



ALTADENA HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

Land Use Issue

A Brief History of Altadena Land Use

by Michele Zack

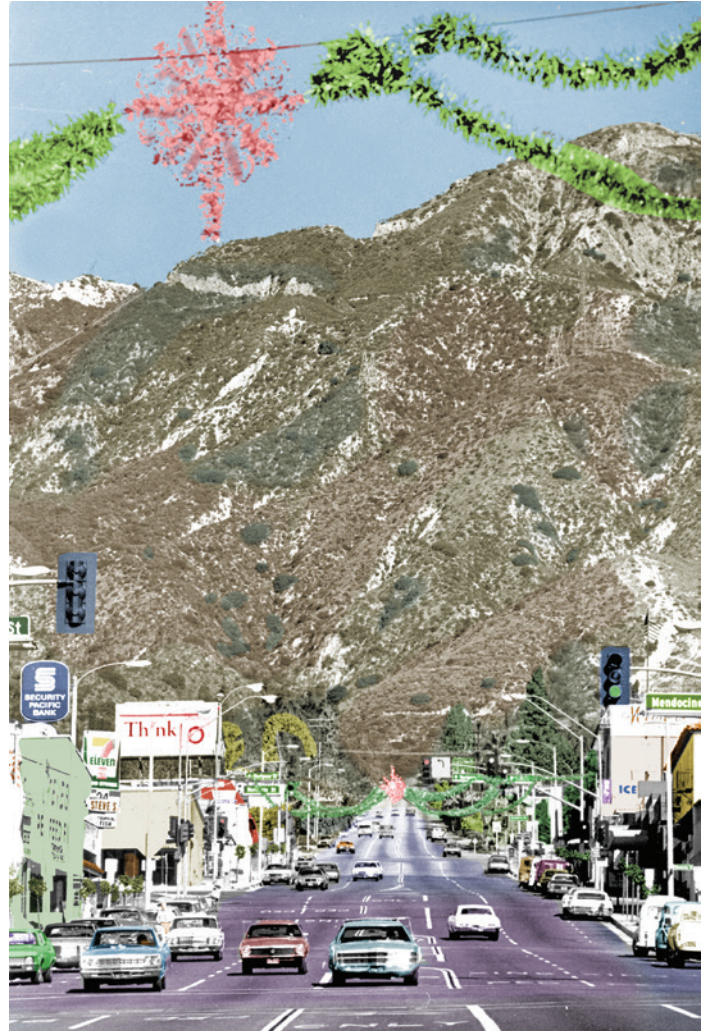
The busy thoroughfare we know as Lake Avenue began as a pencil line drawn on a map dividing Rancho San Pasqual's 14,000 acres into a grid of square-mile sections. The future Altadena occupied the top third — roughly 9 square miles — from the grant line in the north (present day Loma Alta) down to where Woodbury Road would later exist, between Arroyo Seco and Eaton Canyon.

This survey was created after California was added to the United States as a territory, a spoil of the Mexican American War. In accordance with Land Ordinance of 1785, land outside then-existing states must be surveyed and recorded before being sold or opened for settlement. California took the fast track to statehood in 1850 because of the discovery of gold.

Called Prospect in its upper reaches until the 1880s — Lake Avenue acquired its name because when the section line describing it was extended south, it crossed a small artificial lake built around 1800 with Indian labor at the San Gabriel Mission. One end of the land depression (now Lacey Park in San Marino) was dug out to increase its capacity from a sag pond into a reservoir. A wagon track led north from "Mission Lake" toward the mountains, and was later named Lake Avenue.

In the 1840s during California's Mexican period, American Benjamin "Don Benito" Wilson began acquiring former mission lands including the San Pasqual and his Lake Vineyard estate; by the late 1850s he extended his holdings to build an agricultural and real estate empire including most of the future Altadena, Pasadena, South Pasadena, San Marino, and Alhambra.

Post Civil War, real estate development in Southern California took off because from 1869 it became easy to get to here via the Transcontinental Railroad. The Indiana Colony, established by Union supporters and Temperance advocates in 1874, named itself Pasadena



Lake Avenue began as a pencil line on a map.

and incorporated in 1886. It became the genteel center of a land boom soon racing out of control. The boom busted in the late 1880s, but by then Pasadena had expanded eastward to include the southern section of Lake Avenue.

Its town center was at Colorado and Fair Oaks when cardinal directions and addresses were assigned to streets. Sections of streets north of Colorado had "north" affixed to their addresses, those east of Fair Oaks "east," and so on. Lake Avenue was extended up into the foothills to vineyards and orange groves then known simply as "The Highlands."

Nine hundred and seventeen acres of the Highlands were formed into a subdivision named Altadena, launched in 1887 at the moment boom turned to bust. Its timing was off. Developers John and Frederick Woodbury acquired it for \$5 an acre in 1882, but didn't invest to connect to

Upcoming Event



Improving on Nature;
Altadena's Plant
Exploring Popenoes
A lecture by Michele Zack
June 15 at 7 PM
Altadena Community Ctr

Continued on Page 6

Letter from the Chair

Val Zavala

Hello All,

This issue of our magazine focuses on land use and housing. Land use is key to quality of life. It is also extremely complex. Zoning laws and regulations are often beyond the comprehension of the average resident. The prospective sale of Nuccio's Nursery on Chaney Trail road is a perfect example. You've probably seen yard signs reading: "No Sports Complex on Chaney Trail." What's behind these signs? Here's a short explanation.

Nuccio's Nursery (see story page 4) is a renowned family-owned nursery specializing in camelias and azaleas. It has been at its current location since 1946. After decades of running the nursery the Nuccio family wants to sell the 78-acre property. In the meantime, Polytechnic, a private K-12 school in Pasadena, had been looking to expand its sports facilities. In December, the school made an offer on the Nuccio property and opened escrow.

At a recent ACONA webinar the head of Polytechnic, John Bracker, said their plans would impact only a small portion of the land. It would include a baseball field, seven tennis courts, a multipurpose field with a running track as well as an outdoor education facility and environmental science classrooms. Bracker says Polytechnic is committed to land conservation, fire suppression, public safety and an inclusive and transparent process. He also said Polytechnic is exploring community benefits such as trail improvements, trailhead public restrooms and land conservation.

In response, a group of homeowners led by Michael Bicay expressed strong opposition to Poly's plans. The group, called



Altadena Wild, says the "sports complex" would bring traffic, noise, and hundreds of people and cars to a quiet residential area. They also point out the property is in a high fire risk zone, with sensitive wildlife and ecology. Bicay pointed out that Chaney Trail road is narrow and would be very dangerous in the case of an emergency evacuation. Altadena Wild distributed the yard signs you've seen and has created a website with more detailed information.

Unless Polytechnic withdraws the offer, the issue promises to play out over several years. The process requires public hearings, an environmental impact report, public agency review, planning commission hearings and final approval by the LA County Board of Supervisors.

Be assured that Altadena Heritage will hold a panel discussion on this topic with both parties represented. This will likely happen in the fall after Polytechnic's plans are revealed in more detail.

I'd like to thank our editor and board member, Mark Goldschmidt, who spends hundreds of hours writing and editing articles for this newsletter. If you like to report and write, we would love to have you contribute. If there are any topics you would like us to cover, please let us know. After all, Altadena Heritage is about and for Altadenans.

Warm Regards,



Val Zavala, Chair, Altadena Heritage

Not Getting Email from Altadena Heritage?

Altadena Heritage currently uses the mailing list service, MailChimp, for our invitations, announcements, e-newsletter and other notifications. If you are missing our emails, here are some tips that should help:

- Add altadenaheritage@gmail.com to your contact list or address book
- Check your spam or junk folder and mark the email as Not Spam or Not Junk
- Check spam filter settings to be sure altadenaheritage@gmail.com isn't being blocked
- If using a webmail provider such as AOL, Yahoo, or Hotmail be patient. These providers throttle delivery, which can sometimes result in emails taking about 24 hours to be delivered
- Gmail automatically delivers emails from mailing lists to the Promotions tab. Drag an email from Altadena Heritage from

your Promotions tab into your Primary tab. You'll see the Primary tab turn red when you've done this successfully. Make sure to open emails that are from Altadena Heritage when they arrive in your Primary tab. This helps Gmail understand that you value these emails.

Altadena Heritage Board of Directors

Val Zavala, Chair	Bill Stuart
Kathleen McDonnell	Huan Gu
Gary Mendes	Claire Smith
Darrell Weber	Niki Bridges

Newsletter Editor: Mark Goldschmidt

The ADU Story

By Mark Goldschmidt

In 2003 California's state legislature passed AB 1866 amending "sections of the Government code to encourage the creation of second units..." The intent of the bill reads: *"The Legislature finds and declares that second units are a valuable form of housing in California. Second units provide housing for family members, students, the elderly, in-home health care providers, the disabled, and others, at below market prices within existing neighborhoods. Homeowners who create second units benefit from added income, and an increased sense of security."*

There was already a full-on housing crisis in 2003, and things were predicted to get much worse. Planners and legislators were looking for ways to provide more housing within the developed area and bring people closer to jobs and amenities. Los Angeles had sprawled to a metro area of three-hour commutes, and yet vast areas were zoned as low-density single family residential (R1) exclusively. Little buildable space remained, and sites allowing multi-family were built out.

Legislators looking for an opportunity to open up some of this low density residential land passed AB 1866 in an early attempt to encourage and to give permission for cities to loosen up zoning in some single family neighborhoods, and to "ministerially consider second-unit applications in accordance with State standards." It also asked (not required) municipalities and districts to "allow identification of realistic capacity for second-units in addressing a locality's share of regional housing needs."

AB 1866 did not succeed in promoting suburban infill. To the contrary, many citizens were enraged at what they perceived as a threat to their way of life. Cities all over California fought the concept of adding any density to their neighborhoods, enacting tough restrictions and steep fees to make it impractical to add a rental unit in a single-family zone. One example: in 2017 a Pasadena homeowner who wanted to build a 900 square foot ADU was billed by the city for over \$42,000 in fees prior to construction, including a Transportation Improvement Fee of \$9,800, a New Residence Impact fee of \$22,800, and a \$2,800 school fee.

Overcoming Determined Resistance

Over the last two decades the housing crisis has deepened. In desperation, and trying to provide some relief, Sacramento has enacted a number of bills to counter the roadblocks municipalities kept erecting to stymie any increase in density. The final blow to local control over second units in R1 neighborhoods came with the signing of SB 13 in 2019. Now ADUs are no longer subject to most restrictive municipal and district codes and ordinances. No more "Impact" or "New Residence" fees, no minimum lot size, now just a four-foot

minimum setback all around, no more need to comply with floor-area-ratio, open space, or lot coverage restriction, no parking requirement (even to replace a converted garage), and units can be at least 16 feet tall. If it seems Draconian, it is; single-family exclusive zoning is now extinct in California.

This change was propelled through the State legislature largely with support of young professionals and recent graduates who face a hard time finding decent places to live. Even with two good incomes, many families cannot save enough to buy a home. Meanwhile, some low income residents fall out of the market entirely and end up living marginal lives or homeless. Some cram families into tiny apartments. Old working class neighborhoods gentrify as they fill with people who have the scratch to pay high rents. Construction of new low-to-moderate income apartments barely dents the need. Within the Los Angeles conurbation there is little vacant land to develop, and land zoned for apartments is particularly scarce.

Will a proliferation of ADUs change Altadena? Surely it will, over time. We will see more people, more cars parked on the street, and back gardens will be reduced. It's starting to happen now, it will be gradual but inevitable. Perhaps if zoning changes had been embraced two decades ago with AB 1866 we might have worked out a solution to encourage infill regulated to minimize impacts on

neighborhoods. But entrenched opposition by municipalities was loud, nasty, and legalistic. Thus the heavy hand of the State descended in the form of a slew of Assembly and Senate bills to insure that every homeowner would be entitled to build an ADU or convert a garage no matter how small the lot.

The Future of ADUs in Altadena

Altadena is in better shape to absorb more back-houses, converted garages, and new 'Junior ADU' apartments than most cities because of its relative low density. It already supports an ecology of flag lots, backyard houses, and garage apartments. A heterogeneous mix of architectural styles and widely varying house and lot sizes are part of Altadena's allure. Fitting small dwellings in among the trees and shrubbery could accommodate many units without significantly altering the feeling on the street. That homeowners will make these environmental modifications incrementally will add some idiosyncratic additions to neighborhoods, and this being Altadena, we can trust that many will be charming and artistic. Others, not so much of course.

Over a long lifetime I've seen homes demolished and replaced by dingbats and huge apartment blocks, completely transforming neighborhoods in West LA, Pasadena, and the Bay

Continued on page 9



Nuccio's Nursery Over the Decades — A Love Affair with Camellias

By Val Zavala

Nuccio's sits on 13 acres of slightly rising land on Chaney Trail, hugged by the chaparral above Loma Alta and Fair Oaks Avenues. With expansive views south, and the San Gabriels behind, there is a sense of timelessness about the upland site this nursery has occupied for 77 years. Stop by if you haven't already, to meet Tom and Jim, and wander among seemingly endless varieties of camellias and azaleas.

Brothers Tom and Jim Nuccio, both now in their 70s, estimate there are 200,000 plants on their property — although they've never actually counted — and 600 kinds of camellias. Many were hybridized by the Nuccio family over two generations. Their nursery is world-renowned; they ship throughout North America, Europe and Japan.

Tom and Jim's father Julius was 11 when he started growing camellias in his mother's Alhambra backyard in the 1930's. She got tired of moving her clothesline to accommodate her son's plants, so in 1946 Julius's father (Tom and Jim's grandfather,) found 38 highland acres for sale in Altadena and bought it for \$12,500 to grubstake his sons, Julius and brother Joe. The nursery takes up six of the site's 13 flatish acres, with the balance of the land steep, gullied, and unusable. (In the early 70's the family bought 40 more contiguous acres, but the nursery still uses the original six.)

Tom says, "My grandfather bought this property because it was affordable. He didn't bother to check if it had water. So my dad approached the water company and asked if they could supply some. They said, 'We have plenty of water, but we don't have any pipe.' After WWII the metal was all used up." Julius learned that a local character, a motorcycle hell-raiser type, might know where to get pipe and approached him. "The guy said, 'Can you come up with a case of whiskey?' The pipe showed up. No questions asked. The case of whiskey was gone." Water has flowed ever since, without any irrigation system. The thousands of plants are hand-watered with a wand on the end of a hose; there is quite an art to watering thousands of containers this way, according to Tom, who has trained generations of workers to do this crucial job correctly.

The Nuccios are expert propagators — hybridizing, growing, grafting, and selecting unique and beautiful new varieties. They have worked with Huntington Gardens which grows about 100 camellias they developed, including one named for Henry Huntington.

Propagating is a multi-year, slow-evolving process that cannot be sped up. Jim Nuccio says, "Camellias grown from seed will not bloom for roughly five years, depending. And when one does bloom and looks promising you have one plant. Then, usually by rooting cuttings (sometimes grafting) it takes five years to build the stock up. Tom explains that the whole time

you're evaluating when it blooms and if it has any idiosyncrasies — does it bloom early or late? does it set buds well or is slow to produce flower? So it takes about four or five years to really evaluate a new camellia.

One fun aspect about propagating their own varieties is naming them. Of course they named one for their grandfather, Julius Nuccio, and their grandmother Katie. Another of their favorites is Nuccio's pearl.

Camellias are not just for beauty, you may be drinking some. "Our bestselling camellia is the *Camellia senensis*", explains Jim. "It's the least ornamental. So when you are drinking your basic Lipton or other black tea you are drinking camellia. Quite a few customers order 50 to 100 at a time to start a small tea plantation. It's become our best-selling camellia."

The business has served them well over decades. During COVID they noticed a uptick in local customers who had time to work on their gardens. Many were discovering the 77-year-old business for the first time. But like so many family businesses, successive generations have other interests — which is true of the younger Nuccios as well. So Jim and Tom will be selling the land and closing the much-loved family enterprise. What will become of the land is still undetermined.

(Polytechnic school in Pasadena is interested in buying the land to build a sports facility. It has sparked a controversy that will be explored later by Altadena Heritage.)

The time will come when they step away from the six acres of camellias they have nurtured for decades. What will they miss most? "People are certainly up at the top," said Tom. "But also seeing new varieties (of camellias) and new developments. If you get a hand-pollinated cross you get a new seedling. I'll miss the new stuff that's not out there yet."

What will he not miss? "Well," says Tom, "the days aren't long enough to get things done. You fool around with other things and you don't get the thing done you set out to do. I won't miss the frustration of always being behind."

As for Jim, "I will miss the people, especially new customers and new audiences for my oblique sense of humor. But I won't miss the frequent driving trips in the van to deliver plants up to the Bay area, although my wife and I know all the good restaurants between here and San Francisco."

The world of camellia growers will miss Tom, Jim, and Nuccio's nursery, and Altadena will miss knowing that there is a world of choice and cheerful help and advice. With tremendous horticultural knowledge, skill, and decades of time, they have introduced 210 new varieties, winning the prestigious *Camellia Propagators* award 13 times.

But the award we Altadenans would likely give the Nuccios would be a prize for decades of wonderful service, making our community stronger, and our gardens more beautiful.



Tom Nuccio at the door of one of many shade houses at the nursery.

Breakfast at Nuccio's - 2008

by Mark Goldschmidt

Fifteen years ago Altadena Heritage thought we should celebrate one of our community's oldest businesses, Nuccio's, world famous for its camellias. February should be good, plenty of blooms, and we'll have to drink tea (camellia sinensis). We staged a breakfast event for a Sunday morning, but when the day came it was raining steadily. We stood with umbrellas, greeted the few cars that came, and asked them to come back next Sunday.

It was a glorious cool day, around 80 people showed. We set up in the upper corner by the house among trees and flowering rhododendrons. The following was written in 2008, shortly after the Breakfast.

"Events chair Anita David kept the "camellia beverage" warm under what seemed like dozens of tea cozies, with help from Lily Etezady and Brownie Allen. More board members, Sandra Miller and husband Jim, collected money

and rounded up chairs, and Thomas Stahl created his normal beautiful graphics. We heard the intriguing family business story of Nuccios as told by one of its founders, Julius Nuccio. Local historian Michele Zack gave a talk on Altadena's Nurseried Past, providing lots of evidence on how important commercial and private nurseries and gardens have been to Altadena from the very beginning."

It wasn't just for fun that we invited the public to this glorious spot in the hills; memories of the bitter struggle over the La Viña development were still fresh, and we wanted people to be conscious that this land was eligible for development. Someone asked Julius about the future of Nuccio's "It's for sale," he said. "Make me an offer." The Nuccio's knew that when they retired, it would be the end of the nursery.



Lili Etezady and Anita David serving tea.



Julius Nuccio "The Nuch"



Tom Nuccio



Guests enjoying the morning

A Brief History of Altadena Land Use

Continued from Page 1

Pasadena's rail lines and to develop water sources until 1885. A few mansions had been built or were then under construction along Mariposa Street; these, added to a few rusticated existing ranches and vineyards, were embellished into Woodbury's vision of an upscale community that would attract Midwestern wealth as people poured West seeking new lives, opportunities, and health.

Engraved images of homes, gushing water sources, and an imagined grand hotel and a rail service yard appeared on Altadena's promotional materials. "The business center will be started on the west side, near the Arroyo," a newspaper article quoted a confident John Woodbury, "because the land is comparatively flat there." This made sense; besides being flat and having water resources, Altadena's west side was in a beeline north of Pasadena's center at Fair Oaks and Colorado. It was the shortest, cheapest route for building a rail line; Woodbury envisioned a community of gracious homes and small farms near the Arroyo that would spread east toward Lake Avenue, following Pasadena's land use pattern.

The Woodburys' dreams deflated with the real estate bubble — John (the mastermind) went bankrupt, fleeing in shame back to Iowa where he remained mired in lawsuits; Captain Fred removed to a modest home in South Pasadena. Regional panic was followed by a national depression through the 1890s, and Pasadena's population plummeted from 12,000 to 5,000.

This background is salient, because three circumstances helped Pasadena and Altadena rebound; they also established land use patterns that in Altadena, prevail today.

1) Before the bust, three north-south rail lines were built connecting booming Pasadena to sleepy Altadena, providing transportation to take advantage of new tourism and real estate up-cycles soon to come. The first two were west-side operations, one following Lincoln and veering to the arroyo and mountain camps, the other up Fair Oaks/Raymond to Mountain View Cemetery, established in 1882. The third "Highland Railroad" followed Lake Avenue. It stopped at New York Drive at first, but its franchise included rights to the top of Lake Avenue, and over to Las Flores Canyon in anticipation of a line up to Mount Wilson. Altadena thus developed as a street car suburb on a north-south axis.

2) National depression could not stop those who still had money

from visiting California for health and recreation. With its grand hotels, excellent climate, capital and cultural resources, the region exerted a magnetic force on the wealthy (many of whom were sick). Most hailed from the Midwest; they fed nascent mountain tourism and health-seeking industries, and many built homes and stayed.

3) The most advanced engineering project in the world was the Mount Lowe Railway, launched from "Altadena Junction" — at Calaveras and Lake Avenue in 1893. Its first segment was an electric trolley running deep into Rubio Canyon, narrow, steep, and utterly wild. An instant success, the rustic Rubio Pavilion dramatically spanned the canyon below. It included a dance hall, restaurant, hotel, and wooden stairways hung with Japanese lanterns threading through fern grottos and passing over waterfalls, making nature accessible, enhanced with commercial entertainments. It was just a cheap, short trolley ride away.

Thaddeus Lowe determined Rubio Canyon would be the jumping off point for the railway's innovative "Incline" section, which opened the Forth of July, 1895. This electric hybrid-powered project advanced technology used in San Francisco's cable cars, and offered affluent tourists a novel alternative to the Mount Wilson Toll Road. The Great Era of Hiking was on, and the Toll Road on the edge of Eaton Canyon was drawing thousands in conventional foot and hoof traffic on weekends by 1891 to access camps, rustic hotels, and mountain beer gardens — where Pasadena's alcohol prohibitions were not enforced. The Mount Lowe Railway and resorts were among the first vertically integrated of tourist destinations, including through rail transport from Los Angeles and elegant hotels with extensive wine lists. Shops, restaurants, a post office,

zoo, fox farm, cabins, and miles of hiking trails earned it the "Switzerland of America" moniker.

Most locals never rode the Mount Lowe Railway. However, 60,000 tourists took the thrilling Incline Rail to Echo Mountain its first year, and its popularity only grew. Visitors all poured through the sleepy highland outpost. Pasadena's grand hotels and numerous shops benefited greatly, but Altadena had little infrastructure to attract tourist dollars. Trains from Los Angeles to the Mount Lowe railway were soon heaving up Lake, Fair Oaks, and Raymond



Rubio Falls



Livery stable at Altadena Junction

Avenues on lines purchased from failed predecessors. All converged at Altadena Junction, which became a transport hub for mountain tourism — both rail and equestrian. The Tally Ho Livery Stable catered to those renting horses and carriages to access Mount Wilson camps via the Toll Road. Inevitably some, both affluent and middle-class, stayed and bought real estate.

The Junction's stables and beautiful brick power house at Calaveras on Lake Avenue remind us of a time before transportation was ruled by the automobile. In 1903, a second Altadena hub developed a half mile north at Lake and Mariposa, when Henry Huntington established his Pacific Electric Railway and bought out the bankrupted Thaddeus Lowe. He added an east-west rail "Dinkie" (small gauge) line across Mariposa from Fair Oaks to Lake serving tourists, workers, domestics, and new homeowners. Huntington made his money selling real estate, not trolley tickets. By 1912, he'd gobbled up all smaller, less profitable lines to make Pacific Electric the largest inter-urban rail system in the world connecting 50 communities in four counties over 1,164 miles of track. Altadena's fate as a north-south trolley car suburb was thus cemented: most people didn't yet have automobiles — the closer you lived to the train, the better. As home ownership began growing, modest neighborhoods cozied up to trolley lines.

Small businesses began sprouting at the relatively flat intersection of Mariposa and Lake. La Mariposa Hotel opened in 1907 as Altadena's first commercial building not directly tied to transportation. In the Progressive Era preceding the Roaring '20s, Altadenans also began debating (and rejecting) the idea of incorporating as a city. Many surrounding communities had taken this crucial step to plan, and to control commercial and residential development. Only cities can raise taxes and enact local ordinances.

The area around Lake and Mariposa was called "the heart of Altadena's business district." Our unincorporated town's population grew faster than any where else in L.A. County in the 1920s — from 3,000 to nearly 20,000 people in under a decade. The arrival of so many without established shopping habits in Pasadena ushered in Altadena's first golden age of commercial development on Lake, Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Avenues. New businesses proliferated as housing — affordable, median, and luxurious — replaced farms and orchards.

Extensions of Altadena Drive and New York Drive east of Lake Avenue, as well as a Dinkie line along Mendocino to the Country Club, (established in 1911), opened East Altadena for home building. Washington Boulevard between Hill and Altadena Drive, and a node at Allen and New York, also began developing commercially. Country Club Park, a subdivision of one-acre-plus

lots on 500 acres of the old Allen Ranch, began infilling Altadena's last open expanse, shifting exclusive housing east from Mariposa Street's "Millionaire's Row." Altadena farmers, dairies, and commercial nurseries continued favoring west Altadena because of superior water resources and soil.

Westside land was also cheaper; besides agriculturally-inclined buyers it attracted modest and middle income home builders. Elisha P. Janes built close to 200 affordable Tudor-style cottages between Marengo and Lincoln, acting as financier, builder, landscaper, and sales agent. Bankruptcy forced him out in the panic of 1927 preceding the Great Depression, however the division of former agricultural parcels into smaller lots continued, creating new middle-class neighborhoods and encouraging commercial uses along with residential on Fair Oaks and Lincoln.

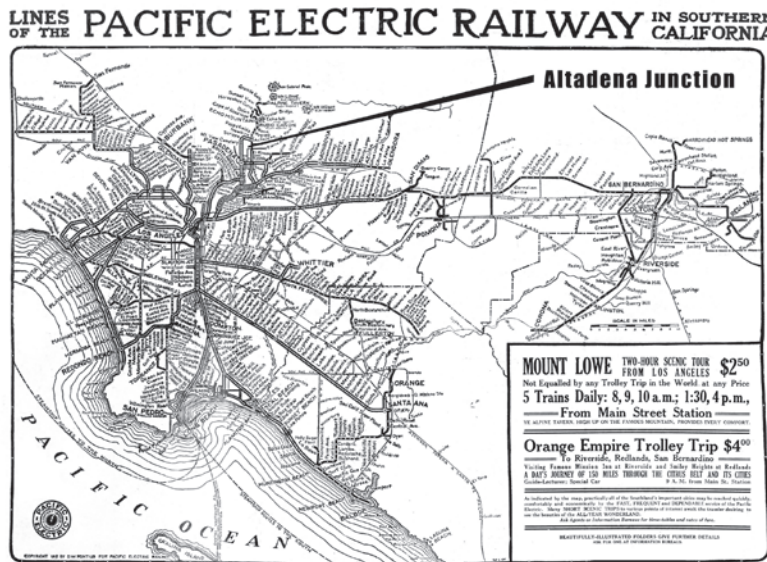
Altadena's many advantages explain its phenomenal growth in the 1920s, and beyond. With natural beauty and mountain views, the community enjoyed an extraordinary range of real estate options — and excellent transportation links to Pasadena and Los Angeles. That it remained unincorporated also meant minimal enforcement of Prohibition. Webster's Pharmacy on North Lake was the only place in the San Gabriel Valley where one could fill a prescription for alcohol, and liquor was available

at two popular destinations, the Marcell Inn at the top of Lincoln, and the private Altadena Country Club east of Lake Avenue, as well as at smaller establishments along Lincoln and in the mountains.

Automobile ownership skyrocketed and commercial areas developed in the 1920s, but Altadena remained as it began, a streetcar suburb without a civic core. Its shopping areas were long, skinny affairs — mostly along steep north-south grades. No dominant business zone or town center developed, with the exception Lake Avenue centered at Mariposa. Residential builders struggled up to small commercial areas and nodes with convenient, modest housing. Three factors reinforced the pattern: Altadena's abundance of good public transportation; sufficient still-open land; and, third, a total lack of planning as an unincorporated community of Los Angeles County.

Once this pattern was established, without provision for commercial expansion or parking, it continued. No agency focused on planning, and people liked living near shops. About once a decade from the turn of the century through the 1960s, local cityhood campaigns failed to convince a majority of Altadenans that projected benefits — coming as they would with taxes, budgets, politicians and bureaucrats — outweighed costs.

Continued on next page



Altadena was well connected early in the 20th century.

A Brief History of Altadena Land Use

Continued from previous page

Altadena's landmark institutions were almost all on or within a block of Lake Avenue: Farnsworth Park, the William Davies Recreation Building, original and new Sheriff's stations, First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Altadena, Altadena Library, Eliot Junior High School, Scripps Home for the Aged, and St Elizabeth Church. Including schools in other parts of town, a total of six were built during or significantly expanded within 10 years of the Depression. Churches from Pasadena were also attracted by inexpensive land along Lincoln.

A major loss during this era, closure of the Mount Lowe Railroad in 1936 due to fire, and an addition, the opening of the Los Angeles Crest Highway in the 1940s, hinted at changes to come. One incorporation bid after another failed, as Pasadena nibbled away at the shrinking Altadena in 37 separate "bites" as that city increased its tax base. One can imagine people thinking regarding cityhood: with so much civic and commercial development, who wants another layer of government telling us what to do and taxing us?

Post-World-War-II, tremendous demand for housing plus easy credit from new FDIC loans and the GI Bill, drove the largest expansion of homeownership in US history. Altadena, still with open land, was attractive to builders. From 1946 through the early 1960s, almost every spare scrap, most on the west side (including

the Meadows, Altadena's first integrated neighborhood and Floricita Farms on the Arroyo), but also in east-side Presidents Street developments, filled with new "ranch" houses. (See box on Racial Change below.) The last agricultural land was subdivided, along with old estates such as those of Zane Grey, Col. Green, and Scripps families. Absent planning or much oversight by Los Angeles County, the quality of building, subdivisions, and public infrastructure was uneven.

Altadena grew to over 46,000 people in the 1950s as baby boomers swelled the population — compared to 43,000 today. The modern community has since evolved and gone through significant social, racial, and cultural changes — but its land use patterns were set in the streetcar era.

The current era of climate change and unsustainable urban sprawl is the new driver of land use policies: statewide regulations are encouraging infill, and discouraging building in fire-prone foothills. Insurance companies and state regulations are combining to make living in Altadena more expensive — but also curbing hillside development.

This article was adapted and condensed from an earlier paper prepared for an Altadena Heritage committee studying commercial and residential land use.

Racial Change Over Time

Just as a pencil line drawn on a map of California in the 1850's influenced the future of where Lake Avenue would be built — another pencil line drawn from the 1930s-60s denied or limited financial services, such as home loans in certain neighborhoods. It was called "red-lining", and contributed to an east-west polarization in housing along racial lines in Altadena in the 1960s and 70s. This important story belongs more to the town's social and cultural history (see *Altadena: Between Wilderness and City*, 2004, pp 170-187) than in a brief overview on land use. However, because dramatic changes occurred in a short period, it would be an oversight not to summarize how demographic shifts along with red-lining affected Altadena's residential and commercial land use, and to provide an update.

In 1960, Altadena was overwhelming (95%) white, the majority of its neighborhoods covered with by-then-defunct racial covenants. For a variety of Pasadena-linked causes including urban renewal, turnover of housing stock, and freeway construction — combined with larger events such as the Civil Rights Movement, Watts Riots, Vietnam War, and political assassinations — many whites began leaving Altadena, especially West Altadena. By 1970, the town was 68 percent white, while the next census in 1980 counted the population as 49% white. This share remained fairly stable for the next 20 years: in 2000 the white population was 47%. In the same period the share of Black residents went from under 4% in 1960, to 27% in 1970, to 43 percent in 1980, to 39% in 1990, to 31% in 2000. Such convulsive racial change in housing spilled over to affect commercial activity in the most impacted areas, causing an overall down cycle in real estate values for a time. Bargains were to be found in homes all over Altadena.

In the years since, Altadena has followed the national trend of becoming an increasingly diverse suburb, but with an unusually stable population of around 43,000. It is now considered an affluent area (under 9% poverty rate, compared with 14% countywide) and a strong homeownership rate of over 70%. This compares with 42% in Pasadena, 56% statewide, and 65% nationally. Today's census broken down by race: whites, 53.2%; blacks, 19.6%; other race, 14.3%; two or more races, 6.94%; Asian, 5.16%; Native American, .6%; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, .1%. Altadena's diversity and wide range of housing stock attracts new homeowners of all stripes.

As in 1980, more Black residents live west of Lake Avenue in 2023, but today's diverse Altadena neighborhoods are all integrated. Racial housing patterns shift slowly or quickly along with demographics, but no summary of residential land use would be complete without a word about the real estate industry's role as the homebuyer's chief consultant. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Fair Housing Act of 1968 legally dismantled the "Red-lining" of neighborhoods, it continued informally, practiced when agents steer clients to this or that community, or side of town based on judgements about class and race, and needs such as educating children. This has decreased dramatically since the 1960s and 70s, when many agents made Lake Avenue a dividing line — not showing Black clients properties to the east of it, or white clients homes to the west of it. Today in Altadena, we hear more complaints from long-time residents about gentrification than integration, and we're once again in a real estate upcycle. No more bargains, for now.

ADU *Continued from Page 3*

Area. ADUs are not that. However, siting structures in ways that are insensitive to neighbors causes anger and discord, and this is sure to happen when a new unit shades a next door vegetable garden or blocks a mountain view. Angry neighbors make life hell; even if you can legally do what you want, it always works out best to be considerate.

Will ADUs solve our housing crisis? No, of course not, but they will help.

For one thing, many won't be rented, but used as work spaces, studios, guest suites, to house caregivers, or for family overflow. (It is illegal to use them for short term rental.)

Some dread the coming of ADUs, this is a significant change to our environment that they did not sign on for when they purchased their homes, and do not condone. I sympathize to a degree, change can be rough and can bring conflict. But it's a done deal, ADUs are here and more are coming.

Personally, I see many advantages to a backyard rental beyond monetary rewards, someone to watch the house, feed the cat and maybe report an irrigation leak when I'm on vacation. I see opportunities for elderly to age in place with a care-giver, or to move out to the backyard and let the next generation raise kids in the family home. I see a prospect of more young people joining our community as a good thing, they will bring life and variety and patronize local businesses while they enjoy a pleasant leafy environment. And homeowners will be able to add value to their properties and gain income from what for most of us is our biggest lifetime investment.

Altadena Housing by the Numbers

Altadena Population in 2023 - 43,384

Area in square miles - 8.5

Population Density - 5,124.5 per square mile
(Compared to LA's 8038 per square mile)

Total housing units - 15,860

Percentage of homes that are owned - 74%

Percentage that are rentals- 26%

Granny flats approved from 2017 to 2022 - 458

Median home price - \$879,600

Median rent - \$1834 /month

Median mortgage - \$3130 / month

Median real estate taxes - \$5343/ year

Source: Town charts

towncharts.com/California/Housing/Altadena-CDP-CA-Housing-data.html

Planning an ADU in Los Angeles County?

Two agencies must approve your plans; Regional Planning determines if your plans conform to zoning requirements – height, setback, etc. The Department of Building & Safety will make sure that your little unit conforms to all building codes for a dwelling.

Find links to all these resources at our website:

altadenaheritage.org/adu

Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook

Start with this online booklet by the California Department of Housing and Human Development. Well written overview of ADU issues.

Step-by-Step Guide for Accessory Dwelling Units in Los Angeles Unincorporated Areas

Covers the steps required by County zoning and permitting.

Ordinance 2020-0059 – Title 22

Amendment to Los Angeles County code establishing development standards for ADUs.

Public Works Los Angeles County Building & Safety

Homeowner's Guide. How to Successfully Plan and Prepare for your next Accessory Dwelling Unit(ADU)/ Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit (JADU) Project

Covers all steps and requirements for building permits and construction once zoning has been approved.

LA County Planning

Planning Permits for Accessory Dwelling Units

Basic ADU information with links to other pages. Links to a Standard ADU Plans Program with pre-approved construction plans that streamline Building and Safety approval. "Coming soon" they tell us.

LADPW Accessory Dwelling Unit –Expedited Plancheck Submittal Checklist

Building & Safety checklist of most everything that needs to be specified or shown on plans for ADUs

California Housing Finance Agency (CalHFA) Grant Program

ADU Grants up to \$40,000 towards pre-development and non-reoccurring closing costs. Predevelopment costs include site prep, architectural designs, permits, soil tests, impact fees, property survey, and energy reports.

Neighborhood Housing Services of Los Angeles County (NHS)

Assists low income households access favorable financing.

We're All Going to Die!

By Claire Smith

It's true, the inevitable will arrive for us all! So consider your heirs. To be in grief and not have any direction on where to start to settle a deceased family member's affairs can be crippling. Think of your legacy, what can we do to ease these moments for our loved ones? We can PLAN!

People have various motivations for estate planning. Some might want to alleviate potential familial discord, some might want to ease the burden on their children — and nobody wants the rewards of a lifetime gobbled up by attorneys and the State of California in Probate Court. This can happen if you don't properly delegate distribution of your assets.

Why is probate so scary? Because it sucks up time and money and it's a huge headache. Who wants to go to court? Think of the burden you will bequeath to your heirs when you leave assets with no official place to go. When you die the court has to see if anyone has a claim on your property. By statute, probate fees are based on the gross value of the estate. To keep the math easy let's use a million dollar home as an example. In probate there will be attorney fees and pay for a designated "Estate Representative" who can be a family member or close friend who coordinates the process; if there is no one the court deems suitable, the state will appoint someone. For our \$1 million dollar home, the fee would be \$33,000 to the probate attorney and \$33,000 to the Estate Representative. If a "court approved" sale is necessary, and someone contests ownership, or there are other complications and no designated heirs, it will take 12-18 months to complete right of possession and it will cost at least \$66,000. Will loved ones afford \$66,000 to gain possession of your property or would they have to sell the property to pay these fees?

I've been in real estate for 17 years and used to think that trusts were only for people with lots of money. With lawyers involved, it seemed financially out of reach for me, but a trust will keep you out of probate. You can get one done for less than \$400 through online legal service sites, but beware, there are many kinds of trusts, and I recommend you confer with an expert. What does a trust do? For Real Estate, a trust holds the property so it will pass to your "Successor Trustee" avoiding probate. Once a property is in a trust, the successor trustee can continue with mortgage payments, insurance, repairs, anything the home needs. The trust owns the home – not an individual. When the owner passes away, the successor trustee becomes the guardian.

What about a will? A will gives you control of who you leave your assets to, but not how or when they get those assets. All assets not held in a trust are subject to the California probate process. A will is better than no document, but a trust is the most comprehensive way to avoid probate and make your wishes known. Do you NEED a trust? Every situation is different, you really need

to consult a professional and decide what is right for you. Before you do, look up "setting up a trust in California" online, there are several types of trust designed to fit varying needs.

Another way to avoid probate on your real estate is to hold joint title. I bought my first house in Altadena in 2003, before I was in real estate. I remember escrow asking me how I'd like to "hold title." I had no idea what that meant or what the future implications could be. Know that there are five main ways to hold title in California and every home buyer should research what type of holding is right for them. But I HIGHLY recommend more than a single owner. That includes "Right of Survivorship" or "Transfer on Death" deed that are less costly than trusts to avoid probate. But they work only for property, and you must then make separate plans for bank accounts and other assets, medical directives, etc.

What if you do nothing and have only your name on your

deed? It's quite gratifying to hold title as the sole owner, testimony to all of your hard work in black and white! I had a client and dear friend who bought his dream house for \$1.7 million in the Hollywood Hills. When it came time to decide how to hold title I suggested creating a trust or to just put his Mom on the title with "Right of Survivorship." He was so proud and excited and told me that he knew he needed a trust and would get to it. He closed escrow in August 2019. At the age of 49 in July 2020 he suffered a

brain aneurysm and died. Because he'd made no arrangements, his mother had to endure a year of probate on top of losing her beloved only child.

For finances, you can designate a beneficiary with "TOD" or "Transfer on Death" that will grant your heirs access to your funds for the "final arrangements." You do this directly with every bank and investment firm where you have accounts. Talk directly to your bank representative to learn your options and what they suggest regarding establishing beneficiaries versus setting up a financial trust. Be sure to keep records in an easy-to-find place or give copies to trusted loved ones. A beneficiary will usually have instant access to your funds which is helpful, especially if your end of life plans have not been arranged.

For all of us, what's next is the great unknown. It isn't just death, but what if you become mentally incapable of making decisions? That's why a trust is best, it provides for many situations: Advanced Medical Directives, final wishes, memorial plans, who to contact and in what order, passwords to accounts and more. You don't always need a trust but it is a great way to have everything in one place. I'm not an estate lawyer, just someone that has seen easy transitions of property and many that were unnecessarily hard. Each person and situation is individual and I encourage you to research which steps are best for you. Most important is to ACT! Your loved ones will sing your praises for it.



Golden Poppy & Garden Party — 2023 Edition

Heartfelt thanks to Mark and Carol Forbush, who graciously hosted the 20th annual Golden Poppy Awards & Garden Party in their exquisite garden. Their warm hospitality created a memorable experience for all. It was a perfect day, mild and sunny, but as the afternoon unfolded, the lightest of showers descended upon the gathering, adding a touch of magic to the event. The mingling of raindrops and laughter echoed through the gardens, creating a perfect ending to a truly enchanting day.

The highlight of the event was a ceremony acknowledging Golden Poppy winners who have created beautiful, sustainable gardens that benefit the community by making their neighborhoods more beautiful. Each received a bronze plaque to display among their plantings. The awards served as a testament to

their hard work, creativity, and green thumbs.

On the morning of the following Sunday, a bicycle tour of winning gardens was led by Dorothy Wong of the Altadena Bicycle Club. Forty or so people joined the pack at Triangle Park and rode off into the foggy morning for a joyful ride around Altadena.

Golden Poppy Winners (Left to right below.)

**Lori Melby &
Stephen Bailey**
609 E Mendocino St

**Geoff Thompson
& Daron Hovanessian**
2080 Garfield Ave

Diane Marcussen
1603 Coolidge Ave

Rita & James Sowins
2611 Page Dr



Altadena Now an Official “Tree City”

It all began when a member directed our attention to a home on Altadena Drive. It had changed ownership and a chainsaw massacre of magnificent mature trees soon followed. These trees provided shade and beauty, but were not legally protected. Members of Altadena Heritage’s Tree Committee discussed different ways to raise community consciousness, and to promote the message of how valuable trees are in an ever-warming world. Perhaps information and soft diplomacy would cause residents to think before cutting down mature, healthy trees? One idea was to become an official “Tree City” through the Arbor Day foundation. Lisa Wintner took on the task, which turned out to be complicated.

As an unincorporated community, it wasn’t clear that Altadena qualified; most, if not all “Tree Cities” are civic entities. There are five criteria for being named a Tree City:

- 1) assigned responsibility for trees to a staff member or department,
- 2) having a law or policy governing tree management,
- 3) an inventory of existing trees so that long-term planning can be established,
- 4) an annual budget (at least \$2,000 per resident per year) for tree management.
- 5) an “annual celebration of trees” must be held

We were covered on the first four. As to the fifth, we learned that the “annual celebration” does not have to coincide with California’s official Arbor Day. Thus, Altadena Heritage’s annual Tree Giveaway in November became Altadena Tree Day, complete with declaration signed by Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

It sounds simple but wasn’t. Lisa researched County ordinances

and budgets, and worked with Sussy Nemer in the 5th District office, as well as with Steven Gutierrez and other helpful staff at LA County Department of Public Works. It was established that Altadena met all required criteria. The last step was for Supervisor Barger, our mayor, to sign the Tree City application form.

Altadena Heritage has been promoting trees for a cooler, shadier community for years, beginning in the early aughts with our Golden Poppy Garden Awards that honor gardens that give shade and beauty to the street. We worked with Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy and Arroyo Seco Foundation to plant an oak grove on a derelict piece of land at the southwest corner of Woodbury and Marengo to create Old Marengo Park in 2006. We lobbied the County to plant median and parkway trees in the Woodbury Corridor, and plant more trees on the west side of town. We gave away trees donated by SCE in 2012 in combination with a Third Thursday program on the urban forest, and led in the design of Triangle Park in 2017.

Our annual Tree Giveaway is an ongoing effort to keep Altadena cool and shady. In 2020, spearheaded by Anne Chomyn, we initiated the giveaway during COVID, combining it with Zoom programs led by Dr. Jerrold Turney, tree expert and plant pathologist. (The videos are available on our website <https://altadenaheritage.org/online-tree-workshop-one/>.) We have received grants from SCE since 2017 to help us mitigate the Heat Island Effect and pay for tree giveaways. We provide trees to be planted in private spaces, (complementing the County program for trees on public rights-of-way) and plan to continue giving them away every fall on Altadena’s Tree Celebration Day.

Look for Tree City signs, which will soon be going up in a few locations around town.



Altadena Heritage
730 E. Altadena Dr.
Altadena, CA 91001-2351

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PASADENA, CA
PERMIT NO. 90

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Photos: Huan Gu

Golden Poppy 2023



Host Carol Forbush and
Board member Niki Bridges



Greeters Gary Mendes & Darrell Weber



Become a Member



altadenaheritage.org/membership-ah/