The Trees of Balboa Park

By

Nancy Carol Carter

Landscape architect Samuel H. Parsons, Jr. noted with enthusiasm the growth of trees and shrubs in City Park when he returned to San Diego in 1910. Five years had elapsed since his New York firm had submitted a comprehensive master plan for the layout of the 1,400 acres set aside as a park in 1868, but mostly left in a natural state for the next few decades. Parsons had returned to San Diego because the city had decided to host an international exposition in 1915. He was hired this time to assess progress on City Park’s master plan and to suggest improvements in all of San Diego’s parks. He thought San Diego had made good progress in engineering roads and otherwise fulfilling the landscape plan of City Park.1 His formal report to the park commissioners, submitted June 28, 1910, includes a description of trees and other plantings in the park. By the time Parsons wrote this report, City Park had been in existence for forty-two years and was estimated to contain about 20,000 healthy trees and shrubs. The park commission kept careful records of 2,357 shrubs and vines planted in 1909, but earlier landscape records are sketchy.2

In 1902, Parsons had suggested that the mesas be left open to preserve the stunning views stretching from the mountains to the ocean. “Overplanting is a common mistake everywhere,” he said, “A park is too often perverted to a sort of botanical garden, where a heterogeneous lot of plants are gathered together and massed in a haphazard fashion.”3 He was trying to help San Diegans understand the difference between a park and botanical garden and perhaps obliquely commenting on the hodgepodge of homegrown efforts to develop the park before 1910.

Good Intentions and Dead Trees

Contemporary newspapers contain accounts of the sporadic public and private efforts to enhance City Park. Some of these initiatives made successful and long-lasting improvement to park lands, while other projects were missteps. When volunteers planted small areas of the park, the plant choices were sometimes inappropriate and maintenance poor. Lack of water was a third strike against the success of these efforts. In a few years, trees were too often dead or ailing. These failures undoubtedly contributed to public apathy about

Nancy Carol Carter, former Director of the Legal Research Center and a Professor of Law at the University of San Diego, holds the M.S. (History), M.L.S. and J.D. degrees. She is the author of “Naming Balboa Park: Correcting the Record” in the Winter/Spring 2010 issue of this Journal. She created and maintains a Native American web site chronicling events affecting the original inhabitants of San Diego County (www.sandiego.edu/nativeamerican).
park improvement. Efforts to beautify the large and barren expanse of City Park looked futile.

George W. Marston was among a group of twelve prominent citizens who, in 1884, petitioned the City Trustees for permission to plant and maintain a number of trees on the tract known as the City Park Reservation. The expense was to be defrayed by private donations. He said, “We propose to set out this present season, an avenue of eucalyptus trees alongside one of the roads leading over the mesa and continue such improvements whenever there are sufficient funds.”

The next year, the Ladies Annex of the Chamber of Commerce resolved to apply to the city for ten acres to plant shade trees and flowers to create a family-friendly location. It would be improved with booths or other buildings suitable for recreation, thus forming the nucleus for other park improvements. Individuals donated trees, sometimes in complete disregard for their suitability. The sugar maple, helpfully brought back from upper New York State, could not have lasted long.

The 700 trees and shrubs planted in “Annex Park” running along Sixth Avenue from Juniper to Palm Streets suffered from the lack of water. The Union editorialized on an impasse that threatened to doom the trees. The city had contracted for irrigation pipes, but had not paid to get the work started. In the interim, nearby hydrants had been tapped for irrigation water, but the water company had barred further use of the hydrants. The editorial stated, “If the company will allow water to be used until the pipes can be put in, the 700 trees can be saved; otherwise they will die. The water company is not in good humor but it can hardly be believed that the company will refuse a favor as the Ladies Annex have requested. Even a water company should not show bad temper to ladies.” After this admonition, the water company relented and agreed to supply water until the city pipes were installed.
Water did not equal salvation for this attempt at park improvement, however. A Ladies Annex report in 1891 stated:

The ten-acre tract in the southwest corner of the city park [Annex Park] is being depredated by the rowdy boys of upper Sixth Street . . . . They have partially destroyed the vine house, hacked the benches and broken the shrubs. What is worse, there are adults not over scrupulous in staking their horses or other animals out on the tract under cover of darkness. These creatures have done more damage than the boys. Nipped shrubs and trees show where they have grazed.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1888, Dr. J.P. LaFevre, a practicing physician, organized thirty San Diegans into a tree-planting club. Each member contributed one dollar per month to plant eucalyptus trees in the western areas of the park. Many of these trees succumbed to drought within the next ten years.\textsuperscript{11}

After 1890, businessman and philanthropist Bryant Howard undertook one of the largest and most intelligent planting efforts in the park, although his occupation of park land was controversial.\textsuperscript{12} Under a provision that allowed park land to be used for charitable and educational purposes, Howard successfully petitioned the City for a grant of 100 acres to establish an orphan boys home and training center. The Women’s Home Association piggybacked onto the Howard petition and five acres was added to build a home for indigent women. No one in San Diego was of a more charitable mind that George W. Marston, but he spoke out against this grant, calling it a dangerous precedent.\textsuperscript{13} For Marston, Kate Ses-
sions, and others, such ad hoc assignments of land reinforced the need for a comprehensive City Park plan.

Bryant Howard spent $12,000 to build a turreted Queen Anne-style building of four stories northeast of the Russ School. A refuge for homeless and abused women was also constructed. The surrounding acres of the “charities tract” were cleared of brush and the debris that had accumulated after many years of unregulated dumping. The land was plowed and richly fertilized. The whole tract was laid with water pipe. More than 10,000 trees, suitable for San Diego, were planted, including varieties of eucalyptus, cypress, pepper, grevillea, and several varieties of acacia and pine. These trees were carefully watered and cultivated and showed healthy growth. Winding drives were made. In a year or two, promised a newspaper account, “our citizens will have a beautiful park half as large as the cultivated portion of Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, and much more sightly—all without being taxed a single dollar towards its accomplishment.” If the city furnished water, Howard promised to construct a series of small lakes with miniature waterfalls in the deep canyon at the upper portion of the tract. “Such a flow and exhibit of water would be of more value to the city than almost any other improvement,” asserted the San Diego Union.

Months later, Howard’s charities tract received more newspaper coverage. Kate Sessions wrote in her gardening column about the double row of 100 Australian rubber trees, also called Morton Bay figs, planted in the charities tract, believing it to be the only long avenue of the trees in California. Agaves, date palm, and fig trees filled out the corners of the cultivated area and citrus and pomegranates had been planted. By the next summer, thousands of guava
bushes and an additional 1,000 lemon and orange trees were taking root. All this verdant growth, visible near the south boundary of the park, was seen by the San Diego Union as a convincing reply to the skeptics who wondered if anything would grow on the dusty chaparral hills of City Park.19 By 1893 it was estimated that 15,000 trees populated “Howard’s forest,” some more than 30-feet tall.20

Kate Sessions’ experimental garden and nursery provided another demonstration of the park’s horticultural possibilities. In February 1892, the city adopted an ordinance granting Sessions the use of 36 acres of City Park.21 Her lease was at the opposite end of City Park from the Howard tract, near the intersection of Upas Street and Sixth Avenue. Lease terms required her to plant 100 trees per year in City Park and to furnish 300 trees annually to the city for planting elsewhere. She carried out the single most sustained planting program in the park, making annual additions to the tree count for more than a decade.

While her tree selections were appropriate for San Diego, they also were eclectic and, in some instances, experimental. Parsons respected Sessions as he got to know her, but was undoubtedly referring to some of her plantings when he expressed concern about the grounds taking on the look of a “botanical garden” rather than a city park, and when he called the tree plantings near the corner of Sixth and Upas “gloomy.”22 Still, the Monterey cypress, cork oaks, camphor trees, Torrey pines, peppers, palms, and varied acacias and eucalyptus undoubtedly improved the appearance of the park tremendously.23

Sessions’ ten-acre flower field in her nursery had the most transformative effect on the park. It became the place for Sunday outings, providing an attraction that brought San Diegans into the park and illustrated the magnetism of skillfully cultivated public gardens.24

One other area provided an admirable demonstration site for park improve-
ment. A group of Golden Hill neighbors began to nurture plantings on the southeast corner of City Park after seeing the green promise of Annex Park and the Howard tract. The conscientious homeowners in this upscale neighborhood maintained and expanded plantings of trees and shrubs, creating one of City Park’s most attractive areas near the intersection of 25th and A Streets, complete with a playground and the first golf course in the park.25

The appearance of the park was influenced by the general enthusiasm for tree planting that swept San Diego in 1892.26 Many residents attended public meetings and the newspapers published long articles on the benefits of tree planting, along with suggestions of species to plant and instructions on placement and care. An organization to conduct an aggressive campaign of tree planting was formed and the Mayor suggested that Torrey pines be propagated for planting in City Park. He had recently visited the groves near La Jolla and worried that the Torrey pines were looking poorly and could be destroyed by fire. The Council appropriated $30-35 for the purposes of collecting seeds and creating a tract of Torrey pines in City Park.27

Unfortunately, the financial panic of 1893 struck before the public’s new interest in tree planting could translate into significant action. San Diego was severely affected by this national economic downturn. Attention to city beautification and park development plummeted as resources shrunk. Bryant Howard’s fate is illustrative. He and his silent partners were financially ruined when the Consolidated Bank failed. Their ability to support the charity they had established and to maintain the trees and grounds of the City Park charities tract abruptly ended.28

There had been six concentrated efforts to improve areas within City Park during the nineteenth century: George Marston’s privately donated avenue of eucalyptus trees; Dr. LaFevre’s tree planting club; the Auxiliary park strip; Bryant
Howard’s charity tract; the Kate Sessions nursery grounds and tree plantings; and the Golden Hill area. The combined size of these improved areas was less than 200 acres—a fraction of the total 1,400 acres set aside for City Park. Worse, many of the plantings within the park were in trouble. The arid 1890s saw seven consecutive years of minimal rain. Zeal for new plantings drained away as people observed that even established trees were suffering from drought and disease. About two-thirds of the Ladies Annex plants died, along with many trees in the Howard tract and those on the west side of the Golden Hill improvements. Still, the city of San Diego wrestled with water issues, had no plan for park development or maintenance and remained parsimonious in its allocations for work at the park. The city even removed Howard tract water pipes for reuse in La Jolla. The Los Angeles Times commented that San Diego “does nothing whatever with its park...which with comparatively small expense, could be made one of the most beautiful places in California.”

Threat and Defeatism

The absence of park development led to recurring demands to sell park land for real estate development and invited a variety of intrusive land uses. San Diego’s first school was built in the park, as was Howard’s industrial training school for orphan boys and the women’s home. Park canyons became an unofficial city dump. The park was home to a variety of enterprises: city machine shops; a gunpowder magazine and militia target ranges; the animal pound for stray cattle and horses; buildings, wells and reservoirs belonging to the water department; shooting ranges for local gun clubs; and a quarantine house for those infected with smallpox and other communicable diseases (called the “pest house”). A mayor of the period took note of the numerous squatters who had made park land their own. Another account mentions the homeless Professor LeBatt who occupied a cave in the park. In addition to all the newer uses of park land, there remained one Indian village near 8th and Date Streets. Some ideas for park use were resisted. An observatory, county fairgrounds, and a customs house were proposed, but not placed in the park. A request for 60 acres of park land to grow tobacco was vigorously condemned by a park commissioner as a desecration. A request to use park land for manure storage was sidelined by the City Council. Neighbors on the southwest boundary of the park successfully resisted the creation of a “milk ranch” in the park. Other residents objected to the placement of a fire engine in the park near their houses. In 1886, the U.S. Army proposed exchanging its downtown barracks location for a piece of City Park land. Twelve years later, the U.S. Army declined the mayor’s offer of the park as a military camp for the mobilization of thousands of troops headed to the Philippines during the Spanish American War.

San Diego found it difficult to get a park improvement plan off the ground. City Council leadership was lacking and while pronouncements by newly elected mayors tended to favor park preservation, none successfully implemented a park development plan. From time to time local newspapers editorialized along the lines of the San Diego Union in 1884: permanently improving the park is one suggestion “that should meet the unqualified approval and support of all who have an interest in San Diego.” Yet, citizens who tried to move their elected officials to action on
the park encountered a stone wall. One park proponent harshly criticized the “gas bags” on the City Council who continued to resist City Park expenditures.\textsuperscript{42}

With no park development plan in place thirty years after the park was established, some began to view City Park as more a liability than an asset. As a counter to the growing pessimism about park development, Sessions stepped in to put forth the first overall plan for City Park improvement in 1898. She proposed planting the barren canyon slopes with bougainvillea, California poppies, and morning glory vines, each to be located where they would grow most successfully. Level areas of the park would get a mixture of palms, bamboo, and eucalyptus. She argued that the park lands could be made colorful and more wooded with little expense. She fully recognized that her idea was no substitute for professional park planning, but she offered the city an economical means of doing something to improve the park. To add credibility to her effort, she made public her correspondence with New York City park planner, Frederick Law Olmsted, and suggested him as a landscape designer for City Park.\textsuperscript{43}

Sessions’ effort went nowhere with city officials and did not stave off City Park critics. At the end of 1898 horticulturist George P. Hall wrote a dark assessment, lamenting the dying trees and absence of anything attractive in the vast expanse of park lands.\textsuperscript{44}

There is probably no city, big or little, in the United States so park-cursed as San Diego is with its huge 1,400-acre scab, a miserable unsightly desert, a stricture upon the growth of the city, one of the greatest drawbacks San Diego has, but it is as sacred as a white elephant, and appears to be consecrated to disuse for all time.\textsuperscript{45}
Hall’s statement was a low point in the public perception of City Park development. Such stark and defeatist appraisals refueled the determination of Sessions, Marston, and a few other prominent citizens to save the park from its critics and the perpetual lethargy of city officials. These boosters realized that the hope of City Park’s preservation resided in a comprehensive and unassailably professional plan for park development. The plan would have to be created by a landscape architect with impeccable credentials and proven experience with large urban parks. Once a formal plan for every acre of City Park existed, park boosters would have an effective weapon against those inclined to continue nibbling away at park land for other uses.

Seizing the Initiative

In 1899, park improvement became a concern for the Chamber of Commerce. An entire monthly meeting was devoted to presentations about City Park. One speaker recounted all past efforts to improve the park. Sessions presented a paper on the “artistic possibilities” of the park through low-cost improvements, a refinement of her earlier park planting ideas. The Chamber of Commerce agreed to approach the City Council with a proposal for action on the improvement of City Park. With this resolution, the fate of City Park began to look up. A subtle realignment of political power was underway.

After two more frustrating years of delay on park development with the City Council stalling and pleading poverty, the Chamber of Commerce took a decisive step to fill the vacuum of city leadership. The Chamber created its own Park Improvement Committee. Julius Wangenheim, a prominent businessman, led the cause, urged on by Marston and Kate Sessions. The dithering and penury of
city government would no longer act as a bar to park planning—the Chamber of Commerce had taken matters into its own hands. The new committee would move forward with the help of Marston’s deep and generous pockets, a subscription campaign, and a legacy left for park improvement. Although no longer looking to the city for leadership, the Chamber understood that city approval would be necessary for any changes in the park.

The Chamber’s Park Improvement Committee moved into overdrive when it hired the accomplished and energetic Mary B. Coulston as its secretary and publicist. A classic example of the right person at the right time, Coulston had been the editor of *Garden and Forest*, a publication created by botanist Charles Sprague Sargent of Harvard University and the Arnold Arboretum. While *Garden and Forest* ceased publication in 1897, it is still read today for the quality of its writing on landscape design and preservation, national and urban park development in the United States and internationally, scientific forestry, and the conservation of forest resources. The best and the brightest wrote for the publication. Coulston worked closely with these contributors, growing in knowledge and connecting to the wider world of horticulture and landscape architecture. When financial problems forced the magazine out of existence, she enrolled in the top horticultural program of the day at Cornell University. She later moved to northern California and became acquainted with Kate Sessions.

Coulston fully understood the need to “sell” the San Diego public on the benefits of park improvement so that the City Council could, in turn, be forced to act. Her public relations campaign combined aesthetic arguments with the practical benefits of drawing tourists and new residents and businesses, thereby increasing the tax base. Coulston offered a broader view while skillfully targeting local sensibilities. She spoke before every group that would have her and published long
but interesting articles in the San Diego newspapers. She covered every conceivable aspect of public parks generally and City Park particularly. She responded to critics by tactfully refuting negative points made in editorials and letters to the editor. She rebutted naysayers with descriptions of the bad initial reaction many New Yorkers had to the creation of Central Park. When the *San Diego Sun* editorialized that hiring an outside landscape designer was a waste of money when locals could easily do all the work, Coulston masterfully distinguished park planning from park development, conceding that locals could certainly do the work of developing the park once a plan was in hand.50

With sensible, poetic and persuasive writing, Coulston helped the citizens of San Diego think differently about their public park land. Many people were working for the park, but “probably no other person gave so much of the best that was in them as did Mrs. Coulston,” according to historian William Smythe. “She was of a sincere and intense nature and threw herself into the work with a joyful abandon.”51 She also urged the appointment of Parsons as the landscape architect for City Park. She knew him from her *Garden and Forest* work and arranged for Marston to meet him during a business trip to New York City. The meeting went well and Parsons was hired.52 Coulston immediately began introducing San Diegans to Parsons through biographical articles and discussions of his prior park planning work. She whipped up a great deal of excitement about his arrival in town.

**Druids, Woodmen and Arbor Day at City Park**

Just before Parsons was hired in 1902, the Chamber’s Park Improvement Committee received what must have been a tempting offer. E.W. Scripps, the newspaper tycoon who had successfully planted hundreds of acres on his Miramar Ranch
with trees, offered to donate enough saplings to create a forest across all of City Park. It is unclear as to why this offer was not taken up. Had it come a few years earlier, City Park might have become a dense urban forest. The most likely explanation is that the Chamber of Commerce wanted to leave park planning in the hands of the expert they were finally bringing to San Diego. Parsons announced early on that he wished to preserve much of the natural look of the park, using trees at entrances to mark the park boundaries and to accent landscape features and frame views. His landscape design principles did not mesh with those of Scripps, though Parsons expressed admiration for the Miramar Ranch when Sessions and Coulston took him there to view examples of mature San Diego trees. Scripps never understood why his offer was refused and complained in 1910 that the park remained an under-planted and barren “blemish” when it could have been thick with his donated trees.

After a few years of drought relief and the hiring of a landscape architect, tree planting in City Park resumed after 1902, but with the understanding that Parsons would be consulted on the species and locations of trees. Sessions and Coulston produced two spectacular planting events to bring citizens into City Park and to generate favorable publicity and momentum for park improvement.

In 1903, San Diego’s big July 4 celebration featured international boat races, fireworks, a lighted flag on Fifth Avenue created by red, white and blue incandescent bulbs, a formal ball, and a massive tree planting in Balboa Park by various fraternal groups from around the state, including Elks, the Ancient Order of Druids, and the Foresters and Woodmen of the World. Parsons supplied a map showing where the trees should be placed while Coulston did her usual good job of stirring public interest. On the day, however, delays in the arrival of some trainloads of fraternal brothers and a party atmosphere disrupted Coulston’s
well-crafted organizational plans. Holes for 1,000 trees had been prepared, but only about 600 trees were planted that day.  

On Saint Patrick’s Day, 1904, San Diego celebrated Arbor Day for the first time. With Sessions helping to organize the planting, Coulston put together a winning community event that brought 3,500 school children to City Park, with representatives of classes and schools planting 60 pine and cypress trees. Coulston solicited messages from Governor Pardee and President Theodore Roosevelt to be read to the children, thereby insuring avid press interest. This happy event helped to distract attention from a minor flap that had hit the papers the month before when a stand of healthy palm trees in the former Howard tract were cut down to make way for a road specified in Parsons’ park plan.  

Between these two events, local attention to tree planting was further concentrated by the visit of Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the United States. His trip to California and invitation to visit San Diego were publicized for months in the local papers. Pinchot came in September 1903. He was driven through City Park to see its “forest possibilities” and delivered an address sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce to a large number of citizens. This highly placed contact paid off three years later when the federal Bureau of Forestry provided 1,000 trees for City Park.

Conclusion

The two community events—July 4th and Arbor Day—were the last mass tree planting endeavors undertaken by private groups in City Park before 1910. The plan of the Chamber of Commerce to force the city into taking responsibility for
park improvement was working. Very gradually, the city’s years of benign neglect were replaced by governmental actions that improved and developed the park.

In April 1903 the City Council authorized the Board of Public Works to start park improvements, such as road building, irrigation pipes, and planting. Discussions of a bond issue to fund park improvements began. In September 1903, the city outlawed shooting in the park and began to systematically enforce state laws prohibiting the digging of roots and extraction of sand from public parks. Good progress was reported on the park water piping system by 1905. The same year the electorate voted to amend the city charter to set aside a small percentage of property taxes to create a fund for park development. A 1907 city ordinance prohibited dumping in City Park. By 1908, ten miles of roads had been completed in the park. In 1909 the first arrest for sleeping in the park was made. The “pest house,” shooting ranges, and other occupants were evicted from park land. Most importantly, on April 17, 1905, the City of San Diego appointed its first Board of Park Commissioners with Marston as president. The private Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee handed over work on the park to city supervision.

Over the next few years, tree planting in the park continued according to Parsons’ landscaping plans, in lots of 200 to 14,000 trees at a time. When Parsons saw City Park in 1910 after a five-year absence, he was bowled over by the rapid growth of vegetation in the San Diego climate. “I have never seen anything like it,” he wrote. Although he had visited many parks in the United States and Europe, the rapid transformation of San Diego’s City Park was “a revelation.”

San Diegans had experienced their own revelation regarding City Park. They had witnessed the success of a determined few to preserve park land for public uses. They had seen private action, however halting, successfully move the park toward improvement and beautification. By 1905 when Parsons made his last submissions on the park, every acre of the barren and hopeless “scab” of park land had come under the umbrella of a comprehensive plan, the details of which were unfolding before the public eye. In 1910, as San Diego began to plan for the Panama-California Exposition of 1915, City Park became Balboa Park. Its vast landscape had survived to defy its harshest critics and was poised to become the urban treasure San Diegans know today.

NOTES
2. “Commissioners Asked for a Budget of $50,000 and More Trees Strongly Urged by Park Board,” San Diego Sun, January 26, 1910, 2.
5. The actual size of the plot set aside for “Annex Park” was 13.9 acres.
7. A Mrs. Watkins brought “Annex Park” trees back from her trip to New York, apparently without thought as to how a sugar maple and horse chestnut would fare in the San Diego climate. [Mrs. Watkins Donation], San Diego Union, April 16, 1890, 6:2.
Annex Park,” *San Diego Union*, April 15, 1890, 4:2.


12. It was later revealed that Bryant Howard was the public face of a charitable effort funded by O.S. Witherby who did not want his philanthropy recognized until after his death. “The Howard Tract; Sensational Testimony,” *San Diego Union*, June 30, 1894, 5:3. Howard was among the most prominent men in the early history of San Diego, having at one time owned the San Diego Union and served as president of Consolidated National Bank. He died in 1901. The interest of his wife, Medora H. Howard, in the welfare of children was cited as a reason for the family’s charitable work. “Mrs. Howard City Pioneer Is Dead,” *San Diego Union*, June [n.d.], 1916. Cited from a typed copy in the Biographical Files, SDHC Library and Archives.


14. After Howard and his silent partners in the charitable endeavor, O.S. Witherby and E.W. Morse, lost all their money in the Consolidated Bank failure, the children’s home could not be maintained and the building and tract of land reverted to the City of San Diego in 1896. One year later and just 10 days after the City had insured the property, the building burned. No fire hydrants were located within a mile of the structure. “San Diego County,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1897, 11.


20. “City Parks, Public Grounds Comprising Over 1,400 Acres,” *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1893, 16:6. Later in the year, a financial panic wiped out Howard’s bank and the charities fund. He and his silent charitable partners were unable to maintain the boys home. In 1896 the Howard tract reverted to the city and in May 1897, the large Queen Anne building suffered a devastating fire. Showley, *Balboa Park: A Millennium History*, 21. Some sources report that the Women’s Home burned, but that building remained in the park until the 1950s.


22. Parsons claimed the Grevillea, Blackwood Acacias, Monterey Pines, and Monterey Cypress had proven to be brittle and messy and their shapes did not harmonize with the character of the park. Not only should no more of them be planted, he said, but those in the park should be “eliminated.” Samuel B. Parsons, “[Report] To the Board of Park Commissioners, June 30, 1910, reprinted in “Make City Park Paradise of South, Urges scenic artist,” *San Diego Union*, July 5, 1910, II-9:1-2.


25. Not to be mistaken for the manicured turf of a contemporary links, the Golden Hill golf course had dirt fairways with poured oil “greens” around each of the nine holes. Montes, “San Diego’s City Park, 1868-1902,” 48.


29. “Maintenance for Park Trees,” *San Diego Union*, September 18, 1897, 2:3. The Street Improvement
Committee recommended an investigation and report on the necessity of spraying trees in the park infested with insect pests and to trim trees and shrubbery and for the Board of Public Works to water trees on upper 5th Street, in the Howard tract, and in the Ladies Annex park. A request for funds to do this work was subsequently submitted, but not fully funded.

31. When the Board of Public Works requested $100 to give trees in the Howard tract needed care, the Council reluctantly complied, but with half the amount requested. “Charter Amendment; City Council Disposes of Important Business,” San Diego Union, October 4, 1898, 3:1.
35. In one egregious example, a contractor was reportedly dumping at least 20 wagonloads of garbage daily in a ravine just above Ivy Street in City Park. “Contractor Dumping,” San Diego Union, December 13, 1887, 5:5-6.
38. Presumably, this meant a dairy with a herd of cows. “Board of City Trustees,” San Diego Sun, April 14, 1882, 4:3.
40. “San Diego County,” Los Angeles Times, May 19, 1898, 11. This offer may have been a San Diego effort to promote its climate at San Francisco’s expense. Soldiers complained bitterly about the cold wind and fog at San Francisco’s Presidio Army base where they lived in tents before shipping out to the Philippine Islands.
42. “San Diego County,” Los Angeles Times, May 15, 1895, 11.
43. Sessions had been making the public case for hiring a professional landscape architect for the park since at least 1891. “Kate Sessions Writes Letter About Park Improvement,” San Diego Union, May 27, 1891, 2:1.
44. George P. Hall served as county agriculture commissioner, developed expertise in citrus culture and eventually became an advisor to the Little Landers colony at San Ysidro.
45. “Geo. P. Hall’s Views,” San Diego Union, December 23, 1898, 2:3-4. It is possible that Hall was disgruntled by an 1893 refusal of the City to grant a request for 7.4 acres of park land made by the San Diego Agricultural Society for a county fair and further irritated by Mayor D.C. Reed’s high-flown declaration that the 1,400 acres of park land “should for all time remain intact . . . and be as sacred as Holy Writ.” Showley, Balboa Park: A Millennium History, 23.
46. “San Diego County,” Los Angeles Times, September 2, 1899, 15.
47. Showley, Balboa Park: A Millennium History, 23; Elizabeth C. MacPhail, Kate Sessions Pioneer Horticulturist (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1976), 68.
49. Alice Eastwood, Sessions’ friend at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, may
have been the intermediary. Coulston’s life was cut short in July 1904 when she did not survive surgery for a blocked intestine. She was attending a summer course at UC Berkeley to complete her horticultural degree begun at Cornell. “Her service is not as well known to horticulture as it should be,” eulogized a former co-worker. “The Late Mrs. Coulston,” American Garden, August 6, 1904, 514. Her friends and employers in San Diego were devastated by the loss. Kate Sessions buried Coulston’s ashes in City Park.

50. “Editorial: As to Park Plans,” San Diego Sun, Oct. 3, 1902; The Mary B. Coulston Scrapbooks at the San Diego History Center Archives collect her prodigious output. She wrote on the history of urban public parks, parks and good citizenship, the value of natural landscapes, parks as important artistic works and parks as places for young people to study botany. She described possible park adornments and uses, including cactus gardens, water features, music concerts, native plant preservation.


54. Parsons is identified with the picturesque style of landscape design originated in England by Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1716 – 1783) and reflected in the Central Park work of Frederick Law Olmstead. The style moved away from formal rectangle and diagonal shapes in favor of naturalistic curvilinear landscapes; “Mr. Parsons’ Trip to Miramar,” San Diego Union, January 3, 1903. The author thanks Molly McClain for this reference.

55. “One thousand acres of pine trees could be growing now in the park without a dollar of expenditure,” Scripps scolded the Park Commission. In opposition to Parson’s plan, Scripps suggested that “the whole of the San Diego park lands be planted” to create “a large forest growth of trees in the park.” Otherwise, it appeared that the barren land of City Park would remain “a blemish.” E.W. Scripps to San Diego Park Commission, March 12, 1910, Scrapbook on Balboa Park, California Room, San Diego Public Library.


63. Smythe, The History of San Diego, 1542-1908, 621.

