

## After 30 years, Victory! (almost)

By Michele Zack



*Gathering at the Owen Brown gravesite, late 19th Century.*

In the late 1980s, Altadena Heritage made the leap from Town Council sub-committee to independent 501(c)(3). Our mission: to protect and preserve Altadena's architectural, historical, cultural, and natural heritage.

Among our first projects was an attempt to gain California Landmark status for Owen Brown's hillside gravesite (he died here in 1889) — on Altadena's urban edge.

Owen was the last survivor of the spectacularly failed 1859 raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Led by his father John Brown, a band

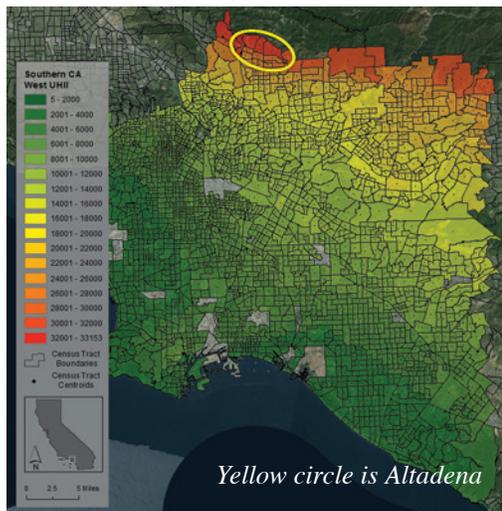
of radicals had hoped to arm slaves and abolitionists to start a rebellion that would end what they referred to as "the blood sin" of American slavery. The raid did not accomplish its goal, and John Brown and others were tried and hung for it — but it has been characterized as the first battle of the Civil War, or at least the point after which war became inevitable.

For 20 years, Owen was a fugitive before he followed his sister Ruth, her husband Henry Thompson, and his brother Jason to this area in 1880. The family was attracted by Pasadena's abolitionist, temperance-minded culture of Union supporters, and

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## The Urban Heat Island Effect: local, not global, climate change

By Anne Chomyn



*Yellow circle is Altadena*

Altadenans love living in and near the foothills. We love the trees, the rural feel, the hiking trails, the views. The urban edge provides refuge from many negative aspects of living in our densely populated area. But there is one feature we are not escaping: the urban heat island effect.

We are part of a metropolis of 18 million inhabitants, with concentrations of people, buildings, traffic, and industrial activity that generate a lot of heat. Add to that the heat from sunlight absorbed by pavement and roofing materials that is then re-radiated. Urban centers, with less vegetation to provide shade and cooling, are much hotter than less developed areas — many causes combine to create what is called the Urban Heat Island Effect. Because our L.A. basin consists of many urban centers, we essentially live with the effects of an "urban heat archipelago."

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# Letter from the Chair

Living here, we all know Altadena is special. Altadena Heritage founders took it a step further: pledging concrete action when needed to preserve and raise awareness of our community's rich architectural, historical, environmental, and cultural heritage. Among the first issues stirring us to action was an effort to protect the gravesite of Owen Brown above Altadena Meadows. We are so pleased that real progress is being made toward this historically significant goal — and that we are a part of it. Read our front-page article to find out how you can help.

We live on the urban edge, that area where city and housing abut wildlife and national forest. Often there is overlap between wilderness and city; we frequently see it in neighborhood posts about coyotes and bears, fires and hikers. We welcome flatlanders to the trails above Altadena, and we worry when bears and coyotes, critical components of the natural ecosystem, stray too far down the lane. I personally benefit from living on the urban edge, in a canyon where charred fencing from the big fire in the early 90's reminds me of its dangers. Like Mary and Alice (see Life on the Urban Edge on page 4). I enjoy seeing bright stars at night, and the occasional fox, bobcat, bear, and yes, mountain lion and rattle snake.

We property owners enjoy the benefits of living on the edge, but must accept that we share it with others. Crazy kids setting off fireworks and smoking in dry brush areas, hikers who get lost or lose their dogs, bikers and equestrians — we all vie for the same trails and open space — usually quite peacefully. There is tension on the edge, however. Here are some concerning questions: how much farther are we willing to let development go up mountainsides and into canyons? Just because areas are zoned for building, is it always a good idea? What can we do to head off bad development before it happens?

Thoughts about living on the urban edge inspired this issue of Altadena Heritage Newsletter. Southern California Edison recently funded our grant application: Altadena's Urban Heat Island Effect (see story page 1). We live within the hillside zone most impacted in Los Angeles County by rising temperatures.

This grant enables us to expand educational programs and target issues around local climate change and what we can do about it.

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In September, Rob Bruce and Greg Gill graciously opened their beautiful 1913 Craftsman home to Altadena Heritage. Along with the contractors who worked with them, they shared how they lovingly restored everything from roof and ceiling to floors and foundation.

We held our first ever Patron event at the McNally house on Mariposa in June, thanks to the generosity of the DuPuy family. Thanks to all who joined at the Patron level of \$100 per year. For those who haven't, please consider it for next year — patrons supply more than half our membership income, which is the driving force behind Altadena Heritage. The time to renew for 2019 is at our famous annual holiday meeting December 2nd, so mark your calendars now.

Thanks to everyone working in different ways to protect and improve our community, including the Tree Group (see article pg 5 — and to the editors and writers of this newsletter — the most thoughtful and in-depth we have focusing on Altadena issues — I am privileged to be a part of it.

Altadena Heritage's Board continues our strategic planning to decide on how to focus our efforts to best meet our mission. We welcome your ideas and input - altadenaheritage@gmail.com.

Upcoming events:

- Third Thursday on Complete Streets - Nov 15th
- Owen Brown Advocacy - Nov 27
- Annual party - Dec 2
- Third Thursday on County Permitting Processes - Feb 21st
- Fire Safety - Mar 15th

See you around town,  
Sharon Sand



*Six Chairs in a Row - Current board chair Sharon Sand and 5 former AH chairs attended This Old House – Altadena Edition on Oct 27th. From left, Tim Gregory (founding chair), Michele Zack, Rob Bruce, Sharon Sand, Mark Goldschmidt, and Linda World.*

# Art of the Struggle

The work of Charles White, Altadena's highly regarded visual artist, is the subject of a stunning retrospective of more than 100 pieces at New York's Museum of Modern Art through Jan. 13, 2019. This show will come to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Feb 17 - June 9th, 2019. White spent the second half of his 40-year career in our town and taught at LA's Otis Art Institute. "Art must be an integral part of the struggle," insisted White, "...it must ally itself with the forces of liberation." Charles White lived with his family in the Altadena Meadows neighborhood, and several times turned to John Brown — leader of the 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry he believed would spark a slave rebellion — as a subject. The gravesite of Brown's son Owen, the last survivor of that raid, lies close to the White home where White's son, Ian, still lives. Altadena Heritage has been working with Ian, Town Council, Cantwell-Anderson, LA County, and others to preserve the hilltop grave site as significant to local and national history.

*John Brown as depicted by Charles White.*



## After 30 years, Victory! *Continued from Page 1*

Owen and Jason homesteaded remote acreage above today's Altadena Meadows. Security was still an issue (some historians opine both brothers suffered from PTSD) and they packed six-guns when venturing down to Pasadena to attend church or Temperance Society meetings.

Altadena Heritage's first efforts to preserve Owen's gravesite did not bear fruit, and subsequently others also tried and failed to gain protection for it. Although contiguous to the National Forest, the site is on a private inholding zoned for development — which makes it nearly impossible to gain a preservation easement because the owner's permission is required.

Altadena Heritage is happy to announce that more than 30 years after our first attempt, the gravesite and six adjoining foothill acres (overlooking La Viña's 271-home gated development) are close to being permanently protected for both historic significance and open space value.

We have played a role in this. Altadena Town Council's Land Use Committee formed a subcommittee to devise a final condition, on top of several others, to be attached to any approval to build 18 one-story homes on an 8-acre site within La Viña's gates currently zoned for a school (this project is called La Viña II). Because in the 1990s La Viña was controversial and many Altadenans fought it ferociously, two community members with specific knowledge were invited to join this group — I am a current representative of Altadena Heritage and local historian and Marietta Kruells is a former AH board member and trail expert directly familiar with La Viña's legal battles.

After a year exploring options, the group presented its best idea to Land Use and the Town Council in three presentations over the spring of 2018: La Vina II's developer would purchase the gravesite's 6-acre parcel, deed it to a land conservancy that will guarantee public access and protection from development, and in addition provide \$300,000 to improve trails and document the site's history — in exchange for the Town Council's approval of the 8-acre project. The final condition

creates parity for the loss of open space and a school that 1990s plans included. This open space, unlike the site within La Viña that it overlooks, will be publicly accessible. The working group met with Meadows residents and the Town Council heard comments at three of its meetings before finally recommending approval of this deal on May 15th.

The six acres were purchased on behalf of the developer Cantwell-Anderson at auction in June and will be transferred to a land conservancy, and \$300,000 deposited in a community benefit fund to support Owen Brown's gravesite, when (and if) developers receive final approval from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. In August, L.A. County Planning Commission approved the project, passing it on to the Board for approval. The public hearing before our Supervisors has been scheduled for Nov. 27, when it is expected a final vote will decide the issue.

A short note of support for the La Vina II project with the Owen Brown gravesite condition sent to our 5th District Supervisor Kathryn Barger (KBarger@bos.lacounty.gov) will help move this 30-year-old dream to reality. If you write such a note, please copy altadenaheritage@gmail.com so we may track our influence in this matter.

Without developer Tim Cantwell's cooperation, hard work, and money, such an outcome could never have been achieved. We hope preserving Owen Brown's gravesite will help realize a larger goal of healing community divisions wrought during La Viña's development. Integrating its residents into our community would help resolve Altadena's own (small c) civil war.

A short documentary video about preservation of the site was prepared by filmmaker Pablo Miralles, whose parents Maria and Adolfo led the fight against the original development, and me. Watch it at altadenaheritage.org or on a large screen at Altadena Heritage's Holiday Celebration Dec. 2.

# Life on the Urban Edge

By Trish Pengra

Where does Altadena end and the forest begin? There is a line on a map, but in reality the edge of urban life as you ascend the San Gabriel Mountains is fuzzy. Once upon a time, long before Eulalia Pérez de Guillen received a land grant to the San Pasqual rancho that would include Altadena, the region was home to American Indians who hunted deer, antelope, and small game, and gathered acorns, other food stuffs and medicines. But they were gone before water flowed to fruit orchards and millionaires built estates along Mariposa Street. The hillsides above the old rancho grant-line, now Loma Alta Drive, were populated by homesteaders, summer camps and sanatoriums nestled high above the valley -- at least until smog diminished the therapeutic benefits of the mountain air. Small ranchos, parcels of several acres, drew home-builders with their horses and a retired engineer ran the largest Russian wolfhound kennel in the country on land that became Altadena. Much early home construction was rough-hewn, but virtually all pre-World War II homes have succumbed to fires, floods and debris flows. Post-war years brought artists and scientists, the bohemian Jirayr Zorthian with his notorious ranch, his friend physicist Richard Feynman and many JPL colleagues, as well as many seeking remoteness and views.

With the exception of the gated La Viña development built in the late 1990s on the site of a former sanatorium, most hillside architecture is varied and individually built. The Meadows is set apart from Altadena, across Millard Canyon on a high spit of land at the end of cul-de-sac Canyon Crest Road. It's a neighborhood of small lots in a mixture of mid-century styles. Higher on a mountainside to the east, a turn off Chaney Trail takes you to Alzada Road and Jaxine Drive where elegant mid-century moderns and more contemporary dwellings are accessed by crumbling private roads, and mostly hidden by fences or nestled among trees.

East of Lake, homes above Loma Alta must adapt to land even steeper overall than in the west -- some homes seem stapled to the mountainside. But this area was developed more recently to higher standards, and streets and drainage are well maintained by the County. For these Altadena residents, a step outside reveals a magnificent view of the bristling metropolis below, frequently shrouded in smog but often revealing the blue Pacific some 40 miles distant. At dusk, the setting sun casts amber alpenglow on the mountainsides. At night, skies are dark; glare from below isn't enough to mar summertime views of Venus, Jupiter, Saturn and Mars and the great constellations.

It is quiet up here. The absence of noise is so profound it

can unsettle city dwellers when they first come to live here. The ever-present roar of traffic turns into a low hum above Loma Alta until it finally disappears; you hear only crickets, bird song, the rustle of leaves stirred by the wind, perhaps the soft gurgle of a stream. This quiet beauty draws many up the steep mountainside, despite the dangers of living on dead-end streets that can be cut off by mudslides, washouts, or wildfire.

Mary MacGilvray lived on and off in a 475-square foot cabin in the Angeles National Forest for 25 years. Her cabin and the others in Millard Canyon are inholdings in the National Forest, privately owned structures leased for 20 year stretches. The tiny dwellings, clinging to Millard's slopes beneath a canopy of oaks,

are the only ones above Altadena, but there are some 30 other groups of cabins scattered across the front range.

Sitting on her cabin's porch, Mary seldom saw hikers but encountered plenty of wildlife. Once she was awakened by a bear snorting as he sniffed her feet through an open window. She blasted the forest quiet with an air horn and never saw that bear again. Despite having to cross a stream twice to ferry groceries to her front door, Mary described the forest as "a wonderful place to live."

Long-time Alzada resident Alice Wessen tells me she nick-

names bears who are frequent visitors, most recently Cinnamon and Scar. She's careful to keep pet food inside and secure her trash cans, often adding a sprinkle of red pepper to keep the wild animals wild. Bears, it seems, don't like red pepper. Neither woman voiced fear of the occasional visiting bear, bobcat, or mountain lion, and expressed their awe at sighting spiders, snakes, birds, foxes and deer. Both share the same attitude toward the local wildlife: it's their home, too, so be respectful.

The two women share volunteer leadership of a local chapter of the California Fire Safe Council, a non-profit organization dedicated to making communities less vulnerable to wildfire. Council members train for emergencies and participate in drills to prepare for fires, heavy rains, mudslides or earthquakes. Under Mary and Alice's leadership, the council used \$270K in grants to clear brush, trim trees and reduce fuel near homes in Millard Canyon.

Jose de Jesus Lopez, "J" to colleagues and friends, lived for 14 years in Pasadena when his job with the LA County Fire Department's Prevention Services Bureau took him to The Meadows. He loved it and soon moved there with his family. J knew what needed to be done to protect homes from wildfire: maintain a defensible space. J says this doesn't mean clear cutting—well-rooted grass, shrubs and trees can help protect your home in the event of heavy rains or mudslides. It does mean



making your home—its structure and the environment in which it sits—as fire-safe as possible.

J teams up with Diane Travis, Forest Fuels Planner for the Angeles National Forest, to make sure residents in and near the forest can create a fire-safe zone around their homes. The October 2017 30-acre brush fire on Mt. Wilson was a testament to the effectiveness of this strategy. Earlier in the year, the Forest Service removed brush near the peak's communications towers and observatory; when fire broke out it was contained and put out without harming the peak's critical infrastructure or historic buildings.

Today wildfires are frequently fought using aircraft. California has been a pioneer in the use of fire-fighting planes. Army pilots mapped inaccessible mountain areas and served as fire spotters as early as 1920. In 1929, the County forester and fire warden conducted an experiment to determine if a

lit cigarette or cigar tossed from an airplane could start a fire. Yes, it definitely could! In 1953, Los Angeles County teamed with Douglas Aircraft to use DC-7s to drop water on wildfires., and soon, the County Fire Department was converting World War II aircraft for firefighting operations. Today it has 9 helicopters to battle flames.



Another sort of aircraft more often disturbs the mountain stillness—the loud thrum of search and rescue helicopters. LA County Deputy Sheriff Dan Paige says that this summer's extreme heat kept some hikers off the mountain and reduced rescues; in 2017 the Altadena Mountain Rescue Team handled 112 calls, provided assistance to other local rescue teams, and participated in 16 law enforcement missions.

Despite inherent natural dangers, the mountains' beauty exerts its siren call. The 2010 Altadena Community Standards update put restrictions on development atop visible ridgelines to help preserve the view we all share of the San Gabriels. For this, I am grateful. (ed. note: Altadena Heritage had three members on the committee.)

Though living downslope in the heart of Altadena, I often turn my gaze to the mountains and the reassuring solidity of their chaparral-cruled peaks. I understand why, despite the many hazards of living high on the mountain-

side, people still choose to live there, close to nature and trails, on plots of land large enough to keep horses, with dark skies, quiet nights, and wild visitors. Life on the urban edge is one carefully balanced between danger and beauty. As J says of his home in The Meadows, "You have to understand where you live and embrace it."

## Altadena Tree Warriors

By Trish Pengra

Altadenans Jill Vig and Kathy Musial first got in touch with Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (DPW) to complain about tree pruning. Jill, a certified arborist, said "tree butchering" more accurately describes what often goes on. She and Kathy are part of an informal group monitoring tree care in Altadena. While the County might brush off individual resident complaints on this matter, members of the Tree Group, as they call themselves, are all horticultural professionals working for the county or at public or private gardens.

Jill takes care of the Water Conservation Garden at the Los Angeles Arboretum. Kathy is curator of plant collections at the Huntington Botanical Gardens. They are longtime Altadena Heritage members, and we are fully behind their efforts, which support our programs on combating the urban heat island effect in Altadena (see story page 1) Dave Mosher from our board has joined the group.

Having established its bona fides, the Tree Group is working with DPW to grow our tree canopy. When the New York Drive Improvement Project was initiated, County senior project engineer Joe Gadosh reached out to the Tree Group and Altadena Heritage about parkway tree selection. New trees will appear once the main objective—reconstructing the road—is complete

in 2019. The county provided locations of those to be removed, and Kathy visited each, noting where replacements need to be compact because of narrow parkway width. The county also sent its list of "approved trees" and the Tree Group provided recommendations based on growth rates, pollen levels, root structure, pruning requirements, water needs, and disease susceptibility. Two trees were chosen: Australian Willow (*Geijera parviflora*) and Brisbane Box (*Lophostemon confertus*), attractive drought-tolerant Australian natives with non-invasive root systems and tolerant of smog.

Tree trimming by Southern California Edison is another matter. In fact it was the recent trimming — or, as many attest, mutilation — of trees by SCE subcontractors, often in people's back yards, that initially motivated Jill and Kathy to mobilize. SCE explains that new more restrictive state laws passed after last year's Northern California fires require providing greater clearance to their distribution network, particularly the "three bares," the un-insulated high voltage lines running at the very top of poles. The County has no say over how SCE trims trees, but Kathy, Jill, and Altadena Heritage will work to maintain a dialogue with the company, and try to mitigate damage to our precious trees.

# The Urban Heat Island Effect *Continued from Page 1*

Altadena Heritage will present a series of talks and workshops through 2019 — each looking at a different aspect of the outside effects urbanization has on our foothill community, along with possible mitigations. These programs are partially funded by a generous grant from Southern California Edison.

We are rededicating our efforts on this issue because, according to a study commissioned by California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), Altadena and communities in the south-facing foothills of the San Gabriels experience summer temperatures hotter than in the rest of the County. Prevailing on-shore winds push air from heat-generating and heat-absorbing areas inland, north, and east up against our foothills. Altadena's highest altitude areas are most affected. Ozone moves on the wind in a similar way. San Dimas, for example, has the highest ozone concentration in the nation.

How much hotter is Altadena due to LA basin's urban heat archipelago? Because of a study mandated by California legislation, we have numbers. This 2015 study produced an "Urban Heat Island Index" (UHII) that offers state and local governments a tool to prioritize areas where programs are most needed. The UHII has a temperature and time component — the longer the temperature of an area is greater than that at a rural reference point, or the higher the temperature, the greater the UHII.

The study took the temperature of nearly every census tract in California's urban areas at every hour around the clock in June, July, and August of 2006 and 2013. These temperatures were compared to the temperatures of analogous rural reference areas.

The three northernmost census tracts of Altadena have a UHII of about 33,000 (Celsius) degree hours. This reflects an average higher temperature of 13.6° F compared to the upwind rural reference area when all hours, day and nighttime, for all 182 days in the study, are tabulated. Other Altadena census tracts have slightly lower differentials: 11.5° to 12.3°. La Canada and communities north of San Dimas have similar values. Our numbers are among the highest in California.

The accompanying map shows the L.A. basin. Areas colored red or brown have a greater Urban Heat Island Index (UHII). Blue areas have the lowest UHII values. The eight Altadena census tracts are circled in yellow.

How can we reduce the heat generated in urban heat islands? Mitigation possibilities include cool or green roofs, cool and permeable pavements, trees and other vegetation, and, of course, reducing fossil fuel use. Cool roofs reflect more light than standard roofs and emit less heat. Cool pavements replace or coat heat-absorbing materials such as asphalt with lighter colored materials. Green roofs are planted with vegetation that cools the air through transpiration. Trees shade paved surfaces and also cool by transpiration.

Are there regulations in place mandating mitigation of the Urban Heat Island Effect? The City of Los Angeles has taken the lead. Mayor Eric Garcetti pledged to reduce the temperature of the city 1.7° by 2025 and 3° by 2035 through planting trees, installing green roofs, and painting pavement light grey to reflect sunlight. The city is hotter by 6° during the daytime due to

the urban heat island effect according to a 2014 Yale study. The city is experimenting with light gray surface coating of streets and parking lots. Pilot projects have shown that freshly coated pavement is cooler by 10° on a sunny day. Funding to test such coatings in an entire neighborhood is being sought to see how much it will reduce overall temperature.

In 2015, Los Angeles became the first U.S. city to require cool roofs on new residential buildings or on replacement projects involving more than 50% of existing roof. Pasadena soon followed suit with similar requirements. And, in the last three years, City Plants, a non-profit funded by L.A.'s Board of Public Works, has planted 80,000 trees.

The County, our local government, is taking steps as well. In May 2016, the Board of Supervisors created the Chief Sustainability Office headed by Gary Geros, who oversees County efforts to combat climate change and the urban heat island effect. His office develops policy the County's 37 departments implement. The County Public Health Department is at the forefront, as heat is associated with many health problems. UHII increases during heat waves, and more heat generates more air pollution — also a health issue.

The County's main efforts involve trees, cool roofs, and cool and permeable pavements. Just last month (October 2018), the Board of Supervisors adopted updates to Green Building Standards in the building code requiring cool roofs on all new or major roof replacement projects.

What can Altadenans do to reduce our UHII? Since we are at the mercy of communities upwind of us and their efforts to mitigate urban heat, we need to lobby city and state officials. We can also install cool roofs and pavements and plant more trees. Besides providing protective shade, trees actually take heat (and pollutants and carbon dioxide) out of the air. Altadena Heritage has been at the forefront of tree planting and environmental sustainability in our town for several years, and we are not letting up!

Please join us in Third Thursday Programs at the Community Center to learn and get involved in working on this issue. Nov. 15th at 7 pm we will look at the effect Complete Streets can have on reducing the heat island effect as well as on bringing economic benefits to Altadena.

Learn more here: <https://www.epa.gov/heat-islands/what-you-can-do-reduce-heat-islands> and <https://calepa.ca.gov/climate/urban-heat-island-index-for-california/>.

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Newsletter edited by  
Mark Goldschmidt

# Edge Dwellers

By Mark Goldschmidt

We are used to hearing about *future* uncertainties of climate, and often see the results of weather events and wildfires scientists tell us will become more erratic and intense in a warming world. A look at the geologic past of our local environment, on the mountain edge of LA's vast conurbation, lends perspective. It is hard to process catastrophic eventualities until they happen.

The San Gabriel Mountains rise from a sloping pediment of debris they have shed as jostling crustal plates pushed them up. Altadena sits on this outwash south of the mountains, but the Sierra Madre fault, running east-west along the hillside roughly at Loma Alta, marks a sharp division between mountain and plane. In geologic time, the San Gabriels are rising rapidly and are among the fastest growing in the world — about a half to one-and-a-half millimeters a year. They are also eroding rapidly, about 5.5 inches of the Front Range moves downslope each century according to retired Altadena CalTech hydrologist Norman Brooks.

We know we live in an unstable environment even though there have been no major earthquakes along our area of the fault for a very long time. We are currently living through what is called a “seismic gap,” according to retired Santiago Canyon College geologist Eric Hovanitz, who lives on Florecita Drive, a few meters from the fault line. The paucity of recent quakes in our zone should not make us feel comfortable, he says, because it could mean that forces are building for The Big One. It is somewhat comforting to know that our bedrock provides a solid anchor for structures, and that the outwash debris on which Altadena sits is not subject to liquefaction, making it a good base for well-engineered buildings to survive earthquakes.

In the 1920s and 30s, the County and Army Corps of Engineers built check-dams up the canyons, trying to manage the vast quantity of rock and soil migrating down the Front Range every rainy season, sometimes flooding flat lands and wiping out houses and the Altadena golf course — as happened in 1938. The dams, however, filled up with sediment quickly and were rendered useless because they were located far up the canyons and impossible to clean out. The next generation of debris basins was created at the base of canyons to allow for removal. The example we all know is behind Devil's Gate Dam, now called Hahamongna, which after years of neglect is being emptied following an extended fight among the County, Pasadena, and local communities over how much to remove over how long a period of time. Answers to these questions were complicated by the fact that although Devil's Gate now serves as a debris basin, it was built in the 1920s as a reservoir.

Over the years fire has taken its toll on hillside homes; virtually nothing built before 1940 still stands. All but faint traces of structures such as Mount Lowe hotels, funicular, and moun-

tain camps are gone. Modern building codes and brush-clearance policies, along with today's advanced fire fighting equipment, methods, and aircraft, mitigate — but do not eliminate — inherent threats. If a serious fire were to coincide with one of our occasional fierce winds blowing down the mountains, it would be almost impossible to control and all Altadena would be threatened.

According to geologist Hovanitz, however, flooding is what we should fear most. This year's tragedy in Montecito (near Santa Barbara) reminds us how a big storm after a fire can cause



*Eighty years ago, Altadena was inundated. Courtesy Altadena Historical Society.*

catastrophic debris flows. Not since the 1938 flood brought vast quantities of debris into town (following fires in 1934 and 35) has Altadena experienced anything like that. However, analysis of sedimentary deposits documents historic storms of far greater magnitude than what hit us 80 years ago. Such storms are driven by “atmospheric rivers” called ARkStorms, originating in tropical waters as far away as Indonesia; they may persist for weeks or months. In 1821 such flooding caused the course of the Los Angeles river to jump from Santa Monica to its present outfall in San Pedro. It and an 1811 flood are dwarfed by still-earlier floods attested to by geologic evidence. Imagine our next ARkStorm, debris basins filled to capacity, water surging downhill, carving deep gullies through streets, yards and homes as it races for low ground.

So, with all the dangers lurking why do we choose to live here on the urban edge? Flying in to LAX from the east coast a few weeks ago I stared down at the vast sprawl of LA's exurbs. It went on and on, only an occasional baseball or soccer field interrupted a desert of roofs and pavement. How great, I thought, that I am privileged to live in Altadena, with the mountains right there to remind me that I live in a natural world. Disasters may hit anywhere, but life is good.



Altadena Heritage  
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# Annual Meeting and Holiday Celebration



**Sunday, Dec. 2, from 3-6 pm**

2174 Midlothian Drive (corner of Midwick Drive)

This year we will hold our annual meeting and holiday celebration at the exquisite home of Chantal and James Giddens. The Giddens chose their home for its magnificent mountain view — not for the house then standing there. They proceeded to transform a California Ranch style residence into a modern Japanese-inspired courtyard habitat, complete with artist's studio and home theater.

Mingle, eat, drink, and get involved at this members-only event: the time every year to join/renew commitment to Altadena's most active civic organization.

R.S.V.P to [altadenaheritage@gmail.com](mailto:altadenaheritage@gmail.com) or call 626/296-6983



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