Like many other wealthy men of the era, such as Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and Henry Frick, Henry Huntington spent his last years accumulating a priceless library and art collection. Along the way, he also established and endowed an institution that made his treasures available to scholars and the public. From 1917 until his death in 1927, Huntington concentrated on enriching the aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual landscape of southern California. Having amassed a fortune with his business triad, he wanted to build a monument to himself and his wife as well as return some of the fruits of his wealth to the people of the area. He once explained to financier and later Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon: “I give my whole thing, my collection to California. I made money with the streetcars; I made money with the subdivisions; and I want to leave my money to America in memory of my wife and me.”

Huntington spent several months each year in New York and was undoubtedly impressed by the many philanthropic monuments being established by the city’s wealthy entrepreneurs. Some, like the Rockefeller Foundation, were devoted to eradicating disease and aiding education; others, like the Morgan Library or Frick Museum, presented collections of great literary masterpieces and valuable artwork to both scholars and the public.

As early as 1906, Huntington was thinking about the future of his expanding rare book and manuscript collection. He had already considered giving his library to the public but was not sure of the method of disposition. It was George Ellery Hale, solar astronomer and creator of the Mount Wilson Observatory, who
convinced him to build the Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino.

Hale had left his faculty position at the University of Chicago and the directorship of the Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, to set up and take charge of the Carnegie Institution's Mount Wilson Solar Observatory in the mountains just north of Pasadena in 1904. Once in southern California, he also worked to strengthen the area's arts and sciences. Hale first labored to transform the Throop Polytechnic Institute in Pasadena (renamed the California Institute of Technology in 1920) into a major scientific research-oriented university. But he was also interested in the region's facilities for studies in the humanities and hoped to establish a first-class library in the southland.

On 3 October 1906, at a dinner given in Huntington's honor by the city of Pasadena, the trolley magnate was seated next to Hale. That evening, the two men discussed book collecting, and Huntington asked Hale whether he should donate his library to a New York institution or install it in southern California. Hale, seeing an opportunity to fulfill his dream of making Pasadena a center for the arts and sciences, favored bringing the collection to the West Coast. Huntington listened carefully to the scholar's recommendations but made no commitments, and the two did not discuss the topic again for six years.

In 1912, Hale and a group of culturally minded citizens organized an art and music association in Pasadena, and Huntington was named to the group's board of directors. Huntington tried to attend the meetings whenever he was in southern California, and Hale was given numerous opportunities to coax the millionaire to bring his library west. Hale also decided to talk with members of Huntington's family. On 14 February 1914, he wrote Arabella praising her son Archer's creation of the Hispanic Society of America Museum in New York and asked to be introduced to him. (Collis Huntington had adopted Archer, Arabella's son by a previous marriage.) The correspondence led to a meeting on 16 April. After seeing Archer in the morning, Hale was accompanied to the Hispanic Museum by Henry Huntington in the afternoon. As they toured the collections, Huntington surprised the scientist by describing a provision in his will that left the San Marino estate, including his art and book collections, to the people of southern California. The institution was to be administered by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Although pleased with Huntington's decision to set up his li-
In the Los Angeles basin, Hale did not approve of the county supervisors overseeing the institution. To dissuade Huntington from leaving his library in the hands of politicians, Hale played on Huntington's prejudices against organized labor. Stressing that the current board of supervisors knew little or nothing about rare books or fine art, Hale wrote Huntington on 17 April: "The outlook for the future is little better, and it would be much worse if by any unfortunate chance the labor leaders acquired any such power [municipal political office] as they have in San Francisco." As an alternative, Hale offered the idea of a board of trustees selected by Huntington to supervise the library and art collection. Three days later, Huntington responded to Hale, noting: "Some of your suggestions are most excellent, and I will take them under consideration." 

Encouraged by Huntington's note, Hale followed up with several other letters explaining the advantages of forming a board of trustees similar to those overseeing such organizations as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Institution. In May 1914, he emphasized the international importance of Huntington's collections to the fields of art, history, and literature and tried to convince the millionaire to build a research library. Several months passed before Huntington returned Hale's letter. Then, in October, Huntington wrote the scientist: "Your letter of May 11th reached me as I was sailing to Europe, and during the summer I have given your suggestions some thought. I am not ready to reply, but it is quite possible that you have planted a seed." 

After Huntington returned from Europe in late 1914, Hale spoke with him several times about the library. He also discussed his ideas with Huntington's close business associates Patton and Dunn, whom he felt might be able to influence the millionaire. In March 1916, after again speaking with Huntington, Hale sent an outline of what he termed a "concrete plan" for the creation of the research library and a board of trustees. Pleased with the recommendations, Huntington responded: "The mode of organization is in line with my ideas, and I hope, with the aid of Mr. Archer Huntington, to develop and formulate some such plans." Two years passed uneventfully, then in March 1918 Hale met with Huntington to discuss further the library plans. Three months later, the scientist presented a lecture on Huntington's library to the Pasadena Art and Music Association. After a general discussion of book collecting, Hale praised Huntington for acquiring the Church, Chew, and Hoe libraries, which he collectively termed "the crown jewels of
English literature." After the talk, he sent Huntington a transcript of his address.⁹

Fourteen months after this speech, the scientist's lobbying finally paid off; Huntington informed Hale of his plans to establish the library in San Marino and asked the astronomer to be one of the trustees. On 31 August 1919, the first trust indenture creating the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery was signed. The institution was to be a "free public library, art gallery, museum, and park, containing objects of artistic, historic, or literary interest, and its object was to advance learning in the arts and sciences, and to promote the public welfare." Its original trustees were Howard Huntington, Archer Huntington, William Dunn, George Hale, and George Patton.¹⁰

From 1919 until the founder's death in 1927, several additional indentures were signed preparing for the library's status as a public institution. In 1922, Huntington transferred all his books and manuscripts as well as his paintings, sculpture, tapestries, and antique furniture, to the trustees. Two years later, the Board of Trustees formally accepted the art gallery, the library, and the contents of the two buildings, which in 1924 had an aggregate value of $4,043,964.¹¹

In 1923 the board created a permanent endowment, and Huntington provided the library with numerous securities. The fund held 2,550 shares of the Huntington-Redondo Company, 1,350 shares of Rodeo Land and Water Company, 10,000 shares of Southern California Edison preferred stock, and 3,664 shares of the Hammond Lumber Company. The endowment was also given a sizable number of bonds. Listed at face value these included $1,092,000 worth of City Railway of Los Angeles bonds, $2,830,000 worth of Los Angeles Railway bonds, $142,000 worth of PE bonds, and $3,000,000 worth of Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company bonds. The market value of these securities was between $9 million and $10 million.¹²

Meanwhile, as work progressed on the library building and plans were laid to create a research staff and prepare the institution for scholars, Huntington lost two immediate family members and a close business associate. On 27 March 1922, he was shaken by the death of his only son, Howard. One week after the death, Dunn told Graham of Huntington's sadness: "Mr. Huntington is taking the loss terribly hard, but is, I believe pulling up a little all the time."¹³ Henry M. Robinson, president of First National Bank of
California and a trustee of Caltech, succeeded Howard Huntington as a trustee of the Huntington Library.

Two years later, Huntington lost his wife. Arabella, who had been ill since December 1923, died on 16 September 1924. Describing Huntington's state following her death, George Hapgood, a personal secretary of the millionaire, wrote to art dealer Joseph Duveen about Huntington's trip to New York: "We arrived yesterday after a rather trying trip, but Mr. Huntington stood the strain better than I thought he would. The house seems desolate, and it will be a long time before he becomes adjusted to the new conditions." Eleven months later, in August 1925, William Dunn, Huntington's right-hand man and close friend, died. Robert A. Millikan, a Nobel prize winner in physics and president of Caltech, succeeded Dunn on the Huntington Library's Board of Trustees.

Emotionally weakened by these deaths, Huntington's health rapidly deteriorated. His prostate problems, which had bedridden him in 1915, recurred in 1924. In the fall 1925, he was taken to see a specialist at Philadelphia's Lankenau Hospital by the chief surgeon of the Los Angeles Railway, Ernest A. Bryant. Huntington underwent what was believed a successful operation and returned to southern California to recuperate in late November.

The seventy-five-year-old Huntington did not recover rapidly but remained optimistic. In February 1926, he wrote the wife of J. E. Brown, a deceased employee: "While I am still under the doctor's care [a full-time nurse had moved in to take care of him], I expect soon to be up and about and as active as ever, but it has taken a long time for the wound to heal, and until it is fully closed, I prefer to be cautious." By May, Huntington was still convalescing in the upstairs portion of the San Marino house and had not yet ventured downstairs. Although Huntington's condition improved somewhat in the summer, and he began to receive visitors, he never fully regained his health.

In late April 1927, Huntington decided to return to Lankenau Hospital for a consultation to see why a complete recovery had not taken place. It was decided that a second operation was needed, but the situation did not appear life threatening. On 4 May Huntington wrote: "I am to be operated on tomorrow, but there is very little danger of it not being successful. I do not know how long I will be in the hospital but not probably more than two or three weeks." Huntington never rebounded from this second operation, and three weeks later, on 23 May 1927, he died.
Thus ended the life of Henry Huntington, a builder who capped a lifetime of creation by establishing the library, art collections, and botanical gardens. Although not the entrepreneur’s greatest achievement, the institution remains his most visible and best-known contribution to metropolitan Los Angeles.

In 1908, Huntington had explained why he chose to build his many enterprises in the southland: “When I went to California years ago, I traveled east, north, and south from one end of the state to the other, even going off the beaten paths by team and studying every section carefully. I came to the conclusion then that the greatest natural advantages, those of climate and every other condition, lay in Southern California, and that is why I made it my field of endeavor.” Although this statement reveals that Huntington had shown foresight in investing in the Los Angeles basin, it does not tell the whole story.

By 1900, Huntington was a middle-aged man who had distinguished himself in the railroad business and, because of a huge inheritance from his uncle, was also quite wealthy. Many people quite properly believed he would retire to a life of luxury and philanthropy. But Huntington appears to have been a builder by nature, a man driven to create, and the evidence suggests that the shadow of Collis weighed heavily upon him.

Huntington’s close ties to his uncle during their nearly thirty-year association were undoubtedly instrumental in shaping his subsequent career. Besides acquiring important administrative skills, Huntington thought these years with Collis were the best of his life. He spoke frequently and fondly of his early railroad days, particularly when discussing his uncle. Journalist Otheman Stevens remembered: “I found his [Huntington’s] dominant emotion concerned his uncle C. P. Huntington. He invariably spoke of him with a certain degree of awe, almost reverence. He showed me some portraits of C. P. Huntington one day, and regarded them almost as a zealot would look at a saint’s picture.” These photographs most likely included the two of Collis that adorned Huntington’s office in the Los Angeles Railway Building.

Success at several positions with Collis’s railroads aided the nephew’s climb up the managerial ladder, and it appeared that Huntington would eventually attain his dream and succeed his mentor as president of the Southern Pacific Railroad. When Collis died unexpectedly in 1900, Henry explained the tremendous loss this way: “The shock of his death was the severest blow I have ever received, for I loved him as a boy loves his own father and received
from him the kindest treatment that any son could possibly get."  

The loss was compounded, however, by the majority stockholders of the SP, who were unwilling to see the Huntington influence continue at the railroad, and dashed Henry’s hope of following his uncle as company president.

Yet Huntington remained influenced by the memory of Collis. Either driven to get out from under his uncle’s shadow and succeed by himself, or merely pushed by his own creative energy, Huntington worked obsessively to establish a business kingdom that might eclipse that of his famous relative. Whether or not his many business successes in the Los Angeles basin could be considered a memorial to Collis, one of his other endeavors was specifically to honor his deceased associate. Upon his death in 1927, Huntington left a sizable endowment for the establishment of the Collis P. and Howard E. Memorial Hospital to be built in Pasadena. And several years earlier, in 1913, perhaps in a subconscious attempt to mirror his life, Huntington married his uncle’s widow, Arabella.

Although it is debatable whether Huntington’s achievements actually surpassed those of his uncle, his role in developing the Los Angeles basin is clear. In 1917, John B. Miller, president of Southern California Edison, provided the best contemporary assessment:

Mr. Huntington has been the direct means of bringing more money to this community than any other person. He built the great Pacific Electric Railway system, which linked Los Angeles to the surrounding towns which, with transportation abreast with the best in the world, became places of importance and the homes of thousands of prosperous people, aiding to make Los Angeles the Metropolis of the Southwest. . . . Mr. Huntington [later] concentrated his Southern California interests in the Los Angeles Railway. . . . He is principal owner of the Huntington Land and Improvement Company, one of the great real estate developing organizations of the region, and he has many other interests interwoven with the very fibre of our financial and industrial life.

Indeed, as Miller had suggested, Huntington’s contribution to the creation of metropolitan Los Angeles was enormous. His many enterprises and far-reaching influence shaped urban life of southern California. So prevalent were his southland projects and so successful were his ventures that he became linked with prosperity and progress. The Huntington name and the perceived image of boosterism, investment, and development in the Los Angeles metropolitan area were virtually interchangeable terms between 1902 and 1917.
### Table

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* Dates mark the arrival of a streetcar line but not the PE.


Huntington built his business empire upon a foundation of an extensive trolley system that covered the downtown core of Los Angeles and radiated outward to neighboring settlements. Because growth and development followed the spreading trolley tracks, Huntington controlled how, when, and where the Los Angeles basin expanded. The positive relationship between a trolley link and community growth is shown by historian Glenn Dumke’s chart (above) indicating how the population of selected suburbs rose after the PE’s arrival.

Taking advantage of his trolleys, which were rapidly carrying the growing population to the suburbs, Huntington formed several land companies and power firms. A major landholder in southern California, he purchased vast stretches of rural land along the PE’s planned routes; once the interurban tracks were laid, he subdivided, creating a variety of communities designed for different classes of home buyers.

His utility firm, Pacific Light and Power, supplied approximately 85 percent of the electricity it generated to the street railroads. But PL&P also furnished electricity for business and residential use; in 1913 it provided the city of Los Angeles with 20 percent of its electrical needs besides serving cities in the San
Gabriel Valley. Southern California Gas, a PL&P subsidiary, supplied nearly 20 percent of the natural gas consumed in Los Angeles when Huntington sold it in 1913.26

Thus, Huntington’s major interests in southern California were in the critical sectors for regional growth. The three legs of his business triad—trolleys, real estate development, and electric power generation and distribution—determined the spatial layout of greater Los Angeles. Operating this well-oiled development machine in an era when land-use and zoning statutes were largely absent, Huntington became the Los Angeles basin’s metropolitan planner.

In addition to frequently deciding the direction of development and its subsequent form, Huntington was also involved in a number of other businesses that promoted growth in the southland. He became involved in local agriculture, industry, the hotel business, and many leading civic and social organizations. With these various enterprises, he was one of the region’s largest business employers. An ardent advocate of the open shop, Huntington employed strikebreakers and hired labor spies and provided employee-benefit programs to keep his companies free of union organization. Thus, he became a dominant force in thwarting attempts of organized labor to gain a foothold in the Los Angeles basin. Because the business community was successful in keeping strong unions out of Los Angeles, labor costs were approximately 30 percent lower than in closed-shop San Francisco. This was undoubtedly a factor in attracting businessmen to the Los Angeles basin.

Directly involved in so many different large-scale projects during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Huntington was by far the foremost urban developer in the area. Theodore Dreiser’s depiction of his protagonist, Frank Algernon Cowperwood, and his many enterprises in The Titan could be used to describe Huntington’s varied commercial ventures in southern California. “How wonderful it is that men grow until, like colossuses, they bestride the world, or, like banyan trees, they drop roots from every branch and are themselves a forest—a forest of intricate commercial life, of which a thousand material aspects are the evidence.”27

Huntington and other entrepreneurs shared an “appetite for risk,” invested in a number of different businesses, and had the fortune of being in the right place at the right time.28 But Huntington was also exceptional in that he possessed a fine management background secured during his years of railroad service under the guid-
The Pacific Electric in 1910. Compare the layout of the trolley system with southern California's current freeway network. Courtesy of the Huntington Library
The Los Angeles basin's freeway system as of 1984. Courtesy of the California Department of Transportation
ance of Collis Huntington. Clearly, his connection with his uncle was important for Huntington’s career. However, without the assistance of his uncle, with his determination, drive, and energy, Huntington likely would have been a successful businessman, possibly remaining a merchant in the hardware business. Rarely making a poor investment, he had a keen sense of timing and astute business skill. Huntington used these abilities to quintuple the market value of the fortune he had received from his uncle’s will. In August 1928, his estate was appraised at $43 million, a figure that did not include the Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino or his boyhood home in Oneonta, New York, which he had converted into a library and public park. Although the value of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery is difficult to ascertain, in 1927, for insurance purposes, the contents of the art gallery alone were valued at $15.1 million, and the library collections were worth at least another $15 million.

Huntington’s years with the railroads also taught him to think on a grand scale and in terms of building entirely integrated systems. These views, combined with the large inheritance, led to the creation of his southern California business triad that was unique in its scope, impact, and success. Although Huntington rarely discussed his business strategies, it is apparent that he came to southern California with the notion of transforming the basin into a thriving metropolis, a master plan to accomplish this goal, and the financial resources to carry it out.

Although many businessmen worked in specific ways to expand their respective urban economies, Huntington arrived in the Los Angeles basin with a vision for developing the entire area. To avoid possible interference from associates, he almost always chose to operate alone or in small syndicates that he dominated through control of a particular firm’s stock. Because Huntington believed Los Angeles could “extend in any direction as far as you like,” he proposed joining the “whole region into one big family” by blanketing it with trolley lines, transforming the landscape into neat suburban communities, and providing for future growth by constructing huge hydroelectric facilities to produce excess power.

Although other businessmen, such as Moses Sherman in Los Angeles or Borax Smith in Oakland, had used streetcars to promote real estate projects, their operations did not approach Huntington’s in size or success. Sherman had operated several interurban lines in southern California over the years. However, none was profitable—in fact, most of his trolley firms went bankrupt—
and the largest system he ever operated was the 180-mile Los Angeles Pacific. In northern California, Smith established the extensive Key Route interurban network. Although successful in the borax business, he was not familiar with railroads, and because of some poor financial decisions lost control of his trolley empire and fell into bankruptcy.

However, Huntington’s operations were so much larger in scope—spanning the entire Los Angeles basin—and were established in such a short period of time that they did not merely design and promote Huntington subdivisions, they designed and promoted metropolitan Los Angeles. Although the southland would have expanded into a major urban center without Huntington, because other entrepreneurs lacked his bold blueprint for overall regional development or the ability to carry it out, the area would have grown more slowly. With slower growth, vast suburban sprawl would have awaited the automobile and may have resulted in a differently shaped basin dominated by a downtown core.

His enterprises were so huge and his impact on the Los Angeles basin so great that Henry Huntington remains in a class by himself, the metropolitan entrepreneur. Sketching the outline of the area, Huntington directed the development of greater Los Angeles; then, involved in a number of other businesses, acted as a catalyst for its rapid economic expansion. He was the person with the right training, managerial skills, and financial resources who arrived in the right area at the right time. Huntington inherited vast wealth, but was no rentier; he used those resources to fund increasingly ambitious projects. The vast outlays of capital that he put into the southland’s infrastructural industries in such a short period of time, combined with his vision, managerial expertise, and business acumen, provided the impetus that propelled southern California into the leading population, commercial, and cultural center on the West Coast.

Today, the Huntington name remains prominent in southern California. Examples include the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Huntington Drive, the Huntington Hotel, Huntington Beach, and Huntington Park. In addition, many people in the area still have fond memories of riding the Pacific Electric trolley cars. Yet these namesakes and recollections of the interurbans fall short of conveying Huntington’s importance to the southland. Henry Huntington must be remembered as the entrepreneur who envisioned and then established the modern contours of metropolitan Los Angeles.