

REPORT & PLAN  
OF  
CITY PARK  
SAN DIEGO, CAL.

BY SAMUEL PARSONS & CO.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, NEW YORK



George W. Hanson  
3525 Seventh St  
San Diego



New York City, New York.

Sept. 15th, 1905.

To George W. Marston, Esq.

Dear Sir:-

We have the honor to submit, together with the map of drives, walks, lakes, and plantations of the City Park of San Diego, a report, or explanation, of the motives of our design in order that the spirit of it may not be violated through misapprehension.

Having fixed the general design in conformity with the boundaries of the park, the problem of entrances to it, conforming to conditions without and within, presented itself as one of the first importance.

Adjustment to the needs of the general public was, first of all, to be considered, and as the number is not fixed, or its possible increase easily determined, the exact number of entrances must be left an open matter.

During fifty years,- since the completion of the celebrated "Green Sward" plan of Central Park,- pressure of increasing population has compelled eight additional entrances.

Originally, entrances from avenues and streets of a hundred feet in width - twenty in number - were thought to be enough, and each additional one has been allowed with reluctance for they reduce the apparent size, disturb the solitude, and add difficulties in maintenance and protection of the park.

The problem of determining entrances to San Diego Park was the more difficult, in, that a great part of its boundaries to the east and <sup>North</sup> west are so sparsely populated that streets are only partially laid out, and in some sections to the east none now appear even on the city map.

Along the populated part to the west we have fixed a number of entrances from important streets leading into the city.

Peculiarly varied canyons bar entrances at several points where they would be convenient. As, for instance, at Fir Street, on the west side, a small canyon renders it impractical.



At the head of the two main canyons north, a needed entrance is out of the question because possible grades would be too steep, and even if possible, "grades", "cuts", "fills", or any violation of natural conformation, in itself beautiful and desirable, should in every instance be avoided unless they can be made to conform, through art that conceals art, to the form and spirit of surrounding nature.

This 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. Hollow inclines and narrow gullies of as subtle beauty as the most perfectly sculptured forms of the human figure, need no touch of art, which at best would disturb a peculiar charm that is in such perfect harmony with its setting of surrounding country, where canyon and canyada, at certain seasons of the year, draped with only a light covering of thin growth of flowering shrubs, give the impression of fold on fold of most beautiful grayish green.

So valuable have these convolutions of surface seemed to the designers 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 landscape, roads have been ordered with this in view. None have been carried through artificial depressions at any place, and this, in view of unusually steep grades both in and out of canyons; in the face of many difficulties.

It may not be without interest to state the way in which these difficulties were overcome. First a contour map of the territory embraced in the park was secured; made to a scale of fifty feet to the inch, covering in all sixteen feet



square. On this map careful studies were made of the entire Park, during a period of many months, in order to locate entrances, drives and walks. But as imperfections are incident to the best of surveys, it became an obvious necessity to test and prove roads, walks and plantations, by fitting them to the actual ground, which was accomplished within a year's time.

Of the magnitude and difficulty of such an adjustment, one who has not had a like problem to solve can hardly conceive.

After correcting the map, and carefully noting thereon the grades and distances of roads; the matter of paths, and general arrangement of planting was taken up.

In order to explain more fully the conception of the general plan of these roads, paths, and plantations, we must consider more in detail the various features as worked out in the completed design. The road entrances were devised for the purpose of giving such frequent access to the park as the character of the ground would admit, and the necessities of visitors demand.

On the west side, where in all probability a large number of persons will always seek access, the roads are introduced at <sup>Date Juniper, Maple,</sup> Kalmia, Quince, and Upas Streets. Broken ground and several deep canyons finding exit there, make it impracticable to carry streets into the park on the south side except at Eighth, Eleventh, <sup>12th</sup> Thirteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-fifth, and Twenty-seventh Streets.

On the east side, where the city is not at this time developed, entrances are limited to three, - Amherst and William Streets, and an un-named street 1200 feet south of the N. E. corner of the Park. This region has not been entirely laid out, even on the city map, and because of undeveloped territory outside of the boundary it was thought unwise to fix an exact number of entrances. In any case the topography of this



section makes more than the above mentioned entrances almost, if not quite, impracticable.

Just adjoining the eastern boundary the country is comparatively level, but in a westerly direction within the park, the canyons are of increasing steepness, and of a width so great that it has been found feasible to make only four entrances to the north, namely: Choate St., north, Florida St., north, Park Boulevard, and <sup>North St</sup> a street leading from the north end of Pound Canyon to the University Heights Settlement.

✓ An essential thing in the ordering of a park is a road along and outside its boundaries, to prevent abutment of private or other buildings upon it. In this case, however, it has been found impracticable to establish such a boundary avenue because of numerous canyons and other steep declivities, but in all possible places such an avenue has been provided. As, for instance, from Upas to <sup>Jefferson</sup> Kalmia St., from Sixth to Ninth St., from Eleventh St. to Russ High School; on the north side, from Bryant to Tenth St., and from Seventh to Sixth St.

✕ Another general principle, which cannot be too urgently insisted upon, from the very beginning, 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 obtrusive as to disturb the restful beauty of nature.

These are some of the reasons which have moved us to set apart for quasi park purposes the entire lower part between Pound Canyon on the west, and the boundary of the park on the east; within the northern limit, a projection of Date Street <sup>11th</sup> across the hills eastward, parallel to the <sup>Southern</sup> Western boundary. <sup>78th</sup>

In this territory stand, at present, the Russ High School, with its athletic field, and the <sup>Chie</sup> Women's Home with its playground. All these quasi park features may be grouped at a



lower level than the rest of the Park, whence the vision may easily pass over them to the Bay, and large masses of trees may be made to shut off, and isolate, their alien character so that it may in no wise distract the contemplation and enjoyment of some of the noblest and most beautiful scenery in the world.

In the general adjustment of roads we have been governed, primarily, by the consideration of reaching view points from which interesting scenes within and outside the boundaries of the park may be seen to the greatest advantage, and in making these roads easy to traverse, have made them as a trail would have been made, producing thus a thing that exactly fits a place, and has in addition to the beauty of fitness, one also of gracefulness.

A primarily essential object in designs of parks in most great cities is to shut out as thoroughly as possible all sense of feeling of the city, with its multitudinous activities and noises and buildings, lying without and around it; so that the restfulness of nature may be uninterruptedly enjoyed, as in the Central Park of New York.

In the San Diego Park it is different. Upon entering it the vision is compelled by the noble scenery which girdles the horizon with uninterrupted majesty. The purple slopes of snow-capped mountains, from forty to eighty miles away, dominate half the horizon; the shining bay, and the Coronado Islands, and greatest of all the Pacific Ocean, with the long, low ramparts of Point Loma jutting far out into the strangely placid waters, hold one for a while with compelling force. Then the vision seeking rest, in nearer and more intimate scenes, finds the park at first a little place by comparison, but presently its loveliness asserts itself, and holds the imagination. In deep canyons move purple changing shadows of clouds, and fold on fold of minor canyons cut into the walls of the greater ones. The soft curves and undulations of these greater canyons,



beautiful under all conditions, have a special and enticing charm in the glancing light of the morning or evening sun. They lend a refinement to the general effect of the park so subtle as to quite elude our poor mastery of words to express. Much of the beauty undoubtedly comes of the thin garment that clings like a diaphanous Greek gown, giving a charm of color without obscuring the loveliness of form. As that great master of landscape making of the last century - Prince Puckler Muskau - says of an analagous situation:- "From this place of beauty the surrounding of picturesque, luxuriant nature is idealized, and makes an environing work of noble art limited only by the horizon itself."

In the matter of walks or paths, a method of treatment has been adapted similar to that of roads, namely: the easiest routes to the most attractive points, but steeper grades are allowed, and a more winding course, with quicker curves, so that places inaccessible by road may be readily reached by walks. For instance, the most charming of rambles to be found in the Park may be made by walks creeping along the brink, down and across slopes of canyons. The convenience of vehicles, and the easy agreeableness of their movement along drives, is enticing enough, but a realization of the deep seated, inherent charm of the place may be had only by loitering along edges of great declivities, and losing oneself in inner folds of canyons, where roads may not be made to go.

In the mysterious charm of these weird indentations of the surface of the earth, lies the distinctive quality which makes this park unlike any other in the world, and it has been our constant effort to conserve, and in all allowable ways of art, help the eye and the imagination of the beholder to find it.



To this end, paths, where roads will not do it, lead into places worth the seeing. The width of these paths has been made to vary from the merest trail to ten feet, and it may be said that they should be regarded as flexible quantities, to be changed in width according to changing needs.

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. Given some adequate source, as the reservoirs of a great city, these lakes may be constantly filled, and by simple power of gravitation made to trickle down slopes of canyons with beneficent effect. Until ample water may be had to fill these lakes, and do this work, smaller ones may be constructed within the water areas as shown on the plan, so that their shining surfaces may be seen from afar on high places, making unique and pleasing features of a picture. Hidden, as lakes generally are in parks, in valleys, they lose value in such comprehensive outlooks as are found in San Diego Park. As to the need,- the appearance of slopes during the greater part of the year, when rain seldom falls in quantities,- will loudly attest.

In the matter of planting, experience constantly deepens the impression that none but trees, shrubs, vines, and flowering plants that are indigenous, or that will grow readily, should be used. And particularly here, where there are 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 even after ample means of irrigation are attained. For instance, while there can be no doubt the general charm of grass sward is so great that it will be sought here with the coming of irrigation; yet a more artistic and economical sward may be made of *Lipkea repens*, which readily adapts



itself to this climate, and we commend its general use as in all respects desirable.

In pursuance of this principle of planting only such growths as will thrive, belong to the soil, and will look a part of it, we are conscious of adhering to that very essential principle of landscape making which gives the charm of spontaneity and accents a dominant, distinctive quality of nature. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the different kinds of trees, shrubs, and perennial plants made use of, are few, and that the list of them is short.

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.

Trees, it will be seen, have been planted a good distance apart; fifty, thirty-five, twenty-five, and fifteen feet; according to size; and shrubs from six to ten feet.

It will be seen that plantations have been restricted, and where trees are used, it has been mostly for the purpose of making vistas of the splendid distances; enhancing their value by making foregrounds of the tree plantations.

While the use of small shrubs may be extended further than is shown in the plan, it should be done always with reference to the far views. It may be suggested, however, that if proper care is taken of the native shrubbery now growing in the park, there will be comparatively little need of adding more than is indicated in the plan.

In order to explain more fully our scheme of planting, attention is called to the important entrance at the northeast<sup>most</sup> corner of the park, at Upas and Sixth Streets, to the large number of Monterey Pines and Monterey Cypress; relieved on the front next to the drives by such shrubs as *Acacia Latifolia*, *Coprosma Brewerii*, and *Laurustinus*. A little southeast of these; hidden by masses of *Eucalyptus*, is arranged on compara-



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 tively level ground, a garden with winding walks; ~~planted with carnations, peonias, a great number of roses, and other native and flowering plants.~~ Sixth Street to the south, <sup>near</sup> from Upas to Juniper Street, is to be an avenue of Palms, and as the street is to be 100 feet in width between these points, there will be plenty of room for their developement. It has been felt that palms need for good effect, places where their tropical character may not be contrasted with the native subtropical foliage. In spite of the fact that many palms are used in San Diego, we are convinced that, if used, they are best behind other trees, or in secluded gorges. In most cases the low bluish green Chamaerops Humilis is especially useful when employed in large quantities with other kinds.

South of Juniper Street, in a small canyon, or canyon, have been planted a lot of low growing evergreens, such as Cupressus Azoricum, Rhus laurina, Pinus ~~cembra~~, Pinus pinea, and other pines. On the eastern bank a wild garden without walks, containing flowering plants, has been located to accent the charm of this attractive glen.

At the junction of Date and Eighth Streets an imposing entrance has been laid out; two hundred feet wide, on either side of the fifty foot drive as it enters. This space is intended to be quite open, but for a couple of fine Pepper trees already planted there; and to be covered with grass, thus preserving the dignity and breadth that should characterize such an approach. Near this entrance, and just north, a playground for children has been located, and still further north alongside the road, a drinking fountain, close to a plaza where congregating people can enjoy the best view in the Park, of the city, Point Loma, and the Pacific.

Across the entire hillside here; extending to Pound Canyon, a broad belt of that most beautiful of Californian growths - the Pepper tree - has been established, and sustained



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by the almost equally beautiful trees, the Monterey Cypress and Pine; and at the extreme southwest corner, on either side of a walk, which leads to the plaza and fountain, are planted masses of *Araucaria Bidwillii*.

Across the foot of Pound Canyon, as far as the drive which enters at Thirteenth and Ash Streets, a territory has been reserved in which may be planted different kinds of *Eucalyptus*, by members of the Forester's Society, for purposes of commemoration.

Around the Russ 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.

Somewhat further east, just off the main drive; on high ground above a large canyon, is a place for stables, yards, and sheds; which is sequestered by masses of *Eucalyptus rostrata*. To the west is a mass of the most beautiful of Pines, *Pinus canariensis*.

The planting indicated in this part of the Park may seem sparse, but we have been obliged to take into consideration the mass of trees already growing on what has been known as the Howard tract, and the fact that more would only serve to shut out the mountains, which would be a misfortune.

Westward, near the course of this drive, straggling along the sides of several canyons converging here, are two great groves of Palms, which, though not particularly noticeable from the drive, are intended to be of great extent and effectiveness when approached by the path leading from the north, and in viewing them from up or down the sides of the canyons. At the southeastern end of the group, the Palms will be seen to widen out into a circle which suggests the placing of seats or a summer-house from which views of a great part of the Palms



may be had. A lake nearby adds interest and picturesqueness to this section.

The ground becomes more and more broken as one goes eastward from this point. Indeed, except in the vicinity of the Park Boulevard entrance, along part of the west boundary between Juniper and Upas Streets, and in the Golden Hill region, from Twenty-fifth to Twenty-eighth Street, on the Southern boundary; scarcely any, even comparatively level land may be found. Hence the difficulty of finding easy grades for drives and paths, and in planting so as not to interfere with views of the mountains, east and north. ✓

The eastern portion of the park consists of wide canyons, which, in places, have a depth of a hundred feet, and planting done here has been on higher levels, to lift them, adding value thereby to depths in which grow low indigenous shrubs.

In this region, on Golden Hill, a garden surrounded by groups of palms has been planted, and walks and roads lead through them. Here also on the very edge of the steep side of a canyon, is a summer-house, from which one may look down into it for more than a hundred feet, and secure a fine wide view of Powder House and Switzer Canyons.

While the growth of the city, and increasing use of the park will, of necessity, multiply the number of summer-houses, comfort-stations, and other structures, beyond the provision of this plan, it should be done with due appreciation of the primary and essential quality of a park, and so sequestered as not to disturb the harmonious arrangement of nature.

The summer-house on Golden Hill is left in the open for the obvious purpose of affording unimpeded views of charming scenery, and is, therefore, in no sense an incongruous, offensive, interpolation. It has the beauty of use.

Throughout all this region of canyons, ample provi-



sion, it will be seen, has been made for lakes, in high places, for purposes of irrigation. In order to give varied effect to walks through this place of great canyons, large quantities of Eucalyptus, Cypress, and Pine have been used, and across some of the lakes bordered by these trees, paths have been led across causeways, that reflections of dense foliage may be the better enjoyed.

Most effective use may be made of the cactus family, a considerable variety of which are native to the park. It should not be made into formal gardens, but helped to grow in its native places, along sides and in nooks of canyons. By processes of elimination and transplanting, the varied <sup>existing</sup> cacti may be made to appreciably accentuate the strange enticing charm of these declivities.

Of trees, the Pepper, the Monterey Cypress and Pine, not to mention others of almost equal value, the possibilities are quite beyond what nature affords us, in the East, and it is doubtful if a Californian who has not lived much on this side of the continent, or in Western Europe, can have a due appreciation of them, so prone are we all to look afar for the kingdom of heaven.

The White Oak is beyond doubt a noble tree with its tonic qualities of rugged, enduring strength, but here in these three trees of Southern California are elements of positive, alluring beauty.

The Pepper, growing with surprising rapidity to a height of from thirty-five to forty feet, is of a luminous yellow green of dense feathery foliage, or, to be more exactly descriptive, plumage, makes an arrangement of light and dark that, possibly only the trained eye of the artist may duly appreciate.

The Monterey Cypress, growing, also, quickly to forty



feet or so, is most effective, and taken altogether is possibly the most satisfactory of all the trees of the Pacific Coast. Its growth is hardy, as well as quick, and it has drought resisting powers beyond even those of the Pepper tree, which is saying much.

Of scarcely less value, is the Monterey Pine; dark green, with lustrous long needles; like, in a general way, but of superior form to those of the White Pine. With still longer needles of silky texture and sheen, the Canary Pine has a surface quality; clean, and most satisfactory.

If, with such subject matter as these trees afford, the landscape maker fails to compose groups of unusual beauty of form and color, the fault is with him.

Of vines, the variety is also great, and the value much. The showy Bougainvillea ~~that~~ may be used on steep declivities, or to drape faces of cliffs, or summer-houses; but sparingly, because of an exceeding luxuriousness of growth that would crowd out from amongst trees, less prolific, but more valuable growths.

In this vast domain of fourteen hundred acres, - twice the size of New York's Central Park, - are long undulating hills whose treeless lines cut against the sky with an effect of vast loneliness that should be <sup>partially</sup> left for value of contrast and restful solitude, when the eye turns from the drooping golden plumage of the Pepper tree with its vermilion pods, to the Cypress, and dark green Pines of shining silkiness.

Enough has been said of the planting to show that it has been done for the purpose of enhancing the weird charm, and wonderful contours of canyon sides, and of affording, now and again, from favorable points, far vistas of the incomparably vast distances, in the circle of which this park is set, a gem of solitude; unlike any other park in the world.



Where the soil has been denuded of its growth, it takes a long time for unaided nature to come by her own again, as many barren parts of the park have evinced for many years, but with a little judiciously ordered help the covering of these bare places may be made even more pleasing than ever by the introduction of analogous growths which may be found to do as well as those that have grown spontaneously.

Care should be taken, even where trees are set out forty or fifty feet apart, to leave the natural growth of shrub and vine, and all else, alone; thinning it only as the growing needs of trees require.

As a matter of economy and convenience, adequate nurseries should be parts of every public park; and we respectfully suggest to the City of San Diego that it may, with profit to itself, establish in this way a precedent of value to older and larger places, that may help them to the same intelligent forethought and economy in the ordering of public matters, as distinguishes American management of corporation business, great and small.

In this way abundant opportunity would be afforded for experiment with different kinds of growths, helping to better developement, and to a closer knowledge of how much of the flora ~~and fauna~~ of the tropical and temperate zones may thrive in this subtropical region. It would afford, also, means of setting out with much greater liklihood of success, trees, shrubs, and vines, because days, and times of day, best suited could be used. The planting that will, in time, have to be done, and that will be constantly doing in this great area of fourteen hundred acres, will eventually compell the establishment of a nursery, and if done at once, much will be conserved in manifold ways.

It is respectfully suggested, also, that some adequate system of police protection be devised, as soon as may be found



practicable for the protection of young growths against the spirit of vandalism which is known to exist in San Diego, as well as in the older cities. Nothing should be allowed to disturb, or strip the strangely treeless plains of their garment of greenish silvery gray.

As to gardens of flowers, it may be said that places for them in this picturesque aggregation of wild hills, have been difficult to find.

Love of gardens, with formal walks and cultivated flowers, is common to all, by nature or heredity, and must even here be recognized to some extent; but for gardens, level places are needed, and if not found must be made; and to force a system of terraces for level places to any appreciable extent would be to do violence to the spirit of this incomparable scene and strip it of distinction, so, such places as have been chosen for gardens, and there could be many more selected if needed, are near houses of the city, on naturally level places; screened by trees so that they may have the intimate quality that should characterize them, and not make discordant notes in the larger harmony. A great danger, always, in parks, is found in the desire to add beauty through extravagant spectacular display, always ugly, and in the illusive, subtle charm of this bit of nature it would be peculiarly unfortunate.

As to the making of roads, after the course of them has been fixed with due regard to use and beauty, which of necessity go together, it should be said that crude petroleum has been used to advantage by applying it in thin layers over thoroughly pulverized and graded surfaces, which have been rolled into compact form. One great advantage of this method in San Diego at nearly all seasons of the year is freedom from dust. The occasional rains that fall here as deluges, washing the sand and gravel into great heaps to the utter disarrangement



of made roads, will eventually necessitate the placing of a scientifically devised drainage by tile pipes of various sizes; iron basin heads, or gratings, as well as certain forms of bridges.

Roads, therefore, have been ordered with a view to minimizing in natural ways this artificial, but in some places, inevitable feature of the park.

In regard to methods of irrigation; it should be said that, although the scheme of locating lakes on reservoirs on high ground will quite obviate the necessity of pumping stations, eventually a well ordered system of irrigating pipes will have to be established throughout the park.

Another problem of considerable difficulty will be found in the treatment of the soil, which, although with the aid of water alone, is possessed of a wonderful quality of fertility, will, in order to get out of it the best it can give, need a little help.

The excellent results obtained in city gardens of San Diego prove the value of artificial fertilization.

To this end of high culture, needs of the region, differing distinctly from those of eastern states of America, or of Europe, should be duly considered.

Here, for instance, the soil should not be broken unless for a purpose, as the planting of a tree; then a hole four feet in diameter should be made, and fertilizing matter and water applied at that point.

The best and most economical method of obtaining fertilization is from compost heaps, which should be made to decompose the many kinds of vegetable matter that may be gathered; including soil and the ordinary manure, of which the larger part of the decomposing mass should be made. This heap should have drainage ditches around it, and a vat or cistern, for



redistribution over it. These compost heaps should be made in secluded parts of canyons, and sequestered by an agreeable arrangement of trees arranged for the purpose. For the maintenance of these sources of fertilization over the entire face of the park, and abundant supply of water will be needed to serve throughout the long rainless season.

In such places as have not been marked on the map for plantations, all wild things, both great and small, that may be found growing there, should be, not disturbed, but helped by liberal watering, and results, it may be safely predicted, will surprise even Californians, accustomed as they are to growths of a kind that seem to us, of the East, quite marvelous.

In conclusion we wish to admonish those who come after us in the work of carrying out our design to a nearer state of completion, and in adding such things as future needs may demand, to work always with an eye single to the conservation of the unusual beauties with which nature has so peculiarly, and richly endowed this spot of earth.

To know what not to do, and when to stop, is about the last thing an artist learns, and not many ever learn it at all; only the great ones, perhaps. In the matter of public parks there are so many of the public to whom it belongs, who, being unable to comprehend for just what purpose it was made, try constantly, and with good intention, to divert it to uses altogether apart from the original and true purpose of it, that constant pressure of sane public opinion is needed to save it from them.

In order to do what we may in giving such saving public opinion a right direction, and a good start, in San Diego, we have dwelt with what may seem a good deal of iteration, upon what we have tried our best to do, to preserve and accentuate natural beauties of a very unusual kind, which we trust may be



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kept forever free from the interjection of all foreign, extraneous, and hurtful purposes, or objects.

Respectfully  
Sam'l Parsons & Co