

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
The Ebell of Los Angeles

HALS NO. XX-##

Location: 743 South Lucerne Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 90005

Latitude: 34.061624 Longitude: -118.324211 (at the northeast corner of property) (iTouchMaps.com)

Significance: The Ebell of Los Angeles is a women's club, located five miles west of downtown Los Angeles, in the Windsor Village community. The club was formed in 1894, by Harriet Williams Russell Strong, with their ideals based on the teachings of Dr. Adrian Ebell, who pioneered and taught women's education, and arranged women's societies.¹ The building was designed and built in 1927, of cast-in-place concrete, by architect Sumner P. Hunt of Hunt & Burns, Architects, in the style of Mediterranean Revival. This 75,000 square foot property includes the world-renowned, 1,300-seat Wilshire Ebell Theatre at the south end. The club's previous location, from 1905 to 1927, was on Figueroa Street. At the time of the new building, 3,000 women were members, studying "literature, music, drama, the fine arts, travel, and many other subjects (omitting religion and politics)."²

Florence Yoch and Lucile Council were chosen as the landscape architects, at the insistence of the club membership, to hire a woman to design the gardens. This project was designed relatively early in their long careers, which started in 1918 and 1921 respectively. Florence had already designed gardens at Rancho Los Alamitos, Long Beach (for Florence Bixby), the Wilshire Country Club in 1920, Il Brolino - a residence in Montecito, and The Women's Athletic Club in Los Angeles, amongst numerous other projects. Her partnership with Lucile Council began in 1925, and the pair continued to landscape public gardens at Occidental College and the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, as well as residences for movie moguls George Cukor, Jack Warner, and David O. Selznick. This was also prior to Florence Yoch's involvement in the movie set design of "Gone With The Wind", "The Good Earth", and "How Green Was My Valley", to name a few.

Description: The Ebell of Los Angeles is bordered on the north by Wilshire Boulevard, on the east by Lucerne Boulevard, and 8th Street is the boundary to the south. Located west of downtown Los Angeles, it is adjacent to the neighborhoods of Hancock Park and Windsor Square to the north; to the west is the gated community of Fremont Place; Olympic Park lies to the south; and to the east are the West Adams and Pico Union communities. The Ebell of Los Angeles owns parking lot properties, just west of the building, and across Lucerne Boulevard to the east. The Ebell is surrounded by Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZ) -

Hancock Park, Windsor Square, Windsor Village, Wilshire Park, Country Club Park, La Fayette Square, and Miracle Mile North.

Wilshire Boulevard is a high-traffic, four-lane commercial corridor. On the adjacent blocks of Wilshire, are banks, churches, and temples; the Scottish Rite Cathedral is across the street. The streets crossing Wilshire are wide, with mature trees, and the street names are mostly English-themed – Plymouth, Victoria, Windsor, Lucerne, Burck. To the north and west are very large homes built in the early 1900s; to the south and east are medium to large single-family residences, from the early thirties; and two-story apartment buildings dating from the 1930s to 1940s.

The whereabouts of the original landscape plans are unknown, but the Ebell archives have the Hunt & Burns offices' original architecture plans, and a "Memorandum of Cost of Planting," which includes dates of all invoices, nursery names, quantities, unit prices, and construction costs of "Trees, Shrub, Vines, Plants, Pool and Lawn, Sprinkler System, Pottery, etc. on the Grounds of The Ebell of Los Angeles Club House, as compiled from invoices rendered to Misses Yoch and Council, Landscape Architects."³ Also existing in the archives, is the Yoch-Council contract for work between "Misses Florence Yoch and Lucile Council," executed on September 14, 1927, for a total amount of \$10,000. There are photos of the grounds, dating from 1927 through the 1930s to reference.⁴

The side of the Ebell fronting Wilshire Boulevard has an area of about fifteen feet of landscaping up to the sidewalk. There are two large olive trees (*Olea europaea*), at the entrance sides, as well as one at the northeast corner of Lucerne and Wilshire Boulevards. White iceberg roses are in the planters on either side of the wide concrete steps. The existing ground cover is lawn. At the corner, further out from the olive, is a fifty-foot Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*). This tree first shows in photos from the 1930s, so is not original to the Yoch-Council design. On the plant list, there are eight olive trees ordered from W. H. Smither of Pasadena at \$100.00 each. In the earliest photos from 1927, these three olives are in the same location.

The Lucerne Boulevard side of the property has ten feet of landscape area to the sidewalk for the length of the street. There are two large Strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*), one in front of the arcade and one to the left of the office entrance. Two large olives are towards the 8th Street side of the street, and in this area are many Japanese Mock Orange shrubs (*Pittosporum tobira*) throughout, that have grown into ten-foot trees and six-foot hedges. One white oleander (*Nerium oleander*) is in between the office doors and double doors further south. In the old photos, there appears to be a leafy ground cover, but now there is a lawn. These plants and trees are all on the original plant list.

South at the intersection of Lucerne Boulevard and 8th Street, just at the Theatre

corner, is an olive tree that shows in the oldest photos from 1927. Further out towards the sidewalk and behind the “Wilshire Ebell Theatre” sign is a forty-foot redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*). The redwood does not appear in any of the old photos. There are two twenty-foot olive trees on either side of the Theatre entrance, and those, also, are in the original photos, as are the Japanese Mock Orange hedges that have grown into trees. At the corner near the redwood is lawn, and there appears to be lawn in the old photos.

In writing about the patio garden, “Pacific Coast Architect” magazine, from 1927, states that, “It is amazing to find so much accomplished in so short a time in the way of landscape architecture (for which Florence Yock (sic) and Lucile Council are responsible), but the amazing is commonplace in Los Angeles. A few years’ growth of vines and thickening shrubbery – potted plants and tubed trees on the terraces – gay awnings and summer frocks – and one can picture this patio as a most enchanting spot, under the warm blue skies of sunny Southern California.”⁵

The main entrance to the interior garden is located at Lucerne Boulevard just to the right of the arched patio arcade, up concrete stairs with wrought iron railings. There are also entrances to the patio garden through the office, the tearoom loggia, and the terrace at the west. At the top of the steps and to the right is the tearoom loggia, and to the left is the patio garden. At the loggia level, facing south though the double colonnades are three steps down to the garden. With the grade of Wilshire Boulevard being fifteen feet higher than on 8th Street at the opposite end, the rectangular garden is terraced down towards the south. In the Pacific Coast Architect magazine article, it says, “The stepped terraces and arcades are cleverly handled, and the space between walls, 55 x 130’, seems even more spacious, on account of the interesting breaks in surrounding walls and roofs.”⁶ The rectangle patio garden is divided into three sections, with a fountain in the middle and lawn areas at the north and south.

Between the time of the first site visit to the Ebell, and the final site survey, three tall palms, Cocos Plumosa (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*), were removed. These palms were located in corners of the garden, and are on the plant memorandum, listed as “3 Cocos Plumosa (Palm) (this includes the one removed from old Ebell).”⁷ Two palms were purchased from the Asahi Nursery on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles. The third and tallest palm, at the northeast corner of the patio garden, appears above the arcade roofline in all photos from 1927 on. There is a note in the plant memorandum, indicating that it was moved from the prior Ebell location on Figueroa Street.

Facing south between the colonnades, on either side of the three steps are low boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*) hedges. Another three steps down lead to the main level of the garden, with boxwood hedges on either side. Small boxwood plants appear in a 1927 photo and are on the plant list. There are four-foot concrete walks on either side of the garden, with planting beds along the edges,

and lawn in the middle area. The lawn slopes down twice, with the perimeter path stepping down four steps with the lawn slope.

A round, three-foot high fountain is in the center. A bronze statue is centered at the fountain basin. Designed by Henry Lion, it is a woman facing north holding a flag in her left hand, and a spouted bowl with a handle, in her raised right hand. The fountain basin is currently empty. When running it appears that the water comes out of the small lion's heads, at the east and west sides, just under the statue's base. A plaque at the base reads "Fountain of Honor Erected in 1930 to the husbands, brothers, and sons of Ebell members, who nobly served their country in The World War." The archive files contain a contract with Henry Lion for the design and installation of the statue. Mr. Lion was paid \$3,200.00 to create and install this statue in 1930. The fountain basin is pictured in the original photographs without the statue, until 1930. There is a four-foot concrete walk around the fountain. A cross axis path, going east and west, leads to the arched patio arcade at the east.

The planting beds on either side of the paths contain multiples of hibiscus, camellia, ficus (*Ficus benjamina*), Japanese Mock Orange (*Pittosporum tobira*), New Zealand Tea Tree (*Leptospermum scoparium*), and one white oleander on the right side, all pruned up to six feet, where possible, in a continuous hedge. Interspersed is yellow African Iris (*Dietes iridioides*). The hibiscus, camellia, oleander, and African Iris are on the plant list and all appear to be planted in the same place as in the original photos, so they may be the original plants. In the northwest corner is a fifteen-foot dark pink-flowering Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*), and on the east side towards the south is a twenty-five foot Jacaranda. The Crape Myrtle appears in a garden installation photo, from Los Angeles Public Library Archives/Herald Examiner dated October 1, 1927, as well in the photos from the Pacific Coast Architect in 1928. There is a Crape Myrtle listed in the plant list, purchased from W. H. Smitter of Pasadena for \$110.00. The existing tree appears smaller than what was planted in 1927, so it may not be the original tree. On the original plant list, there is also a Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*), as well as photos of it in 1927. To the right of the Jacaranda is an ornate wrought iron and metal sign reading, "The Ebell Shakespeare Memorial Tree Planted By Frederick Warde April 23, 1931. However, there are photos of the tree in 1927, so the origin of this tree is unknown. At the south end of the garden are two Australian Tree Ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*).

There are five terra cotta pots with palms in the patio arcade. They appear in a photo from 1932, but are on the upper patio to the west. In Professor James Yoch's book, about his cousin, Florence, *Landscaping the American Dream*, there is a photo on Page 163, of Florence and Lucile Council's own garden in San Marino, with the very same oil jar. The notation next to the photo reads, "The olive jar that formed the focal point of views from the lawn."⁸ There are "Spanish oil jars" noted in the "Memorandum of plantings" as being purchased from Paul

J. Howard for \$75.00 on October 4, 1927.

History:

Born in 1890 in Southern California, Florence Yoch was the youngest of six daughters. Her father, Joseph Yoch, came from Berlin to the United States, and was a stonemason, then contractor, farmer, and eventually was in coal mining. He moved his family from Illinois to Santa Ana, California, in the late 1880s. Florence's mother, Catherine Isch Yoch, a teacher before she married, "was active in political and social affairs."⁹

Spending most of her childhood outdoors, Florence was inspired by the country settings of her family's summer rides to their Laguna Beach summer home. Her family was friendly with Polish actress, Madame Helena Modjeska, and visited her home, Arden, in Orange County, exposing Florence to creative people in the arts and in horticulture. The Yoch family helped establish Laguna Beach as a cultural resort in building The Laguna Hotel.

Florence studied Landscape Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, changed to Cornell University in their College of Agriculture in 1912, and finished her education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Gardening in 1915. Lucile Council became an apprentice with Florence Yoch's firm in 1921, and in 1925 they formed a partnership in South Pasadena. As James Yoch states in his book, "Florence Yoch was the principal designer, and Lucile Council was in charge of the office." Lucile was also the "plant organizer and finder."¹⁰ They were partners in their business and personal life until Lucile Council's death in 1964. Florence Yoch worked for 53 years completing over 250 projects. She died in her 81st year, on January 31, 1972.

The Ebell of Los Angeles site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 6, 1994, #94000401; Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #250, listed in 1982; and Official American Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Citations and
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2. Allen, Harris, A. I. A., "A Notable Women's Club House." *Pacific Coast Architect*. February 1928. Volume XXXIII, Number Two: 11. Print.
3. "Memorandum of Cost of Planting." 2 Feb. 1928. Offices of Hunt and Burns, Architects. The Ebell of Los Angeles Archives.

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5. Allen, Harris, A. I. A., *Pacific Coast Architect*, 12.
6. Ibid.
7. "Memorandum of Cost of Planting."
8. Yoch, James J., *Landscaping the American Dream: The Gardens and Film Sets of Florence Yoch: 1890-1972*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York. 1989.
9. Ibid, page 5.
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The Ebell of Los Angeles entrance at Wilshire Boulevard. Photo by Libby Simon. July 20, 2013.



The Ebell of Los Angeles, south elevation, The Wilshire Ebell Theatre entrance. Photo by Libby Simon. July 11, 2013.



The Ebell of Los Angeles. Patio Garden, facing south. Statue by Henry Lion. Photo by Libby Simon. July 11, 2013



Inner garden facing northeast, at right - Patio Arcade, at left - Tearoom Loggia. Photo by Libby Simon. July 11, 2013.

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