

Elliot asked me, as Chairman of Altadena Heritage, to talk about the Heritage of Altadena tonight. So, I've been thinking, what are the broad qualities that we have inherited that define our community? I've come up with six "Heritages" –

Altadena is a place people come to create their own **Personal Paradise**, their own little piece of the California dream, they – we – feel it is our right, and we guard this right jealously! This is our primary "Heritage" This is not so unusual, doesn't everyone want this, really? A place of one's own? In Altadena it is not tempered so much with a tradition of civic society. Let the County fix and light the streets, they leave us alone.

The Woodbury brothers came from Ohio in the 1880s, bought land, built a house on the barren uplands, and sent away for deodar seeds so they could plant a grand avenue on the approach to their land. They had an illustrative town plan made up, plotted out lots, and were planning a hotel before the bust of 1888 put an end to their dreams of riches, though they did leave us Christmas tree lane lined with cedars, and their house, once so stark on the barren ground that was Altadena, now hemmed in with tract homes.

Over the years more homes were built, many quite grand and beautiful, more people came, and on a certain level there was cooperation, some civic groups, particularly during the depression when Altadena switched from being solidly republican to solidly democrat.

But still, there has always been **resistance to change**, the belief that any change might erode the quality of life that is so treasure So, I would put "**resistance to change**" as the second great "heritage" we live with – a commonly held feeling – I would say "a conviction" even – passed down to us from early Altadenans, and still holding sway.

Of course change always comes eventually, but if the citizens won't take it in hand, it is generally imposed from the outside.

There have been at least a dozen attempts to incorporate, since 1895, some have been well funded and hard fought, but all have failed.

From the LA Times in 1914, an article describes an early attempt at incorporation (via Michele Zack's book *Between Wilderness & City*)

“The rock over which those present split into two factions was the word ‘city’. Some... contended that the charm of the foothill district now is that it is a place of country homes, and declared that if it were to become a city, however small, it would no longer be a desirable place to live. Opponents countered that it would be possible to be a city on paper, with “ no string of stores, or any business street whatsoever is concerned, there is nothing to fear”.

It's not a new thing that people want Altadena to remain unchanged, and retain its “Rural Character” – it's certainly true a 100 years ago. Now, I believe that when people speak of Altadena's “rural character” they are really talking about a certain unevenness in the neighborhoods -- random lot sizes and house sizes, lack of sidewalks, an abundant assortment of planted trees, and – important -- backdrop of mountains. Personally, I like it, and I think that this is where future value lies for us as a place because this variety of street experiences gives us a particular charm and distinguishes us from other communities.

Hostility of many towards commercial development here has a long tradition: In 1907, Altadenans were reported to have picketed the Model Grocery when it set up shop in Altadena's little Mariposa Hotel at Lake and Mariposa (where Websters now sits).

Another mind-set we have inherited – thus making it a tradition and so a heritage, is our **distrust of Authority**, and **of government**. We were, and remain, quite libertarian in our outlook, we don't want anyone snooping around our converted garages or looking for unlicensed cats or telling us that we can't park on the street at night. That, more than our heterogeneous, contentious and fiercely private population, is why incorporation has always failed, and will always fail. We prefer to have authority far away, and we want to be left alone to do what we wish in our personal paradises. We don't trust our neighbors either, our fellow Altadenans, give them some power and a

budget, and things are going to change, we will open ourselves up to corruption, there will be parking meters all over town -- somebody is going to win and I might be the loser.

Well, if citizens don't take power, there will be others who will take advantage.

Pasadena chipped away at Altadena for years, some 46 different annexations. So our 4th great heritage: Altadena is the **un-Pasadena**. Pasadena was founded by civic minded – I would even say somewhat utopian Midwesterners as a temperance city; Altadena's agriculturalists grew grapes and produced wine, and during Prohibition, Webster's had a license to sell Medicinal Whiskey, the Marcel Inn was a well known destination watering-hole with a lovely garden, and the Altadena Town & Country Club was a hard drinking scene. It wasn't sin-city or anything, but it seems County sheriffs had a fairly laissez-faire attitude. Meanwhile, Pasadena developed a vibrant commercial and cultural life, and was definitely known by name and conjured up images of a land of golden sunsets over orange trees and snow draped peaks.

Strangely this un-Pasadena legacy persists to this day. As Michele wrote: "Altadena has always existed in a sort of dance with Pasadena from the earliest days, embracing the larger city's services and amenities while remaining aloof from its bureaucracy."

Today, if you want to go to a show or eat in a restaurant, we all pretty much have to go to Pasadena, this from a town that has maintained a population of about 42,000 for the past 50 years – is quite shocking! There remains to this day a feeling of resentment towards Pasadena for dominating the conversation, for disrespecting Altadena – which it does -- but we are completely dependent on it, we are the un-Pasadena just up the hill.

Our **mountains** are our greatest legacy, the front range of the San Gabriels dominate this town, where we squat in our frame houses on the mountains' outwash train among irrigated gardens and planted trees. Back in the day people came to the steeply rising fault scarp to exploit and dig tunnels for the water, they came to hike and hunt, but

mostly they came for the dramatic views and the play of light and vapors shifting on the hillsides.

And of course Thaddeus Lowe came to build a funicular, a railway, hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions, quite a wonderful pre-Disneyland mountain destination, the cool and scenic mountain heights in an era before air-conditioning.

Interestingly, it largely ignored the town of Altadena – and perhaps Altadenans ignored it as an attraction for wealthy tourists, but it did encourage good transit connections – which remain to this day as bus service replacing the old trolleys and Redcars.

Finally, we must acknowledge what happened between 1960 and 1970: “**racial change,**” when 50% of Altadena’s white residents left and were replaced with people of color. Court decisions changed the housing laws and overturned covenants, and Pasadena redeveloped it’s Pepper street African American neighborhood and put freeways through, dividing its neighborhoods and ripping out a huge amount of housing stock. Then the fight over integration and busing let to some rather terrible consequence for our school district. Altadena was redlined right down Lake Ave for years, and that divided our community even more than it had been by class, now by ethnicity. I think we have now integrated into a nicely diverse town in that we have many people living next to each other, getting along and enjoying life without, necessarily, agreeing on a lot of things. It has left us a legacy of diversity, which I see as positive, and divisiveness and poorer schools, which is very sad.

(So: my nominations for 6 “Heritages” that define Altadena as a cultural and civic entity: 1) a strong belief that one’s piece of land is one’s kingdom, a personal paradise, 2) resistance to change, 3) distrust of authority, 4) we are the un-Pasadena and proud of it, and 5) the mountains & 6) we are a diverse community.)

It was into this environment that Altadena Heritage was born. In 1983 to 85 there was a battle to save Scripps Hall, what is now Waldorf school, and Heritage started as a

sub-committee of the Town Council. I am not really familiar with Heritage's early years, though I did move to Altadena in 1986, I didn't get involved with AH until about 2000 after being gone most of the 1990s.

In brief, Altadena had lost many great homes, some torn down to make room for post war housing, but we still retained many. The County had (and still has) no historic designation that would help to save those that remained, and no plans to institute any limitations on preventing their destruction. Our community's ingrained suspicion of governmental authority and strict belief in personal property would make such a designation unpopular. So, Heritage sought instead to go the education route, to spotlight our architectural assets, our inventory of large properties and historic homes, which had been largely ignored or taken-for-granted, and to show people that older homes were often way better and more interesting than new ones. There was a lot of support in the community, especially in the early days with the fight over Scripps hall. A full inventory of ALL the homes built before 1940, and some commercial structures was made at great expense of time, money and effort. We have the archives and a computerized database in our office at the Community Center, and is part of Altadena Heritage's legacy that we are very proud of.

In the early 1990s, Altadena Heritage was involved in the process of formulating the original Community Standards District (known as CSD) regulations, along with various stakeholders from the Town Council and the Chamber. At that time there was considerable fear that the kind of mansionization that was taking place in Arcadia and Alhambra would take over our neighborhoods, so the emphasis in Single Family for residential areas was to insure light and air by mandating generous setbacks based on lot size. The Lake Ave. standards portion of our current CSD was formulated a bit earlier, also, I believe with Altadena Heritage members, I know Camille Dudley was on that one. The Lake standards and the Lincoln Ave standards both predated the CSD, but were rolled into the CSD (along with Lake Ave) when it was put together by the planning dept.

Altadena Heritage was founded as an activist organization, and we have never shied from making our views known, though we try to remain calm and reasonable. It was Altadena Heritage that initiated the hillside ordinance – and participated in a 6 year long process to get changes in our CSD that will, we fervently hope, prevent our hillside from ever looking like Glendale's. There is no guarantee, however, and constant vigilance is needed. Our educational mission really takes center stage – our Heritage of Abundance, urban homestead oriented lectures and workshops have been going on for 5 years now, and are very popular. In all our activities we try to bring people together to promote and celebrate our community.

We are sometimes accused of being an elitist organization, and I suppose there's truth in that. We don't serve hot dogs and sheet cake at our events, we opt for decent wine and good food, and we strive to have a good clean look to our graphics. Our members would like it if Altadena became a bit more up-scale and attractive. From the people who joined the visioning sessions at the Loma Alta gymnasium last year, most of whom were not AH members, I can see we are not alone.

Most of us would like to see some kind of town center, or at the very least, way more local retail, and restaurants in particular.

I know that many, and probably most of us, fear the encroachment of the kind of bleak strip development, mini-malls, & auto related businesses standard for Southern California, and in fact for most of the country. The original Lake Ave CSD provisions were put in to try to avoid that, though without a whole lot of success

As to our residential areas -- in a land of crushingly uniform housing developments and cheesy architecture, there is a certain amount of pride that we are different, we have a history, diversity of lot and house sizes, we have lots of great homes and people, -- and the mountains – these heterogeneous qualities make us a bit special. I think I can speak for everyone on the Board of Altadena Heritage when I say that we support retaining AND enhancing, this rough texture of our neighborhoods.

I suppose it is universal, but it is especially true in Altadena, that it is easier to gather people to Oppose something than it is to Change anything. We need to make a few tweaks in the residential portion of the CSD to avoid over-burdening home owners with the necessity of getting a CUP for minor variations.

The commercial districts are all quite distinct: the five main ones that can be fairly called "districts", they are Lincoln, Fair Oaks, Lake Ave., Allen and Washington. All are different, and all should be considered as separate entities, they may require different zoning changes to allow them to evolve in their own specific ways into more attractive and useful areas.

Of course, we would love some real street improvement, curbs, lights, medians, street furniture – especially on Lake Ave, where I have my office, because I look at it so much. Lake should be a magnificent procession up to the front range, but in fact looks pretty desolate. But this sort of physical change has to come with intense urban design. street remodels are needed to calm traffic, beautify these corridors, and render them useful, not just arterial viaducts. And of course, PARKING – the big bugaboo on all these urbanized corridors, this has to be solved. This is all far beyond our limited program on the CSD subcommittee, but we do have the ear of the supervisor and powers that be and if we can just get together and decide what we want – and with visioning process I do see that we do in fact have much in common (with some vocal outliers). If the County hears us speaking with a unified voice, they do respond -- they certainly have under the current Supervisor. Understandably, the County people do not want to get involved in our squabbles.

We did manage to pull it off with the Hillside Provisions of the CSD, we got buy in from hillside property owners, it should be possible to get consensus on some other important changes we need to make.

Finally, I do want to address Monte Cedro: this takes over from the Scripps Home for the aged. A number of us went to their preliminary outreach presentation in 2006 or 7,

and saw their renderings, a pastiche of a faux-Craftsman style. We made a small protest, and they changed the design, certainly made it more attractive. From an architectural heritage point of view, the old buildings that were removed were a mess, the original structure was probably okay but had been extensively added to and remodeled over the year. In 2007, my wife Michele was running for Town Council and canvassed the neighborhood, even talking to people living there, and could find no one opposed to the project. She did go on record with the TC that the charitable mission that initiated the Scripps Home for the Aged was lost, along with the old name, but there wasn't any protest or much anyone could do.

For my part, I welcome MonteCedro, the hundreds of new residents and staff, and see its completion as a real plus for Altadena, with more people desiring more services, could we get a serious restaurant on Lake Ave? could we redevelop some of the areas that are hopelessly seedy , across from Elliot for example. There is a real opportunity with the addition of many rather wealthy citizens for big improvements. We can and should try to make this happen, things WILL change one way or another. We need to be proactive, rather than getting together to oppose this or that development, we need to advocate FOR what we want.