

Gone (almost), but not forgotten

# The Italian Sunken Garden of Hulett C. Merritt

[Editor's note: The Pasadena Museum of History graciously provides WPRA News readers with historical vignettes to relive our past and inform our future.]

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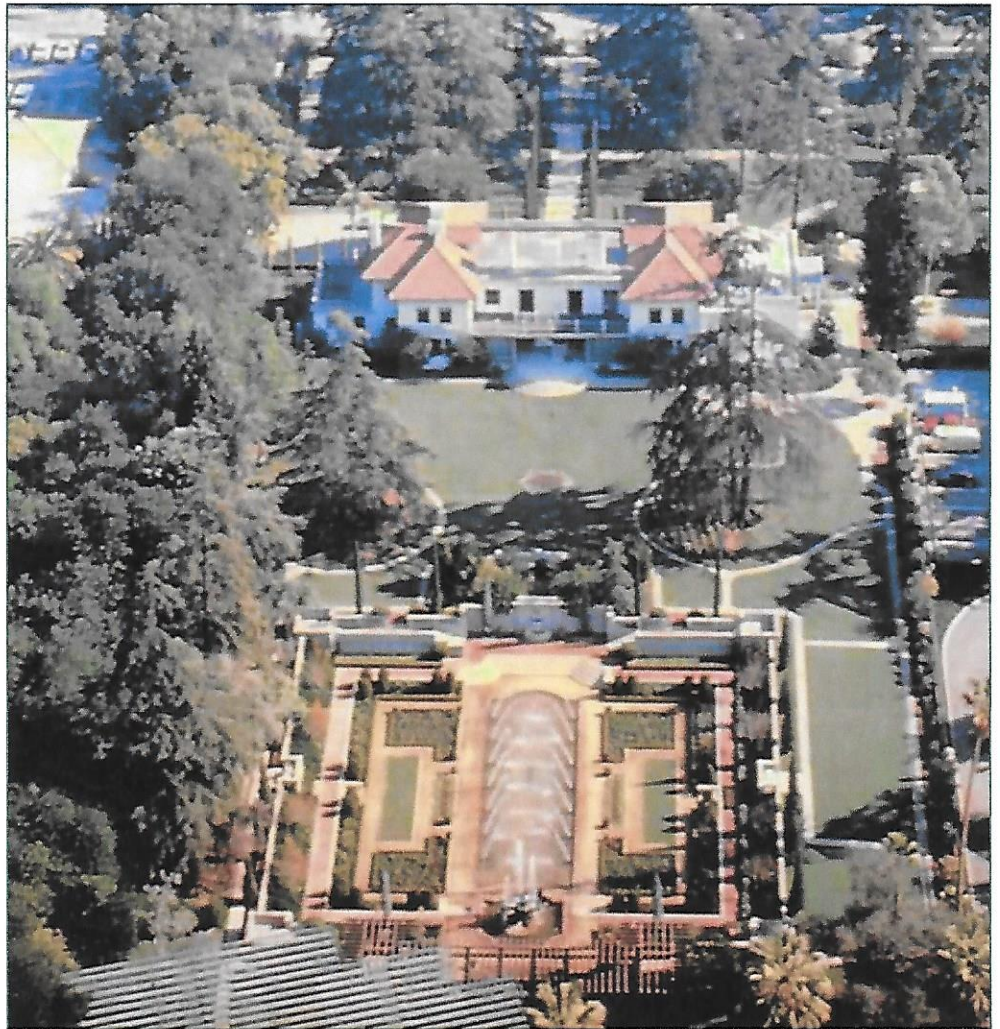
In 1907, when Hulett C. Merritt was constructing his home at 99 Terrace Drive, work on the extensive garden he was creating on the west side of his property attracted attention.

On March 16 of that year, the *Pasadena Star* observed that “The formal garden is coming more and more into popularity and some examples of it are being introduced into Pasadena. ...one of the most extensive of these formal Italian gardens is being laid out for Hulett Merritt on the Orange Grove end of his West side place.”

On June 29, the *Star* reported on “The Sunken Gardens of Pasadena,” an article that had just been printed in a publication of the California Promotion Committee, about the Busch and Merritt gardens.

“Hulett Merritt is completing another sunken garden of an entirely different type. ...it is unique, constructed on conventional lines, something after the old Roman or Grecian gardens. There are other smaller sunken gardens in and about the city, but none in any way as pretentious as either the Busch or the Merritt gardens.”

In the booklet *PASADENA – The Modern Garden of Eden*, Elbert Hubbard wrote “... the palatial homes of the wealthy are surrounded by gardens of indescribable beauty. Millions have been spent in the layout of these flower-gardens, and in their care, maintenance and extension. The sunken garden of Adolphus Busch, the Saint Louis millionaire, is known the world over. ... The stately Italian gardens of Hulett C. Merritt, those of Doctor Rudolph Shiffman, the Japanese garden of H.E. Huntington, and a score of others are notable examples of the highest in the art of landscape-gardening – harmonious, pleasing, altogether delightful.”



A view of the Merritt grounds in the early 1960s. In 1915 Porter Garnett wrote in *Stately Homes of California* “...the extent of the grounds in which the mansion is set gives it much of the character of a country place. The gardens immediately surrounding the residence comprise about seven and one-half acres. This terrain is enclosed by a wall and is bounded on three sides by streets, one of them Orange Grove avenue which, with its fine lawns and meticulous palms, may be said to be the most beautiful street in the West.”

For more than a century, the sunken garden of Hulett C. Merritt was evidence of a time when spacious lawns and gardens lined South Orange Grove Avenue and made it one of the most beautiful residential streets in the world.

The west side of the Merritt estate is now occupied by Jamieson Place, with townhomes flanking the sunken garden at the center, and what was in 1907 called a “small lake” with water lilies has now been redefined as a swimming pool.

*The Pasadena Museum of History is located at the corner of Orange Grove Boulevard and Walnut Street (470 W. Walnut); free parking in the museum lot. The Research Library & Archives are open to the public free of charge Thursdays-Sundays from 1-4 p.m. For additional information, please visit the Museum's website, [pasadenahistory.org](http://pasadenahistory.org) or call (626) 577-1660, ext. 10.*