

WATTLES FARM

North Curson Avenue (The main entrance to the Wattles Farm community garden is ¼ block north of Hollywood Boulevard on North Curson Avenue. The garden is defined at its northern boundary by Wattles Mansion, at the west by North Curson Avenue, at the east by North Sierra Bonita Avenue, and at the south by Hollywood Boulevard.

Los Angeles  
Los Angeles County  
California

HALS CA-77

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### WATTLES FARM

HALS NO. CA-77

**Location:** North Curson Avenue (The main entrance to the Wattles Farm community garden is ¼ block north of Hollywood Boulevard on North Curson Avenue. The garden is defined at its northern boundary by Wattles Mansion, at the west by North Curson Avenue, at the east by North Sierra Bonita Avenue, and at the south by Hollywood Boulevard.

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.

Lat: 34.1021 Long: -118.355 (southwest corner of Wattles Farm, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

**Significance:** Wattles Farm, started in 1975, is one of the oldest surviving community gardens in the City of Los Angeles. It was among the first gardens started under then Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley's initiative to use public lands for community gardening. The initiative had been inspired by the victory gardens of World War I and World War II.

The garden is part of Wattles Park (Mansion & Gardens), a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. There are avocado trees and eucalyptus trees on site that are over 100 years old. Wattles Farm is home to a community of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, mainly the Ukraine and Georgia, who make up the majority of the garden's current members. These members greatly influence the culture of the garden and what is grown there (tomatoes, cucumbers, and dill in the summer, beets and greens in the winter).

**Description:** Wattles Farm is 4.2 acres. It presently has 172 garden plots (approximately 15-by-15 feet each) tended by 300 community members. There are two avocado groves. The Herschel Gilbert Avocado Grove measures at 1.43 acres and has over 150 avocado trees. It is the only remaining avocado grove of that size in the city of Los Angeles. There is a citrus grove along the northern side of the garden that measures at 2,600 square feet. There is an herb garden, a cactus garden, a memorial garden (consisting of a variety of fruit trees, a grape arbor, and flowers), an experimental garden (consisting of various heirloom vegetable plants), and two small-scale vineyards. There is a greenhouse, multiple tool sheds, and a picnic area. The garden is thriving and most of its elements are in good physical condition. Prior to 1975, the 4.2 acres (i.e. the lower park) comprised the avocado and fruit orchard of the 50-acre Wattles Park (Mansion and Gardens).

**History:** Wattles Park (Mansion and Gardens) was built in 1907 by Gurdon Wattles and designed by architects Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey. In 1968 the City of Los

Angeles purchased the property. After the sale, the property was neglected for many years. In 1975, a group of 14 local residents converted 4.2 acres (the lower park) of

Wattles Park (Mansion and Gardens) into a community garden, i.e., Wattles Farm. This conversion was made possible by the now-defunct Los Angeles City Hall Office of Neighborhood Gardens and Farms, which was directed by Mark Boon Casady, aide to Mayor Tom Bradley. At the time, Mayor Bradley, inspired by the victory gardens of World War I and World War II, had started an initiative to source federal funds provided under the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA) to use for supporting the creation of community gardens on city property in Los Angeles. The Office of Neighborhood Gardens and Farms, through Metro Farms, Inc., a non-profit entity, helped provide land leases and liability insurance necessary for community gardens using city property. Additionally, Metro Farms provided horticultural experts for the community gardeners. Metro Farms encouraged gardens that were started at the time to become autonomous, self-governing, non-profit California corporations. So, in 1978 Wattles Farm became incorporated as Wattles Farm and Neighborhood Gardeners, Inc., and had its own officers, individual rules and regulations. Wattles Farm, along with twenty other community gardens all over Los Angeles at the time, were the first gardens that were systematically supported by City Hall and met the demand of residents wanting to garden in the city. In the first year of the Neighborhood Gardens and Farms Program, the gardens collectively yielded more than \$3 million in produce for about 10,000 participants.

The Wattles Farm land during the early years required a lot of work due to the neglect of the preceding years. The original gardeners cleared heavy brush and weeds, tilled the soil, installed a planned plot area and irrigation system. They also resuscitated the many avocado trees on the site. Within a year most of the preliminary work on the garden had been completed and 30 plots had been installed. The remaining elements of Wattles Farm, as noted in the "Description" section above, developed over the next 15 years. A few of the original members of the garden still remain.

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Completed: July 30, 2011



Fork along central path at Wattles Farm (Ali Bhai, July 2011).