

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

### CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2008-2724-HCM

**DATE:** August 21, 2008  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Location: 4730 Crystal Springs Dr.,  
3201/3210/3401 Riverside Dr, 2715 Vermont  
Ave, 5333 Zoo Drive  
Council District: 4  
Community Plan Area: Hollywood  
Area Planning Commission: Central  
Neighborhood Council: Greater Griffith Park  
Legal Description: Tract Rancho Los Felis

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
GRIFFITH PARK

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**APPLICANT:** Griffith Van Griffith  
The Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust  
2430 Juniper Ave  
Morro Bay, CA 93442

**OWNER:** City of Los Angeles  
Department of Recreation and Parks  
1200 W. 7th Street Suite 748  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

### RECOMMENDATION That the Cultural Heritage Commission:

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.10 because the application and accompanying photo documentation suggest the submittal may warrant further investigation.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP  
Director of Planning  
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Ken Bernstein, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

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Office of Historic Resources

Attachments: April 19, 2008 Historic-Cultural Monument Application  
ZIMAS Report

## **SUMMARY**

Established in 1896, this 4,218 acre City of Los Angeles park is the largest interurban wilderness park in the nation. The park is located within the eastern edge of the Santa Monica Mountains, northwest of downtown Los Angeles, and adjacent to a 4.9 mile stretch of the Los Angeles River. The majority of the subject area consists of rocky hills, canyons, gullies, and large areas of open, rugged natural landscape. Seven peaks in the subject area exceed 1,000 feet. Plant species include coastal native trees, shrubs, vines, herbs, riparian vegetation, and non-native species. Throughout Griffith Park are lawns, picnic areas, camp grounds, landscaped areas, infrastructural buildings, recreational, entertainment, and educational amenities, as well as trails, roadways, and signage.

The proposed Griffith Park historic monument was formed in 1896 by the donation of private land owned by Colonel Griffith J. Griffith and his wife Mary Agnes Christina Mesmer to the City of Los Angeles as a gift for use as parkland. This land was originally a portion of the Rancho Los Feliz, owned by José Vicente Feliz of Sonora, Mexico. As a corporal for the Spanish Crown, on June 1781 Feliz escorted the original eleven families from Sonora to the settlement that would become the *Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles sobre el Rio de la Porciúncula* ("Los Angeles"). Feliz became the pueblo's *Comisionado*, the highest political authority at the time. Some time between 1795-1800, the Spanish Crown granted 6,647 acres of land to Feliz for his public service and loyalty, establishing the Rancho Los Feliz. In the 1830s, the Feliz family constructed an adobe residence in the Rancho. The Feliz family later willed the Rancho to their family lawyer, Don Antonio Coronel, an early Justice of the Peace for Los Angeles. After California came under United States rule, Coronel became the area's first County Assessor and later Mayor of Los Angeles, establishing the City's first Department of Public Works. Coronel would also go on to become State Treasurer of California. In 1883, Coronel helped establish the Historical Society of Southern California. Helen Hunt Jackson developed the idea of writing her famed novel Ramona, while staying with Coronel on her visit to Los Angeles. Coronel would later sell the Rancho to John Baldwin, after which it was sold to Thomas Bell.

An immigrant from Wales, Griffith J. Griffith settled in San Francisco in the 1870s where he became wealthy investing in mining activities throughout the Southwest. After visiting Los Angeles in the 1870-80s, he resettled in Los Angeles and purchased a 4,071 acre portion of the original Rancho Los Feliz from Thomas Bell in 1882. Griffith began developing and selling sections of the southern portion of the Rancho land, establishing the residential communities of Los Feliz, Ivanhoe, and Kenilworth. On December 16, 1896, Griffith presented to the City Council a property deed and letter donating 3,015 acres of the Los Feliz Rancho as a "Christmas present." To secure water rights for the City, Griffith later donated an additional 1,000 acres alongside the Los Angeles River.

Because of the size, complexity, and diverse uses of the subject area, the application identified more than 30 key features as "Historically Sensitive Resources and Areas" that appear to be historically significant and serve as contributors. Six of these are recognized historic resources that are locally designated Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCMs). Other buildings and structures in the subject area have been determined eligible for listing in the National Register and California Register. Throughout the subject area are park infrastructural elements such as walls, barriers, drainage canals, stoppage dams, and water fountains constructed in a "Park" style between the 1930s-50s. In a style adopted by the Department of Recreation and Parks for most of the 1950s, rubble rock and ashlar set in mortar is used as a consistent design theme throughout Griffith Park.

Major alterations to the subject area include the placement of the Interstate 5 and 134 freeways through parkland in the 1950s-60s and the introduction of the Toyon Landfill in 1958. With the establishment of the park in 1896, these two developments close the period of significance for the subject area, establishing 1896-1958 as the period of significance. The application does identify some contributing elements prior to and after the stated period of significance; these include the Feliz Adobe (1853), the LA Shares Warehouse (1961), the Train Ride (1963), and Travel Town (1962).

### ***Contributing Elements***

#### **1. Former Costume Workshop and Surroundings/LA Shares Warehouse 1961**

This facility consists of a primary building built in an expressionist Modern style attached to two extensions that wrap around in a helical fashion. In addition to being the LA Shares charitable facility warehouse, it once served as the costume workshop for the Griffith Park Children's Theater.

#### **2. Ranger House, c. 1938**

The "Ranger House" is a one-story residence with a front elevation that features four windows, a concrete stairwell, and a small front-facing pop-up gable. It served as a clubhouse for the "Breakfast Rangers," a group of horsemen within the Los Angeles Breakfast Club.

#### **3. Municipal Plunge and Associated Buildings, 1927**

The "Plunge" is the largest public pool in the City of Los Angeles, and lies on the backside of a two-story rectangular-plan Spanish Colonial Revival style pool house. In addition to Spanish-tile roofing, the building features decorative Spanish tile and two *corredors* covered by arches and wooden trellises. In addition to recreation, this facility was used for canoe paddling and pageants.

#### **4. Pony Ride, 1947 & Train Ride, 1947, 1963**

The prominent features of the Pony Ride are the square plan canopy, the oval pony track directly to the east, and the ticket kiosk to the west. The kiosk has an eastern elevation recessed beneath an overhanging roof and is clad in a barn-style design.

The primary building in the Train Ride facility is a square-plan one-and-a-half story ticket kiosk.

#### **5. 1920s era DWP Building (I)**

This City infrastructure building is a rectangular-plan, one-story side-gabled building that features Colonial Revival elements topped by a red asphalt shingle.

#### **6. 1920s era DWP Building (II)**

The DWP Building is a rectangular plan concrete building that is five bays long by three bays wide. Each of these bays features a large inset with molded surrounds, and most feature a large covered window.

#### **7. Feliz Adobe, 1853, 1934 (HCM #401)**

This Spanish Revival-style adobe is the earliest building in Griffith Park. It was built by José Paco Feliz, the son of José Vicente Feliz, to whom the Spanish Crown granted the 6,647 acre Rancho Los Feliz. The property was later renovated and enlarged in 1934.

### **8. Sycamore Grove**

This grove of sycamore trees is on the western side of North Zoo Dr. and appears to be original to the park.

### **9. Riverside Drive Bridge, 1938 (HCM #910)**

This five-bay concrete span crossing the Los Angeles River was constructed as a Public Works Administration project. The bridge is supported by concrete piers between arches that underscore each bay. Stylized light fixtures and railing line the four-lane bridge.

### **10. L.A. Live Steamers**

The Los Angeles Live Steamers Railroad Museum is an open-air collection of rideable 1/8 scale miniature steam, electric, and diesel trains around various steel tracks. Among these is a main line donated by Walt Disney that runs a circuit around the perimeter of the museum.

### **11. Walt's Barn, 1950**

Walt's Barn features a roof featuring a sinking ridgeline with a dovecote and an exposed wood ridgebeam that extends out of the southern façade. The barn once belonged to Walt Disney and served as his workspace for his model train line that is now a part of Live Steamers.

### **12. Travel Town Transportation Museum (Collection, 1952-1962)**

Travel Town features an assortment of buildings and features, including actual examples of transportation such as steam locomotives, cabs, and railway cars. The structural elements of the museum include an entry kiosk constructed of metal columns and a cross-gabled roof, a metal frame bridge, and a small rectangular waiting canopy. The site Travel Town now occupies served as a POW camp during World War II.

### **13. "Little Nugget" Railcar, 1937 (HCM #474)**

"Little Nugget" is a Union Pacific Railroad passenger car built in 1937 by Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing Co. It is among the features on exhibit at the Travel Town Transportation Museum.

### **14. Wilson & Harding Golf Courses, 1923-1924**

The Wilson & Harding Golf Courses were first developed in the 1920s and were improved by the WPA in 1937. The courses served the public for a nominal cost (in keeping with Colonel Griffith's stipulation that the park serve those of modest means), and because they were considered so well-designed, also hosted several national tournaments.

### **15. Wilson & Harding Golf Clubhouse, 1937**

This is a two-story irregular-plan clubhouse with a Spanish Eclectic design, and was a product of the WPA in 1937.

### **16. Old Zoo Buildings, 1914-c. 1937**

The most prominent features of the Old Zoo are a series of cave-like spaces recessed into the side of a hill with an irregular arrangement of boulders that gives them a prehistoric appearance. It was one of the nation's few free admission zoos in the 1930s. The structures now serve as mostly a landscaping element and are not actively used.

### **17. Wilson-Harding Turf Maintenance Facility, 1927**

Twelve single-story rectangular-plan buildings make up this facility. All are gabled and primarily clad in corrugated metal and topped by corrugated metal roofs.

**18. Merry-Go-Round, 1926, installed 1937**

The current Merry-Go-Round was relocated from San Diego's Mission Beach Park in 1937. It was often visited by Walt Disney and his children, and was influential in the creation of Disneyland.

**19. Los Feliz Café and Signage, 1948, 1956**

The Los Feliz Café was constructed by converting a Quonset hut, retaining the interior barrel vaulted supports. It features window panes that slant upward and outward, as well as a 1950s-era neon pole sign.

**20. Central Service Yard Administration Building, 1958**

This building has a T-shaped plan: the long leg of the T is one story tall, and the cross is two stories. It is of Mid-Century Modern design and features ribbon windows and large glazing units covered by decorative metal screens.

**21. Former Cricket House, c. 1933**

The former Cricket Clubhouse is a one-story rectangular-plan building with an overhang porch and French doors. It is now a part of the Los Angeles Equestrian Center.

**22. Vermont Tennis Courts, c. 1927**

This facility is made up of three sets of four tennis courts set upon irregular boulder work and masonry representing the park style.

**23. Nursery and Horticulture Center, 1927**

This facility was establishment with the intent of reforesting Griffith Park.

**24. Greek Theatre, 1930**

The Greek Theatre is a two-story performance venue designed in a Second Greek Revival style. It was home to free marionette shows for children, as well as the Federal Theatre Project's "living newspaper" productions of various current issues of the 1930s.

**25. Bird Sanctuary, 1922-c. 1937**

The Bird Sanctuary is an open area with recently-built low park-style walls bordered by a wood post and beam fence. It designed by the Los Angeles Chapter of the Audubon Society and constructed by Boy Scouts in 1922.

**26. Griffith Observatory, 1935 (HCM #168)**

The Observatory was designed in the classically-inspired PWA Moderne style. It, along with the Greek Theatre, was built with funds donated by Colonel Griffith. The building is one of the most significant visual icons of the City and has been recently restored and expanded.

**27. Mt. Hollywood Tunnel, 1927**

The Mt. Hollywood Tunnel runs east-west and is a segment of Mt. Hollywood Drive. It has a square-shaped, smooth concrete face at each entrance, while the tunnel itself is a barrel vault of roughly-finished concrete poured in placed concrete.

**28. Fern Dell Nature Area, 1914/1937/Gabrielino Indian Site (HCM #112)**

The focal point of the Fern Dell Nature Area is a secluded grouping of below-grade pedestrian trails and streams bordered by rock walls and ferns. The development of Fern Dell spurred the creation of trails toward the western side of Griffith Park. The site that Fern Dell now occupies was formerly a Gabrielino Indian site.

**29. Bronson Caves, c. 1909-1920**

The Bronson Caves are the openings of a man-made tunnel, with one large opening on the west side and three smaller openings facing east. The caves have been featured in many major films.

**30. Hollywood Sign, 1923, reconstructed 1978 (HCM #111)**

**31. Hollywood Sign Viewshed**

This series of 50-foot high letters once read "HOLLYWOODLAND" and served as an advertisement of the residential tract of the same name. Along with the Griffith Observatory, it is the most visible and recognized landmark in the subject area. The Hollywood Sign Viewshed includes only the land within park boundaries and not privately-owned properties surrounding the sign.

**32. 1930's era Stoppage Dam**

Though many of the stoppage dams in Griffith Park have now been covered by over-growth, this one east of the Roosevelt Golf course has been exposed by the recent fire. It features scored concrete embedded with boulders in a mandala-like pattern.

**33. Cedar Grove**

The Cedar Grove is an oblong-shaped, 225 feet by 240 feet grove of cedar trees, with foot trails passing through and benches throughout.

**34. Early Water Tower, c. 1927**

This early water tank located across from Cedar Grove is set into the hillside. It is made of sheet metal studded together and topped with exposed rafter tails and a sheet metal roof.

**35. Bee Rock**

Originally known as "Griffith's Altar," this was a common destination of Colonel Griffith when showing off the park to reporters and dignitaries. It has a large exposed sandstone northward face and is covered with mixed scrub on other faces.

**36. Bee Rock Trail, 1903**

Bee Rock Trail was one of the first trails cleared in Griffith Park. It begins due east of Bee Rock in front of the Old Zoo Picnic Area, and presents a view of the exposed face of Bee Rock.

***Non-Contributing Elements***

**37. Los Angeles Zoo and Autry National Center, 1966/1987**

**38. Freeways and All Associated Ramps, 1957**

**39. Toyon Landfill/Reclamation Project, 1958**

**40. Marty Tregnan Golf Academy, 2000**

**41. Roosevelt Municipal Golf Course, 1966**

**CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important

events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

**FINDINGS**

Based on the facts set forth in the summary and application, the Commission determines that the application is complete and that the property may be significant enough to warrant further investigation as a potential Historic-Cultural Monument.