaking of its Mexican past." This is a subtle way of elaborating on the thesis of the book's research --- the attempt by Anglo Los Angeles to destroy much of the

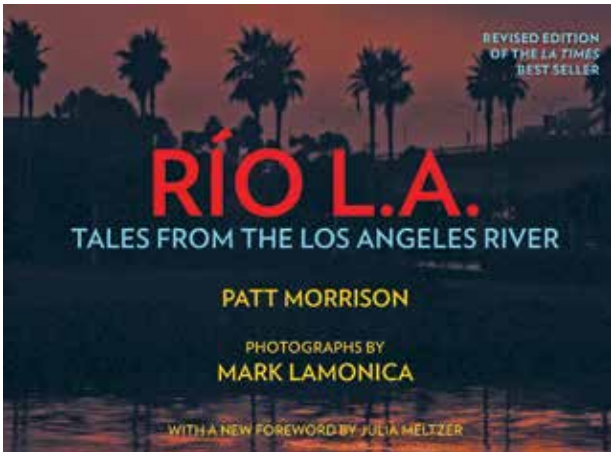


history of the city's Mexican origins. Chapter 5 is called "Remembering a River." Deverell writes, "Rivers are saturated with the past. They can *tell* stories as much as they can *be* characters in stories if listened to and studied carefully enough." The river, holds Deverell, is a "vector of ethnicity." He tells the story of a remarkable study of 1914, when City engineers interviewed elderly Mexican people, seeking their memories of where and how floodwaters roiled in the late 19th century. **Michael Kolster's** photography in his 2019 ***L.A. River*** is superb. Kolster is a professor of art at Bowdoin College in Maine, and for this project used an 8 X 10 camera and the wet-plate collodion process known as ambrotype from 1851, invented one year after Los Angeles was incorporated. It is a cumbersome, slow process involving chemistry, gallons of clean water, and a dark box to process the images. A day's work might produce ten one-off ambrotypes. I particularly love the immediacy, detail and imperfections of these images. The book includes essays by Kolster, **Frank Gohlke**, and the incomparable **D.J. Waldie.** Waldie wields his own lyrical synthesis of the 19th century floods, and writes about how the river was home to the poorest of the poor in early 20th century Los Angeles. "White, middle-class, and intolerant Angelenos recoiled at the riverside's racial and ethnic diversity and aimed the trajectory of the city's development westward, on the slopes of flood-proof hills." Gumprecht, Deverell and Waldie are mining the same themes and facts --- each of them is worth reading for their nuanced interpretations. Photographer **Peter Bennett,** in his 2021 ***The Los Angeles River***, writes about how he was educated about the river by the Friends of the LA River organization in 2008, and writes, in a short essay, about the hazards of photographing there --- one has to be "stealthy and a little brazen." But also careful not to slip on algae and slime. Not to mention the day he was avoiding gunshots on his way back to his car. The book's photographs are divided into geographical sections, and are photographed with in-your-face vivid color. Veteran journalist **Patt Morrison,** known to all Angelenos for her reporting for the ***Los Angeles Times*** and on public radio, and for her Emmy-award winning work on public television, has written a lively account of the river in the 2001 book, ***Rio L.A.: Tales From the Los Angeles River,*** with photographs by **Mark Lamonica,** and a forward by Kevin Starr, California's former State Librarian. This is a lively social history, and so chock-a-block with Morrison-isms that one can hear in her voice in one's own mind. She writes of the river: "In a city of stars, it is a has-been. In a city of bone-shaking earthquakes and blow-torch winds, it has been tamed into a toothless creature of unnatural nature." And the stories! "On the riverbank where the Arroyo Seco empties its occasional waters into the Los Angeles River stands the once-notorious Lincoln Heights jail, the original "Graybar Hotel." There, in 1951, the second act of the Bloody Christmas jailhouse beatings took place, the police scandal that became the underlying plot in the film *L.A. Confidential."*

I looked up "Graybar Hotel" --- a slang word for jail, originating right there, on the bank of the Los Angeles River.

On October 14-16, 2022, in Los Angeles, The California Garden & Landscape Society will hold its long-awaited conference, "The Los Angeles River: Past, Present, and Future."

The conference will focus on what the river means to its proximate neighborhoods



--- whether through growth and expansion of river boundaries causing the disappearance of neighborhoods and other features, or with the blending of river boundaries with communities that once had their backs to this storied river. Revised thinking about the sources of the river now hold that the L.A. River has two headwaters --- Arroyo Calabasas (Santa Monica Mountains) and Bell Canyon (Simi Hills, Ventura County); they braid into a channel in Canoga Park.

Water coming from those steep San Gabriel Mountains flow into the Arroyo Seco, where it joins the concreted river at the confluence between the City of Glendale and the Atwater section of Los Angeles.

About Paula Panich

Paula Panich is a writer and printmaker who lives in Los Angeles in her dreams. She writes a monthly column for the venerable *Larchmont Chronicle* in L.A.; her latest book is a collection of previously published culinary essays, *The Cook, the Landlord, the Countess and Her Lover.* Her most recent piece of journalism appeared in the ***Texas Observer*** in the summer of 2022, a collaboration with photojournalist Ilana Panich-Linsman: https://www.texasobserver.org/abortion-before-roe-photo-essay/ She can be found in the wilds of New Mexico.

WALKING IN THE LA RIVER: AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

CHAR MILLER

I thought I knew what to expect when my students and I went down to the river. After all, we had read Blake Gumprecht's compelling *Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*.[1] We had dug into Norris Hundley's encyclopedic *Great Thirst: Californians and Water, A History*[2] and were jolted by environmental historian Jenny Price's lyrical essay "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A."[3]

These master narrators of the fifty-two-mile-long Los Angeles River frame its past condition and contemporary state in ways as interwoven as the river's threaded course once was as it flowed down the San Fernando Valley, pressed through the Glendale Narrows, and then fanned out across the LA Basin on its way to the sea.

Through differing lenses, Hundley and Gumprecht focus on the complicated ways those who have resided along the river have responded to its periods of dry and wet. The arid months were much less dangerous, of course. But the thunderous winter floods that could swiftly crash over or blow through the river's banks, and pummel the surrounding built environment, were properly feared.

Or at least that was the reaction of the region's Euro-American colonists: they were more flat-footed than the seasonally savvy and more-mobile indigenous peoples of the inland valleys—the Tongva and Tataviam, among others. They had known for millennia where not to live in a time of heavy rain.

Those floodwaters posed another dilemma for those who planted themselves so firmly within the river's watershed—the floods' sediment-packed, scouring energy ("damaging debris discharges" is what the LA Department of Public Works calls this process) could churn new paths to a new mouth.[4]

The river's volatility and variability are hard to appreciate today, as it follows a concrete-fixed course out of the downtown area on a relatively straight shot before it pours into San Pedro Bay, near Long Beach. Prior to being boxed in, however, the LA River streamed into the Pacific anywhere between San Pedro and Santa Monica Bays, an unpredictability that drove real estate developers, civic leaders, and flood-weary residents crazy.

They went a little vengeful following the blockbuster 1938 floods, which pounded the Southland, killing more than one hundred people, wiping out earthen levees, and ripping through neighborhoods and commercial districts. A quick-setting political consensus drove the call for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the LA County Flood Control District to do what they do most—pour concrete (Gumprecht estimates that upward of 3.5 million barrels went into the reconstruction

The free-flowing Los Angeles River at Griffith Park, ca.1898-1910. Courtesy WikiCommons.

of the river by the late 1950s).

In a post-Katrina age, we might doubt the knee-jerk reaction to make rigid what had been a flexible natural system. But in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and well into the next decade, there were few naysayers as the Corps and district laid down cubic yard after cubic yard into the construction of upstream dams (Hansen, Sepulveda, and Big Tujunga, and their peers). Full channelization of the river's banks and the construction of countless culverts and storm drains helped capture and flush water into a river that now largely functioned as a flood-control device for its 834-square-mile watershed. We had formed up nature to our liking.

That structural reconfiguration was what my students and I anticipated seeing when we rendezvoused at Steelhead Park, just off Riverside Drive in the Glendale Narrows. We weren't disappointed.

This pocket park, one of several designed to open some greenspace along the river's hardened course, demarcates the southerly end of a short stretch of soft-bottom riverbed. The hard-wall, steep-slanted banks and the fully concretized channel that runs south beneath the Figueroa Street Bridge, makes it an ideal spot to consider the confluence of social and natural forces that define this space.

Helping us think about some of these tensions was Peter Enzminger. He had taken the first iteration of my class Water in the West in spring 2008 and was finishing up his master's in urban planning at USC. As part of his studies, Peter developed a model for how during the summer people could make more use of the hardened river bottom itself. His goal was to entice them off the bike/walk path that runs along the bank to deepen their connection to the river as a river. I asked him to share his insights with us, and as we sat in the small amphitheater-like seating at the park, he located his project within the larger effort to revitalize the river.

Dating from the quixotic founding of the Friends of the LA River (FOLAR) in 1985, whose idealistic enthusiasm has pushed public dialogue to such a point that we now have a fully developed river revitalization plan, the goal has been to elevate Angelenos' consciousness about the watershed they inhabit.

Seeing the river afresh initially required cutting through the chain-link that fenced it off from the curious; it also required punching holes in the hard-and-fast politics of flood control that dominated civic conversations about the LA River's place in the community.

Over the years and as a result of countless local hearings, neighborhood confabs, and planning charrettes, a new politics about the river started to emerge that reflected FOLAR's grand ambitions in the mid-1980s. It had a singular focus, asserted one of its co-founders, poet Lewis MacAdams, in the *Whole Earth Review*: to run the river from an "urban hell" into "a sylvan glen, a thicket, an avalon, a marsh, a place of great blue herons, where a kingfisher darting at a steelhead's flash might accidentally flush a doe."[5]

Fitting within this larger ethos that conceives of the river as a living resource and communal responsibility was Peter's playful project—employing wooden pallets to make a platform on the river bottom that can be moved around like puzzle pieces during the dry months and serve as an informal gathering spot; during wet months it would be forklifted out of the riverbed. (Contrast his small-scale, informal, and intimate immersion in the river with architect Frank Gehry's grandiose vision of building large, elevated platform parks that would loom over the flood channel and top by four feet the river's banks: "we thought if we can't get rid of the concrete, maybe we can cover it."[6] The river as an integral landscape would be buried).

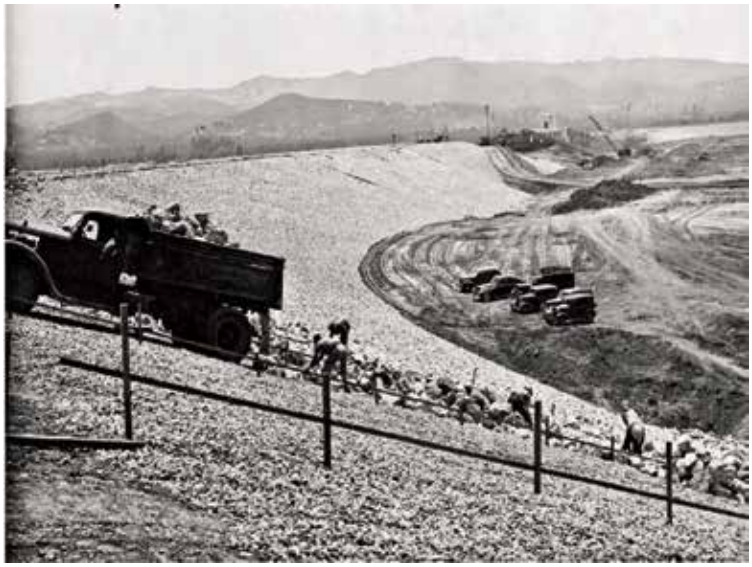
Before pedaling away to sketch out new ideas upstream, Peter brought us back to the river's current structure and the cavernous space it created; its vastness, its monumentality, he said, is overwhelming.

He was right. When we walked down the embankment and into the river, and positioned ourselves directly beneath the Figueroa Bridge, everything appeared out of scale. The sheer-walled channel conveyed something of the magnitude of the engineering project and its depth and width (roughly fifty by 200 feet) bespoke the sheer volume of water that could sluice full speed through this site on its way to the Pacific; it's been clocked at forty-five miles an hour. The flood-controllers' ambition was outsized.

It also remains palpable. As struck as we were by the geometric angularity of the space—its bed, wall, and bridges—and by the energy and transportation grids that arc overhead and by the muffled hum of cars and the screech of Metrolink brakes,

Opposite: Los Angeles River: Flood of 1938 aerial view above Victory Avenue. Courtesy US Army Corps of Engineers. Courtesy WikiCommons.

Above: View looking upstream from the lower limits of the channel showing partially excavated and graded channel. Santa Ana Freeway is in the foreground. Courtesy US Army Corps of Engineers.



Top: Seconds after this photograph was snapped, Gideon reached into the swift moving LA River channel and caught a fish. Courtesy Laura Munoz, 2014.

Left: The Sepulveda Dam (1941) made suburbanization and freeway construction possible in the San Fernando Valley. Courtesy US Army Corps of Engineers.

Right: Workers constructing the Sepulveda Dam in the aftermath of the 1938 flood. Courtesy US Army Corps of Engineers.

Immersed in the watershed: My students and I slop up the LA River, a rite of passage and a heuristic moment in my "Water in West" class. Courtesy Nora Kuby, 2009.

running beneath this urban dynamic was another pulse, small, unmistakable, and surprising.

The river was animated.

Some of this had to do with the fact that we were there but two days after heavy rains, so there was a good flow slipping across the concrete. Some of this had to do with the bobbing presenceof a clutch of black-necked stilts feeding in the waters just south of the natural-bottom narrows; same with a pair of mallards wriggling through a tangle of root and trunk.

More consequential, I think, was how—and sneakily so—the river came alive for us as we stood in its gurgling midst. "I did not expect the inner channel," Jess later reflected. "Of all the things that I saw last Tuesday, I don't know why that inner, two-foot-deep channel full of water rushing along made the biggest impression, but it did."

> "CERTAIN IN ADVANCE THAT IT WOULD NOT "FEEL LIKE A REAL RIVER," SHE CAME TO REALIZE THAT THE "INNER CHANNEL GAVE IT LIFE."

Lewis MacAdams Park (formerly Marsh Park) contains bioswales that capture stormwater from city streets and filters it before it percolates into the aquifer below. Courtesy Mountains Recreation & Conservancy Authority.

Certain in advance that it would not "feel like a real river," she came to realize that the "inner channel gave it life." In its rush, "the currents played, swirling the water and creating my favorite sounds, as it hurried off downstream. The river seemed alive because it did not behave perfectly—water from the inner channel sloshed out, soaking the rest of the riverbed in a few inches of water and allowing the algae to grow even on the concrete."

Jenny Price taught us to look for markers like that: to see nature in the cracks, like the six-inch waterfall the river has been making as it slowly undercuts the seam between two concrete slabs, a tiny cataract that, if you stood still, roared. I took that as an instance, however microscopic, of what Price asserts: "Nature is never passive."[7]

Because every place "has an active, very particular ecology, climate, topography, geology, flora, fauna," the task is to locate

"WHAT WE NEED IN L.A., AS ELSEWHERE," SHE HAS WRITTEN, "IS A FOUNDATIONAL LITERATURE THAT IMAGINES NATURE NOT AS THE OPPOSITE OF THE CITY BUT AS THE BASIC STUFF OF MODERN EVERYDAY LIFE."

its constituent elements, peculiar and prosaic, and to write about them, dream about them, affirm them. "What we need in L.A., as elsewhere," she has written, "is a foundational literature that imagines nature not as the opposite of the city but as the basic stuff of modern everyday life."[8]

The Los Angeles River is that wellspring for Price, and it became so for another of my students, Kristen, who initially had been repelled by it: "The river is a hodge-podge of cement that looks like sand, trash that looks like trees, and life that is so surrounded by the city that you feel like you need to poke it to make sure it's alive." So Kristen wrote, but her critical perspective shifted as she headed down the steep, concretized bank: "From the bottom up, it's hard to forget that it's enormous and moving, and as I experienced it, it seemed to regain some of the life that its ugly urbanization had taken from it."

Then a childhood memory surfaced, of hours spent in the concrete-lined irrigation ditch that runs behind her Boulder, Colorado, backyard. It's "a place where I could see snails and moss peeling in the fall and chase water spiders that I didn't know. I was cherishing their river as a form of Jenny Price's urban nature, a form which I saw as both beautiful and alive."

The prospects are beguilingly complex: "When we begin to believe, as I did when I was young," Kristen wrote, that "our rivers, even our artificial rivers, are magic, we allow ourselves to care about them, and in doing so we give them potential, a potential which, while painful, can also be liberating."

I did not see that coming, either.

Coda: March 11, 2020

No one who registered in the fall of 2019 for the next semester's Water in the West class could have foreseen the pandemic to come or the disruption it would have on all our lives. Or that on a beautiful sun-lit day in early March, amid rumors that the Claremont Colleges might go into lockdown, that our field trip to the river would be the last in-person class we would have for more than a year.

The troubling news came half-an-hour after we had piled into a handful of cars to drive from Claremont to Lewis MacAdams Park where we would rendezvous with Tilly Hinton, LA River activist and curator of LA River X; and Edward Belden, who works on river revitalization efforts for the City of Los Angeles. That's when my students' phones started to blow up. First came the official emails from each of the consortium's five undergraduate college presidents indicating that classes would end immediately, and that the campuses would close until, well, who knew? Then came commiserating texts from the students' friends and finally calls from anxious parents. By the time we had reached the park, we were collectively distraught, uneasy and adrift.

Then something magical happened. After meeting Tilly and Ed and learning about the generative power of river activism outside and inside government, an argument for individual agency so vital at this precise moment, our guides shepherded us down to the river—and paused. They let the river speak. It gurgled, swirled, and rushed by our feet. We stepped off the path and on to rocks and boulders—dry islands in the stream—and inhaled. Cool, damp and fecund, this soft bottom stretch of the river nurtures a rich biodiversity: students started calling out the indigenous and introduced plant life that proliferated in this fertile space (*Textilis patens* jostling with *arundo donax*, as an example). Floating downstream: a red-winged blackbird's rusty-gate-like song. Above, a convoy of Lesser goldfinch chattered while darting through the canopy. Well before we saw it swoop into a nearby sycamore rooted in wet soil, we heard a belted kingfisher's sharp, strident rattle-of-a-call.

These sights, sounds, and smells were oddly restorative. Or maybe not so odd: on a day of intense angst, the river was calm; its quiet, quieted us. On the way home, they slept.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Char Miller is the W.M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History at Pomona College. Recent books include *Natural Consequences: Intimate Essays for a Planet in Peril* (2022), *West Side Rising: How San Antonio's 1921 Flood Devastated a City and Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement* (2021), *Hetch Hetchy: A History in Documents* (2020) and *Not So Golden State: Sustainability vs. the California Dream* (2016).

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Endnotes

[1] Gumprecht, Blake. The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth. Creating the North American Landscape. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

[2] Hundley, Norris. The Great Thirst: Californians and Water. A History. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

[3] Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA," in William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 220-44.

[4] Los Angeles County Comprehensive Floodplain Management Plan, Tetra Tech Project #103is6345, March 2021, 92. Online: https://pw.lacounty.gov/wmd/NFIP/FMP2020/documents/Draft%20Comprehensive%20Floodplain%20Management%20Plan.pdf. Accessed July 26, 2022.

[5] Lewis MacAdams, "Restoring the Los Angeles River: A Forty-year Project," Whole Earth Review, Spring 1995, 64. Online: https://archive.org/details/sim_whole-earth_spring-1995_85/page/n65/mode/2up?q=macadams. Accessed July 25, 2022.

[6] Quoted in Louis Sahagún, "Frank Gehry's bold vision to upgrade the LA. River seeks to atone for past injustices," Los Angeles Times, January 11, 2021, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2021-01-11/frank-gehry-plan-los-angeles-river. Accessed August 1, 2022.

[7] Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA," in William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 226.

[8] Ibid, 242.

Down by the River: Tilly Hinton, Char Miller and students, March 2020.

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Front Cover: Constructed in 1906, the four - square Living Tower was part of Camp Meeker in Sonoma County. The corner support columns were live redwood trees that were inserted with seven levels of observation platforms, which were each accessed by a ladder. Courtesy Real photo postcard, photographer: Lowry, author's postcard collection

Back Cover: The Los Angeles River at Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, 1938. Photo courtesy Wikimedia.