



CHARLES FARWELL EDSON

Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

*Los Angeles: From the Sierras to
the Sea*

Charles Farwell Edson

A Critical Reading Edition

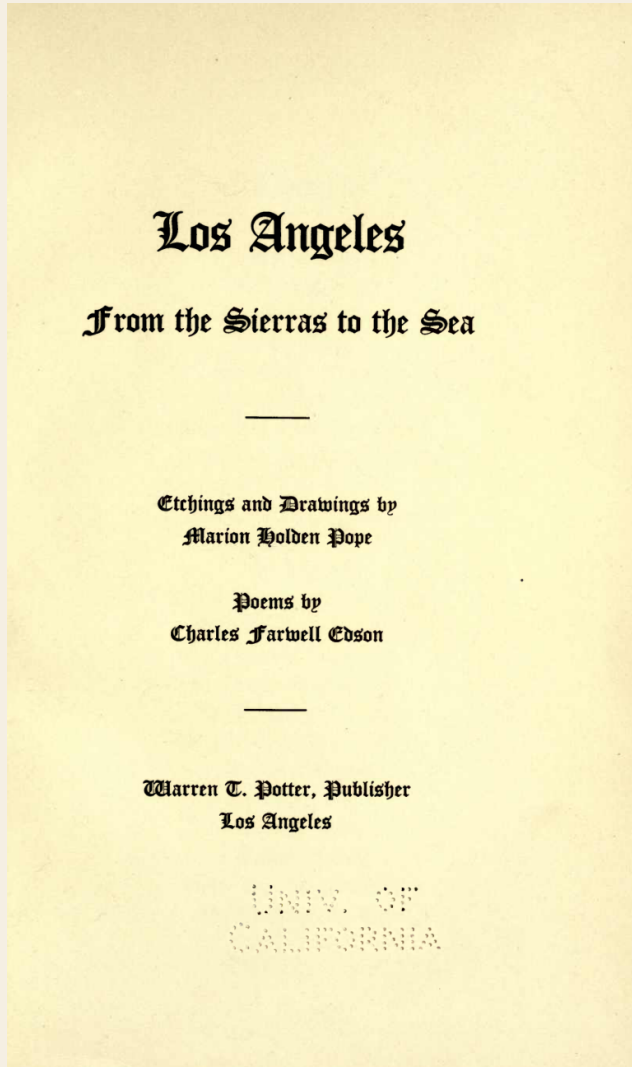
Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



Title page or opening source witness for Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea.

Editorial Note

This is a reset reading edition, not a facsimile. The text was transcribed from the source pages in the local archive and collated against available embedded text. Physical page wraps were rejoined only when the source showed that they were typographic continuations; stanza breaks, meaningful indentation, epigraphs, subtitles, speakers, and section headings were retained. Obvious scanning debris was removed without silently modernizing diction, spelling, or punctuation. Each poem or complete sequence ends with a source note in the established Green-volume form.

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Introduction

Charles Farwell Edson heard Los Angeles as a musician might: in mountain water, streetcars, civic arguments, harbor traffic, oil fields, parks, and the pressure of crowds. Born in San Francisco, trained in Chicago, and long active in Los Angeles as a singer and teacher, he shared a household and public world with reformer Katherine Philips Edson before their divorce. His 1916 collaboration with artist Marion Holden Pope, *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*, moves from the aqueduct and Cahuenga Pass through downtown and outward to San Pedro. This edition resets every poem in that book and keeps Pope's title page as the single archival witness.

Biography

Charles Farwell Edson was born in San Francisco on April 3, 1863, into the Farwell family of merchants and politicians. He studied singing and piano at the Chicago Musical College and became a professional singer, voice teacher, composer, and poet.

In 1890 he married Katherine Philips, who became one of California's important suffrage and labor-reform leaders. They lived in the Antelope Valley during the 1890s and moved to Los Angeles around 1900. Their children included dancer and ethnographer Katharine Edson Mershon and historian Charles Farwell Edson Jr. The marriage ended in divorce in 1925.

Edson taught singing, gave recitals, directed music, wrote poetry, and participated in Los Angeles civic and artistic life. His professional work placed him near the city's club, conservatory, and reform networks, where music, public pageantry, and politics overlapped.

In 1916 he published *Sierras to the Sea*, illustrated by Marion Holden Pope, a sequence of twenty-four poems moving through Los Angeles landmarks and the region's water and mountain systems. The book refuses to be only an advertisement: it examines the city through reservoirs, tar pits, museums, roads, beaches, and the Sierra supply that sustained metropolitan growth.

The same year brought *San Francisco, the City of the Golden Gate*, extending Edson's civic-geographical poetry to his birth city. Together the volumes make a paired California project, one rooted in musical cadence and the progressive-era conviction that landscapes, infrastructure, and public life

belonged in the same art.

Edson moved to Santa Fe in the early 1930s. He entered the music competition of the 1932 Olympic art program and died suddenly of a heart attack in Santa Fe on August 7, 1936.

Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea

Stage 1 | 1916

The complete verse text of the 1916 collaboration with Marion Holden Pope, reset from the source pages.

Our Sierras

Prisoned in icy kiss, the ocean mists
Whiten Sierra's peaks of rugged stone,
Then melt in joyous crying of the clouds
And all the glory of the fiery sun.
Our human city with prophetic eye
Looked to the good of men for years to come;
Gathered the crystal drops in reservoirs,
Then slipped them down through concrete and through steel.
The mighty mountains store for good of all
What dewy clouds take from the willing deeps;
Sweet air-filled drops, Almighty's distillate,
That swells the seeds, washes man's filth away;
For thus the living water comes to bless,
Then turns again to breast of Mother Sea.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 12.

Cahuenga Pass

This was the King's Highway where Dons of Spain
Carvorted on their richly saddled steeds;
Where creaking, rough carretas, oxen hauled,
Went slowly through the pass in calm content.
The pious Padres in their gray-cowled gowns
Trod on this way with not a thought of self,
Save that expressed in Mission good of all,
That soon went down before Man's selfishness.
The King's Highway the Padres gave to us,
And we, high priests unto a great ideal,
Made Queen's Highway by giving women rights
That had accrued through Man's fight to be free.
Thus each trail widens to a flowing road
Where all Humanity can go in peace.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 14.

In San Francisquito Canon

Our bold dreamers with a torch of Hope
Spotted an honest man in time of need;
Asked him to build a mighty aqueduct,
And here it stands in perpetuity.
His Irish honesty burned in the breasts
Of all who followed him in confidence,
And God's white coal will give to this fair town
Light, heat and power with the water flow.
No greater monument was ever raised,
Running from High Sierras to the Sea,
And future generations of our blood
Will bless the men who made this city free!
In this wild canon yellow grains of gold
Were first found by a Californian.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 16.

La Brea

More than a hundred thousand years ago
Huge monsters roamed these thickly wooded hills;
Were caught in asphalt beds, held unto death,
And we can reconstruct their skeletons.
Another hundred thousand years some life
May reconstruct the bony frame of Man;
Will wonder how it lived and what it ate,
For they will live and feed upon themselves.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 18.

Southwest Museum

“Catch your Archeology alive,”
The founder of this mausoleum said,
And in the quiet of these plastered halls
The bones of many pasts are kept on view.
We build our sturdy palaces of stone
To outlast all the buffetings of time,
But hardly have we boasted in our pride
Before our dreams are scrap-heaped, useless piles.
Nothing endures but Life’s evolving round
Of growth, decay, to fertilise new growth,
And from the lush urge of our eagerness
A larger humus rots to fecundate.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 20.

Municipal Golf Links

Men live like rats in modern offices,
Burrowing all around the cheese of trade;
Slavers and slaves to ugly God of Greed,
Who play at golf to ease their frenzied minds,
Then lift their eyes to life-renewing hills
For further strength to toil and grab again.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 22.

Buena Vista Street Bridge

Here flows the river of Los Angeles;
The railways run beneath the arching bridge;
Elysian Park, a rest cure for the soul,
Guards the wide gate that lets the tourists in.
The patient footman, soon forgotten horse,
The auto trucks, the costly motor cars,
Street cars, steam cars, aeroplanes pass by,
For so we go on land or in the clouds.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 24.

North End Broadway Tunnel

Here, old, lost adobe hugs the hill;
All of the friends of youth have passed away;
The plaster has begun to leave the walls
Above the common realty sign, For Sale.
The shining cars speed fast beneath the hill
Where Fremont flew the Bear Flag of this State
With Stars and Stripes of these United States
To tell to all the world our coast was Free.
Yet custom, breeding, tie us to a wheel
That is revolved by shaft of antique laws,
Run in the woof of temporising codes
And theologic creeds that know not Christ.
The Past and Present! Till the Future are
Cut through dense walls so that we learn The Truth!

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 26.

La Reina de Los Angeles, 1781

The Forsters, del Valles and the Picos,
Sepulvedas, Morenos, Coronels;
The Lugos, the Serranos, Alveras,
Were called to mass by these old mission chimes.
The Plaza was alive with prancing steeds;
Gay Señoritas smiled behind their fans
In black mantillas brought from far-off Spain,
For Church and State held their Fiestas here.
But vain the jangling street car drowns the bells;
The Plaza circle swarms with Mexicans;
The old church draws up closer to Fort Hill
As though it feared this touch of modern life;
And well it may, for God is but a name
Where minted metal rules the world of men.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 28.

Main and Fourth Streets

Up and down the crowded streets they go,
Hard rock men who built the Aqueduct;
Muckers and concrete mixers, rough and strong,
Well browned by dry Mojave's burning sun.
The Interurban cars block narrow Main,
And glaring picture shows and bold saloons
Mulct lonely men in from the silences,
Where circumstances make or break a man.
Salvation Army and the Volunteers
Sing raucous hymns to turn them toward the Christ;
God knows they need it in this moil of greed
Where men quote men in terms of stocks and bonds.
Men and the Game! A snatch for die-stamped signs!
And all one gets is Food, some Clothes and Sleep!

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 30.

Central Square Fountain

The haughty pigeons beg so daintily;
They strut and coo just like us common folks;
The spray rainbows each round falling drop
Of water that is splashing in the pool.
And here men sit and argue while they sit;
Condemn the Government, the way of it;
Settle the great, complex affairs of State
To their content, such is Democracy.
The air of Freedom is so sweet and new
That all they sense is right to criticise.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 32.

Oil Fields

The derricks stand, bald monuments to trade;
Up through earth's crust we pump the hidden oil;
Rush here and there with force it generates,
And wonder at the earthquakes in our wake.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 34.

Down Broadway from Temple

Blindfolded Justice sits, a sombre thing,
In courts of men who quibble over Law!
Here also are the records of our age
In written books of transfers and of trades.
Far down the street an outgrown City Hall,
Where our wise Solons talk efficiency.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 36.

Down Spring from Fifth

They called it Primavera, those old Dons
Whose language is a rippling, tripling song,
But when the Gringos came they named it Spring,
A closed and unresponsive substitute.
This is the bankers' street where men of might
Build marble office piles to house their wealth;
Make slaves of men with paper chains of bonds
That run for tens of years, so they be safe;
And yet the business world of ours has need
Of all the printed forms that stand for gold;
Bills of exchange, the daily checks of trade,
The give and take through central clearing house;
We play our parts, lenders and borrowers,
Until Almighty God strikes balances.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 38.

Central Square

The happy trees wave in the sea-sent wind,
Drawn from the up-draft of the heated plains;
The weary people throng the cement seats
To catch a breath of country in the town.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 40.

Second Church of Christ, Scientist

The slow evolving progress of mankind
Is marked by broken shackles, everywhere,
And now the Science of the things Christ taught
Is laid down for the use of those who care.
Angelfish Christ who owned no foot of land!
Loving the poor who had such need of it!
Driving the money-changers with a scourge
When they defiled the holy Temple steps.
But this creed stands for Life's Duality;
The He and She of nature's graciousness,
And human Christ love with no thought of self
Can make a heaven of this coin-mad earth;
His Law of Service fused in glow of Love
Will give light through sombre veils of creeds.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 42.

The Temple of the Home

In all the lands that front the mighty sea,
Stretching from stern Gibraltar to Suez,
You find old temples, ruined or in use,
To varied Gods, queer products of men's faiths.
But we, new worshippers at modern shrine,
Pray to that God who formed this scheme of things;
The clean creative urge that blends some two
To reproduce, that their kind live again.
With light of Love the altars are ablaze;
The acolytes of Joy swing incense rare;
The good High Priests of Knowledge chant a mass
Caught from the Angel Choirs of Poesy;
The temple bells are happy children's songs;
The holy records, imprint of our souls.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 44.

Up Broadway from Seventh

This is the woman's street and day by day
They throng the walks in gingham and in silks;
Dainty and debonair, lonely and rich,
They ride in limousines or walk on foot;
Poor tired mothers dragging worn-out boys;
A bevy of school girls down from L. A. High,
While far beyond in clear-cut afterglow
The peaceful mountains marvel at our haste.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 46.

Railroad Tracks

The modern steel trails come at last to camp
Here by the sandy, washed-out river bed;
Linking us all to each far land of earth
With chains of Finance, Commerce and of Trade.
And in this greater Brotherhood of Man
Will grow a New Earth, born to Human Needs;
Not bound by steel but ministered for Him
To know the wondrous glory of The Love!

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 48.

Sycamore Grove

Under the live oaks shade the mockers' nest;
The sprawly sycamores lift from the wash;
The city din is lost in nature's calm;
The wildwood bids the nervous people wait.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 50.

Elysian Park

You climb the rain-washed sandstone on a knoll,
Past spidery gumtrees swaying on thin stems,
Beyond the grey-green spruces in a cleft
Of hills. Far off the hazy mountains stand
Serene and calm in waning light of day;
The scented wind from out the fragrant pines
Caresses each tired cheek with touch of balm.
The little birds (wee minstrels of the sky),
Sing jocund songs of all earth's good to man;
Soft-footed night steals up the still ravines,
And we are alone, at rest, in peace, with Love.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 52.

Universal City

Past of a thousand years, built yesterday!
Shell of a dream, reborn at mere caprice!
A mushroom growth from spawn of vagaries
Thrown to the winds by poet alchemists.
The movie stars shine in this firmament,
Fixed for a fleeting time upon Life's screen;
Silent as yet, but soon Art's witchery
Will catch their voices for posterity.
All far-off lands are brought before your gaze;
Hobos and Kings upon equality;
And every quaint phase of God-made earth is here
Seen through a film, not darkly, but alight;
The World a Stage! Humanity the Play!
And no drop curtain falls until Life dies.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 54.

Inner Harbor; San Pedro

They sucked the age-deep silt through tubes of iron
And made new land to hold the warehouses
Built by a strong municipality
To save for all the unearned increment.
The cargo boats and steamers of the lines
Ply up and down from far Alaska's cold
To torrid Panama's tremendous gash,
And each pays some small tribute to this port.
So good Saint Peter saves the souls of men
With yellow gold, our standard of this life.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 56.

The Keeper of the Light

I see strange sights from out my steel-ribbed shaft;
The fishing boats by hundreds seek the deep;
The fussy pleasure yachts flit on the bay;
The moving-picture sailors plough the main
With land-legs that are fearful of the sea;
The stately boats that carry passengers;
The lumber schooners down from Oregon;
The mighty liners up from isthmus way;
The sugar boats from Honolulu's shore;
The warships with our flowing Stars and Stripes.
But more than this I see the bay alive
With boats on boats in cargo to all lands;
A greater fleet built in this good southwest
Where men and women are forever free.
The ocean waves broke high above my light,
Driven by southeast wind in misty blasts,
But in the haze that covers distant plains
A finer people grows than earth has seen.

Publication. First published in *Los Angeles: From the Sierras to the Sea*. Los Angeles: Warren T. Potter, 1916, p. 58.

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Selected primary and secondary sources

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Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the publication notes and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. The cover uses original abstract artwork prepared for this edition.