



EXISTING CONDITIONS

HISTORY

When the Portola expedition came to the future site of the Pueblo de Los Angeles in 1769, they camped at the foot of Buena Vista Hill near Broadway in Elysian Park. It is believed that the hills were sparsely wooded in those days but that most of the native cover was burned off for stock grazing after the first settlers arrived.

The 525 acres of land, which comprise the park today, represent the last large unbuild parcel of land of the original four square leagues or 17,172 acres of Spanish land grant by King Carlos of Spain to the Pueblo from which Los Angeles grew. Had he been more familiar with the terrain, he might have omitted the park area in favor of more desirable acreage. The close of the Mexican War in 1848 placed the Pueblo in possession of the U.S. Government and the park lands were used for many years as pasturage.

During the administration of Mayor Henry Hazard, the city began to view its lands differently. The business, agricultural and population booms of the 1880's raised the aspirations of the councilmen and they came to feel the need of city parks. In 1886, they met that need by dedicating Elysian Park. In 1894, the magazine "Land of Sunshine" had an editorial on Los Angeles Parks which had some rather sur-

prisingly up to date opinions. The following are excerpts from this article.

"Matter of surprise to many new arrivals in Los Angeles is that with the remarkable advantages which the city possesses in climate and scenery more has not been done in the direction of creating extensive and beautiful parks. Trees, plants and flowers which only thrive in hothouses in the East grow here luxuriantly all the year round, and there are few days during the year when a stroll under spreading branches is not pleasant even to the most delicate."



BUENA VISTA HILL 1938

"Last and most important is Elysian Park, the only park of considerable size (Griffith Park was not then a city park), covering about 550 acres of hill land, a remnant of the thousands which the city once owned. The 550 acres of which the park is composed was acquired under the old treaty, which gave to each pueblo four square leagues of ground, the park being a portion of that quantity. For a long time this rough land was considered almost worthless and was finally set aside by the city under the name of Elysian Park, on April 5, 1886. Mayor Hazard, coming into office, became enthusiastic over the prospect offered by the ground as a public place of resort, and immediately set about in the endeavor to secure appropriation or assistance for that purpose. First of all, he advocated the planting of trees on the hill-sides..."

"There have been planted several hundred thousand trees in the park, mostly Eucalyptus. Otherwise the park is almost in a state of nature. It is no exaggeration to say that this tract is capable of being transformed into the most unique and beautiful park in the United States, if not in the world. Most of it is within the frostless belt of the Cahuenga Valley, where the

most delicate plants and flowers flourish all through the winter, when even in Los Angeles tender varieties are sometimes nipped on an extra cold winter night in the lower lands. The park is situated about one mile north of the geographical center of the city and is bordered by the Los Angeles river on the north. Even by our own citizens it is as yet little known and appreciated, except by a few visitors from a distance, who are taken to visit this park, rave over its natural beauties and express astonishment that it has been so much neglected. The land within the boundaries of the park is extremely hilly, cut in all directions with canons, and contains enough level spaces to make it exactly fit for the creation of those striking effects the landscape gardener brings out, even under adverse circumstances."

"The visitor to Los Angeles who is an admirer of the beautiful in nature should not fail to drive or walk through Elysian Park. An hour's ride would suffice, or a day might well be devoted to a ramble among its hills and glens."

Manpower for park development has often come from convict gangs and from the ranks of the unemployed. Hundreds of the latter were put to work in the park dur-

ing the depression years of the late 1890's, the years before World War I, and the 1930's. During those periods, thousand of trees, shrubs and flowers were set out in the park and the current systems of irrigation pipes and roadways were laid out. The park became very popular and carriage and burro rides were available on the main road which looped westward from Fremont Gate and ended down Chavez Ravine. Another attraction of the park was an artificial creek and pond.

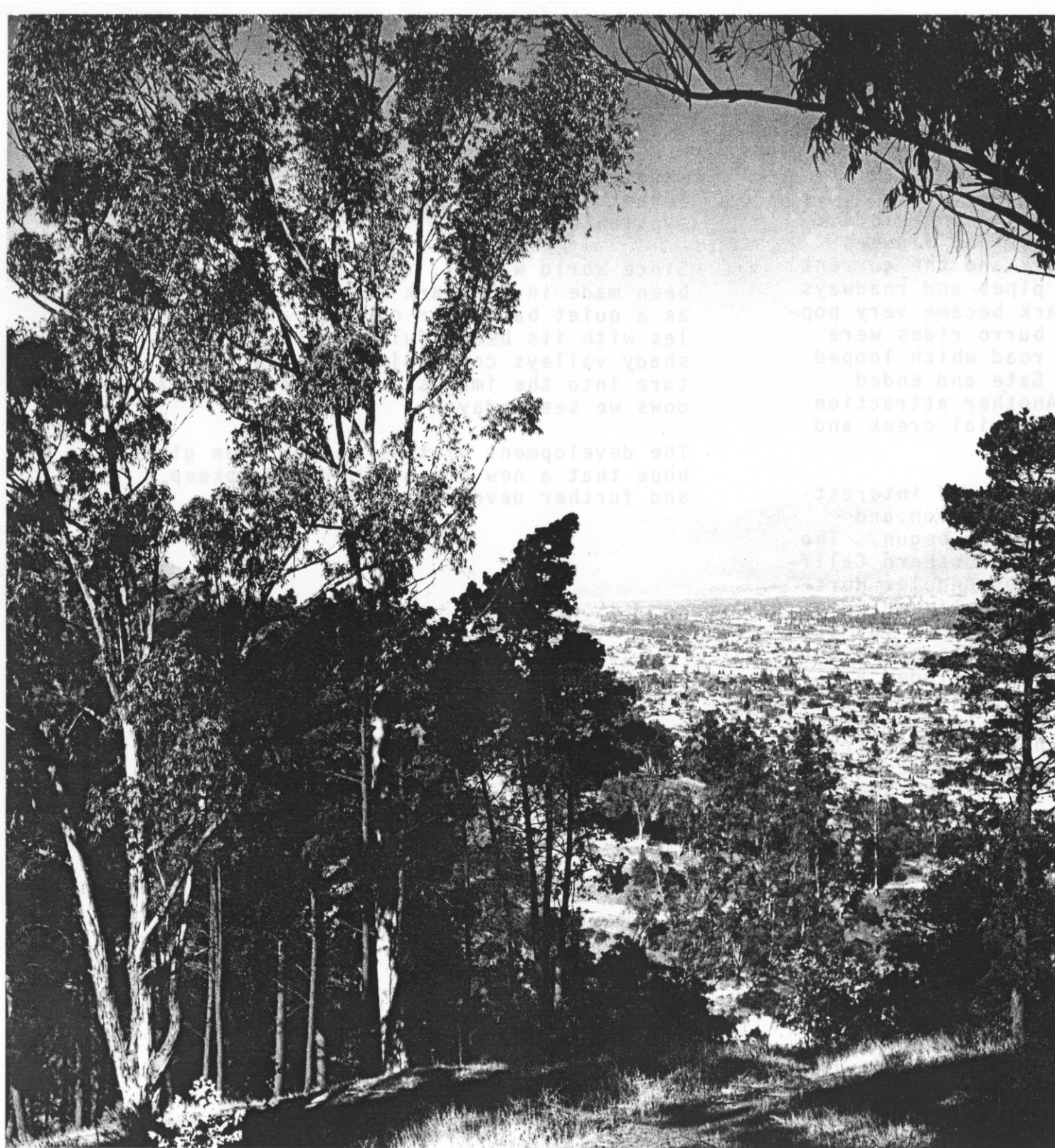
During these years a number of interesting experiments with forestation and plantings of rare trees were begun. The first Botanical Garden in Southern California, launched by the Los Angeles Horticultural Society, was established here in 1893. This area was selected for its frost-free climate and for its excellent soil. The original trees included a magnificent Cape Chestnut which produces masses of lavender flowers in early summer, a double row of Phoenix sylvestris, which was a gift from a foreign country, several large Tipuana tipu trees and a grove of exotic Rubber trees. In all, about 67 species remain of the original plantings.

In more recent times, whole groves of Deodar cedars, Pines, Olives and Eucalyptus trees were established on the hill-

sides, illustrating the feasibility of forestation where irrigation water is available.

Since World War II, few improvements have been made in the park and it has existed as a quiet backwater of central Los Angeles with its beautiful old trees and shady valleys continuing to grow and mature into the impressive groves and meadows we see today.

The development of this master plan gives hope that a new era of improved upkeep and further development is at hand.



NORTH VIEW 1941