

Ambassador's Mansion and Gardens

Pasadena, CA



History of the Designed Landscape
UCLA Extension
Arch -X 472.6A - JC Miller
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Historical Precedent Analysis

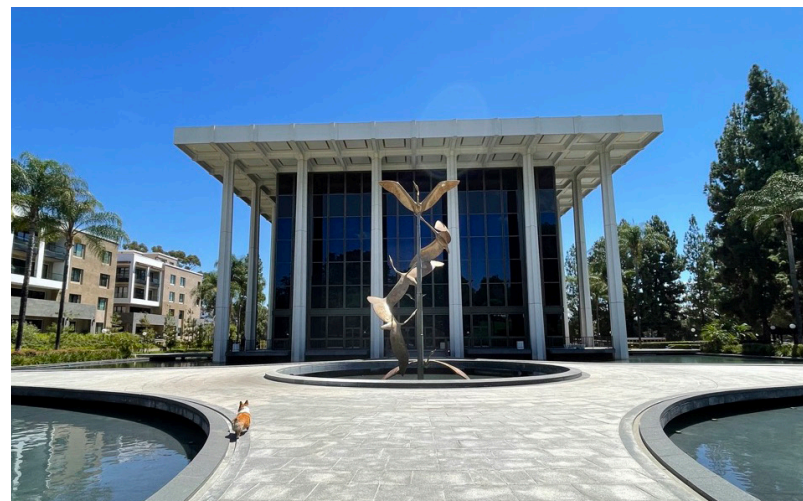
A Brief History of the property

The Ambassador Mansions and Gardens is a public garden space and event venue located in Pasadena, California, along the east side of Orange Grove Boulevard, between Del Mar and Green Street. The area was once known as Millionaire's Row due to all the mansions that were situated along Orange Grove in the early 1900s. At its peak, the property covered over 35 acres, with many mature trees, park like spaces, half a dozen of mansions and remnants of their gardens. The space was assembled by the Radio/Worldwide Church of God as their headquarters and campus for the Ambassadors College in the 1950s - 1960s.

Herbert Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church started acquiring mansions in 1947 to build the campus. He bought a series of mansions along Millionaire's row, such as Fowler Mansion, Villa Terrace Mansion, Mayfair Mansion, Rankin Mansion, Villa Francesca, and culminating in the acquisition of the Hulett C. Merritt Mansion.

Herbert then hired Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall (DMJM) architecture firm and Garrett Eckbo and his team Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams, to design a cohesive plan

for the site. In Urban Landscape Design (1964, McGraw-Hill), landscape architect Garrett Eckbo wrote about the challenges faced with designing the space, "Large old gardens of individual character must be merged, connected, integrated, and redeveloped to campus scale and character." They also brought in Peter J. Holdstock to design 3 new mid century modern buildings for the campus, 2 still stands, the Ambassador's Auditorium, still in use today, and the student center, which has been sold and converted into Marantha High School.



Ambassador's Auditorium with reflection ponds and Egrets taking flight sculpture designed by David Wynne

The building shows international style modernism features such as the cubic shape, clean lines, glass facades, symmetry and minimalistic vibes. The auditorium was once nicknamed as "The Carnegie hall of the West".

In 1990, the church closed the college and was unable to find an institutional buyer, the property was split up and sold for residential

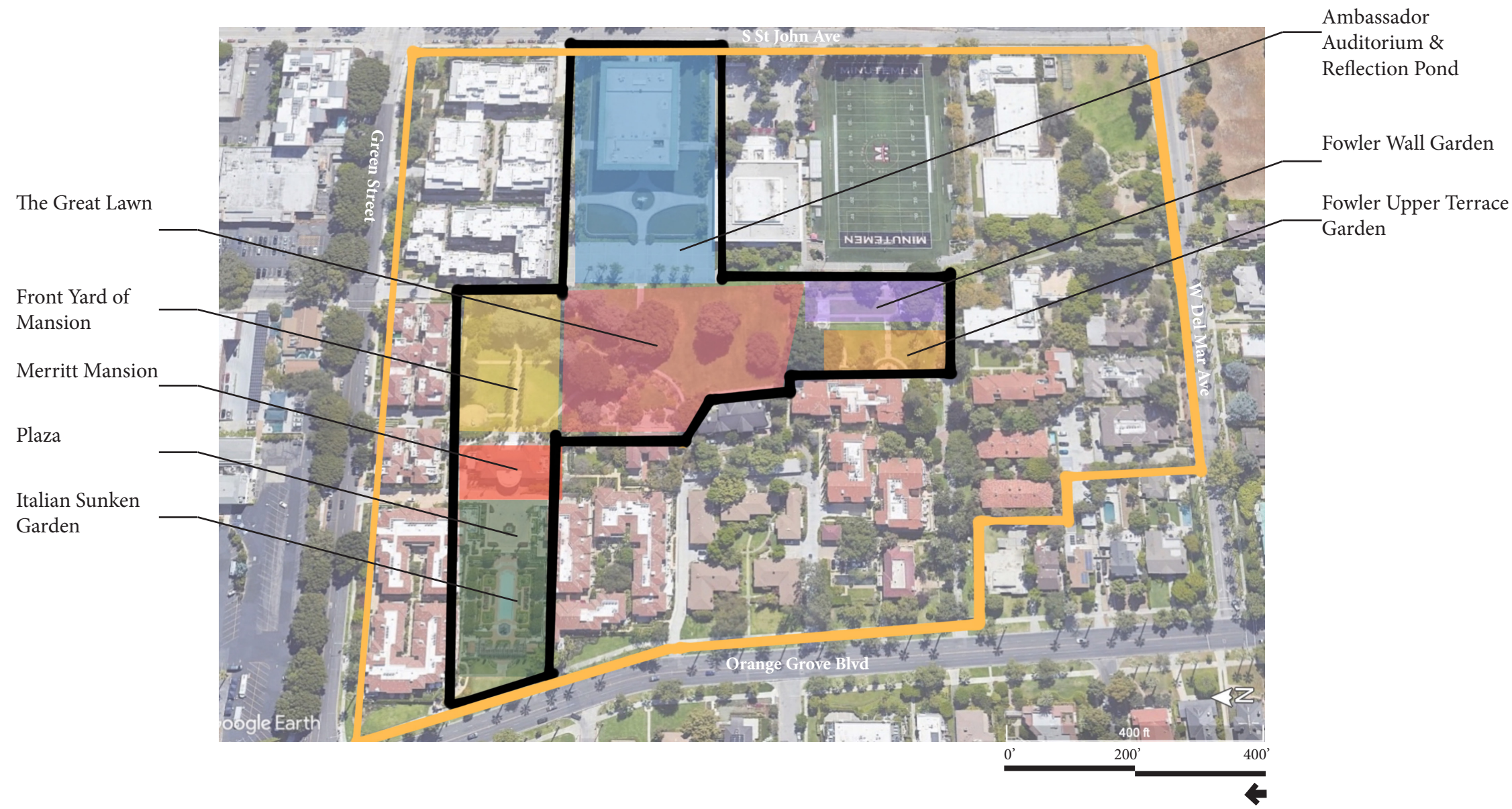
development. Only 8 acres of the interior garden space and 3 mansions has been preserved, Hulett C. Merritt's Mansion (Italian influenced), Villa Terrace Mansion (Italian influenced), and Mayfair Mansion (Tudor Revival influenced).



Top: Villa Terrace Bottom: Mayfair Mansion by 6. Craig Baker 6/22/2020

Of the 8 acres of garden space preserved, there are the grounds of the Hulett C. Merritt Mansion, the Great lawn and small ponds on the upper terrace, and the Fowler Terraced Walled Gardens.

Ambassador's Mansion and Gardens Site Plan



Legend

- Perimeter of Ambassador Auditorium and 8 acres of preserved garden space
- Perimeter of original 35 acre site

Key Map



Hulett C. Merritt's Mansion

The Hulett C. Merritt's Mansion or Villa Merritt Ollivier, formerly belonging to a mining magnate, Hulett C. Merritt, in the 1950s. The Merritt Mansion was renamed Ambassador's Hall after the purchase it was the center piece of the campus until they built the Auditorium in 1974.

The mansion and gardens show historic influences from the Italian Renaissance era. The large villa and multi-terraced formal gardens, are like the Villa Suburbana complexes, a showcase of wealth, symbol of taste and status. The 17,000 Sqft villa has grand double staircases into the second floor and large columns flanking the entrances on a plinth. The building shows some influences to 15th century Medici and Palladio's Greco - Roman style of buildings, although the columns at Merritt's are set in a round manner rather than square. The entrance is imposing and grand, facing into a central view of the gardens.



Back entrance of Merritt Mansion with double staircase and roman inspired columns.
6. <https://blog.bhhscalifornia.com/steel-barons-pasadena-mansion-lists-for-6880000/>

The Mansion is situated on a hill which provides views of the garden spaces and mountains. Baroque garden techniques can be found throughout the garden, from the hedges along the main entry, to the trees that line the property.



The front entrance of Merritt Mansion
4. <https://la.curbed.com/2015/5/9/9962548/historic-merritt-mansion-on-former-ambassador-college-campus-asking>

The front terraced garden has a man made pond with a Japanese influenced bridge that leads to the grand stairway. The stairway is lined by an avenue of Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), geometrically trimmed hedges and trees, influenced by Baroque gardens.



Merritt Mansion 19-- prior to Ambassador College changes
5 <https://calisphere.org/item/bf38c658b8ffaa5751e19b9dc49af033/>

The bridge, pond and avenue of Cypress are likely an addition done by Eckbo and his team as historic images of the mansion do not show the bridge or trees.



The main stairway and entrance is situated on a central axis into the mansion and continuing the central axis through a formal plaza in the back of the mansion, and down into a formal Italian sunken garden with a pool, multiple water features and symmetrical parterre.

The Italian sunken garden behind the villa showcases strong influence of the 16th century idealized Italian renaissance garden through its many features.

The manipulation of topography, the space is sunken into the ground, long linear forms, extensive use of water features, 3 fountains, and symmetrical parterres.



Sunken Italian Garden
7. <https://www.whablog.com/2018/03/22/ambassador-gardens/>

Hulett C. Merritt's Mansion Site Plan



Front terrace garden and tree lined stairway, grand views looking east



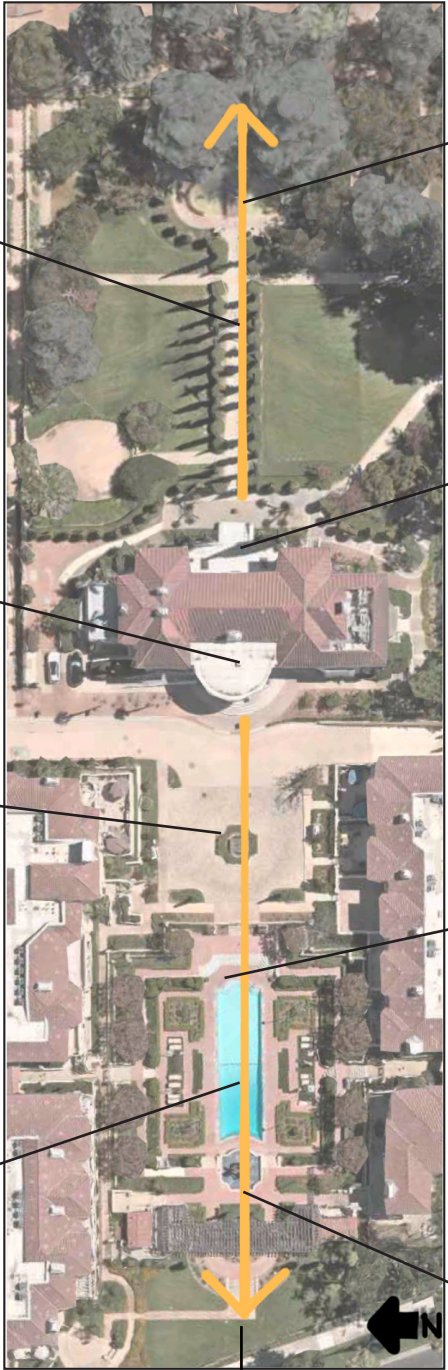
Back grand entrance with Doric columns facing west looking into plaza



Formal Plaza for receiving guest with water feature and trimmed planting facing west



Italian sunken garden with parterre and reflecting pool facing west



Central Axis guiding the individual procession into the Villa and gardens



Main entrance pond and Japanese influenced bridge facing west



Main entrance of Villa with Ionic columns facing east



Concaved steps at entrance to Italian sunken garden facing west



Water feature and modern sculpture at end of Italian sunken garden facing east

Aerial View of Italian Sunken Garden

Symmetrical layout and Parterre planting



Aerial View of Merritt Mansion

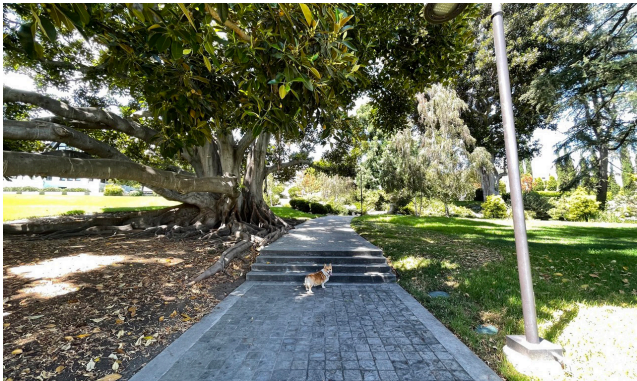


Key Map



The Great Lawn

The Great Lawn is located in the middle of the property, it is situated on a hill with paths connecting the different buildings. The Great Lawn was redesigned by Garrett Eckbo's team as the connecting piece of the Ambassador's College campus. The space has English pastoral influences, vast lawns with some scattered large trees. It feels like an international style park.



Path through the Great Lawn leading to the upper terrace

On the upper level of the Great Lawn, there is a water feature that may have historic influence from the Scholar Gardens of China. There are multilevel small ponds, streams, and waterfalls cascading down a terrace, on top of the stream is a pagoda inspired structure. The winding paths show borrowed views.



Pagoda like structure on upper terrace of Great Lawn



Stream cascading down terrace



Water feature and double staircase to upper terrace



Grotto at south end of lower terrace walled garden



Key Map



Fowler's Terrace Walled Gardens

Eldridge Merick Fowler's terrace gardens are located on the south side of the property. There are two main gardens, the upper terrace has more of a international park influence, large lawns and trees.



Upper Terrace garden and stairway into walled garden
8 <https://aiaoc.secure-platform.com/a/gallery/rounds/9/details/6881>

The lower terrace is a Italian influenced Hortus Conclusus with a large lawn, multiple water features and a modern take of a grotto.



Walled Garden with water feature and grotto at end



Final Thoughts

The Ambassador's Mansions and Gardens is gem of Pasadena, a small glimpse into the past living spaces of the early 1900's elite. It was very interesting to see all the Italian Renaissance influences in architecture and formal gardens so far from Italy. Though the properties and spaces have gone multiple phases of changes and ownerships, what is left still shows clearly where their historic precedents and influences come from.

References

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- <https://aiaoc.secure-platform.com/a/gallery/rounds/9/details/6881>
- https://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/

To the Left: Historic photos of the original Fowler's Lower Terraced Walled Garden

- https://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/

Thank You