

Community-Specific Historical Backgrounds

ALTADENA

Altadena is an unincorporated community in Los Angeles County in the northwest part of West San Gabriel Valley (WSGV), just north of the City of Pasadena. As the largest unincorporated area in the WSGV, Altadena encompasses 8.48 square miles of land that is roughly 14 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles. The community is bounded on three sides by various wilderness areas including the Arroyo Seco, Angeles National Forest, and Eaton Canyon. Originally inhabited by the Hahamongna-Tongva people, the 8.5 square mile community is now home to a population of 43,344 people. While the community has resisted annexation by the neighboring city of Pasadena for decades, small portions of the community have been incorporated over time.

The population by age follows a bell curve distribution with roughly 20 percent of residents under the age of 18, 20 percent over the age of 65, and the remaining 60 percent between the ages of 18 and 65. The population of Altadena is diverse, with approximately 40 percent White, 30 percent Hispanic/Latinx, 20 percent Black and the remaining 10 percent mixed or of other racial backgrounds.

The community is dominated by single-family housing, including an especially rich collection of Queen Anne homes from the early days of settlement. Other residential property types include single- and multi-family homes in a wide variety of architectural styles. There are a total of 15,334 housing units in Altadena, and 90 percent of all units were built before 1979 and are at least 44 years old, compared to 72 percent of housing in Los Angeles County.

The northern and eastern portions of the census-designated place (CDP) are characterized by access to the to the San Gabriel Mountains via a variety of trailheads and open space, while the southern portion of Altadena is characterized by man-made features, with north-west commercial corridors along Lake Avenue and Fair Oaks Drive, and an east-west commercial corridor along East Altadena Drive. Altadena also has a variety of public parks, including Loma Alta Park, Charles S. Farnsworth Park, and Charles White Park, in addition to the Altadena Town & Country Club and Altadena Golf Course and the Mountain View Mortuary & Cemetery.

Unlike many of the other unincorporated areas of the West San Gabriel Valley, Altadena has exhibited a strong civic pride and identity, in addition to creating both its own Library District and a Chamber of Commerce. Its residents have a long history of resisting incorporation as an independent town or annexation by surrounding cities, namely Pasadena.

General History of Altadena

Portions of Altadena share a significant history with nearby Pasadena, though residents of the area have historically maintained a distinct identity. Altadena was named for its relationship to its southern neighbor Pasadena, as “alta” means “high” or “above” in Spanish. Later, the Altadena Chamber of Commerce would promote the community with the false history that the name came from “alta-eden” in the 1930s to highlight the scenery and bucolic nature of the city.¹¹²

The land that is now part of Altadena was originally part of Rancho San Pascual, given to Juan Mariné in 1835, though he and his heirs did not cultivate the land, nor did José Perez, a relative of Mariné’s widow who claimed the land after Mariné abandoned it. In 1843, a former Mexican military hero named Manuel Garfias was granted the land by his former commander.¹¹³ Upon California statehood, Garfias welcomed the American officials with a grand ball and, in return received a United States patent for 13,693.33 acres of land in 1863. Ownership was transferred to former army surgeon Dr. John S. Griffin and Benjamin “Don Benito” Wilson, a wealthy landowner who would eventually become the second mayor of the City of Los Angeles and a three-term state senator, in 1873.¹¹⁴ Wilson would plant some of the earliest orange trees in the San Gabriel Valley, in addition to developing early irrigation networks.

The modern development of Altadena begins in the mid-to-late 1800s when agricultural landowners began to sell large tracts of land to developers. Much of the early development of Altadena runs parallel to Pasadena. Benjamin S. Eaton, a developer in the area, developed water systems for vineyards and orchards near the present-day Eaton Canyon circa 1860. Once improved, 4,000 acres was sold to Daniel Berry, including the lands for Pasadena and Altadena.

¹¹² Mike Manning, “Altadena, California,” Altadena Town Council, accessed July 28, 2023, <http://altadenatowncouncil.org/history/>.

¹¹³ W.W. Robinson, “The Story of Rancho San Pasqual,” *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, 37, no.4 (December 1955), 352.

¹¹⁴ King, 22–23.

Pasadena was founded by the San Gabriel Orange Growers Association, also known as the Indiana Colony, on land that was purchased from Eaton in 1873.¹¹⁵¹¹⁶ Pasadena took its name from the Anglicization of an Ojibbwe (Chippewa) word for “valley” and soon developed its own identity as the first true suburb of Los Angeles.¹¹⁷ Shortly after, Bryan O. Clark began a nursery in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, which he named “Altadena” to capitalize on its proximity to Pasadena.

Early residents of the Altadena area included former Union soldiers, abolitionists, and formerly enslaved people, such as Robert Owens. Born in Texas in 1806 and enslaved until 1853, when he was able to purchase his own freedom, Owens traveled to California, which had joined the United States as a non-slavery or “free” state as a part of the Compromise of 1850.¹¹⁸ Owens settled in a canyon above Altadena and while he faced significant discrimination, was able to work enough in the Greater Los Angeles area that he was able to purchase his wife’s freedom in 1854. Owens gained a reputation as a successful businessman and community leader, establishing a lumber road to facilitate a contract with the U.S. Military to supply wood from El Prieto Canyon. Owens and his wife, Winnie, led the first formal religious service for Black people in Los Angeles County and assisted Bidy Mason in successfully suing for her freedom. Later, Owens would purchase property in downtown Los Angeles. His business ventures, in addition to real estate and ranching operations, allowed Owens to eventually become the wealthiest Black man in Los Angeles at the time of his death in 1865.¹¹⁹

Another significant resident of Altadena was abolitionist Owen Brown, a participant in the 1859 raid at Harper’s Ferry Virginia. Undertaken by his father John Brown to encourage a southern rebellion of enslaved people, the elder Brown was arrested and executed, but Owen Brown

¹¹⁵ “History of Altadena,” Los Angeles Walking Tours,” February 5, 2021, <https://www.lawalkingtours.com/history-of-altadena>.

¹¹⁶ “History of Altadena.”

¹¹⁷ City of Pasadena, “About,” Accessed October 16, 2023, <https://www.cityofpasadena.net/about-pasadena/>.

¹¹⁸ “Compromise of 1850,” History.com, <https://www.history.com/topics/slavery/compromise-of-1850>.

¹¹⁹ Daniel Medina, “Mountain Men: Pioneers and Outlaws of the San Gabriels,” PBS SoCal, November 11, 2013, <https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/departures/mountain-men-pioneers-and-outlaws-of-the-san-gabriels>.

escaped and lived as a fugitive for over 20 years before settling in the foothills of Altadena in 1881 before dying eight years later.¹²⁰



Plot map developed by John Woodbury and Pasadena Improvement Company, 1887 (Source: Altadena Town Council)

Developer John Woodbury, along with his brother Frederick, purchased 937 acres from Eaton between 1880 and 1881. Streets were developed, notably Mariposa Street, which became known as Altadena’s Millionaire’s Row, where Woodbury built his own home.¹²¹ The community began to use the name of Clark’s Nursery, and Woodbury officially established the Pasadena Improvement Company in 1887, which developed a plot plan for a residential development of Altadena as a town. The original plan for the city included a train station that would house the Los Angeles Terminal Railway running between Altadena and Pasadena. In addition, an elaborate hotel was planned, the Altadena Hotel, in a similar fashion as the Raymond Hotel in South Pasadena and the Hotel Green in Pasadena.¹²²

The Pasadena area drew a significant number of new residents, many of whom were wealthy industrialists from the large cities of the American East and Midwest. Andrew McNally, the wealthy head of a mapping company purchased fifteen acres in Altadena in 1887. His business partner, William Rand, told a reporter it was a “rather expensive folly.”¹²³ McNally loved Altadena and encouraged other wealthy Midwesterners to settle in the area north of Pasadena. McNally’s daughter, Nannie, would bring her husband, Ed, to Altadena where the air would be better for the breathing difficulties he suffered in the Chicago air. There, they would begin their family, including their second son, Wallace Neff, who would later become one of the most preeminent architects in Southern California.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Steve Scauzillo, “Grave of Altadena abolitionist to receive historical landmark status after 35-year effort,” *Pasadena Star-News*, March 4, 2024, <https://www.pasadenastarnews.com/2024/03/02/grave-of-altadena-abolitionist-to-receive-historical-landmark-status-after-35-year-effort/>.

In February of 2024, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the nomination of the Owen Brown gravesite as a Los Angeles County Historic Landmark; as of April 2024, the designation is awaiting approval by the Los Angeles County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission.

¹²¹ Judy Triem, Altadena Heritage, *National Register Nomination: Woodbury-Story House*, 1991.

¹²² Both extant and on the National Register.

¹²³ Diane Kanner, “The Lemon Grove Boyhood of Wallace Neff,” *Southern California Quarterly*, Winter 1998. Vol. 80, No 4. 446–447.

¹²⁴ Kanner, “Lemon Grove,” 451.

COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

Woodbury, McNally, and other early residents imagined Altadena as an enclave for wealthy residents, but the crash of the land boom of the 1880s caused the elaborate plans to crumble. Many parcels remained unsold and grandiose development plans, including the Altadena Hotel and the Los Angeles Terminal Railway were abandoned. The result was that until the 1920s, much of Altadena was developed solely with agriculture, including oranges, olives, walnuts, dates, avocados, and ornamental plants.¹²⁵ The wealthier residents were largely shielded from the effects of the Panic of 1888 and the resulting wealthy residents maintained a strong identity as separate from the incorporated areas of Pasadena, South Pasadena, and Glendale.



Andrew McNally House, ca. 1900
(Source: University of Southern California Libraries)

Residents of Altadena resisted the urge to incorporate into a city, and additionally began a long history of avoiding attempts of annexation by the City of Pasadena. Many of the small farms in Altadena, along with the wealthier residents that owned larger farms, were involved in growing grapes and directly profited from the continued expansion of Los Angeles' wine industry. Pasadena, which had early on established their civic identity as a temperance city, ran counter to those goals.¹²⁶

Even though Altadena was never formally incorporated, the civic life of the early 20th century was quite lively. The Altadena Country Club, now the Altadena Town and Country Club, was founded in 1911 and featured a nearby private airport, operated by Hollywood director Cecil DeMille, from 1919 until 1921. Zane Grey, the famous novelist, relocated from Ohio to Altadena in 1926 along with his wife, who started the Altadena Library in 1926. Residents established an independent fire department in 1924; a permanent fire station was constructed in 1925. Altadena Historical Society, which remains in operation to the present day, was formed in 1935 and has since advocated for the preservation of many historic structures in the local community.



Zane Grey Residence, 1925
(California Historical Society, University of Southern California Libraries)

Altadena, along with neighboring Pasadena, was also home to a small but notable Jewish Community. The earliest known Jewish settler to the area was Moritz Rosenbaum, of German descent, a member of the California Colony of Indiana.¹²⁷ By the 1920s, Jewish residents, most of whom worked in merchant professions like shoemaking, tailoring, or dry goods store ownership, had made sporadic attempts to form lasting

¹²⁵ Michele Zack, "A Very Short History of Altadena," Altadena Heritage, November 3, 2012, <https://altadenaheritage.org/a-short-history-of-altadena/>.

¹²⁶ Zack, "A Very Short History of Altadena."

¹²⁷ Roberta H. Martinez, "History of Jewish Community in Early Pasadena," ColoradoBoulevard.net, October 4, 2016, <https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/jewish-history-in-pasadena/>.

congregations and Jewish day schools. Construction of the first synagogue, Temple B'nai Israel, was completed in 1923, and men's and women's chapters of B'nai B'rith Lodge, an organization to “respond to the needs of Jews who had encountered discrimination” were established in 1924 and 1929, respectively.¹²⁸ Jewish residents of the Altadena planning area likely attended meetings at these organizations or joined aid societies such as the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association or the Hebrew Aid Society.¹²⁹ The synagogue would move to its present-day location in southwest Altadena in 1941, as the vast majority of Jewish residents of the WSGV had settled in Altadena and East Pasadena, however it would retain its ties to Pasadena and was renamed as the Pasadena Jewish Community in 1956.¹³⁰

Altadena, because of its unincorporated status, has had a strong history as a safer community for Black residents of the West San Gabriel Valley, primarily because large portions of the community area were not covered by HOLC redlining maps which would restrict the financing of homes. Altadena Meadows, in particular, became a well-known middle class Black neighborhood. Many domestic servants and employees of wealthy families of Pasadena lived in Altadena, including the mother of science fiction writer Octavia Butler, who would use Altadena as a setting in her novel *Kindred* and would eventually purchase a home there.¹³¹

Following the 1930s, Altadena developed a reputation as a liberal area in the largely conservative San Gabriel Valley. “Artists, writers, and bohemians” flocked to Altadena in the 1940s, which saw its population boom to 46,000 in the post-World War II era.¹³² In 1956, the largest attempted annexation of Altadena by the City of Pasadena occurred, though was ultimately unsuccessful.¹³³ Throughout the 20th century, though, Pasadena would continue to annex significant portions of Altadena.

Like the rest of the WSGV, Altadena saw changing demographics in the latter half of the 20th century. Half of Altadena's White population left throughout the 1960s and 1970s in a pattern of “white flight” seen throughout the greater Los Angeles area, largely moving to the new

¹²⁸ Martinez, “History of Jewish Community.”

¹²⁹ “About PJTC,” Pasadena Jewish Temple & Center, <https://www.pjtc.net/aboutpjtc>.

¹³⁰ “About PJTC.” The present name of the synagogue is the Pasadena Jewish Temple & Center.

¹³¹ Carl Abbott, “Pasadena on Her Mind: Octavia E. Butler Reimagines Her Hometown,” Los Angeles Review of Books, February 2, 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/pasadena-on-her-mind-octavia-e-butler-reimagines-her-hometown/>.

¹³² Zack, “A Very Short History of Altadena.”

¹³³ Manning, “Altadena.”

suburbs of the San Fernando Valley. The residents that moved to Altadena in their place were much more racially and ethnically diverse. Children of these families attended Pasadena Unified, which was the first school district outside of the American South to be ordered by the Supreme Court to engage in busing to desegregate schools within the district.

Altadena Development History

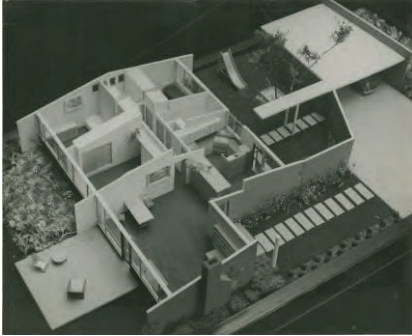
The first Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map produced for Altadena in 1908 consists of two pages and shows large tracts with elaborate, single-family residences along Mariposa Avenue, which was referred to as “Millionaire’s Row”. Dates of construction for assessor parcels show that residential development proceeded outward from Mariposa Street, along Altadena Drive. Large blocks with consistent dates of construction date from the 1920s; these feature smaller parcels and residences when compared to the estates constructed in pre-1910. The early character of Altadena was a community of small farms and large homes, giving the community a much more rural feel, even though architects from Pasadena were likely working in Altadena. Pasadena, by comparison, was a more densely constructed neighborhood with lots and residences that were closer together.

In the 18 years until a second Sanborn map of Altadena was platted in 1926, the community had significantly expanded in geographic reach and improvements. The pages needed to map the entire town expanded from two to 35 pages. Commercial corridors exist along Fair Oaks Avenue and Lincoln Avenue; however, the vast majority of the community’s improvements are single-family homes, and it is common to see many vacant lots between homes on the same block. Some remnants of Altadena’s agricultural industry remain, such as an avocado nursery and a dairy farm, and some of the larger lots feature poultry houses.¹³⁴ Residences, even smaller ones, constructed in the 1920s and 1930s feature larger front yards with extensive landscaping. The rural character and street landscape from this period of residential development is still extant.

Assessor dates of construction show that starting in the 1940s, entire blocks of single-family homes were built in the period of one or two years, likely builder-designed. The last Sanborn map available for Altadena dates from 1949 and shows most residential tracts improved

¹³⁴ Note: These properties were shown on the 1926 Sanborn map, however none are extant in the present day.

with a single-family dwelling. Also notable at this time is the marked difference in lots sizes; the northern and eastern portions of Altadena feature larger parcels with more yard space and garages, while the lots in southern and western Altadena are considerably smaller, which results in a higher density of single-family housing. This pattern continues to exist today. Lincoln Avenue and Fair Oaks Avenue remain commercial corridors, with residential improvements mixed in. Portions of Woodbury Drive feature a commercial section as well.



Model of one of 28 Park Planned Homes, designed by Gregory Ain, ca. 1945 (Source: AD&A Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

Cul-de-sacs were introduced in some blocks in the 1930s and 1940s, but these features became more common in blocks where the dominant date of construction is from the 1950s, along the outer edges of Altadena. While these homes were likely constructed in anticipation of residents utilizing FHA funding, larger parcels with elaborate, potentially architect-designed homes are found in the northeast portion, with curvilinear streets. Notably, an early modernist neighborhood known as “Park Planned Homes”, designed by architect Gregory Ain and landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, is located along Highview Avenue, south of Altadena Drive, in northern Altadena.

There are limited small areas of development from the 1960s, on the northern and eastern boundaries of Altadena. The only significant areas of post-1978 development is in the La Vina Development, in the northwest portion of the boundaries on the site of the former La Vina Sanatorium.

EAST PASADENA–EAST SAN GABRIEL

East Pasadena–East San Gabriel is made up of two bordering unincorporated areas; collectively, these CDPs are about four-square miles in size. The total population in this community is 26,807, making the population density about 6,700 people per square mile. East Pasadena–East San Gabriel is bordered by Pasadena to the north, Arcadia to the west, San Marino to the east, and Temple City, San Gabriel, and Rosemead to the south.

East Pasadena–East San Gabriel is predominantly white, yet it contains a significantly higher Asian population and a lower Latinx and Black/African American population compared to the County overall. In East Pasadena–East San Gabriel a notable 32.8 percent of the population speaks Chinese at home compared to the County average of 4 percent. Additionally, fewer people speak Spanish at home in East Pasadena–East San Gabriel (27.1 percent) when compared to the