

PENINSULA PAST

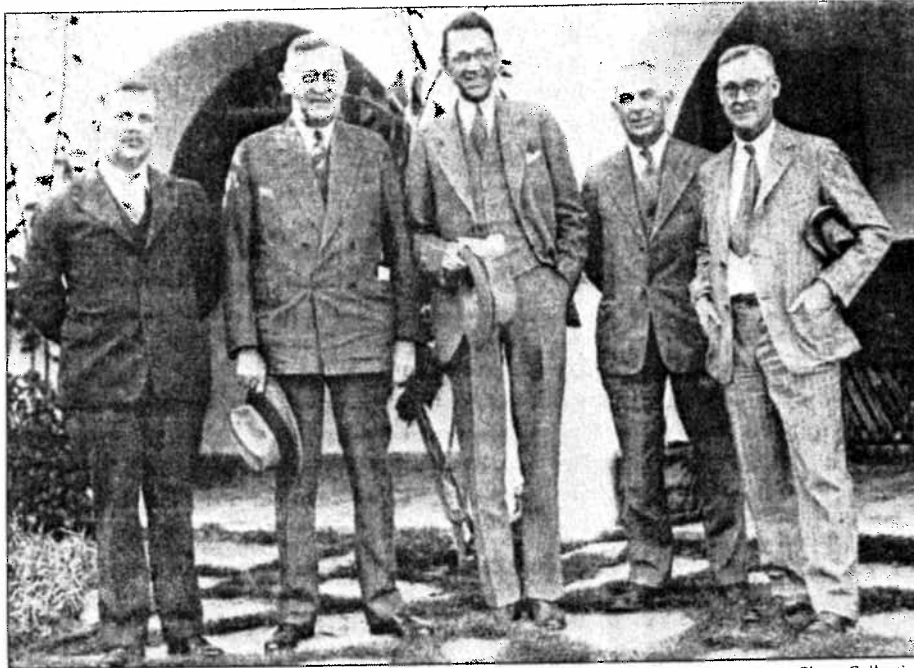


Photo courtesy of the Palos Verdes Library District Local History Room Photo Collection

The Palos Verdes Art Jury inspects a residence in 1929. Pictured are, from left, Charles H. Cheney (city planner), Jay Lawyer (general manager), David Allison (architect), James F. Dawson (landscape architect) and Robert Farquhar (architect).

Charles H. Cheney The first city planner of PVE

**By Monique Sugimoto and
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Special to the News

“Good architecture and attractive neighborhoods, gardens and landscaping are what make a city worthwhile ... they give life satisfaction. Everything else is secondary.”

So said Charles H. Cheney, the first city planner for the city of Palos Verdes Estates, at the 1940 national conference of the American Society of Planning Officials. As PVE celebrates its 75th anniversary, it has much for

which to thank Cheney.

Just more than a hundred years ago, “city planning” was not a full-fledged profession; the term was not well known and even less understood. At what would become the profession’s first meeting in 1909, participants, ranging from architects and landscape architects, to social welfare and civic interest groups, discussed the pressing housing issues of the day including overcrowding and congestion, poor construction and ventilation,

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inadequate parks and playgrounds, migration to cities and ugly advertising signs.

After this conference, city planning would sweep the country, forever changing the nation's housing landscape.

Cheney's education prepared him well for this burgeoning field. Graduating from the University of California, Berkeley in 1905 with a degree in architecture and engineering, Cheney went on to Paris' famous École des Beaux-Arts where for three years he studied the main cities in France, Italy, Spain and England.

In 1910, Cheney returned to the United States and worked for several years as an architect, before turning his full attention to city planning in California.

Cheney created the first state-wide city planning conference in California in 1914. One year later, he was instrumental in persuading the California Legislature to pass the first city planning measure. The City Planning Law of 1915 provided for the creation of city planning commissions in all incorporated cities and towns.

Not long after, Cheney drafted a state zoning enabling act that gave unincorporated areas the right to create zones or districts. Adopted in 1917, the California State Zoning Act, was the start of designated districts for industry, business, and residential areas.

Cheney also played a major role in writing the California Planning

Act of 1927, which authorized cities, counties and regions to establish master plans and appoint planning commissions. He was key to getting the language "improvement and control of architecture" inserted into the act, noting that it was through architectural control that "harmonious development" and attractiveness in a city could be achieved.

Cheney came to Palos Verdes in 1921 as one of the executive members of the Palos Verdes Project. Until his death in 1943, Cheney made his home here and put his knowledge of city planning into practice. The results can be seen in the architecture, beautiful neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, and the lush and open landscapes that have come to define PVE.

Together with noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Cheney laid out the PVE area, including plans for streets with wide planting strips, zoning for businesses, single-family residences and apartments, central business areas, church locations, parks, playgrounds, school sites and continuous open spaces for recreation.

Schools, playgrounds and neighboring parks were spaced using the "10-25-40" standard: 10 acres for elementary schools, 25 acres for junior high schools and 40 acres for high schools, each with designated playgrounds or playfields and parks throughout the area.

In 1922, Cheney proclaimed the Palos Verdes Project the "largest single piece of city planning by private enterprise ever undertaken in this country for permanent

development."

Cheney completed the city's protective restrictions in 1923 that are still in force today. He was integral to the establishment of the Art Jury and the Palos Verdes Homes Association, serving as secretary of both for many years.

Cheney's interest in architectural control was grounded in his belief in the importance of "aesthetics" to the planning process. He felt planners should pay more attention to buildings especially since they are "the most conspicuous, the most intimate, continuously used and observed part of every city."

The close relationship between the natural environment, scenery and buildings was very important to Cheney. In his unpublished manuscript, "The Most Notable American Art," Cheney notes that the "art of landscaping or of architecture, either one, is discredited without proper use of the other, and collaborate to a high degree, if a worthy result is to be obtained."

Cheney, the "planning dynamo" of California's planning movement, worked tirelessly to realize the benefits of city planning and community building. The importance of planning to create harmony within a community is captured in the subtitle of one of his articles: "Only by deliberate Planning and Supervision can Unity and Beauty be obtained in a Town or City. Palos Verdes in California exemplifies this Fact."

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