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Pasadena at 125: Early History of the Crown City

By Nathan Masters

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History & Society

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An 1880 view, looking west, of Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library.

This month, the city of Pasadena **turns 125 years old**. Set ten miles northeast of central Los Angeles at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains, the Crown City has been an

Although the city was born in 1886, Pasadena as a community traces its origins to the 1875 founding of the San Gabriel Orange Grove Association, an agricultural cooperative carved out of Rancho San Pasqual. The colony of Indiana orange growers thrived, and its success fostered the growth of a settlement on its eastern flank, centered around the intersection of Colorado and Fair Oaks Boulevards. The community soon adopted the name Pasadena, derived from the Ojibwa (Chippewa) word for "of the valley." (The town's nickname was Crown of the Valley.)

A photo souvenir postcard shot at Pasadena's Flag Studio, which had an artificial orange tree next to which tourists could pose. Courtesy of the David BoulÃ© Collection.

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Building said to be Pasadena's first orange packing house. A sign reads, 'No Chinese Employed.' Many field workers were Chinese, but they were not welcome in the central city. Courtesy of the Archives, Pasadena Museum of History (A-16-2B).

The Raymond was one of several hotels serving tourists to Pasadena in the late nineteenth century. It burned to the ground in 1895 but was rebuilt and reopened in 1901. Courtesy of the Archives, Pasadena Museum of History (H-77-17)

With its garden-like setting and warm Mediterranean climate, Pasadena in its early years attracted well-heeled tourists and health-seekers from the East Coast, especially during the winter months. Many of the tourists later returned as residents. Among the Eastern transplants who settled in Pasadena and its environs were **Lucretia Garfield**, widow of the murdered 20th president of the United States, and Owen and Jason Brown, sons of the abolitionist John Brown.

Another, Thaddeus Lowe, retired to Pasadena in 1890 after a distinguished career as a scientist and **chief aeronaut of the Union Army's Balloon Corps** during the Civil War. Over the next few years, Lowe would strengthen Pasadena's role as a resort destination with his Mount Lowe Railway, an engineering marvel that transported visitors high above the plains of Pasadena to the crest of the San Gabriel Mountains.

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Pasadena celebrates Grand Army of the Republic Day, 1886. The parade honored Union veterans of the Civil War, as well as Owen and Jason Brown, sons of the radical abolitionist John Brown and residents of nearby Altadena. Courtesy of the Archives, Pasadena Museum of History (B6-12).

Postcard of the Circular Bridge segment of the Mount Lowe Railway. Courtesy of the James Rojas Collection, Metro Transportation Library & Archive. Used under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

Members of the Valley Hunt Club with their hounds, circa 1888. Courtesy of the California Historical Society Collection, USC Libraries.

Many of the newly-arrived Pasadenans brought with them the attitudes and conventions of the East Coast upper-middle class, lending the young city a cultivated, almost patrician patina. The exclusive Valley Hunt Club, for example, organized rabbit hunting excursions in the Arroyo Seco, fox hunts in the English tradition, and grand society events. One of its annual events, the Tournament of Roses, spawned the world-famous New Year's Day Rose Parade, which in its early years reflected the bounty of flowers and other ornamental plants surrounding the city.

An arts community blossomed in the city as well. Pasadena became a locus of the Arroyo Culture, a variation of the Arts and Crafts movement influenced by Southern California's

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Greene and Greene's Gamble House under construction. Courtesy of The Greene and Greene Archives, USC, at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.

Postcard depicting the house of widowed First Lady Lucretia Garfield. The house, designed by Greene and Greene, was actually located in the city of South Pasadena. Courtesy of the South Pasadena Local History Images Collection, South Pasadena Public Library.

Another product of the Arroyo Culture was Throop University, a private college founded in 1891 to teach arts and crafts to the local community. Over the years, the school's mission evolved, its focus shifted to technology, and in 1920 it was renamed the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). The Pasadena university has since served as the academic home of Nobel Prize-winning physicists Robert Millikan and Richard Feynman and counts mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot and Intel co-founder Gordon Moore among its alumni.

The stories that make up Pasadena's 125-year history carry contradictions that truly reveal the complexity of the place from a perspective most Rose Parade viewers never see. The city that was home to baseball legend **Jackie Robinson** was also, in 1970, **ordered by a federal judge to desegregate its school system**. Flower-encrusted

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artifacts from the museum's collections as well as from JPL, the Pasadena Star-News, St. Andrew's Church, and other Pasadena institutions.

The future Dodgers second-baseman Jackie Robinson (middle) played baseball and football at Muir High School and Pasadena Junior College before transferring to UCLA. Courtesy of the Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

*Many of the archives who contributed the above images are members of **L.A. as Subject**, an association of more than 230 libraries, museums, official archives, personal collections, and other institutions. Hosted by the **USC Libraries**, L.A. as Subject is dedicated to preserving and telling the sometimes-hidden stories and histories of the Los Angeles region. Our posts here will provide a view into the archives of individuals and cultural institutions whose collections inform the great narrative—in all its complex facets—of Southern California.*

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