

## Of Stone Walls and Good Neighbors

### The Quest for a Safer Walk from the Mission to the Museum Meets Opposition

by Jean Yamamura

**F**or armchair historians and professional researchers alike, the project to create a safer pedestrian-automobile situation at the old stone bridge across Mission Creek near its eponymous old stone church has led to marvelous revelations. The treasure trove of photos and documents assembled show the mayordomo's house under the road, aqueduct remnants running all over the historical park, and the origins of bridges and walls. Some of these date back to the 18th century, others to the early 20th. All of them evoke fond memories for longtime residents, and the concept of changing any of them has come up in arms.

Don Olson walked to and from his Garden Street offices for 14 years from his home on Puesta del Sol, becoming intimately familiar with the incidents involving the stone bridge, stone walls, power poles, and bicycles, and the screeching of tires indicating near misses. Olson was no neophyte to traffic realities. As the city planner and then special projects manager for Santa Barbara, he'd seen it all during the course of his career. But what really bugged him was watching school kids visiting the Santa Barbara Mission—about 12,000 come from Los Angeles schools alone—get on buses to go across the creek to the Museum of Natural History for safety's sake.

After he retired, he started having conversations with Karl Hutterer, then the head of the museum, and with Tina Foss, who directs the Mission museum and is the institution's cultural resources manager. Surely all students could walk between the two as Santa Barbara school kids did? Mission Canyon Association's Tim Steele and Tom Jacobs, former president and chair of our architectural committee, respectively, had been discussing the very same thing.

As the idea gained steam, their group gained members. Eventually named the Mission Heritage Trail Association (MHTA), it now holds engineers, architects, historians,

priests, planners, PTA members, and assorted residents representing 27 governmental, neighborhood, and private entities. A lot of proposals popped up and were scrutinized: a walkway behind Mt. Calvary, behind the Hoffman house further west, a roundabout, a T-intersection, closing Mountain Drive's entrance, a giant Steampunk pipe tunnel under APS, and undergrounding utilities.

The group organized walking tours and presented their ideas at meetings held by Mission Canyon, Riviera, and Upper East associations. Significantly, with the city and county, they held three public workshops to explain the historic resources of the area, the risks to safety resulting from more than two centuries of change, and the planning process. It was, MCA board member Alastair Winn described, a lot like herding a thousand cats.

The most sober and likely-to-be-approved proposals remained on the table by the end and were written up in the "Mission Park to Mission Canyon Multimodal Improvement Plan."

This volunteer group of experienced professionals knew the pitfalls of Santa Barbara's planning process—notoriously one of the most stringent in the state, if not the country—and knew how to present persuasively to officials and staff. People took their wild-eyed enthusiasm seriously, especially their opponents.

Lanny Ebenstein and Paulina Conn have also traveled the highways and byways of the canyon for decades. They know equally well the traffic incidents that occur outside the doorsteps of their homes on Mission Canyon Road. And they believe MHTA's concepts will hurt the history and ambiance of the entrance to Mission Canyon.

Ebenstein, who has lived in the canyon since he was 3, is a member of conserva-



The photo at top shows the bridge circa 1897. The thick wall at the photo's left edge is a remnant of the Mission's raised aqueduct, with the pillars and gate of the carriageway to the Hazard estate to the right. The image below shows the area today, with walls and gate moved west 12 feet. At far right is the reservoir abutment.

PHOTOS: (top) © Neal Graffy Collection; (bottom) © Google Street View, protected by copyright but used in accordance with fair use principles.

tive think tank The Cato Institute, a UCSB econ lecturer, and an author whose most recent book, *Chicagonomics: The Evolution of Chicago Free Market Economics*, made the *New York Times* "notable books" short list. Conn has lived in the canyon for 43 years and is a stalwart foe of institutional overreach. They've formed the Coalition to Preserve Mission Canyon to rethink MHTA's ideas, which Ebenstein described as well intentioned but detrimental. Another member described the ideas as a complete waste of time and money.

The Coalition sees the MHTA as too free and easy with the historic stone walls touching the bridge that crosses Mission Creek.

**Of Stone Walls (cont. p.2)**

## Of Stone Walls (cont. from p.1)

They criticized the workshops as holding too few options to their liking. They've viewed the city's representations of a possible pedestrian bridge across the creek with horror. And they assert the new pedestrian bridge concept—to run outside the west side of the vehicle bridge—requires changes that will destroy the entire historic nature of the area.

To recap, the south end of the old stone bridge literally sits between a rock and a hard place. If the reservoir abutment at the corner of Mountain Drive were moved for a walking path, the Chumash-built reservoir could collapse, said Fred Sweeney, an architect who often speaks for MHTA. On the other side of Mission Canyon Road sits the wall around Mt. Calvary, most of which is as old as the bridge, dating to 1891.

For MHTA, the last solution left standing to get walkers directly from the Mission to the Museum involves the 1930 alterations to the walls, the road, and the bridge itself. Possibly the oldest bridge in Santa Barbara County, according to a historic survey by Ron Nye, it was widened, along with the road, by 12 feet on the west side back when "historic" meant "European." The walls on either side were disassembled, moved, and rebuilt. Nonetheless, it's still historic—anything over 50 years old can be so considered (which includes a lot of us).

Similarly, MHTA envisions that a new pedestrian creek crossing could again dismantle and swing to the west a portion of the stone walls to give access to a new footbridge. The property owners—the Kay family on one side and the brothers of Mt. Calvary on the other—are fine with it. The MHTA historians—including the Pearl Chase Society and the Santa Barbara Conservancy—are fine with it. Even members of the HLC have quietly said they're fine with it.

The owners of the properties involved have not endorsed proposals sounded by Coalition members. Mt. Calvary does not want a walkway behind their property nor do the owners of the Hoffman house further to the west. The owners of the Kay property are emphatically against having the public walking behind their stegosaurus wall.

Nye's report was prepared for the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) when the Multimodal plan came before them in 2015, but HLC didn't accept it, said the city's architectural historian, Nicole Hernández. The Multimodal had no accompanying money to build anything, noted HLC. The first part of Nye's report on the historic significance of the various parts was valuable, but in the HLC's experience, the evaluation of project impacts would flex with every



The teeth of the stegosaurus wall can be seen at top left in this portion of an image showing the stone bridge circa 1897.

PHOTO: Neal Graffy Collection

different design iteration. The HLC opted to wait, Hernández said. She added that the Secretary of the Interior rules, which dictate historic designations, list ways historically designated structures can be altered.

In the city's view, said Nye, the ills from building a west-side walkway could be mitigated by removing the east-side one. Lanny Ebenstein disagrees, stating that removing that footbridge would "landlock" Rocky Nook Park. How would any schoolchild or tourist visiting the Mission Historical Park get to Rocky Nook?

The Multimodal plan contains the germ of an idea for a new footbridge running with the concrete sewer line just east of the current footbridge. Lying farther away from the historic bridge, it could be made of more compatible materials and perhaps camouflage the sewer line. It could be reached by a pathway between the upper and lower reservoirs. However, Ebenstein pointed out, none of that is part of the capital projects funding listed for other portions of the Multimodal project.

Aside from the quandary presented by the stone walls and bridges, a large bone of contention is whether or not Mission Canyon Road will get wider between the bridge and Las Encinas Road. The Coalition sees that the addition of bike lanes and a pedestrian path will widen and straighten the road, raise traffic speeds, and take out three mature sycamores. MHTA states the entire road will slide to the east and a left-hand turn lane might be added at Mission Canyon and Las Encinas. The area left behind on the west side would not be for cars; it would turn into a clearly marked walkway and bike path.

Another issue recently raised is the original stone curb on the east side of Mission Canyon Road. Will it be buried further? Or will it be revealed by a newly moved road? It's fairly clear how each faction answers those questions.

The many meetings MHTA sponsored—attended by Coalition members—allowed their collective 860-plus volunteer hours

of research and meetings to shine to such a degree that both Santa Barbara City Council and County Board of Supervisors voted a year ago to place the conceptual plan on their respective capital projects list. In other words, the group got a green light for funding—some day.

In answer, the Coalition filed an application, signed by six residents, late this February for historic landmark status for the stone walls to prevent "demolition, removal, or relocation." The outcome won't be known for months.

Sweeney explained that while the Multimodal plan might be approved as a guiding document, the individual projects and their plans would jump through all the hoops of planning, design, permits, architectural and historic review, and public comment.

And then there's the fundraising. About \$3.4 million could be needed for the Los Olivos Street to Foothill Road projects, excluding the long-term ones, like a new east-side bridge, according to city and county Public Works. The bridge alone is likely to cost a million from planning to ribbon-cutting, Sweeney estimated, and the review process would take one to two years.

A longstanding mystery—that of law enforcement jurisdiction—was finally solved through all the historic research. For years, city police and county sheriff would call on the California Highway Patrol for bridge incidents. No one knew whose jurisdiction it was in. CHP sometimes has all of two officers patrolling from the Ventura County line to Gaviota, so their response was less than fast. The historic surveys donated by the city and another financed by the county (thank you, Salud Carbajal) finally laid the city-county boundary at five feet inside the north end of the bridge.

After looking at the Mission to Museum problem for decades, Don Olson's not yet seeing any light at the end of the tunnel. But he's used to that. It's an occupational hazard of his former profession. What makes this project different, though, is that it's close to his heart. He intends to see it through, and he has a lot of support, including from the Mission Canyon Association.

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

Excerpt from "Mending Wall" by Robert Frost



# Multimodal Plan Would Mar Mission Canyon

by **Paulina Conn and Lanny Ebenstein**

**T**he entrance to Mission Canyon is the most historic site in Santa Barbara County, and among the most historic sites in California and the western United States. For this reason especially, any changes in this area should be approached from the most cautious and careful of perspectives.

The current Mission Canyon Multimodal Plan would have the following effects:

- Relocation and demolition of dozens of feet of historic sandstone walls adjoining the historic Mission Bridge, including a number of feet of the “stegosaurus” wall
- Loss of eastern side pedestrian access
- Moving the asphalt corridor of Mission Canyon Road as much as 19 feet closer to the Santa Barbara Woman’s Club and Rocky Nook Park between Mission Bridge and Puerta del Sol, also widening the asphalt corridor by as much as 40 percent and straightening it
- Landlocking of Rocky Nook Park — it would no longer be possible to walk on the eastern side of Mission Canyon Road and Los Olivos between Rocky Nook and the Mission area

- Location of a new, single-span steel pedestrian bridge of approximately 140 feet in length on the western side of Mission Bridge; the trusses would protrude several feet above the existing stone bridge

The Coalition to Preserve Mission Canyon is a grassroots group of mostly canyon residents who oppose these radical changes to the entrance to Mission Canyon. The Coalition is aware that, even though statistically Mission Canyon Road is a safe corridor, some changes could be made to help pedestrians, especially, feel safer.

Rather than radical transformation of this historic and scenic corridor, the Coalition is looking for immediate, financially doable solutions for possible new crosswalks, consolidation and moving of signs for easier destination and speed guidance, maintenance of all painted lines for the best safety practices, perhaps some new stop signs, and particularly slowing down traffic speed.

The Coalition to Preserve Mission Canyon seeks solutions that honor what the community has expressed as its top goals for this area — preserve historic Mission Bridge, preserve the historic sandstone walls, preserve

other historic and archeological resources, preserve ecological resources, preserve the rural quality of the area, and preserve views and aesthetics — all while having a pleasurable and safe way to get to destinations.

Local historian Walker Tompkins wrote in 1967: “The newcomer in search of authentic relics of Santa Barbara’s Spanish Period can find more history packed in the two-acre area bounded by Mission Ridge Road, Mountain Drive, and Mission Canyon Road [E. Los Olivos], than anywhere else. Here will be found the ruins of the Mission waterworks that date back to the first decade of the nineteenth century. Unlike the latest restoration of the Mission facade and bell towers [1953], the waterworks relics are originals, not replicas.” Tompkins also wrote: “No residential neighborhood in the city boasts a richer historical background, or offers more relics and landmarks of old Spanish days.”

Let’s work together for solutions that save our history and ambiance.

*Paulina Conn and Lanny Ebenstein are members of the Coalition to Preserve Mission Canyon.*

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Abandoned Cars?

We’ve had questions about what to do about cars abandoned in the canyon. Wait for a week or two to be sure the vehicle is really abandoned. Then simply call the CHP (967-1234) during regular business hours with the car make and model, the license number, and the location. They will take care of it. — Laurie Guitteau

### MCA Dues

Don’t forget to pay your \$35 yearly dues for MCA. That is a bargain! Your dues purchase the Mutt Mitts that keep literal tons of dog waste off trails, streets, parks, and creeks. As the all-volunteer Mission Heritage Trail Association develops a safe passage through the canyon, MCA donated \$5,000 to help ensure the project enhances the beauty and history of the area.

A onetime donation of \$5,000 was given to the Botanic Garden’s Seed the Future campaign last year, and the same to the Museum of Natural History to celebrate its Centennial this year. Both institutions are treasures of our canyon.

Send your dues to MCA, P.O. Box 401, Santa Barbara, CA 93102-0401, or you may pay with Paypal on our website, [missioncanyon.org](http://missioncanyon.org). If you’ve already paid, thank you! — LG

### Fire Fees Clear Brush

The Mission Canyon Vegetation Management Project, funded with a \$325,000 grant courtesy of our State Responsibility Area (SRA) fees, has completed almost 40 acres to date, which is about half of the total project acres. Captain Rob Hazard of Santa Barbara County Fire, who is managing the work, said they are ahead of schedule. Work has finished at the olive grove along upper Mission Canyon Road. Because the old olive wood dulled chipper blades quickly, Hazard manned the burn piles there with 15 firefighters. Next is Edison road junction at the end of the paved portion of the Tunnel Trail. If you have areas of concern that should be cleared, contact Capt. Rob Hazard directly: [Rob.Hazard@sbcfire.com](mailto:Rob.Hazard@sbcfire.com).

And a reminder — it’s time to pay those fire fees again. You should be receiving a bill any day. This year you can pay them more

willingly since we in Mission Canyon are seeing them at work. — LG

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The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of **Lee Anne Dollison**, graphics, production, and photography. MCA’s Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month, at 7:30 p.m., at the S.B. Natural History Museum’s MacVeagh House. All residents are welcome to attend.



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## Your MCA Newsletter Spring 2016

Complicated Walk  
from Mission  
to Museum  
Pros and Cons

Abandoned Cars • Dues Due • Fire Fees

# Mission Canyon Association 2016 Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 28  
6:30 p.m. social half-hour  
7 p.m. meeting start time  
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History  
2559 Puesta del Sol  
Fleischmann Auditorium

## El Niño Nada . . .

You don't want to miss this year's Annual Meeting!

In our answer to El Niño's no show, Steve Windhager and Madeline Ward join forces to help us all learn how to cope with the reality of less and more expensive water. Steve, director of the Botanic Garden, and Madeline, the City of Santa Barbara's water conservation coordinator, will give tips on how to retrofit your garden without ripping it out entirely and starting over from scratch. Learn

about the two new water conservation landscapes now at the Garden that include not only drought-tolerant landscapes but 45,000 gallons of rainwater collection tanks as well. Not only will you leave with money-saving ideas, each person attending the annual meeting will receive a free pass to the Botanic Garden so that you can see it all for yourself. You cannot afford NOT to come.

Bring a neighbor. And carpool!