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Establishing Permanence: The California Statehood and Southern California Stadiums in the Early 1920s

By Laura Gomez

Thousands of years after the demise of the Roman Empire, the Roman Colosseum survived. A testament of Roman technology, society and culture, the Colosseum perpetuates the ancient cultural accomplishments to all visitors. Modern sports stadiums attempt to evoke similar feelings. The steel and concrete stadiums, of early twentieth century America, illuminate the nation's growing leisure culture. Private institutions, universities and professional sports built these permanent structures to satisfy the growing popularity. Contrary to the stadium filled East, California remained without a stadium until 1921. California's delayed participation in the nationwide arena construction trend makes the beginning of stadium construction a pertinent area of study. What events led the City of Pasadena and the City of Los Angeles to construct a stadium? What does stadium construction reveal about the contemporary society and local culture? By elucidating the motivating factors leading to California's decision to build the immense stadiums, it becomes clear that the Rose Bowl and Memorial Coliseum represent California's global economic and cultural goals of prestige and leisure.

Placing these case studies within the state's history requires a cultural history approach. Considering that stadiums are cultural products, that serve a specific function in society, both techniques will provide the analysis necessary to reveal the socioeconomic ideals attributed to magnificent arenas. Locating each stadium within their respective local history reveals the influence of local cultural and economic institutions, in particular the organizations that incur the greatest benefits. Local newspapers, magazine publication, committee minutes, and school publications provide a wealth of the evidence used to illuminate the cultural and social ideals associated with the construction of a grandiose, local stadium. An inclusive analysis illuminates the national, statewide and local implications of stadium construction.

Although sport history remains a popular topic of study, early Californian stadiums have yet to be analyzed collectively. In an attempt to begin to close this gap in the sport historiography, I will analyze the historical significance the Pasadena Rose Bowl and the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to the development of the California state.

The construction of the Central Pacific Railway of California led to the future development of the entire state. The transcontinental railroad reduced the cross-country voyage to only a week- marking California's entrance into the national market. Californian agriculture could now be sent eastwards, facilitating an economic boom throughout the state. By the 1890s, refrigerated railroad cars allowed the Southern Californian citrus industry to surpass other economic exports.¹ The railroad perpetuated Californian industry, allowing its transfusion across the nation. No longer isolated by geographic distance, California experienced an increased amount of interaction with the nation. Without a doubt, the twentieth century held a host of local, national and global possibilities for the state. A developing state, California showcased its newly attained significance through the construction of stadiums in the southern region of the state.

Pasadena Rose Bowl

Southern Californian elites worked together to bolster the image of the state of California. By the late 1870s, large-scale, mechanized agriculture propelled the Californian economy onto the national market, facilitating California's economic boom in the late nineteenth century.² Elaborate agricultural fairs throughout the state in the early 1880s reveal the extent of the industry's influence on the entire Californian populous, and the civic pride associated with agricultural production. Between the 1880s and 1920s, the citrus industry composed the majority of California's agricultural production.³ Citrus affected the local culture so much that in the 1880s, Charles Fredrick Holder, member of the elite Valley Hunt Club, suggested a festival of flowers to celebrate the new year and the impending orange season, a proposition that would come to fruition in 1890.⁴ Holder wanted to "tell the world about [the Southern Californian] paradise" through an elaborate festival of roses.⁵ The members of the Valley Hunt Club, agreed to promote the city of Pasadena to the entire American nation by establishing a festival similar to Nice, France's 'Battle of the Roses.'⁶ The Rose Parade, founded in 1890, celebrated the local economy through an extravagant display of leisure culture. The upper-middle class neighborhood profited handsomely from the agricultural industry, resulting in an increase of leisure opportunities that could now be fulfilled with the elaborate festival.

A host of athletic competitions entertained the first festival attendees in 1890.⁷ Hundreds of Pasadenians flocked to Tournament Park to witness the various activities, including footraces, horseraces, and the "orange race," where contestants gathered oranges into a basket and began a foot race hoping to beat each other's time.⁸ The following year witnessed the first horse-drawn chariots covered in thousands of flowers,⁹ an experience unavailable anywhere else in the nation during winter. The Tournament of the Roses Association soon realized the vast economic potentials of a tourist destination. Advertising the festivities alongside Southern California's favorable winter weather provided a lucrative tourist opportunity.

As news of the festival travelled, the Rose Parade provided Pasadena with national acclaim. By 1900 Vitascope Company recorded the festival, transmitting it to a variety of cities across the nation.¹⁰ Although viewed months later, the recording allowed a glimpse into the state of the Californian economy and local culture. At a time of great economic surplus, the Rose Parade encompassed all of the positive aspects of California. In 1917, the Rose parade hosted the first international floats - hotels from Yokohama and Manila.¹¹ The attendance of these international businesses reveals the growing immigrant population as well as the increased international economic activity of California. Chariot racing remained the most popular sport until 1915, when the public began to favor football.¹² The Rose parade's popularity outgrew the one thousand capacity of Tournament Park. A tourist attraction by the late 1910s, the spectators continued to return in large numbers. So much that the 1921 festival, that hosted the game between Washington & Jefferson College and California, provided enough revenue to permit a contract for the building of a concrete stadium at Tournament Park on February 7, 1922.¹³ The Tournament of the Roses Committee proposed to finance subsequent construction through ticket sales.¹⁴ The stadiums popularity allowed the mortgage to be paid off by 1929.¹⁵ Alongside a growing

population, successful economy, and increasing national prestige, the Rose Parade quickly evolved into the celebration known today.

Between 1890 and 1920 the festival of the flowers grew exponentially, in size and extravagance. An escape from the cold winters experienced elsewhere in the nation, the Rose Parade attracted tourists and national attention. Ultimately, the construction of the Rose Bowl signifies the recent economic achievement of the state.

Architectural features of the Rose Bowl reveal the Tournament of the Roses Association's attention to ensuring a continuous return of spectators through the promotion of a shared identity. Audience experience remained the primary focus throughout Myron Hunt's architectural design. The "mule-shoe" shaped stadium allows a straight line of sight from every single seat. The construction of a stadium that provides an equal experience across social class reveals the ongoing Progressive Era and resulting social reforms. The Association's consideration of the parade's attendees is revealed by the addition of shaded seats at the stadium's ends.¹⁶ Hunt also decided to leave the South end opened, a traditional Greek theatre feature allowing breezes to hit the crowd.¹⁷ Further revealing the importance of the Californian weather to the entire festival experience. The importance of the audience experience reveals the Rose Bowl's attempt to create a shared community, even amongst visitors, through its architectural features. Moreover, a favorable experience ensured a return to the stadium and economic profit. By responding to contemporary social values, the rise of the middle class and resulting increased leisure opportunities, the City of Pasadena demonstrates their capability to become a national tourist destination. As the Rose Bowl reached a larger audience it transformed into a tool for promoting the national leisure culture.

The Rose Bowl served to reinforce the contemporary Californian culture. An architectural behemoth, the stadium portrays an image of luxury, illuminated by its neoclassical architectural features. The construction of the Rose Bowl cements the importance of the City of Pasadena, declaring the city a historic place to the nation and to a certain extent the world. Transforming the local festival into a national spectacle reveals the residents of Pasadena's desires to become pivotal to the national identity. The stadium, seating 57,000 spectators, anticipated an increase in attendance. Within a few short years after construction, the Pasadena Rose Bowl lived up to its aspirations.

A nationally registered historic city, Pasadena recreated its image as one of the nation's leading cities through the construction of a modern sports facility.¹⁸ Almost thirty years after the first tournament, the festival culminated in the construction of the Pasadena Rose Bowl. The stadium, an architectural feat in itself, highlighted Southern California's favorable weather, extravagant local practices and economically thriving populace. The Rose Bowl demonstrated California's new economic and social status within the nation. The history of the construction of the Pasadena stadium reveals California's gradual inception into the union. Eventually, the televised Rose Bowl game would become one of the most widely watched programs, revealing once again the success of the Pasadena Rose Bowl.

Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum

California boosterism continued with the construction of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in 1923. Contrary to the Pasadena Rose Bowl, the L.A. Memorial Coliseum

clearly represents the city's desire to attain national and international acclaim. A direct result of the local effort to spur economic growth the construction of the stadium simultaneously displays the desire of the Los Angeles elite to ensure the future of Southern California development.

Given that World War I postponed the 1916 Olympic Games, scheduled in war torn Berlin, many cities throughout the United States as well as international cities clamored for the honor.¹⁹ Los Angeles community leaders attempted to secure the upcoming Olympic Games. As early as 1915, the City of Los Angeles publicized their desire to host the upcoming games.²⁰ Only the tenth most populated city in the United States of America, lacking a stadium, and not yet recognized as an international metropolis, these desires seemed unlikely prior to the 1920s. Even so, Californian elites continued to campaign for the Olympic Games, initiating plans for the construction of a renowned stadium capable of hosting the games.

Post-Great War Los Angeles suffered a decline in economic revenue, evident by the local effort to promote economic revenue. Mayor of Los Angeles, Meredith Snyder instated a group of individuals to the California Fiestas Association, later known as the Community Development Agency (CDA), to promote "travel to Southern California"²¹ in 1919. Owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, Harry Chandler set a meeting with four other major publishers, F.W. Kellog of the *Evening Express*, H.B.R. Briggs of *The Record* and Guy Barham of *The Herald* in order to facilitate the "up building and advancing of Los Angeles."²² Considering that these newspapers depended on local distribution for profit, their desire to facilitate Californian promotion is understandable. Chandler's meeting reveals the various efforts put forth by Southern Californian elites to ensure the survival and profitability of the region. Mayor Snyder's CDA, composed of Californian elites; realtors, contractors, bankers, and merchants, singlehandedly pioneered the construction of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum as a part of their greater attempt to guarantee California's significance within the nation, securing the Olympic Games.

William M. Bowen, prominent judge, member of the Board of Park Commission and the CDA, initiated the efforts to build a local recreational and educational facility in the early 1900s. As a member of the Board of Park Commission, Bowen sued the Sixth Agricultural District in 1908 for the public rights to Agricultural Park, now known as Exposition Park. By 1910, the courts named Agricultural Park property of the people of Los Angeles; the city then paid the district \$10,000 dollars for the land and agreed to pay a total of \$100,000 dollars for the land's maintenance and future improvements,²³ resulting in the construction of the Museum of History, Science and Art, what is now the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. Bowen's aspirations did not stop with the museum. The state later built an armory on the grounds.²⁴ Eventually the park had a sunken garden, and an Art Gallery, both built by private contributors.²⁵ A 1914 publication in the annual Historical Society of Southern California journal reveals the contemporary murmur of a future stadium construction, the author states

One of the features of this field is a great Stadium, to be constructed in the west end of the oval, which is to have a seating capacity of from thirty to fifty thousand persons. In this Stadium great athletic contests of the future will be held.²⁶

A 1914 history of Agricultural Park, done by Lillian Van Aken, ends with the hope that the prospective stadiums will enhance the image of Los Angeles, and transform this spot into one capable of “uplifting [...] the intellect and morals.”²⁷ Aware of the popular desires, Bowen continued his efforts to build a recreational facility. He urged the University of Southern California to build a stadium in order to increase the local economic revenue.²⁸ After USC failed to initiate construction, Bowen took it upon himself to secure \$500 from the City Council to hire an architect for the proposed educational and recreational facility on site.²⁹ Eventually these plans led to the construction of the Memorial Coliseum.

Agricultural Park, like Pasadena’s Tournament Park, hosted various agricultural fairs and exhibitions. The recently established relationship between the City of Los Angeles and Agricultural Park led CDA members to choose this site for the Memorial Coliseum. Also, the open plot of land adjacent to Agricultural Park and the museum provided ample room for the enormous construction. Considering the popular agricultural and technological fairs, Agricultural Park perpetuated the pastoral ideals associated with California. Celebrated in California since 1858, agricultural fairs allowed locals to come together and witness the most recent improvements to planting, harvesting, tilling, housework etc.³⁰ Agricultural park provided the ideal juxtaposition between historic and innovations – an ideal location for Los Angeles to introduce the world to the American West. The permanent stadium, in the epicenter of Los Angeles cultural transfusion, would undoubtedly transform Los Angeles into an international cultural metropolis.

Surprisingly, the proposal for the Memorial Coliseum witnessed resistance from Mayor Snyder and CDA member Price. The CDA proposed two funding techniques, one through bond measures, and the other through a ten-year lease of the city property where the accumulated rent would cover construction costs.³¹ Snyder and Price opposed both of the CDA’s proposed funding techniques, since each required heavy public funding.³² The people of Los Angeles voted against the one million dollar bond entitled, Los Angeles Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Auditorium, in August 1920, yet the CDA still continued to urge for the public funding of the stadium through the latter, lease arrangement.³³ Setting high rental fees for any municipal use would render the property use beneficial to only upper class residents. Price and Snyder continued fighting against the funding proposition, leading them to file a lawsuit against the CDA. By 1921, California’s District Court of Appeals ruled that the CDA’s pressure on the government was in fact constitutional, since they were acting on behalf of the people.³⁴ The CDA dismissed the bond’s rejection in the polls, arguing that that the legal writing proved too confusing for the locals. The controversial funding of the stadium led the Municipal League of Los Angeles to publish their outrage with the construction of a structure they argued would without a doubt benefit private institutions more than the greater public.³⁵ Los Angeles residents favored the construction of the stadium, although not enough to pay for the costs. When the court forced the City of Los Angeles into the binding lease agreement, John Parkinson, the architect behind the Los Angeles skyline offered his services free of charge. A stadium with vast economic and cultural opportunities, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum began construction at the close of 1921.

Following its completion sixteen months later, committee chairman William May Garland set various meetings with representatives of the International Olympic Committee. At the 1920 Paris Olympics, Garland managed to secure the 1932 Olympic Games for Los Angeles by 1923.³⁶ The construction of the enormous facility proved to influence the

American Olympic Committee (AOC) greatly, considering that of those cities that propositioned for the Olympic Games, only Los Angeles built a stadium. Through the construction of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, California cemented its national and international cultural and economic significance. The IOC recognized the city as a suitable host for the Olympics, making the construction a successful attempt to secure global prestige.

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum signifies Los Angeles recent unveiling as an international metropolis. The strategic placement of the structure presents Los Angeles rich local culture to all the visitors. A culmination of decades of infrastructural development, the CDA managed to construct a stadium capable of attracting tourists, as well as national and international status to the local community. With the Memorial Coliseum, California cemented its place within nation's economic and cultural developments.

Conclusion

Southern California proved its significance in the nation's contemporary cultural and economic goals through the construction of two stadiums the Pasadena Rose Bowl and the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

The Pasadena Rose Bowl introduced the nation to Southern California's celebration of the local, prosperous agricultural industry. The Valley Hunt Club soon transformed the local tradition into a nationally acclaimed extravagant festival. By catering to individual audience members through the implementation of particular architectural features, the Tournament of the Roses presented an idealized image of California to the nation. A land filled with wealth, beauty and extravagance, the Rose Bowl welcomed visitors to California's distinguished New Years celebration. A direct result of the local agriculture, the Pasadena Rose Bowl illuminates the economic history and resulting social power associated with the local industry. This Californian stadium worked to reproduce images of California that would highlight the local economy and open the door to California's role in perpetuating a national identity.

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum was constructed for the sole purpose of acquiring international prestige. Although William M. Bowen began architectural plans for a stadium in 1910, it would not begin to be constructed until the head of the Community Development Agency, William May Garland, campaigned for a stadium capable of hosting the Olympic Games. The Coliseum's strategic location presents the City of Los Angeles as a cultural metropolis, making it eligible for Olympic consideration. The ornate structure reveals the Los Angeles elites investment in the future development in the city. Although their desires to acquire national and international significance remained economically motivated. The Coliseum ensured the cultural and economic prosperity of Los Angeles.

Finally, the continuing trend in stadium construction makes the completion of the historiography necessary. Scholars continue to disprove the economic profits, yet construction continues. Therefore, an understanding of the cultural importance of stadiums, not just the sports they host, will help understand the why sports stadiums continue to be a priority to communities, as revealed by the recurring trend. These expensive constructions reveal contemporary cultural beliefs that deserve to be further analyzed in order to understand the social function of the stadium. Furthermore, the reasons leading these various institutions to construct stadiums aid the contextualization of modern urban

renewal strategies. Through close examination of the stadiums social benefits, modern stadium construction lends itself more understandable.

Notes

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³ Sackman, *Orange Empire*.

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⁵ Joe Hendrickson, *Tournament of Roses: The First 100 Years* (Los Angeles: Knapp Press, 1989).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Herb Michelson and Dave Newhouse, *Rose Bowl Football: Since 1902* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977).

¹³ Rube Samuelson, *The Rose Bowl Game* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1951).

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²⁰ “Los Angeles Wants Olympic Games,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 1915.

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²⁴ Lillian A. Van Aken, "History of Exposition Park" *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 9, no. 3 (1914): 244-252.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Los Angeles Bureau of Budget and Efficiency, *A Study of Organization and Administration of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum*, 1953.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ City of Sacramento, *Transactions of the California State Agricultural Society During the Year 1858*, (1859); John Rickards Betts, "Agricultural Fairs and the Rise of Harness Racing," *Agricultural History* 27, no. 2 (April 1953), 71-75.

³¹ Steven A. Reiss, "Power Without Authority: Los Angeles' Elites and the Construction of the Coliseum," *Journal of Sport History* 8, no. 1, (Spring 1981): 50-65.

³² *Price v. Sixth Agricultural District*.

³³ Los Angeles Bureau of Budget and Efficiency, *A Study of Organization and Administration*.

³⁴ *Price v. Sixth Agricultural District*.

³⁵ "Who's Running Los Angeles Anyway?" *Bulletin of the Municipal League of Los Angeles*, January 3, 1924; "Secret Session on the Stadium Scheme," *Bulletin of the Municipal League of Los Angeles*, July 8, 1929.

³⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1923; May 27, 1923; June 9, 1923.