

Balboa Park Transformed: The Panama-California Exposition Landscape

By Nancy Carol Carter

Introduction

The 1915 Panama-California Exposition changed Balboa Park forever. It took park development and landscape in a direction never anticipated by its creators and early designers, including Kate O. Sessions, Samuel Parsons, Jr., and John Charles Olmsted. The insertion of buildings and a lavish landscape on an unimproved park mesa disregarded expensively purchased park planning advice and set the course for today's congested and water-intensive park center.

This article reviews the early history of Balboa Park landscape planning and



Exposition landscape supervisor Paul G. Thiene moved among work sites on horseback. Trees were planted along the Paseo del Prado in 1913. ©SDHC #81:12192.

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Canyon above Date Street in Balboa Park, 1912. ©SDHC #1473-B.

development. It sets aside the myth of Sessions' involvement in landscaping the 1915 Panama-California Exposition grounds and brings two "accidental landscapers"—Frank P. Allen, Jr. and Paul G. Thiene—out of the shadows. Instead of following the advice of experienced experts, Allen and Thiene turned away from the use of native plants and drought-resistant landscaping, embracing a flower-filled landscape with grassy lawns. The gardens of Balboa Park were overwhelmingly popular with visitors who would go on to recreate similar high-maintenance displays in their own yards. The "Garden Fair" was expensive, costing San Diego approximately \$400,000 in grading and planting alone. The result was a landscape as fanciful, improbable, and beautiful as the Spanish Colonial Revival buildings it showcased.

Before the Exposition Bloomed

When farsighted San Diego officials set aside 1,400 acres of pueblo land as "City Park" 1868, they did not at the same time earmark funding for the park or create a plan of park development. For almost four decades, the vast acreage reserved as a park remained in its natural state.¹

For many residents, the lack of recreational amenities and landscape improvement made it difficult to think of the dusty, chaparral-covered expanse

as a “real” park, or any kind of special place worthy of care and preservation. The lands and canyons of City Park were used carelessly: for dumping, target practice, animal slaughter, storage of dangerous explosives and other activities incompatible with the purposes of a public park. City Park’s vast acreage tantalized avaricious land speculators and property developers.² This same abundance made it easy for the City Trustees to parcel out park land for alternative uses. The mere survival of City Park was under constant threat from those who would repurpose the land.

When the first park improvements came, they were intermittent, grassroots efforts by concerned citizens eager to show that the park could be improved. Lack of consistent garden care, inadequate water and vandalism doomed all but two of the early privately undertaken planting projects within the park.³ Horticulturist and nursery owner Kate O. Sessions presented the first comprehensive landscape design plan for City Park in 1889, but the city did not act on the idea. Three years later, Sessions was appointed to the unpaid position of City Gardener. She had just leased a small corner of City Park for her nursery business. The



Kate Sessions, 1932. ©SDHC #4645.

unusual lease agreement required Sessions to establish “an experimental nursery and garden” and extracted payment in the form of trees which Sessions was obligated to provide to the city and plant in the park.⁴ Under this arrangement, Sessions undertook a sustained ten-year park planting program. At the same time, her nursery, with its seasonal displays of blooming roses, chrysanthemums, violets, and other colorful flowers, became a popular place to visit.⁵ The Sessions nursery was, in effect, a demonstration garden—living proof that botanical beauty could be coaxed from the formidable scrub lands of City Park. Her successful work encouraged the next major step in park landscaping.

Understanding the long-term value of a large urban park to the City of San Diego, the Chamber of Commerce established a Park Improvement Committee in 1902. This was an end run around a city government that could not be moved to care for its park, but city officials acquiesced to private work in the park. Acting on the advice of Kate Sessions, George Marston and others, the Chamber hired Samuel Parsons, Jr., one of the nation’s most experienced and best known landscape architects, to create a comprehensive plan of development for every acre of City Park.⁶



Mules grading road in Balboa Park, 1911. ©SDHC #2003:21.107.

The “Genius” of San Diego’s Park

Parsons came to San Diego in December 1902.⁷ In the planning tradition of landscape architects, he “consulted the genius” of City Park, meaning that he looked for attractive natural features that should be preserved and enhanced by his landscape plan. Parsons found the park, with its glorious views of mountains and ocean, to be both beautiful and unique in the world. He did not try to overlay a standard design on City Park, but instead suggested making a regional statement. Unlike parks that might be found in New York, Paris or London, regional sensibility in San Diego suggested very restrained planting and use of native or well-adapted exotics appropriate to the climate. Park mesas should be largely unadorned, Parsons said, because the views were so decorative.

Parsons’ plan aimed to “preserve and accentuate natural beauties of a very unusual kind, which we trust may be kept free from interjection of all foreign extraneous and harmful purposes or objects.” He was warning San Diego not to bring their city into the park. If absolutely necessary to put structures in the park, they should be kept within a narrow band at the southern edge of the park. Likewise, Parsons suggested that any formal gardens of seasonal flowers be located in the same area, near downtown.

The Parsons plan reflected the philosophy of landscape architects of the time. Witnessing the unpleasant effects of the Industrial Revolution on cities, they believed that bucolic and quiet urban parks functioned as an important safety valve by offering repose from city life. San Diego was not a busy metropolis like New York City where Parsons worked, but from his vast experience, he was inviting San Diegans to imagine a future in which growth would enhance the public value of the open land preserved in their City Park.

As the Parsons plan was implemented, new park roads, paths and landscaping showed San Diego that large-scale park development was more feasible than had been imagined. Encouraged about their park, voters amended the city charter in 1905 to set aside a percentage of property taxes to create a fund for park development and the first Board of Park Commissioners was appointed. The Chamber of Commerce now stepped back from direct park involvement and allowed the Parsons plan to guide city work in the park.⁸ This changed in 1909 when San Diego decided to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal with a world's fair.

The Panama-California Exposition Company voted a preference for using City Park for the 1915 celebration and expressed an expectation that city bonds would be floated for park improvements.⁹ Parsons was brought back to assess the progress of San Diego parks and made a final contribution with his 1910 report. It included a suggestion that City Park be given a more prepossessing name in advance of the exposition, resulting in its renaming to Balboa Park.¹⁰ Parsons and his original landscaping plan then faded from local memory as exposition planning charted an entirely new direction for the park.

John Charles Olmsted Stands on Principle

Resolving to hire top professionals to create the exposition, the Panama-California Exposition's Building and Grounds Committee started a talent search in 1910. They scored a public relations coup when the nation's leading landscape architecture firm signed on. The Olmsted Brothers were in demand across the country and were experienced designers of exposition grounds.¹¹

By early November 1910, John Charles Olmsted was in San Diego.¹² He set to work designing exposition grounds on the Balboa Park site designated by the Exposition Company and approved by the Board of Park Commissioners.¹³ It was at the southern side of the park, conveniently near downtown San Diego. This site comported with the planning principles



An enchanted forest of eucalyptus and acacia.
©SDHC #80:4584.



Frank P. Allen, Jr. stands third from the right, c. 1915. ©SDHC #82:14142.

of both Parsons and Olmsted. If man-made structures had to be brought into an urban park, the intrusion should be limited and kept to the park perimeter. Olmsted quickly developed a general plan for the Panama-California Exposition and specified some new landscaping for Balboa Park. He designed, built and staffed an exposition nursery to propagate and cultivate the millions of plants that would be needed for the exposition grounds.¹⁴

Olmsted's exposition plan was fatally undermined by two other bright young professionals brought to San Diego by the exposition's Building and Grounds Committee, Frank P. Allen, Jr. and Bertram Goodhue. Both disliked the south side location, favoring instead the park's elevated central mesa as an exposition building site. Allen, proven builder of expositions and Director of Works for the Panama-California Exposition, liked the additional space and more accommodating topography.¹⁵ Lead architect Goodhue, meanwhile, knew his buildings would be more imposing if placed on the higher ground of the mesa.¹⁶ The two men audaciously developed an alternative to the Olmsted Plan and used it to garner support.¹⁷ Their persistent lobbying for the new location played into the hands of local businessmen who saw financial advantages in building the exposition at a further remove from downtown San Diego.¹⁸

Opposition to the Olmsted Plan culminated in a September 1, 1911, decision by the Building and Grounds Committee to override Olmsted and move the exposition to the central mesa of Balboa Park.¹⁹ Olmsted did not hesitate when informed of the new building site. As a matter of professional principle, the Olmsted Brothers firm resigned from the Panama-California Exposition. Olmsted

believed that building an exposition in the heart of Balboa Park was a needless and irreversible sacrifice of San Diego's most unique and valuable civic asset. He refused to allow the Olmsted Brothers firm to be a party to "the ruin of Balboa Park,"²⁰ and was saddened by a decision leading to its "outrageous disfigurement."²¹ He accurately predicted that this incursion would be the beginning of a more widespread invasion into the park's once peaceful interior. Drawing on his long professional experience, like Parsons before him, Olmsted invited San Diego to take a longer view and to protect the priceless tranquility and open space of its urban park.

Stunned by the abrupt resignation of the Olmsteds, exposition officials, along with the chagrined Allen and Goodhue, made frantic attempts to bring the Olmsted Brothers back to the project. However, the firm quickly moved to sever all Panama-California Exposition business ties, including the reassignment of the Olmsted employees who were overseeing the thriving plant nursery established for the exposition.²²

Expert Consensus: Sessions, Parsons and Olmsted

Many San Diegans mistakenly believe that Kate O. Sessions landscaped Balboa Park in advance of the 1915 exposition. In fact, Sessions' active planting within the park ended in 1903 when her ten-year lease of park land expired. She retained a lively interest in the horticultural development of the park throughout her life and was remembered as a valued local consultant to both professional landscape architects hired for Balboa Park. She spent substantial time with Parsons after his hiring in 1902 and Olmsted after his arrival late in 1910.²³

Sessions domesticated native plants and was open to using exotic (non-native) plants in San Diego landscapes if they were practical choices. She looked for new plants from parts of the world with a climate similar to San Diego's and for species that did not require irrigation. She consistently advised against grassy lawns because of their water requirements. Her thinking was very much in line with the recommendations made by



Paul Thiene excelled at mixing plants into attractive groupings, as along these El Prado buildings. ©SDHC #8125-20.



A great tropical bouquet awaited visitors to the Botanical Building, 1915. SDHC #1467.

Parsons and Olmsted for Balboa Park: that landscape choices needed to suit the San Diego climate, soils and rainfall. The Parsons plan recommended that much of Balboa Park remain in its natural state and that formal planting be kept to a minimum.

Olmsted, who had lived in California as a young man and worked on landscape projects across the country, was cognizant of regional differences and aimed to create landscape designs appropriate to the place and its ecology. For the Panama-California Exposition, the Olmsted operation consulted with Kate Sessions, Los Angeles native plant expert Theodore Payne, and the superintendent of Golden Gate Park in

San Francisco, John McLaren. They ingeniously asked San Diego residents to donate cuttings to the exposition nursery. Not only was this a money saver and a way to stir public interest, but it also identified plants already proven to thrive in this region. Local gardeners responded generously with thousands of starts for roses, ferns, vines, shrubs and other plants.²⁴ In addition, the Olmsted nursery staff began to expertly propagate native plants of San Diego and to move full-sized trees onto the exposition grounds.²⁵

Balboa Park was an ideal place to practice a new Olmsted planting technique developed for dry western climates. It preserved and enhanced natural chaparral lands. Underbrush would be cleared, leaving behind native flowering plants, young oaks and hardwood shrubs. Then attractive native and compatible plants would be added to the semi-cleared chaparral lands. New plants might need some water to become established, but soon the entire tract would be self-sustaining and dry-farmed.²⁶

This “new native park typology for the American West,” the managed, naturalistic landscaping that Olmsted envisioned, aligned with Parsons’ recommendation that San Diego aim to make a unique regional statement with its naturally magnificent park.²⁷ Olmsted described his landscape ideas at a meeting of the San Diego Floral Association shortly after arriving in San Diego and spoke to the local newspapers. Inspiration for the more formal landscaping of the exposition would be found in the Mediterranean gardens of Italy and Spain,

places where rainfall was also scarce and seasonal. These gardens were exemplars for San Diego, Olmsted explained, because they used flora indigenous to their climate, incorporated hardscape (stone and tile walls, terraces and arcades) and did not rely on “the lawn effect.”²⁸

Although Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted shared similar views about Balboa Park landscaping, they played no role in preparing the park for the Panama-California Exposition nor did they substantially influence the design. Sessions was in her mid-fifties, busily operating her nursery in Mission Hills. She sold plants to the exposition, but her interests and expertise did not extend to organizing and supervising a massive multiyear park development project.²⁹ Parsons had wanted to return to San Diego for the exposition landscape job, but was edged out by the selection of the Olmsted Brothers. Then, just when it was time for exposition landscaping to get underway, the Olmsteds resigned and withdrew their experienced employees. The proficient exposition nursery lived on, but the nuanced design sensibilities of John Charles Olmsted left town with him.

Ironically, the ideas of these experts—San Diego’s preeminent horticulturist and the two most famous landscape architects of their day—the three people who had most carefully studied and considered the appropriate landscape for Balboa Park, were largely ignored when it came time to execute the grandest design and planting project in the history of the park.



Exposition visitors found shady pergolas and a plentiful supply of benches. ©SDHC #87.



The sweet scent of lilies perfumed the Garden of Montezuma (Alcazar Garden). SDHC #8125-12.

The Accidental Exposition Landscapers

Although not widely recognized for this work, Frank P. Allen, Jr. and Paul G. Thiene were the landscapers of the Panama-California Exposition.³⁰ Each was hired at the exposition in a different capacity, then propelled into landscaping responsibilities by the Olmsted resignation.³¹

Allen, the exposition Director of Works, had promoted the central mesa building site in opposition to the Olmsted Brothers' aesthetics and design plans. At the same time, Allen was caught off guard by their resignation and was surely mortified by his role in depriving the Panama-California Exposition of the talent and prestige of the Olmsted firm. Perhaps as a way to make amends to his corporate bosses, or from a sense of duty, Allen stepped up to assume responsibility for overseeing landscaping of the exposition. This added a substantial work load to his already heavy responsibilities, but obviated an embarrassing and possibly fruitless search for a successor.

While the Olmsted resignation brought consternation to Panama-California officials, one low-level employee saw opportunity. Paul G. Thiene understood that his exposition nursery supervisors would be leaving San Diego with the Olmsted exodus. He promptly wrote to Allen, asking for a promotion.³² The latter desperately needed help once he had agreed to take over landscape responsibilities. He promoted Thiene to Nursery Supervisor. Before long, in recognition of Thiene's

ambition, supervisory abilities and horticultural expertise, Allen promoted him again to Exposition Landscape Supervisor.

Securing an exposition nursery job as a sub-foreman earlier in 1911 had been a salvation for Thiene. He had relocated to San Diego in 1910, purchased land in Old Town and started the Ramona Nursery. Business was slow and his financial reserves exhausted when he was hired at the exposition. With the Olmsted departure, and its unexpected opportunity for advancement, Thiene proved more than capable of handling complex landscape projects and directing large teams of workers. Additionally, he had a designer's eye.

Allen and Thiene approached their work in Balboa Park from a completely different perspective than that of Sessions, Parsons, and Olmsted. They had little time for consultation or reflection on earlier ideas, although Allen put himself through a crash course of landscape reading and tried to learn something of local growing conditions. They had a mandate to landscape just the exposition grounds—a 640 acre island within Balboa Park.³³ They were not urban park planners and did not have to consider the park as a whole or the long-term impact of their plant choices, although the landscaping—funded by city bond money—was to be one of the permanent enhancements left in Balboa Park after the exposition.

Unconstrained by well-considered principles of landscape design for urban parks or the environmental sensibilities of more experienced horticulturists, Allen and Thiene relied on their own landscape references, all from well-watered parts of the country. Allen grew up in the upper Midwest and had lived on the verdant coasts of Washington and Oregon. Thiene was a German immigrant who first lived in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and, immediately before coming to San Diego, was a resident of Portland, Oregon.

Together Allen and Thiene changed the types of plants being cultivated at the nursery and began scraping away native vegetation on Balboa Park's central mesa. They called on the traditional park and garden aesthetics of English romanticism to create a densely planted, lushly green, vine draped, flower-filled exposition landscape with plenty of grassy lawns. San Diego's mild climate was celebrated with a lavish overlay of tropical accents.

The work of these accidental landscapers was a great popular success. "Whoever loves flowers and trees will find it hard to leave this exposition," wrote an enthralled *Sunset* contributor, "never has there been such an exposition, one vast botanical garden, the finest, rarest specimens of plant life growing and thriving in open air."³⁴ Captivated visitors and writers used every superlative in praising the landscape beauty of the Panama-California Exposition.³⁵ Others simply declared that the gardens of the exposition were the product of a magic wand, a paradise on earth, a new Eden.



The Lipton Tea Pavilion and plantation was next to the model farm and orchard. ©SDHC #84:14791.

In creating this botanical wonderland, Allen and Thiene made plant choices and design decisions for 1915 that popularized a contrived and water-dependent landscape style that continues to influence Southern California. Furthermore, they helped to institutionalize a basic climatic misunderstanding that confuses frost-free regions with tropical plant zones. But frost-free does not mean tropical. The difference is the rainfall disparity between a Mediterranean climate like San Diego's and places soaked by tropical downpours.

Favorite Exposition Gardens and Landscape Displays

Travelers from Chicago and other winter climates were dazzled by the exposition's opening day show of bright flowers. While their home gardens hibernated under a blanket of snow, visitors saw living proof of San Diego's mild January climate. Ten thousand blooming poinsettia shrubs blazed against the creamy walls of the new buildings and proclaimed the official red and yellow colors of the exposition. Adding to the pleasure (and publicity value) was the rarity of the poinsettia in most parts of the country. In 1915 a single poinsettia bloom cost one dollar at Christmastime in New York, the equivalent of about \$25 today.³⁶

The opening day floral display was carefully planned to impress, as were all other plantings throughout the year. In a descriptive essay on the Panama-California Exposition for *The Architect*, Allen wrote that as much care was given to the design

of the landscape as had been lavished on the buildings. "Holding the interest of the visitor" was the overriding objective, with the result that long, straight walkways were avoided in favor of paths that "swing easily from one view to another." Along a canyon rim one might see "a jungle of palm and bamboo," giant ferns, rich bloom and undergrowth resembling the tropics.³⁷ Use of many different plants in novel groupings was a signature design technique at the exposition. One source estimates that two million plants of 1,200 varieties were used. There were 350 kinds of trees and 85 different vines.³⁸ In 1912 alone, 50,000 shrubs were planted on the exposition grounds.³⁹ When Thiene created a comprehensive list of exposition plants for the official guidebook, it filled 25 pages.⁴⁰

Within the framework of overall attention to landscape and rich planting across the exposition grounds, there were special features, all well-described in San Diego Floral Association's *California Garden* magazine. "A Monthly Excursion Through Exposition Grounds" was written by a horticultural expert who botanically identified plants and appraised the ways they were used.⁴¹

Three formal flower gardens charmed visitors. The "Garden of Montezuma" was situated just inside the west entrance. Geometric walkways divided formal flower beds planted with ever-changing displays. Picturesque street lamps lighted the garden at night and a large vine-covered pergola provided shade during the day. A peacock was likely to stroll out of the dense green eucalyptus forest sheltering the south side of the garden. The stately California Tower rose to the north. Balboa Park visitors today know this area as the Alcazar Garden. It was renamed and given a Moorish design makeover for the 1935 exposition. The eucalyptus forest to the south gave way to a parking lot.⁴²

Across the Prado, the less elaborate "North Gardens" provided a quiet place to contemplate the dome and tower of the California Building while resting on heavy Italian benches. Surrounded by acacia, eucalyptus, and other trees, a central meadow and wildflower area was seasonally enlivened by a changing show of bright flowers, including a Canna Lily display that earned a special mention from architect Carleton Winslow in his book on the exposition.⁴³ Today's Old Globe Theater complex occupies the location of this 1915 garden.

The Southern California Counties Building was fronted by the largest and most stylized garden of the exposition. Perversely, the Southern California exhibitors set out to convey English formalism and, indeed, the garden would have been at home in a London park. Within crossing walkways, ten separate square and rectangular flower beds were laid out, each encircled by a low hedge and a wide border of grass. Color and types of flowers varied with each bed, presenting a patchwork of bright blooms. Two large curved beds bracketed the geometric layout. Trees were strategically placed among the flower beds, including a young *Ficus macrophylla*



The Botanical Building in Balboa Park, 2015. Editors' collection.

that has continued to grow since being planted in 1914. The rest of the garden is gone, but this Morton Bay fig centenarian has become a state champion in the California Register of Big Trees and is a long-time favorite of Balboa Park visitors. It stands between Spanish Village and the San Diego Museum of Natural History.

With enough water, even temperamental tropical plants can thrive in San Diego, but the Botanical Building ensured ideal conditions for rare plants. Many exposition visitors had their first encounter with the alluring green world of a lath house, having already been charmed by the reflecting ponds with colorful water lilies in front of the building. Many people saw their first Tree fern, blooming Rhododendron, Anthurium, Papaya plant, Staghorn fern, Bird of Paradise and open air orchids within this “lath palace.” In 1915 a long glasshouse extended out the back of the Botanical Building. Songbirds trilled and ever more exotic plants inhabited that steamy environment. Thiene went to great lengths to acquire rare water plants for the glasshouse pond and equatorial flowering vines to trail languidly from above.

By walking north, past the Botanical Building, to the present day location of the Children’s Zoo, visitors came upon the Japanese Garden and Tea Pavilion. The tea house, garden bridges, gates, and lanterns were all shipped in from Japan. The structures were assembled with wooden pegs by Japanese workmen. Visiting gardeners created an authentic Japanese-style garden. Its horticultural highlights were a 100 year-old Sugi pine (the national tree of Japan), a Ginkgo tree, and a magnificent wisteria vine. Paths and a water garden with colorful carp completed the setting. Green tea was served in the Pavilion.⁴⁴

For a different cup of tea, it was possible to visit the exposition's tea plantation. Sir Thomas Lipton decided to test Southern California as a tea-growing area by shipping in 200 tea trees from his commercial plantations in Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). He brought along a crew of Sinhalese gardeners and harvesters. Very few exposition visitors had seen tea trees under cultivation, let alone been served a cup of tea from freshly harvested and processed tea leaves.⁴⁵

An attractively planted pond at the base of the Cabrillo Bridge was another visitor favorite. Called Laguna del Puente or Laguna Cabrillo it provided an enjoyable overlook down into the canyon. A chorus of singing frogs perched among the water plants and surrounding papyrus, lotus, rushes, bamboo and Pampas grass were reflected in the water.⁴⁶ While that feature has completely disappeared, other 1915 landscapes are almost unchanged. Pepper Grove during the exposition was a place to escape the bustle of the El Prado area, to relax with a picnic lunch and to find play areas for children. In 1915, visitors were reminded that the softly weeping California pepper trees were symbolic of the state's mission past. Palm Canyon was created in 1915 as an overt celebration of the San Diego climate.⁴⁷ Additional plantings over the years developed it into a botanically important palm collection, still offering pleasure and education for the hardy canyon hiker.

The Panama-California Exposition, as proof of San Diego's year-around mild climate, announced that it would be open during all of 1915. This was a logistical nightmare for landscapers expected to maintain the high standard of a horticultural wonderland. To perpetually refresh all gardens over a full year, the nursery had to retain a huge inventory of plants in all stages of development.



Alcazar Garden, Balboa Park, 2015. Editors' collection.

Thousands of other plants were kept in emergency reserve in case a frost or other disaster killed entire planted areas or if a whole nursery crop failed.

Upkeep was unending, particularly in the formal gardens. Beds were inspected daily for drooping or dying plants. All major work had to be done outside of visitor hours, so crews worked at night to replace plants or totally replant the beds to keep them looking fresh. Early morning crews watered flowers and other thirsty plants before the exposition gates opened.⁴⁸ The grassy lawns of the exposition required high maintenance and heavy watering during most of the year. The generous use of lawns and non-native flowering plants sharply distanced the landscape, as created in 1915, from the style proposed by earlier Balboa Park planners.⁴⁹

Following the Money to Landscape Success

Allen and Thiene overcame obstacles by working compulsively and employing their epic organizational and supervisory skills. Still, all the energy and talent of this dynamic pairing may not have been enough to produce and maintain a picture-perfect landscape without one other asset: a great deal of money. The generous funding for exposition landscaping is a largely untold story, but is essential to understanding the success attained in converting an unadorned mesa of Balboa Park into an acclaimed “magic garden [in] place of the desert.”⁵⁰

The funding source was \$1.5 million set aside from Park Improvement Bonds. These funds were tapped by the Board of Park Commissions to pay their contractor, the Panama-California Exposition Company, for building and landscape improvements within the exposition grounds. There is a full accounting in a 1916 exposition audit report.⁵¹

Landscape expenses totaled \$408,747.⁵² In addition, \$427,000 was spent on pergolas, benches and other garden furniture while Palm Canyon landscaping cost \$169,000. A \$437,000 irrigation system was installed. Balboa Park’s recalcitrant soil was forced into fecundity by adding \$203,000 worth of top soil and manure.⁵³

The “accidental landscapers” Allen and Thiene were enormously successful in meeting the challenges placed before them late in 1911. Their teamwork was productive and transformational. They deserve every plaudit, but in the end, funding levels dictated what they could accomplish. The scale of exposition landscaping success was ratcheted up to its pinnacle of triumph by the enormous financial investment made by the people of San Diego who had voted for the Park Improvement Bonds that paid for all the landscaping at the Panama-California Exposition.

NOTES

1. For more details on the neglectful early history of Balboa Park, landscape efforts and the hiring of the first landscape planner, see Nancy Carol Carter, "The Trees of Balboa Park 1910" *The Journal of San Diego History* (hereafter *JSDH*) 56, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 137-153 and Nancy Carol Carter, "Mary B. Coulston: Unsung Planner of Balboa Park," *JSDH* 58, no. 3 (June 2012): 177-202.
2. Even as exposition planning was underway, the San Diego Board of Park Commissions was fending off efforts to purchase pieces of Balboa Park for housing development. In 1912, speculators offered \$600,000 for 240 acres of the park. Letter, McFadden & Buxton Real Estate Co. to Board of Park Commissioners, September 3, 1912, San Diego (City) Board of Park Commissioners Correspondence, Box 1, File 1-20, San Diego Public Library (hereafter Park Commissioners SDPL).
3. Park improvements, including well-established trees planted by the early-day Golden Hill neighborhood, may still be seen on the southeast corner of Balboa Park. Likewise, planting by Kate O. Sessions between 1892 and 1903 still lends a well-established appearance to the northwest corner, near Upas Street and Sixth Avenue.
4. The lease required 300 trees annually for city use and 100 trees for the park. The lease was approved as Ordinance #153 by the San Diego City Common Council, Feb. 17, 1892. Elizabeth C. MacPhail, *Kate Sessions: Pioneer Horticulturist* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1976), 51.
5. The newspapers ran stories about which flowers "Miss Sessions" had in bloom and visitors turned out by the hundreds. During these years Sessions earned the "Mother of Balboa Park" appellation later bestowed upon her and introduced many species of trees and plants to San Diego.
6. Samuel Parsons, Jr. (1844-1923) was born into a family of horticulturists. He worked with the famous Calvert Vaux who with Frederick Law Olmsted had designed New York's Central Park. Parsons won commissions to design public parks, private estates, and cemeteries in more than 20 states. He served as superintendent of Central Park and was president of the American Society of Landscape Architects.
7. For a fuller account of Parsons' work in San Diego, see Richard W. Amero, "Samuel Parsons Finds Xanadu in San Diego," *JSDH* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3-23.
8. Gregory Montes, "San Diego's City Park 1902-1910 From Parsons To Balboa," *JSDH* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 11.
9. Exposition Director-General Charles Collier said that the city would eventually spend a great deal of money upgrading City Park, so why not spend in advance of the exposition. "Preliminary Plan for Exposition is Outlined," *The San Diego Union*, September 8, 1909, 1:3. Eight months later, after some possible derailments of the exposition were avoided, the Exposition Company adopted a resolution calling on the city to "vote bonds in the sum of \$1,000,000 to be expended in park improvements for exposition purposes." "Exposition Stockholders Endorse Terms of Compromise Proposals by San Franciscans," *The San Diego Union*, May 8, 1910, 9:1-4.
10. Samuel Parsons, Jr., [Report] *To the Board of Park Commissioners, June 30, 1910*. For the full story of the name change from City Park to Balboa Park, see Nancy Carol Carter, "Naming Balboa Park: Correcting the Record," *JSDH* 56, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2010): 31-42.
11. "Committee Selects Olmsted to Plan Park and Fair Improvements," *The San Diego Union*, November 10, 1910, Sec. 2, 9:1. Traveling to job sites was the province of John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920), one-half of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm and heir to the consummate reputation of his step-father Frederick Law Olmsted. The brothers undertook more than 3,500 commissions all across the United States and were, in 1910 and for many years afterwards, at the top of their profession.
12. "Eastern Architect is Here to Plan Grounds for Exposition," *The San Diego Union*, November 6, 1910, Sec. 3, 1:1.

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13. "Director-General Outlines Plans for San Diego Fair," *The San Diego Union*, June 19, 1910, 25:2-3.
14. This nursery eventually covered 35 acres of propagation beds and more than 100 growing beds. An inventory showed that seven million plants had been propagated. "Panama-California 1915 Fair is Magnificent Triumph of Art and Enterprise," *The San Diego Union*, March 28, 1914, 11:2-5.
15. Frank P. Allen, Jr. (1881-1943) was an obvious candidate when the Panama-California Exposition Company set out to "hire the best." He had the matchless experience of helping to build two other world's fairs. Allen trained in architecture and engineering under his father in Michigan and established successful practices in Chicago and the Pacific Northwest. He was Director of Works for the San Diego exposition and participated in the engineering and architectural work, notably as the designer of the Cabrillo Bridge. The exposition building and grounds were completed under Allen's management one month in advance of the January 1, 1915, opening day. For a profile see Nancy Carol Carter, "Meet Frank P. Allen, Jr.," *California Garden* 105, no. 2 (March-April 1914), 19. A fuller account is given in: Kathleen Flanigan, "Frank P. Allen, Jr.: His Architectural and Horticultural Imprint on San Diego," *JSDH* 42, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 332-359.
16. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1869-1924) was lead architect for the Panama-California Exposition. He established his reputation as a New York architect by designing Gothic Revival buildings. Travel in Spain and Mexico inspired the extravagant Spanish Colonial Revival style he brought to the San Diego exposition. Photographs and descriptions of his work are found in Carleton Monroe Winslow, *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916).
17. A drawing of the new plan filled one-half page in the newspaper within days of winning a vote to move the exposition. "Magnificent Exposition Site Laid Out," *The San Diego Union*, September 6, 1911, 7, 1-7.
18. Historians differ in their emphasis on business interests as a factor in the placement of the exposition buildings and grounds, but the real estate and transportation interests of John D. Spreckels, Joseph Sefton, Jr., G. Aubrey Davidson, Charlie Collier and other exposition officials are commonly mentioned as forces acting against the Olmsted Plan. Matthew F. Bokovoy, *The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwest Memory, 1880-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 56-58.
19. "Tentative Plans for Fair Site Approved," *The San Diego Union*, September 2, 1911, 10.
20. The day after John Charles Olmsted was informed of the decision to move the exposition to the central mesa, he sent his firm's resignation to the Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee of the Panama-California Exposition. Day Letter [Telegram] Olmsted Brothers to George W. Marston, September 2, 1911, Job #4051, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Manuscripts Room, Library of Congress (hereafter Olmsted Associates).
21. Night Letter [Telegram], Olmsted Brothers to Judge M. A. Luce, September 2, 1911, Job #4051, Olmsted Associates.
22. On the same day that the Olmsted Brothers resigned from the exposition, a message was sent to their local supervisor instructing: "Do no more work on any plans for the Exposition or Park" and "remove all belongings" and "leave San Diego as soon as possible." Day Letter [Telegram], Olmsted Brothers to H.H. Blossom, September 2, 1911, Job #4051, Olmsted Associates. For more information on the Olmsted work with the Panama-California Exposition, see Gregory Montes, "Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan," *JSDH* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1982).
23. Sessions was on the Park Plans Committee of the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee and was instrumental in the hiring of Samuel Parsons, Jr. in 1902. She led his first tour of City Park and introduced him to other local horticulturists for advice on local growing conditions and appropriate plantings. The first meeting between Olmsted and Sessions was late in 1910. [Lists and Memoranda], Box 1, File 1-1. Park Commissioners SDPL.
24. Christine Edstrom O'Hara, "The Panama-California Exposition, San Diego, 1915: The Olmsted

- Brothers' Ecological Park Typology," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 1 (March 1911), 72.
25. Frank Sessions, brother of Kate O. Sessions, was the large tree moving expert for the exposition. San Diegans donated unwanted landscape trees. Homeowners got a free tree removal service and the exposition grounds were enhanced with mature specimens.
 26. O'Hara, "Panama-California Exposition," 74. Olmsted employees overseeing work at the new exposition nursery explained this naturalistic planting technique to a local newspaper. "Model Nursery is Thriving in Park," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, February 23, 1911, 3.
 27. O'Hara, "Panama-California Exposition," 79.
 28. "Olmsted Outlines Plans for Park Improvement," *The San Diego Union*, November 11, 1910, II:6.
 29. As was her customary behavior, Sessions also provided unsolicited advice. After receiving an order for a certain plant, she wrote the exposition landscape supervisor a tart note explaining that that particular plant "had never been a success" in San Diego. She offered to sell him a related plant that could thrive in the local climate. Letter, K.O. Sessions to P.G. Thiene, July 27, 1912. Box 1, File 1-1, Park Commission, SDPL.
 30. Paul George Thiene (1880-1971) received horticultural training as a young man in Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1903 to find greater opportunities in the landscape field. Thiene parlayed a short period of low-level employment with the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm—approximately seven months in 1911 in San Diego—and his experience as supervisor of landscape at the Panama-California Exposition into a highly successful private landscape architecture practice in Pasadena. His association with architects of the Golden Age of estate building in the 1920s secured his reputation as a leading interpreter of Italian Renaissance garden style. A full profile appears in: Nancy Carol Carter, "Meet Paul George Thiene," *California Garden* 105, no. 2 (March-April 2014), 15-18. Although Frank P. Allen, Jr. is credited in several sources with overseeing Panama-California Exposition landscaping and Paul G. Thiene receives an occasional mention in the literature, no published source focused on the dimension of their task or told the story of their successful working partnership before the publication of John Blocker, "Collaboration Brings Balboa Park Into Bloom," *California Garden* 105, no. 2 (March-April 2014), 10-14.
 31. The Olmsted resignation prompted the Board of Park Commissioners to hire a new landscaping expert for park areas outside the exposition grounds. John Morley became Superintendent of San Diego Parks in November 1911. He made prodigious improvements to the park before 1915, including planting the first rose garden. During 1914 the Board of Park Commissioners altered its relationship with the exposition company in a way that extended John Morley's authority into the exposition grounds. Morley retained his position for decades and is vitally important to the history of Balboa Park, but his role is not covered in this article.
 32. Letter, Paul G. Thiene to Frank P. Allen, Jr., September 7, 1911. Box 1, Folder 1-2, Park Commission SDPL.
 33. The size of the exposition grounds is listed at 640 acres in Richard W. Amero, "The Southwest on Display at the Panama-California Exposition, 1915," *JSDH* 36, no. 4 (Fall 1990). Different acreages were reported over the years. A 1914 newspaper reports on an exposition of 450-acres. "Landscape Garden in Park Wonderful," *The San Diego Union*, June 14, 1914, III:2-5. Florence Christman in *The Romance of Balboa Park* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1985) states that the exposition covered 400 acres. The size dropped to 350 acres in "Magnificent Exhibition Site Laid Out," *The San Diego Union*, September 6, 1911, 7.
 34. Walter V. Woehlke, "Nueva España by the Silver Gate," *Sunset* 33, no. 6 (December 1914), 1130, 1127.
 35. The exposition spawned a publishing boom of new books and articles in publications like *Colliers*, *Overland Monthly*, and the local papers. A news writer rhapsodized over Frank P. Allen, Jr.'s work, including the lushness of planting, blooming flowers and "velvet lawns." W.C. Getty,

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- "Exposition Tribute to Master Builder," *The San Diego Union*, November 29, 1914, I:8. An eccentric publication praising the exposition landscape and the marvels of California was produced in a special edition to invite President Woodrow Wilson to visit San Diego. F. Weber Benton, *Semi-Tropic California The Garden of the World*, 2d ed. [President Wilson Invitation Edition 1915] (Los Angeles: Benton Publishing Company, 1915). A flowery tribute to the exposition landscape appears in George Wharton James, *Exposition Memories Panama-California Exposition* (San Diego, 1916; Pasadena: Radiant Life Press, 1917). "A carefully trained wilderness of tropical plants delights the eye," Bensel Smythe wrote in "The Fair at San Diego," *Review of Reviews* (May 1915), 88. The best descriptions of the gardens are found in Carleton Monroe Winslow, *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, and Eugen Neuhaus, *The San Diego Garden Fair* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916).
36. Woehlke, "Nueva España by the Silver Gate," 1125.
 37. Frank P. Allen, Jr., "The Panama-California Exposition," *The Architect* 9, no. 6 (June 1915), 218-37. Note: Some sources cite this article to *The Pacific Coast Architect*, but the journal changed its name with the June 1915 issue.
 38. Christman, *Romance of Balboa Park*, 46.
 39. Balboa Park Master Plan, Adopted July 25, 1989, prepared by Estrada Land Planning, Inc., City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department and the City of San Diego Planning Department, 203.
 40. *The Official Guidebook of the Panama California Exposition San Diego 1915*. Note: One printing of the *Guidebook* did not include Thiene's plant list.
 41. G. R. Gorton, San Diego County Horticultural Commissioner, published his "Monthly Excursion" throughout 1915, 1916 and into 1917 with an occasional guest author. Kate O. Sessions and Alfred D. Robinson also published comments on exposition landscaping in *California Garden*.
 42. Carleton Monroe Winslow, Jr., "The Architecture of the Panama-California Exposition 1909-1915," Masters Thesis, The University of San Diego, 1976, 63.
 43. Carleton Monroe Winslow, *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, 48.
 44. Barbara S. Jones, "Garden Heritage of Balboa Park," *California Garden* 62, no. 6 (November-December 1971), 183.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. Eugen Neuhaus, *The San Diego Garden Fair* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1916), 60-61.
 47. By 1911, three thousand palm trees had been planted in the canyon. Letter, Frank Allen to James Frederick Dawson, October 16, 1911, Olmsted Papers, cited in O'Hara, "Panama-California Exposition," 79.
 48. Christman, *Romance of Balboa Park*, 45.
 49. Unsurprisingly, people loved these lawns. Visitors and residents from outside the Southwest expected bright green grass in parks and formal garden settings. For those from more arid climates, lawns were an appealing touch of landscape luxury. Architect Bertram Goodhue liked the way that the exposition's "green, velvety lawns...frame the first glimpses and views" of his light-colored exposition buildings. Winslow, *Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, 20.
 50. Neuhaus, *The San Diego Garden Fair*, 60.
 51. W. J. Palethorpe, Report on the Panama California Exposition to April 30, 1916 (Los Angeles: W. J. Palethorpe [1916]), 7. This is an audit by a certified public accountant.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. Palethorpe, Report. All landscape expenses are listed in "Schedule D" of the Palethorpe audit. These costs were paid by the San Diego Board of Park Commission from Park Improvement Bonds. There were also costs for planting the north border of the exposition grounds.