ALTADENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1935

The Echo

Volume 100 Fall/Winter 2026

Bringing an Out-Of-Print History Book Back To Life

By Charles Allen, Sagest Press

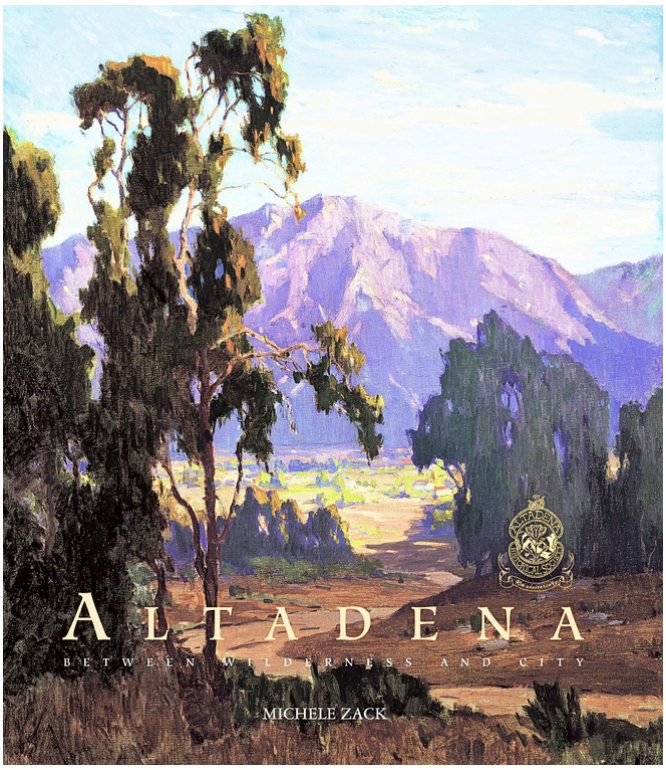
Reprinting an out-of-print history book is an honor—and often a technical puzzle.

When the Altadena Historical Society asked us to reprint *Altadena: Between Wilderness and City* by Michele Zack, first published in 2003 and 2004, we expected a typical restoration: scanning printed pages and rebuilding the book from scratch. Instead, AHS had saved the original digital files on CD-ROMs. That seemed like good news. It was not quite that simple.

Digital technology changes quickly. The CDs used an obsolete format that modern computers could not read. The book had been created in Aldus PageMaker, a program no longer supported by current design software. Its fonts needed updating, which required careful adjustments to preserve the original spacing and layout. Files created on different computer systems were difficult to identify, and among dozens of design files, we had to determine which one contained the final corrections from 20 years ago.

That task depended on the remarkable work of Veronica Jones, president of AHS, and the AHS book committee: Peggy Blue, Jane Brackman, Marlane Forsberg, Tim Gregory, Kahani Malhotra, Laura Mulfinger, Narmeen Nasseem, and Aiko Offner. They compared our best digital version against the second printed edition, line by line and word by word, to catch missing edits and discrepancies. Their work was essential to producing an accurate new edition.

We also updated the printing. The original was printed in two colors; the new edition uses carefully managed four-color printing for richer contrast, smoother tonal range, and more depth in black-and-white photographs. Achieving consistent results required specialized prepress



work and close coordination by us with the printing plant.

Finally, AHS chose to turn the original softcover into a more durable hardcover, with endpapers and a dust jacket. The result is a book designed not only to look beautiful, but also to endure.

The larger lesson is that digital files are useful, but they are not permanent. Software, operating systems, and storage formats become obsolete. Physical books, photographic prints, negatives, and historical objects remain among the most reliable ways to preserve knowledge. The book is available at AHS, Vroman's, Webster's, and The Gamble House.

When 3,000 copies of a book are printed, there are 3,000 originals—and 3,000 backups—in 3,000 different places. As long as someone can read them, the history and imagery they contain remain.

President's Message

This year has been one of rebuilding, renewal, and remarkable growth for the Altadena Historical Society. As we continue finding our way toward a new normal after the Eaton Fire, our organization has shown extraordinary resilience. We have welcomed new members, engaged new volunteers, taken on new assignments, become a research source for large projects and strengthened our connection with the community in meaningful ways.

Our republishing of *Altadena: Between Wilderness and City* by Michele Zack has been a tremendous success. The book is now available at Vroman's, Webster's Pharmacy, the Gamble House, and through our AHS website, expanding access to Altadena's history and deepening our reach across the region. See our cover story to learn more about the reprinting.

Our Eaton Fire Oral History Project has entered its second phase, shifting its focus toward the rebuilding of Altadena. This work continues to draw both local and national attention, highlighting the importance of preserving community stories during times of change.

We are also proud to have become a partner to several respected institutions, including USC, UCLA, the Los Angeles Conservancy, the Los Angeles County Library, the Los Angeles City Library, and the Altadena Library. These collaborations strengthen our mission and broaden the impact of our work.

This year also marks a major investment in our future. We are introducing a new computer research resource that will allow visitors to come into the office and conduct research directly on-site. You will be able to hear and see oral histories, explore archival materials, and access digital collections in a more interactive way than ever before. This tool represents a significant step toward making our history more accessible to the community.

In addition, we are renovating our offices for the first time in 20 years, creating a more functional space for our members, volunteers, and researchers. This renovation reflects our commitment to growth and to providing a home worthy of Altadena's rich history. **We will be closed to the public during the month of November while renovating.**

As we move into a new chapter of this 91-year-old organization, we do so with gratitude and optimism. We look forward to expanding our programs, offering more events for our members, and continuing to serve as a trusted steward of Altadena's history. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected, and more inclusive Historical Society. Thank you for being part of this journey.



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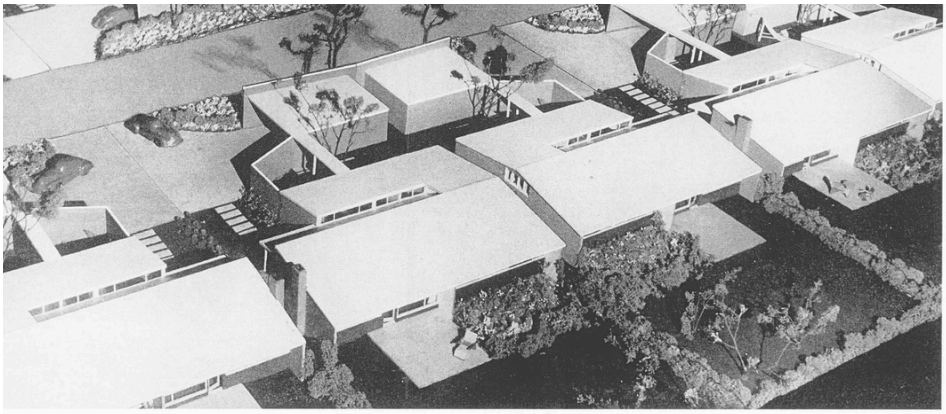
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We are sad to say goodbye to two longtime volunteers and graphic Paula and Marv Wegner. Their skills made The Echo a professionally designed newsletter. We are very grateful for their work and consider ourselves fortunate to have had them on our team. Before beginning work on the newsletter, Paula also served as board treasurer.



The image shows a model of Park Planned Homes, a groundbreaking midcentury modern cooperative housing development in Altadena designed by architect Gregory Ain with landscape design by Garrett Eckbo

Rebuilding Altadena's Gregory Ain Homes

By Cynthia Pearson

In the mid-to-late 1940s, architect Gregory Ain designed, in collaboration with landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, a small neighborhood of houses on Highview Avenue known as the "Park Planned Homes." 28 houses in Ain's modern style were built to give individual homeowners an easy, private living space while encouraging a community along the street, with fenceless lots on open entrances and coordinated landscaping.

A Guggenheim Fellow, Gregory Ain championed housing solutions for postwar Americans. Recognizing that the need for new housing on a large scale was an opportunity for thoughtful planning, Ain applied his design acumen and social ideals to create homes that balanced comfort, affordability, and connection.

A contemporary advertisement for Ain's "Modernique Homes" (Mar Vista, 1948) declared them "Built for Living," and cited a range of features in support, from privacy inside and outside the home, to convertible and customizable spaces, to affordability, offering prospective homeowners a vision of a tranquil, well-designed home that felt exclusive while remaining attainable through the potential yielded by multi-unit design and construction.

Designed by Ain with similar principles, the Park Planned Homes were advertised as "the last word in modern homes" and envisioned as "miniature estates." With an emphasis on standardized building materials and incorporating a floor plan that could be mirrored and alternated to provide continuity and flexibility, the Park Planned Homes were designed to function as a cohesive whole, with adjoining driveways and continuous landscaping. However, the experience of the particular person or family living in each home was given just as much attention as the communal aspect of the development.

Ain designed the layout of the house with function and flow in mind. One listing touted the "privacy, seclusion, and an all-captivating feeling of cheerfulness [pervading the] home," while another highlighted the quality of "smart simplicity." Each home was built with the homeowner– in terms of the feel and look of a desirable home, but budget as well – in mind. It has been said that Ain was interested in addressing the "common architectural problems of common people," and the Park Planned Homes represented a well-balanced and well-designed approach to that goal.

Throughout the decades, the Park Planned Homes contributed to a midcentury spirit alive in the Altadena foothills.

Rebuilding Altadena's Gregory Ain Homes (continued)

In January 2025, the modernist enclave was swept up in the devastating Eaton Fire. When the embers died out, 20 of the 28 houses were completely gone; essentially three-quarters of the Park Planned Homes were lost, and those remaining were not immune to the fire's effects.

As each Altadena homeowner considers their future after the Eaton Fire, the Park Planned Homes occupants have turned to Gregory Ain's original vision as they look to the future. The owners share both a goal of rebuilding and a commitment to the community spirit the Park Planned Homes embodied and have embarked on a project of rebuilding according to the original blueprints drafted over 80 years ago.

Homeowner Mark Lansdown is a leader in the efforts to create "Park Planned Homes 2.0." For Lansdown, an architect and former general contractor, who had spent years restoring his Ain home, rebuilding in the original style was a foregone conclusion. Having inherited the home from his wife's parents, Lansdown's history with the home spans decades, and his family's legacy in the home and his own years of renovation work compelled him to forge a path toward recreating his lost home. Many neighbors were similarly Ain enthusiasts and had interest in returning the street to some semblance of its pre-fire self.

After the fires, as homeowners were trying to figure out the next steps forward, one Highview resident asked Lansdown to speak to a group of them because of the trust he had inspired over the years as a neighbor and an architect. While the details required more time to hammer out, enough homeowners were receptive to working together. From there, the idea of the Park Planned Homes 2.0 truly started to take shape.

On behalf of himself and his neighbors, Lansdown was able to track down, via the University of California – Santa Barbara, the original blueprints for one version of the mid-century structure. He, with his background in architecture, was able to develop plans that stayed quite true to Ain's designs, with concessions to current building code requirements. He, working in collaboration with other planners and architects, distributed these plans to his Highview neighbors, working with them to sign on to rebuilding cohesively. A Los Angeles-based architect graciously offered to create plans for each orientation of the floor plan and take them through the building department's approval process for all homeowners. Together, Lansdown and his partners on the project were able to present workable plans to the community. The ability to make the plans available pro bono is something that Lansdown considers a triumph and a key toward reestablishing the neighborhood.

Getting 20 neighbors on board (even with free plans) to participate in a recreation of the community was no easy feat; individual homeowners' needs and circumstances pulled neighbors in different directions. Lansdown points to his years building relationships with his neighbors as a definitive factor in even starting the process of collective rebuilding.

Nevertheless, the process was not without tough moments. Concerns about and disputes over construction costs, financing, SBA loans, and insurance (all too familiar to Altadena residents) all contributed to significant headwinds, and as Lansdown points out, everyone's stories were different. Neighbors had made changes to their properties and didn't want to reduce their house footprint (having moved away from the original Ain design), and residents, proud though they may have been to be part of the original

Rebuilding Altadena's Gregory Ain Homes (continued)

Park Planned Homes development, were also looking to the future.

To address these tensions, Lansdown met with all neighbors to manage the design process. Through modifications, made as gracefully as could be without compromising the architecture, a consensus was reached to rebuild in such a way that when a future visitor to Highview goes down the street, it will look almost identical to the way it did nearly 80 years ago. Although minor changes are needed because of building height specifications, roofing regulations, and other nods to contemporary standards, overall, it will look like same neighborhood, in Lansdown's vision.

While, from the street view, the new homes will mimic the midcentury structures, Park Planned Homes 2.0 will not produce 20 exact replicas of the lost buildings. Even before the fires, while some homeowners, like Lansdown, had undertaken significant work to maintain or return the homes to their mid-century roots, many had, over the years, taken steps to personalize the homes to their needs. With the new construction, many homeowners are creating the interior plans to fit the current moment, with bigger kitchens being a recurring feature. Lansdown, for his part, is looking forward to keeping the spirit of Ain's design intact while making some modifications of his own, and he does look forward to updates to the infrastructure; replacing 80-year-old plumbing will be a silver lining.

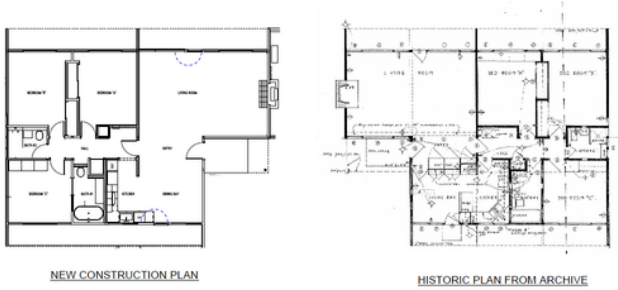
As the rebuilding progresses, the moment echoes the one in which Ain envisaged the Park Planned Homes. He wrote, "The construction of homes is now about to be resumed on an enormous scale, and it is no advantage whatsoever to the prospective home builder that modern materials, techniques, and regional planning are theoretically capable of providing for better and cheaper dwelling units than accepted standards. Our technology, industry, economics, and real estate practices are not organized and coordinated to take full advantage of the obvious theoretical possibilities, nor is the public organized to demand that they do so."

Although Ain was responding to World War II, Lansdown is responding to a different disaster, and, while Altadena residents deserve an easier route, his willingness to organize and coordinate will serve a new generation of Park Planned Homes owners. Ain said of his Park Planned Homes, "The subdivision about to be built in Altadena...represents an attempt to achieve efficient and enjoyable homes within the framework of the existing building "industry". This description, and spirit of practical optimism, applies now to Park Planned Homes 2.0.

As of September 2026, 16 homes are currently being rebuilt– a triumph of collaboration, architectural tribute, and resilience.



Photo of Highview Ave Residence before the fire



Floor plan of Residence



2 A.M. at the corner of Lake and Colorado

The Yale House moves to Altadena

By Tim Gregory

As the rebuilding of Altadena progresses, some have suggested moving homes worth saving on to now vacant lots instead of rebuilding homes lost to the fire. We asked board member Tim Gregory to recount his personal house moving experience to give us an idea of what that entails.

The Yale House was built in 1904 by Wilbur Yale, a former City Treasurer of Pasadena, at 354 South Catalina Avenue in Pasadena. I remember Belle Yale telling me when I was a small boy that she first saw the house as a young bride, joining her husband from the East. As she traveled by horse and cart along Colorado Street (then a dirt road), she could see the witch's hat tower of the house above the surrounding orange groves. Of Victorian Midwestern farmhouse design, it was evidently one of the first substantial structures built in southeast Pasadena. Its like can still be seen in the middle of orange groves in rural areas of California.

Mrs. Yale (and her house) saw many changes over the next eighty years. Wilbur died early on and, by the 1920s, small California bungalow and period revival-style houses had replaced the orange groves.

My family lived in a bungalow, next door but one to the Yale House, for forty years. The Yale House was always the landmark of our neighborhood.

Belle died in 1965 at 90+ years of age and her house was sold to Caltech. By the 1970s, many of the old families (including ours) had moved away and the pleasant but unpretentious single-family homes and gardens along South Catalina were gradually replaced by condominiums and student housing. After renting out the Yale House to students for 18 years, Caltech decided in 1983 to develop the site and offered the house free of charge to anyone who could move it quickly. Saddened by the imminent destruction of my childhood neighborhood, with all its memories and "ghosts," I jumped at the chance of saving this important piece of my past.

Then started almost two years of incredible ups and downs, highs and lows, delights and frustrations.

First, I purchased a vacant flag lot that a recently-divorced woman was anxious to get rid of.

The Yale House moves to Altadena (continued)



Yale House in sections

My original application to the County Engineer to move the house was turned down, because the house was "dilapidated and would be an eyesore in its new neighborhood" (to use their words). To prove my case, I solicited the opinions of all the neighbors within a 1/2-mile proximity of my Altadena lot, hired an architect to verify the house was structurally sound (almost 100% redwood) and moveable, asked both the Pasadena Urban Conservation Office and the City Director for the area to apply pressure regarding the importance of historic preservation, and researched the number of ca.-1900 buildings already existing in my new neighborhood.

Besides hiring a mover and contractor, I had to acquire all permits (moving, building, road-use, tree-trimming, and sewer-capping) and coordinate the activities of the electric, cable TV, and telephone companies along the route to ensure any low-hanging wires would be raised or lowered to the ground in time for the move. All the while, I was feeling the pressure from Caltech as their deadlines kept being moved back and the demolition bulldozers were poised to roll in.

At last by the end of September 1983 the house was ready to be "prepped" for the move. The “witch’s hat” roof on the second story was demolished (being too tall to move), all sub-floor plumbing was removed, and the house was literally buzz-sawed in half. Holes were poked through the foundation and steel beams were placed through them under the house. Jacks were used to raise the house; the jacks were later replaced by blocks. Then wheel assemblies were put in place, in effect creating a truck trailer under the house. Truck cabs would be attached to the “trailer" and 40 tons and 2,000 square feet of house would be ready to roll.

Then came three unseasonable days of rain.

The now-exposed ceilings of the house collapsed and both my Altadena lot and the house became mired in mud. After another grace period from Caltech, we at last moved out at 12:01 A.M. on October 3. After a one-hour pause while the movers extricated the back half of the house from where it had become wedged between two date palms on the parkway (all done by whistles of different pitches), we were on the road. All the neighbors came out to

The Yale House moves to Altadena (continued)



The "Witch's Hat" roof is being rebuilt in Altadena

watch--one lady even sat on the curb enjoying some wine and cheese while she observed the show. The three parts of the procession-- front and rear halves of the house plus a double-garage from down the street (perched on the back of a flatbed truck)--were decked in colored lights like floats in a Christmas parade. We were accompanied by a sheriff, City utility truck, and a County inspector. A brave workman rode on the top of the two-story section to make sure the house didn't bash any low-lying branches or unexpected wires.

By a circuitous seven-mile route of wide streets we reached our destination at 175 East Altadena Drive at 5:30 A.M. (a half-hour before my permit to be on the street expired). At one point, as my sister and I stood on a corner waiting for the house to arrive, a sheriff's car stopped to ask us what we were doing there in the middle of the night. "I'm waiting for my house," I replied. Fortunately, the sheriff had seen it coming so didn't haul me in as an escaped mental patient.

The only next-door neighbors who didn't get my preliminary warnings woke up in the middle of the night to see a house moving within feet of their bedroom window. (They turned out later to be my biggest supporters.)

Then came the massive job of reconstruction and restoration. The footings and foundation were built under the house. The mover returned to set the house down and turn it slightly so it would sit squarely on its new concrete-block foundation. The witch's hat roof and its copper finial were rebuilt and the one-foot gap all around the house, caused by the buzz-saw, was filled in. (So the house ended up being one foot longer than it had been at the old site.)

Originally, there were no electrical wall switches in the entire house--all lights operated by pull-strings. Switches were installed, many wall power outlets were added, and the house was wired for 220 volts. All plumbing was replaced and I decided to underground all utilities (water, sewer, gas, electricity, telephone, and cable TV) through various trenches running up my driveway. (My morale and pocketbook were both sadly depleted when I was informed a previous owner of my property had never paid his sewer assessment fee--guess who had to pay it!) Central heating and air-conditioning and a security system were other large investments.

The whole interior of the house--walls, woodwork, ceilings--had been painted Navajo white by Caltech. I wanted to recreate the interior that I vaguely remembered from that long-ago day when Belle Yale sat beside me on the window-seat and told me the story of her house. It had to be a "poor man's restoration", however.

The Yale House moves to Altadena (continued)

I both couldn't afford and really didn't want a complete makeover. I did hire a crew to strip the wood in the living and dining rooms, although the fact they all smoked like chimneys made me wonder about the shape of their lungs considering the effects of smoke combined with the potent fumes of chemical strippers.

My father helped me clean all the copper door hardware. I treated the house (and myself) to a stained-glass window from the Wallis Studio installed on the stair-landing depicting an orange grove against a mountain backdrop.

A Gamble House or a Wrigley Mansion the Yale House was not. It was a comfortable old place that I wanted to keep that way.

An 80-year-old house, just like a human body, has lumps and bumps which it earns through age and the simple fact of being lived in for such a long time.

My aim was to create an environment that carried on from where the Yales had left off with the addition of the things we (and the Building Code) considered necessities in the 1980s.

Alas, the Yale House, which I had hoped to be my legacy to Altadena, completely burned down in the Eaton Fire. All that's left are the two stone pillars on both sides of the driveway that once identified my cherished former home.



Yale House in Altadena

Scholarship Recipient London Merrit

We are happy to hear that one of our Ellen Garrison Clark scholarship recipients is following in Mrs. Clark's footsteps and lifting others as she herself succeeds. Here is her story:

I wanted to personally thank AHS for the scholarship I received in 2022. Because of your generosity, I was able to attend the University of Southern California and graduated in May 2026. Your support truly helped shape my journey, and I will always be grateful for the investment you made in my future.



Today, I am the founder of London & Latte, a mobile espresso and matcha bar serving handcrafted espresso, matcha, and specialty beverages throughout Southern California. My mission goes beyond serving coffee—I hope to connect with people one latte at a time, speak at community events, and encourage young people to pursue higher education, graduate, and believe they can become business owners.

I operate London & Latte as a mobile beverage experience, traveling to community events, nonprofit programs, private gatherings, local businesses, and popups throughout Southern California. From creating menus and preparing ingredients to managing customer service, sales, event setup, marketing, and partnerships, operating London & Latte has allowed me to experience firsthand what it takes to build and grow a small business.

One of the most important parts of my mission is using those experiences to inspire other young people. I want students and young adults to see entrepreneurship as something that is attainable for them. Through London & Latte, I hope to give young people opportunities to gain hands-on experience in customer service, communication, sales, teamwork, professionalism, and business operations while building confidence and independence. I hope my journey—from scholarship recipient to USC graduate and business owner—can inspire other students to dream big and see what's possible.

AHS Author Talk

Join the Altadena Historical Society for our final program of 2026, featuring author Mary Lea Carroll and her memoir, Across the Street, Around the Corner...the Road Home.

Inspired by reflections during the COVID lockdown, Carroll draws on her childhood in Altadena and later life in Pasadena to explore how everyday connections with neighbors enrich our lives and strengthen our communities. Her message of connection and belonging feels especially meaningful for Altadena today.

Carroll will read selections from her memoir and discuss the stories behind it. Books will be available for purchase.

We hope you'll join us!

FREE
November 9th 7p.m.
Altadena Community Center
730 Altadena Drive
Altadena 91001



