

## Mary B. Coulston: Unsung Planner of Balboa Park

By Nancy Carol Carter

This article claims a more prominent place for Mary B. Coulston (1855-1904) in the history of Balboa Park and of San Diego. She has been inadequately recognized for her contributions to park development and her working partnership with “The Mother of Balboa Park,” Kate O. Sessions. It also lifts the veil on an unrecorded personal life. Newly uncovered information places her among the fascinating cast of characters who shook off a notorious past to be reborn in California.

While every serious history of Balboa Park mentions Coulston, secretary to the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee during 1903-04, her exceptional—and indeed unique—qualifications to promote the aims of the Park Improvement Committee have not been acknowledged or fully understood. Similarly, the scope and import of her work generally is unelaborated, perhaps because the job title of “secretary” obscures the true nature of her responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> To marginalize Coulston as a female functionary, however, is to ignore the record. She independently wrote and spoke on behalf of the Park Improvement Committee and was a decision-maker and supervisor. She acted as the trusted liaison with the park’s first landscapers,



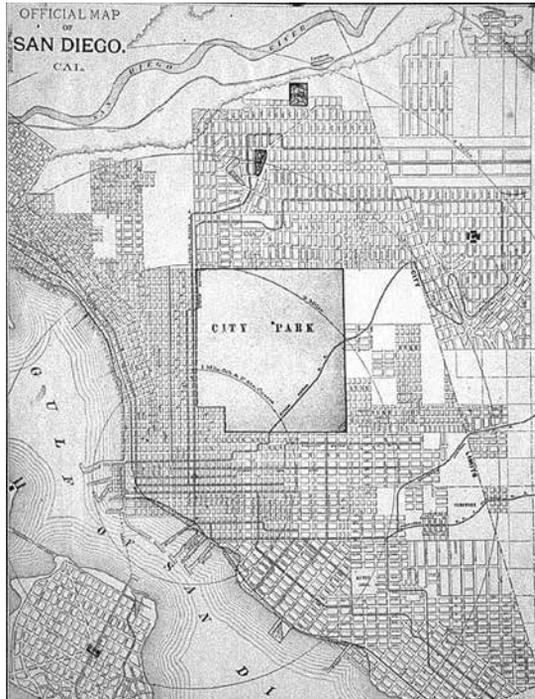
*Mary B. Coulston, published in  
American Gardening, August 1904.*

---

**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 several articles on Balboa Park in *The Journal of San Diego History*. She created and maintains a Native American web site [www.sandiego.edu/nativeamerican](http://www.sandiego.edu/nativeamerican).

city officials and important supporters of park development. Arguably, Coulston herself, rather than the official park plans committee, selected the first landscape architect for San Diego's City Park.

There are reasons that local historians have not spent more time on Coulston. She lived in San Diego for less than two years, arriving late in 1902 and meeting an untimely death in July 1904. Few contemporaneous accounts of her San Diego life and work exist. Historians have perhaps exercised caution in relying upon the more available, but suspect, appraisals published immediately after her unexpected passing. Researchers



*Official map of 1893 showing the relative size of City (Balboa) Park as established in 1870. ©SDHC Document Archives.*

working without the benefit of Internet sources would have been stymied in learning about her professional and personal life. Her age and place of birth were never specified. There is no known cache of personal papers or diaries. No San Diego photographs of her have come to light and just one has been found elsewhere. She was never identified in public sources as being a widow or as being divorced. The first mention of her children appeared in an obituary. For earlier historians, the fuller story of Mary B. Coulston's life was nearly impenetrable.

More easily discoverable, but also completely unmentioned in the historical record is Coulston's part in introducing San Diegans to three important environmental themes sweeping the country at the turn of the twentieth century. She brought the Nature Study school curriculum,<sup>2</sup> the Country Life Movement,<sup>3</sup> and Theodore Roosevelt's focus on national forestry<sup>4</sup> to town. In each instance, she had a direct association with the key national personalities driving these initiatives. She also arranged the only San Diego appearance of Elbert Hubbard,<sup>5</sup> founder of the Roycroft artisan community and influential proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement. For a short-time resident of San Diego, Coulston's community contributions and involvement make an impressive list, but her primary focus was City Park.

## San Diego City Park: Neglected and Threatened

Today's Balboa Park was created when San Diego's city fathers set aside 1,400 acres of land in 1868 as City Park. Over the next thirty years, invoking a plea of poverty, the city government did nothing to beautify or improve City Park for recreational uses. The dry and barren expanse was considered an eyesore and had become a place for squatters, rabbit hunters, illegal dumping, stray animals, and illicit farming and grazing. One public feature of the park was a "pest house" used to quarantine people with communicable diseases. As the years rolled by with no improvements at City Park, real estate investors and some public officials began earnest discussions about the sale of park land for development.

With this great public asset under threat, San Diego park advocates ramped up their efforts to preserve the land for its intended use. However, various and repeated efforts to prompt action on park development from the lethargic city government failed utterly.

Prominent businessman Julius Wangenheim did not become personally involved, according to his memoirs, until his civic pride was pricked. During a Sunday stroll in City Park, he encountered an English visitor to San Diego who wondered why the city had done nothing to develop such a beautifully situated park. The remark "got under his skin" and he resolved to take action.<sup>6</sup> The next day Wangenheim proposed that the Chamber of Commerce take on the park as a project and raise money for its improvement. The Chamber's Board of Directors created a Park Improvement Committee that day, August 15, 1902. Wangenheim was appointed the committee chair.<sup>7</sup>

Wangenheim's description of a seemingly spontaneous act does not tell the whole story. The speed with which advocates of park improvement leapt into action after appointment of the Chamber committee signals some prior coordination. With the logjam that had stalled City Park improvements broken, the pent-up energies of those San Diegans championing park improvement now had a vehicle for organized community action. The dramatic story of how effectively the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee seized the initiative and surged into the vacuum of city leadership is told elsewhere, but everything changed for City Park when the Park Improvement Committee



*In 1902, prominent businessman Julius Wangenheim proposed that the Chamber of Commerce take on the park as a project and raise money for its improvement.*  
©SDHC #89:17283.



*Horticulturist and park advocate Kate O. Sessions worked closely with Coulston to further park development. ©SDHC #81:11358.*

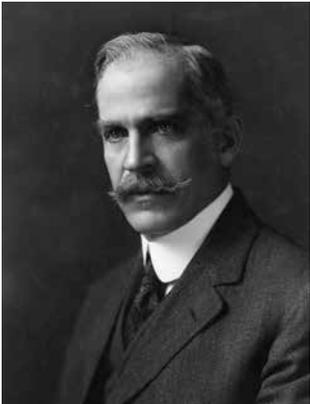
was created. The dithering and penury of city government would no longer act as a bar to park planning—the Chamber of Commerce had taken matters into its own hands. The new committee would move forward with the help of Marston’s deep and generous pockets, a subscription campaign, and a legacy left for park improvement. Although no longer looking to the city for leadership, the Chamber understood that city approval would be necessary for changes in the Park.<sup>8</sup>

On August 18, 1902, three days after the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee was appointed, the search for a professional park planner began. Although many San Diegans saw no need for an outside professional, the subcommittee on park plans, consisting of wealthy department store owner George W. Marston,



*Department store owner George W. Marston hired Coulston to help shape public opinion regarding the development of City Park. ©SDHC #82:13739.*

horticulturist and park advocate Kate O. Sessions, and Ernest E. White, who ran the San Diego branch of the Spreckels Brothers Commercial Company,<sup>9</sup> were convinced that intelligent City Park development demanded a comprehensive plan created by an experienced landscape architect.



*Ernest E. White ran the San Diego branch of the Spreckels Bros. Commercial Company. He was one of the members of the Park Plans Subcommittee of the Chamber of Park Planning Commission who first contacted Coulston and brought her to San Diego. ©SDHC #2007-001-131.*

The first act of the subcommittee was to contact Mary B. Coulston.<sup>10</sup> According to the *San Diego Union*, “Mrs. Coulston was asked to advise the Committee concerning the ability and standing of the foremost artists” in the field of landscape architecture, “so that the best man may be secured at as early a date as possible.”<sup>11</sup> Coulston was in Northern California, fresh from studies at the Cornell University horticulture program, and scouting for a place to settle. Why at this critical

turning point in City Park development did San Diegans look to the unemployed and, at that moment, rootless Mary B. Coulston?

## The *Garden and Forest* Credential of Mary B. Coulston

The most important credential recommending Coulston to the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee predated her enrollment at Cornell. During the prior ten years she was an editorial assistant at *Garden and Forest: A Journal of Horticulture, Landscape Art, and Forestry*. More information about this singular publication helps to explain its power as résumé material.

No ordinary nineteenth century gardening magazine, *Garden and Forest* was in a class of its own and described as “one of the few American original ventures, and one of the best and most creditable.”<sup>12</sup> It was published for just one decade and had a small circulation, yet *Garden and Forest* was influential in its day and retains profound historical significance.<sup>13</sup> Scholars continue to examine what was “arguably the most important late-nineteenth-century forum for discussing the role of science in human affairs. Those who wrote about horticulture or landscape design or forestry were not just reporting on the latest discoveries...but were also participating in a larger cultural debate about the appropriate role of expertise in scientific research and in shaping public policy.”<sup>14</sup>

The publication is credited with changing American attitudes about forest preservation and the need to adopt governmentally directed scientific management of forests on public land, along the lines previously established in Europe.<sup>15</sup> It helped to define emerging professions. The fifty theoretical articles contributed by critic and art historian Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer offered a philosophical underpinning that helped distinguish landscape architecture from the craft or trade of gardening by defining “landscape art” as the “fourth art” of design.<sup>16</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Samuel Parsons, Jr., and all the leading landscape architects of the day wrote for *Garden and Forest*, seeing it “as their best forum for shaping the profession” that was just evolving. Landscape architects lacked a professional organization before 1899 and had no recognized academic training programs until 1900.<sup>17</sup>



Coulston brought landscape architect Samuel Parsons, Jr. to the attention of the park plans subcommittee. ©SDHC #94:19310.

The fields of horticulture and botany also were influenced by *Garden and Forest*. Horticulture was only “vaguely delineated” but became more distinctly separated



*Cabrillo Canyon looking south through Balboa Park toward downtown. ©SDHC #1560.*

from agriculture, botany and landscape architecture during this period, even as debates continued on the appropriate mix of scientific education and practical training in each field. As was frequently the case, *Garden and Forest* put forth an international model that might be profitably adapted to the United States. The American who established the first academic program in horticulture at Cornell University and defined the field, Liberty Hyde Bailey, joined into the *Garden and Forest* conversation on the distinctions between horticulture, botany and related subjects.

Still the preserve of many amateurs, botany was professionalizing at the end of the nineteenth century as the use of microscopes to study plant cell structure became more common and greater understanding of plant reproduction provided a basis for plant classification. When it became known that genetic laws applied to plants, the complexity of plant science was compounded. *Garden and Forest* published sophisticated articles on cellular growth in plants and physiological botany, while also engaging in the philosophical conversations that were defining botany as a separate scientific field.<sup>18</sup>

Most relevant in regard to Coulston and San Diego's City Park, *Garden and Forest* took a special interest in the creation of urban parks and was an articulate champion of their care and management. "Credit for the graceful prose and for the eloquent advocacy for public parks" goes to William Augustus Stiles (1837-1897) who edited all but the last few issues of the journal and was appointed to the New

York Board of Park Commissioners in 1895.<sup>19</sup> Stiles was a friend of Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the first Americans to call himself a landscape architect and to gain an international reputation as a designer of large public parks.

Historians point out that Stiles does not always get credit for the scholarly, scientific and literary style of *Garden and Forest*. His name gets lost within the advertising pages while Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), founding director of Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, is prominently named as the journal's "conductor," a title he conferred upon himself to signal his guiding hand in the enterprise. *Garden and Forest* was Sargent's brainchild and he financially supported it, but rather than participating in day-to-day production, he guided content to areas that mattered to him, such as forest conservation, the preservation of natural scenery and the creation of public parks.<sup>20</sup> However, the journal was independently edited far from Harvard University at the Tribune Building in New York City. Stiles, with able assistance from Coulston, turned out more than 8,400 highly regarded pages over *Garden and Forest's* ten-year life.

Sargent was fortunate in engaging Stiles as the managing editor of his new journal. The latter was born into a well-educated family and graduated at the top of his class at Yale University. After teaching a few years, his poor health prompted a sea voyage to California via the Isthmus of Panama. He taught music and English literature at an Oakland academy and, beguiled by the flora of California, took up the study of plants. He sought physical activity by joining the Corps of Engineers mapping project for the Union Pacific Railroad. Poor health and problems with his eyes forced a return to the New Jersey farm owned by his father. He took up a systematic study of botany while confined to a darkened room for several months. His sisters read text books to him and quizzed him on content. His interests expanded to topics that would later be featured in *Garden and Forest*, including landscape architecture and forestry.

When his sight was stabilized, Stiles ventured into journalism with expert writing on New Jersey politics. He ran unsuccessfully for public office and served as secretary to the New Jersey state senate, then moved to New York City for a post at the United States Customs House. His leap to the New York *Tribune* occurred when the newspaper's publisher heard Stiles give an intelligent and witty after-dinner speech to a group of Yale alumni. He was offered a job as editorial writer on the spot and worked for the *Tribune* for the rest of his life. Stiles also worked as the agricultural correspondent for the *Philadelphia Weekly Press* from 1883, reporting on current research in agricultural methods. He perhaps attracted Sargent's attention with his stout editorials defending the original vision of Central Park and other public landscapes.<sup>21</sup>

Exactly how Coulston came to be hired at *Garden and Forest* and the nature

of her work on the publication are poorly documented. The only information on these points appears in a letter to the editor written by a former co-worker after seeing her obituary in *American Gardening*. The letter states that Coulston came to Stiles's attention through her earlier reporting on Philadelphia flower shows. As a member of the *Garden and Forest* editorial staff it was part of her work "to cull out news items and contribute articles" suitable for publication and "in that way she became thoroughly familiar with the field and personally acquainted with the leading horticulturists and foresters of the world. The files of *Garden and Forest* contain the results, an immense amount of work she selected, prepared and edited."<sup>22</sup>

Coulston's decade at *Garden and Forest* and with Stiles prepared her to play a pivotal role in the development of Balboa Park. She honed her writing style under a master of the printed word and was infused with a deep appreciation for the value and purpose of public parks. She got an education in the thorny realities of public park politics during the time that Stiles served as a New York City Park Commissioner. Finally, through her attendance at national conferences, her editorial work, and the handling of correspondence for *Garden and Forest*, she had an acquaintance with almost every important landscape architect, forester and horticulturist in the late nineteenth century, as well as the social and cultural thinkers drawn to *Garden and Forest*.

Sargent discontinued his critically acclaimed but unprofitable journal after Stiles' death in 1897. This ended Coulston's employment at the Tribune Building in New York City, although she retained an association with the *Tribune* newspaper as a free-lance contributor. She relocated to Ithaca and enrolled at Cornell University to study in the country's preeminent horticulture program headed by Liberty Hyde Bailey.<sup>23</sup> He was fully familiar with her writing and editorial experience and put Coulston to work on his monumental *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture*.<sup>24</sup> Her participation in Bailey's informal student group, the Lazy Club,<sup>25</sup> solidified personal relationships with other students who became well-placed and useful contacts after leaving the prestigious Cornell program.

Historians of Balboa Park and San Diego have not fully appreciated the profound significance of Coulston's *Garden and Forest* experience. Within the universe of public parks she was one-of-a-kind. There was not another person in the United States with a similar combination of journalistic experience and skill, specialized knowledge, and apposite contacts. With her, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee forged a solid link between the undeveloped park in their small and isolated town and the nation's cutting edge thinking about public park creation, design and management.

## Coulston Builds a Vision and Selects a Landscape Architect

When initially contacted by the Chamber of Commerce subcommittee on park plans in mid-August 1902, Coulston helped Kate Sessions devise a list of potential advisors and they dispatched numerous letters soliciting names of capable planners for San Diego's City Park.<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, a Chamber of Commerce report from the Park Improvement Committee described, according to the *San Diego Union*, "much consultation with landscape gardeners and with others who are supposed to know about such things, and considerable correspondence with leaders of such movements throughout the world."<sup>27</sup>

Late in September 1902, Coulston, living in the San Francisco Bay area town of Livermore, was invited to San Diego as the guest of Sessions to further consult with the plans subcommittee of the Park Improvement Committee.<sup>28</sup> That was the account of her San Diego arrival reported to the newspapers. In actuality, Coulston had been hired by George W. Marston to help shape public opinion regarding the development of City Park.<sup>29</sup> As a successful San Diego merchant, George Marston understood the value of advertising. He later wrote that Coulston was "an accomplished woman [and] an excellent press writer" who "gave a powerful impetus to park enthusiasm."<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after arriving in San Diego and visiting City Park, Coulston spoke to a meeting of the Park Improvement Committee and guests. "That the park will be unique is self-evident," she stated, setting a tone for subsequent talks to clubs and civic organizations.<sup>31</sup> A few days later, she published the first of a series of articles in the local newspapers. Finding that the park had "unguessed opportunities," she extolled the climate and natural characteristics of San Diego's big park and explained the financial, business, and tourism advantages that park development could bring.<sup>32</sup> The next day, she published another article responding to a newspaper editorial downplaying the need for professional park planning and suggested the use of home-grown horticultural talent in developing City Park. Here she first displayed the informed point of view and tact that proved so effective in shaping public opinion in San Diego. She drew a distinction between the value of local knowledge for plants and planting, which were secondary to park development, coming after the primary work of an overall artistic concept and design, which were the province of specialized and experienced landscape architects.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout October 1902 Coulston turned out a steady stream of articles for the local newspapers in what today would be called a public relations media blitz.<sup>34</sup> She told every possible story about the design of public parks and their benefits, generally, and in San Diego specifically.<sup>35</sup> She wrote about music in the

park and the use of native species in park planting.<sup>36</sup> She continued to promote the importance of expert park design, named the landscape architects under consideration and described plans for George W. Marston to meet one of them, Samuel B. Parsons, Jr., during a business trip to New York. When Parsons was subsequently hired to design City Park, Coulston introduced him and his noteworthy public park experience in an extensive professional profile.<sup>37</sup>

There is reason to believe that Coulston had a stronger hand in selecting City Park's first landscape architect than previously understood. Her acquaintance with Samuel B. Parsons, Jr., is well known. According to one of her obituaries, she once worked for Parsons, but this assertion is otherwise unsubstantiated.<sup>38</sup> A better explanation of their friendly relationship dates to her time at *Garden and Forest*. The journal's chief editor, Stiles, was appointed to the Board of Park Commissioners in the same year that Parsons assumed the job of landscape architect for New York City parks. Parsons is likely to have been a frequent visitor to Stiles' office and Coulston's involvement may have included administrative support to Stiles' work as a park commissioner.<sup>39</sup>

It is no secret that she brought Parsons to the attention of the park plans subcommittee in San Diego and helped to arrange Marston's meeting with Parsons in New York. Less well known is the fact that Coulston reached out to Parsons to determine his interest and availability for the San Diego job within days of becoming aware of this possible landscaping commission. She reported receiving a first letter from San Diego dated August 18, 1902. The date of her letter to Parsons was August 25 and he replied to her Livermore address on September 5: "I write to say that I do not see why our firm cannot make a plan of a park for San Diego."<sup>40</sup> The next month, in a handwritten letter to Coulston dated October 10, Parsons wrote: "Thanks for all the trouble you are taking...I like all you say about the San Diego Park..."<sup>41</sup>

While other famous landscape architects of the day were mentioned in newspaper articles and a show of wider consideration was made, there is no evidence that the search ever went beyond Parsons. As head of the park plans committee, Marston personally interviewed Parsons, but he does not seem to have contacted or interviewed others.<sup>42</sup> Parsons was highly qualified and a fine choice as City Park's designer, but it appears that his selection was fast-tracked in line with Coulston's recommendation so that the Park Improvement Committee could push forward as expeditiously as possible. Marston made a point of saying in a later history of San Diego parks that Coulston had "wisely directed the committee in their initial work."<sup>43</sup>

Marston had hired Coulston as a jobbing journalist on a temporary basis, but she made a strong and favorable impression during her 1902 stay in San Diego,



*Arbor Day 1904.* ©SDHC #22689.

proving to be so knowledgeable and useful that arrangements were made for her to move to San Diego and work full time on behalf of park development. Effective January 1, 1903, her role was formalized when she was elected secretary of the park plans subcommittee. When the full Park Improvement Committee met later in the month, she was elected secretary to that larger committee and provided with an office and living quarters in a suite of the Sefton Block at Fourth and C Streets downtown.<sup>44</sup>

Once settled back in San Diego, Coulston rapidly built on the social connections she had forged during her previous visit. She joined the Wednesday Club.<sup>45</sup> She served on a committee with U. S. Grant, Jr., to reorganize the social programs of the Salvation Army in San Diego.<sup>46</sup> Along with several members of the Scripps family, she was named a charter member of the Marine Biological Association of San Diego.<sup>47</sup> She also became a charter member of the Horton Improvement Club.<sup>48</sup> Coulston joined and became “prominently connected to” a religious congregation known as the Fellowship and did volunteer work with jailed youth.<sup>49</sup> She became friends with city leaders, including the police chief, city librarian, mayor and, of course, those working on behalf of City Park. She spoke before every public group that would schedule her. She presented Saturday nature study programs for children at the public library.<sup>50</sup> She talked on eastern religions at a special program on India hosted by the Congregational Church.<sup>51</sup>

Coulston helped organize popular events that brought out hundreds of people and publicized the park, including San Diego’s first Arbor Day celebration planned

in collaboration with Sessions. The two women had bonded quickly on both a personal and professional level and worked companionably on large and small projects furthering park development. One account called them “inseparable.”<sup>52</sup> Because she is better known in San Diego history, Sessions has received more than her fair share of credit for some of their joint projects. Considering that Sessions had a nursery and a florist business to run, it was Coulston who shouldered responsibility for most of the logistical planning and all the correspondence and publicity for an event like the 1904 Arbor Day tree planting in the park. Coulston, as a product of big city life, brought new ideas and a certain sophistication to local event planning.

Her valuable public relations work continued and Coulston undertook the routine work of preparing meeting minutes and handling correspondence as secretary to the Park Improvement Committee. But, as park development commenced in earnest after Parsons was hired, Coulston undertook an entirely new set of responsibilities. No single member of the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee had time to manage the day-to-day work of park development. Chamber members ran banks, real estate offices, canning companies, stores and other enterprises. Yet, their organization had seized the initiative from city officials on park development and they wanted to make the most of the opportunity, pushing park improvement as far forward as possible while they held the reins. It is not clear whether they originally contemplated the need for someone like Coulston, but when the necessity became apparent, she was recognized as the ideal person to handle a variety of executive tasks and to serve as the single point of contact for the Committee vis-à-vis city officials (especially the public works department), the landscape architect, interested individuals and civic groups, outside visitors who might lend credibility and glamour to the enterprise, and the popular press.

Coulston turned her hand to practical assignments after Parsons started his work. He had been hired in late October and came to San Diego for his first look at City Park in December 1902.<sup>53</sup> Coulston was part of the escort as Parsons assessed the park grounds and was shown around the San Diego region to learn more about local trees and landscapes. On December 30, 1902, the president of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce reported to the membership that the improvement of the park was in the hands of a strong committee and that Parsons, “the eminent landscape architect is now on the ground making a careful survey of the situation and just as soon as he can be supplied with a reliable contour map will be able to arrange for the building of needed roads and paths...”<sup>54</sup>

Securing this contour map was one of Coulston’s first assignments upon taking up her duties with the Park Improvement Committee in January 1903. The city’s



*Englishman George Cooke, business partner of Samuel Parsons, Jr., oversaw the layout and construction of the park.*  
©SDHC #98:19772.

Department of Public Works was to furnish the map, but dragged its heels. She offered funds from the Park Improvement Committee to hire extra surveyors and draftsmen because Parsons could not make progress without a contour map. In late April she reported the delays to the Park Improvement Committee and wrote a letter of complaint to the city engineer. He took offense, made further excuses and indignantly called her letter “impertinent.”<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, John McLean was hired as the first gardener for the park and assigned to work under Coulston’s supervision.<sup>56</sup> Together they selected a site and oversaw the building of a nursery for propagation and temporarily storing the gifts of trees Coulston was soliciting for the park.<sup>57</sup>

Through this period Coulston was arranging for street sweepings to be delivered to the park so that the abundance of horse manure could be used for soil enrichment,<sup>58</sup> working with the city on water piping in the park,<sup>59</sup> arranging for illegally dumped items to be cleared, urging the city to ban chickens, grazing and camping from park lands,<sup>60</sup> as well as controlling hunting and shooting. By late May, Parsons’ first maps for City Park were arriving in San Diego and the full park survey was finally completed with extra workers funded by the Park Improvement Committee.<sup>61</sup>

With a plan for roads and paths completed, Parsons sent word that his business partner, Englishman George Cooke, would come to San Diego to oversee layout and construction. As his arrival date neared, Coulston provided another round of introductions to the people of San Diego with newspaper articles describing Cooke’s training and landscape experience.<sup>62</sup> She handled all the logistics for Cooke’s stay in San Diego and his preparations for the work that began at the end of July 1903. She kept projects moving forward. The pace of roadwork and planting in the park increased through the next months, despite various bumps and delays. By the summer of 1904 even the most skeptical San Diegan could no longer deny that their neglected and forbidding City Park could indeed be developed and improved.

At this time, Coulston arranged to take leave from her work. She enrolled for summer classes at the University of California. Academic credits at Berkeley, when combined with previous classes at Cornell University, would complete a college degree for the fifty-four-year-old horticultural journalist. On June 22, 1904,

she boarded the steamer "Santa Rosa" heading for Berkeley.<sup>63</sup> After arriving she wrote of her homesickness, saying "I shall meet many people here soon, but it is San Diego that I love."<sup>64</sup>

Coulston was hired by the University of California to teach in the Farmers' Institute, the public education wing of agricultural colleges across the country. Whether this was a summer job or a permanent post that required her ultimate relocation to Northern California is unknown, but it is likely that the end was in sight for her position with the Park Improvement Committee. Eventually this Chamber of Commerce committee would stand aside so that the city of San Diego could reassume responsibility for City Park. Whatever her future employment locally, San Diego acquaintances regarded her stay in Berkeley as temporary. Just one month after her departure, they learned that she would never return. On July 17, 1904, Coulston died in Oakland during emergency surgery prompted by an intestinal blockage.

### **Coulston Memorialized**

Hailed by the *San Diego Union* as "one of the brightest, noblest and best beloved women" who lived in San Diego, Coulston's death was a severe shock to the community. The story spun out for days in the newspapers: first the bald announcement of her demise, then elaborations on her last illness, and finally poignant excerpts from several cheerful letters she had written and mailed to San Diego a few days before her death. A San Francisco newspaper stated that the death "would be felt in the south," citing her involvement in San Diego park improvement and her prominent charity work in San Diego. This report named her children as Mrs. Wilfred Clarke and Claude Coulston.<sup>65</sup>

Memorial services were announced in both San Francisco and San Diego. Detailed tributes were published. A last newspaper story referenced the tug-of-war over Coulston's cremated ashes that arose between friends in Northern and Southern California.<sup>66</sup> Sessions supervised all the flowers for the San Diego memorial service and carried out her friend's final wishes. After San Diego laid claim to the disputed Coulston ashes, she buried them in City Park under a Cedar of Lebanon tree.<sup>67</sup>

Coulston's death was subsequently reported in a variety of national publications, speaking to the breadth of her mark in horticulture and related fields. The following tribute, probably submitted by Sessions, was sent to *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening*, a journal that had published two of her articles about San Diego's City Park.



Mrs. Mary B. Coulston, of San Diego, Cal., formerly editor of *Garden and Forest*, and one of the most active and useful workers and writers on horticulture on the Pacific Coast, died suddenly July 17, after an illness of 36 hours. She was in attendance at the summer school of the University of California at Berkeley, and was in good health and spirits two days before her death. Mrs. Coulston was secretary of the Park Improvement Committee of the Chamber of Commerce at San Diego...She was born in Pennsylvania and was best known to horticulturists throughout the country by her writings in *Garden and Forest*...When that publication suspended four years ago, Mrs. Coulston went to Cornell University for a two years' course in horticulture, forestry, and nature study, and it was to complete this course that she was at the University of California. For the past two years she has been secretary of the Park Committee in San Diego where she has been of great assistance to the landscape architects in carrying out the extensive park improvement plans. She was an active worker in philanthropy, especially among the youthful criminals. Mrs. Coulston was a woman of rare mental attainments and personal charm and was beloved by all who knew her. She was a member of many clubs and organizations, and impressive public memorial exercises were conducted in her memory by the Fellowship and the Wednesday Club in San Diego.<sup>68</sup>

A notice in *American Gardening* called Coulston "a lady of very high ideals" who did very conscientious work for the *Garden and Forest* and was especially interested in forestry problems. Her contributions to Liberty Hyde Bailey's

*Cyclopedia of American Horticulture* are mentioned. Importantly, this obituary supplies otherwise unreported facts about Coulston's life after ending her studies at Cornell and before being hired in San Diego. It states that she traveled with a theatrical company in a clerical capacity for a short time (most likely the theater company of her daughter and son-in-law), and that upon visiting California, she decided to make it her permanent home.<sup>69</sup> According to this obituary, she did some work with a Los Angeles newspaper before settling in northern California.<sup>70</sup>

A letter to the editor in a subsequent issue of *American Gardening* candidly assessed Coulston and pointed out that her work was likely to be undervalued. It was signed only with an initial "G," giving no useful hint to the writer's identity. It is likely that "G" supplied the photograph of Coulston published along side the letter, placing the only known picture of her on the record.

It is with deep regret that I read in *American Gardening* of the death of my old-time co-worker, Mrs. Coulston. The Service rendered by Mary C. [sic] Coulston in the horticultural world was of the sort that is not known or appreciated as it should be. It was the oil that makes the engine run smoothly, rather than the puffing steam, or the ponderous driving wheels. She was neither an amateur nor professional florist or gardener, and really had comparatively little of the technical skill required to grow plants, and knew little about them, yet she accomplished much in the line of horticultural literary work, including park and outdoor art of all sorts...Her life is a striking example of what a woman with ordinary education can do in a comparatively strange field, provided she has push, discretion and ability.<sup>71</sup>

Obituaries were also published in the *American Florist*,<sup>72</sup> the *Country Gentleman*,<sup>73</sup> and the widely read and prestigious journal *Science*, which mentioned Coulston's recent appointment as "assistant in agriculture in the University of California."<sup>74</sup> Both Cornell University and the University of California listed her name in their annual memorials for 1904.<sup>75</sup>

Coulston's death was shockingly unexpected and untimely, yet the widespread expression of civic loss seems out of proportion for someone who lived in San Diego less than two years. She had earned this degree of sincere respect through her job competence and useful volunteer work in the community. Despite being a newcomer, almost everyone in San Diego knew her name, her work, and her good works. The unreserved acclaim may equally demonstrate Coulston's ability to keep secrets and to have at last escaped the taint of notorious events in her past.

## Philadelphia Noir

Coulston is a woman of mystery in the San Diego historical record. Nothing about her life before *Garden and Forest* has appeared in a San Diego source. New research fills in some of the gaps and uncovers the tumultuous experiences of Coulston's earlier life in Philadelphia.

Mary Bollinger (Coulston) was born in 1855. Her early life was spent in Philadelphia and the nearby New Jersey farm lands across the Schuylkill River. She and her widowed mother joined a Philadelphia Methodist Episcopal church in 1866.<sup>76</sup> Nothing is known about the schooling or home education that so ably prepared her for a later career in journalism. When eighteen years old, she married a twenty-three-year-old carpenter, Charles W. Coulston. A son, Jesse Claude, was born when she was twenty and a daughter, Theodora Emily, followed five years later. In 1880 the family was farming in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey.<sup>77</sup>

By 1883 Mary and Charles Coulston had moved into Philadelphia where their daughter was belatedly baptized.<sup>78</sup> She and her husband joined the rapidly growing congregation of a handsome and charismatic minister, Waldo Messaros. The eloquent preacher claimed to have been born in Greece on Christmas Day and to have attended Oxford University. Temperance lectures by "the Greek Orator" drew sell-out crowds.<sup>79</sup> Messaros rode a crest of popularity as his congregation grew from 40 to 380 members.<sup>80</sup> Later, when his fraud and alcoholic dissipation came to light, "Messaros" was reported to be of Scots-Irish parentage and named MacKenzie,<sup>81</sup> but his public unmasking came too late for Coulston.

After three years of active church involvement, the Coulstons, along with a few others, became disillusioned with their minister. Mary Coulston said she had originally "idolized" Messaros, but now found him to be "a wolf in sheep's clothing."<sup>82</sup> He had managed to skate through church investigations, but charges persisted of improper conduct, drunkenness and inappropriate relationships with women in the congregation.<sup>83</sup> His effort to join a Masonic lodge was held up for more than a year when charges of drunkenness, loose morals and false representation were raised. He was called, not Greek, but an "Irish adventurer." A newspaper editorial called him a "liar, pious fraud, adventurer and drunkard."<sup>84</sup>

The Coulstons may have decided to entrap Messaros who, in their opinion, did not belong in the ministry. But as events unfolded, it was the Coulstons, not Messaros, who suffered public condemnation and a series of upheavals that destroyed their marriage. When the Coulstons tried to leave the church, Messaros resisted their repeated requests for the customary letters of dismissal from church membership (needed for presentation when joining a new church). Messaros perhaps hoped to avoid the questions and speculation likely to attend the loss

of such prominent congregants. By this time Charles operated his own business and Mary was a church leader and Sunday school teacher who was well-known for her work with the Society of Organized Charity.<sup>85</sup>

Messaros was scheduled to meet Mary Coulston at her home to discuss the still-pending letter of dismissal from the church. She previously had invited the family doctor and other members of the church congregation to be present with her husband. The witnesses were in a separate room when the Reverend Messaros came to call. After a few moments together in the parlor, Coulston's cries of alarm brought her husband and others into the room where she and Messaros were entwined. Her husband knocked Messaros to the floor and the doctor interceded to stop the fighting. Mary said she had been attacked and went out to call in the police. At the police station, a Messaros supporter from the congregation offered any price to derail the charges that were being filed (a story disputed at trial), but when a grand jury heard the complaint the panel returned a true bill of indictment. Messaros was charged with assault and battery and assault and battery with intent to rape.

Exactly what happened that day in the Coulston's parlor is not known. Mary Coulston portrayed herself in a newspaper interview as the one woman in the church willing to speak out on Messaros' conduct and weather the consequences.<sup>86</sup> "I am not the only woman in that congregation who has been insulted by Messaros," she told a reporter, "but I am the only woman who had the courage to resent his conduct and expose him...If the women of this congregation would just tell a little bit, Messaros could not stay in this city."<sup>87</sup> She came into the legal case against Messaros with the positive attitude that she was performing a necessary service to the community. "The duty has fallen on me," she said, "because others shrink from publicity."<sup>88</sup> Whether she spoke with careless bravado or pathetic naivety, Coulston had a hard lesson ahead.

The Philadelphia trial of a prominent minister on attempted rape charges convulsed the press and commanded national attention. Locals fought for seats in the courtroom. "Mrs. Coulston" was headline news in sensationalized stories from coast to coast. She was subjected to a textbook example of the way in which a claim of sexual assault is deflected by branding the accusation a lie told by a scorned woman. In this defense, the male is portrayed as a victim of a woman's delusional thinking. Legal scholars contend that this "Cassandra Curse"—the stereotype of the female liar—persists to this day, so its presence in an 1886 Philadelphia courtroom is hardly surprising.<sup>89</sup>

The newspaper reports on the Coulston-Messaros case portrayed Coulston as an emotionally desperate woman. She was described as "rather plain, tall, slim, and dark-complexioned,"<sup>90</sup> in other words, not someone likely to attract

the advances of the handsome Messaros whose wife was beautiful, blond, and well-dressed. Despite acknowledging that Mrs. Coulston had delivered her evidence with dignity and withstood a vigorous cross-examination by the defense attorney,<sup>91</sup> the press discredited her testimony as “mud throwing.”<sup>92</sup>

Messaros claimed complete innocence and testified that he had been pestered and pursued by Coulston.<sup>93</sup> She had forced her attentions upon him since joining his church, he claimed, and had told him that her husband was a thief, a forger, and a liar. On the day he visited her home, she suddenly threw her arms around him and called for her husband, Messaros told the court.<sup>94</sup> The charges, he said, were the result of a conspiracy.

Although the newspapers discounted Coulston’s testimony that Messaros had previously asked her to join him in an out-of-town rendezvous and grabbed her forcibly in her home, the jury found some aspects of the case to be creditable. While they found the defendant not guilty of the specific charges, the jury admonished Messaros with a further finding that he “was deserving of censure for his indiscretions and imprudence.” If Coulston saw elements of a Pyrrhic victory in the jury verdict, it went unacknowledged in the press, which simply proclaimed the acquittal of Messaros on all charges and crowed about the overflow crowds at his next church service.<sup>95</sup>

One week after prevailing in court, Messaros announced his plan to sue the Coulstons for conspiracy and blackmail.<sup>96</sup> The prior month, shortly before the Messaros trial began, the couple were sued for false arrest and imprisonment and required to post a bond guaranteeing their future appearance in court. This charge may have been prompted by supporters of Messaros. The suit complained that Mary Coulston had caused the unwarranted arrest for drunkenness of someone encountered in her charity work.

When it came time to face these charges one month after the Messaros trial, Mary Coulston fled Philadelphia for New York where she reportedly was going to disembark for Europe.<sup>97</sup> Her husband was jailed, and Mary was pursued by a Philadelphia police detective. Telegrams asking the New York police to arrest her were dispatched.<sup>98</sup> This was reported on January 28, just one day after a Philadelphia newspaper published “The Coulston Family Affair,” a vague story of a Coulston family fracas and Mary Coulston’s charges of aggravated assault against her father-in-law and her husband’s two brothers.<sup>99</sup>

It was 1887. Mary Coulston was thirty-two years old and her children were about seven and twelve years of age. Her family relationships were strained to breaking and she was on the lam from the law. Her life was a shambles. Whether she was crumbling under the strain and humiliations of the Messaros trial and other legal problems, or whether her husband and quarrelsome in-laws had

driven her from the family home is unknown. Years later in San Diego, Coulston was praised for her common sense and affability. Was she the volatile maker of her own disastrous fate in Philadelphia or a victim? Unfortunately, no letters or diaries or personal narratives that might further illuminate this question have come to light. We do know that one phase of her life ended in 1887 and that her energies and passions found an entirely new focus during her remaining years.<sup>100</sup>

Coulston left the country after her failure to answer the false imprisonment charges and the forfeiture of her bail. Although her destination is unknown, six months after escaping Philadelphia she and her son Claude are listed as passengers arriving at the New York port of entry on July 22, 1887.<sup>101</sup> The ship's log does not mention her small daughter, Theodora Emily, and indeed there is no further information about whether Coulston retained custody and raised her children or if they lived with their father in Philadelphia. Likewise, it is not known if she returned for any period of time to the marriage or received any form of support from her husband. No divorce decree was found in the records searched. If the Philadelphia police further pursued her on a fugitive warrant, the story is unrecorded.

A year after her desperate flight from the country, Coulston was living in New York and working under an inspiring mentor at *Garden and Forest* which was edited and published in the *Tribune* building.<sup>102</sup> The *Tribune* newspaper sent her out on various assignments, including to the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition.<sup>103</sup> There she encountered Hindu teachings at the World's Parliament of Religions and became a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. She became a recognized leader and treasurer in the newly established Vedanta Society<sup>104</sup> and her character even appears in a 2010 play about the visit of famous swamis to New York in 1899.<sup>105</sup> Throughout her life, Coulston was a seeker of religious truth. She was continually associated with spiritual groups and charitable work.

Some questions about the life of Mary B. Coulston may never be answered. We do not know how a young woman who married at age eighteen and became the mother of two children developed the journalistic skills that provided her with a livelihood. We do not know how she managed the rapid transition from a troubled life and marriage in Philadelphia to a plum editorial job in New York City. We do not know if she told intimates in New York and later in San Diego about her unhappy experiences in Philadelphia or completely shrouded her past. We only know that she rebounded and found a new beginning in California. She was leading a contented and productive life at the time of her death in 1904.

During her short association with San Diego, Coulston contributed matchless knowledge and experience at a critical time in the history of Balboa Park. Her journalism remolded public opinion about the value of City Park and the

desirability of supporting park development. She worked with enthusiasm and energy to get the practical work of park improvement off to a successful start, handling a variety of responsibilities far beyond those usually assigned a committee secretary. By the time the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee handed over its work to the City of San Diego's first Board of Park Commissioners,<sup>106</sup> the myth that City Park could never be developed was exploded and the preservation of the park as public space was largely assured.<sup>107</sup> Mary B. Coulston was not on the fringe of these developments. Rather, she contributed significantly to both outcomes and deserves to be recognized as one of the principal planners of Balboa Park.

## NOTES

1. The most unstinting treatment of Coulston and the best understanding of her role in bringing Samuel Parsons, Jr. to San Diego as the park's landscape architect is in Richard Amero, "Samuel Parsons Finds Xanadu in San Diego," *The Journal of San Diego History* (hereafter *JSDH*) 44, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3-23.
2. Nature Study was an educational movement that grew out of nineteenth century environmental consciousness. Cornell University became the hub of the movement under Liberty Hyde Bailey who secured state funding for the creation of school curriculum materials. *Nature-study Leaflets*, College of Agriculture, Cornell University (Ithaca, NY, 1896-1904). The movement is credited with transforming science education in American schools and was replicated across the country. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science: Hands-On Nature Study in North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 78. Straight from her association with Bailey at Cornell, Coulston introduced all the teachers in San Diego to the concepts of nature study "in a delightful talk." "Nature Study Talk by Mrs. Coulston to Teachers," *San Diego Sun*, April 18, 1903; "Advocates of Nature Study," *San Diego Union*, April 19, 1903.
3. "The country-life movement is the working out of the desire to make rural civilization as effective and satisfying as other civilization," wrote Liberty Hyde Bailey in introducing his book *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1911). He wanted to improve the quality of rural life and preserve it as an alternative to crowded and unhealthy cities. He started the magazine, *Country Life in America*, at the time that Mary B. Coulston was enrolled at Cornell and deputized her to scout articles for the venture. Bailey later served on Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission. It is likely that Coulston's 1903 address to the Farmer's Club was San Diego's first introduction to the formal ideals of the Country Life Movement. "Meeting of Farmers' Club This Afternoon," *San Diego Union*, February 10, 1903.
4. Coulston had been a delegate to the Cleveland and Atlanta meetings of the American Forestry Congress in 1888. *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Forestry Congress, Cleveland, August 16, 1888 adjourned to Atlanta, December 5, 1888*, 8. At *Garden and Forest* she met all the leading foresters in the country, including Gifford Pinchot who was appointed by Theodore Roosevelt as the first chief of the United States Forest Service. She brought Pinchot to San Diego to meet with the Chamber of Commerce and assess the prospects for forestry planting within City Park. "Head Forester Pinchot's Views on the Park," *Evening Tribune*, September 4, 1903.
5. Coulston corresponded with the son of Elbert Hubbard to finalize plans for the Roycroft founder to appear in San Diego. [Elbert Hubbard], *San Diego Union*, April 2, 1903.
6. Julius Wangenheim, "An Autobiography," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 1956), 357.

## THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

7. "Regular Weekly Meeting Board of Directors, Aug. 15, 1902," [San Diego Chamber of Commerce] *Minutes 1902*, 185.
8. Nancy Carol Carter, "Trees of Balboa Park: 1910," *JSDH* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2010), 137.
9. "Ernest E. White Dies After Long, Useful Career," *San Diego Union*, March 30, 1930.
10. Kate Sessions surely was the conduit, but the precise pathway to Coulston remains undocumented. The two women had several common acquaintances, including Cornell University's Liberty Hyde Bailey who would have been fully aware of Coulston's relocation from New York to California. San Diego botanist and civil engineer Townshend Stith Brandegee, who worked with Sessions on City Park improvement, was a *Garden and Forest* contributor who had corresponded with Coulston. Letter from M. B. Coulston (for W. A. Stiles) to T. S. Brandegee, January 28, 1896, Townshend Stith and Katharine Layne Brandegee Papers, University and Jepson Herbaria, University of California, Berkeley.
11. M.B. Coulston, "History of the Park," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1903.
12. Sheila Connor, "Historical Background," (Historical Essays on *Garden and Forest*) [www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html) (accessed January 19, 2012).
13. The first issue of *Garden and Forest* appeared on February 29, 1888; the last on December 29, 1897. One indication of regard is the inclusion of *Garden and Forest* in the *Making of America* digital library project of the Library of Congress in collaboration with several leading universities.
14. Char Miller, "A High-grade Paper: *Garden & Forest* and Nineteenth-Century American Forestry," (Historical essays on *Garden and Forest*), [www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html) (accessed January 19, 2012). An example of continuing scholarship is a recent dissertation: Shen Hou, "A Magazine of Nature: *Garden and Forest* and the Rise of American Environmental Awareness" (Ph.D diss., University of Kansas, 2008).
15. Miller, "A High-grade Paper."
16. Landscape art came after architecture, sculpture, and painting. Ethan Carr, "*Garden and Forest* and 'Landscape Art,'" (Historical Essays on *Garden and Forest*) [www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html) (accessed January 19, 2012).
17. The American Society of Landscape Architects was formed in 1899 and Harvard University instituted the first academic program in the field in 1900. Carr, "*Garden and Forest* and 'Landscape Art.'"
18. Mac Griswold, "The Influence of Garden and Forest on the Development of Horticulture," (Historical essays on *Garden and Forest*), [www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/miller.html) (accessed January 19, 2012).
19. Phyllis Andersen, "'Master of a Felicitous English Style': William Augustus Stiles, Editor of *Garden and Forest*," (Historical Essays on *Garden and Forest*), [www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/essays/andersen.html](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/prd/gardfor/essays/andersen.html) (accessed January 19, 2012).
20. Ibid.
21. Biographical information relies on three sources: Andersen, "Master of a Felicitous English Style;" "William A. Stiles is Dead," *New York Times*, October 7, 1897; and *Biographical and Genealogical History of Morris and Sussex Counties, New Jersey* (New York: Lewis Publishing, 1899), 679-80.
22. "Letter to the Editor," *American Gardening* 25, no. 496 (August 6, 1904), 514.
23. Mary Bollinger Coulston is listed in the *Register of Cornell University 1900/01* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1901).
24. Bailey's compilation of plant information for both the United States and Canada, along with geographical and biographical sketches was published in four volumes from 1900-02. Mary B. Coulston is listed among the contributors.

*Mary B. Coulston: Unsung Planner of Balboa Park*

25. At one student club meeting, Coulston spoke on the subject "How a Horticultural Magazine is Made Up," sharing her *Garden and Forest* editorial experience. "Lazy Club," *Cornell Daily Sun*, December 4, 1900.
26. A file of replies from an illustrious list of correspondents exists. "Responses from Planners," George W. Marston Papers, File 16, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA (hereafter Marston Papers, SDHC).
27. "Planning for Active Work," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1902.
28. "Plans for Band Stand," *San Diego Tribune*, October 1, 1902.
29. When interviewed in 1929 on park development, Kate Sessions referred to Mary B. Coulston as being "in Mr. Marston's employ" and a help "in molding public sentiment." Julia T. McGarvey, "Development," *San Diego Union*, July 14, 1929.
30. George W. Marston, "History of City Park," in William Ellsworth Smythe, *History of San Diego, 1542-1908* (San Diego: The San Diego History Co., 1907), 7.
31. "Park Improvement Committee," *San Diego Union*, October 3, 1902.
32. M.B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "San Diego's Advantages," *San Diego Union*, October 6, 1902.
33. M. B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "Park Plans: An Argument for the Landscape Gardener," *San Diego Sun*, October 7, 1902.
34. The scrapbook into which Coulston pasted all her published newspaper articles is preserved at the San Diego History Center Library and Archives.
35. M.B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "A Park's Value to San Diego," *San Diego Union*, October 13, 1902.
36. M.B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "Music in the Public Parks," *San Diego Union*, October 17, 1902; M.B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "Native Plants in the Park," *San Diego Union*, October 15, 1902.
37. M.B.C. [Mary B. Coulston], "Pleased with the Selection," *San Diego Union*, October 22, 1902.
38. It is possible that Coulston worked for Samuel Parsons for a short time or part-time, but the better explanation for their easy acquaintanceship is contact over many years in New York at the *Garden and Forest* editorial offices. "Woman Agriculturist Meets Sudden Death," *San Francisco Call*, July 20, 1902.
39. The close association of Stiles and Parsons was mentioned in a newspaper article published during Parsons' first visit to San Diego. "Viewed the Views," *San Diego Sun*, December 26, 1902.
40. Letter from Samuel Parsons, Jr. to Mary B. Coulston, September 5, 1902, Marston Papers, SDHC, File 16, Folder 1/16.
41. Letter from Samuel Parsons, Jr. to Mary B. Coulston, October 10, 1901 [sic]. Parsons mistakenly dated his handwritten letter 1901, but the letter undoubtedly was written in 1902, Marston Papers, SDHC, File 16, Folder 1/16.
42. "Samuel Parsons, Jr. Will Plan Big Park," *San Diego Union*, October 21, 1902.
43. Marston, "History of City Parks," 7.
44. "Meeting of the Park Improvement Committee," *San Diego Union*, January 17, 1903.
45. Her name later was listed on a memorial page in the club's program. "In Memoriam," *Program for 1904-1905, The Wednesday Club, San Diego California* (1904).
46. "Work of the Salvation Army," *San Diego Union*, September 22, 1903.
47. This organization aimed to secure the foundation and endowment of a marine biology scientific institution in San Diego. "Biological Association," *San Diego Union*, September 27, 1903.
48. "Horton Improvement Club," *San Diego Union*, October 23, 1903.
49. "Talented Woman Summoned by Death," *San Diego Union*, July 19, 1904. The Fellowship is not

## THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

- described in the general histories of San Diego's early religious groups, but was affiliated with the metaphysical "New Thought" religion pioneered by the Rev. Benjamin Fay Mills and formally established as the Los Angeles Fellowship in 1904, as described in Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1973), 257. A letter from the Rev. Mills, "whose teachings Mrs. Coulston had tried to follow faithfully and literally" was read at her memorial service. "Eulogies of a Noble Woman," *San Diego Union*, July 27, 1904.
50. "Secretary of Park Improvement is to Address Children at SD Public Library," *San Diego Union*, October 30, 1903.
  51. "Congregational Church Program," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, December 4, 1903.
  52. Ada Perry, "Kate Sessions' Title 'Mother of Balboa Park' Earned One," *San Diego Union*, September 22, 1935.
  53. "Mr. Parsons Much Pleased with Park Site," *San Diego Union*, December 23, 1902.
  54. W. L. Frevert, "Annual Report 1902," [San Diego Chamber of Commerce] *Minutes* (1902), 271.
  55. This is the only account of the famously tactful Coulston ruffling feathers in San Diego, but it appears to be a matter of defensiveness from a city official whose failure to perform an assigned task was being tracked in the daily news. "As to Delayed Park Maps," *San Diego Tribune*, April 23, 1903.
  56. John McLean was an experienced park gardener, having worked at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco under Park Superintendent John McLaren. "Head Gardener for City Park," *San Diego Sun*, March 12, 1903.
  57. One gift of 125 rare trees was received from the University of California experimental forestry station which was under the direction of a Cornell University classmate of Coulston. "Active Work on the Park," *San Diego Union*, May 8, 1903. Coulston was also in touch with the nation's head forester, Gifford Pinchot.
  58. Letter from Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee to Board of Public Works, City of San Diego, May 21, 1903, Minutes & Secretary's Reports, Marston Papers, SDHC, File 18.
  59. "The Improvement of the Park," *San Diego Union*, April 17, 1903.
  60. "Secretary's Report, Park Improvement Committee, July 29, 1903, Marston Papers, SDHC, File 18.
  61. "Park Map is Admired," *San Diego Tribune*, May 26, 1903; "Survey of Park Completed," *San Diego Union*, June 12, 1903.
  62. "Landscape Architect Cooke Now Coming," *San Diego Union*, July 23, 1903.
  63. [Passenger List], *San Diego Tribune*, June 22, 1904.
  64. "Talented Woman Summoned by Death," *San Diego Union*, July 19, 1904.
  65. "Obituary: Mary B. Coulston," *San Francisco Call*, July 19, 1904, 5.
  66. "Fellowship Will Hold Memorial Exercises," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, July 20, 1904.
  67. Florence Christman, *The Romance of Balboa Park* (San Diego, San Diego Historical Society, 1985), 32. Christman cites to unspecified Kate Sessions "notes" of as the origin of this story. Efforts to confirm in original sources or to pinpoint a possible location for the tree with park horticulturists were unsuccessful.
  68. "Obituary," *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening* 14, no. 7 (September 1904): 119-120. Coulston's articles on San Diego City Park had appeared in the February 1903 and November 1903 issues of this journal.
  69. Mary Coulston's daughter, Theodora Emily Coulston, became an actress and was the second wife of Wilfred Clarke, a comic actor and the nephew of Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth. Wilfred Clarke's vaudeville act was on a circuit that played in San Francisco, Los Angeles and

Mary B. Coulston: *Unsung Planner of Balboa Park*

eventually in San Diego. After studying at Cornell, Mary B. Coulston apparently made her way to California by traveling with the act. Mrs. Clarke visited her mother in San Diego on one occasion and had departed for Europe shortly before Coulston died.

70. "Obituary," *American Gardening* 25, no. 495 (July 30, 1904): 502.
71. "Letter to the Editor," *American Gardening* 25, no. 496 (August 6, 1904), 514.
72. "Obituary: Mary B. Coulston," *American Florist* 23, no. 844 (August 6, 1904): 41.
73. "[Obituary]," *Country Gentleman* 69, no. 2689 (August 11, 1904): 730.
74. "Obituary: Mary B. Coulston," *Science* 20, no. 501 (August 5, 1904): 189.
75. *The Cornell Countryman* 2, no. 1 (October 1904): n.p.; "Deaths of Members of the University," *Report of the President of the University on Behalf of the Regents, University of California* (1904): 134.
76. "Alphabetical Record of Members in Full Connection, Pennsylvania Church and Town Records, 1708-1985," Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012).
77. The marriage was at the Twentieth Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. "Pennsylvania Church and Town Records, 1708-1985," Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012). Although the name in the census record is spelled "Colston," the listed ages and names of the children indicated that this is the family of Mary B. Coulston. 1880 U.S. Census, New Jersey, Ancestry.com Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012).
78. Pennsylvania Church and Town Records, 1708-1985," Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012). In later life as an actress and in a relationship with a younger man, Theodora Emily Coulston conveniently claimed 1883 as a date of birth, shaving three years off her age.
79. "Personal and Religious Notes," *Frank Leslie's Sunday Magazine*, 24 (1888): 315.
80. "A Pastor in Court," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, June 22, 1886 (hereafter "A Pastor in Court").
81. Messaros become a severe alcoholic, lost his ministry, and was sued for divorce. He died from "pneumonia, superinduced by dissipation." Another newspaper reported that Messaros' death followed "a long debauch" and debilitation due to alcoholism. "Waldo Messaros Dead," *New York Sun*, October 9, 1893. Further information on the minister's decline is in "A Shipwrecked Life: Rev. Dr. Woods Preaches upon the Death of Waldo," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 16, 1893.
82. "The Accused Philadelphia Pastor," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, June 23, 1886 (hereafter, "Accused Philadelphia Pastor").
83. "A Pastor in Court."
84. "Philadelphia Scandal," *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, July 1, 1886. This newspaper published the fullest account of criticism against Messaros.
85. "A Minister in Trouble," *New York Times*, June 22, 1886 (hereafter, "A Minister in Trouble").
86. "Accused Philadelphia Pastor."
87. "They're On the Line," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, June 26, 1886.
88. "Accused Philadelphia Pastor."
89. Amy D. Honner, "The Cassandra Curse: The Stereotype of the Female Liar," *U.C. Davis Law Review* 31 (1997): 123, 130-145.
90. "A Minister in Trouble."
91. "Messaros' Ordeal: Plaintiff's Story Not Shaken by Cross-Examination," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 24, 1886.
92. "Coulston Mud Throwing Fails to Convince Jury," *New York Herald*, December 29, 1886.

## THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

93. "The Pastor's Peril," *New York Herald*, December 29, 1886.
94. "An Alleged Conspiracy," *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 29, 1886.
95. "Messaros in the Pulpit," *New York Times*, January 10, 1887.
96. "Reversing the Order of Things," Lehighton [PA] *Carbon Advocate*, January 8, 1887. No additional information about such a law suit was uncovered in research, so this may have only been a threat.
97. "Flight of Mrs. Coulston," *New York Sun*, January 29, 1887; "Rev. Messaros Accuser Skips," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, January 29, 1887.
98. "The Strike May Stop Her," *New York Times*, January 29, 1887.
99. "The Coulston Family Affair," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 27, 1887.
100. While a divorce decree has not yet been located, the Coulstons apparently separated at this time. A Charles W. Coulston (whose father's name was the same as Mary Coulston's father-in-law) married again at age fifty on Nov. 23, 1899. "Pennsylvania County Marriages, 1885-1950," Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012).
101. "New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957," Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed January 20, 2012).
102. The first issue of *Garden and Forest* was published on February 29, 1888, seven months after Coulston returned by ship to the United States. Whether she was a part of the enterprise when editorial work began or joined the staff later in 1888 is unknown (the journal does not list its staff).
103. She was perhaps covering a well-attended women's suffrage meeting when reported by one of the movement's magazines to be staying in Chautauqua, New York, sending daily dispatches to the *New York Tribune*. [Mrs. M. B. Coulston], *Woman's Column* 5, no. 32 (August 6, 1892), n.p.
104. Swami Vivekananda founded the first Vedanta Center in the West in New York City in 1894. Its State of New York articles of incorporation list Mrs. Mary B. Coulston as a founding trustee. "Record VII," *Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda*, vol. 10 (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1970), 65. The Vedanta connection introduced Coulston to some famous New Yorkers, including wealthy businessman Francis H. Leggett and concert singer Emma Thursby.
105. Bill Davis and John Schlenck, "Scenes from the Great Summer," *American Vedantist* 16, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2010), 13.
106. "First Park Board Named Last Night," *San Diego Union*, April 18, 1905. George W. Marston and Ernest E. White from the previous park planning subcommittee of the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee were among the first appointees to this new board.
107. Encroachments and reassignment of park lands for non-park uses would continue, but descriptions of City Park as a blight, along with suggestions of wholesale park land disposal, largely faded from the public discourse.