

**Most Viewed**      **Most Emailed**

1. Two stabbings in Simi Valley
2. Bryant likes taking the load
3. Mayor V., where are you?
4. Cops search for shooter in weekend 'road rage' death
5. Lakers get back to work after streak ends
6. Cops ID man stabbed at North Hollywood park
7. Dead woman found in pool of blood in L.A. home
8. L.A. Marathon winners crowned
9. Lakers impose their will late, defeat Dallas
10. Dodgers' Garciparra could play at short

**More News**

- [Russian woman wins \\$100,000 for beating L.A. Marathon men](#)
- [Marathon takes a heavy physical toll, much of it due to poor preparation](#)
- [Politics sway reward offers for crime tips](#)
- [Valley losing its history as development spreads](#)
- [Eagle Rock teacher creates insect monitor job to treat creatures respectfully](#)
- [Medvedev win has many czar-gazing](#)
- [Bill would require nonprofits to reveal race, gender makeup](#)
- [`Semi-Pro' aims high, falls short](#)
- [Ferrell feels right at home with `Men'](#)
- [`Indiana Jones' push gets help from Web](#)
- [Perry draws up a new play to get more cops on beat](#)
- [Youth centers rife with abuse](#)
- [In hazmat gear, FBI probes Utah home after ricin scare](#)
- [Family tragedy over teen love](#)
- [Hillary's Texas blues going into primary](#)

# Valley losing its history as development spreads

## Activists working to save significant landmarks

*By Connie Llanos, Staff Writer*  
Article Last Updated: 03/02/2008 10:05:17 PM PST

**NORTH HOLLYWOOD** - A little bungalow in the heart of this community is renewing a big debate about historic preservation across the San Fernando Valley.

Brought to the area in 1904, the bungalow was home to Wilson C. Weddington, a member of one of the Valley's first families, the area's first postmaster and a key figure in the region's early development.

But while the house has been designated a cultural monument, booming development in the region means it faces demolition unless owner JSM Construction finds a new site for it within 180 days.

Some say the uncertain fate of the Weddington house is symbolic of what has happened in the Valley for decades as a string of historic sites have been lost or are threatened amid the growing pressures of urbanization.

"In an attempt to revitalize an area, the history and quality of life suffer from overdevelopment," said Richard Hilton, a Valley historian.

Hilton cites the Josef von Sternberg House in Northridge. Designed in 1935, it was regarded as one of the finest pieces of work from modernist architect Richard Neutra. But it was torn down in 1972.

There was also the Valley Music Theater, the area's first performing arts center, which hosted Bob Hope, Jim Morrison and other celebrities. It was demolished to make room for condominiums in 2004.

And then there was one of the original homes sold by William Paul Whitsett when the Valley pioneer laid out the blueprint for

suburbanization of the region in 1923.

A developer razed that home last year just days before it could be designated a historic landmark.

Grass-roots efforts, however, have been successful in preserving some

[Click photo to enlarge](#)



The Weddington House in North Hollywood is boarded up while construction booms around it on Friday, Feb. 29, 2008.

Lincoln proposed  
emancipating slaves for  
\$400 each early on in war  
Neighborhood Council  
meetings  
Events calendar  
'Amazing Technicolor'  
performance

sites over the years. In Van Nuys, community members helped save City Hall, Baird House and Woman's Center with historic designations.

But it remains an uphill battle.

"Part of the challenge in the Valley is that it's younger, and by and large its built environment is newer than what's found in the rest of L.A.," said Ken Bernstein, manager of the city's Office of Historic Resources.

---

Bernstein said the Valley has not been scrutinized enough for potential historic sites and that of 912 cultural monuments in the city, only 50 are in the Valley.

"It's a giant undertaking to try and comprehensively identify historic sites, and the funding and priority for the Valley had not been there," he said.

But a citywide survey on historic sites - sponsored by a \$2.5million grant from the Getty Museum and set to start this summer - should help.

It was launched after a Getty assessment of Los Angeles' preservation efforts found that 85percent of the city's geography - including the Valley - had been overlooked.

"One thing the (new) survey might do is shine a long overdue spotlight on sites that are worthy of future historic designation," Bernstein said.

"It will be an important planning tool as Valley communities struggle with balancing growth pressure with the need to protect those qualities they most cherish, including significant historic building and cohesive historic neighborhoods."

For now, the Weddington house has become a rallying cry for preservationists.

Officials with Heritage Square Museum, an outdoor collection of homes that include predominantly Victorian residences and 19th century structures in Highland Park, have said they would gladly take the Weddington House into their collection.

Mitzi Mogul, vice president of Heritage Square, said JSM Construction has agreed to move the house to the site and restore it at the company's own cost.

"The Weddington House would be our first bungalow, and our first home from the San Fernando Valley, and it would help tell that region's history," Mogul said.

But at a recent Cultural Heritage Commission meeting, Valley history buffs said that plan simply won't do.

"This house should stay in North Hollywood. It's here where it has historical and political meaning," said Guy Weddington McCreary, an active Valley historian and a descendant of the original family.

City Councilman Tom LaBonge, whose district includes the site of the house, said he is making it a priority to preserve the Valley's iconic structures even though money and land remain a challenge.

Among his ideas is widening Chandler Boulevard to create an outdoor architectural museum - similar to Heritage Square - for the Valley's historic homes.

And while preservationists also worry about the fate of the Lankershim Train Depot and historic dining car Phil's Diner - designated cultural monuments that have seen little attention - LaBonge said their restoration should start soon, particularly if more community members get involved.

"It's more than just a government designation that makes a historic neighborhood successful," LaBonge said. "It's the devotion and love of the people in the area."

Victoria Brinn Feinberg, an urban-planning expert teaching housing issues at California State University, Northridge, said preservation is key to maintaining a community's identity.

"You have to strike balance between development and preservation," Feinberg said. "If not, we would have the same Starbucks and McDonald's everywhere, and it wouldn't matter where you were."

While preservation issues are playing out nationwide, she said some communities have learned to be flexible and innovative to keep their history alive even as development pushes forward.

In Glendale, the Good House was preserved as a cultural museum, with financing for restoration and maintenance coming from a development of senior housing that was built at the site.

In Brugge, Belgium, city officials require the original historic facades of particular neighborhoods to be maintained while the buildings behind the facades can be entirely new.

"You don't have the historic interior, but at least you have the look and charm of it," Feinberg said. "It's not a solution to historic preservation, but it's one way the city has moved forward."

In the Valley, Hilton said, renewed emphasis on preservation appears to be brewing as more historical groups spring up.

And the battle now is ensuring structures are not only saved but also restored and turned into community venues.

"We are always grateful to save a structure, but we also want the public to have access to it so history can be interpreted and it can become a visceral experience," he said. "Otherwise, it's just a shell."

"If you have to fight over preserving the Lankershim depot because a developer is given the opportunity to construct higher and denser, the priority's clearly not set right."

### **AT A GLANCE**

The status of some of the San Fernando Valley's historic structures:

#### **LOST**

Joseph Von Sternberg House

Bob's Big Boy Van Nuys

Devonshire Downs

Van Nuys Drive-In

The Valley Music Theater

Chatsworth home of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz

Harrison Gray Otis House

Busch Gardens

Moses Hazeltine's Sherman Oaks home

One of the original Van Nuys homes built by William Paul Whitsett

SURVIVING

Van Nuys Woman's Club

Andreas Pico Adobe

Baird House Van Nuys

North Hollywood Department of Water & Power building

Los Encinos State Historic Park

Leonis Adobe - the city's first cultural monument, designated in 1962

Van Nuys City Hall

El Portal Theatre

Chatsworth Community Church

Rancho El Encino

IN QUESTION

Lankershim Train Depot

Phil's Diner

Weddington House

Eichler Tract in the Balboa Highlands

Oakie Estate

Campo de Cahuenga