



[The Journal of San Diego History](#)  
SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY  
[Spring 1977, Volume 23, Number 2](#)

## San Diego's City Park, 1868-1902

an Early Debate on Environment and Profit

[by Gregory E. Montes](#)

[Photographs from this article.](#)

### INTRODUCTION

Of San Diego's considerable sights, 1,078-acre Balboa Park, particularly its world-famous zoo, is one of the best-known and best-loved attractions for City residents and visitors. The early history of Balboa Park, called "City Park," "the Big Park" or just "the park," before 1910, vividly illustrates some important San Diego conflicts, accomplishments and setbacks in the areas of physical environment and financial profit. From the park founding in 1868 to the beginning of a comprehensive plan for it in 1902, the repeated struggles over City Park between land profiteers and park enthusiasts stimulated characteristic, American Victorian views and actions concerning the social, economic and aesthetic worth of public parks and natural landscape. In San Diego the problems and possibilities for a large public park were dramatized by close juxtaposition of a stupendous natural setting; a sub-tropical climate conducive to a wide variety of plant life; laissez-faire, frontier capitalism and several dedicated environmentalists of sorts familiar with the heart of the 19th and 18th century, English-American public parks and landscaping tradition.

The history of City Park in 1868-1902 has fascinating and amusing moments but above all it is sobering to think that the entire 1400 acre park was generally preserved in the late 19th century heyday of shady land deals whereas in the presumably more enlightened 20th century, 322 acres of the park have been deeded or leased to freeways (109.2 acres), a burgeoning naval hospital (92.6 acres) and other incompatible uses.<sup>1</sup> The outward-exploding, suburbanizing pressures of the 1950's partly explain these assaults on the park. But beyond that we must look to lapses of values in our culture which allowed these tragedies to occur. Now, since the mid-1960's,

American society has increased its appreciation of rural and urban natural environments, the latter of which is best represented in large city parks such as Balboa. Perhaps study of the brave defense of that park in earlier, equally difficult times can help us enjoy the park more and do better for it and ourselves in the future.

IN THE BEGINNING. 1769-1868.

The Presidio of San Diego, the first European settlement in Upper California, was founded on July 16, 1769.<sup>2</sup> However the village at the base of Presidio Hill, now known as Old Town, did not receive the status of "pueblo" (town) until January 1, 1835. Under Mexican and previously Spanish law, the title of pueblo gave the settlement a right to hold and dispose of a surrounding, four square leagues.<sup>3</sup> By the Fitch survey of San Diego Pueblo Lands in 1845, the "Ayuntamiento" (Town Council) claimed eleven, not just four square leagues for San Diego. After the American annexation of California in 1848, the City of San Diego was chartered and in 1853 filed claim again to its eleven square leagues of pueblo land. The claim was confirmed by the U.S. Land Commission in 1856.

In 1867, enterprising [Alonzo E. Horton](#) bought 960 acres of pueblo lands about two miles south of Old Town and directly in front of the great bay of San Diego. Horton paid about 27 cents per acre but made thousands when he resold the land located strategically at what he called New Town and what is now bustling downtown San Diego.

Horton's land coup spurred local talk of reserving pueblo lands on the edge of New Town before they were sold too quickly and too cheaply. Some thought that the land could be reserved, either temporarily or permanently, as a public park.

On February 15, 1868, [Ephraim W. Morse](#), a Trustee of the City of San Diego presented a resolution which was approved by the two other board members, [Thomas Bush](#) and [J.S. Manasse](#), to set aside two 160 acre "pueblo lots," "for the purpose of securing to the inhabitants of the City of San Diego a suitable park."<sup>4</sup> Few could see the need for a 320 acre park for a town of 2,310 people. Only Alonzo Horton, of all people, would accompany Morse to select the park site. Morse then proposed, and Horton accepted, that since 40,000 pueblo acres were still available, they should reserve nine instead of just two pueblo lots, or 1,440 acres for the park, although two days before, Morse and/or the two other trustees had sold forty acres in the southwest corner of the park site, nearest New San Diego's center, to Isabella Carruthers for a housing addition. Thus development pressures began on City Park before it was formally established.

On May 26, 1868, after the election of a new Board of Trustees, the Morse-Horton park recommendation was adopted and passed by Trustees Jose Guadalupe Estudillo, [Marcus Schiller](#) and [Joshua Sloane](#). They resolved that the nine pueblo lots northeast of New Town, "comprising 1400 acres, be for a park."<sup>6</sup>

From contemporary accounts, of those involved in the park reservation Mr. Morse was apparently the most important and in fact the founder of City Park, although the roles of three other key figures cannot be totally verified nor discounted.<sup>7</sup>

E.W. Morse was born in Amesbury, Massachusetts in 1823, worked there as a farmer and teacher and left Boston in 1849 for the California gold mines.<sup>8</sup> After a hot summer there he came to San Diego in 1850, seeking milder weather. He was City Trustee in 1866-68, a merchant and realtor. He helped arrange the Horton land sale.<sup>9</sup>

Some, including A.E. Horton's widow, claimed later that Horton was the principal founder of City Park.<sup>10</sup> But park benefactor [George W. Marston](#) wrote ". . . it was Morse's brain and heart that conceived the park and... Mr. Horton was prompted to do what he did by Mr. Morse."<sup>11</sup> Also Morse was much more interested in plants and gardening than was Horton.<sup>12</sup> Morse later gave equal if not superior credit to Horton in the park founding even though others said that Morse had been the main proponent.<sup>13</sup>

Friends of former trustee Joshua Sloane later said that he was an early park advocate, although not much was heard of him in that regard afterwards.<sup>14</sup>

Most sources make short mention of Jose G. Estudillo, President of the Board of Trustees when the park was founded, member of one of San Diego's oldest Mexican ranching families and later State Treasurer of California.<sup>15</sup> However, in 1915 Estudillo stated: "I suggested that 1,400 acres be set aside as a public park. I really didn't have in mind that the land should be used for a public park, but merely as a means of saving it for the city. And that is the story of the origin of the park."<sup>16</sup> We cannot verify now whether Morse or Estudillo got the park idea first, but the latter seemed to share the fear of others that after a few more Hortonian deals the City would find itself with no public lands and little income to show for the sales.

Like Morse, Estudillo stood up for the park in later years. Once a real estate dealer hotly called Estudillo, "you old barnacle," because of his defense of the park against private encroachments.<sup>17</sup> Don Jose, more comfortable in Spanish than English at that time, was not sure what barnacle meant but he did not like the way it was said. He challenged the realtor to a duel. Luckily a friend persuaded Estudillo to look up barnacle in a dictionary. The rancher did and allowed that it was a fairly good description of himself. He then called off the duel.

One wonders what precedents of public city parks, especially those founded on municipal common lands, could have given Morse and/or Estudillo the idea to establish a park. Before City Park, three plazas with varying degrees of landscaping, had been founded in Old and New San Diego.<sup>1</sup> The thought of setting aside more San Diego park lands was said to have circulated since 1850.<sup>19</sup> Beside experience with public plazas, most American San Diegans of 1868 were familiar with larger, more ornate parks in their native Midwestern, East Coast and even European homes. Major Eastern American parks were founded in the 19th century as public necessities in growing cities or in the 18th and 17th centuries as common grounds for pasturage, recreation, parades and public meetings. Parks and some park history were known in San Diego in 1868. Only one year later the *San Diego Union* wrote that, to ameliorate health and morale problems in an industrializing, urbanizing era, "every considerable city in Europe and the United States... has its vast tract of land reserved and beautified as a park."<sup>20</sup>

Also, in Latin America between the 16th and 18th centuries, public parks, usually long, formal promenades (*alamedas*), were founded on communal lands at the edges of cities.

The similar, pre-19th century experiences of the Anglo and Spanish-American worlds with public grounds on communal lands derive ultimately from the parallel medieval and ancient Roman laws on colonization and municipal rights in Britain and Spain.<sup>21</sup>

E.W. Morse was probably most influenced in his park thinking by the large, landscaped Boston Common of his native state.<sup>22</sup> Also he may have seen, on one of his many trips back East after 1849, the quickly famous, beautifully landscaped Central Park of New York, inaugurated in 1865.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Jose G. Estudillo may have been aware of public parks and promenades in Mexico and perhaps also Spain, not to mention the American parks he heard about in San Diego.

Whether Morse, Estudillo or someone else first thought to save pueblo land with a public park, temporarily or permanently, they came from cultures with long, similar public park traditions and they showed sincere appreciation of San Diego's City Park in the following years.

#### THE FIRST FIGHT. 1869-72.

In October, 1869, the San Diego Trustees asked the California legislature to confirm the May, 1868 dedication of San Diego's 1400 acre City Park.<sup>24</sup> A bill to this effect was introduced in the 1870-71 legislative session but was opposed by San Diego land speculators who sought to amend it and reduce the park by 480 acres on its east side. On hearing this, San Diegans gathered 160 signatures to insist upon dedication of the entire 1400 acres.<sup>25</sup> The full park was confirmed in a state act of February 4, 1870, which declared that the land, "be held in trust forever by the municipal authorities of said city for the use and purpose of a public park, and for no other or different purpose."<sup>26</sup>

The "schemers and landsharks" of San Diego, led by City Attorney Charlie Taggart, were not deterred by state sanction of City Park.<sup>27</sup> They got their man in Sacramento, State Senator James McCoy, to quietly introduce a bill on November 17, 1871, to repeal the 1870 park reservation act.<sup>28</sup> Luckily San Diegans soon heard of the bill. Immediately a "public safety committee," composed of G.W. Marston, Daniel Cleveland and three or four others, drew up and printed a petition addressed to the state legislature requesting that the 1870 park bill be "not repealed or in any wise amended."<sup>29</sup> Ten or twelve canvassers rushed through San Diego and within about one hour obtained 366 signatures for the petition.<sup>30</sup> The signers included prominent citizens: E.W. Morse, Jose G. Estudillo, Douglas Gunn, W.B. Bancroft and [Jose Antonio Serrano](#).<sup>31</sup> The park repeal bill was killed in the legislature. City Park supporters won their first battle with the indignation and organization which would characterize their subsequent efforts.

#### A RESERVED WILDERNESS. 1872-81.

Between 1872 and 1881 few improvements were made in San Diego's 1400 acre City Park. The canyons and mesas were covered by dense chaparral and after winter rains the arid land bloomed in large patches of yellow, white and blue with the many small flowers of wild adenostema, sage brush, 'Spanish' violets, shooting stars, mimulas and white popcorn.<sup>32</sup> The low-lying vegetation was home to coyotes, wildcats, rabbits, squirrels, quail and lizards.<sup>33</sup>

Through the 1870's an Indian rancheria or cluster of homes was allowed to remain in the south part of the park near 8th and Date.<sup>34</sup> At the southwest corner of the park, closest to settled San Diego, contractors dug out large amounts of dirt from the hillside and residents dumped heaps of barbed wire, tin cans and barrel staves.<sup>35</sup> In March, 1873 the newly formed San Diego Water Company obtained City permission to drill a well in Pound (now Cabrillo) Canyon.<sup>36</sup> Two reservoirs, with 70,000 and 100,000 gallon capacities, were built atop the mesa flanking the canyon.<sup>37</sup> In the 1870's the City set up an animal pound in the westernmost canyon of City Park, thereafter known as Pound canyon. Here stray cattle and horses were impounded until bailed out by owners.<sup>38</sup> In August, 1881, the City allowed a merchant, Mr. Wentscher, to construct a gunpowder magazine on a 300 square foot, southeast corner of Pueblo Lot 1136 in City Park, far removed from any public or private buildings.<sup>39</sup> On August 8, 1881, City Trustees allotted (but did not deed) five acres at the south central edge of City Park for the San Diego High School.<sup>40</sup> Joseph Russ, then California's largest lumber dealer, donated wood to build the school which was completed and occupied in 1883. For the following twenty years the building was known as the Russ School.

#### PARK RUMBLINGS. 1882-87.

Although the Russ School concession set a hazardous precedent as the first major encroachment on City Park, it also stimulated local interest in improving the tract for true park uses. In 1882 the *Union* noted that if some plants, flowers and "artistic decorations" were set out in City Park and irrigated with water from the reservoirs there, the large, nearly empty reserve could become "the glory of a flourishing seaport city."<sup>41</sup> In December, 1884, eleven persons and one corporation (Allison Brothers), including George W. Marston, A. Klauber, Charles S. Hamilton and several other prominent San Diego businessmen, petitioned the City Trustees to allow them to plant, at their cost, eucalyptus trees along a rough road in City Park and to make further improvements as their funds allowed.<sup>42</sup> The Trustees granted the request and a partial survey of the park was made in January, 1885.<sup>43</sup> Apparently business affairs or other reasons sidetracked the sponsors from carrying out the project at that time.

About 1886, [Elisha Babcock](#) and H.L. Story built a steam power street car line, the University Heights Motor Road (or Park Belt Line), through the southeast section of City, up Switzer Canyon and onto the mesa.<sup>44</sup> This and other rail lines radiating from downtown San Diego, in the growing commercial prosperity of the 1880's, made City Park more accessible to more people and also increased park development and improvement pressures.

The first major debate on how to use City Park took place in December, 1886. The U.S. Army offered to trade its downtown San Diego barracks site for a City Park location. Various views erupted on the matter. George Marston, later an ardent opponent of park encroachments, favored the proposed land exchange, particularly if the Army improved the grounds around barracks in City Park.<sup>45</sup> Businessman Levi Chase felt that the cost of improving all of the park was far beyond the means of San Diego and even of a city the size of San Francisco.<sup>46</sup> Chase proposed that City Park be sold in stages until 640 acres remained which could be improved with the revenues from park sales. Mr. Chase thought that such a park would well serve a city which he did not foresee passing 250,000 in population. How hard it is to read the future!

The barracks exchange opponents, which included John G. Capron, Mr. Parrish and Daniel Choate, may have acted from self-interest. The *Union* noted that among those most against selling or bartering parts of City Park were speculators, "connected with land-grabbing syndicates," who owned land near the park and feared deflationary prices if more choice, adjacent land was put on the market.<sup>47</sup>

It is tremendously ironic that in the late 1880's several San Diego realtors countered development pressures brought on City Park by those who did not yet see the eventual need for a 1,400 acre park but who, upon realizing that, would later work hard to preserve and improve the public open space.

After the above arguments the City Trustees resolved to ask the State to authorize San Diego to sell 760 acres of City Park and to approve the barracks exchange.<sup>48</sup> Then no further steps were and the whole matter died away. But the 1886 debate may have encouraged a much more ambitious park venture of the following year.

#### THE HOWARD TRACT. 1887-89.

On November 4, 1887, Bryant Howard and E.W. Morse asked the City Trustees to grant them and several associates, 100 acres of City Park on the promontory between Cabrillo and Florida canyons where the U.S. Naval Hospital now stands.<sup>49</sup> The Howard group proposed to establish an Orphan's Home, Pierce Boy's and Girl's Home, Kindergarten, an Industrial School and a School of Technology on the 100 acres. The buildings, grounds and operating costs of the charitable or educational organizations would be paid for with \$150,000 from a bequest of the late J.M. Pierce, \$150,000 from anonymous donors (of which \$100,000 later turned out to be from Judge O.S. Witherby) and \$300,000 from Howard and friends.<sup>50</sup>

In making the request, Howard underlined an aspect of City Park which put it under increasing development pressures. Howard said that his group could obtain free land elsewhere but wanted the charitable institutions, "near the heart of our city, within easy access of the larger number of those they are intended to benefit."<sup>51</sup>

On December 2, 1887 the City Trustees granted 100 acres to Howard and Company and also five acres nearby to the Woman's Home Association on which to house indigent and poor women.<sup>52</sup> The large size of the Howard grant and the number of buildings proposed for it, on high City Park land with some of the best views, apparently alerted George Marston to the dangers of park incursion. Whereas only recently he had favored placing Army barracks in City Park, he and several other San Diego businessmen asked the State in February, 1889 not to authorize the City's conveyance of park land to Howard.<sup>53</sup> But the State proceeded to confirm the act. In Spring, 1890 Bryant Howard planted the grounds of the "Charities Tract" (also called "Howard Tract" or "Orphan's Tract") with over ten thousand trees-mainly blue and sugar gums, acacias, pepper trees, fan palms and cypresses.<sup>54</sup> Irrigating water pipes and winding drives were laid out. The three-story Children's (or Orphan's) Home and nearby Woman's Home were both built in the turreted, Victorian, "Queen Anne modern Style."<sup>55</sup>



During the Panic of 1893 the Consolidated Bank failed and took with it the fortunes of Howard, his associates and the Pierce estate.<sup>56</sup> The grantees could no longer maintain or further improve the 100 acres as stipulated in the deed from the City and the property reverted to the City in 1896.<sup>57</sup> The Woman's Home burned in 1897, coincidentally one month after the City had insured it for \$4,000.<sup>58</sup> The City promptly collected the insurance.

Although the Howard grant opened a further wedge to diminishing City Park's open space, the extensive grounds improvements made there fired many San Diego imaginations as to how the whole 1400 acre park could be beautified.

#### THE LADIES ANNEX PARK. 1889-90.

In 1889-90 the Ladies Annex of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, led by Mrs. Ben Lake, raised \$514 and planted trees and bushes on fourteen acres at the west side of City Park between Juniper and Palm streets.<sup>59</sup> The Ladies Annex wanted a park area embellished with shade trees, shrubs, flowers and "booths or other buildings suitable for recreation," where they could take family and friends.<sup>60</sup> The ladies saw their work, much as Howard did his, as "a nucleus for other park improvements."<sup>61</sup> They also knew of the current, Anglo-American, practical rationale for large, public urban parks: "for as the lungs are to a human body, so is a park the breathing spot of the people, and if these efforts are successful, they will prove a lasting boon to the City of San Diego and a crown of glory to the Ladies Annex."<sup>62</sup> The women's group chose to improve, with City approval, a two acre parcel in City Park near Date Street and an 11.9 acre site between Ivy and Palm, also at the west edge of the park.<sup>63</sup> The ladies had clear knowledge of the Romantic, Picturesque school of landscape gardening championed by Frederick Law Olmsted. They proposed to accentuate and artfully frame nature: ". . . the view is magnificent, and a grand effect could be obtained by placing rustic arbors over which hardy vines could be trained, rustic seats and clumps of trees."<sup>64</sup> The "Annex Park" was laid out under the guidance of [Miss Kate Sessions](#), Annex member, horticulturist and most probable source of the group's familiarity with Eastern American gardening theory.<sup>65</sup> Water for plants was donated by the San Diego Water Company and water cartage to the park by Pioneer Truck Company.<sup>66</sup>

Altogether the Annex planted about 700 trees and shrubs in City Park, including eucalyptus, Monterey cypress, acacias, pines, "flame trees" and poinsettias.<sup>67</sup> The Annex Park brought not only the first extensive City Park improvements not accompanied by buildings but also some amusing moments. By April, 1890 the one month of free water cartage by Pioneer Truck Company expired. The ladies began to take water from fire hydrants near the park. The water company sent notices prohibiting that but then relented and let the practice continue to save the new trees.<sup>68</sup> Soon thereafter, San Diego's State Senator, W.W. Bowers, claimed credit for obtaining the water company's mercy. Joseph Flint, Secretary of the San Diego Water Company, was infuriated and wrote the *Union* that the good senator, "had better retain his water, for there cometh a time... when he may need a drop to cool his parching tongue."<sup>69</sup>

Despite the water provided, the Annex Park withered some in the summer of 1890. Years later, Emma (Mrs. Frederick T.) Scripps recalled that when she and her parents arrived in San Diego from England in August, 1890 they were told of a park near 6th and Laurel. "We were all hungry to see green grass and trees. I shall never forget the disappointment when there was no grass. A

few eucalypti stood in the bare, hard ground like giant giraffes with their long legs and a tuft of leaves for a head. Tears came to our eyes, our disappointment was so great."<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless the Ladies Annex efforts did not totally lack for admirers. In November, 1890 an Annex member wrote:

The zoological pair in the ladies section of the City Park have demonstrated that goats and burros can absorb dracenas into their systems with wholesome results. A lady who has been observing their frolics says that the pair have chewed off about thirty-six of these shrubs.<sup>71</sup>

#### GOLDEN HILL PARK. 1889-90.

In 1889-90, residents of the Golden Hill neighborhood, led by neighbors Leroy Wright and Mathias Heller, began to plant and maintain the adjacent southeast corner of City Park.<sup>72</sup> The improvements may have been inspired by the contemporary ones of the Howard Tract and Ladies Annex. For many years Golden Hill Park was the greenest, most admired area of City Park.<sup>73</sup> This section contained City Park's first golf course—a nine-hole, oiled-green, dirt fairway creation, San Diego's first park playground.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately a seven year drought in the 1890's killed off the west side of Golden Hill Park, about two-thirds of the Ladies Annex plantings and much of the Howard Tract improvements. Golden Hill was improved again in 1901-02, when Matt Heller employed an Italian gardener to plant and tend there, eucalyptus and palm trees and roses.<sup>76</sup>

#### PARK OPPORTUNITIES AND OPPORTUNISTS. 1890-91.

In 1890-91, San Diegans, encouraged by the Howard Tract, Ladies Annex and Golden Hill activities in City Park, proposed both some constructive and some detrimental projects for the large reserve. The beneficial included a suggestion of up to \$5,000 annual City funding of park beautification; a \$100,000 bond issue for park dams, lakes and boulevards and the recommendation of Kate Sessions that F.L. Olmsted be hired to design all of City Park.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, a mansion owner, attorney John Gay, asked to fence off an adjacent sector of the park for his private family use.<sup>78</sup> And three promoters asked for a fifty year lease of 100 prime acres of City Park, nearest downtown, for a Southwest International Exposition and also a botanical garden to sweeten the commercial pill.<sup>79</sup> Neither proposal received final City approval.

#### THE SESSIONS LEASE. 1892-1902.

For many years Kate Olivia Sessions was one of the major advocates of planning, laying out and planting the entire 1400 acre San Diego City Park as a public, recreational and botanical garden. As a horticulturist she could honestly combine simultaneously her commercial, botanical and public park interests. Kate Sessions was born in San Francisco in 1857 and studied agriculture at the University of California at Berkeley in 1878-81.<sup>80</sup> Kate came to San Diego in 1883 and opened a nursery on Coronado Island in 1885.<sup>81</sup> Later land prices soared there and in January, 1892, Miss Sessions asked the Common Council to lease her a part of City Park where she could establish a commercial and experimental nursery. She felt that the nursery, open to the public (on foot) and planted with both native and previously untested exotic species, would provide, "a continual incentive to our citizens to encourage and foster work in our park."<sup>82</sup>



On February 16, 1892, the City approved a ten year lease to Kate Sessions of thirty-two acres in the northwest corner of City Park, away from the most likely area of early public improvements at the southwest.<sup>83</sup> In return for the nursery land and free City water, Sessions was to plant and maintain in the park each year, 100 "choice and varied sorts of trees" for the City and provide annually 300 "ornamental trees" in crocks or boxes to plant in City streets, plazas and playgrounds.<sup>84</sup> Every year thereafter Kate gave the City more trees than her lease required and she never used more than ten of the thirty-two acres leased.<sup>85</sup>

Within a few months of securing the lease, Kate had cleared the land of sagebrush and stones and planted thousands of items. At its peak her nursery contained about 20,000 plants.<sup>86</sup> She experimentally grew twenty varieties of eucalyptus, eight each of acacia and bamboo, Eastern elm, Spanish cork oak, Azorean honey plants, Hawaiian kukui trees and the Banyan tree.<sup>87</sup> Many of the Torrey pines, Monterey cypresses, eucalyptus and oaks now growing in northwest Balboa Park were planted there by Kate Sessions.<sup>88</sup> On Sundays in the 1890's up to 100 San Diegans walked through the Sessions San Diego Nursery to enjoy or be converted to the pleasures of plant life.<sup>89</sup>

#### THE CITY PARK LAND RUSH. 1892-1902.

While the Howard Tract, Ladies Annex and Golden Hill improvements in City Park brought both constructive and questionable proposals for the park's further development, the Sessions nursery lease brought on a veritable landslide of requests and suggestions for more intense private and public use of City Park. The scramble did not end until August, 1902, when the Chamber of Commerce began its campaign for a comprehensive City Park plan and improvement program.

In February, 1892, even before the Sessions lease had received complete City approval, Riley R. Morrison and S.G. Blaisdell requested City Park land for "experimenting in growing trees and flowers under the same terms granted to Miss K.O. Sessions."<sup>90</sup> The men wanted a not immodest, 1,000 foot wide strip of the west side of the park between Fir and Juniper streets. In October, 1892 the City Park Commission, which included Bryant Howard, informed the City's Board of delegates that the Morrison-Blaisdell lease was sought for "private purposes" and that several other parties were waiting to see if the land request succeeded and if so, they would also jump for slices of City Park. The Commissioners summarized: "If these leases applied for are granted, there will be no limit to them."<sup>91</sup> The Commission added that, "in the near future," it hoped to raise funds to survey and "properly lay out the whole park system."<sup>92</sup>

But these words did not stop land seekers nor lenience from some City officials. In March, 1893, the Delegates approved a lease of 7.4 acres at the prize southwest corner of City Park to the San Diego County Agricultural Society for its annual fair.<sup>93</sup> But no more is heard of that. In June the Pastime and Silver Gate gun clubs obtained City approval to use (but not lease) one acre of the park near Cabrillo Canyon and the line of Maple Street for a trap shooting range.<sup>94</sup> At the same time the Common Council (Delegates and Aldermen) approved the petition of Company "A," National Guard Naval Reserve, to operate a rifle range in City Park near the range already occupied by Company "B."<sup>95</sup> In December, 1893, the Delegates moved to let Mr. Timothy Ryan "occupy" 200 to 300 acres of City Park with his plant nursery for twenty-five years! At this stage of deterioration the *Union* stepped in to remonstrate. The newspaper warned that extensive

litigation might be required later to remove Ryan. These legal imbroglios could hamper future park improvements. The *Union* reminded all:

"The city park, if preserved intact, will make a magnificent pleasure-ground in future years when this city has expanded as it must in obedience to nature's laws. . . San Diego stands today on the threshold of a new era. While extending all reasonable encouragement to legitimate enterprise, the people should guard with jealousy the city park... against the greedy assault of land-hunters."<sup>96</sup>

Also in these years, City Park especially near downtown, was plagued by squatters' homes.<sup>97</sup> It was proposed in 1894 that the usurpers be made to pay a nominal rent to acknowledge City ownership of the land.<sup>98</sup>

When the Howard Tract was forfeited to the City in 1896, it seemed to some like a vacuum begging to be filled. In January, 1897, a fraternal order, the Knights of Pythias Lodges of California, asked the Common Council to deed it thirty acres of the former Charities Tract for a home for aged and ill Pythians and their dependents.<sup>99</sup> The City Lands Committee of the Council was quite willing to grant the property, merely adding for a note of respectability that the Pythian grounds be open to the public and designed in accord with a "general plan of improvement for the entire park."<sup>100</sup> Two days after the Pythian request, on January 20, Alderman Dodson, truly swept by the New Year's spirit of giving, proposed that the City also deed twenty acres of City Park near the head of 25th Street to the State for a normal school.<sup>101</sup>

Between the Pythians and the normal school, the wrath of City Park Commissioner W.R. Maize was considerably aroused. He wrote on January 22 that as of late the Common Council totally ignored the original mandate of the Park Commission, when appointed in 1892, to "keep out the Ryans and others of that ilk and to preserve City Park intact until a comprehensive plan for it could be designed and carried out."<sup>102</sup> Captain Maize reminded that since 1892 he had sent a full contour map of the park to Frederick L. Olmsted and had received from the eminent landscape architect, an estimate of \$7,000 for a complete City Park improvement plan. Maize said that "many persons of the mossback species" objected to such expense just for park plans. However, "a progressive gentleman and capitalist" (who later turned out to be George Marston), had promised to pay for the design but only if "we keep out intruders."<sup>103</sup>

As long as the Pythian threat remained, Captain Maize maintained his vigilance for City Park. In irreverent California he found it helped to invoke higher, outside authority. In February, 1897 Maize reminded *Union* readers that four years earlier Professor C.S. Sargent, renowned Director of the great Arnold Arboretum at Harvard, visited San Diego's City Park and remarked that, "it was the most magnificent park site that he had seen in all his travels; that the beautiful view of bay, ocean, and mountains could not be surpassed."<sup>104</sup> Professor Sargent emphasized that due to the mild climate, a great and unique variety of plants could be cultivated in the park and that in fact to do so, was "a botanical necessity to the United States."<sup>105</sup>

Commissioner Maize stated that, with or without City assistance, he hoped to soon obtain complete plans for City Park "in the near future" and to lay out in the most accessible southwest corner of the tract, drives, bicycle paths and picnic grounds for enjoyment by both the prosperous

and "the humblest citizen."<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately the beginning outlined by Captain Maize required more public support and that was still five years away.

Another would-be park poacher came forward in January, 1899. J.S. Manasse asked the Council to let him use part of City Park near Cabrillo Canyon for "gardening purposes" which turned out to be the growing of barley solely for his own gain.<sup>107</sup> Judge M.A. Luce wrote in the *San Diego Sun* an eloquent rejoinder to Manasse's request:

In the wet season the Park in its native condition, carpeted with affileria and green bushes, is much more pleasant to look upon than the sowed barley fields." Within one month. . . the whole Park will be covered with wild flowers in beautiful variety and profusion.

And even in the dry season the growing bushes and unbroken soil are much more pleasant to look upon than dry stubble fields and dust.

Don't barter the natural beauty of the Park for a few dollars rental.<sup>108</sup>

The City Park cause received major impetus in March, 1899, when the will of Dr. John Allyn bequeathed \$3,000 for City Park landscaping and roads.<sup>109</sup>

The Allyn bequest (not used until 1903), previous park improvement talk (mainly by Sessions, Maize and Marston) and the realization that park land grabbers would keep coming back for more until a complete park plan was undertaken, brought City Park matters to a head by September, 1899. Then the San Diego Chamber of Commerce held a well-attended meeting in which the major park protagonists spoke their minds.

Charles Hamilton recommended spending about \$6,000 per year from the City's General Fund for City Park beautification.<sup>110</sup> Kate Sessions restated the idea heard before that with San Diego's benign climate, City Park could have an unparalleled variety and growth of plants from the U.S. Southwest, Latin America, Australia, South Africa and elsewhere."<sup>111</sup> Palms, bamboos, cacti, bougainvilleas of "oriental and extravagant coloring," eucalyptus, "ferny" pepper trees, deep red poinsettias and California poppies could be arranged, according to the species, in clumps, arbors, avenues and fields to accentuate and brighten the rugged beauty of City Park.<sup>112</sup> Miss Sessions referred to Olmsted's designs for New York's Central Park and the Boston park system and declared: "We know how the best work is being done, and we ought to begin our work on the same plane of intelligence that Boston, Detroit, Chicago and other cities are working today."<sup>113</sup> Kate indicated that she hoped to combine her local horticultural experience with a plan by "the best landscape architect in the U.S." (Olmsted), who would visit San Diego extensively, to make City Park a great artistic and scientific accomplishment.

Mayor Capps, a consistent park supporter, said in the true spirit of 18th century English landscape art (perhaps informed on this by Kate Sessions), that the park improvements should, "copy wild nature as nearly as possible; all set designs should be excluded."<sup>114</sup> The public needed to ruminate on these grand park thoughts for a few more years.

Large scale park efforts received new energy in July, 1901, when millionaire publisher Edward W. Scripps offered to donate enough trees and shrubs from Miramar Ranch north of San Diego to plant the entire 1400 acre City Park.<sup>115</sup> Scripps felt that not much had been done yet for City Park except the Howard Tract plantings and, "a great deal of discussion and agitation on the subject now and then."<sup>116</sup>

In November, 1901 a newly appointed Superintendent of City Parks recommended as Commissioner Maize had earlier, that as a beginning, a 400 square foot area in the southwest, most convenient corner of City Park be graded and planted with trees, shrubs and lawns.<sup>117</sup>

By this time, the question was not if City Park would be improved but how that work would be financed. Finally the more benevolent park partisans were pushed to the front by revival of a version of the 1886 park sale/improvement proposal. In April, 1902, the Common Council considered both a park improvement bond and also the possible "disposition" of a strip of land on the west side of City Park.<sup>118</sup> The land was to be sold to pay for landscaping in the rest of a reduced City Park. In June the Council asked the City Attorney to advise whether City could sell "a portion of its public parks." The official concluded, fortunately, that the City could not do so without first amending its Charter.<sup>119</sup>

Apparently, with such schemes in the air, the constructive park forces, led by George Marston, Kate Sessions, W.R. Maize and more recently Julius Wangenheim, decided that it was time to take decisive steps for City Park.<sup>120</sup> On August 15, 1902, Mr. Wangenheim proposed at a board meeting of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce that their organization appoint a Park Improvement Committee to obtain a plan for the entire City Park, begin improvements near 6th and Date and solicit funds for the work. Mr. Marston then offered publicly for the first time to pay a professional landscape architect to design the park plan.<sup>121</sup>

In October Marston hired, at a cost to himself of about \$10,000, Samuel Parsons, Jr., to devise the City Park layout. Mr. Parsons had been for fifteen years Superintendent of New York's Central Park and was an ardent disciple and friend of Frederick Law Olmsted. By July 30, 1903, Parsons had completed his design for City Park and work began in the southwest sector of the tract.<sup>123</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The story of San Diego's City Park between August, 1902 and November, 1910, when it was named Balboa Park and the 1915 Exposition preparations began, is nearly as lengthy and intricate as that we have reviewed between 1868 and 1902. The 1902-10 period involved more intense San Diego debate on public parks' purposes and aesthetics and the arduous work of laying out roads, paths and plants. The years after 1902 seem somewhat more glamorous because through Samuel Parsons, his English partner George Cook, Park Improvement Committee Secretary and horticulturist Mary Coulston and Kate Sessions, the City Park design and uses were linked more closely than ever to an unbroken chain of 19th and 18th century Anglo-American public parks and landscaping tradition from Frederick Law Olmsted to Andrew Jackson Downing, Sir Joseph Paxton, John Nash, Humphrey Repton, William Kent and Lancelot

Brown.<sup>124</sup> The 1902-1910 City Park developments and their august ancestry require more attention than we can give here.

This history of City Park in 1868-1902 has presented the major figures, issues and possible motives related to the founding, attempted reductions, actual and proposed uses and tenacious preservation of the 1400 acre tract. Despite rife land speculation in San Diego, City Park remained intact until 1902 mainly due to the efforts of relatively few, although well-placed people who appreciated the unique, mild climate, diverse vegetation and dramatic scenery of San Diego. They had migrated to enjoy those assets and not just to get rich. These individuals faltered at times and allowed some park incursions which later boded ill for it, but generally they stoutly defended City Park and retained their vision of what it could and must become some day for inevitable, growing urban needs. The City Park advocates learned and convinced others, especially from the example of New York's Central Park, that a large, well-designed public park could improve not only the health and spirits of all classes of city residents but also the local tourism, settlement, tax base and economic growth. But beyond that the City Park champions, who got their fill of economic realism in daily work, prized a large park for providing near the hectic town, quietude, chances to reflect, romance, vast views of distant scenery and close observation of colorful, native wildflowers.

---

## Notes

1. Richard W. Amero, *Balboa City or Balboa Park?* (San Diego: Typescript, 1973), p. 6 (unnumbered). Richard W. Amero, *Balboa Park: Fairy City or Country Park*. (San Diego: Xerox typescript, 1974?), p. 1. Both Amero papers are in the California Room, San Diego Public Library. Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Master Plan for Balboa Park, San Diego, California* (San Diego: City of San Diego, June, 1960), p. 12.

A different figure of 1,100 remaining unencumbered park acres in Balboa Park is given by: San Diego Park and Recreation Dept. "Balboa Park Information." (San Diego: 1960), p. 2 (unnumb.). H.C. Hopkins, *History of San Diego: its pueblo lands and water*. (San Diego: 1929), p. 325-6, wrote angrily that after San Diego handed over the first seventeen acres for the Naval Hospital in 1921, which was confirmed by the State in 1922:

"Never again can San Diegans say they have a 1400 acre park. They have nothing of the kind. They have given seventeen acres of it to the richest and most able to pay power in the world. The City now has a park of 1,383 acres. Who will be given the next slice?" Now we know the answer was 'many others,' and sometimes more than once or twice.

2. These major dates, and activities, between 1769 and 1867, are briefly outlined by: Ben F. Dixon, "The Name 'Balboa' and Balboa Park" (San Diego: Typescript, 1955), pp. 3, 9 (unnumb.). In Box File: San Diego Parks, San Diego Historical Society Library and Manuscripts collection (Hereinafter cited as SDHC). For some of these same dates also see: James Mills, *San Diego-*

*Where California Began*: (San Diego: SDHC, 1960), p. 7; Walter G. Smith, *The Story of San Diego* (San Diego: City Printing Co., 1892), pp. 22, 69, 72, 96.

3. William E. Smythe, *History of San Diego, 1542-1907* (San Diego: The History Company, 1907), p. 386.

4. Hopkins, p. 321, see "Minutes of Meetings," San Diego Board of Trustees, Book "A," p. 344.

5. Smythe, p. 617. For a condensed version of Smythe's review of City Park history, 1868-1902, see: Southern Trust and Commerce Bank, *Balboa Park, San Diego. California -- The City Built Around a Park* (San Diego: n.d., ca. 1920) 12 p. foldout photos and text; in Box File, San Diego Parks, SDHC.

Hopkins, p. 322, notes that Smythe erred some in describing the Carruthers incident: "It is difficult to see how she (Carruthers) 'stole a march' on the same Trustees who had the full say of the sale of the land (to her) as well as the setting of it aside for a park."

6. Robert L. Horn, "A History of Balboa Park," *California Garden*, (Fall, 1959, Part 1), p. 9; The nine 160 acre pueblo lots reserved for City Park were 1129, 1130, 1131, 1135, 1136, 1137, 1142, 1143 and 1144 minus the 40 acres sold to Isabella Carruthers at \$4.40 per acre or \$175 for the total. Smythe, p. 617. Hopkins, p. 321, see "Minutes of Meetings," San Diego City Board of Trustees, Book 1, p. 26.

7. Daniel Cleveland, friend of E.W. Morse and a fellow park defender, wrote in 1928(?) that Morse should be recognized as founder of City (later Balboa) Park because: "Largely through his personal efforts and influence, as a prominent and influential citizen of San Diego, he secured the adoption of the (park reservation) ordinance." Daniel Cleveland, "San Diego Pioneer Tells History of Balboa Park," n.d. (1928?), n.p. (*San Diego Union?* n.p. in "Scrapbook of Clara A. Schmucker," p. 24-5, SDHC (hereinafter, "Cleveland/Schmucker").

Hopkins, pp. 319-20, wrote in 1929: "The author has recently inquired of practically all the old timers, and they are agreed that Mr. E.W. Morse was the man responsible."

Mary Gilman Marston, comp., *George White Marston, A Family Chronicle*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1956), V. 2, p. 9, wrote: "The City of San Diego ought to recognize its indebtedness to Ephraim W. Morse for securing for it Balboa Park, and all honor ought to be given him as its founder."

8. Smythe, p. 280. Florence Christman, *The Romance of Balboa Park*. (San Diego: Neyenesch Printers, Inc., 1973), p. 9.

9. Smythe. p. 284.

10. T.D.A. Cockerell, "Kate Olivia Sessions and California Floriculture," *BIOS* (Mount Vernon, Iowa), Vol. XIV, No. 4, Dec. 1943; (in K.O. Sessions Box File, SDHC), p. 168; Mrs. A.E. Horton stated in the *San Diego Sun* of April 27, 1924, that in 1868 her husband asked the City Trustees to set aside a large tract of land for a public park and that, "there was much hilarity over

this, as the new city of San Diego consisted of a few small buildings near the foot of the present Fifth Street." However, Mrs. Horton allowed that E.W. Morse helped her husband select the park site.

In fact Horton may have first conceived the park idea, not only to assist the public but to eventually raise values on his land. The park site chosen by Morse and Horton was immediately east and north of Horton's Addition. The selected site also prevented other realtors from later taking that land and competing with Horton in that prime, high area overlooking the bay or near downtown.

Horn, Part 1, p. 9, emphasizes that contrary to some late 19th century San Diego beliefs, Alonzo Horton did not own and donate the land reserved for City Park.

11. M.G. Marston, V. 11, p. 10.

12. *Letters of E.W. Morse*, (San Diego: March, 1870-Jan. 1871), (at SDHC), Book 1, f. 61. On May 16, 1870, Mr. Morse wrote George Marston:

"I have continually from the very first, urged upon Mr. Horton the advantages in dollars and cents, it would be to him to have shrubbery and plants growing around his house (hotel), but unfortunately he has no natural taste for them, though he has taken a step in the right direction by hiring a gardener & I hope he will keep him."

One looks over the fence with the remark, "Well it does one good to see something green growing -- it looks, as though things would grow if it ever rained, etc., etc."

M.G. Marston, V. 1, p 172, states that Mrs. E.W. Morse also loved to grow a profusion of flowers around their cottage at 10th and G Streets.

13. Cleveland / Schmucker; On August 27, 1904, Morse wrote Horton:

"On looking up the city records I find the enclosed data:

"My recollection is that you and I really located the park. Bush did not go on the ground, but agreed to what we recommended. He and I signed the report, as the committee previously appointed. I don't remember the details, but I am sure the other trustees (Bush and Manasse) took little interest in park matters, and that you were earnestly with me until it was finally clinched. I can think of no other person who did as much as you to save it."

Smythe, p. 284, reports also that: "With characteristic steadfastness he (Morse) was a friend of the park to the end, and stood up for its preservation and improvement, even when others weakened." Smythe, p. 619, states that until his death in 1906, Morse was, one of the park's staunchest friends and in the front of every fight for it."

14. Hopkins, p. 320, gives Smythe's report that Joshua Sloane told a friend, "They want to cut up the park, but I'm damned if they shall do it." Christman, p. 12, states that another friend of Sloane's went so far as to say, "He was the man who first proposed a big park and he urged it on the trustees till they let him have his way."



15. Smythe, p. 169.

16. *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 5/27/15, p. 1; in *Biographical File*, "José Guadalupe Estudillo," SDHC. At the 1915 Exposition in Balboa Park, J.G. Estudillo was called, "surviving founder of Balboa Park." May 26, 1915, 47th anniversary of the resolution reserving City Park, was called "Estudillo Day;- see *San Jacinto Register*, 6/27/15, p. 2, also Biog. File, "J.G. Estudillo.

17. Horn, Part II, Spring, 1960, p. 25.

18. In the late 18th and early 19th century Spanish village of Old San Diego there was the central plaza, albeit dusty and unimproved, considered essential in ancient Spanish and Mediterranean town life. Secondly, Plaza de Pantoja, named for Juan Pantoja de Arriaga who made the first survey of San Diego harbor in 1782, was deeded to the town in 1850 by land developers William H. Davis (an Estudillo in-law) and Andrew B. Gray. (W.G. Smith, p. 96; MacPhail, p. 10). Dates for the first plantings at Plaza de Pantoja vary from 1868 (Carl H. Heilbron, ed., *History of San Diego County* (San Diego: The San Diego Press Club, 1936) p. 153, to 1887 (MacPhail, p. 10).

In 1867, Alonzo Horton set aside New Town Plaza (now Horton Plaza) and later sold it to the City for \$10,000 (Smythe, p. 621).

19. *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 5/27/15, p. 2.

20. *San Diego Union* (hereinafter *SDU*), 11/4/69, p. 2; (column) 3. Editorial, "Our Public Park."

21. E.A. Gutkind, *Urban Development in Western Europe: The Netherlands and Great Britain*, Vol. VI in series, *International History of City Development* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 211-13, 158-9. E.A. Gutkind, *Urban Development in Southern Europe: Spain and Portugal*, Vol. III in series (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1967), p. 127-35. Paul Zucker, *Town and Square. From the Agora to the Village Green* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 238, 242-3. Ervin Y. Galantay, *New Towns: Antiquity to the Present* (N.Y.: George Braziller, 1975), pp. 27, 33.

22. Settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Company bought the forty-five acre Boston Common in 1634 from the Reverend William Blaxton. The Common is considered the oldest public city park in English North America. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston, A Topographical History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 35, 201. Daniel Cleveland wrote in 1928:

"Mr. Morse, born and raised in New England, where every town has a public park- realized that if San Diego was to have a public park it must be gained through the reservation from sale of a part of the pueblo land for that purpose while this land still remained in the ownership of the City." (see M.G. Marston V. 11, p. 8, from an article on E.W. Morse by Daniel Cleveland in the *San Diego Union*, 7/22/1928).

23. On the national influence of Central Park as early as 1868, the founding year of San Diego's City Park, see: John W. Repts, *The Making of Urban America, A History of City Planning in the*

United States (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 336-39.

The *San Diego Union* noted rather proudly in 1869 that while many animals at New York's Central Park zoo required expensive heating in winter,

"Almost any animal can live the year round in the open air in San Diego. Indeed we look forward to the time when not the least of the attraction of this place will be its magnificent Park with its unwonted wealth of vegetable and animal life." (*SDU*, 6/30/99, 2: 1, Editorial)

*The Union* showed familiarity with parks elsewhere in 1869 when it reminded those who said City Park's 1400 acres was too large, that Central Park was over 800 acres, Chicago had 2,000 acres in public parks, Philadelphia had 2,000, London parks were 500 to 1,200 acres each and the Bois de Boulogne had over 2,000 acres. (*SDU*, 11/4/69, 2:3)

24. Hopkins, p. 322.

25. Hopkins, p. 323, says J. Sloane led the petition campaign. Smythe, p. 619, refers only to "prompt and strenuous action by friends of the park" in 1870.

26. Cleveland /Schmucker. Horn, Part 1, p. 16.

27. *SDU* (Weekly), 8/31/71, 3:4.

28. Cleveland/Schmucker.

29. "Petition... to the Senate and Assembly of the State of California, n.d. ("Dec., 1871" pencilled in on both SDHC copies; probable Nov. date), Petition and Ordinances Folder, Balboa Park File, SDHC. Both petition copies have printed: "A true copy. See worn original in hands of Speaker of the Assembly."

30. Cleveland /Schmucker. Richard F. Pourade, *The Glory Years*. Vol. Four of a Series on the Historic Birthplace of California. Series commissioned by James S. Copley (San Diego: Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1964). p. 91.

31. Petition, 1871. City Trustee A.B. McKean, in on the repeal scheme with Taggart, was the only Trustee to sign the petition. He signed "under pressure" from the Public Safety Committee and noted, "concerning cemetery only." The petition requested that besides the Park reservation, cemetery lands "not be used for other purposes than burial."

Smythe, p. 619, states that the petition was signed by "all the leading citizens, and nearly all the voters, of San Diego."

The *San Diego Union* (Weekly), Jan. 4, 1872, 2:4, noted that the people of San Diego were "unanimous" in requesting the legislature not to reduce or do away with the park.

E.W. Morse said that the Trustees had already secretly given deeds to parts of City Park and to 220 acre Mount Hope Cemetery to their speculator friends. Morse predicted that if they persisted, a vigilante committee would hang them. (Pourade, p. 90)

Daniel Cleveland, who helped draw up the 1871 park petition, was a one-time Mayor of San Antonio, Texas (1865), an amateur botanist and naturalist. He founded the San Diego Society of

Natural History and "as a result of his research, several species of ferns bear his name." He was born in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1838 and died in San Diego in 1929. See: Jerry Mac Mullen, *The Southwest Corner. Historical Sketches Appearing in the Sunday Edition of the San Diego Union*. Vol. IX. San Diego: 1964, p. 42-4, SDHC. Another source says Cleveland discovered only one fern species. Letter of June 11, 1935 from Mrs. Winifred Davidson, Ocean Beach, CA, to Beatrice L. Fish; In *Biographical File*, "Daniel Cleveland," SDHC.

32. George W. Marston, *History of San Diego City Parks*. (San Diego: Privately printed?, 1936), p. 5. The Marston pamphlet text is contained in: Heilbron ed., *History of San Diego County*, pp. 153-64. Much of the Marston parks pamphlet is condensed in: H.K. Raymenton, "California Athens" (San Diego: typescript, n.d.), in "San Diego's Parks" Folder, G.W. Marston Collection, SDHC. Horn, Part 1, p. 10.

33. Horn, Part II, p. 17, G.W. Marston, p. 5, wrote: "We have some other things now instead of cactus and coyotes, but how much civilization has destroyed." And Marston wrote that before freeways took more of the park in 1959.

34. *Balboa Park Citizens Study Committee*. Final Report. May 27, 1957 (San Diego: City of San Diego, 1957), p. 2.

35. Horn, Part II, p, 17.

36. *SDU*, 3/19/73, 3:3. Waterworks in City Park were proposed earlier in 1870 as necessary to accommodate expected increased San Diego growth and more irrigation of plants in a more frequently visited park. The growth was to come from completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1868 and increased migration to California. (*SDU*, 6/23/70, 2:3)

In April, 1873 an artesian well was bored to water at 300 feet but insufficient pressure did not bring it to ground level (*SDU*, 4/24/73, 3:3). In May a well was sent down to 100 feet and a steam engine pumped up water at a capacity of 54,000 gallons per hour (*SDU*, 5/16/73, 3:3; Pourade, p. 10 mentions the water capacity).

37. Pourade, p. 108.

38. *Ibid*.

39. San Diego City Clerk's Office (hereinafter CCO), Folder 1, Park-Balboa Park, Miscellaneous, Prior to 1935 (hereinafter B.P.- 1), No document number, but is the first one in folder. 2p. "Preamble & Resolution granting A. Wentscher a portion of City Park for a Powder Magazine."

It is interesting to note that a "powder-house" stood in the middle of Boston Common, a City Park ancestor, in the 18th century (Whitehill, p. 45).

40. Cleveland /Schmucker. Horn, Part 1, p. 10. As early as 1873, the *San Diego Union* suggested that due to the city's expanding population, the six existing schools were overcrowded and another one was needed (*SDU*, 1/19/73, 2: 1, "Provide for Our Public Schools."). The paper

recommended that a 10 acre school site be chosen on high land in the south part of City Park, not far from downtown but away from the fire dangers of built up areas and provided with healthy air and fine views. The Union cited another rationale, later used many times to justify City Park encroachments. That is the school, with landscaped grounds, would be a practical first step toward the improvement of the park."

But in fact the Russ School grounds had in the 1880's, "little or no improvement further than the clearing of the brush away, and the surface was strewn with small pebbles for the most part and poorly adapted to any sport." H.C. Hensley, *Early San Diego, Reminiscences of early days and people*, 3 vols. (San Diego: typescript, n.d.), V. 111, p. 476; Calif. Rm., San Diego Public Library.

In 1957 it was noted that the Russ School descendant, San Diego High School, holds no deed from the City to that park land and remains there mainly by 'squatter's rights' and the fact that the school district's capital and operating costs for that site have been repeatedly approved by the voters. (Balboa Park... Committee, p. 3).

41. *SDU*, 3/29/82, 3:3, "Public Park and Experimental Garden."

42. *SDU*, 12/28/84, 3:3, "Proposed Park Improvements."

43. *SDU*, 12/31/84, 3:1; 1/4/85, 3:1; 1/11/85, 3:2; 1/16/85, 3:1. All articles under "Local Brevities," except 1/11/85, under "The City Trustees."

44. Pourade, p. 18S. Hopkins, p. 324.

45. *SDU*, 12/29/96, 3:2-3.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *SDU*, 12/30/86, 3:4, "The City Park Reserve," Letter to the Editor from "Anti-Monopoly." The letter's view finds some support in the *Union* ad section of the same day (p. 6, c. 2), which contained this notice:

"Daniel Choate, Real Estate Dealer, . . . Owner of ten different additions well located in different parts of the city. Easy payments given to ACTUAL BUILDERS. Secure a home while they are cheap."

48. *Ibid.*

49. *SDU*, 11/4/87, 5:3, "City Trustees-Beneficent Project of the Late J.M. Pierce's Executors."

50. *Ibid.* See: *SDU*, 1/1/99, 1:5; 9/1/99, 6:1,2, on the \$100,000 contribution of Judge Witherby.

51. *SDU*, 11/4/87, 5:3.

52. *SDU*, 12/3/87, 5:5. Hopkins, p. 327. For further details on the text of the Howard deed, see: *SDU*, 1/13/89, 1:5,6, "City Park Charities."

Cleveland/Schmucker incorrectly states that the Woman's Home grant was 20 instead of 5 acres.

53. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 154; The Chamber of Commerce Park Committee, formed by George Marston, J.T. Jenks and H.P. Whitney, asked the Common Council to oppose the State bill confirming the Howard grant and all similar deedings in California. The Council resolved to do so on January 29, 1889 and sent copies of the resolution to all members of the State Legislature on February 5, 1889. See also: M.G. Marston, V. 1, p. 10.

The opposition of Marston and friends to the Howard grant raised some dust in the press. *The Pacific Beach* (Weekly) stated the most frequent arguments: public or private construction would stimulate park improvements and private charitable offers should never be spurned and in sum; "the quibbling should stop and these park charities secured beyond a peradventure. The iron is hot! Strike!" (*The Pacific Beach* [Weekly], V. 1, No. 49, 1/31/89, 3; in Newspaper Box File III, SDHC).

54. *SDU*, 3/15/90, 5:2; 4/27/90, 7:1. Horn, Part II, p. 17. *SDU*, 6/28/91, 6:1.

55. *SDU*, 4/27/90, 7:1, 2.

56. *SDU*, 1/1/99, 1:5; 7/5/03, 7:1-7.

57. Hopkins, p. 327.

58. *Ibid*, fn. 55 above.

59. G. Marston, p. 5. Smythe, p. 619. Ten acres is generally cited as the size of the Ladies Annex Park but see footnote 62 below for the correct acreage, 13.9 acres.

60. The Ladies Annex, San Diego Chamber of Commerce, The Ladies Annex Park Tract Report (San Diego: 1889-90), original MSS. in California Room, San Diego Public Library, p. 3.

61. *Ibid*.

62. Ladies Annex, p. 7.

63. Ladies Annex, pp. 8, 15.

64. Ladies Annex, p. 9.

65. Ladies Annex, p. 121.

66. *Ibid*.

67. Ladies Annex, pp. 121, 93, 27-30.

68. *SDU*, 4/15/90, 4:2; 4/13/90, 4: 1.

69. *SDU*, 4/15/90, 6: 1.

70. Emma Scripps, "She Said It With Flowers," *California Garden*, Autumn, 1953, Vol. 44, No. 3, The Kate - Sessions Issue (San Diego: San Diego Floral Association), p. 7.
71. *SDU*, 11/8/90, 8:2.
72. G. Marston, p. 6.
73. Christman, p. 21.
74. *Ibid.* Horn, Part II, p. 17.
75. G. Marston, p. 6.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *The San Diego World* (New Series), V. I, N. 1, May 3, 1800, p. 1; in Newspaper Box File IV, SDHC. *SDU*, 5/21/91, 2:1; 5/27/91, 2:1.
78. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 267, Petition of March 9, 1891.
79. CCO, B.P.-1, No doc. no. Petition of September 17, 1890.
80. Cockerell, op. cit., pp. 169-70.
81. Cockerell, p. 172.
82. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 313, Filed: January 1892.
83. Ordinance No. 153, City Ordinances Folder, Box File #3-Early Correspondence, G.W. Marston Collection, SDHC.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Horn, Part II, p. 18.
86. *Los Angeles Times*, 4/28/95, n.p., "Flower Culture. San Diego Woman Who Is A Winner." In *Kate O. Sessions Scrapbook*, belonged to Alice C. Carroll; at SDHC.
87. *Ibid.*, fn. 86.
88. Alice M. Rainford, "Looking Back," *California Garden*, Autumn, 1953, p. 10. Horn, Part II, p. 18.
89. *SDU*, 9/22/35, n.p., Ada Perry, "Kate Sessions' Title 'Mother of Park' Earned One," in *Kate Sessions Notebook*, Kate Sessions Box File, SDHC.

90. CCO, B. P. - 1, Doc. No. 311, Filed: February 1, 1892, p. 1.
91. CCO, B. P. - 1, Doc. No. 312, Filed: October 23, 1892, p. 1.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
93. CCO, B.P.-1, No. doc. no., follows Doc. 374.
94. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 480, Filed: 6/5/93.
95. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 481, Filed: 6/93.
96. *SDU*, 12/31/93, 4: 1.
97. *SDU*, 11 /30/94, 4:2.
98. *Ibid.*
99. CCO, B. P. - 1, Doc. No. 1312, Filed: 1/ 18/97.
100. *Ibid.*, 1 p. letter of 1/21/97, attached to Doc. 1312 above.
101. *SDU*, 1/20/97, 2:3.
102. *SDU*, 1/23/97,2:3.
103. *Ibid.*
104. *SDU*, 2/6/97, 2:2.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.*
107. CCO, Folder 1, Parks-Balboa Park-Streets, Through, 1896-1930 (hereinafter B.P.-2), Doc. No. 4240, Filed: January 21, 1899.
108. *Ibid.*, *San Diego Sun* article, n.d., pasted onto Doc. No. 4240.
109. *SDU*, 3/5/99, 5:2; 2/26/1901, S:3.
110. *SDU*, 9/1/99,6:1, 2.
111. *SDU*, 9/4/99, 7:1-3.
112. *Ibid.*, fn. 110.



113. *Ibid.*, fn. 111.

114. *Ibid.*

115. *SDU*, 7/29/01, 8: 1.

116. *Ibid.*

117. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 1322, Filed: December 2, 1901.

118. *SDU*, 4/8/02, 3:1,2.

119. CCO, B.P.-1, Doc. No. 2003, Filed: 6/23/02.

120. We see from preceding events that the August 15, 1902 action was not just taken due to Mr. Wangenheim's ire that the park was unimproved, as described by: Julius Wangenheim, "An Autobiography," *California Historical Society Journal*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, Dec., 1956, p. 357. See also Horn, Part III, p. 25; G. Marston, p. 6.

121. M.G. Marston, V. II, p. 11.

122. *SDU*, 10/21/02, 7:1,2.

123. G.W. Marston, p. 8. *SDU*, 7/31/03, 5:1; 7/2/03, 3:1,2. On July 4, 1903, 600 trees were planted under the auspices of two fraternal orders and the Park Committee, but Parsons and his partner George Cooke were not present until July 30 to supervise park work.

124. Derek Clifford, *A History of Garden Design* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), see chapters VI-XI. George F. Chadwick, *The Park and the Town* (N.Y.: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), see Chapters 1, 2 and 9.

[Photographs from this article.](#)

---

**Gregory E. Montes** graduated from Yale University School of Architecture in 1972 with a Master of Architecture degree. He now works as Associate Planner with the San Bernardino County Planning Department. The article published here was an award winning paper in the Copley Books Awards Graduate/General Division at the San Diego History Center's 1976 Institute of History.



San Diego History Center, 1649 El Prado, Suite 3, San Diego, California 92101 -  
Phone: (619) 232-6203

# San Diego's City Park, 1868-1902

an Early Debate on Environment and Profit

[by Gregory E Montes](#)

[Back to the Article](#)



**A view of City Park's Sixth Street Canyon** around 1900. Formal establishment of City Park, now called Balboa Park, took place in 1868 when Ephraim W. Morse and Alonzo E. Horton's resolution for establishment of a park reserve of 1400 acres was adopted by the San Diego Board of Trustees. Debate on how this vast amount of acreage should be improved and utilized would continue for years afterward. [Photo 1473-b]



**Ephraim W. Morse**, a prime mover behind creation of City Park. Morse, a native of Amesbury, Massachusetts, first came to California in 1849 during the Gold Rush. In 1850 he settled in San Diego seeking a milder climate and took up the profession of merchant and realtor.



**Jose Guadalupe Estudillo** served as president of the San Diego City Board of Trustees when City Park was founded.



**The Women's Home Association about 1894.** This photo was not included in the original Journal article but is shown here for the on-line reader's interest. [Photo 3237]



**The burning of the Women's Home Association in 1897.** Situated on City Park land, the Home had been created to shelter poor and indigent women. Interestingly, it burned down only one month after the city had insured it for \$4,000. [Photo 3238]



**Kate O. Sessions** contributed greatly to the improvement of City Park. In exchange for a city lease to use a portion of the park as a nursery, Miss Sessions annually furnished the city with 300 ornamental trees for park, street or school ground planting, plus an additional 100 trees to be planted on park land.



**Arbor Day planting in the park was encouraged by Sessions.** She made certain that San Diego residents were reminded of the date's approach each year. [Photo 16019-1]



**The park as seen from Sixth and Date Streets.**



**The Cabrillo Canyon "freeway" traversing the park about 1903. [Photo 1560]**



San Diego History Center, 1649 El Prado, Suite 3, San Diego, California 92101 -  
Phone: (619) 232-6203