

It began with a dream, and a man behind the dream...

by Edward Iginio Placidi and Juli Reding Hutner



Burton E. Green



he rows of bean fields are gone. Morocco Junction is a faded memory. The great ranchos are lost in a history of Spanish origins.

Today tall stately palms line Beverly Drive and stand guard over posh homes, the reflection of a mosaic-domed City Hall glistens in the glass facade of the Bank of America tower, and the name of our city evokes a glamorous, mystical land of milk and honey in the hearts and minds of people throughout the world.

It began with a dream, and a man behind the dream.

The destiny of Rancho Rodeo de Las Aguas, "the Ranch of the Gathering of the Waters", the future Beverly Hills, was not set until the early 1900's when the third dry hole was drilled by Burton E. Green and his oil partners and Green declared, "No more drilling."

Though geologists had told Green that there was definitely oil beneath the lush soil, Green avowed, "Let it stay. We will build a city that will be a dream city... exclusive and secluded, between Los Angeles and the sea."

photo courtesy of Historical Collections, Security Pacific National Bank

Beverly Hills, Premier Issue 1977

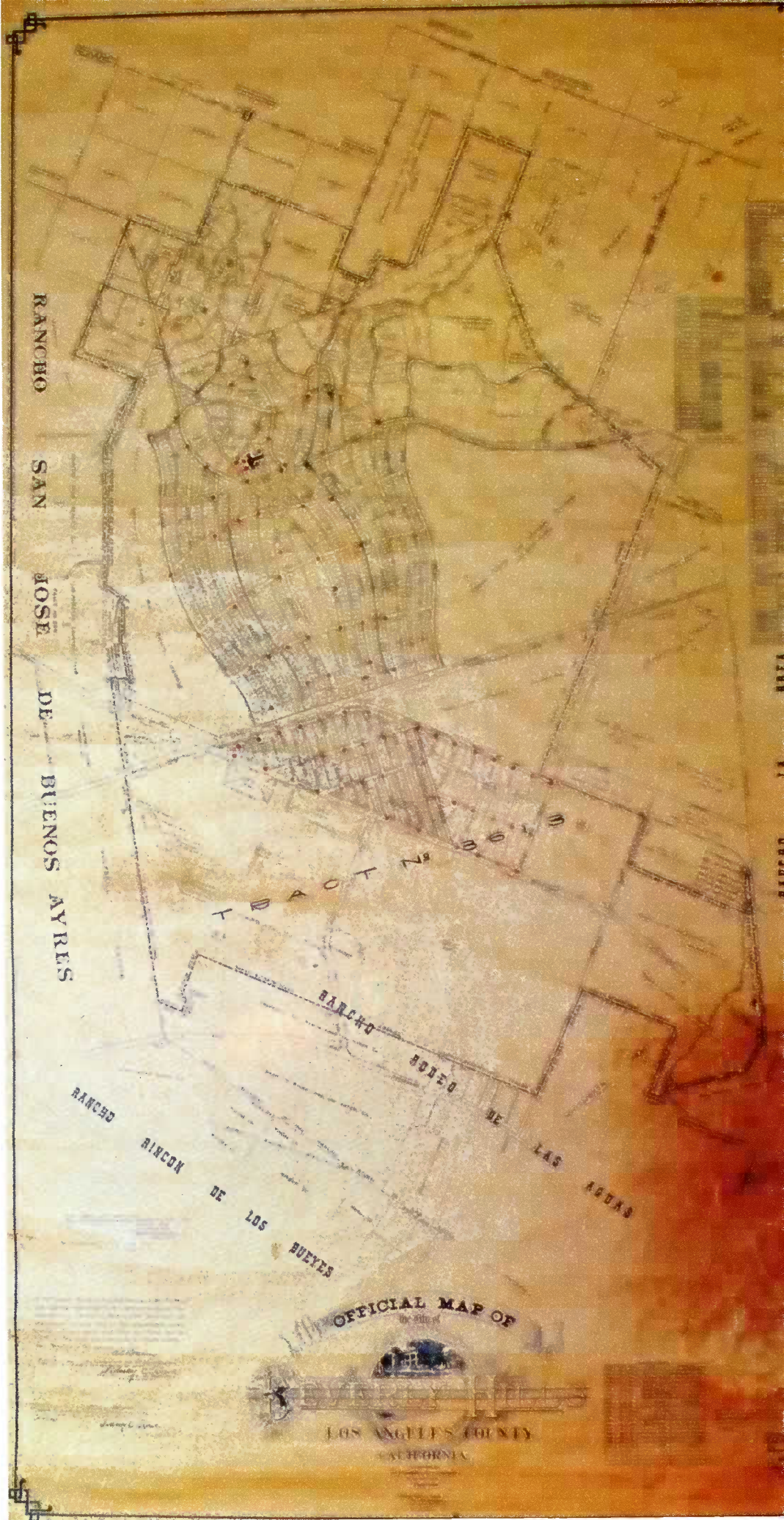
When Eugenio Valdez and six-year-old Vicente Ferrer Villa traveled north with an expedition from Sonora, Mexico in 1781 in search of fertile land to colonize, they came upon a vast swamp studded with oak, sycamore and willows. It was the domain of the Gabrielino Indians, the early inhabitants of Los Angeles County, and Beverly Hills was once the site of one of their villages.

The recorded history of Beverly Hills only begins with the Gabrielino Indians. The land was to pass through many hands with many an entrepreneur envisioning grand plans for these fertile hills. The history of "the Ranch of the Gathering of the Waters" has often stood in grim counterpoint to the promise of its name.

Valdez' daughter, Maria Rita, who married Villa in 1808, became the first owner of the entire 4,500 acres of Rancho Rodeo de las Aguas. An ongoing dispute between Maria and her kinsman, Luciano Valdez, who refused to allow Maria's cattle to drink from the only watering place on the ranch, led to a settlement with Maria purchasing his share of the land for only \$17.50 on August 11, 1844.

133 years later, a Beverly Hills property sold for over \$200,000,000. Ironically, this property is located near where Maria Rita's home once stood, now the northwest corner of Sunset Boulevard and Alpine Drive.

For over 70 years, the Valdez family led a prosperous though often troublesome life on their verdant land - watered by streams trickling down from what today are Coldwater and Benedict Canyons, with hordes of wild geese roosting on the site of today's Civic Center.





Burton E. Green's Home — Completed in 1914

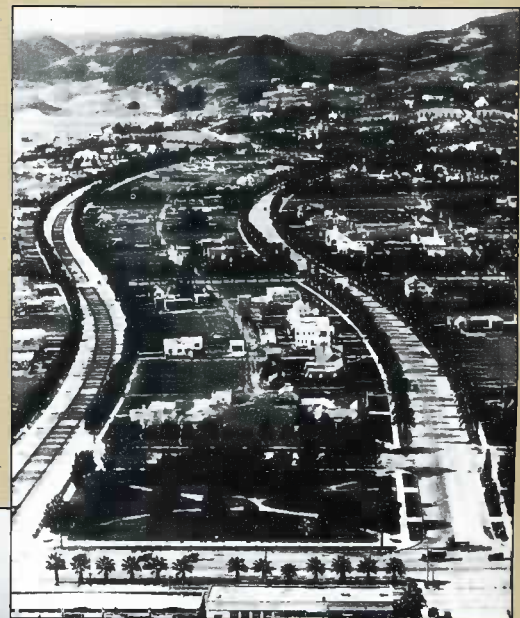


Beverly Hills Hotel — 1912



Rodeo Drive — 1922

Typical Foliage



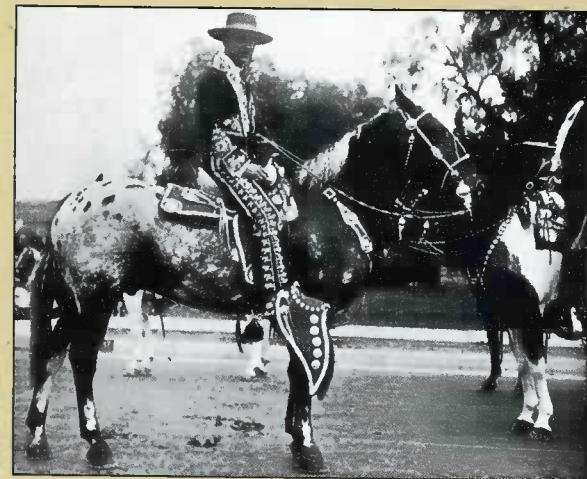
Santa Monica,
and Beverly Boulevards



Original Beverly Hills Billies



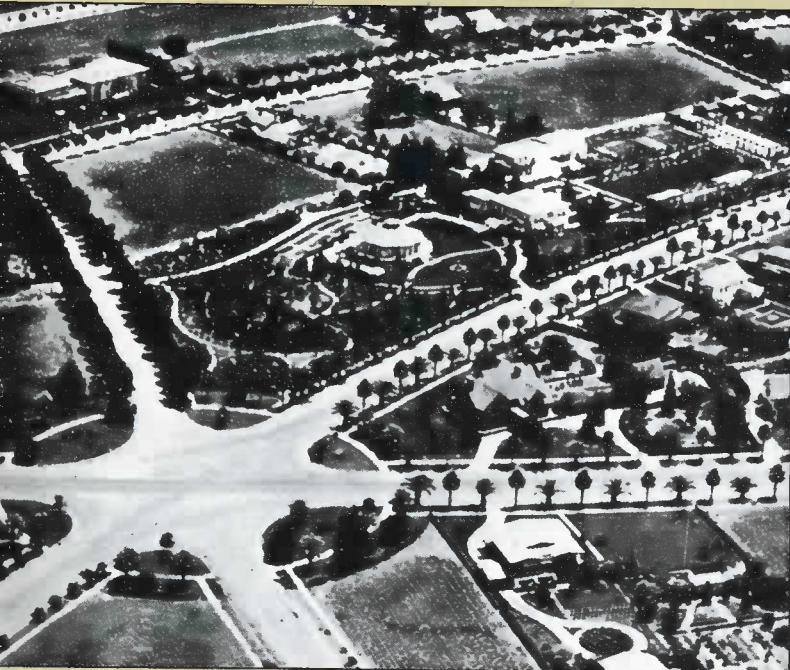
Wilshire and Lower Santa Monica Boulevards
circa 1932



Silsby Spalding — First Mayor (1922 - 1929)



Payne Furnace and Supply Co. — 1928



Sunset Boulevard (looking south) — 1918



Sunset Boulevard — 1925



Beverly Drive (looking south) — 1937



Rodeo Land and Water Company Truck

In 1854, plagued by frequent Indian raids and widowed with eleven children, Maria decided to sell the ranch and move to a new home at Temple and Main in downtown Los Angeles. She accepted Benjamin Davis Wilson and William Workman's offer of \$4000 for the future of Beverly Hills

Wilson and Workman were the first entrepreneurs with high hopes for the rancho land, planting 2,000 acres of wheat in 1862. But the wheat venture failed when a terrible drought withered their crops and the gathering waters vanished from the canyons. Then the newly formed De Las Aquas Land Association attempted to establish a German colony called Santa Maria, but several years of drought again brought failure. And failure was the fate of all with dreams for Rancho Rodeo de Las Aquas, until Burton E. Green founded the Rodeo Land and Water Company in the early 1900's.

Sheep herding, mass cultivation of lima beans, a search for oil and various subdivisions all proved fruitless and were short-lived. Even an 1880's land boom bringing a steam train from Los Angeles which stopped at Morocco Junction, as Beverly Hills' station was known, and continued on to the coast quickly withered and died.

The old rancho was still unsettled. Coyotes howled through the night, rattlesnakes infested the horse trails and wild geese were still flying over the land.

An Austrian traveler, Archduke Ludwig Salvator, described Beverly Hills in the late 1800's as "A plain of adobe from which are afforded glimpses of a fertile valley, lying like a green carpet at the foot of the hill."

It was not until the Amalgamated Oil Company, formed by Green and a number of well-known men in the region, failed to find large quantities of "black gold" that the future of the rancho land was envisioned in a dream.

Green was the man behind the dream, the guiding genius, the moving intellect. Tree-lined, gently-curving streets, verdant parks and large residential lots would grace the finest of cities, a utopia in a rapidly urbanizing world.

The original plans behind the subdivision that went on the market in January 1907, called for these gently-curving streets to all lead into one central point. Its design has been compared to the ancient city of Rome, with its streets curving into the Piazza del Colosseo, or Washington, D.C., with the streets moving in toward the Capitol Building.

The focal point of Beverly Hills later became Will Rogers Park and stands today across Sunset Boulevard from the Beverly Hills Hotel in silent testimony to those early plans.

The first house in the new Beverly Hills was built in 1907 by Henry C. Clarke. There were no more homes built until 1910 when Burton Green



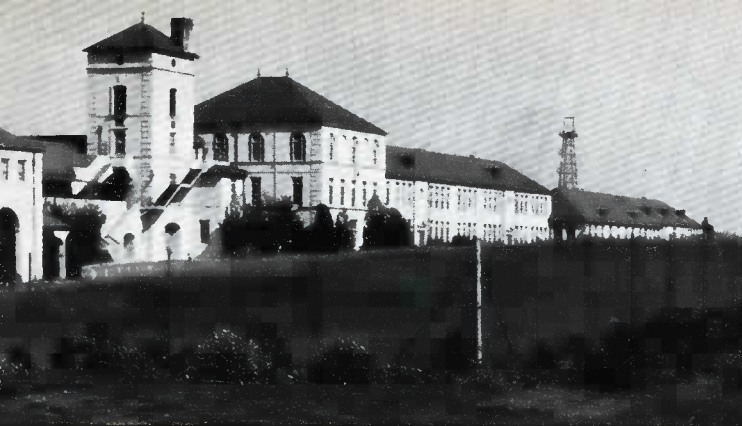
Beverly Hills Hotel — 1925



Beverly Hills Hotel — 1912

brought in a landscape architect from New York to plan the city, the parks and to plant palm trees on some streets, acacia, tall pine, or pepper trees on others.

Yet by 1911 there were still only six homes north of Santa Monica Boulevard. With his fledgling dream in jeopardy, Green came up with a new master plan to create interest in his new and unique city. With vision and foresight he built the Beverly Hills Hotel, one of the most exciting and famous hotels in the world. The hotel immediately became the center of community activities, where church services, dances and weddings were held.



Beverly Hills High School — 1944

Four years later, enough people had moved to the area for Beverly Hills to be incorporated into a city. Gradually the little dream city started to grow.

In 1919, however, when Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks moved into their newly built "Pickfair", Beverly Hills became famous overnight. The stars and moguls of the motion picture industry began migrating to Beverly Hills in droves. A golden era dawned for residential, business and cultural development. The population jumped from 672 in 1919 to over 17,000 by 1930 — and the \$4 million assessed value of the city skyrocketed to \$63 million.

Beverly Hills was booming and prospering when suddenly the old water nemesis struck again. The former "Ranch of the Gathering of the Waters" seemed to be running low. The fate of the elegant and now thriving community was hanging in the balance as Los Angeles tried to gobble it up in an annexation maneuver. But its sturdy and loyal citizens decided to fight and a special election was held. Those voting against



World War II

annexation to Los Angeles won the battle and Beverly Hills was again free to move on toward the fulfillment of Burton E. Green's vision.

Green's daughter, Liliore, who still lives in Beverly Hills, remembers her father in the early days: "Father developed one or two streets on the market at a time, rather than allowing scattered sales here and there. He kept the city's growth orderly this way. Even during the depression he kept things going the way he wanted. He wouldn't lower prices to let a whole different kind of house be built. The people came because we had the best schools, police department, and at least since the 1930's trash pick-up. I wouldn't live anywhere else even today. I don't see the point of it. Not that I have anything against Los Angeles, but you still can't get the kind of services and life you have in Beverly Hills.

Liliore knew her father as a very modest yet determined man — and when his partners wanted to name the city Burton Hills as a monument to his dream, Green refused and shortly thereafter decided on its present name.

On February 26, 1953, Greene was given a golden key to the city he founded. In the account of the presentation in the *Beverly Hills Citizen* of the date, Green explained the naming of Beverly Hills: "My home was in Middleton, Wisconsin. I was reading the papers here one day in the early 1900's and saw where President Taft was preparing to vacation in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts. The idea suddenly struck me — *Beverly Farms, Beverly Hills* — and that was how this city got its name."

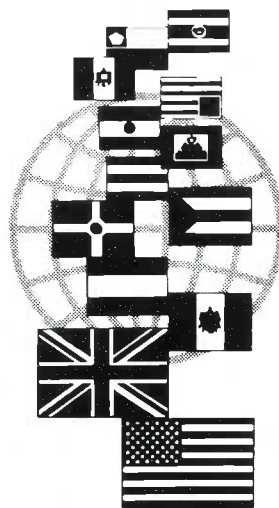
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William Havitt said: "They only deserve a monument who do not need one, that is: who have raised themselves a monument in the minds and memories of men."

Burton E. Green's monument is Beverly Hills.

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