



Andrew McNally House, 1887

# Altadena Historical Society

## From our Files

### Fires

September 13, 2009

## And speaking of fires...

The **1934 Brown Mountain fire** scorched 3000 acres above Altadena. One year later high winds fueled a fire that burned La Vina Sanatorium to the ground. The **1935 La Vina** fire blazed across the foothills from Millard Canyon to Las Flores canyon, almost destroying the home of Charles H. Cobb. His Spanish style mansion, elegantly appointed with imported exotic hardwoods, was landscaped with eucalyptus, palm trees and lodge pole pines - fuel just waiting for a fire. But the 83 year-old Cobb, with help from his 200,000 gallon reservoir was prepared for the fight.



Home of Carrie and Charles H. Cobb, about 1930. (Photo reprinted from [Altadena's Golden Years](#) by Robert Peterson, p. 37)

According to the October 24, 1935 issue of the *Altadena Press*, "About two o'clock in the morning [Cobb] was awakened to find that not only his property, a mansion nestled against the foothills of Las Flores canyon, but his life and that of his household were endangered. Due to the water system installed on the Las Flores ranch 20 years ago, Mr. Cobb, with the aid of Andrew Anderson, was able to save all of his property with the exception of damage done to a few trees and shrubs. Mr. Cobb handled a water hose bearing 100 pounds pressure, playing it upon a blazing furnace within a few feet of his garage and other buildings, the point first threatened."

Cobb made his fortune in lumber, starting off as a lumberjack in his home state of Maine and later Washington. Prior to retirement he served as president of International Lumber Company. In 1916, he and his wife, Carrie, purchased a substantial part of Las Flores ranch and built their dream home in the shadow of Echo Mountain.

The newspaper article continued, "Mr. Cobb stated that he has contended for many years that the canyons and foothills above Altadena should be periodically burned off by the forestry department to eliminate dangers to property and loss of life... This statement coming from a man who has spent a lifetime in the woods is significant and deserving of careful study."

Cobb died in 1939. About 20 years later the house was torn down due to neglect and vandalism. Cobb's estate, at the top of Lake Avenue, is now a park managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Sources: [Altadena: Between Wilderness and City](#) by Michele Zack (2004); [Altadena's Golden Years](#) by Robert H. Peterson (1976); *Altadena Press*, October 24, 1935, p 1

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