

The Utopian State of Southern California

Erin Schneider of the Llano Del Rio Collective



Earlier this year we found California's Utopian Colonies, by Robert V. Hine. Hine's book focuses on the years 1850–1950, one hundred years of California's blooming reputation as a land for freedom of expression. Hine uses the term "utopian colony" to discuss these groups. Others have referred to them as communes, cults, or intentional communities. While there have been numbers of intentional communities throughout the history of our country, the promise of plentiful land, fruit, gold, and climate brought Easterners, Midwesterners and immigrants alike to the West Coast.

California's Utopian Colonies is one of first books on its subject. It is a cream-colored book, with its intriguing title placed in the center of its dust jacket. Small pen sketches are scattered across the cover; little towns and little structures housing great ideas. Inside are stories of ambitious women and men, with wide ranging beliefs, creating their own utopias in deserts, mountains and cities. We wandered upon the traces of these communities people had created in our Golden State. What their architecture looked like, how this reflected ideology, what these places look like today?

Using Hine's book as a starting point we drew our focus to Southern California, defining the break between the north and south at the Tehachapi Mountain Range (34.950° N, 118.500° W). We searched for colonies that had sprung up since the last edition of Hine's book (1973). Colonies that manifested the sorts of ideals we are interested in: radical politics, alternative spirituality, collective organization, ecological-sustainability and creativity. These are communities whose unique organizations expand upon the freedom of the California lifestyle, forging truly alternative existences.

In order to create new models for living these communities had to create new ways of building a place, defined by their ideals rather than around the needs of economy and city life. For some communities this meant establishing a Shakespearean colony for the arts (Arden), or Grecian panoply of arcades and columns dedicated to Theosophy on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean (Point Loma). For others it meant starting a community of studios and galleries to showcase Chicano/a artwork in Highland Park, or customizing a Cadillac to communicate the belief that extraterrestrial contact with earthlings is for the greater good of the planet (Unarius).

An important feature of many of the groups chronicled in this guide is that they used the land and its local materials to sustain themselves. The off-grid families of Mountain Drive in Santa Barbara made their homes from adobe brick, of local clay and foraged wood. The Little Landers near San Diego failed nearby stones and boulders to create Bolton Hall; it still stands today. Rubel Castle was a dream of Michael Rubel. It was built collectively by his friends, family, and neighbors from 1960 to the present. It was constructed on a former orchard without an official plan. The winding and towering castle holds bottles, a motorcycle, broken china, and many other knick-knacks in its imaginative rock and cement walls. The Los Angeles Eco-Village in Koreatown grows its food, recycles water and compost on site. This allows the community to live relatively independent from the industrial food system surrounding them.

In California these small-scale experiments in living allowed for hand-built ideological structures within idiosyncratic spaces. Contrast this with the large-scale urban utopian designs inspired by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City or Le Corbusier's Contemporary City. The high cost of infrastructure within these modernist urban developments, limited the democratic freedom of the residents to participate in the creation of their own living spaces.

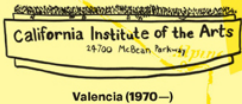
The Llano del Rio Colony (our collective's namesake) was designed by architect Alice Constance Austin. She was hired by Llano's founder, Job Harriman, to build a cooperative community. She designed a circular plan for community convenience including administrative buildings, school, stores, and a blacksmith shop. Her home designs were conscientious of women's needs. They included kitchenless homes (meals were cooked communally) with built in furniture, communal day care, and heated floors to reduce housework. Meanwhile a picture's caption from a 1914 issue of the colony's newspaper, *Western Comrade*, announces that the new stone-walled and tin-roofed Luckel Camp is both a trout hatchery and a motion picture factory. Such statements of grandeur embody the unique enthusiasm behind many of the colonies of Southern California.

In this guide we've illustrated buildings and founders in order to put a face on the creative force of ideas and movements, past and present. We hope this partial survey of California's utopian spectrum will inspire others research further, or go ahead to start your own ideal state.

For more information read: *The Visionary State: A Journey Through California's Spiritual Landscapes*, Edith Turner and Michael Rafter (Chronicle Books, 2006). *The Modern Utopian: Alternative Communities of the 1900s and 2000s*, Richard P. Farrell and Timothy Miller (Process, 2010). *California's Utopian Colonies*, Robert V. Hine (D.W. Norton, 1973).



Annenworth
Earlham (1908–1930s)



Valencia (1970–)



Mountain Drive
Santa Barbara (1940–2008)



Halcyon (1903–)



Dunites
Oceano (1920s–50s)



Llano del Rio
Llano (1914–18)



Hog Farm
Sunland (1966–Unknown)



Krotona
Los Angeles (1911–26)



Source Family
Los Angeles (1969–75)



THE AETHERIUS SOCIETY
COOPERATING WITH CASE FROM SPACE
Los Angeles (1952–)



Circle of Sex
Gavin Arthur



Self Realization Fellowship
Los Angeles (1925–)



LA Eco Village
Los Angeles (1993–)



Peace + Justice Center
Los Angeles (1995–96)



Pisgah Grande
Highland Park (1900–1920)



WCCW
Los Angeles (2013–)



Gay Liberation Front
Los Angeles (1969)



Highland Park
Chicana Arts
Highland Park (1960s–)



Holyland
Los Angeles (1924–)



Rubel Castle
Glendora (1968–2007)



Arden
Lake Forest (1888–1906)



Little Landers
San Ysidro (1909–1925)



Loma Land
San Diego (1900–42)



Unarius
El Cajon (1954–)



Little Landers
San Ysidro (1909–1925)

Our Future: By Way of Our Past By Way of the Hellholes of Now

Allensworth, Aetherius, Halcyon, Holyland, L.A. Eco-Village, Llano Del Rio; these are the mystical sounding titles of the communities listed in this guide to real utopias. However this list of names could just as easily read: Hinkley, Glen Avon, Heavens Gate, Mission Santa Barbara, City of Bell, Southern California. For, of course, with each non-violent dreamtime village there is a quadrillion other hellholes begat of genocide, pollution, domination, shopping. And while this guide celebrates the magic of utopias ability to inspire, it is these ever-present dystopias and the way they appear to foreclose our future that drives us consistently to the utopia's memory.

Go then to the beach. Silicone Beach in Western Los Angeles, hard up against the vibrant blue Pacific. There our peoples finest minds, creatives, innovators, out of the box thinkers, are bought and produced for Google, Facebook, YouTube + that other brilliant start up. These places and their people are organized and ordered by those who profit on our trust of the freeware discount-society cult from which they imagine to profit. Many now carry these palm-sized computer wonder-box devices upon them, holding them to their ears and eyes at semi-regular intervals. We are lead

to believe that their attractive and mirrored surfaces are meant to connect and entertain us. But for how long will we continue to know whom is directing whom; increasingly as all that was once lived between two-or-more people is available as a digital app? Where are these technical overflows, waiting in the wings of tomorrow? Here right now... freshening, live-tweeting, discounting our lives to the cheapest efficiency? Why have we accepted these private corporations as the better of two evils when matched against our governments NSA? Are they both not in the same market, constructing meaning and future plans of profit, to dominate and coerce from the same massive datasets? How do our futures disappear? Subtly, suddenly? Looking at these utopias we are reminded not only of the vast range of habitable options, the veracity of socialism, agriculture, harmony, nudity, music, but also the fragility of the living anthropological kingdom. The entire arcs of possible ever expanding zoological classifications, kingdom and phylum, we humans have shared together in the potential of cultivating here, just next door. And we, like the individuals who once experienced them together, hope for a second chance to embody these.

— Llano Del Rio Collective

a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing, for it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always landing.

— Oscar Wilde
(The Soul of Man Under Socialism)

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MAP OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIF. Utopias of So. Cal.

Colonies, Communes and Intentional Communities of Southern California

Pin and handill courtesy ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives

