New Web Feature Showcases Conservancy Conservation Easements

by Adrian Scott Fine

Saving historic places rarely takes a one-size-fits-all approach; the Conservancy most often applies a different set of tools and strategies in each case. While much of our work typically involves years of effort nudging a project toward a preservation outcome, the best way to permanently save a historic resource is through a conservation easement. An easement is a legal agreement recorded on the title of the property that runs in perpetuity with the deed, regardless of the owner.

Through a new feature on our website, the Conservancy for the first time can showcase our diverse collection of twenty-seven easement properties. The new Conservancy Easements section includes a description of each property and a slideshow with photos of the historic elements that each easement covers. To explore this exciting new feature, visit laconservancy.org.

Easements in a Nutshell

An easement is basically a private or partial legal interest transferred by a property owner to a qualified preservation nonprofit organization (in this case, the Conservancy) or government entity. The owner continues to own the property but transfers the specific set of rights represented by the easement to the easement-holding organization. As the easement-holding organization, the Conservancy is responsible for monitoring the property’s condition, reviewing any proposed changes to the property, and ensuring that any alterations conform to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (nationally recognized and widely used preservation standards).

Local State Historic Parks on Closure List

by Adrian Scott Fine

On May 12, the Conservancy honored the Antelope Valley Indian Museum State Historic Park with a 2011 Preservation Award for its outstanding preservation and recent reopening. Imagine our surprise the very next day, when the museum appeared on California State Parks’ list of parks it plans to permanently close due to the state budget crisis. The list of seventy parks includes five in Los Angeles County (four of which are designated as historic) and forty percent of all state historic parks in California.

Stabilizing and restoring the Antelope Valley Indian Museum building took nearly a decade of planning, two years of construction (including a temporary delay due to the loss of funding), and $1.4 million. In addition to the irony of the timing, closing the museum after investing so much time, effort, and money would squander these resources as well as our heritage.

The other Los Angeles County state parks on the hit list are Los Encinos in Encino, Pio Pico in Whittier, Saddleback Butte in Lancaster (not a historic park), and Santa Susanna Pass in Chatsworth. Permanently closing these and sixty-five other parks would be incredibly short-sighted and unprecedented in California’s rich history of parks.

State Parks has proposed park closures in the past, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation has twice included California’s state parks on its annual list of America’s 11...
The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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Thanks to the Getty Research Institute for access to the Julius Shulman photography archive.
Preservation Issues in the News

by Flora Chou, Adrian Scott Fine, Karina Muñiz, and Marcello Vavala

Leuzinger High School

Spurred by the recent passage of two bond measures, the Centinela Valley Union High School District launched a series of construction projects at Leuzinger High School in the South Bay city of Lawndale. The projects have moved forward without any environmental review or evaluation of potential historic resources on the eighty-one-year-old campus.

Located on Rosecrans Avenue near Hawthorne Boulevard, Leuzinger High School opened in 1930 in what was then a largely agricultural setting. The school acquired a distinctive identity soon after opening: in return for providing staging facilities for aspects of the 1932 Summer Olympics held in Los Angeles, the school was authorized to use the Olympic rings and motto as its emblem.

While the school’s identity as the home of the Olympians is secure, the campus’ physical identity is not: the school district has an aggressive demolition and construction schedule. In August 2010, the district demolished the school’s 1930s Industrial Arts Building, and all seven single-story “finger” classroom buildings were slated for demolition as early as June 2011 until plans were temporarily withdrawn. Referred to as finger buildings for their long, slender shape and often arranged in rows with courtyard space in between, these structures typify postwar California schools and feature such green design elements as passive solar shading. The Daily Breeze reported in October 2010 that “about three-quarters of Leuzinger High would be torn down and rebuilt.”

Local residents and Leuzinger alumni recently formed an advocacy coalition called Save Leuzinger’s Legacy. In May, Conservancy staff attended a board meeting of the school district and urged the school board to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) as part of its ongoing plans. We emphasized that the campus can certainly accommodate expansion and upgrades, which an EIR does not prevent. The California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA, requires an EIR in order to outline impacts of a proposed project on historic resources and evaluate alternatives to mitigate those impacts.

While not every older school campus is historic, the Conservancy does believe that the Leuzinger High School campus is potentially significant and should be properly evaluated. The campus contains a number of irreplaceable buildings that tell the story of both the school’s and Lawndale’s growth and development. Some of the buildings were designed by noted Southland architect T. C. Kistner of the firm Kistner, Wright, and Wright. They include a 1936 PWA Moderne girls’ gymnasium that was financed in part through a Public Works Administration grant. The school expanded after World War II with new structures including the now-threatened finger buildings and the boys’ gymnasium, which features exposed structural arches.

By reinvesting in its existing buildings, Leuzinger, like many other historic schools, can continue to meet the needs of students and the community while providing high-performing facilities for the twenty-first century.

Hollywood Grove HPOZ

In May, Hollywood Grove became Los Angeles’ twenty-eighth historic district, or Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ). Located north of Franklin Avenue between Canyon Drive and St. Andrews Place, the small neighborhood features homes constructed between 1905 and 1939. Seventy-eight percent of the homes were identified as “contributing structures” significant to the neighborhood’s character.

Developed on a former avocado grove, the neighborhood reflects a mix of architectural styles, including Craftsman, American Colonial Revival, and Period Revival. It is a prime example of what a typical residential subdivision once looked like in Hollywood. Many of the homes feature wide front porches, and the streets are now lined with lush landscaping. The next time you’re in the neighborhood, drive by to see this charming enclave for yourself.

Golden State Mutual Building

On June 1, the Los Angeles City Council officially declared the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (Paul Williams, 1949) as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Local landmark status ensures that the city’s Office of Historic Resources and Cultural Heritage Commission will review proposed changes to the building’s significant elements.

With the recent closure of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Conservancy’s Modern Committee, West Adams Heritage Association, and others are working to keep the building’s many historic features intact (see cover story, May/June Conservancy News). These elements include two site-specific murals that flank the upper portion of the building’s double-height lobby.

It is unclear how the landmark designation will affect the court proceedings over the murals, which are still threatened with removal. For background and updates, please
STATE PARKS continued from page 1

Most Endangered Historic Places. Yet this is the first time in the hundred-year history of California’s state park system that the state will actually implement the closures, which they plan to complete by July 2012.

Parks officials maintain that in deciding which parks to keep open, they tried to protect the most significant cultural and natural resources. However, a disproportionate number of state parks targeted for closure contain significant historic buildings and sites.

The closure of state parks is a growing issue confronting more than thirty states across the country. After years of underfunding and deferred maintenance, many state parks struggle to support even basic day-to-day operations.

California has the largest state park system in the nation, with 278 parks, including fifty-one designated as state historic parks. California’s state parks recorded more than sixty-five million visits in 2010. As strong catalysts for heritage tourism, state parks are economic engines that contribute to the economy and overall are a good return on investment.

Some of the parks facing closure are in fact revenue neutral; they generate as much money as they spend. Why close these parks? What will happen to these parks after suffering from years of abandonment, neglect, and deferred maintenance? If implemented, this plan could end up costing the state much more than it saves.

Many questions need to be asked and fully addressed before this plan goes into effect, padlocking these important resources and keeping them off limits to the public for the foreseeable future.

Our parks need your help. The California State Parks Foundation is leading the effort to oppose the closures. You can join this effort by conveying to policymakers the message, “Don’t Let Our State Parks Become Just a Memory.” For details, visit calparks.org.

Sally Mendelsohn (1937-2011)

Sally Mendelsohn, a beloved Conservancy volunteer for nearly twenty-five years, passed away May 11 at age 73. She will be greatly missed and remembered for her warmth, generosity, kindness, and integrity.

Born in Ashland, Oregon, Sally attended Lewis & Clark College and Portland State University. She moved to Southern California in the early 1960s, earning her teaching credential from Cal State Los Angeles. She worked at UCLA, then in the Technical Services department at the Cal State Northridge Library for nineteen years before retiring in 2006.

Sally graduated from the Conservancy’s walking tour docent class in 1984. She led tours of historic downtown, volunteered for special one-time tours, and helped with administrative work in the Conservancy office. She even took extension courses in preservation to expand her knowledge. In addition to spending countless hours admiring historic places with tourgoers, friends, and family, Sally advocated for the preservation of La Reina Theatre in Sherman Oaks when it was slated for redevelopment (the façade was ultimately preserved). Her activism went beyond preservation; she fought for women’s rights, adoptee rights, education, libraries, and funding for public space.

Sally’s vast range of interests included poetry, folk and ballroom dancing, traveling, and West Texas music. She and her twin sister Sue perfected the art of “dawdling.” She was renowned for her green thumb, enthusiasm for native plants, and beautiful flower arrangements. She was a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Studio City for forty years. She loved family and was particularly “tickled” with the arrival three years ago of her grandson, Gram.

Sally was perhaps best known for her generosity; she shared everything with others, from her love of historic buildings to flowers from her garden. “She took the ordinary and made it beautiful,” said longtime friend Jane Prather. “She had an eye for beauty and loved to share it.”

We’re grateful to Sally’s family for suggesting that donations in her memory go to the Conservancy, as well as to her church, the American Lung Association, and the weSPARK Cancer Support Center.

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visit the Issues section of our website at laconservancy.org.

Self Help Graphics & Art Building

In May, the State Historical Resources Commission voted unanimously to determine the former Self Help Graphics and Art (SHG&A) building eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources.

This decision will help protect the building by making certain changes to it subject to public review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Since the building is located in unincorporated East Los Angeles, and the County government does not yet have a preservation ordinance, state-level recognition currently offers the strongest protection.

The building’s listing sets an important precedent because it is based on its cultural, not architectural, significance. Very few landmarks at either the local or state level are designated solely for their cultural contributions, underscoring the need for greater recognition of our diverse cultural heritage. This type of official acknowledgment paves the way for other sites that deserve to be valued and recognized for their cultural importance. Since much of the SHG&A building’s significance stems from events that took place in the 1970s and ‘80s, the listing also signals increasing appreciation of resources from our recent past.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters and/or attended hearings in favor of the California Register nomination. We could not have achieved this level of success without your support.

For background on this issue, please see the November/December 2008 Conservancy News or visit laconservancy.org.
City Hall Tour Back for Limited Time with “Downtown at Sunset”

Our popular summer evening tours start July 20 – perfect for taking advantage of longer days, exploring all the great new offerings in the historic core of Los Angeles, and waiting out the commute if you happen to work downtown.

This special summer series includes slightly shorter versions of three of our standard Saturday tours, as well as three tours of Los Angeles City Hall, which we no longer offer on a regular basis.

City Hall explores the fascinating history and magnificent architecture of Los Angeles’ great 1928 civic building. This is the only time of year we offer this tour!

Modern Skyline explores how urban centers change over time: the blending of old and new, public art, younger buildings that are becoming landmarks in their own right, and the redevelopment of Bunker Hill.

Art Deco highlights the architecture and ornamentation of buildings from the 1920s and ’30s, featuring rich materials and classic geometric design.

Union Station offers an in-depth look this iconic L.A. landmark, the last great railway station built in America.

The tours take place Wednesday evenings from July 20 through August 24; they start at 5:30 p.m. and last about 1-3/4 hours. They cost the same as our regular tours: $5 for Conservancy members and children 12 and under; $10 for the general public.

Space is limited, and reservations are required, so reserve now! For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org/tours or call (213) 623-2489. See you at sunset!

Don’t Miss a Thing! Stay Connected by E-Mail

For late-breaking news, updates, and exclusive online features, sign up for one or more of our e-mail newsletters! Sent every other month (on a staggered schedule with the print newsletter), our general E-News augments the print newsletter for a fuller picture of preservation in Los Angeles. We also send periodic e-mails as needed related to specific topics, such as preservation action alerts, events, Last Remaining Seats, and our volunteer Modern Committee. To subscribe to any or all of these lists, just click on the “Sign Up for E-News” button on our website at laconservancy.org. If you’d like to hear from our volunteer Historic Theatres Committee, send an e-mail directly to lachistorictheatres@gmail.com.

You can also cut down on the amount of paper mail you receive by getting this newsletter, Conservancy News, as an Adobe PDF document. It’s the same publication you’re reading now, just online instead of in print (it’s formatted for easy at-home printing if you’d like). To choose this option, please contact Jessica Burns at jburns@laconservancy.org or (213) 430-4215 with your name, phone number, and e-mail address.

My Favorite Landmark

by Willow Pappageorge, the Conservancy's administrative manager

ADAMS HOUSE (Lloyd Wright, 1939)
7400 Tampa Avenue, Reseda

“The Adams family built this house themselves, living in a tent on the property as they were building. That’s one of the reasons I love this house. I grew up with hippie parents and lived in many tents, including a tepee in Colorado and a tent in Michigan while my parents built a geodesic dome. I also appreciate how modest the house is. It’s tiny by today’s standards [only 676 square feet], but I believe that architecture can be spectacular without being huge or overwhelming.”

Bill and Clara Adams dreamed of owning their own home but wanted it to be affordable and modest. Bill was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian design principles of affordable good design for the working man, so he wrote to Frank Lloyd Wright asking him for a plan for a house. Wright was occupied building Taliesin West, so he sent their request to his son, Lloyd Wright. Wright’s design remains virtually intact and was featured on the Conservancy’s 2006 Spectacular/Vernacular tour.

What’s your favorite landmark? Tell us why your favorite L.A. County landmark means so much to you! E-mail news@laconservancy.org with “My Favorite Landmark” as the subject.
EASEMENTS continued from page 1

Easements come to us in various ways, sometimes as a result of an advocacy effort. When the 1931 Pellissier Building and Wiltern Theatre faced demolition in 1979, the Conservancy helped to delay demolition by negotiating with the City, providing a feasibility study for alternative use, and holding a massive public rally. Backed by hundreds of supporters, the effort resulted in the Conservancy’s first major victory. It also led to an easement from developer Wayne Ratkovich, who rescued the building by purchasing it and completing an extensive, sensitive restoration.

Strong, Permanent Protection

Many owners of historic landmarks look to conservation easements because they provide even stronger protection than traditional landmark or historic district designation. Many local preservation ordinances allow for only a delay, not denial, in the demolition of a designated landmark, as is currently the case in Los Angeles. Easements also are not subject to political issues that can threaten designated properties.

While many owners have the best intentions for their historic properties, future owners may not share the same values. As we have seen all too often, it is risky to assume that future owners will continue to preserve a historic structure, even if they voice such intentions. Residences, especially from the mid-twentieth-century, can be particularly vulnerable. As original or longtime owners move or pass away, the properties they stewarded for decades might be perceived as dated, in need of too much repair, or simply inferior to the development potential of the lot.

An easement requires both current and future owners to properly maintain the property, and it provides a legal means of enforcement. Because easements are recorded on the title for the property and run in perpetuity, regardless of the owner, they serve as a vital tool to protect historic places for future generations.

Some people donate easements to take advantage of potential economic incentives. If the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, an owner may be able to take a charitable contribution deduction from their federal income taxes for the value of the conservation easement, if the contribution meets Internal Revenue Service requirements.

The value of an easement for the purposes of the federal tax deduction varies by property, based on an appraisal performed by a qualified appraiser. The property’s development potential can also affect the easement value. For instance, properties that theoretically could otherwise be redeveloped at a much higher density might have a higher value of the easement and deduction. Anyone donating an easement should obtain solid tax and legal advice specific to their circumstances.

Conservation easement properties are generally privately owned by individuals or organizations who are outstanding stewards and wish to see them preserved, not harmed. Yet the easements do allow us to take action, even legal action if needed, to enforce their requirements.

Every Easement Tells a Story

Most of the Conservancy’s easements cover only the building’s exterior, but some are much more detailed, depending on the property and the owner’s intent.


The Joseph Residence and Apartments is a good example. Built between 1946 and 1970, this property is one of the most significant examples of Storybook architecture in Los Angeles. Nicknamed “the Hobbit Houses,” the eclectic cottages were designed by Lawrence Joseph, a former Walt Disney Studios artist. The Conservancy’s easement protects the striking exterior, the remarkably detailed interior, and the original landscaping.

The Conservancy most recently received an easement on the Lucy E. Wheeler House, designed by Charles and Henry Greene. Located in the Harvard Heights Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), the ca. 1905 Wheeler House is the last remaining example of the firm’s work in the city of Los Angeles. The late preservation architect (and Los Angeles Conservancy co-founder) Martin Eli Weil purchased the home in the 1980s and launched an extensive restoration, removing insensitive alterations and uncovering original Greene and Greene finishes and paint colors. An exceptionally detailed easement covers the home’s exterior and interior features, including the original colors and finishes identified by Weil.

The Conservancy holds easements on properties throughout Los Angeles County, including in Downey, Whittier, and West Hollywood. We also have easements on three properties outside of L.A. County (in Santa Ana and Ventura), which we accepted early in the program.

Each of the Conservancy’s easement properties has its own unique story and significance. Thanks to the protection provided by easements, these stories can continue to inspire us for years to come. For descriptions and photos of these remarkable places, visit laconservancy.org.
Donors Celebrate Opening of Last Remaining Seats

The Los Angeles Conservancy would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of our new Supporting members, and the new and renewing members of our Sustaining, Benefactor, and Cornerstone groups.

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members, were invited to a pre-show cocktail
theatre’s original Mighty Wurlitzer organ.

ed a special performance by Robert York on

critic and historian Leonard Maltin and includ-

The evening was hosted by acclaimed film

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The evening was hosted by acclaimed film

at the Orpheum Theatre in downtown

The mileston twenty-fifth season of Last Remaining Seats kicked off May 25 with a

Donors Celebrate Opening of Last Remaining Seats

The milestone twenty-fifth season of Last Remaining Seats kicked off May 25 with a
sold-out screening of the 1954 classic Rear Window at the Orpheum Theatre in downtown Los

The evening was hosted by acclaimed film critic and historian Leonard Maltin and includ-
ed a special performance by Robert York on the theatre’s original Mighty Wurlitzer organ.

Last Remaining Seats sponsors, as well as Conservancy Cornerstone and Benefactor
members, were invited to a pre-show cocktail reception at the historic Clifton’s Cafeteria.

Many thanks to VIP Reception Sponsor Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Evening Sponsors Cathy and Steve Needelman.

Cornerstone members (l-r) Shev Rush, Catherine Meyler, and Kevin Lane. Photo by Larry Underhill.
Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are $5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; $10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on most tours. Pre-payment is required on Angelino Heights, Biltmore Hotel, and Broadway. For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org or call (213) 623-2489.

WEEKLY TOURS
- Art Deco
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- Broadway: Historic Theatre & Commercial District
  Every Saturday
- Historic Downtown
  Every Saturday

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS
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  First Saturday
- Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main
  Second and Fourth Saturdays
- Downtown’s Modern Skyline
  First and Third Saturdays
- Union Station
  Third Saturday

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call the number above for information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DOWNTOWN AT SUNSET Summer Evening Walking Tours July 20 – August 24

Enjoy downtown Los Angeles at sunset on one of our special evening walking tours, including rare, limited tours of City Hall (pictured). See page 5 for details.

OTHER NEWS

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