

CHARLES LUMMIS -
PRESERVATION PIONEER:
EXPLORING HIS
ARROYO LEGACY

ARROYO SECO



California VF.



*Presented by the
Los Angeles Conservancy
in association with
the Society of
Architectural Historians,
Southern California Chapter*

CHARLES LUMMIS...

Charles Fletcher Lummis (1859-1928) is among the most prominent figures in Los Angeles history, and arguably the most colorful. Rugged, energetic, individualistic, and incurably romantic, the New England native and Harvard dropout embodied all the virtues characteristic of his adopted region, and contributed to its cultural life in a variety of ways.

Lummis was a collector, a restorer, a mentor, a booster, and a magnet for some of the most interesting personalities of his day. But although he was in many respects a trailblazer, Lummis was also an ardent preservationist, who strove to preserve both the artifacts and traditions of the American Southwest.

An invitation to serve as city editor of the *Los Angeles Times* brought Lummis west from Ohio in early 1885. Travelling on foot, he discovered and embraced the beauty and spirit of the American West. Once in California, he devoted the rest of his life to promoting popular awareness and appreciation of the Hispanic and Native American cultures that defined the region.

As editor-in-chief of the popular magazine *Land of Sunshine*, later known as *Out West*, Lummis encouraged the talents of writers like Mary Austin and Jack London, and featured the works of regional artists such as Maynard Dixon, Frederic Remington, and Elmer Wachtel. He himself was the author of numerous articles and books on the Southwest. With his second wife, Eva, he translated documents essential to the history of Spanish America, for which he was awarded a Spanish knighthood. As City Librarian he encouraged development of the Western History Collection and created the important Mexicana collection containing the earliest examples of printing in North America.

Lummis founded the Arroyo Seco Foundation for preservation of the regional ecology and the Sequoia League to improve government policies towards Native Americans. In addition, he was a folklorist, a Doctor of Literature, a published poet, and founder of Southern California's first museum, the Southwest Museum.

Never a rich man, Lummis achieved his many goals through enthusiasm, will, and the strength of his remarkable personality. But his individualism sometimes bordered on fanaticism, and his domestic happiness was marred by infidelity, illness and occasional violence. Lummis suffered two paralyzing strokes before the age of thirty, endured periodic blindness, and was thrice divorced. By the age of sixty-nine the pace of living had exhausted Lummis and he died in 1928 at his Highland Park home.

... PRESERVATION PIONEER ...

Among his many distinctions, Charles Lummis is perhaps best known as one of the Founding Fathers of historic preservation. As turn-of-the-century Los Angeles developed at tremendous speed, Lummis reminded Southern Californians that the greatest gift to the future is an awareness of the past.

In 1895, Lummis founded the Landmarks Club of Southern California for the purpose of preserving the state's historic missions. At that time, the only missions kept in repair were those still in use as Catholic churches. Other missions had fallen into ruins and were in danger of complete disintegration. Furthermore, the influx of Protestants from the Midwest to California in the 1880s had produced a wave of anti-Catholic bias that obstructed popular support of restoration efforts. By de-emphasizing the religious significance of the structures and stressing instead their value as historical monuments for all Californians, Lummis succeeded in raising funds sufficient to repair several missions and was highly influential in increasing public awareness of historic architecture. "Those mighty piles," he wrote, "are monuments and beacons of Heroism and Faith and Zeal and Art. Let us save them — not for the Church, but for Humanity."

The missions that benefited most from the Landmarks Club's efforts were San Juan Capistrano, San Fernando, and the Asistencia of Pala (a branch chapel of the Mission San Luis Rey).

But architecture was only one part of Lummis's greater preservation philosophy, which embraced all aspects of historiography, including art, archaeology, ethnology and musicology. Lummis believed that civilization depends upon a sense of association with the past and



Southwest Museum.

Charles Lummis (center) and his daughter Turbésé visit Mission San Juan Capistrano, 1899

derives inspiration from that past. *Manyana Flor de Sus Ayeres* — “Tomorrow, the Flower of its Yesterdays” — became the motto for his greatest preservation effort, the Southwest Museum.

Lummis was one of the early few to recognize the importance of Native American cultures. At a time when these cultures were being exploited, compromised, and in some cases utterly destroyed, Lummis moved to preserve a record of them; collecting artifacts, photographing tribal rituals and recording folk songs. These materials form the core of the Southwest Museum's collections, and provide vital information that would otherwise have vanished forever. Like California's missions, the museum was to be a symbol of cultural tradition in modern Los Angeles, a monument to its past and a beacon for the future.

... HIS ARROYO LEGACY

The Arroyo Seco, Spanish for “dry stream,” winds twenty miles between Mount Wilson and downtown Los Angeles, connecting the communities of La Cañada, Altadena, Pasadena, South Pasadena, Garvanza and Highland Park. In Lummis's day the stream was surrounded by giant sycamores, age-old oaks, and undeveloped hillsides that bloomed with brilliant wildflowers after the rain. The natural beauty of the region attracted artists, writers, craftsmen and romantics like Charles Lummis, spawning the celebrated Arroyo Culture.

Members of the Arroyo Culture shared a romantic notion of the past and a commitment to tradition in the face of modernism. Charles Lummis concentrated on recording regional history and collecting native artifacts. The Arroyo craftsmen defended pre-industrial artistry by sustaining the practice of manual arts in a communal environment. A free exchange of ideas circulated between Lummis's El Alisal and neighboring artists' salons, and Lummis's Southwesternism combined with the Craftsman aesthetic to produce one of the richest chapters in Southern California history.

Similarly, the painters of the Arroyo employed a traditional romantic manner of rendering to celebrate the native beauty of the region. In so doing, they both preserved a record of the natural landscape and established a distinctive school of painting.

Although the Arroyo culture was ultimately eclipsed by Southern California's mania for growth and all things modern, artists, writers and craftsmen still congregate in this historic quarter, in the shadow of the Southwest Museum. The legacy of the Arroyo ideal — which sees the future in the past and the universal in the regional — is evident in the six sites included on this tour.

**CHARLES LUMMIS - PRESERVATION PIONEER:
EXPLORING HIS ARROYO LEGACY**
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THE
LOS ANGELES
CONSERVANCY

The Los Angeles Conservancy is a private nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the preservation and revitalization of the city's architectural heritage. Founded in 1978, the Los Angeles Conservancy provided one of the first public constituencies for the preservation of historic landmarks in greater Los Angeles, including the Central Library, Wiltern Theater, and Sunset Towers.

The Conservancy welcomes new members to enjoy a bi-monthly newsletter, membership discounts, program announcements, participation in preservation activities and eleven free downtown walking tours. For more information, please call (213) 623-CITY.

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The SAH/Southern California Chapter is the second-oldest chapter affiliated with the National Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians. It is dedicated to promoting the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Southern California's architectural heritage. Membership is open to all interested parties. For information, write SAH/SCC, P.O. Box 92224, Pasadena, CA 91109-2224.

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1. EL ALISAL, CHARLES LUMMIS RESIDENCE
c. 1900. Hunt and Eisen, architects
200 East Avenue 43
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #68

The idiosyncratic design of Charles Lummis's home reflects both the tastes and interests of its owner. It combines features inspired by Spanish-colonial missions, Native American pueblos, and the Craftsman aesthetic, including an espadaña parapet and handcrafted detailing. Lummis built much of the house with his own hands, using boulders from the Arroyo Seco to create a monumental effect. The architectural design itself was long thought to be Lummis's own until recent research revealed the involvement of Sumner Hunt and Theodore Eisen.

Lummis named his home El Alisal, or Place of the Sycamore, in honor of the native trees that shaded the property. Here he hosted his famous parties, or "noises," entertaining some of the most illustrious personalities of his day with foods of the Southwest and songs from the "carefree" days of Spanish California. Guests at El Alisal were as diverse as naturalist John Muir, film star Douglas Fairbanks, writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and humorist Will Rogers.

The house is now owned by the City of Los Angeles and since 1965 has served as headquarters for the Historical Society of Southern California. It is open to the public, free of charge, Thursday through Sunday, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.



2. ABBEY SAN ENCINO

ca. 1915-1929. Clyde Browne, architect

6211 Arroyo Glen Street

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #106

The romance of the California missions blends with European medievalism in this creation of printer and craftsman Clyde Browne. The abbey features an arcaded entrance, a grape-laden patio, a private chapel, a dungeon, and a belltower replicating that at San Carlos Borromeo Mission in Carmel. Reacting against the rapidly-built, nondescript residences passing as "typically Californian", Browne progressed slowly and carefully with his project, building by hand and manufacturing bricks and tiles on-site. Other elements were culled from ruins and demolition sites, yielding wooden beams and old stones that lent a patina of age to the structure. The fabric of the building incorporates fragments of Westminster Abbey, Charlemagne's Tower, San Gabriel Mission and the Van Nuys Hotel bar.

In the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the abbey was originally intended to be the center of a small community combining artistic and commercial enterprises. As built, it included Browne's printing operations, a salesroom, and a handful of artists' bungalows. Throughout its history, the abbey has been variously used as a polling place in local elections, a wedding chapel, and a gathering place for students from Occidental College, who held fraternity initiations in the dungeon. It was also the Browne family residence, and is still owned and occupied by Browne's descendants.



3. JUDSON STUDIOS

1910. Train & Williams, architects

200 East Avenue 66

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #62

Now home to the Judson Studios, manufacturers of fine stained glass, this unusual structure is the second of two buildings erected on this site for the University of Southern California's (USC) College of Fine Arts. The first structure, a blandly Italianate design, was built in 1901 and later destroyed by fire. Its successor, which now stands, reflects the full force of the Craftsman movement, featuring shingle siding, an Art Nouveau frieze and hand-crafted details produced by the art students themselves.

The building served for a time as headquarters for the short-lived Arroyo Guild, an organization inspired by the Craftsman aesthetic of Gustav Stickley. Little is known about the fate of the organization, which produced only a single edition of its publication, *The Arroyo Craftsman* in 1909. The guild's symbol, a raised arm and hammer, appears in terra cotta above the front entrance. Its motto, "We Can," is a variation on Stickley's less optimistic "If We Can."

Central to the building's history was William Lees Judson, a prominent regional painter. Judson served as both Dean of the College of Fine Arts and as a member of the Arroyo Guild. His enthusiasm for the native beauty of the region exerted a great influence on the developing Arroyo culture. In 1920 Judson retired his position at USC and the school discontinued operations on the site. The building then became home to the Judson Studios, the "Tiffany's of the West," operated by William Judson's sons Walter and Lionel.



4. WACHTEL STUDIO - HOME

1906. Elmer Wachtel, architect

315 West Avenue 43

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #503

This modest, modified-Craftsman bungalow was designed to meet the personal and professional needs of the landscape artists Elmer and Marion Kavanaugh Wachtel. Built into Mount Washington's steep slope, the structure offered striking views of the arroyo, the hills and the mountains. It served as both a residence and a studio for the Wachtels, as well as an exhibition space for their works and a salon for other local artists.

Although both Elmer and Marion Wachtel were natives of the eastern United States, their talents were focused on portraying the beauties of the American Southwest, for which they were both praised and derided. For twenty-five years the couple travelled together throughout the region, sketching and painting during the summer months, and returning to Los Angeles each autumn to mount a joint exhibition at their studio-home.

Because of the Wachtels' association with the so-called Eucalyptus School of regional landscape painting, the eucalyptus grove that surrounds the site is included in its designation as an Historic-Cultural Monument.



5. CASA DE ADOBE

1917. Theodore Eisen, architect

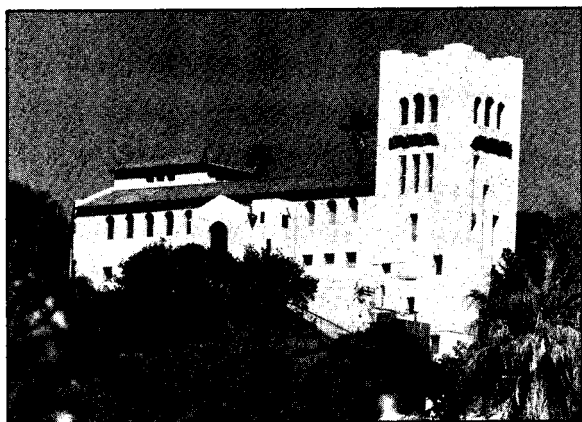
4603 North Figueroa Street

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #493

This 20th-century re-creation of an authentic upper-class hacienda was intended to illustrate what was perceived as the gracious, carefree lifestyle of the Spanish-Mexican period of California history (ca. 1800-1850). Not surprisingly, it was the creation of the Hispanic Society of California, composed of descendants of the old *rancheros* and led by Henry O'Melveny, the prominent attorney who worked closely with Charles Lummis in both the Landmarks Club and the creation of the Southwest Museum.

Theodore Eisen, who worked with Sumner Hunt and Charles Lummis at El Alisal, was engaged as architect for the project, and master builder José Velasquez oversaw its construction. In the manner of the original adobes, bricks were formed from the soil on which the structure now stands, and goat's milk was used in whitewash for the walls. Similar historical accuracy was maintained in the casa's period rooms, which contain authentic furnishings of the pre-Anglo and early-Anglo eras. Because the old ranchos were actually small communities, the re-created hacienda includes a family chapel, a jail cell, and a room reserved for visiting *padres*.

The Casa de Adobe is administered by the Southwest Museum and is open for special events only. Its capacious patio remains in use as an open-air classroom for arts and crafts courses offered by the museum.



6. SOUTHWEST MUSEUM

1914. Hunt and Burns, architects

234 Museum Drive

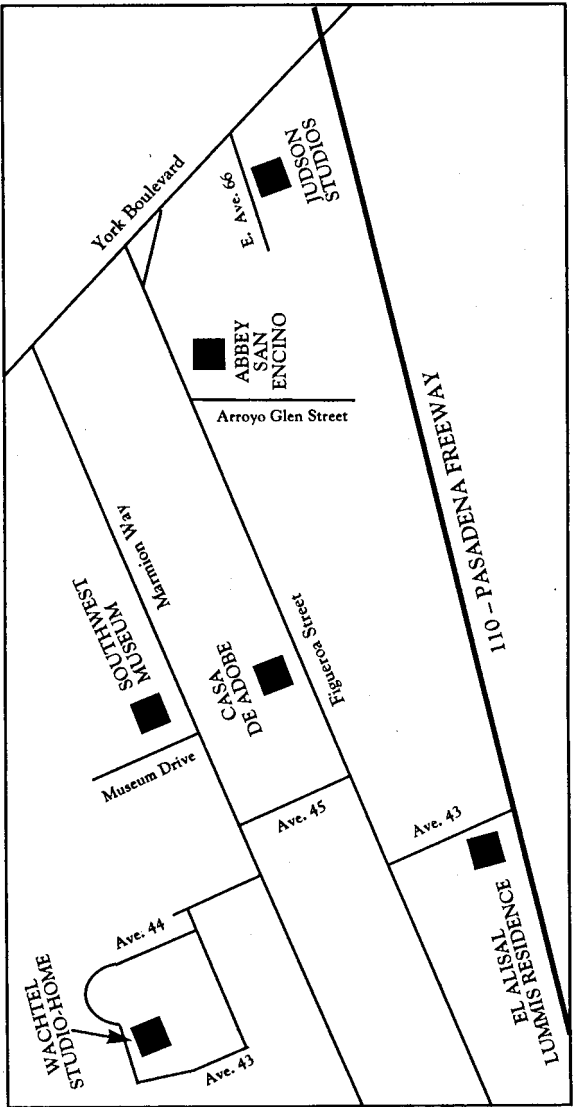
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #283

Established in 1907, The Southwest Museum is the oldest museum in California, and the brainchild of Charles Lummis and his Southwest Society of the Archaeological Institute of America.

The museum's first headquarters were in Hamburger's Department Store in downtown Los Angeles until moving to this location upon completion of the building in 1914. The building takes its cue — in both location and exterior design — from Spain's magnificent Alhambra. Sumner Hunt, who worked with Lummis in the Landmarks Club, was engaged as architect for the museum in collaboration with Silas Burns. Lummis injected himself strongly into the design process by insisting upon the massive caracole (spiral) tower that would house his personal library.

The museum's dramatic site was also selected by Lummis, within sight of his home on the banks of the arroyo. Here he envisioned the eventual development of a cultural acropolis dedicated to the civilizations of all the Americas, and culminating in a Mayan temple at the very top of the hill. (The Pre-Columbian-inspired elevator entrance on Museum Drive was only part of this exotic extended plan to be implemented.) Although this grandiose plan was never fully realized, the museum collections and research facilities have grown to represent the tremendous diversity of Native American cultures from Alaska to South America.

The Southwest Museum is open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.



The Los Angeles Conservancy and SAH/SCC wish to thank the owners of all tour properties for their gracious hospitality. Many thanks also for the dedicated efforts of our volunteers.

Text written by Sandra A.B. Levis

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