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BRAND PARK or MEMORY GARDEN

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by

Lois Ann Woodward

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BRAND PARK or MEMORY GARDEN

Brand Park, or, as it is often called, Memory Garden, had its origin in a desire to recapture to some extent the romantic, the colorful, the picturesque atmosphere of the early California missions. The missions, indeed, formed one of the most important elements of the Spanish occupation. Established more than a century ago by the Spanish padres, these institutions, through the constant effort and hard work of the spiritual pioneers and their Indian converts, became the first centers of education, industry and civilization in California - and this despite the many difficulties which challenged their success in an uncivilized land. With the secularization of the missions came the passing of their heyday. The mission lands usually became privately owned, subdivided, and absorbed into the communities which grew up and expanded about them. Many of the missions were abandoned and left in the not too kind hands of time and the elements; so that, unless measures were employed for their restoration, they rapidly fell into ruin, becoming only memories. This was the fate which overtook the Misión San Fernando, Rey de España, founded September 8, 1797, by Padre Fermín Francisco

de Lasuén.¹

The site on which Brand Park is located was formerly a part of the original land grant of Misión San Fernando. With the assumption of the governorship of California by Pío Pico and the secularization of the missions, San Fernando was leased on December 5, 1845, to the governor's brother, Andrés Pico, and Juan Manso for nine years for the sum of \$1,120 annually.² When Pío Pico sold the lands of all the missions for the defense of California against the Americans, Rancho San Fernando was sold to Juan Celis for \$14,000. In 1854, at the expiration of the lease of Don Juan, Andrés Pico bought a half interest in the property. Here he herded his cattle on the range, and maintained the old mission building as a country home, which he occupied at intervals during his public career.

In 1851, the northern half of the ranch was purchased by Senator McClay and his two partners, George K. Porter and B. F. Porter of San Francisco. The southern part had been purchased previously by Isaac Lankershim.³

The seven acres of the former mission lands, which were converted into Brand Park, lie between Brand Boulevard

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1. H. E. Rensch, Historic spots in California, the southern counties, 56.
 2. Fr. Z. Engelhardt, San Fernando Rey, the mission of the valley, 64-65.
 3. H. E. Rensch, Historic spots, 56-57.

and Mission Street, opposite the buildings of the old mission in San Fernando. This land was presented to the city of Los Angeles by the Mission Land Company at the solicitation of the citizens of San Fernando, and was dedicated to the purpose of a park November 4, 1920. However, because of its distance from the city, the park commission did nothing to improve or develop the park until the spring of 1921.⁴

In order to recreate the old atmosphere of the missions, it was decided to make a "memory garden," typical of those developed by the Spanish missionaries in California, and in which would be preserved flowers and plants from mission gardens, as well as interesting relics on the grounds. The Spanish padres planned their gardens in California according to the ideas of landscaping and design brought with them from Spain and the Old World. Before plans for the "memory garden" in Brand Park were drawn up, a tour of the California missions was made in order to study the landscaping and the architectural designs used in mission gardens. As a result of this trip of inspection, "the sacred garden" at Santa Barbara was chosen as a model, because it was laid out in geometrical design and was recognized as the only example of a mission type garden in existence.

4. M. N. McCann "Memory Garden, Brand Park," in Grizzly Bear, May 1924, XXXV, 205:218. San Fernando is now included in the city of Los Angeles.

Hence, the landscaping of Brand Park assumed the formal arrangement generally seen in Europe, with diagonal, right angle, semi-circular and oval paths. The intersections of the paths were made into flower beds.

The Spanish padres, whose missions were so well known for their gardens, were usually great flower lovers and adept in their culture. Native flowers of Spain and Mexico as well as California were cultivated. Hence, in the "memory garden," many varieties of flowers were planted, including cuttings of plants, vines and shrubs obtained from each of the California missions.

Native trees and flowers of California were given a predominant place in Brand Park. In the central part were planted such specimens as carpenterias, palo verde, penstemmons, bush nimbulus, poppies, yellow tree poppy, matilija, hollies, sage and lupins. Native California cacti and ferns were also given space in two other sections of the garden. A pool was made in a bed of the ferns, in which tiles obtained from various missions were utilized; the name of the mission from which it came was cut into the tile and filled with bronze metal.

Plants, direct descendants of those brought to California from Mexico and Spain, were especially prized and cultivated. The outer borders of the garden were

devoted to many of these. At the north and south ends of the park gate, pergolas of concrete standards in mission style, topped with hewn timbers, were erected. Grape vines obtained from cuttings at Santa Clara Mission, which were grown from the first planted there, were trained along these pergolas. Famous roses, the rose of Castile - an old fashioned moss rose loved by the people of Spain - and the equally prized "seven sisters" obtained from Monterey were also trained along the pergolas. Other climbing plants given a place along the pergolas included jasmine, begonias, passion vines and solanums.

Outside the pergolas were oleander, pomegranate, guava, lime, lemon, orange, fig, and avocado trees. The whole park was surrounded by pepper trees, which had their origin in trees grown at San Luis Rey Mission.⁵

Besides the great varieties of plants, shrubs and trees which were grown to fill the garden with living memories of early mission days, other items of historic interest were commemorated. The mission of San Fernando was used as a camp site by Lieutenant-Colonel John C. Frémont and his soldiers in January, 1847, just prior to the signing of the treaty at Campo de Cahuenga.⁶ In honor of Colonel Frémont

5. M. W. McCann "Memory Garden, Brand Park," in Grizzly Bear, May, 1924, XXXV, 205: 18-20.

6. C. J. Prudhomme and T. E. Keaveney, "Early days in California. I. Conquest of the Pueblo de Los Angeles," in Grizzly Bear, February, 1917, XX, 118:4, 14.

and Pio Pico as signers of the Treaty of Cahuenga, two seals in terra cotta, representing those of the United States and Spain, were placed over the entrance arches of the park. They were gifts of the Eschscholtzia Chapter D. A. R., and were unveiled on May 21, 1924.⁷

A double row of olive trees, planted to form a central path in the "memory garden," were dedicated to American army officers. Those officers headed the army of occupation in the war by which California became a part of the United States. The trees had grown from cuttings of the original olive orchards for which San Fernando Rey was famous in the mission days. They were planted March 9, 1924, by various orders under the leadership of the Division of California History and Landmarks of the Federated Women's Clubs. They were dedicated to the following men: Commodore John Drake Sloat, Commodore Robert Field Stockton, Robert Carson Duvall, Doctor William M. Wood, Captain Samuel P. Dupont, Captain T. B. Montgomery, Lieutenant J. W. Revere, Edward F. Beale, Captain J. B. Hull, Kit Carson, Colonel John C. Frémont, Colonel John D. Stevenson, Lieutenant-Colonel Phillip St. George Cook, Doctor John F. Griffin and others. There

7. H. R. Forbes, Brand Park, also called Memory Garden, 2.

were thirty-eight trees altogether.⁸

✓ The great stone soap vats built during mission days were preserved in a part of the park. However, the most interesting of the mission ruins of this sort were the fountains, which were built by the missionaries and the Indians as a part of the mission irrigation system.⁹ The larger one, built in 1812, was reproduced from a fountain in Cordova, Spain. It was constructed of cement, brick and tile in the form of an eight-pointed star, and had a capacity of 1,600 gallons. Its diameter was thirty feet and its weight about fifty tons. At the time the park was built, the fountain was located on private property. Mr. Brand, the owner, later donated it to the park. It was moved three hundred feet from its original location in the mission fields, and was relocated in the park near the smaller fountain with which it had been connected. On July 6, 1922, the fountain was presented to the City of Los Angeles and dedicated at ceremonies attended by many old pioneers.¹⁰

In the central circle of the park a sun dial was placed, on July 26, 1924. It was given in honor of Eva

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8. Forbes, Brand Park, 2.
9. Rensch, Historic spots, 57.
10. McCann, Memory Garden, 18.

Hettinger, who was instrumental in obtaining the property for the park site. Near it was placed a statue of Friar Junipero Serra sculptured by Sallie Farnum of New York. Here also were located seven memorial benches, each dedicated to a person prominent in California History.¹¹

The people of Los Angeles and San Fernando, through their sentiment and reverence for the old mission San Fernando, have created thus, in Brand Park, an interesting spot in which the historic reminiscences of mission days abound. The ruinous hand of time has been thwarted, and the beauties of at least one part of bygone days have been preserved.

11. Forbes, Brand Park, 2.

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