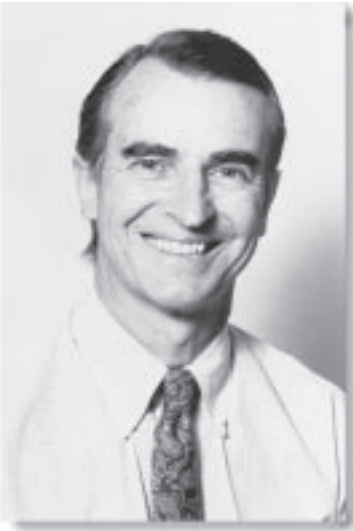


PRESERVE THE SCENIC, NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE ARROYO SECO

By Charles McKenney



Fifteen years of discussion and public participation have raised the hope that the long awaited Arroyo Seco Master Plan would reflect Pasadena's historic emphasis on preserving and protecting the natural state of the Arroyo. This, regretably, has not come about.

There is always a tug of war between the need to accommodate recreation and cars, and the need for natural areas

where we can take time out and enjoy the blessings of nature. The Arroyo Seco Master Plan purports to balance these competing demands, but the Plan's stated goal betrays that assertion.

While giving great lip service to the value of a natural Arroyo, the Plan states its purpose is to "provide facilities for passive and active recreation...in order to provide recreation facilities and programs...."

In pursuit of this purpose, the Master Plan proposes to widen trails and access roads, carve out new access roads, build a bridge from the main parking lot across the low flow stream to the casting pond, build an all weather bike trail, build a six level parking structure in Hahamongna, and to build two new parking lots in the Lower Arroyo totaling 10,000 square feet, one large enough for a bus to park and turn around in.

Why should we care about widened driveways and new parking facilities in the Arroyo? Isn't this the 21st century?

We should care because since the 19th century the Arroyo Seco has been Pasadena's single most important feature and today is recognized as one of Southern California's greatest natural treasures. But for the Arroyo, Pasadena as we know it would not exist. Pasadena landmarks and traditions such as the Rose Bowl, the Tournament of Roses, Brookside Park, the Arts and Crafts Movement, Gamble House, Craftsman Homes on South Arroyo Boulevard, colorful homes along San Rafael, Linda Vista, Prospect and North Arroyo Boulevards, declared and proposed Landmark Districts, Orange Grove Boulevard, Colorado Street Bridge, United States District Court of Appeals (Vista del Arroyo), and La Casita del Arroyo all exist because of their proximity to the natural Arroyo.

All told, eight Pasadena Cultural Heritage Landmarks are along or near the Arroyo Seco. One is the Lower Arroyo itself!

Can we imagine what Pasadena would be today without these signature landmarks and traditions? Certainly, we would be living in a much less rich City.

(Lest we take our blessing for granted, we should remember that other levels of government and our neighboring communities are devoting effort and tax dollars to acquire and preserve for themselves the natural riches Pasadena already has. Regional governments such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the San Gabriel Mountains and River Conservancy have been created with state and federal money to preserve the open and natural areas around us. Pasadena's neighbors Altadena, La

Canada/Flintridge, Sierra Madre, Monrovia, Azusa and Duarte are aggressively seeking to acquire and preserve natural mountains and rivers in and adjacent to their communities.)

Try as we might, we can find no better description of the Arroyo than that which appeared in the August 12, 1912 issue of *The Craftsman*.

The article first describes the unique natural beauty of the Arroyo Seco:

"Here in the West we still have many thousands of acres of unspoiled, virgin woodland, and the desire to save it is growing more general. ...Perhaps the best example which we can give of the preservation of a wild garden of rare beauty and charm for the people is the purchase of hundreds of acres of the woodland in the Arroyo Seco, which threads the western edge of Pasadena. Few cities in the East or in the West are blessed with a more beautiful environment than this particular country, which Nature and the elements have carved and molded and planted for years past unnumbered."

It continues to describe Pasadena's plans for a natural park in the Arroyo:

"The natural scenic beauty of the park, the charm and luxuriance and variety of its growth, with its flavor of woody wildness and freedom make it one which will appeal intimately to the people. Pasadena already has plans for laying out and improve her portion of this nature garden. It is to be a natural garden in every sense of the word. It is not to be molested or desecrated by tawdry architecture, cement walks, marble statuary or anything set or artificial."

It finishes by describing a vision of the Arroyo of the future, which is where we find ourselves today:

"While the city parks with their smooth lawns, landscape gardens, perfect walks and drives are a delight to the people, the Arroyo Seco Park will surpass them all, because it will be wild and free, untrammelled by the conventional laws, just Nature with all her kindness, simplicity quiet and restfulness."

What better guide for our treatment of the Arroyo? Written nearly 100 years ago, these words show why preservation of the Arroyo's natural scenic beauty must be the emphasis of our Arroyo Seco Master Plan.

But words aren't enough. We need a Master Plan that expresses the same commitment to preservation and protection as these examples from Pasadena's past:

- In 1918 Myron Hunt recommended that a plan be created for the Arroyo. The plan recommended that the Lower Arroyo be reserved for trails and bridle paths and planted only with native plants.
- In 1964, the City Council adopted the Jencks Resolution calling for care and stewardship of the Arroyo Seco.
- In 1974, the City Council preserved the last natural area in the Lower Arroyo by renouncing \$750,000 from the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and refusing to grant the District an easement under the Holly Street Bridge to straighten and channelize the stream.

- In 1976, at the request of equestrians, hikers, and residents of Busch Gardens, the City prohibited cars from driving to the target archery field, now the AIDs Memorial Grove, and to the area further south to the South Pasadena Stables.

- In 1977, the City declared the Lower Arroyo to be a City Cultural Landmark.

- In 1992 the City adopted its current General Plan, containing Objective 9, which emphasizes stewardship of the natural environment (Policy 9.5) and restoration of the natural area of the Arroyo Seco (Policy 9.2).

- In 1994, the Arroyo Committee of the Recreation and Parks Commission held community meetings in which the majority of participants were extremely cautious or opposed to accommodating new uses in the Lower Arroyo.

- The Arroyo Seco Public Lands Ordinance, PMC Sec. 3.32.100 et seq., states as its purpose "to establish regulations for preservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Arroyo Seco as a unique environmental, recreational and cultural resource of the city surrounded by residential neighborhoods. Such resource and the neighborhoods must be preserved, protected and properly maintained."

In the face of this history of preservation and protection of the Arroyo's natural condition, the City astonishingly has put forth a Master Plan whose stated purpose is not to preserve the natural characteristics of the Arroyo but to provide facilities such as parking structures and unnecessary bridges and paths.

Active and passive recreation have always been at the heart of the Arroyo, and this should not be cast as a choice between natural preservation and recreation. A natural Arroyo and passive recreation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the Arroyo's natural condition that makes it so attractive for Pasadenans to run, hike, and picnic in.

But despite what the Master Plan asserts, Pasadena General Plan Objective 9, entitled "Open Space Preservation and Acquisition," provides no basis for the Plan's purpose of providing facilities for recreation.

Nor does the Arroyo Seco Public Lands Ordinance. In keeping with the philosophy of open space preservation, the Ordinance among other things establishes the Lower Arroyo as a natural

preservation area. The Ordinance provides clearly that the uses and structures permitted in the Lower Arroyo are limited to current activities and conditions. The Ordinance also states that all lands in the natural preservation area are subject to strict conditions prohibiting excavation on the Arroyo's slope, driving or parking outside existing facilities, and paving trails or roads.

At the most, the Ordinance calls for continuing existing "low intensity recreational activities." At the least, it prohibits new structures, parking lots, paved trails or roads. As the owner of the Arroyo, the City must abide by the Ordinance.

Conclusion

The Arroyo Seco's natural state has made Pasadena the city it is today, and Pasadena has determined to preserve and protect the Arroyo through City General Plan Objective 9. The natural state of the Lower Arroyo forms the basis for its being a Landmark of the City of Pasadena and is the basis for the Arroyo Seco Public Lands Ordinance's purpose to preserve, protect, and maintain the Arroyo.

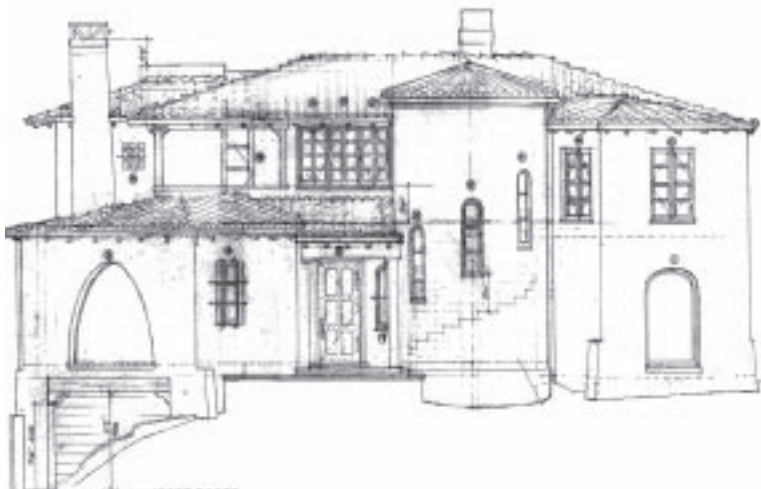
Thirty years ago, the Pasadena City Council made the historic and forward looking decision to renounce \$750,000 from the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to straighten and channelize the natural stretch of the Arroyo under the Holly Street Bridge, thereby preserving this last natural part of the stream for us to enjoy.

Today we have the opportunity to honor that decision and do our part,--to fashion a Master Plan that reflects a common appreciation of what we have and that respects what others have done stretching back over a century. The essential step is to do what the Council did 30 years ago and renounce proposals to build parking lots and to widen roads and trails.

As our guide, let's remember the words of *The Craftsman* written nearly a century ago: "Few cities in the East or in the West are blessed with a more beautiful environment than this particular country... ."

We have our chance to provide stewardship of this beautiful environment. Once gone we can't bring it back.

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