

ACONA Meeting Notes

March 22, 2022

After introductions, the following topics were presented.

History of Altadena

Speaker: Michele Zack, Altadena historian and author
Altadena as a civic entity. Why Altadena didn't become part of Pasadena and why it never incorporated. After the Civil War: San Pasqual Plantation (failed); meant to grow citrus. Altadena didn't become part of Pasadena because Altadena was a wine-growing region and Pasadena was a temperance community.

Benjamin Eaton was one of the early developers. He was a lawyer, engineer. The Woodbury brothers bought land from Pasadena in 1887 with plans to subdivide it. The Woodbury house still stands, south of the Community Center (2606 N. Madison). Orange trees began to be grown during this time. Owen and Jason Brown (sons of John Brown of Harper's Ferry fame) settled in Altadena. D.M. Graham (first mayor of South Pasadena) was an early developer of Altadena land.

Mount Lowe railroad — the “space race of its day” — opened in 1893. Altadena was known more as a train stop at this point (Altadena Junction — at Lake and Calaveras). Stables established at the Junction also held Altadena's first school. After 1906, the Mount Lowe Railroad became Pacific Electric Railway. The inclined portion of the Mount Lowe Railway is still hike-able. In 1902 the Mariposa Hotel was established (on the site that is now Webster's). Henry Huntington consolidated all the railways into the Red Car system, making it the largest inter-urban system in the US.

Altadena grew during this period. Many larger estates to begin with. Elisha P. Jaynes planned to build 500 tract homes. He was builder, banker, landscaper for the development. The middle class began to burgeon. The depression came early to Altadena — around 1927. Jaynes had to leave town with creditors chasing him. Many of the homes weren't finished until after WWII. In the 1920s, Altadena was one of the fastest growing communities in LA County. The trolley system was a big factor.

In 1946 the last Red Car left Altadena and the bus system took over. Smog was an issue. Pasadena had taken 37 bites out of Altadena to enlarge their tax base (largely commercial areas). Marshall School used to be part of Altadena.

Altadena used to be almost exclusively white, with racial covenants in place to keep it that way, until the practice was made illegal. Almost every decade there has been a movement to incorporate Altadena. Every one failed.

In the sixties Altadena underwent convulsive change. White flight was rife. When the freeways went in, in Pasadena, the neighborhoods that were taken out were the diverse communities. Many of those displaced residents moved to Altadena.

Altadena Town Council: What It Is, What It Does

Speaker: Veronica Jones, ATC Executive Committee Chair

Altadena Town Council (ATC) was established in 1975. Part of LA County Fifth District — 2700 square miles. ATC provides a voice in the county for its citizens. There were 1500 ballots cast in the first election; average is in the 400s today. There are 8 census tracts, each with two elected representatives who are residents of their census tract, serving two-year terms elected in alternating years. ATC has five standing committees: Land Use, Safe Streets, Communications, Filming, and Education (the last two currently inactive, but Education will be reinstated soon). ATC partners with a number of community organizations as well as many in the county (see slides for a partial list).

Q&A

Q: Was there ever a feasibility study done on whether Altadena could sustain itself as a city? With all that entails, including independent police and fire departments and other city services? A: There have been many studies, the most recent by the Library.

Comment: We need only look at Sierra Madre and their continuing financial problems, unable to sustain a Fire or Police Dept., to know why incorporating is fraught.

Q: Was there ever an organized political revolt against being governed by far-away government in downtown Los Angeles? Whatever the problems with incorporation by Pasadena it's still closer. A: There have been many organized revolts but they've all failed. Current Altadenans don't want to become part of Pasadena. Altadenans are also tax-averse; feel that taxes would go up if we were incorporated.

Comment: Supervisor Barger has an office in Pasadena.

Q: Once the ATC meetings are back in the Community Center, will they still be live streamed for people that don't attend in person? A: It's always recorded and posted on YouTube the next day. May be able to livestream in the future.

Q: Michele, has Altadena ever tried to take back what Pasadena annexed? A: Not that Michele knows. Altadena did win one important fight: water users in East Altadena aren't burdened with a surcharge as they were in the past because they are served by Pasadena.