



# BALBOA PARK

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE HERITAGE 1868-1910



*“The essential principle of design applies with unusual force in the case of San Diego Park where nature has so beautifully and perfectly modeled slopes and sides of canyons.”*

**SAMUEL PARSONS JR., LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, 1905**

*“Cultural landscapes are not separate systems or characteristics, but integrated, living, dynamic constructs. . . . Judging the integrity of biotic material is approached with an understanding that these materials are inherently dynamic and subject to myriad factors that affect their growth and decline. Intentional alterations and substitutions, as well as the loss of historic plant material due to pests, disease, or neglect, are more often the norm than the exception in the history of many landscapes. These changes may not diminish the overall integrity of a landscape. The key question to consider is whether the change is reversible. . . . Historic integrity is determined by the extent to which the general character of the historic period is evident, and the degree to which incompatible elements obscuring that character can be reversed.”*

**GUIDE TO CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORTS: CONTENT, PROCESS, AND TECHNIQUES  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, 1998**

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### **Resources**

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CALIFORNIA STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY ROUTE 163  
(CABRILLO FREEWAY)

PARK BLVD.

FLORIDA ST.

UPAS ST.

UPAS ST.

QUINCE ST.

REDWOOD ST.

**WEST PARK**

LAUREL ST.

JUNIPER ST.

GRAPE ST.

SIXTH AVENUE

DATE ST.

**GOLDEN HILL  
PARK**

PARK BLVD.

VI

U.S. INTERSTATE I-5

25<sup>TH</sup> ST.



## I. INTRODUCTION

### What Is a Cultural Landscape?

A cultural landscape is essentially a natural landscape that has been altered and shaped by human activity. The National Park Service (NPS) identifies four types of cultural landscapes: *designed landscape*, one that has been consciously laid out to a design principle, style, or tradition and has an historical association with significant persons or design movements. Examples include parks, campuses, and estates. *Vernacular landscape*, one that evolved through land-use functions by people whose occupancy shaped it. Examples include farmsteads and ranches. *Historic site*, one that is significant for its association with an historic event, activity, or person. Examples include battlefields and festival sites. *Ethnographic landscape*, one that contains natural and cultural resources that are defined heritage properties. Examples include sacred religious sites, cultural settlements, and significant geological features.

Balboa Park qualifies as a *designed landscape*, which has developed in stages for 150 years. Three periods of historical significance define the cultural landscape of Balboa Park. The first is 1868–1910, from its initial parkland dedication in 1868 through the first landscape master plan implementation by 1910. The second period of historical significance, 1911–1940, encompasses the two expositions: the 1915–1916 Panama-California (International) Exposition and the 1935–1936 California Pacific International Exposition. The third is the World War II historical period of significance, 1941–1946, when the U.S. Eleventh Naval Command and the U.S. Naval Hospital served the United States during “America’s War” in the Pacific.







## II. HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

### A. Historical Context

The landscape of Balboa Park can trace its past through layers of geologic and cultural history. From its historically native condition through the Spanish Mission period (1769–1821), the Mexican Republic era (1821–1848), and the subsequent American periods, the land that would become Balboa Park can chiefly be defined by its inherent natural landscape characteristics specific to the region—level tablelands of hard clay, known as mesas, separated by aromatic chaparral-covered canyons.

The land remained unused and fallow after California statehood in 1850 until a parkland dedication was recorded in 1868. Like an ancient manuscript overwritten many times, the park’s first formal built expression was that of an enlightened 19th-century Picturesque *design*, a style that American landscape architects borrowed from the English and applied to the “New World.”

Thereafter, the park’s successive design layers were driven by the epic events of international expositions and world wars, and, at other times, years of neglect. Upon seeing the parkland for the first time, its first designer, landscape architect Samuel Parsons (1844–1923), emoted, “Upon entering it the vision is compelled by the noble scenery which girds the horizon with uninterrupted majesty.”



### **Colonization of Alta California**

The West Coast of North America has been referred to as the last outpost of the Spanish Empire. Throughout the 16th century, Spain dominated what they called the “New World” in a fervent search for wealth, the possession of lands, and neophyte conversions. When the Spanish explorers found an abundance of resources, they laid claim to them on behalf of the Crown. Some of the first explorations off the coasts of Baja and Alta California began as reconnaissance missions in search of suitable harbors that would act as weigh stations for the West Pacific Manila Galleons returning from the trade-rich Orient. Stopping at several points along the coast, mapping and naming sites as they went, Spanish explorers encountered native peoples and peacefully exchanged tokens on their way back to Mexico.

In the mid-1700s, Russian exploration had begun along the same coast. In response, Spain exerted its presence and began the colonization of Alta California—Nueva España—in earnest. The structure of colonization came in three movements: the presidios (military); the mission churches (Christianization of natives); and pueblos (villages or towns). Combined, these three separate efforts were meant to function interdependently. The Sacred Expedition of 1769, led by Father Junípero Serra (1713–1784) and Gaspar de Portolá (1716–1786), commenced in Alta California. Between 1769 and 1823, 21 missions were built along the coastal plain of Alta California from San Diego to Sonoma. Attendant *assistências* were established near each mission church. Father Serra founded the first nine missions before his death in 1784. The land that is now Balboa Park was under the administration of the Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá, the first in the chain of missions.

By 1821, after a long period of being under Spain’s dominance, the Spanish colony of Mexico finally won its independence. Subsequently in 1833, the Act of Secularization, which ended the mission system entirely, was enacted. During the

Mexican Republic period, pueblos, or villages, were established in close proximity to mission churches and presidios. Mexican governors distributed former mission lands to members of the most loyal military echelon in the form of ranchos—the unintended fourth and final act of the colonization era. Following the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo, California, Texas, and the rest of the Southwest were conveyed to the United States of America. The subsequent statehood of California in 1850 signaled the acquisition of the greater West Coast, which meant the U.S. would then stretch from coast to coast, realizing its goal of “Manifest Destiny.”



2.1

### 1792 SAN DIEGO MAP

Spanish Exploration Period, Armada  
D. Juan Pantoja, Cartographer  
(Public Domain)

### **New Town and a Parkland Dedication**

From 1850, the fledgling town of San Diego developed from its Spanish and Mexican precedents at the foot of the first military encampment, El Presidio Real de San Diego, the nexus between Alta and Baja California. The village, or the Mexican period *ayuntamiento*, below the presidio served as the town center until an ambitious real estate speculator from the East came to town in 1867. Alonzo E. Horton (1813–1909) immediately saw the opportunity and a vision for a western American town, but not at the current site. “New Town” was born farther south along the shores of San Diego Bay, closer to the primary form of commercial shipping transport—Horton himself had arrived by steamship.

By 1868, Horton had laid out a city grid, building on a previous plan generated by Wm. Heath Davis and surveyor Andrew B. Gray, which encompassed hundreds of acres of land. In the same year, Horton, aka “Mr. New Town,” partnered with Ephraim W. Morse, “Mr. Old Town,” and prompted the city’s Board of Trustees president, José Guadalupe Estudillo, an influential San Diego politician, to set aside parkland—a great “commons”—for the future of a growing city. The siren song of the California Gold Rush still lingered in the air, coupled with the legitimacy of a new American state. The Transcontinental Railroad was near completion, and the Far West was clearly on the minds of many eastern investors and settlers.

The parkland allotment was 1,400 acres in a nascent town of approximately 2,300 people. The park set-aside, in retrospect, could be rightfully construed as either exceedingly visionary, with high expectations of growth, or a bit foolhardy. The reasoning behind the generous set-aside of public land can be deduced by examining the topography within City Park. The engineering prospects of building continuous grid streets, north to south and east to west, as well as streetcar lines over and through the wide, dramatic canyons of Cabrillo, Florida and Switzer, would pose a significant and costly challenge for residential development.

President Estudillo and the Board of Trustees of San Diego presided over a public vote of 35-1, which allowed the Trustees to set aside pueblo lands for a “public park.” The parkland dedication encompassed section lots 1129, 1130, 1131, 1135, 1136, 1137, 1142, and 1143 and the remainder of section 1144 of the federal land identification system, the Public Land Survey System (PLSS). As California was the first U.S. state in the Far West, the PLSS began here in 1851, although the survey wasn’t completed until 1872 following all legal resolutions of former Mexican period land grants and ranchos.

20

San Diego May 26 1868

Board of Trustees City of San Diego, Present  
 Jose Guadalupe Estudillo, President, Marcus Schiller and  
 Joshua Sloane

Votes counted according to ongoing notice  
 allowing the Trustees to sell Pueblo Lands Yes (35) thirty-  
 five, No (1) one

Moved and seconded that Lots (1131) Eleven hundred +  
 thirty one, (1130) Eleven hundred + thirty, (1129) Eleven hundred +  
 twentynine, (1135) Eleven hundred + thirty five, (1136) Eleven hun-  
 dred + thirty six, (1137) Eleven hundred + thirty seven, vacant  
 part of (1144) Eleven hundred + forty four, (1143) Eleven hundred  
 + forty three, (1142) Eleven hundred + forty two, be for a Park

Moved and seconded that the Gilman San  
 Diego Railroad, have the two leagues of Pueblo Lands  
 marked out to them, according to Law & order

Moved and seconded that the secretary be  
 ordered to copy on the minutes, the following letter  
 March 18 1868 about Pueblo lands for public use

Copy of said letter

Office Board of Engineers,  
 San Francisco Cal  
 March 18 1868

J. S. Mansarov. Pres. }  
 E. W. Moore + }  
 Chas. St. Lued }  
 Trustees City of San Diego

## 2.2

MAY 26, 1868

### PUBLIC PARK LAND SET ASIDE DOCUMENT

(SDHC) Transcription below

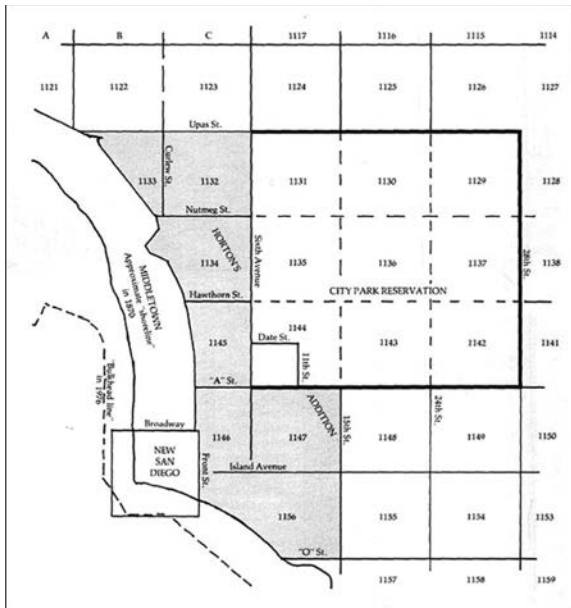
San Diego May 26, 1868

Board of Trustees City of San Diego, Present:  
 Jose Guadalupe Estudillo, President; Marcus Schiller  
 and Joshua Sloane

Votes counted according to ongoing notice allowing  
 the Trustees to sell Pueblo Lands, Yes (35) thirty-five,  
 No (1) one

Moved and seconded that Lots (1131) Eleven  
 hundred + thirty one, (1130) Eleven hundred + thirty,  
 (1129) eleven hundred + twentynine, (1135) Eleven  
 hundred + thirty five, (1136) Eleven hundred + thirtysix,  
 (1137) Eleven hundred + thirty seven, vacant  
 part of (1144) Eleven hundred + forty four, (1143)  
 Eleven hundred + forty three, (1142) Eleven  
 hundred + forty two, be for a Park.

[Further business was conducted at the same meeting,  
 unassociated with the Park in regard to Pueblo Lands]



2.3

**CITY PARK "SECTIONS" MAP** Public Land Survey System Undated (SDHC)

The creation of the City Park reservation was one of the most significant public land gestures in San Diego history. Almost immediately, a pernicious battle to deconstruct the boundary by less-than-civic-minded developers and land speculators ensued. As early as 1869, a group of potential speculators attempted to remove and acquire 480 acres from the east side of the park for private development. This aggressive action was met by the California State Legislature ratifying the city's resolution as:

An Act to Insure the Permanence of the Reservation . . . These lands . . . are to be held in trust forever by the municipal authorities of said city for the use and purposes of a public park and for no other different purpose. . . .

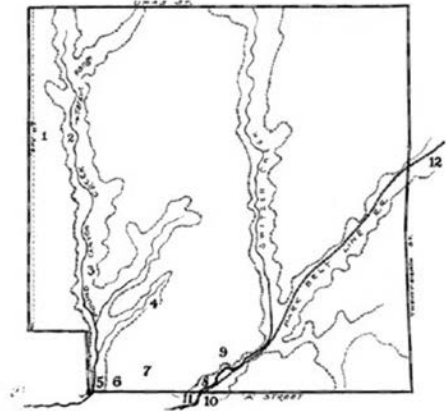
Citizen diligence protected the boundary by exercising the first impulse toward the preservation of the park. This preservation conviction would manifest again and again in each generation thereafter.

## A Park Without a Plan

The generic name of City Park persisted for the next 40 years. For the rest of the 19th century, the park continued to sit fallow and vulnerable to inevitable nonpark intrusions. The first neighborhoods began to build along the west and southern boundaries overlooking a rather rough and native landscape. During the long wait for park improvements, and suffering through a local railroad boom/bust period, citizens remained committed to staving off speculators who were relentless in trying to undo the park's northern and eastern boundaries. Those who had arrived to make their fortunes in real estate clearly had other interests regarding public parkland, "the park was too big" became their motto; only to be met with the strident response of established residents that it was in fact "not an inch too big."

Unregulated land uses of the park included waste-disposal sites, free-range livestock grazing, pistol ranges, and a landfill. This was in addition to the myriad proposals for other nonpark uses. Another use, predating the 1868 set-aside, was a rancheria village of native Kumeyaay Indians at the confluence of Switzer Creek (now Florida Canyon) and Switzer Canyon, left over from the mid-19th-century Mexican Republic period.

There is mention of another Indian rancheria in the area of Date Street and 8th Avenue, also along the southern boundary of City Park. Any remnant of both sites would now be subsumed by Interstate 5. In a 1984 University of San Diego M.A. thesis, by historian Susan Carrico, the author detailed the lives of San Diego's first peoples essentially living on borrowed time. "These references are evidence that the native population lived on the fringes of the city and had no identifiable names..." The native Indian people, survivors of the Spanish Colonial and Mexican Republic periods, were autonomous by default. They were "protected" by the federal



- CITY PARK**
- |                               |                              |                                   |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Pastime Gun Club           | 5. City Water Works          | 9. Powder House                   |
| 2. Firing Stand, Target Range | 6. Russ School               | 10. E. D. Switzer's farm          |
| 3. City Pound                 | 7. Women's & Children's Home | 11. Arnold home                   |
| 4. Powder House               | 8. Indian Rancheria          | 12. Detention Camp ("Pest House") |

2.4

### FIRST MAP OF CITY PARK 19TH CENTURY LAND USES

Amero Collection  
Undated (SDHC)

1. Pastime Gun Club
2. Firing Stand, Target Range
3. City Pound
4. Powder House
5. City Water Works
6. Russ School
7. Women & Children's Home
8. Indian Rancheria
9. Powder House
10. Switzer Farm
11. Arnold Home
12. Detention Camp (Pest House)

government but not citizens of the U.S. and could not own or purchase land. Many Indians lived close to the urban areas of San Diego, next to fresh water sources for purposes of work, yet their status was that of squatters—an unregulated segment of the population. As the city grew, the various settlements were pushed out around the turn of the century.

As the years went on, residential neighborhoods increased around City Park boundaries, largely on the west and south sides of the park. Random tree planting efforts, often close to and in view of the same urban boundaries, reflected desires to create park-like vistas. New residents from the Midwest and Eastern states were used to seeing vast swaths of forests and meadows. By 1890, as many as 10,000 trees had been planted, most were the fast-growing Eucalyptus genus and exotic pines.

Along the southern boundary of City Park, adjacent to the 19th-century upscale neighborhood of Golden Hill, community-driven improvements began in the late 1890s. The small curvilinear island-like mesa would become known as Golden Hill Park. Surrounded by steep canyons and accessed at 25th and A Streets, this exclusive neighborhood park predated the Parsons Plan (see below). The community spared no expense building an aviary, a small macadam layered golf course, and typical Victorian park features for perambulating, viewing, and relaxing.

During George Cooke's tenure as the park's chief landscape engineer (1903–1908), Golden Hill Park was further improved by Parsons's tree palette selections and a more formal circulation element. Cooke introduced several mature exotic palms, adding to the already growing horticultural collection. Some of the oldest trees from this period can still be seen at this secluded park, especially the striking *Araucaria bidwillii*, aboriginal name bunya bunya tree, from New Zealand.

Aviary structure and walking path  
Circa 1910 (SDHC)





The most significant structure was a sunken stone fountain built as a small gathering node, and attributed to Chicago architect and resident Henry Lord Gay. The community's thesis for the fountain was to design a feature that would resemble a spring of ever-flowing (recirculating) water, a resource that was clearly of high value throughout all of City Park. Golden Hill Park would also mark the southern entry to City Park at the head of the surrounding canyons.

## 2.6

### **GOLDEN HILL PARK FOUNTAIN** Circa 1915 (SDHC)



Golden Hill Park  
San Diego, Cal.

In 1892, pioneer horticulturist Kate O. Sessions (1857–1940) secured a lease for 30 acres of land in City Park. In Elizabeth MacPhail’s biography, *Kate Sessions: Pioneer Horticulturist*, the City of San Diego decreed, “K.O. Sessions the right to use and occupy certain lands of the City Park . . . for the purpose of establishing an experimental nursery, and garden, and for the development and cultivation of said City Park for a period of not exceeding ten years, with water privileges.” The nursery space was positioned at the northwesternmost quadrant of the park, at the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Upas Street down to approximately Quince Avenue, and traced the top of what is now the western rim of Cabrillo Canyon, formerly Pound Canyon.



2.7

**KATE OLIVIA SESSIONS**  
(1857-1940)

An early voice supporting preservation of City Park land for public use, pioneer horticulturist and nursery owner Sessions was a lifelong advocate of intelligent and informed park development. Co-founder of the San Diego Floral Association with the revered horticulturist A. D. Robinson, she was an authoritative voice on horticulture and floriculture and wrote often in the Association’s periodical, *California Garden Magazine*. Sessions’ work linked her to experimental growers in temperate regions around the world affording her foreign plant stock which she introduced into the San Diego area.

In 1892 a private-public partnership with the City of San Diego accorded use of 30 acres of park land in the northwest quadrant of City Park for her commercial plant nursery business in exchange for unpaid services as city gardener, her development of a demonstration garden in the park, and the provision of 400 trees annually to the City, 100 of which were to be planted in City Park. Over ten years Sessions planted more than 1,000 trees in City Park, among them many exotic species new to the region. Sessions wrote, spoke and advised on behalf of San Diego parks for more than 50 years in both unofficial and official capacities.

In a May 1940 article in *California Garden Magazine*, “An Appreciation, Not an Obituary,” A. D. Robinson wrote: “Those who attended the Floral Association meetings know of her unrivalled power to convey knowledge and arouse enthusiasm.” Her progressive and influential role is recognized in the appellation bestowed upon her as the “Mother of Balboa Park.”

As a quid pro quo for the use of public land, Sessions was to plant a minimum of 300 trees citywide and 100 trees on City Park land, although she went well beyond quantitative expectations. With the nursery lease, Sessions was also granted the title of “City Gardener”—an auspicious title that broadened her scope and efforts to grow significant numbers of trees on behalf of her adopted city. As Sessions began to fulfill her part of the bargain, she experienced unexpected difficulty in planting trees on the hard clay mesa lands of West Park. Her remedy, albeit somewhat extreme, was to dynamite plant holes to better ensure healthy root growth for each tree. Only the confident scientist in Sessions could have arrived at this solution. A sampling of the first trees planted, now over a century old, can be seen along Sixth Avenue today; e.g., mission pepper, *Schinus molle*; sugar gum, *Eucalyptus cladocalyx*; Canary Island palm, *Phoenix canariensis*; and Kate’s favorites: tipu tree, *Tipuana tipu*, and queen palm, *Arecastrum romanzoffianum*.

In historic photos, it is apparent that most of the plantings were irrigated by hand from hose bibs sited around the area. It wasn’t until implementation of the Parsons Plan began that formal underground irrigation systems were installed. In previous years, the San Diego Water Company had drilled wells in Palm and Pound Canyons with storage reservoirs in the area west of where the Cabrillo Bridge now stands. Claims of water capacity reached 170,000 gallons, at 54,000 gallons per hour at its peak. The gallant efforts of Kate and several community-funded organizations meant well in their attempts to create an urban park from scratch. However, because of those very random efforts, or maybe in spite of them, it became clear that professional design expertise was sorely needed, especially for such a large park and one of such complexity.

### **The Search for a Landscape Architect**

Finally in early 1902, civic leaders Julius Wangenheim and George W. Marston, both philanthropic businessmen, convinced the Chamber of Commerce to appoint a City Park Improvement Committee. Subsequently, a Park Plan Subcommittee, the heart of the cause, was created. Members appointed were George W. Marston, Kate O. Sessions, and Ernest E. White. An additional woman, often invisible on the City Park list of movers and shakers, was Mary Coulston, a seasoned intellect on park design and social movements and a fresh face to San Diego. Coulston had an almost ephemeral presence in San Diego from 1902 to 1904, but at a most consequential time. She clearly became the engine that drove the nationwide search for a professional landscape architect. She also became the promoter-in-chief of the need for, and benefits of, a well-designed public park. Coulston's commitment to seek out the best park designer elevated the local discourse and would ultimately influence the design of City Park.

Coulston's first outreach was to California's most fervent advocate, the renowned Southwest journalist and photographer Charles Lummis. His recommendation led to the park designer of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, landscape architect John McLaren. Having been contacted by Coulston, McLaren consented to visit San Diego and see what could be done at the behest of both Kate Sessions and Mary Coulston, who by this time had become close friends in common cause.

While touring City Park, often with horticulturist Sessions as a guide, McLaren would have observed significant differences between the soils of San Diego and those of San Francisco. Impervious, dense clay subsoils on the mesa tops and rich friable soils in the undulating canyons below were not part of the geological characteristics of the Bay Area, and above all, the climate was radically different. The atmospheric moisture of rolling fog, which holds high humidity while causing a diminution of

As assistant to the editor of Garden and Forest magazine, Charles S. Sargent, and a student at Cornell University, Coulston developed writing skills, horticultural knowledge and a personal acquaintance with leading voices in public park management, forestry, and the emerging field of landscape architecture. Invited by George Marston to come to San Diego as a publicist for the 1902 Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee, she spoke to civic groups and published scores of newspaper articles to educate the public about the value and potential of City Park. Coulston steered the selection of Samuel Parsons Jr. as the first landscape architect for City Park and, as executive secretary for the Park Improvement Committee, was the liaison between the City of San Diego and Parsons in the initial stages of park development. Coulston, with Kate Sessions, hired and supervised the City Park's first gardener and organized San Diego's first Arbor Day celebration, a 1904 tree planting in City Park.



**2.8**  
**MARY B. COULSTON**  
(1855-1904)

A merchant and civic activist, Marston was a tireless and influential public park advocate and supporter in San Diego and the state of California. In a 1990 article on the Marston Garden, Journal of San Diego History he is described as:

Friend of his fellowmen, lover of all growing things" reads the plaque placed at the Junipero Serra Museum in 1950 to honor San Diego's most endearing and respected city father, George White Marston. He was, among many titles, a businessman, city planner, civic visionary, husband and father, and gentleman who loved and cultivated beauty that was expressed in all growing things.

Marston took a leading role in the 1902 Chamber of Commerce initiative to preserve and improve City Park, personally engaging the services of New York landscape architect Samuel Parsons Jr. and paying his \$10,000 fee. When the San Diego city charter was amended in 1905 to provide public funding for City Park, Marston began his long service as a San Diego City Park Commissioner. Blending the ideals of the Progressive and City Beautiful movements, Marston believed that every citizen derived a practical benefit from planned city growth, attractive civic gathering places, from tree-lined streets and from open and green parks. He supported the creation of San Diego's first comprehensive growth plan in 1908, in which urban designer and landscape architect John Nolen proposed strong links between City Park, downtown and the San Diego Bay front.



**2.9**  
**GEORGE WHITE MARSTON**  
(1850-1946)

light, differed greatly from the persistent dry sunny days of Southern California. As far as horticulture, San Diego can host and acculturate plant emigres. For example, citrus and hibiscus easily adapt despite their origins from other continents and hemispheres. Kate's Hawai'ian favorite, the hibiscus, would struggle in Golden Gate Park, and the citrus would certainly bear poor fruit. Conversely, San Diego's City Park could never host moisture-loving rhododendrons and sensitive Japanese maples. McLaren's visit was brief, although it started a relational conduit between the two cities. Later, plant stock from McLaren's park nursery would assist in the "foresteing" of City Park in the barren semi-arid coastal desert that is San Diego. McLaren's other gift was his foreman John MacLean, who became the new head gardener for San Diego's City Park and immediately established a park nursery.

McLaren suggested eastern landscape architects, namely, the sons of the great Frederick Law Olmsted, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John C. Olmsted. However, the brothers were in the throes of transitioning into their father's landscape design legacy and had a full plate of client projects. It was the highly recommended landscape architect in New York City, Samuel Parsons, whose name rose to the top. A founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Parsons was the superintendent of planting for the New York City Parks Department. His charge was to oversee the city's collection of parks, which included the most notable, Central Park—an original Picturesque landscape design by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and architect Calvert Vaux, and the one that set the standard for late 19th-century, early 20th-century public parks in America. On a business trip to the East, George W. Marston interviewed Parsons for the San Diego project and was quite pleased with his authoritative grasp on all the elements of park design. Marston sponsored Parsons with a personal monetary contribution for the development of a landscape master plan for City Park and quickly made arrangements for him to travel to San Diego by December of 1902.



Descended from a long-established horticultural family, Parsons was educated at Yale University. After holding key positions in New York's Central Park, he was appointed Landscape Architect for Greater New York in 1901. An advocate of professional standards, he was a founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In his private practice, Parsons worked throughout the United States on parks, playgrounds, estate gardens, cemeteries, campus plans and housing developments, creating landscapes inspired by the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. In a 1995 Illustrated Monograph on Parsons by landscape historian Charles Birnbaum the author writes:

What makes Parsons's career unique is both its length and the fact he practiced when the profession was emerging and defining its role during the Picturesque and Reform Eras . . .

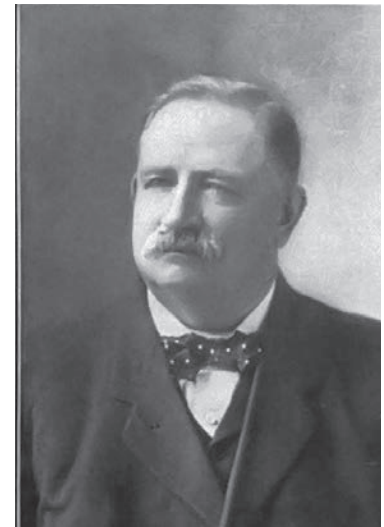
Parsons was one of the leading landscape architects in the United States when selected to design San Diego's City Park in 1902. His plan for park entrances, roads and trails allowed work to begin in 1903, but his comprehensive plan and report was submitted in 1905. In 1910 Parsons was hired to assess and report on the condition of San Diego public parks in advance of the planned 1915 exposition.

With extensive experience as a landscape gardener, English-born Cooke immigrated to the United States in 1895. He created east coast estate gardens and worked in New York's Central Park. After becoming a partner in the landscape architecture firm of Samuel Parsons and Company, Cooke was assigned to implement the 1903 Parson's plan for the development of City Park in San Diego. Cooke's landscape experience and skill as a civil engineer were employed to make rapid progress on building the first roads and formal entrances to the park and completing mass plantings of trees and shrubs in accordance with the landscape plan. This work was accomplished during multiple working visits from 1903 through 1906. When Cooke permanently relocated to San Diego in 1907 he was appointed San Diego's first Superintendent of Parks. His continued implementation of the Parsons Plan for City Park was cut short by his accidental death in 1908.



2.10

**SAMUEL PARSONS**  
(1844-1923)



2.11

**GEORGE COOKE**  
(1859-1908)

### **The American Picturesque Landscape Design Movement**

The Picturesque landscape style in America dominated large public parks and private estates from the 19th century to well into the 20th century. A design approach that was an outright emulation of nature—a series of scenic compositions linked together—evolved from the 18th-century English romanticism of “nature” over the French formalism of “artifice.” Originating in the pastoral lands of England, the agrarian ideals of landscape designer Lancelot “Capability” Brown developed a more dramatic tableau, one of gnarled trees, chasms, and precipices in England.

Later in America, Andrew Jackson Downing would popularize and adapt the style to the North American landscape and inspire park designers throughout the country in his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. Where possible, parks and estates broke from the geometry of the urban grid by manufacturing curvilinear, rustic landscapes with open meadow-like lawns, single-species tree massings, and carefully framed distant views. Designs were consistently predicated on existing natural characteristics of any chosen site and nestled within them.

Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and architect Calvert Vaux carried the Picturesque approach further in the design for New York’s Central Park, which thereafter defined the Olmsted-Vaux partnership and firmly established the emergent profession of landscape architecture. Later, Calvert Vaux would partner with another exponent of the style, Samuel Parsons.

### **Samuel Parsons's First Impressions**

The New York landscape architect, Samuel Parsons, came to San Diego with his principled view of landscape design and its social benefits intact. He was later accompanied by his skillful landscape designer and engineer, George Cooke. Both men were steeped in the Picturesque landscape design style as best expressed in the preeminent Central Park in New York. It was Parsons's first site visit to San Diego, for that matter California, an entirely different landscape "picture," unlike any he had experienced before. Luckily for George Marston, there had been a significant El Niño event throughout 1901–02, which would have left the grounds, despite years of abuse, in a very healthy and natural-looking condition. Marston ferried his landscape architect in a small horse-drawn carriage around the park—around the land that he intuitively knew held great promise. With the local press on their heels, Parsons shared his first blush on the specific topography of the site, referring to the canyons as valuable "convolutions of surface," a natural feature with which he became fascinated.

By 1902, the city had grown to approximately 20,000 residents. The arrival of Parsons effectively coalesced even more public support for the park. His visit to San Diego, while being heralded in the daily newspapers, began to inform his design process. With the flourish of a prose poet, Parsons did not disappoint in his public comments and subsequent impressions of the site to a hungry press:

San Diego park tract is a revelation of an altogether new type of landscape for me, and my first impression is of profound regard for the distinct natural beauty and the magnificent outlook. As the park is now, in its natural state, the whole effect is most impressive. Every park has its own peculiar and distinct characteristics, but this great area of spreading mesa and rugged picturesque canyons is markedly different from all other parks I have seen in Europe and America. There is nothing else like it among the parks of the world.

His reference to the “magnificent outlook” would be further defined and thereon used as his organizing principle for the landscape design. The quote begins to approach a sea change for him, a revelation, as he states, in park design. The surrounding natural landscape of mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and the San Diego Bay clearly captivated him. In a *San Diego Sun* article on 22 December 1902, after becoming intimate with the park setting, he appeared resolved to a major change in park-design protocol:

I shall doubtless have to change my mind frequently and tear down what I have built up in the way of theories. For one thing, let me tell you, that such a sublime view as you have from that park is probably your greatest asset. We must do nothing to shut out that view. Those purple mountains and that shining sea must be preserved to the eye at any cost. In this respect, you see, our modus operandi will be directly opposed to that pursued in the making of eastern parks, where the object is to shut out the city and all the outside world and make a bit of nature right in the heart of a bustling city.

His decision seemed to be a monumental shift in urban park design, or possibly just a counterapproach addressing a specific situation. It is not known whether his new “theory” would be embraced by other designers or even utilized later in his own career. His exclamation does reflect, however, the extraordinary natural characteristics of coastal San Diego.

### **The Samuel Parsons & Company City Park Plan, 1902–1910**

San Diego's City Park presented myriad design challenges as well as fresh opportunities for Parsons. As the park's first landscape design—the predicate layer—the chance to apply a Picturesque design to this foreign land must have inspired and vexed him at the same time. Parsons was decidedly impressed with the topography of San Diego. The ubiquitous natural canyons were a pure delight to him, which he rhapsodically wrote about in the textual version of his plan:

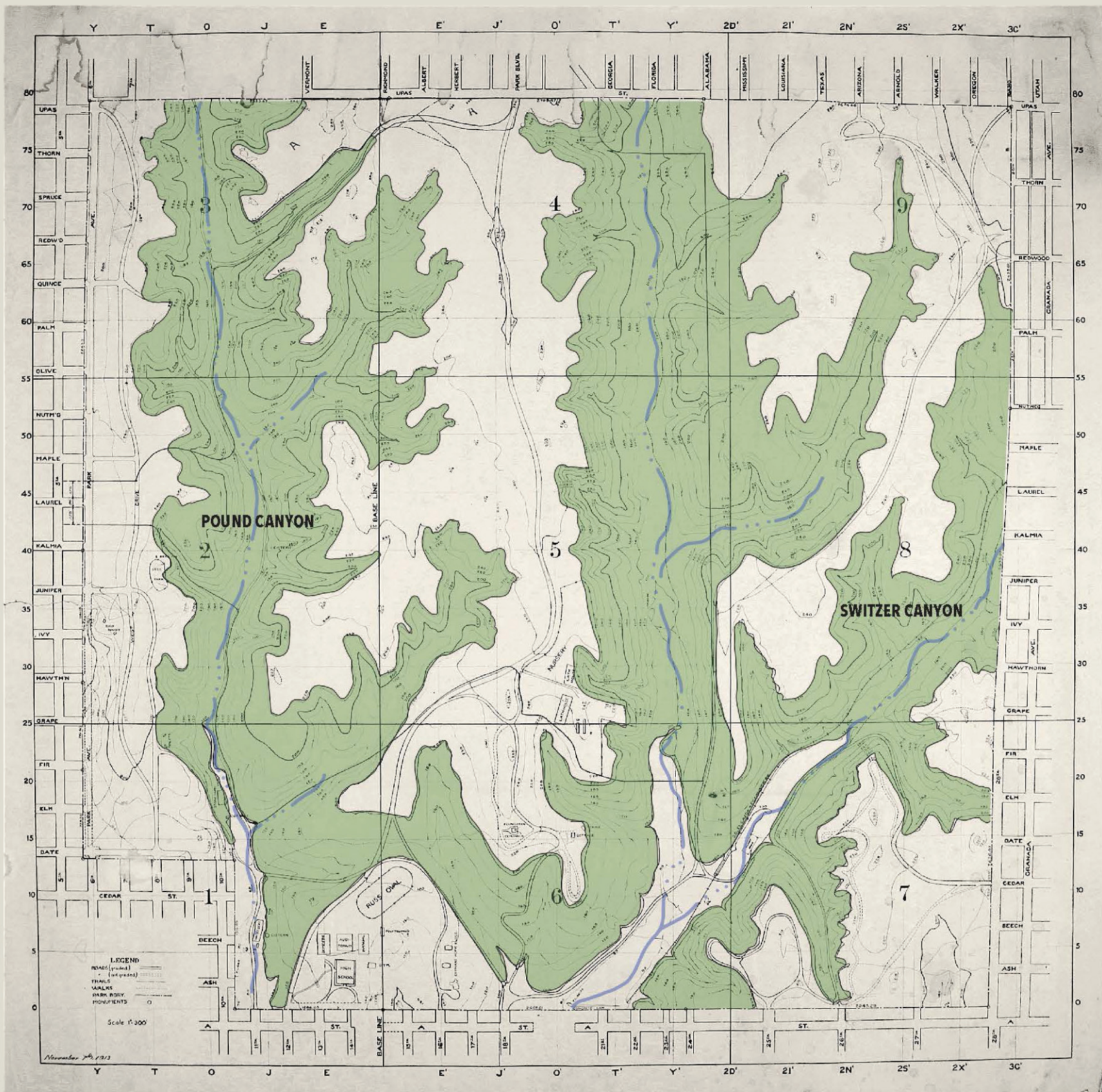
So valuable have these convolutions of surface seemed to the designers [Parsons & Co.] that they have conserved with all possible care the lovely low native growth, which while it clothes with color, leaves still defined, the character of the surface. It will be seen that, through regard for this principle of design, which uses all valuable natural conformations to the end of accentuating the dominant quality of the landscape, roads have been ordered with this in view.

2.12

#### **THE CANYONS OF CITY PARK**

Topographic Map  
Circa 1913

Yet, even as enamored as Parsons was with scenic earthly *convolutions*, they posed significant obstacles during road and park entry design and installation.



San Diego's City Park plan began as early as 1903 with a rough outline of the roads and entries. Their implementation was immediate, as George Cooke arrived in San Diego six months later as the chief landscape engineer and began work with his teams of horse-driven equipment. In *George White Marston: A Family Chronicle*, eldest daughter Mary Gilman Marston wrote, "George Cooke came [and] the dirt began to fly." Never before had the City of San Diego been so mobilized for a public amenity, both in the public and private sectors. City departments, local organizations, and donors rallied for the cause. The urgency to realize a forested green park was driven home in an editorial in the *San Diego Union*, 25 January 1903, "An unsightly, ragged parkless town will not attract eastern capitalists and moneyed home seekers."

Even though Parsons had made just four visits to San Diego, his correspondence and coordination with Cooke and Marston seamlessly facilitated the work. The plan was finalized and sent to Marston in both graphic and textual form, dated 15 September 1905. Parsons referred to it as, "a report, or explanation, of the motives of our design in order that the spirit of it may not be violated through misapprehension."

The most important design elements addressed for the entire park were 1) Vehicular Circulation and Park Entrances; 2) Horticulture and, by association, Water; and 3) Views and Vistas. At first, the most attention was given to the lower section of West Park at Date Street and Eighth Avenue; the southern park boundary; and Golden Hill Park due to their adjacency to San Diego's emergent neighborhoods. The urban core had grown north from the San Diego Bay and embraced the park's west and southern boundaries with attractive homes, as their residents patiently waited for a park.





**a. Parsons's Design Intent ~ Circulation and Park Entrances**

City Park roads were in fact the bones of the layout. Parsons linked them to existing neighborhood access routes by strategically crafting the park entrances, most of which we still live with today. True to the tenets of the Picturesque, some roads were designed specifically to maximize views and vistas by tracing the native topography and avoiding aggressive grading “cuts & fills.”

2.13

**PARK ROAD BUILDING**  
Circa 1903 (SDHC)

In a March 1903 *San Diego Union* article on the progress of the landscape, Parsons remarked:

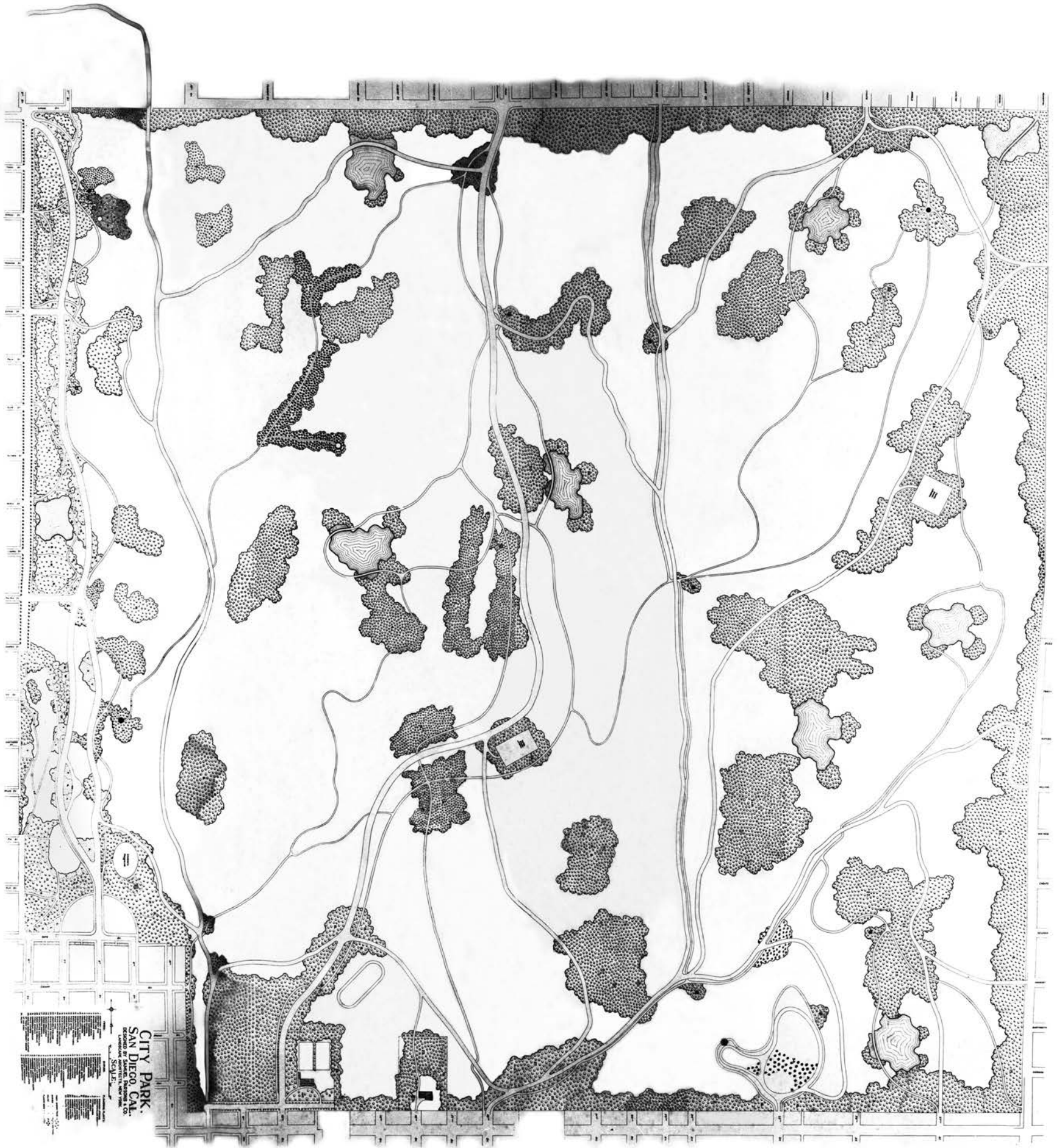
It will be readily seen, therefore, that when a few more roads and paths have been built along the top and bottom of the canyons, to bring their slopes into view, when access is established to the best viewpoint of mountains and sea, and some line of enclosure marks the outer boundaries, there will be a park already made of very simple elements, and little changed from its original character.

The vehicular roads of the plan were sufficiently under control, and George Cooke accomplished his work in remarkable time. In West Park, an inner park road was brought up from Eighth Avenue downtown to the northern boundary at Upas Street. Connections from Sixth Avenue were made at Quince, Maple, and Juniper Streets, providing vehicular entry from the west side of the city into the park.

The most dramatic design element for West Park was a large half-circle entry at Eighth Avenue and Date Streets, with a radius that spanned from Seventh to Ninth Streets. The primary entry statement had a significant visual effect, especially after generous planting had been completed and began to mature. This section of West Park was later subsumed by Interstate 5 and no longer exists.

2.14

**1905 SAMUEL PARSONS  
& COMPANY**  
City Park Plan



CITY PARK,  
SAN DIEGO, CAL.

LANSBURG & ASSOCIATES,  
SAN DIEGO, CAL.

SCALE

1" = 100'

Further east in Pound Canyon (Cabrillo Canyon), a valley road connecting north and south neighborhood points would bring automobiles into the city at Eleventh Street and out of the city toward North Park. A central park road originating at Twelfth Street would run north into the North Park neighborhood. This widest of all the roads traced a higher elevation and later became the official “Park Boulevard.” Further to the east was another north/south valley road through what is now Florida Canyon. Several other sinuous connector roads and walking trails were designed comprehensively throughout the park.

Golden Hill Park had its own exclusive entry at 25th and A Streets, with a loop road around the small mesa. East boundary entries were provided at Cedar, Grape, and Redwood Streets. A studied entry in the lower part of West Park at Fir Street, which could have provided easy access from downtown, became frustratingly “impractical.” Parsons shared his frustrations with Marston that many obvious choices were prevented by steep canyons and his commitment to not violating any natural conformation. Most of Parsons’s park entries are extant today with the exception of the Maple Street entry at West Park, which was removed; and on the eastern boundary, Cedar was later aligned at Date Street.

2.15

**WEST PARK**  
Eighth Street Vehicular Entry  
Circa 1915 (SDHC)

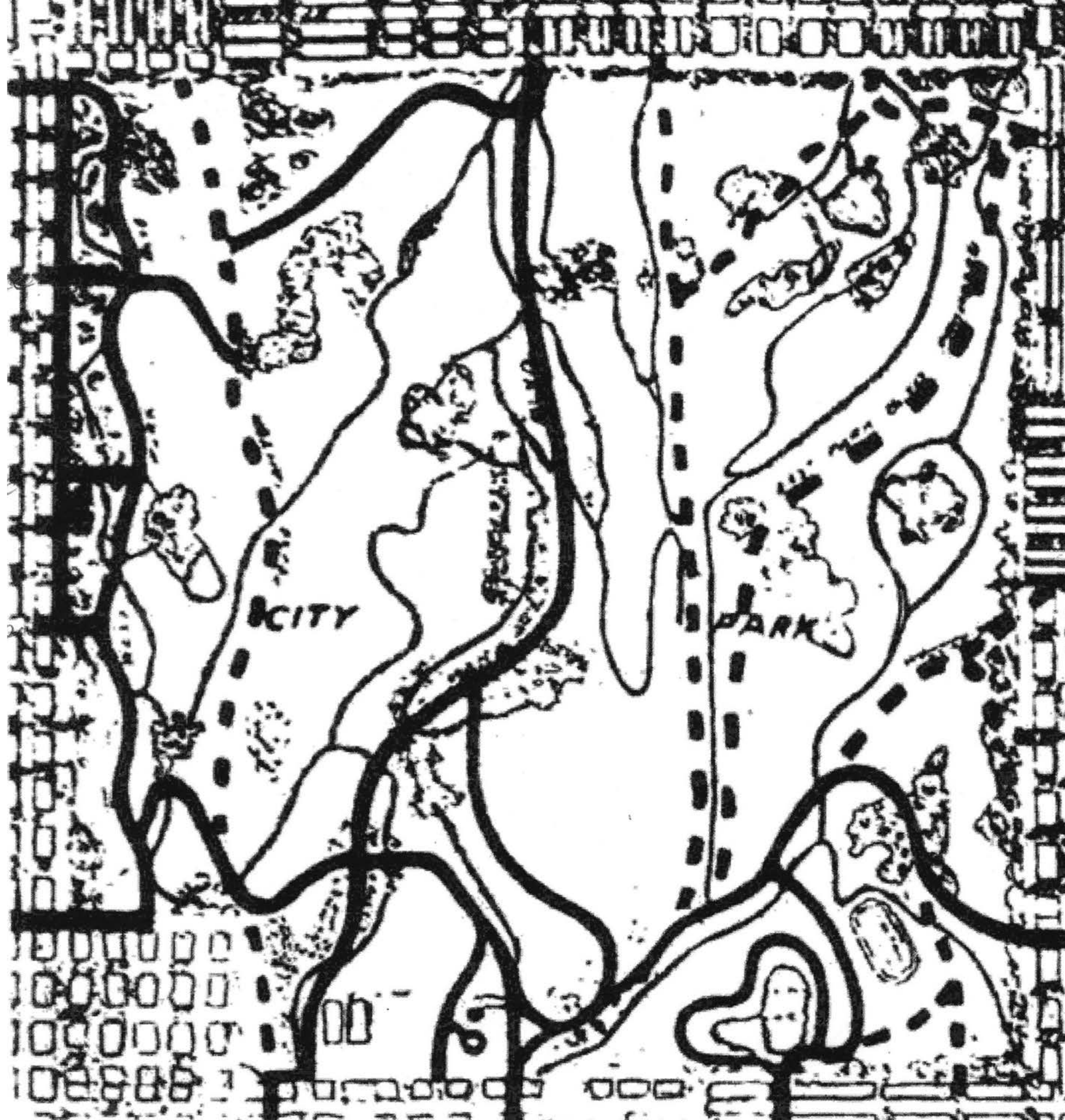


George Cooke had completed nearly 10 miles of Parsons's roads, as well as a prodigious amount of tree and shrub planting, all by early 1908. He and his wife eventually made their permanent home in San Diego after he was appointed the first Superintendent of Parks for the City of San Diego in 1907. His work was in demand and called him to projects in the backcountry for more road building. Tragically, Cooke's life ended in August of 1908 in an unfortunate road equipment accident. One can only imagine how this affected Parsons and the momentum that Cooke had inspired with his dedication and work ethic. With great sadness, George Marston presided over his memorial service and eulogized:

2.16

**COOKE'S FINISHED ROADS** Solid  
lines finished  
Dashed lines unfinished  
1909 (San Diego Union)

He had come to us at the right time, he had secured our confidence and had decided to cast his lot with us. By natural ability, long training and experience, practical sagacity, and tireless industry he was preeminently fitted for the public service to which he was called.



**b. Parsons’s Design Intent ~ Horticulture and, by Association, Water**

From the land ethics ascribed to the Picturesque design movement, Parsons dutifully respected every natural feature and contour on the blank canvas of City Park. Since he was heir to the design legacy, no one was better suited than he to transform the barren tract of land into a world-class landscape setting. As a horticulturist first and foremost, Parsons’s plant palette for the park was carefully thought out in collaboration with the experienced mind of Kate Sessions. Sessions had been in the San Diego environment for 20 years and had experimented with adapting exotic species to the area. She knew what worked, and she knew the growth characteristics of native and exotic plant material.

Sessions herself as well as eager residents were responsible for tree planting in West Park along Sixth Avenue and down into Pound Canyon—thousands of trees had been planted before the advent of the Parsons Plan. The trees most favored were the fast-growing *Eucalyptus* spp., Canary Island pines, *Pinus canariensis*, and Torrey pines, *Pinus torreyana*. Arbor Day tree planting events generated civic pride and always drew great crowds. The first tree planting event was 17 March 1904. Congratulatory telegrams came in for the event from President Theodore Roosevelt, California Governor George Pardee, and Roosevelt’s Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, all progressive conservationists.





San Diego History Center

2.17

**ARBOR DAY TREE PLANTING  
IN POUND CANYON**  
(Cabrillo Canyon)  
1904 (SDHC)



2.18

**UNIMPROVED SIXTH AVENUE**

Date Street Park Plantings  
Circa 1905 (SDHC)

2.19

**KATE SESSION'S QUEEN PALMS**

Double row planting on both sides of  
Sixth Avenue  
Circa 1914 (SDHC)

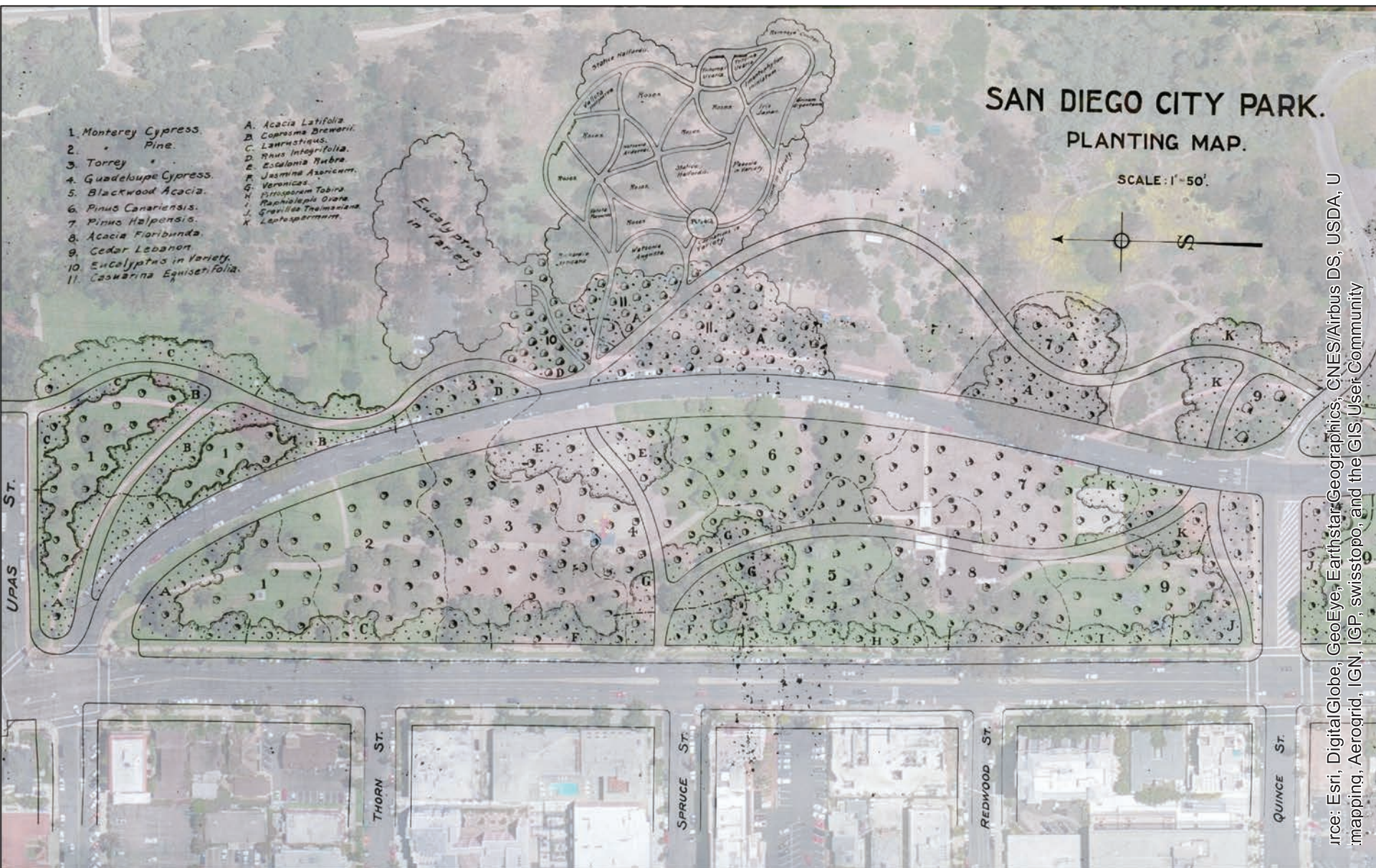
In West Park, Sixth Avenue had languished as an undeveloped “paper street” until the Parsons Plan prompted the city to finally improve it, albeit in segments. In 1905, George Cooke, inspired by Sessions, planted her signature queen palms, *Arecastrum romanzoffianum*, which would eventually continue for 17 blocks of parkway strips on both sides of Sixth Avenue, from Upas to Date Streets. In total, approximately 70 queen palms were uniformly planted with arbor guards, creating the effect of a boulevard. For a very brief time, Sixth Avenue was called Park Avenue but changed back to Sixth Avenue. Cooke also repeated the queen palm planting along the eastern park boundary at the north end of 28th Street.



Following the departure of Kate Sessions and her Sixth Avenue park nursery, George Cooke established a growing ground and staging area as an interim park nursery. The site was located in the middle of the park just east of Park Boulevard. Sessions continued to supply plant material from her nursery in Mission Hills; other regional growers also participated in providing plant material throughout Cooke's planting projects. From Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, John McLaren sent prize specimen stock as well.

Parsons's tree palette was composed exclusively of evergreen species—not one deciduous tree in the lot. It seemed odd that someone from the East Coast would forgo, even consciously avoid, seasonal color in a prospective forest. Parsons observed, "There are not many deciduous trees that do well in Southern California, and such of them as do only tolerably well are not in keeping with the dominant evergreen effect." The tree species chosen were generally large, majestic pines, cedars, cypresses, and other robust evergreens, trees that also held the promise to thrive. Parsons depended on Sessions for counsel on species viability and growth characteristics. He also turned over all palm selections and their placements to her.

Parsons sent the overall narrative plan of City Park in 1905, accompanied by far more intensive, larger-scale planting plans for West Park. The illustrations were keyed alphabetically and numerically—trees were represented with numbers; shrubs were assigned the alphabet. Specifications were made for the spacing between plants to accommodate their growth patterns, taking into account each plant in its full maturity.



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, U  
mapping, AeroGRID, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

2.20

### PLANTING PLAN FOR WEST PARK

Sixth Avenue from Upas to  
Quince Streets

Circa 1905 (SD Public Library)

As an example of Parsons’s planting legend (seen in the enlarged section graphic), the area just south of Upas Street, where the inner park road meets Sixth Avenue, was to have mass plantings of 1) Monterey cypress trees, *Cupressus macrocarpa*; with an understory of shrubs, A) acacia, B) *coprosma*, and C) *lauristinus*, beneath and within the cypress forest—a staged bio-community in effect. The pyramidal deep green cypress trees would tower over swaths of evergreen acacia, floral and aromatic *lauristinus*, and glossy bright-colored foliage of *coprosma*, rendering a composite expression of the diversity in landscape design. Single-species clustering of trees and shrubs emulates the behavior of a natural landscape when species occur in response to their environment and group together on their own.

This particular area became known as Cypress Grove. It was also where the Sessions park nursery had been and still held remnants of her experimental plantings; Canary Island palms, *Phoenix canariensis*; cork oak, *Quercus suber*; and *Eucalyptus* spp.

Vast expanses of lawn on the clay tableland of West Park provided the underlayment for all the generous foresting. Parsons referred to these meadow-like facsimiles as “plantations,” areas where people could passively and freely use their parkland. However, when it came to the rims of the canyons, and as they fell to the valley floors, it was as if the rules had changed. Parsons deeply respected the natural chaparral that “clothed” the canyons, the “dominant quality of the landscape,” and he acceded to their existence.

2.21

**ENLARGED SECTION: WEST PARK AT  
UPAS STREET**

1905 (Plan overlay onto current  
aerial photograph)

1. Monterey Cypress.
2. " Pine.
3. Torrey "
4. Guadeloupe Cypress.
5. Blackwood Acacia.
6. Pinus Canariensis.
7. Pinus Halpensis.
8. Acacia Floribunda.
9. Cedar Lebanon.
10. Eucalyptus in Variety.
11. Casuarina Equisetifolia.

- A. Acacia Latifolia.
- B. Coprosma Brewerii.
- C. Laurustiquus.
- D. Rhus Integrifolia.
- E. Escalonia Rubra.
- F. Jasmine Azoricum.
- G. Veronicas.
- H. Pittosporum Tobira.
- I. Raphiolepis Ovata.
- J. Grevillea Thelmanniana.
- K. Leptospermum.

UPAS ST.



Statice Halfordii.

Valloia purpurea

Roses

Roses

Watsonia Ardernei.

Roses

Roses

Valloia Purpurea

Roses

Richardia Africana

Watsonia Angusta

Eucalyptus in Variety

10

II

A

3

D

E

E

3

4

A

1

2

C

F

G

# CITY PARK. SAN DIEGO, CAL.

DESIGNED BY SAMUEL PARSONS & CO.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, NEW YORK.



SCALE:  
100' 50' 0' 100' 200' 300'

## TREES:






1. MONTEREY CYPRESS.
2. MONTEREY PINE.
3. TORREY PINE
4. GUADELOUPE CYPRESS.
5. BLACKWOOD ACACIA.
6. PINUS CANARIENSIS.
7. PINUS HALPENSIS.
8. ACACIA FLORIGUNDA.
9. CEDAR LEBANON.
10. EUCALYPTUS IN VARIETY.
11. CASUARINA EQUISETIFOLIA.
12. EUCALYPTUS RUOIS.
13. EUCALYPTUS POLYANTHEMA.
14. FICUS NITIDA.
15. CEDAR ATLANTICA.
16. ARAUCARIA BIDWILLII.
17. SCHINUS MOLLE.
18. FICUS RUGINOSA.
19. EUCALYPTUS CORYNOCALYX.
20. EUCALYPTUS BOTRYOIDES.
21. PINUS PINEA.
22. ARAUCARIA EXCELSIOR.
23. EUCALYPTUS ROSTRATA.
24. EUCALYPTUS CITRIODORA.
25. ACACIA MOLLISSIMA.
26. CEDAR DEODORA.
27. QUERCUS AGRIFOLIA.
28. EUCALYPTUS SIDEROXYLON.
29. EUCALYPTUS GLOBULUS.
30. PINUS SINENSIS.
31. CUPRESSUS AZORICUM.
32. PINUS CEMBRA.
33. GROUND RESERVED FOR PLANTING OF TREES BY DIFFERENT ORDERS OF SAN DIEGO.
34. PALMS.

## SHRUBS.

- A. ACACIA LATIFOLIA.
- B. COPROSMA BREWERII.
- C. LAURUSTINUS.
- D. RHUS INTEGRIFOLIA.
- E. ESCALONIA RUBRA.
- F. JASMINE AZORICUM.
- G. VERONICA.
- H. PITTOSPORUM TOBIRA.
- I. RAPHIOLEPIS OVATA.
- J. GREVILLEA THELMANIANA.
- K. LEPTOSPERMUM.
- L. MYRTUS COMMUNIS.
- M. ACACIA BAILLEYANA.
- N. HAKEA PUGEDIFORMIS.
- O. ABELIA RUPESTRIS.
- P. MAYTINUS.
- Q. MELALEUCA LEUCODENDRON.
- R. LAGUNARIA PATERSONI.
- S. RHUS LAURINA.
- T. CERATONIA JILJILUA.
- U. RETINOSPORA FILIFERA.
- V. ACACIA OBLIQUA.
- W. OSMANTHUS AQUIFOLIUM.
- X. POLYGALA APOPETALA.
- Y. ACACIA GRACILIS.
- Z. CARISSA ARDUINA.
- A. PRUNUS ILICIFOLIA.
- B. SOLANUM RANTONETTI.
- C. CRATAGUS LALANDI.
- D. RETINOSPORA PLUMOSA.
- E. CUPRESSUS LAWSONIANA ALUMI.
- F. JUNIPERUS SCOTTI.
- G. PITTOSPORUM UNDULATUM.
- H. ACACIA LONGIFOLIA.
- I. BERBERIS STENIOPHYLLA.
- J. BIOTA ELEGANTISSIMA.

## FLOWERING PLANTS:

- I. RICHARDIA AFRICANA.
- II. IMANTOPHYLLUM MINIATUM.
- III. ROSA.
- IV. TRITOMA UVARIA.
- V. IRIS JAPAN.
- VI. WATSONIA ARDERNEI.
- VII. STATICE HALFORDII.
- VIII. PAEONIA IN VARIETY.
- IX. LILIUM IN VARIETY.
- X. CARNATION IN VARIETY.
- XI. WATSONIA AUGUSTA.
- XII. CRINUM GIGANTEUM.
- XIII. ANEMONE IN VARIETY.
- XIV. ROMNEYA COULTERI.
- XV. STRELITZIA REGINAE.
- XVI. VALLOTA PURPUREA.

TREES SHOWN THUS  AND   
SHRUBS -   
PALMS -   
FLOWER BEDS - 

2.22

PARSONS PLANT PALETTE  
Circa 1905



PARSONS TREES 1904 BOTANICAL NAMES	RECLASSIFICATION BOTANICAL NAMES	RECLASSIFICATION COMMON NAMES	PLANT ORIGIN
<b>Trees:</b>			
Acacia baileyana	Acacia baileyana	Bailey acacia	Australia
Acacia blackwood	Acacia melanoxylon	Black acacia	Australia
Acacia floribunda	Acacia retinoides	Water wattle	Australia
Acacia mollissima	Acacia baileyana	Bailey acacia	Australia
Araucaria bidwillii	Araucaria bidwillii	Bunya bunya	Australia/New Zealand
Araucaria excelsior	Araucaria hetrophylla	Norfolk Island pine	Australia/Norfolk Isl.
Cedar atlantica	Cedrus atlantica	Atlas cedar	North Africa
Cedar deadora	Cedrus deodora	Deodar cedar	India, Himalayas
Cedar Lebanon	Cedrus libani	Cedar of Lebanon	Lebanon to Turkey
Ceratonia siliqua	Ceratonia siliqua	Carob Tree	Mediterranean
Cupressus azoricum	Cupressus arizonica	Arizona cypress	Arizona, No. America
Guadeloupe cypress	Cupressus guadalupensis	Guadalupe cypress	Guadalupe Isl., Baja CA
Eucalyptus botryoides	Eucalyptus botryoides	Bangalay	Southeast Australia
Eucalyptus citriodora	Eucalyptus citriodora	Lemon scented gum	Australia
Eucalyptus corynocalyx	Eucalyptus cladocalyx	Sugar gum	Queensland, Australia
Eucalyptus globulus	Eucalyptus globulus	Blue gum	South Australia
Eucalyptus polyanthema	Eucalyptus polyanthemos	Silver dollar gum	Australia
Eucalyptus rostrata	Eucalyptus camaldulensis	Red gum	Australia
Eucalyptus rudis	Eucalyptus rudis	Flooded gum	Australia
Eucalyptus sideroxylon	Eucalyptus sideroxylon	Red ironbark	Australia
Ficus nitida	Ficus microcarpa (retusa)	Indian laurel fig	Australia
Ficus ruginosa	Ficus rubiginosa	Rusty leaf fig	India, Malaysia
Lagunaria patersoni	Lagunaria patersonii	Primrose Tree	Australia
Leptospermum	Leptospermum laevigatum	Australian Tea Tree	Australia
Melaleuca leucodendron	Melaleuca quinquenervia	Paperbark Tree	Australia
Monterey cypress	Cupressus macrocarpa	Monterey cypress	Australia
Monterey pine	Pinus radiata	Monterey pine	Monterey, CA
Pinus canariensis	Pinus canariensis	Canary Island pine	Canary Islands, Africa
Pinus cembra	Pinus cembra	Swiss stone pine	Central Europe
Pinus halpensis	Pinus halepensis	Aleppo pine	Mediterranean
Pinus pinea	Pinus pinea	Italian stone pine	Southern Europe, Turkey
Pinus sinensis	Pinus sinensis	China pine	China, East Asia
Pittosporum undulatum	Pittosporum undulatum	Victorian Box	Australia
Prunus ilicifolia	Prunus ilicifolia lyonii	Catalina Cherry	California, No. America
Quercus agrifolia	Quercus agrifolia	Coast live oak	California, No. America
Schinus molle	Schinus molle	Mission pepper	Peru, South America
Torrey pine	Pinus torreyana	Torrey pine	San Diego, Santa Rosa Isl.
<b><u>Kate O. Sessions</u></b>			
Arecastrum romanzoffianum	Syragus romanzoffianum	Queen palm	Brazil, So. America
Erythea brandegeei	Brahea brandegeei	San Jose hesper pam	Baja, California

2.23

**RECLASSIFIED PARSONS  
TREE PALETTE TABLE  
2018**

Sources: *Hortus III*, Liberty Hyde Bailey; *Sunset Western Garden Book*; *Southern California Gardens*, Victoria Padilla; *Kate Sessions Pioneer Horticulturist*, Elizabeth McPhail.

The plant origin column of the Tree Palette Table (fig. 2.23) reflects the overwhelming majority of exotic species that originated in temperate latitudes on other continents and hemispheres. Interest in ornamental horticulture and floriculture was at its zenith globally during the late Victorian era at the turn of the 20th century. Southern California participated mightily in the sweeping introduction and adaptation of non-native horticulture during this period. The greening of semi-arid coastal desert lands proved to be a challenge, but it was offset by a mild climate and the discrete use of irrigation, which caused “anything” to grow. During this period, the California Horticultural Society, the Southern California Horticultural Society, the Southern California Floral Society, and the San Diego Floral Association, to name a few robust organizations, were established. All could trace their origins to the Victorian era of global plant collection, taxonomy, and study.

## 2.24

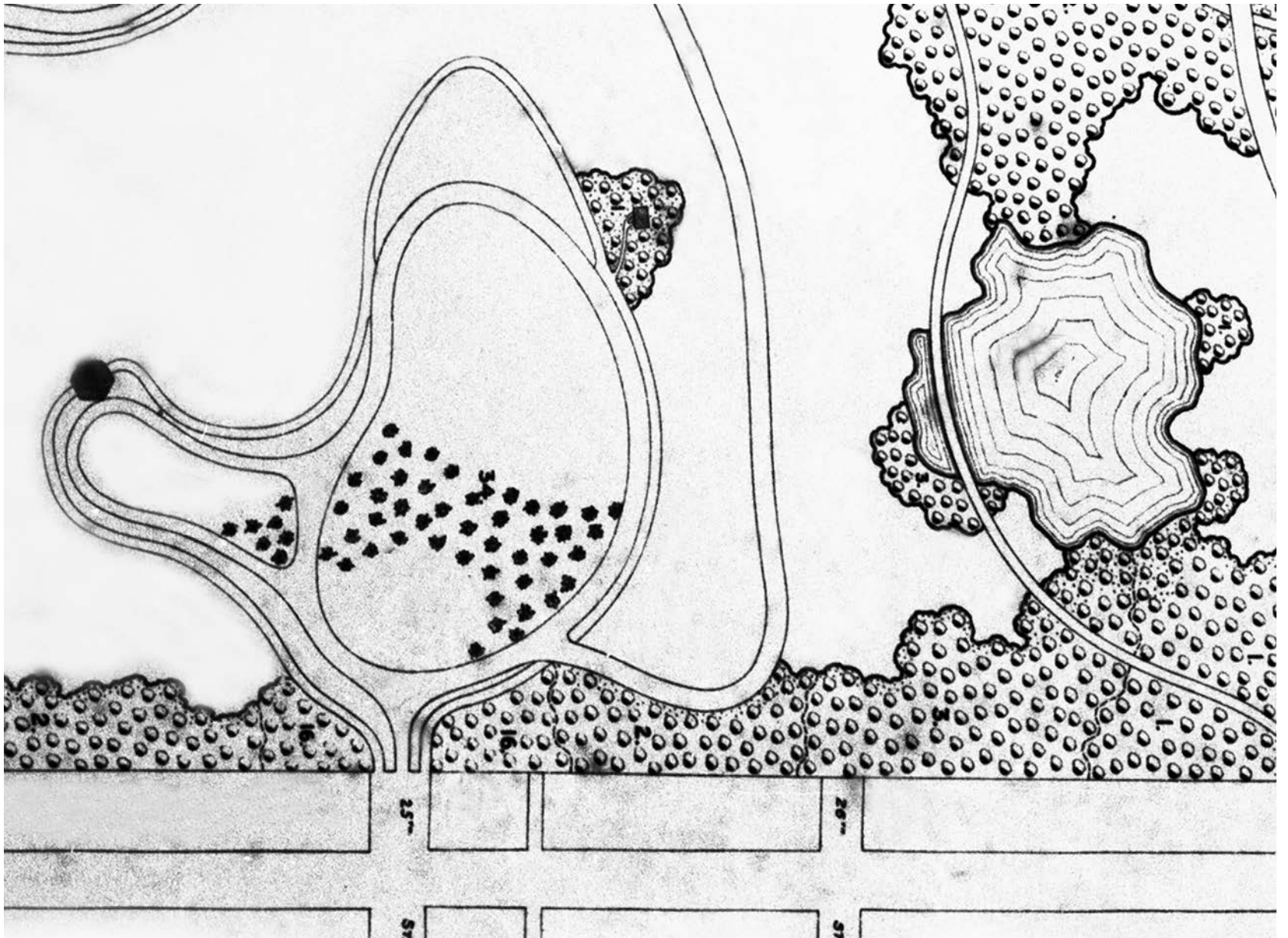
LAWN 'PLANTATION'  
SIXTH AVENUE  
Circa 1915 (SDHC)



To secure water availability for a significant amount of the horticulture planned, the Parsons design included petite reservoirs throughout the entire park property. These little lakes were distributed evenly and would play both a scenic and functional role:

The use of water in the form of lakes, as shown on the map, has a two-fold purpose. First: the usual one, in such cases, is the use of beauty, and the second, and unusual one, the beauty of use; that is to say of irrigation, a matter of importance in Southern California.

Parsons suggested a continuous cycling of water into the lakes, “. . . these lakes may be constantly filled, and by simple power of gravitation made to trickle down slopes of canyons with beneficent [sic] effect.” There doesn’t appear to be evidence that these lakes were actually crafted, filled, or used. By the time planting was installed in West Park, Golden Hill Park, and along park boundaries, the City of San Diego provided irrigation main lines to these specific areas of the park. West Park was served by wells and reservoirs originating in Palm Canyon; the southeastern areas were drawn from existing lines associated with adjacent neighborhoods.



2.25

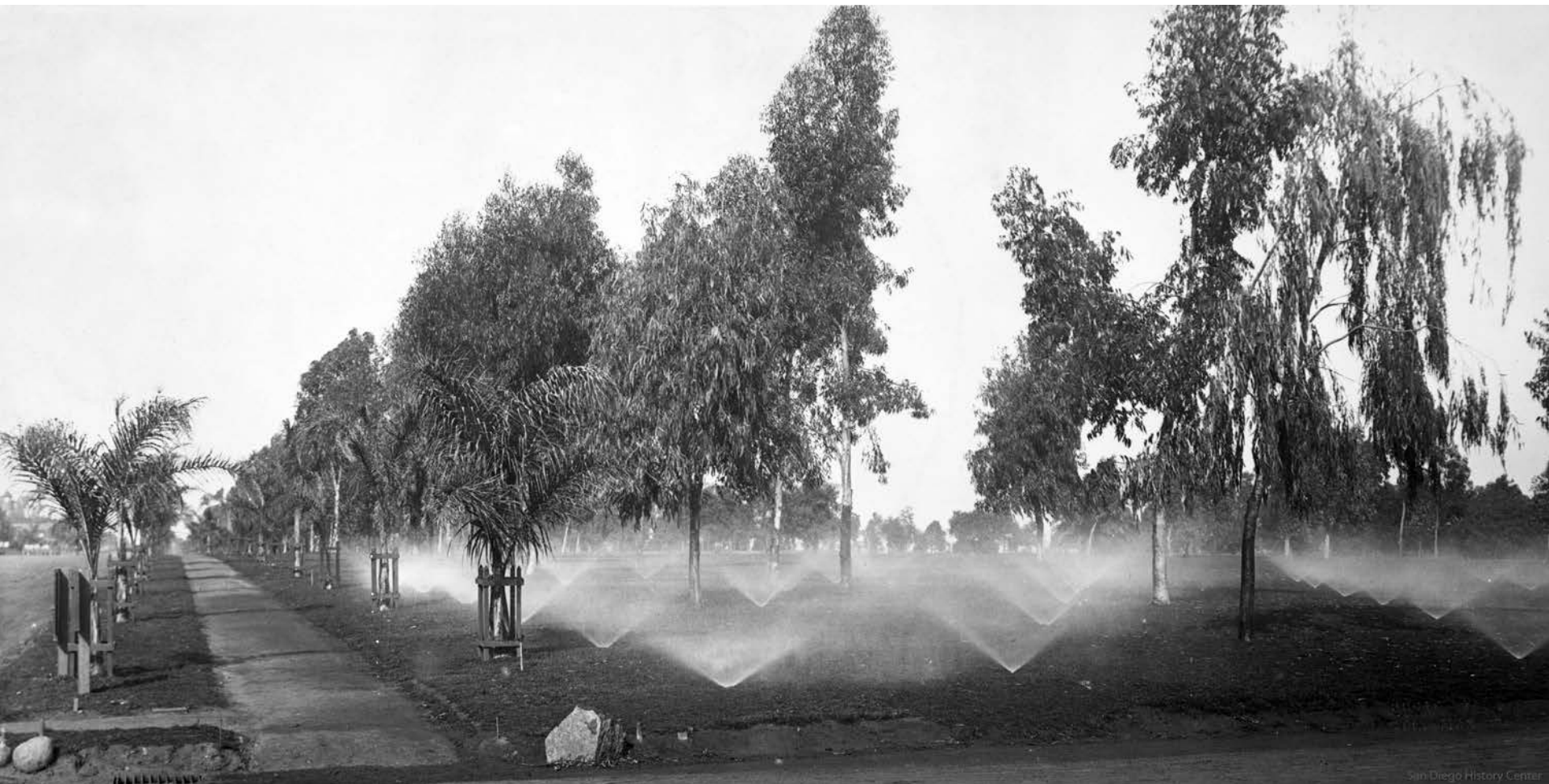
GOLDEN HILL PARK  
WITH ADJACENT 'LAKE'  
1905 (SDHC)

After becoming more familiar with the climate of San Diego where “. . . rain seldom falls in quantities,” and developing his deep appreciation for native horticulture, Parsons suggested that *indigenous* plants be used in the canyons and slopes as much as feasible. He anticipated that Easterners would also prefer large expanses of water-thirsty lawns to which they were strongly accustomed. His professorial narrative described the long seasons of dry weather, “. . . only such growths as may be reasonably expected to withstand these periods of dryness and scarcity of water should be used. . . .” In the case where lawn “plantations” might not be appropriate, he recommended the use of a native Australian ground cover, *Lippia repens*, a favorite discovery of Kate Sessions, as an “artistic and economical [green] sward.”

It is unclear when formal subgrade irrigation was installed, only in West Park as shown. Sprinkler heads and line piping were patented in Los Angeles as early as 1903. The sheer acreage of lawn plantations that were planned would have required significant amounts of applied water and would have been a labor-intensive undertaking. It is feasible that water lines were installed contemporaneous to post-road building and before the planting of trees, shrubs, ground covers, and lawn.

2.26

**SIXTH AVENUE**  
**FORMAL IRRIGATION**  
Queen Palms in parkway strip  
Circa 1915 (SDHC)



San Diego History Center

**c. Views and Vistas**

The very essence of a Picturesque landscape design is driven by arranging view opportunities by either framing distant views or creating ground views, or tableaux, within the landscape. In the case of San Diego's City Park, Parsons maintained an allegiance to this principle in all aspects of his design. Two distant views in particular were preliminarily noted on the plan: 1) On the west side of the Golden Hill Park loop road, the vista looking west was of the sloping downtown area as it meets the San Diego Bay; and 2) In lower West Park along the canyon rim, a vista site was noted looking southeast toward Mt. San Miguel in the Jamul Mountain Range. At 2,600-foot elevation, the conical-shaped mountain was certainly not the highest in the county, but it was the closest to the San Diego metro area and dominated the skyline.

At the Eighth Avenue entrance linking downtown to West Park, Parsons's sweeping half-circle lawn plantation, "an imposing entrance," was surrounded by a massing of the "feathery" light-green mission pepper trees, *Schinus molle*, in the foreground and backed by dark evergreen Monterey pines, *Pinus radiata*—a sampling of his tree palette brushstrokes, if you will. Parsons mistook the pepper tree as a California native, when in fact it originates from Peru, South America, and was brought in by the Spanish to the Mission San Luis Rey in San Diego County.

Additionally, the sites or structures that, in Parsons's opinion, were not compatible with his landscape design, he called for visual buffers to "sequester" them:

2.27

**PARSONS SEMI-CIRCLE  
PARK ENTRY EIGHTH  
& DATE STREETS**  
Circa late 1920's (SDHC)

Around the Russ [High] School and Women's Home are a mass of Eucalyptus, Monterey Cypress, Pepper tree, and Pine, so arranged as to exclude these buildings from the general view of the Park, while adjoining, and to the east, is the field for athletics which is of considerable size.





Parsons's design intent was dutifully carried out by Cooke, who of course made necessary modifications or refinements in the field. In Parsons's 18-page design narrative, nothing was left to chance. In concluding his treatise, he warned of the pressures often put on public parks. He continued his disdain for structures in a park, most likely learned from experience:

Another general principle, which cannot be too urgently insisted upon . . . is that no building should be allowed within its boundaries that does not subserve the legitimate purpose for which the park was ordered. Public comfort, rest, and shelter should mark the limit, and even these may become so numerous and obstructive as to disturb the restful beauty of nature.

And finally, he pleaded to the future, apparently having a difficult time letting go of this most unusual commission:

. . . we wish to admonish those who come after us in the work of carrying out design to a nearer state of completion, . . . to work always with an eye single to the conservation of the unusual beauties with which nature has to peculiarly, and richly endowed this spot of earth.

## **B. Summary of Historic Landscape Character, 1868–1910**

According to the National Register of Historic Places, a *period of significance* “is the length of time when a property was associated with important events, activities, or persons, or attained the characteristics which qualify it for National Register listing.” From the original parkland set aside by the Board of Trustees on 26 May 1868, through the implementation of the first landscape master plan in 1910, San Diego’s City Park travelled from raw land to high style, always being prompted and driven by its citizenry who struggled to elevate the park’s importance on a national scale. In 1868, a population of 2,300, either farsighted or foolhardy, struck a boundary around the canyonlands and mesas of this distinctive tract of land. The parkland, however, lay fallow until the turn of the century in 1900, when the population had grown to almost 18,000.

By 1910, a cadre of park supporters had transformed a good portion of City Park into an emerging picturesque American public park. Its chief designer, Samuel Parsons, understood the magnitude of the effort and the challenge that laid before him:

Upon entering it [City Park] the vision is compelled by the noble scenery which girdles the horizon with uninterrupted majesty. The purple slopes of snow-capped mountains, . . . the shining bay, the Coronado Islands, and the greatest of all the Pacific Ocean, with the long, low ramparts of Point Loma . . . hold one for a while with compelling force.

Of the original 1,400 acres, that “good portion” of City Park, approximately 300 acres or 20% of the land most in demand by adjacent neighborhoods, was planted and irrigated within a short seven-year period. The portion the Parsons Plan actually realized was composed of West Park from Upas to Date Streets and its contiguous canyons; Sixth Avenue; Golden Hill Park; and tree plantings along the park’s boundary edges as well as along the main arterial, Park Boulevard.

Parsons’s keen observations helped redefine and put into a much larger context the tract of land that was apportioned to the public more than three decades—a generation—before his visit. The land would come to host botanical imagery of beauty and sophistication late of England by way of New York—the East had come all the way West. The herculean efforts during the Parsons decade, 1902–1910, proved the park had a new purpose and the city had a new destiny. But the new century had yet another epic journey in store for San Diego.

On 9 July 1909, G. Aubrey Davidson, former executive of the AT&SF Railroad, founder of the Southern Trust and Commerce Bank, and president of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, announced the prospect of San Diego staging an exposition in 1915 to celebrate the upcoming completion of the Panama Canal. President Teddy Roosevelt was determined to secure both coasts of the North American continent by taking over the isthmus and building an access route that would shave off the 10,000 sea miles around the treacherous Cape Horn.

The federal government had sanctioned San Francisco as the official host for the 1915 Panama *Pacific* Exposition. But by 1910, San Diego had reached nearly 40,000 in population and secured the right to host a concurrent—auxiliary—exposition. The upstart city with its natural harbor reckoned it was the first American port of call north of the canal and pressed forward. Parsons, during his last visit in 1910 to consult on compatibly merging the ongoing City Park planting with the new expo plans, suggested the park should have a more culturally relevant and romantic name. “Balboa Park” was chosen, named for the 16th-century Spanish explorer, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who was the first to trek through the Central American isthmus and encounter the Pacific Ocean.

With a decent level of botanical maturity and its new name, the park once again was to undertake a significant and historical step into the future as the clamor for the 1915 Panama California Exposition in San Diego gained momentum. Two primary themes would emerge: the popularization of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, and its many style variations, and the promotion of horticulture, agriculture, and floriculture as viable regional industries. Both themes were a perfect fit for the San Diego landscape and redefined its civic identity thereafter.



### III. EXISTING CONDITIONS DOCUMENTATION

#### A. Summary of Historic Landscape Character Remaining from 1868–1910

Following the park's dedication in 1868, the 1,400-acre tract sat fallow, neglected, unimproved, and subject to indiscriminate nonpark uses. Frustrated with the lack of leadership, residents took measures into their own hands and began early foresting programs. Their efforts, coupled with 10 years of the Sessions park nursery plantings, confirmed that a green park adjacent to their homes could be achieved, although in a random manner. Seeing the need for a comprehensive landscape design, a very motivated civic group formed and sought professional help, which culminated in the *Samuel Parsons & Co. Landscape Plan of 1905*. The plan realized the hopes and visions of the residents of San Diego toward a formal urban park and in a style comparable to that of the famed Central Park in New York City.

Assessing the cultural landscape of Balboa Park's first period of significance, 1868–1910, reveals 42 years of public use that culminated in the predicate layer of park development, which continues to convey historic integrity today. The park contains remnant historic fabric, e.g., the park's unique topography, vehicular circulation, and park entrances and vegetation. The chief function and original design intent of City Park was that of an unstructured, passive-use, public park. In 1905, Samuel Parsons held to his design standard:

Another general principle, which cannot be too urgently insisted upon, from the very beginning, is that no building should be allowed in its boundaries that does not subserve the legitimate purpose for which the park was ordered. Public comfort, rest, and shelter should mark the limit, and even these may become so numerous and obtrusive as to disturb the restful beauty of nature.





3.1

**POUND CANYON BRIDAL TRAIL**  
Circa 1910 (SDHC)

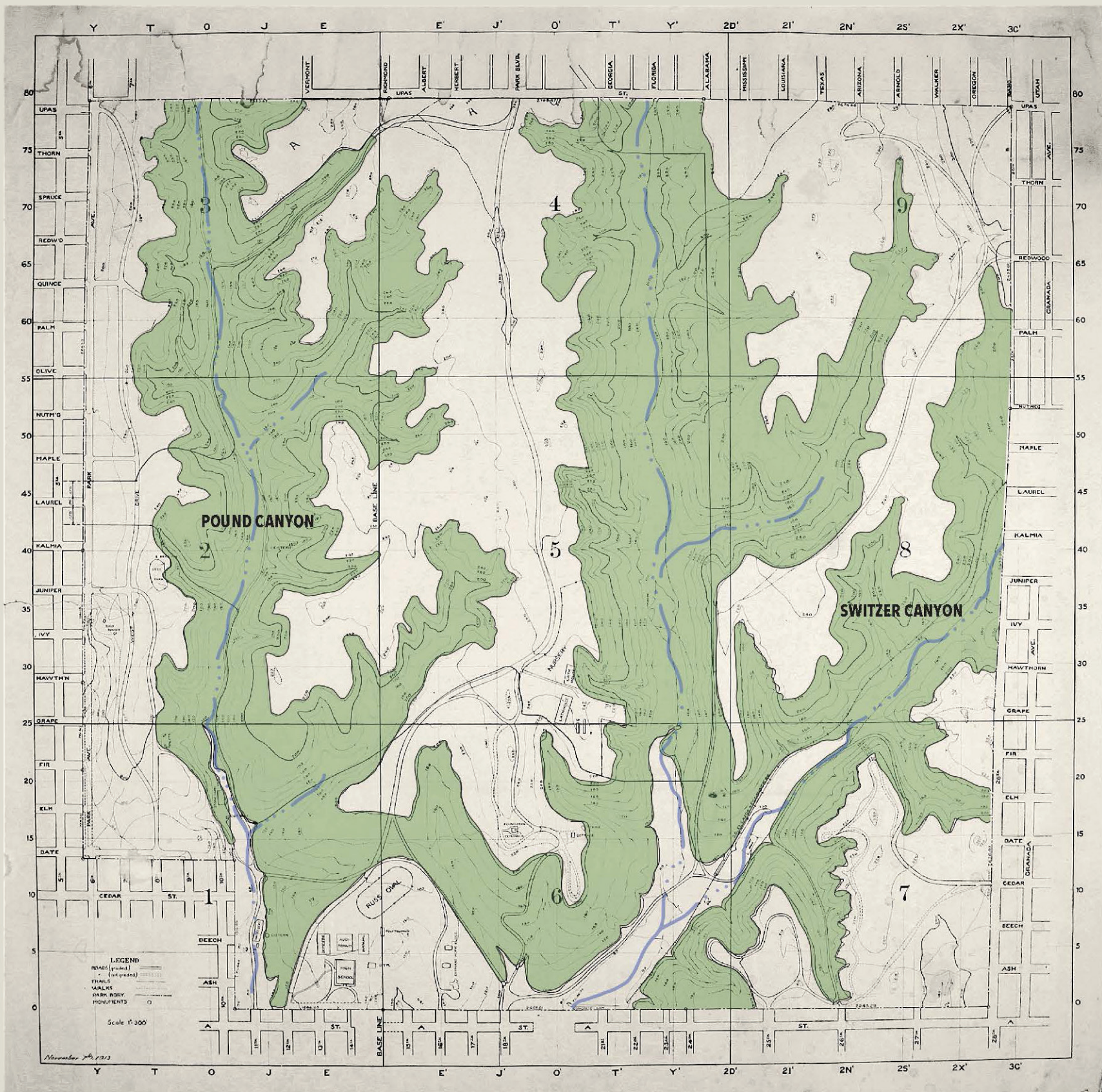
### **Topography**

Canyons and their contiguous tablelands (mesas) are among the most unique and character-defining features of the San Diego County landscape. Parsons was enthralled by the undulating topography. “So valuable . . . these ‘convolutions of surface’ . . .” His designs observed and honored the native landscape, even framing views to and from the slopes of the canyons. The roadway designs were deliberately laid out to maximize views of the surrounding natural landscape from every angle. The park canyons varied in their slope profiles, the amount of elevational change in each, and the width from the tops of slope banks. Pound Canyon and Switzer Canyon were the deepest chasms, ranging from a 60- to 140-foot drop, with a range of canyon rims between 700 and 2,000 feet. Seasonal creeks ran down each canyon floor and eventually drained into San Diego Bay.

3.2

**CANYONLANDS OF CITY PARK**







3.3

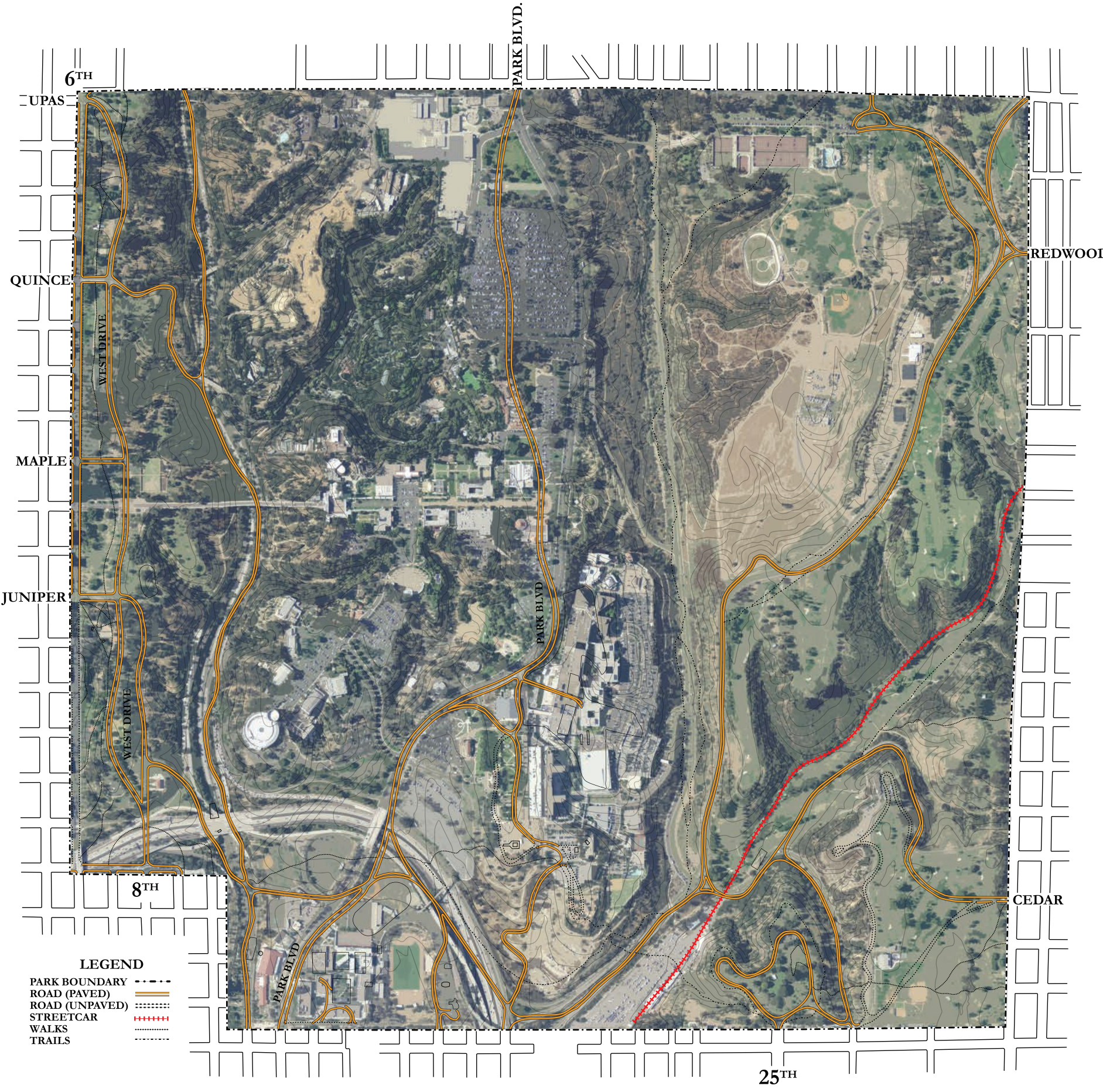
### FREEWAY IMPACTS TO WEST PARK

#### Circulation

From Parsons's first visit in December of 1902 and well into 1910, a parkwide circulation plan, with park entrances, was implemented throughout the entire tract—some 10 miles of roadways with 10 entrances along the park boundaries.

It will be readily seen, therefore, that when a few more roads and paths have been built along the top and bottom of the canyons, to bring their slopes into view, when access is established to the best viewpoint of mountains and sea, and some line of enclosure marks the outer boundaries, there will be a park already made of very simple elements, and little changed from its original character.

The most significant landscape circulation entrance was at the southernmost end of West Park at Date Street. Eighth Avenue came up from a very robust downtown warehouse district and was met by a semicircular lawn plantation entry statement framed by a grove of bright-colored evergreen pepper trees in a backdrop of dark green cypress and pines. This special design element was, unfortunately, much later subsumed by the construction of Interstate 5 in the early 1960s.



6<sup>TH</sup>

PARK BLVD.

UPAS

QUINCE

REDWOOD

MAPLE

JUNIPER

8<sup>TH</sup>

CEDAR

25<sup>TH</sup>

**LEGEND**

- PARK BOUNDARY    - - - - -
- ROAD (PAVED)       - - - - -
- ROAD (UNPAVED)   - - - - -
- STREETCAR        - - - - -
- WALKS             - - - - -
- TRAILS            - - - - -

## **Vegetation**

The Parsons tree palette, developed in consultation with horticulturist Kate Sessions, introduced exotic trees from temperate climates around the globe. For more than a century, these particular species have achieved significance as the iconic trees of Balboa Park and serve as an informal arboretum of sorts, unlike other parks of the day.

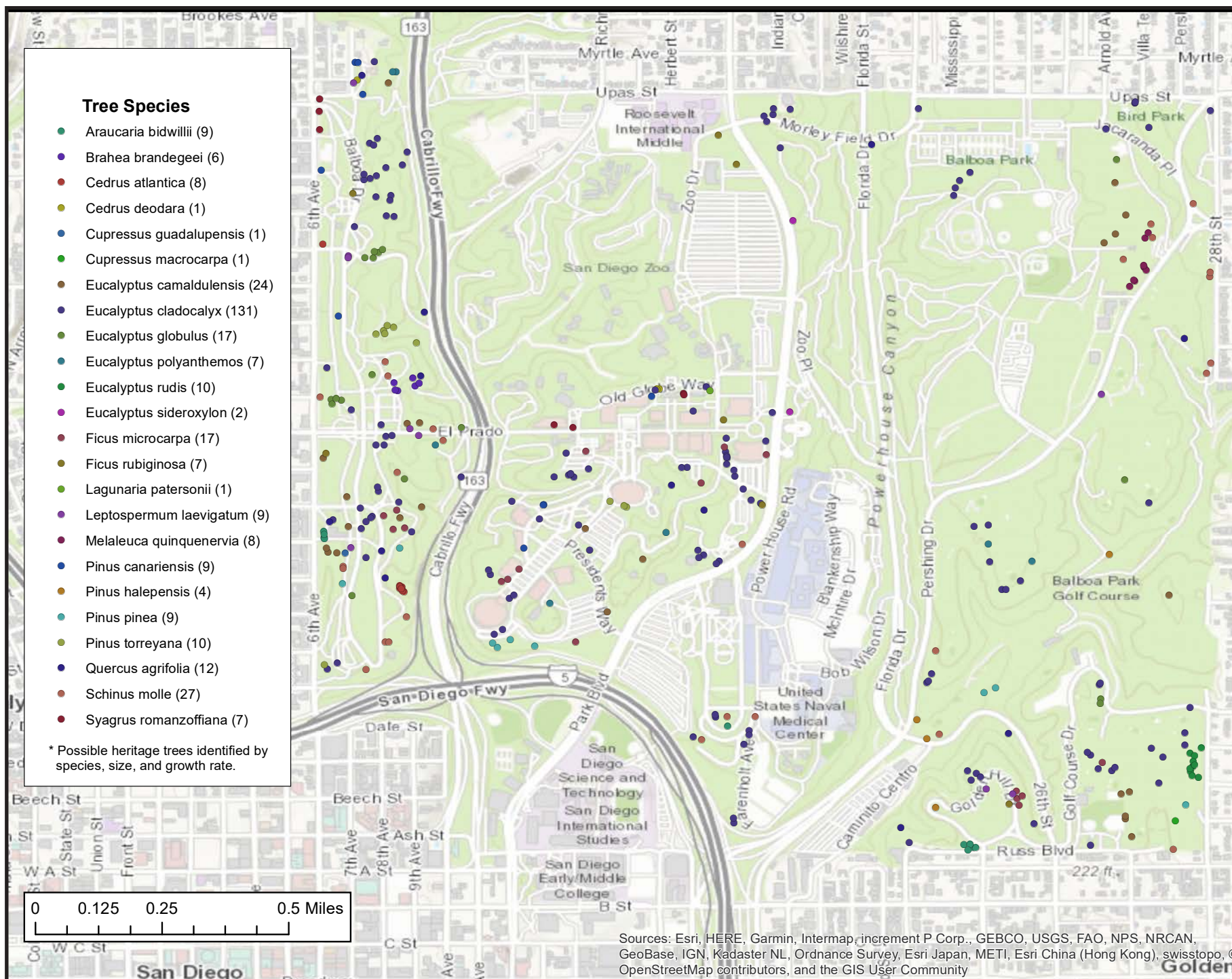
As part of the Cultural Landscape Heritage study, the Balboa Park Conservancy conducted a tree survey in 2017–2018. Some 15,000 trees were documented by height and DBH (diameter at breast height). DBH is a standard method of expressing the diameter of the trunk or bole of a standing tree. The locations of all trees were also recorded with GPS coordinates.

A heritage tree identification program developed criteria to better account for the most mature trees and their potential historic significance. Included were tree species that were listed on the Parsons plant list from 1905, as well as trees that were known to have been planted or introduced into the San Diego region by Sessions. Trees that exceeded 42" at DBH qualified for inclusion.

The survey results showed several trees have achieved significant enough maturity to be listed as potential heritage trees, especially those that may have associative value with either the Parsons Plan and plant legend or the Sessions park nursery plantings, as well as those that predate them. These foundational trees defined the urban forest of City Park and were carefully selected by the designers, growers, and park advocates.

### **3.5**

#### **POTENTIAL HERITAGE TREES**

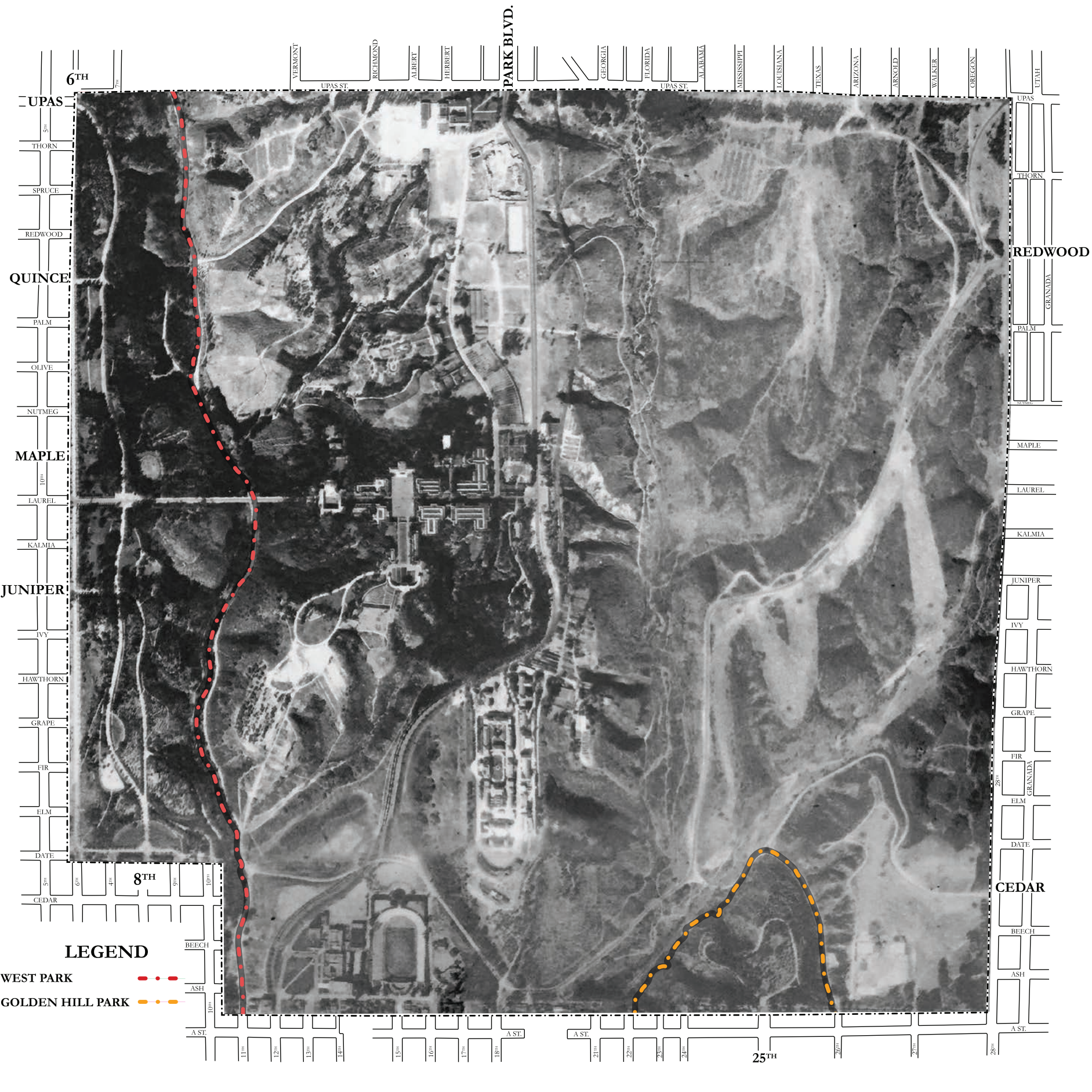


Additional criteria were developed to identify potential *witness trees* as defined by the National Park Service, “A Witness Tree is a tree that observed key events in American history. . . .” City Park trees that were from the Parsons tree palette, called out on the 1905 planting plans, and that are extant from the period of significance 1868–1910 qualify as potential witness trees.

Approximately 300+ acres of parkland were planted and irrigated in West Park, Golden Hill Park, and along the southern boundary. But by 1909, the city had turned its attention toward a well-funded aggressive plan for an exposition to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. What ensued would strike a blow to the Parsons Plan’s momentum. Yet, the plan had already laid in a strong predicate layer of a Picturesque landscape design from the early 20th-century American park aesthetic (i.e., exotic tree canopy, views and vistas, and sinuous pleasure-driving roadways) that has persisted to today.

### 3.6

1928 AERIAL PHOTO  
SHOWS MATURING FORESTS  
OF WEST PARK



6<sup>TH</sup>

UPAS

THORN

SPRUCE

REDWOOD

QUINCE

PALM

OLIVE

NUTMEG

MAPLE

LAUREL

KALMIA

JUNIPER

IVY

HAWTHORN

GRAPE

FIR

ELM

DATE

8<sup>TH</sup>

CEDAR

**LEGEND**

- WEST PARK - - -
- GOLDEN HILL PARK - - -

BEECH

ASH

A ST.

11<sup>TH</sup>

12<sup>TH</sup>

13<sup>TH</sup>

14<sup>TH</sup>

15<sup>TH</sup>

16<sup>TH</sup>

17<sup>TH</sup>

18<sup>TH</sup>

PARK BLVD.

A ST.

21<sup>ST</sup>

22<sup>ND</sup>

23<sup>RD</sup>

24<sup>TH</sup>

25<sup>TH</sup>

26<sup>TH</sup>

27<sup>TH</sup>

25<sup>TH</sup>

CEDAR

BEECH

ASH

A ST.

UPAS

THORN

REDWOOD

GRANADA

PALM

MAPLE

LAUREL

KALMIA

JUNIPER

IVY

HAWTHORN

GRAPE

FIR

GRANADA

ELM

DATE

CEDAR

BEECH

ASH

A ST.

UPAS

UTAH

OREGON

VERMONT

UPAS ST.

RICHMOND

ALBERT

HERBERT

GEORGIA

FLORIDA

ALABAMA

MISSISSIPPI

LOUISIANA

TEXAS

ARIZONA

ARNOLD

WALKER

OREGON

UPAS ST.

**B. Considerations for National Register of Historic Places Criteria  
City Park First Period of Significance, 1868–1910**

**Criterion A: Broad Patterns of History**

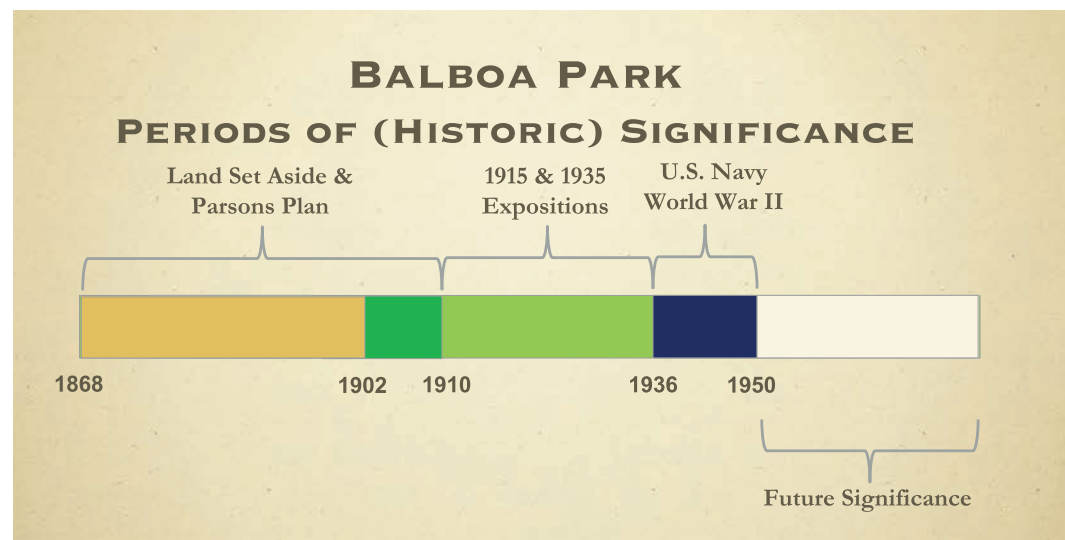
- San Diego Pueblo Lands to Parkland Dedication
- San Diego Global Experimental Horticulture

**Criterion B: Significant Persons**

- George White Marston, Philanthropist
- Kate Olivia Sessions, Pioneer Horticulturist
- Samuel Parsons Jr., Master Landscape Architect
- George Cooke, Master Landscape Engineer

**Criterion C: Design Movements/Design Masters**

- American Picturesque Landscape Design
- Samuel Parsons & Company, Landscape Architects, New York





## V. APPENDICIES

### A. National Park Service Standards & Guidelines for Cultural Landscapes

#### 1. National Park Service Publications

The Balboa Park Cultural Landscape Overview is informed by the following National Park Service (NPS) publications:

- *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*
- *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*
- National Register Bulletin 15: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*
- National Register Bulletin 30: *Guidelines for Documenting and Evaluating Rural Historic Landscapes*
- NPS Preservation Brief 36: *Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes*

## 2. Cultural Landscape Typologies

*The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* identifies four types of cultural landscapes:

- **Historic Designed Landscapes**

A landscape consciously laid out to a design principle, style, or tradition that has an historical association with a significant person, trend, or movement. Examples include parks, campuses, and estates.

- **Historic Vernacular Landscapes**

A landscape that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped it. Function plays a significant role in vernacular landscapes. Examples include farmsteads and ranches.

- **Historic Sites**

A landscape significant for its association with an historic event, activity or person. Examples include battlefields and presidential homes.

- **Ethnographic Landscapes**

A landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage properties. Examples include sacred religious sites, cultural settlements, and massive geological structures.

## **B National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)**

### **1. Significance Criteria**

According to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), historic significance may be present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and that meet at least one of the four NRHP significance criteria.

- **National Register Criterion A**

Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history.

- **National Register Criterion B**

Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

- **National Register Criterion C**

Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

- **National Register Criterion D**

Property has yielded or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### **2. Definition of a Period of Significance (POS)**

A period of significance is when a property has attained historic significance that may qualify it for the National Register of Historic Places. The property is associated with important events, activities, persons, or qualifying characteristics. The time can span many years and consist of beginning and closing dates.

**C. Historical Status of Balboa Park Sites**

Balboa Park National Register District (National Register #77000331): 22

December 1977

California Quadrangle (NR #74000548): 17 May 1974

El Prado Complex (NR #76000515): 12 December 1976

Ford Building (NR #73000433): 26 April 1973

George W. & Anna G. Marston House (SD Historic Site #40): 4 December

1970

George W. & Anna G. Marston House (NR #74000552): 16 December 1974

George W. & Anna G. Marston House Gardens (SD Historic Site #287): 22

August 1994

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**E. City Park (Balboa Park) Timeline**  
**First Period of Significance, 1868–1910**

**26 May 1868** San Diego’s Board of Trustees sets aside 1,400 acres “for a public park forever.” The City Park boundary encompassed PLSS Lots 1129, 1130, 1131, 1135, 1136, 1137, and a portion of 1142, 1143, and 1144.

**1869** A group of land speculators and developers attempt to remove 480 acres from the east side of the park and acquire them for private development. Citizens gather signatures to retain the original 1,400 acres.

**4 February 1870** The California state legislature ratifies San Diego’s park set-aside. The land is to be “held in trust forever . . . for the use and purpose of a public park, and for no other or different purpose.”

**1870s** A long-established American Indian rancheria enclosed within City Park boundaries, near Date Street and Eighth Avenue is gradually depopulated.

**1870’s** Stray livestock are confined by city officials in the westernmost canyon of City Park, giving rise to the name Pound Canyon (later Cabrillo Canyon).

**1873** The private San Diego Water Company gains approval to drill wells in City Park’s Cabrillo Canyon and constructs two large storage tanks on the nearby mesas.

**1881** City Trustees approve 5 acres in the southern section of City Park for Russ School (San Diego High School).

**August 1881** Mr. A. Wentscher, a merchant, receives permission to build a gunpowder magazine on a 300-square-foot allotment at the southwest corner of Pueblo Lot 1136.

**29 March 1882** *The San Diego Union* editorializes on the potential for improving the park with artistic enhancements, the planting of flowers, and the application of water.

**14 April 1882** City Trustees deny a request to establish a dairy operation in City Park.

**14 August 1882** Russ (High) School opens its doors on 8.5 acres of City Park allotted by officials for San Diego's first high school.

**12 December 1884** Twelve citizens, including George Marston, successfully petition the City for permission to plant and maintain privately funded eucalyptus trees in City Park.

**1884** John G. Capron is granted permission to build a powder house in City Park.

**1885** Slaughterhouse Canyon, with its open-air abattoir, becomes known as Powder House Canyon after ammunition and gun powder storage is moved from downtown to City Park.

**1885** The Ladies Annex of the Chamber of Commerce gains permission to landscape an area of City Park along Sixth Avenue between Juniper and Palm Streets (this planting of 700 trees and shrubs ultimately succumbs to drought and vandalism).



**1886** The Citizens Association for Improving and Beautifying San Diego, headed by Bryant Howard, sign petitions in opposition of a City Park land sale: “We are opposed to the sale of even one foot of it.”

**1886** Levi Chase advocates selling half the park to reduce it to a more manageable size of only 640 acres.

**December 1886** The United States Army unsuccessfully proposes an exchange of its downtown barracks location for 500 or more acres of City Park.

**1887** Small pox victims are confined to the previously built “pest house” isolation ward within City Park.

**1887** Chamber of Commerce President G. G. Brandt proposes a permanent county fairgrounds, observatory, custom house, and other public buildings saying, “Surely we have more land in that park than will be needed for park purposes for the next half-century, if indeed it is ever to be made useful for such purposes . . . Then why not make use of it for our more immediate wants? . . . Now, Mr. Editor (letter to the San Diego Union) lend your journal as a powerful influence towards having something done to our present worthless park.”

**2 December 1887** Private philanthropists led by Bryant Howard gain the use of 100 acres of City Park to establish a boy’s orphan home, kindergarten, industrial school, and other charitable institutions. A large Queen Anne-style building is erected near the southern border of the park. Water pipes are laid and extensive landscaping undertaken. The Women’s Home Association is granted use of 5 acres of parkland to construct a shelter for homeless and indigenous women.

George Marston speaks out that it would be a dangerous precedent and that the park should be, “entirely under one Board of Commissioners.” *The San Diego Union* editorializes back, “No let us have some of the city park opened to the hand of private improvement and a charity, and we answer for it that the millions of San Diegans who will be here in 1989 won’t bewail the forethought which prompted the concession.”

**13 December 1887** An ongoing problem of garbage dumping in City Park is aired in the newspaper.

**1888** Dr. J. P. LeFevre organizes a 30-person tree-planting club to plant eucalyptus trees in City Park. Most trees succumb to drought within 10 years.

**July 1888** The short-lived Park Belt street car line, also known as the City & University Heights Railroad, opens a 10-mile line running from 18th and A Street to the Kensington neighborhood and running through City Park and Switzer Canyon.

**1889–1890** The Golden Hill neighborhood and Ladies Annex begin to improve Golden Hill Park at 25th & A Streets. Landscaping begins along with a playground and three-hole golf course.

1890 Bryant Howard begins extensive landscaping of the 100 acres of the charity tract, water is piped in, and 10,000 trees planted. The Women’s Home Association opens a 10-room residential facility and day nursery, which remained until the construction of I-5 forced its relocation in the 1950s.

**February 1892** A city ordinance grants Kate O. Sessions a lease on 30 acres of City Park, in the northwest quadrant at Sixth Avenue and Upas Street, for use as a nursery and growing grounds. Lease terms require her to plant 100 trees per year in the park and to provide 300 trees annually for other city beautification projects.

**1893** Russ School's use of City Park land is expanded.

**1893** A severe economic downturn bankrupts the philanthropists behind the charity tract ending all support and maintenance of their City Park installations.

**1893** The San Diego Agricultural Society requests 7.4 acres of City Park to create a permanent location for a county fair.

**January 1897** The City Lands Committee approves the deeding of 30 acres of City Park to the Knights of Pythias Lodge of California to build a home for the aged and ill; public opinion influences a final decision to deny the request.

**January 1897** A city official proposes that 70 acres of City Park be donated to house a State of California normal school, launching years of controversy on this proposed park incursion.

**1897** Golfers gain permission to build a nine-hole golf course and a club house in City Park. The sand and dirt course is bounded by Upas, Richmond, and Laurel Streets and extends east to Florida Canyon.

**April 1897** City Trustees agree to an exclusive lease of 60 acres of City Park land for a tobacco plantation; subsequent opposition derails the scheme.

**1898** Russ School's use of City Park land is again expanded.

**1898** Mayor Edwin Capps and others promote Florida and Switzer Canyons as sites for dams to create lakes and reservoirs.

**May 1898** Kate Sessions puts forward the first overall plan for planting City Park, making clear that her plan is no substitute for expert park planning, preferably by Frederick Law Olmsted.

**July 1899** Leading women of San Diego and the Wednesday Club request a plot of parkland upon which to construct a public library building.

**August 1902** The Chamber of Commerce creates a Park Improvement Committee. Mary B. Coulston is hired by George Marston as executive secretary and publicist.

**October 1902** Samuel Parsons is hired by the Chamber of Commerce Park Improvement Committee to create a comprehensive landscape plan for City Park. Marston funds Parsons's commission for \$10,000.

**December 1902** Samuel Parsons visits City Park in preparation for a landscape master plan. His four-day reconnaissance visit with George Marston yields observations that find their way into his park design.

**March 1903** John MacLean, formerly of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, is hired as City Park's first head gardener; with Mary B. Coulston he establishes a park nursery.

**April 1903** The San Diego Board of Public Works is authorized by the city government to undertake its first improvement work in City Park.

**July 1903** George Cooke, of Parsons & Company, arrives in San Diego to implement design plans for City Park. Road building, planting, and the definition of park entrances ensue. More than 14,000 trees and shrubs are planted in the next two years.

**4 July 1903** Members of the Elks, Foresters, Woodmen, and other fraternal organizations in California converge on San Diego for a mass tree planting in City Park, organized by Mary B. Coulston using planting specifications of Samuel Parsons.

**Fall 1903** Kate Sessions vacates her City Park nursery site to make way for the Parsons Plan road building. She moves her operations to Mission Hills.

**17 March 1904** San Diego's first Arbor Day tree-planting celebration is held in Balboa Park. Kate Sessions planned the event on the birthday of the revered horticulturist and agronomist Luther Burbank.

**27 January 1905** San Diego voters amend the city charter to earmark a percentage of property tax income for a park development fund.

**17 April 1905** San Diego appoints a Board of Park Commissioners led by George Marston.

**1905** Samuel Parsons submits his final report. His City Park plan envisions a pastoral and open landscape celebrating natural mountain, ocean, and bay views. He concludes his design narrative with a strict recommendation to keep the park “forever free from the interjection of all foreign, extraneous, and hurtful purposes or objects.”

**30 November 1905** USS Bennington Oak Grove is established at 26th Street in South Park, Golden Hill neighborhood. Sixty-six live oaks, *Quercus agrifolia*, are planted to memorialize the loss of life from a ship’s boiler explosion.

**1907** City Park Commissioners note that the park is being cleared of undesirable uses: rifle clubs and shooting are discouraged or banned, shacks have been razed, the pest house evicted and cattle grazing discouraged. The first ordinance to protect the park from rubbish dumping is enacted.

**1907** George Cooke is named as the first superintendent of San Diego city parks.

**1907** Russ School in City Park is replaced with a much larger school building, the “Grey Castle.”

**1908** Ten miles of roads within City Park are completed along with many other specifications of the Parsons Plan.

**March 1908** A decorative fountain grotto designed by architect Henry Lord Gay, and installed under the supervision of George Cooke, is completed in the Golden Hill Park.

**August 1908** George Cooke dies.

**9 July 1909** A San Diego auxiliary exposition to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal in 1915 is proposed by Chamber of Commerce President G. Aubrey Davidson.

**August 1909** San Diego's Water and Street Departments relocate their stables from Pound Canyon to a City Operations Yard at the 20th and A Street area of City Park.

**4 September 1909** The Panama-California Exposition Corporation is formed.

**1910** Samuel Parsons returns to San Diego to assess the readiness of City Park to host an exposition. His report includes the suggestion that City Park be given a more distinctive name.

**9 August 1910** San Diego voters approve a bond issue of \$1 million for permanent park improvements, exclusive of temporary exposition buildings.

**27 October 1910** City Park is renamed Balboa Park by action of the Park Commission.

**9 November 1910** The Olmsted Brothers are selected by the Building and Grounds Committee of the Panama-California Exposition Corporation as landscape architects for the exposition and the park as a whole.

**19 July 1911** The 1915 Panama-California Exposition San Diego groundbreaking event is held on the Central Mesa.

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Cultural landscapes are not separate systems or characteristics, but integrated, living, dynamic constructs. . . .

*Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports:  
Content, Process, and Techniques National Park Service, 1998*



## A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A Cultural Landscape is essentially a natural landscape that has been altered and shaped by human activity. The National Park Service (NPS) identifies four types of cultural landscapes: Designed Landscape, one that has been consciously laid out to a design principle, style or tradition and has an historical association

with significant persons or design movements. Examples include parks, campuses, and estates. Vernacular Landscape, one that evolved through land use functions by people whose occupancy shaped it. Examples include farmsteads, and ranches. Historic Sites, one that is significant for its association with an historic

event, activity, or person. Examples include battlefields and festival sites. Ethnographic Landscape, one that contains natural and cultural resources that are defined heritage properties. Examples include sacred religious sites, cultural settlements, and significant geological features.