



# EAGLE ROCK VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer/Fall, 2020

## Charles Fletcher Lummis' El Alisal

**Journalist Sam Hall Kaplan writes:**

"If there ever has been a place in Los Angeles that captures the spirit of a time and person, it is El Alisal, the home, garden and passion of Charles Fletcher Lummis in Highland Park.

El Alisal in Spanish means the Sycamore, which was the tree that in numbers shaded the three acre grove at Avenue 43 and Carlota Boulevard, which Lummis selected as the site for his rancho in 1897.

From 1897, when Lummis started building the house out of local stone taken from the adjacent Arroyo Seco, until his death in 1928, the idiosyncratically styled concoction, which was completed in 1910, served as a center of a movement labeled the 'arroyo culture'."--Los Angeles Times

El Alisal was for years the home of the Historical Society of Southern California. Faced with considerable costs to properly restore the building and its own priorities, the Society left several years ago. Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks now manages the building.

Christian Rodriguez, curator of the building and Operations Coordinator of Occidental Colleges Institute for the Study of Los Angeles will make the case for the national importance of "El Alisal" and advocate for its adoption as a National Monument in the first virtual Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society meeting. In addition to the overdue recognition of the building, and its builder, a pioneer in the effort to take seriously the contributions of Native America

and Spanish America to our country, this designation might solve the current impasse over the costs of proper restoration and the larger stability problems introduced by the construction of the Pasadena Freeway.

Join us virtually on October 20th at 7:00 PM for a presentation and discussion of this option.

**The inscription on Lummis burial vault in the building reads:**

Charles Fletcher Lummis  
March 1, 1859 to November 25, 1928  
He founded the Southwest Museum  
He built this house  
He saved four old missions  
He studied and recorded Spanish America  
"He tried to do his share"

**LUMMIS' EL ALISAL:  
A NATIONAL MONUMENT?  
WITH CHRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ  
OUR FIRST VIRTUAL MEETING  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 7:00**



**EAGLE ROCK  
VALLEY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

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## Hello, Eagle Rock!

**We would like to live as we once lived, but history will not permit it. – John F. Kennedy**

**H**istory can be fickle. Whether it is intentional or not, we tend to look back at history with rose-colored glasses. Wouldn't it be nice to live in medieval Europe or 1920s Eagle Rock? When history is decades or centuries away, we can put on those glasses and forget about bad stuff and concentrate on the good stuff. Maybe that's why we like history. Current events, on the other hand, are not often afforded the luxury of rose-colored glasses, so we feel the raw events, both good and bad. Usually those current events seem important at the time, but then are drowned out by the flood of new current events. In 2020, we have experienced current events which feel historic as they happen. First, it was the coronavirus pandemic causing shelter-in-place rules on a world-wide scale and food and goods shortages at the supermarkets. Quite a few people are out of work, others are twice as busy but working from home. Our healthcare system is stretched to the limit, but somehow holding. Next, two months into the shelter-in-place orders, was the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which was recorded by a brave teenager. That recording brought out a national consciousness of racial injustice throughout the country and the world. It has also flushed out some ugly racial injustice that occurred in our very own community. People started asking about the cross-burning in Eagle Rock, and whether the stories were true regarding racial limiting covenants.

I think history is a good thing, but more as a learning point of who we are and how we got here. It also shows us how far we have come, yet how far we still need to go.

With this in mind, we have decided to publish direct, period news accounts of some of the events that happened in our community in 1927. The language has not been redacted – it is the exact language of its time. This story shows that racism was not just limited to a few residents, but was more wide-spread than any of us would care to admit for our neighborhood. The events described were certainly not isolated, but because there was a great deal of land and money involved, and there was a possibility of a large influx of black people, they made the local newspaper.

While we certainly don't want to offend anyone, we also do not want to shy away from reporting what history happened in our neighborhood. History isn't those rose-colored glasses after all. Was everyone a rac-

ist who lived in Eagle Rock? Was Eagle Rock an isolated racist area? I doubt either were true. Certainly there was an undertone of racism that existed here and other places in the Los Angeles area. While there are many more laws in place that keep these type of events from happening again, we must make sure that they stay in the history category, and not the present day.

Is that the only racist event in Eagle Rock? No. We still have many newspapers to scan – this is re-energizing us to continue to scan our collection. It's not free, so your membership continues to help us in this regard. The scanning has been on hold for a little while, mostly due to the pandemic.

On a lighter note, this is the first year that we have not had an Ice Cream Social during the first week of August in quite a long time. We sorely missed seeing everyone and hearing the bands play. Hopefully this time next year we will be reporting how well the Ice Cream Social went and we will look back at 2020 as something to tell the next generation.

**David Dellinger, President**

president@eaglerockhistory.org

### The objectives of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society

- to preserve, clarify through research and to perpetuate the history of Eagle Rock Valley
- to make this history available to students, researchers, libraries and all interested persons
- to preserve and protect our local landmarks, especially the Eagle Rock

Membership is open to all who would further these objectives

Public Archive Hours 10 to 12 every Saturday  
at the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock  
2225 Colorado Blvd. Eagle Rock CA 90041  
for information call 323-257-1357

This journal is published quarterly by  
The Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society  
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Layout, David Mc Nutt  
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Visit our website at:  
[eaglerockhistory.org](http://eaglerockhistory.org)

The White Sentinel—1927-1930

# Wave of Protest Sweeps Against Proposed Negro Invasion of Eagle Rock

(Editor's note: the material quoted below is from the Eagle Rock Sentinel and the Eagle Rock Advertiser. The original articles are available through the California Digital Newspaper Collection. The views expressed are not those of the editor or the ERVHS)

On February twenty-fourth 1927, the Eagle Rock Sentinel reported:

"An option has been given to the Ellis property, in the block between Lockhaven and El Verano Avenues, south of Colorado Boulevard, to a colored real estate agent, who represents that he is purchasing the acre of land for the 'purpose of placing an apartment hotel thereon and living quarters for some wealthy colored families from Oklahoma'. If the deal represented is consummated, it will be the first colored family to enter Eagle Rock as residents and there is a universal protest against such a move."

"The land is low and unimproved. The option calls for \$1000 cash, which is said to be paid to the owner of the land. On May 16th it calls for \$4000 and on three following years for \$6000, making in all \$20,000 (sic) supposed to be paid for the land. James M. Alexander, 842 Wall Street, is the person who holds the option. He is a colored real estate agent highly intelligent, and when seen, protests that he does not want any law suit nor to take any Negroes into communities where they are not welcome. He offers to sell his contract, or to forfeit it if the option money is returned. He says that the owner assured him that there would be no objection to the location of a number of high-class Negro families in Eagle Rock."

The Eagle Rock Chamber of Commerce wrote the following letter:

"Feb. 22, 1927

James M. Alexander,  
842 Wall Street, Lee Angeles,

Dear sir: The Eagle Rock Chamber of Commerce has learned that a client of yours, colored, contemplates purchasing property in Eagle Rock district and coming here to live and that you hold an option on property here for that purpose. Such a move on the part of your clients would meet with a very universal disapproval by the residents of this community and councilmanic district, to say nothing of Glendale, a few blocks away. This creates an impossible condition and it is sincerely hoped that you may arrange to locate your clients elsewhere.

Eagle Rock occupies an area of but four square miles, with a population of but 15,000 in this valley. Development on a big scale occurred in 1923. You would not develop any territory. The only effect such a move by your clients could have would be to reduce prices surrounding blocks and to incur the displeasure of the residents here, for we have no Negroes, Japanese, Chinese nor Mexicans in this community as residents.

In the interest of future citizenship, of prevention of any bitter race feeling and for the happiness and development of this district, it is fitting that you be informed of the sentiment and that you be asked to settle your clients elsewhere, among their own people. In this the Chamber of Commerce is most deeply interested and most sincerely urges your action, because of the sentiment.

Very truly yours,

Eagle Rock Chamber of Commerce

Chas. A. Butler, Sec'y."

Two weeks later the Sentinel quoted the Chamber under the headline:

**"White and Negro should be segregated. For the happiness of each race they should keep apart,"** is the summarized view taken by the Chamber of Commerce, intent upon making a most determined

## Our Town, Our History



The area in contention was probably near the two houses at right. At left is the Victorian farmhouse now known as Castle Crag. This postcard by B.D. Jackson shows the area about 1922 looking toward Glendale..

action to exclude Negroes from Eagle Rock.

"The first movement that will be carried on is the zoning of the particular block to zone A which permits only one family houses, instead of boarding houses, hotels and courts. This is already in the office of the City Planning Commission and it is hoped action will soon be taken. In the meantime Negroes are trying to buy plots of land around or near the Ellis Tract."

"No good can result from mixing the two races nor their residences," was the statement made yesterday by C. A. Butler, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. "Property values will be destroyed by the Negro presence. This is so apparent that it has seemed useless to warn people not to sell to them and of course no person desiring the good of himself or his neighbors will for a moment entertain any such proposition," said Mr. Butler." Butler was later the editor of the Eagle Rock Advertiser.

"In an interview some time ago, the real estate agent who claims he is purchasing this land of E. S. Ellis, made the statement that he did not desire to lead any Negroes to settlements where they were not wanted. Contrary to this he or his agents, have

approached residents in the West end of Eagle Rock and have offered considerable sums for property. On being refused, he raised his offer \$400.00. The public is most sincerely warned against having anything to do with this class of people."

"A method of restricting the entire city will be worked out at once and soon papers will be in the Chamber of Commerce and in the hands of citizens with a complete plan for relief. When these have been perfected, it is hoped that citizens will at once take hold and forever settle any race question in this neighborhood, the problem of which is assuming vast proportions, a state of serious concern to residents who recognize the possibility of loss of millions of dollars in property values."

Racial restrictions both by deed and by community agreement were contentious issues in the region and country at the time. Although the Supreme Court decided that a New Orleans city ordinance restricting Negro residence in white areas was a violation of the 14th amendment, the general legal opinion was that this did not invalidate deed restrictions, as these were matters of personal contract.

## The Sentinel reported:

"Eagle Rock citizens faced a direct issue on Wednesday (May 12th) morning when it was discovered that in the wee small hours a building had been moved bodily to property on Lockhaven Avenue around which has centered lively discussion regarding Negro occupancy during the last few weeks."

"Halted in operation, workmen in the employ of the Davis House Moving Co., contractors, were informed by Oliver Phillips, local building inspector that such action would be immediately enjoined when a permit issued in Los Angeles on May 4th to the Alexander Realty Co. was produced, although knowledge of such permit had not been received at the Eagle Rock office when the recording of such action within twenty-four hours is required by law."

"This permit was also issued following the adoption of a motion before the city council made by Councilman I. C. Ash, that no building permit be issued for the erection of any building on the property specified until the matter had been decided on by the city council."

## The Sentinel May 14:

"Following the destruction Friday (May 13th) night by fire of undetermined origin, the house on trucks being moved to the property on Lockhaven Avenue, recently purchased by James Alexander, and around which has centered much heated discussion, a proposal is under consideration to acquire this territory for park purposes. No definite action has however, been announced, but a statement has been received from the building department that no permits would be granted before re-zoning is decided upon by the City."

Two and a half years later the possibility of a park was discussed again when lawyers for Mr. Alexander pressed for Council action. He had been unable to utilize the property in the interim.

## On April eleventh 1930 the Eagle Rock Advertiser reported:

"Action toward the San Rafael playground was taken when an ordinance of intention to acquire certain lands in the western part of Eagle Rock for playground purposes was passed by the city council Wednesday. Time for protest, if any is to be made, is set for May 22."

"The property to be acquired is between Lockhaven and El Verano Avenues, through which Milan Way runs. It consists of several dwellings and a tract formerly

owned by Edwin Ellis of the Santa Fe Railroad, and supposed to have been sold to James Alexander, a Negro."

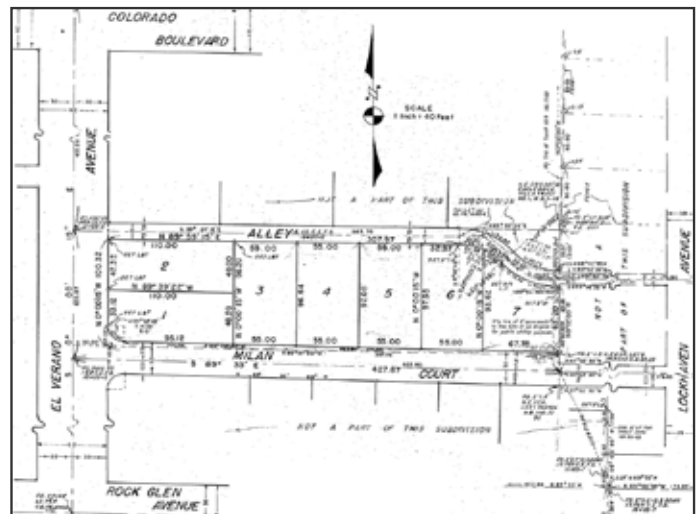
"At a hearing yesterday morning (June 10th), the city council, after several continuances, dismissed the proceedings for a playground in the west end of Eagle Rock. The action was taken on the showing that a majority of property owners, 74 per cent, had signed petitions for this course, and was on motion of Councilman C. A. Holland."

"The Negro, J. Alexander, who holds part of the property it was proposed to use for the playground was present, and said it made no difference to him what action the council took."

The Eagle Rock Taxpayers league, which had been formed specifically to oppose the park acquisition and its associated costs to property owners opined:

"The good people of Eagle Rock are again permitted to breathe the pure air and to enjoy, undisturbed, the security and peace of this highly favored and truly beautiful environment, free from the terror of that threatened Negro influx which has poisoned their joys by day, and haunted their dreams by night, for the past three years. It devolved upon the residents of the western corner of Eagle Rock district to fight and win this battle—for all the people of Eagle Rock."

The cost to Mr. Alexander was not discussed, nor was the future of the property, which was used for residences until, in 1968; it became part of the site for Eagle Rock Plaza.



This area between Milan Court and an alley was probably that in contention. It was subdivided for small lots in 1948 by W. J. and Bonnie Ward, much later than the surrounding area. It now underlies Eagle Rock Plaza.

A Different View—1948

# Racists Fire Cross to Stop Sale to Negroes

(Editor's note: the material quoted below is from the Los Angeles Sentinel, an African American owned newspaper. The original articles are available through Proquest. The views expressed are not those of the editor or the ERVHS.)

**Under the above headline, on September 16th, 1948 the Los Angeles Sentinel reported:**

"Thinly veiled threats, and the burning of a seven-foot fiery cross are the weapons being used by the lily-white citizens of Eagle Rock to prevent a woman from selling her home to a Negro."

"About 9:30 p.m. last Wednesday night a large cross on a hillside overlooking the home of Mrs. Betty Brunner, 4488 Derby Place. (Derby place was removed for the Route 2 freeway. It was near Palmer Drive and Round Top.) A few moments before, according to the story Mrs. Brunner told the Sentinel, she had been aroused by the persistent blaring of automobile horns. She went out to investigate and turned on the porch light."

"She was greeted, she said by ugly shouts of 'there's the --- ---- n-----r lover.' She said there was a mob of about 60 to 70 people before her home. Only a few of them was she able to identify as neighbors."

"About two weeks ago Mrs. Brunner said a Negro couple came to look at her house with a view to purchasing it. Since then, she said she has received numerous telephone calls and visits from real estate men and other members of the community attempting to get her to withdraw the listing of her home with the real estate

agent who is now handling it."

"The usual race arguments were used. If she were to sell to a Negro, they said, property values in the area would decline. Was she fully protected, they asked."

"Sam Worthington, a real estate agent denied that his inquiry's about her insurance were threats. He said that he had attended a meeting of the cross-burning group and had argued against hotheads who had sought even more demonstrative action. When asked why he opposed such a sale, he said 'because I'd like to keep this community white'."

**The LA Sentinel later reported on October 28, 1948:**

"One of the neighbors who had protested most bitterly against the sale was a police officer of the City of Los Angeles. The persons against whom the demonstration was directed called the police. Nobody was arrested then and nobody has been arrested since that time—that is nobody but the prospective seller who was jailed on a suspicious-sounding charge of disturbing the peace, sometime later."

This pattern of racial discrimination and exclusion persisted until and probably after the Rumford Fair Housing Act made racial covenants illegal in 1963. The California Real Estate Association sponsored an initiative to repeal the act in 1963. The proposition was strongly supported by Eagle Rock voters. The U. S. Supreme Court repealed the initiative in 1967, holding that it violated the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment. The initiative was repealed by another proposition in 1974.

# Touring Lummis' "El Alisal" with Christian Rodriguez

Photographs by Eric Warren

## "El Alisal" Welcomes Us.



Intricate rock and brick work on the west façade framed by drought tolerant plantings and native oaks. The masonry was constructed of rocks from the nearby Arroyo Seco by Lummis and usually one other mason.

Most of the home's details were hand made by Lummis.



**at the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock  
2225 Colorado Blvd. Eagle Rock CA, 90041**

**THE CHRYSLER SOCIETY  
PRESENTS  
LUMMIS' EL ALISAL**

**LUMMIS' EL ALISAL:  
A NATIONAL MONUMENT?  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2020 7:00  
Our First Virtual Meeting, with:  
Curator, CHRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ**

#### The Member's Corner



#### Ashley Atkinson

If I said “go eat at every restaurant in Eagle Rock or walk every street (literally) to get to know your community over the course of a year,” would anyone do it? Well someone has! Our member Ashley Atkinson lived in Eagle Rock for 10 years, and did more in that decade than most of us would do in a lifetime.

Aside from being on the Neighborhood Council for 3 years and the TERA Board for 2 years, Ashley came to live in Eagle Rock by the luck of seeing a Victorian farmhouse for rent on CurbedLA. Her late beloved friend and former landlord Ed Hunt and family had purchased one of Eagle Rock’s few remaining Victorian homes, nicknamed Castle Crag, and lovingly restored the property and gardens that surrounded it. Ashley had “always dreamed of living in a Victorian home” and lived in the 3rd floor bedroom with turret for 10 years. (5027 El Verano Ave. above the Eagle Rock Plaza). Ashley now lives in Highland Park with her husband.

Having her Masters in Urban Planning and Public Administration, Ashley stayed in Eagle Rock for its “quirky community characteristics” and “unique sense of identity in L.A.” Oh, and those cool historical looking banners all around town with the Rock and the Colorado Street Bridge on them? Those were Ashley’s idea as well. Bravo and thank you Ashley!

-Katie Taylor