BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ralph Dalton Cornell was born in Holdrege, Nebraska, on January 11, 1890. His father was considered a successful lumberman and also owned several outlying ranches. While the family lived in town, young Ralph—always on horseback—roamed the expanses of the surrounding countryside and early fell in love with the great outdoors.

He was just sixteen when the Cornells visited the resort town of Long Beach in California. They were entranced with the beauties of the land and, as many others before them, decided to make the "big move" and settled in Long Beach in 1908.

One of the primary attractions for lumberman Cornell was the promised wealth of the flourishing eucalyptus industry that had captured the imaginations of many Californians at the time. Unfortunately, the promoters knew far too little about the growing of the Australian native and the processing of its rather capricious wood. Cornell Senior joined the hordes who lost their life savings owing to the sudden collapse of the eucalyptus boom.

But the break with Nebraska had been made and Ralph and his two sisters entered Long Beach High School. Instead of matriculating at the University of Nebraska as he had hoped, Ralph eventually entered Pomona College in Claremont in 1909. It was necessary for him to work his way through college. He waited on table at the old Claremont Inn. In 1910 he acquired 1,000 avocado seeds, propagated them successfully and sold the exotic plants at a good profit. He surveyed the agricultural development of the Coachella and Imperial valleys for an irrigation association headed by George Wharton James in July of 1911. He spent another hot summer vacation helping the Popenoe brothers plant 13,000 date offshoots they had imported from Arabia to begin their nursery a few miles south of Thermal.

These two latter experiences, while horrendous because of the extreme summer heat, served to introduce him to the mysterious and wondrous plant life of the desert, which he never forgot and which never ceased to allure him.

Cornell's prime interests were botany and horticulture but his mentor while at Pomona College, Professor Charles Fuller Baker, urged him to consider the fairly new profession of landscape architecture. It was Professor Baker who was responsible for the publication of the *Pomona College Journal of Economic Botany* and it was in this journal that Cornell's first published article entitled "Plans and Plants for Small Places" appeared in 1911. The inclusion of "Plans" surely indicated that he was strongly considering Professor Baker's recommendation.

After his graduation from Pomona College, *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa, Cornell entered the School of Design at Harvard University. His three years in this eminent institution provided some of his happiest memories.

The position he accepted in Canada upon his graduation from Harvard was terminated when he volunteered for overseas army duty in World War I. He detested violence all the days of his life but he loved his country and he was imbued with a great sense of patriotism.

He returned to Los Angeles in 1919 where he opened an office and his first commission was that of supervising landscape architect for Pomona College. This led to a request from the University of Hawaii for a master plan for their campus. And, eventually, Robert Gordon Sproul, president of the University of California, invited Cornell to supervise the landscape of the new Westwood campus. This association continued for almost forty years, terminating with Cornell's death.

His partnership with Wilbur D. Cook, the well-known landscape architect who designed the master plan for the city of Beverly Hills in 1906, was responsible for Cornell's long affiliation and extensive contributions to the beauty of that community.

These commissions were the beginnings of an illustrious career. Cornell's outstanding design ability, his distinctive taste and style, his special vision and sensitivity to the particular needs of each undertaking soon won for him an enviable reputation.

The scope of his work was astonishing. He did public parks and colleges; he did cemeteries and subdivisions; he did civic centers and malls. He did master plans for Elysian and Griffith parks in Los Angeles and for the Torrey Pines Preserve in La Jolla. He did Hilton Hotels in Egypt and Iraq. He planned the town of Valencia in southern California. He did Fremont Place in Los Angeles in 1912 and almost fifty years later the prestigious Music Center of Los Angeles County.

His legacy was an infinite variety of spectacular and beautiful designs.

Cornell was fortunate that his chosen profession allowed him to indulge in his favorite avocations of botany and photography. His lifelong love of plants and his expertise in horticulture were great assets and impelled him to use both exotics and natives in his landscape design. This has left us the richer for his choice of plantings are botanical gardens of rare treasures.

The sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth itself, and always the plants that grow in the earth—these provided zest and meaning for his entire life.

Ralph Cornell was a humble, unassuming man who gave of himself and his special talents with unstinting generosity for the continued pleasure and gratification of all.

Vera B. Cornell