

# HIGHLIGHTS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE VILLAGE GREEN OWNERS ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2013



*Photo by Gregory Gilmer, West Circle*

## CONDOS COME TO THE VILLAGE GREEN

By Lucy Fried, Court 13

For 32 years after it opened in 1941 as a rental housing complex, Village Green (known then as Baldwin Hills Village or “The Village”) was owned and controlled by a series of investor groups and corporations. The first owners were the original designers and other investors, including the Baldwin estate and the Chandler family, who then sold to a big insurance company in 1949. The Baldwin estate then repurchased the property in 1961 only to sell it again in the early 1970s to a developer who quickly moved to convert the Green to condos.

The developer wrote the covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) for the new homeowner association and incorporated it in August 1973, but five years passed before the turnover of authority to homeowners was

completed. The sale of units proceeded in north-south strips through several phases, beginning with courts near Hauser and moving east. No limit was placed on the number of units a person could buy, and as today, owners had one ballot for each unit owned. By 1978, a majority of units were finally sold, and for the first time, the Board of Directors was controlled by homeowners.

### REALITIES OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Before and after the change to condos, the Green experienced significant population shifts. From its inception, many considered it a prestigious place to live, but it was also a highly segregated place that welcomed only Caucasians and Christians. Unwritten but enforced rules

*(Condos, continued on pg. 7)*

## 40 YEARS & COUNTING

Happy birthday, Village Green! Forty years ago this month, the Village Green Owners Association (VGOA) was incorporated and put in charge of the physical, financial, and social well-being of our 629-unit condominium complex. Ever since, our non-profit association and its representative democracy have provided the structure within which our debates and decisions unfold. **VG**

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# POINTS OF VIEW

How historic should the Village Green’s landscape become over the next 40 years?



## THE BEST OF THE PAST, A VIEW TOWARDS THE FUTURE

By Holly Kane, Chair, Cultural Landscape Report Ad Hoc Committee

**W**orking toward integrating the best aspects of the Village Green’s historic design can save the association money, create a more community-oriented environment and add beauty to the landscape.

Many aspects of the landscape that we see today are remnants of the original design from 1941. When the Village Green was constructed, our landscape was professionally designed to complement the buildings and help create community among residents. There are still at least 72 original trees and hundreds more in original locations. Flowering vines grow up building facades, olive and sycamore allées shade walkways, shrubs separate rear walkways from parking and garages, and groves of trees dot the landscape.

Some aspects of the historic design served that purpose better than today’s landscape does. For example, each garden court had groundcovers like jasmine, honeysuckle, and ivy planted between the fronts of units and the sidewalk, ensuring privacy and requiring less maintenance and water. (Think lawnmowers and blowers right in front of your window.) Shrub masses also existed in



*Historical photo: Margaret Lowe, 1944, Cornell University archives*

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### THE CLR CAN HELP GUIDE GOOD DECISION CHOICES CONSISTENT WITH AN OVERALL VISION

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Yet changes in the landscape happen every day. Trees die, limbs break, seedlings grow, shrubs are pruned—and continual maintenance is needed. The biggest differences between the original design and today, more than seventy years later, are that we now have gray concrete sidewalks and lots and lots of grass. Shrubs of varying heights and varieties line the fronts of buildings, and the original decomposed granite gathering spaces, which existed in every garden court in varying forms, are gone except in Courts 2/3 and 4/5. There are also fewer trees in the landscape today than in the original plan.

One thing that hasn’t yet changed is that we depend on a well for landscape irrigation. When the pump breaks, the Association’s water costs skyrocket. Last fall, the parts of the pump needed to be replaced and the Village Green used city water for 80 days—costing nearly \$30,000 for that short amount of time. We can’t assume that the water supplied by the aquifer will always be clean, or that it will always be available. In making future landscape decisions, our community should be sensitive to ways of conserving water and saving money.

front of some buildings where large panels of grass are today. Gradually returning to this landscape would reduce maintenance costs and provide a more harmonious look to garden courts. The original design still offered large grassy areas (all three large greens were grass, for example, and each garden court had a large grassy area) giving plenty of lawn for activities, gathering and play.

Another change that would be more “historic” involves replacing the gray concrete with a warm, tan-colored stabilized decomposed granite (weathered granite that has broken down into small pieces and is held together

*(Holly Kane, continued on pg. 6)*

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## A CELEBRATION OF THE GREEN'S DIVERSITY

By Tamorah Thomas, Member, Cultural Landscape Report Ad Hoc Committee

**R**obert Alexander, one of the original Village Green architects, visited the Village Green in 1990 to advise us on our early preservation efforts. He was impressed by the community of individual owners who all had a voice in governing and managing the property. He noted with enthusiasm how we attracted a diversity of residents, that families with children could again live

at the Green, and the high integrity of the physical site after a fifty-year period. This led him to conclude, *"Everything is for the better, as far as I'm concerned."*

The National Park Service awarded the Village Green its national historic landmark status in 2001. The designation was approved on the basis of the existing Village Green landscape. The nomination document describes the landscape as: "a calm oasis of greenery, "an ecological system that supports one of the largest bird sanctuaries in the Los Angeles urban area," "a landscape enhanced by the wonderful variety of mature specimens trees," "a variety of well-maintained flowering shrubs and lawn to soften and accent the spaces around paths and buildings creating a remarkable calm and beauty."



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## NOT ONE PLAN OR PERSON SHOULD OWN THE FUTURE VISION OF THE VILLAGE GREEN'S LANDSCAPE

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The landscape of the future should be able to reflect the people that live here. The Village Green of today is a culture of diversity, change, and increasing knowledge. It is one of information and community exchange—a constant rediscovery of who we are as a self-governing society of equal stakeholders. We need to apply these same attributes to how we approach our landscape planning and treatment philosophy.

The knowledge that we have acquired since the 1940s should also be applied and constantly examined. We have learned that an environment that promotes and protects biodiversity is one that will preserve and protect a healthy urban forest; that we must educate ourselves constantly about the resources we need to preserve, protect and maintain a healthy, beautiful and valuable property; and that we must apply twenty-first century sustainability measures, reconciling environmental, social equity and economic demands.

Not one philosophy, plan or person should own the future vision of the Village Green's landscape. The ideal

*(Tamorah Thomas, continued on pg. 6)*

### WHAT'S YOUR POINT OF VIEW?

Attend the next  
Draft Cultural Landscape Report  
orientation and feedback workshop.

Saturday, August 24  
2:00-4:00 p.m.  
Clubhouse

# VOICES OF THE VILLAGE . . . . .

The VGOA members of yesterday left their imprint on today's Village Green. While many of the Association's pioneers are no longer with us, others still are, including some who continue to actively participate in the Green's affairs. A glance back to the heady first years of the Association



## ◀ NAT HUTTON

Nat was one of the Green's earliest homeowners. "In the early 70s, I drove past the Green every day on my way to work and fell in love with it," he said. "When I saw in 1973 that units were being put up for sale, I knew just the one I wanted—and I got it for \$19,000!" Nat has been happy in his Court 11 bungalow ever since. He remembers the early years as a time when residents were vigilant about maintaining the property to high standards. A two-time Board member, Nat was elected Court Council president in 2012 and 2013, a position he also held for 10 years in the '80s and '90s.



## ◀ TERESA THOMPSON

"It was an interesting time," recalls Teresa Thompson, who bought and moved into a Court 2 unit in 1978. "Six committees had been formed and were hard at work, and the new Board was grappling with management challenges. They had not yet hired a new manager or management company and were providing day-to-day management."

Teresa has noticed changes in the Green's population and ethnicity. "When I moved in," she said, "I was the only non-retiree in my 5-unit building; I had five 'Jewish mothers' who gave me friendship and support. When I left the building 21 years later, I had become the only retiree there. My new court, 8, had an older population in 1999 but now has several families with young children. Our first Board was all white. By the late '70s or early '80s there were more Black people in the Green and our Board president was Jim Davis, an African-American."

Active in the Landscape Committee for many years, Teresa recalls that during the '80s, committee members regularly walked the Green with a consulting arborist, landscape architect, and horticulturalist to inspect the condition of the landscape and make recommendations to the Board and manager.



## ▲ NUNO PINHEIRA

Nuno and his late wife, Winnifred, purchased their unit, a two-bedroom in Court 13, in 1974. They paid \$28,000, but Nuno said they could have spent less if they had not accepted the developer's upgrades offer. For "a few thousand dollars," their walls were freshly painted and they got new kitchen and bathroom cabinets and counters, all with choices of colors. They also covered their original tile bathroom floor with linoleum and their wood floors with carpeting.

In 1978, Nuno served as chair of the newly established Security Committee, which, at the request of the Board, was looking into the feasibility of a fence around the Green with electronic and guard-staffed gates. The Board eventually rejected the idea as too costly and probably infeasible.



## SEE AN ORIGINAL PRICE LIST FROM 1975

Visit [www.villagegreenla.net](http://www.villagegreenla.net) see original condo offering documents from the 1970s conversion.

may offer a sense of continuity and some helpful insights as we seek the best way forward for the next 40 years. Here are a few of their recollections. —Lucy Fried, Court 13

◀ **BETTY HARRIS**

The Association’s chief elections inspector for the last two years, Betty came over to the Green one day in 1977 to look for a place to rent, since her landlord was selling her residence. She met with the manager, whose office she recalls being where the maintenance building is now. But when she learned later that she could *buy* a unit and make lower monthly payments than if she rented, she soon found a unit she liked in Court 5, bought it, and moved in. “I haven’t had to move for 36 years,” she chuckled.



**HAROLD & ERIKA PELSTER** ▼

The Pelsters have lived in Village Green since 1960 when the Green was a rental complex. Their court, 12, was a “kids’ court.”(One-third of the courts had been set aside for people who preferred not to live near children, although there were places for kids to play throughout the Green and the separation was erased over time.)

They survived the 1963 Baldwin Hills dam break and flood that killed five people and destroyed much of Village Green’s original landscape. According to Harold, the landscape changes after the flood were very obvious. One big one was the elimination of ivy, which he recalls as sheltering rats and other animals. “Also,” he recalled, “before the flood, cottontail rabbits used to come by in the evenings and eat the grass. And, the decomposed granite was replaced by concrete. The granite made the Green more countryish, but after a rain you had to wear boots, it was so soggy.” *Ed. Note: This was not the same kind of decomposed granite under consideration today in the draft Cultural Landscape Report.*

In 1974, for \$23,000, the couple bought and moved into their two-bedroom Court 8 condo. Recalling the early ‘70s, Harold said he believes the exclusion of children led to “a certain awkwardness,” between renters and owners as the transition process advanced. He recalls the issue boiling over at a town hall meeting at Baldwin Hills Elementary School as renters argued that the Village was a community in which old and young lived together well and questioned how the community’s values could be preserved if children were excluded. *For more on this topic, see “Condos” on page 7.*



◀ **BERNIE ALTMAN**

Bernie bought a Court 1 unit in 1977 and still remembers reacting to his first glimpse of the main Green—“Where have you been all my life!”—as well as his salesman’s name: Al McKool. He soon joined the new Architectural Guidelines Committee and over the years also served on the Social Committee, the Board, and as a Court Council rep. He moved to his Court 6 unit in 1983. Recently, he launched the informal walking group On Your Feet, and helps organize the Cultural Affairs Committee’s summer “Drinks on the Green” events.

An excerpt from the Architectural Guidelines Committee’s July 1978 report in the Village Green publication *Grassroots* demonstrates the challenges facing the newly formed homeowners association and the committee:

“... We are asked to stand between two opposites: the rigid ‘Things must never change; what was good enough for my grandfather is good enough for me’ and the non-conformist who thinks only of himself.... If we work together in harmony, we can keep Village Green a place to be proud of. The interests of the community need not necessarily trample on and conflict with the individual needs and desires of the residents.”

# How historic should the Village Green’s landscape become over the next 40 years?

*(Holly Kane, continued from pg. 2)*

with a binder). Next time you’re out walking the Green, notice the many different colors of concrete and the cracks in the sidewalks. Historically these interior pathways (not the walks in the garage courts) were decomposed granite. Today, an updated version of decomposed granite is a solid surface that is ADA-compliant (suitable for wheelchairs and bicycles), which would add a more natural look to the landscape, be more environmentally sensitive and require less costly maintenance than concrete.

This same warm tan surface could be used to re-create the geometric gathering areas that originally existed in each garden court. Currently, there are few places to sit and enjoy the beauty of the Green or relax and chat with friends and neighbors. By installing benches or movable furniture in each garden court (which were planned but not installed), and planting shade trees and hedges similar to the original design around that seat-

ing, we could create more places for neighbors to gather, for walkers to rest, and for everyone to better enjoy the beauty of the Green. The cost could be minimal, especially if we instituted a “memorial” bench program or searched for grant funding (after all, we are a National Historic Landmark property!).

“We can choose the best elements of the original design and adapt them to suit our future needs.”

By looking back, we can choose the best elements of the original design and adapt them to suit our future needs. Change is always happening, and the Cultural Landscape Report Treatment Guidelines can help the Board of Directors and the community consider all

the options to make good choices that are consistent with an overall vision. This way, the decisions we make today and tomorrow will help the Village Green become an even more enjoyable place to live—one that is more financially and environmentally sustainable, and that better fosters community. **VG**



*(Tamorah Thomas, continued from pg. 3)*

Village Green landscape of the future needs to:

- Lend itself to a collaborative process that focuses on community consensus building;
- Include planning and implementation strategies that consider cost analysis that fit within the current economic climate, providing for immediate needs as well as supporting sound and well-researched sustainable measures;
- Ensure major changes increase the desirability of the Green and thereby potentially increase property values;
- Maintain the Green’s incredible biodiversity that will continue to support our bird and wildlife sanctuary;
- Retain grass that may very well be helping to keep our aquifer healthy and also provides for an equitable level of comfort for all residents of the Green; and finally,
- Avoid a disparaging attitude toward trees species that are not on the original plan, only to be tolerated until they die and never to be replaced.

tions other than historic restoration. Our historic status can be celebrated while also maintaining the landscape that makes us so special and unique today.

The Village Green’s future landscape should be a culmination of all that is the best of Village Green—beginning with the original 1940s plan, and keeping in mind that our history and culture do not stop in 1948. The vision and concept of landscape planning and implementation strategy must not be set in stone, but be a living document that breathes and changes like the landscape itself and the very people who live here.

“Our historic status was never meant to limit future possibilities.”

The Village Green’s future landscape should be cultivated by the entire community on a continual

basis, applying our collective knowledge with objectivity and equity. Changes should be implemented using planning strategies that take into consideration the current Green’s finances. They should embrace our entire history and culture and lead the community today and tomorrow to conclude, “Everything is for the better, as far as we’re concerned.” **VG**

Our historic status was never meant to limit future possibilities or prevent us from exploring and applying op-

“It wasn’t until 1983 that the California Supreme Court ruled that the Green’s policy of age discrimination violated the Unruh Civil Rights Act.”

(Condos, continued from pg. 1)

required that new renters be recommended by a resident and meet income and ethnic criteria.

By the late 1960s, fair housing laws outlawing ethnic and religious discrimination in housing had been passed and upheld, and segregation was more and more difficult to maintain. About a year before the developer incorporated the Village Green Owners Association (VGOA), residents received a letter from management saying, for the first time, that people of all ethnicities would be welcomed. The Village Green’s archives contain a copy of this letter.

## DEVELOPER’S CC&Rs BAR CHILDREN

The developer’s CC&Rs for the new VGOA included a provision barring anyone under 18 from residency. As each phase of the change was ushered in, renters without children could buy if they wished to and could afford to; if not, they had to leave or perhaps stay and pay rent to a new owner. Families with children had to leave.

“The Village” had included children. In fact, it was intended as a haven for middle-income families, and play areas were built into the landscape design. Starting in 1949, however, when the property was sold to an insurance company, vacancies were increasingly filled by renters without children (whether by design or for other reasons is unclear), and through the 1950s most of the children’s play areas were removed.

Although age discrimination was illegal, it was widely prac-

ticed, and the boundaries of the law faced court challenges. It wasn’t until 1983 that the California Supreme Court ruled that the Green’s policy of age discrimination violated the Unruh Civil Rights Act. The case was brought by John and Denise O’Connor, who had bought a two-bedroom unit in the Green in 1975. In 1979, their son Gavin was born, and the Association ordered them to leave. They sued, their case taken up by fellow owners, attorneys Frank and Jean Pestana. With the high court’s ruling, another chapter opened in the Village Green’s life.

## WHAT NOW?

Today, Village Green is an ethnic and age-diverse community, with singles and families and plenty of children and seniors. But maintaining and strengthening our diversity poses a challenge. The prolonged economic crisis has not only threatened our association’s financial health; it has reduced the pool of people, in particular people and families of color, with sufficient means to buy a house.

If we do not actively support ethnic and age diversity in the Green, we may lose it and lose part of our strength as a community. One thing we can do is reach out to new neighbors, both owners and renters. An informed, involved community representing all segments of our population is the key to the quality of life in Village Green. **VG**

*To learn more about our history, read the draft Cultural Landscape Report (Part 1) now available in the VG office and on our website, [villagegreenla.net](http://villagegreenla.net).*

## SIGN UP: NEW EMAIL NEWSLETTER

By Shumway Marshall, Court 4

**V**illage Green owners and residents can now sign up to receive email updates.

Twice-monthly communications will include notices from the Board of Directors like meeting agendas and reports, security updates, an event calendar and more.

The new effort comes in response to a recent survey conducted by the Communications Committee that found half of Village Green owners and residents would like to receive Board agendas, minutes and relevant news electronically. Respondents from about 23 percent of the units at the Village Green answered the 17-question survey, which was distributed and collected at the annual meeting in February and later distributed to all residents by their Court Council representatives.

The all-volunteer committee charged with informing the community about news and issues affecting the Green sought to evaluate how the community perceives its two publications—a monthly update and the quarterly Highlights—and determine if there is a need to also distribute them online. The answer was clear: our community wanted more options for information delivery. **VG**

*Sign up for emails at [villagegreenla.net](http://villagegreenla.net), by filling out the enclosed form, contacting the Office, or emailing [highlights@villagegreenla.net](mailto:highlights@villagegreenla.net).*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### THURSDAY, AUGUST 8 & SEPTEMBER 12

**NEW!** Budget & Finance Committee | Now meeting monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month in the Clubhouse at 7 p.m.

### SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 2013

Draft Cultural Landscape Report orientation/feedback workshop | 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the Clubhouse

### TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2013

Monthly Board Meeting | 7:00 p.m. in the Clubhouse

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2013

Labor Day Jazz on the Green | 3:00-6:00 p.m.



▼ Jazz on the Green  
Sunday, June 30



## BOARD SAYS "NO" TO FRACKING

By Lucy Fried, Court 13

In an 8-0 vote with one abstention, the Village Green Board of Directors in April passed a motion calling for a state moratorium on fracking until it is clear whether and under what conditions fracking may be safely conducted. The vote came in response to a 15-0 Court Council resolution requesting the Board's action. It included a provision to send letters of support for moratorium bills introduced by Assemblymembers Holly Mitchell (our representative) and Richard Bloom.

With the long-awaited vote, the Green joined neighboring associations, elected officials, and thousands of Californians concerned about fracking's impact on humans and the environment. Fracking is occurring about a mile from the Green at the Inglewood Oil Field, and the Board found it prudent to exercise its right to take a stand.

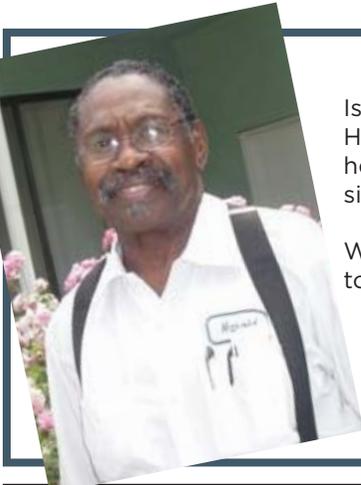
At press time, Bloom's moratorium bill was stalled and a different bill, SB4 (Pavley), was headed for approval in the Assembly, having already passed the Senate. It is not a moratorium bill, and most environmental and community groups are unenthusiastic about it. If signed into law, it will create a regulatory and permitting program for fracking in the state, as well as public notification and disclosures.

## FINAL WORD

Is there anyone in the Green who hasn't met Harold Graves, our maintenance manager? No, he doesn't live here, but he's been working here since 1977.

When asked what's different about the Green today, he said:

**"The people! They never used to want to fix things. Now they want to fix everything."**



Photos by Gregory Gilmer,  
West Circle

Village Green *Highlights* is the community newsletter of the Village Green Owners Association, incorporated on August 9, 1973. We make every attempt to ensure the accuracy of all information. However, we are not responsible for errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in this publication. The editor reserves the right to edit articles and letters for tone, clarity and length. Opinions expressed in *Highlights* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the VGOA Board of Directors or the Management. Please submit submissions or comments to the editor at [highlights@villagegreenla.net](mailto:highlights@villagegreenla.net), or to the Office.