

**ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK**  
**WHO IS “MORLEY” OF MORLEY FIELD?**

By Katherine Hon

It is well known that Balboa Park, San Diego’s 1,400-acre crown jewel, was once called simply, “City Park.” The more dramatic name, “Balboa Park,” was chosen in October 1910 by the park commissioners planning the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition. An integral part of Balboa Park is Morley Field, North Park’s own crown jewel for recreation and relaxation. If “Balboa Park” is a reference to Vasco Nunez de Balboa, who was “Morley?”

John G. Morley was Park Superintendent of all City parks from 1911 to 1938. He was hired November 17, 1911, and oversaw development within Balboa Park as well as La Jolla, Mission Hill and Old Town parks, the plaza opposite the U. S. Grant Hotel, and sixty-five acres on Point Loma.

On June 14, 1914, the San Diego Union had this to say about John Morley:

“In considering the development of San Diego's great park, which, with the growth and commercialization of the city, will be far more appreciated as a haven of rest and fragrance that it is now, it is impossible not to begin with Morley . . . Morley is the son of an English landscape expert, and has been in the same line of work all his life. Before coming to San Diego he was superintendent of parks at Los Angeles, where some of the finest landscape work that city boasts was accomplished during his incumbency . . . When he came to San Diego there was not a lawn in Balboa Park. There are now thirty acres completed . . . One of the most recent and striking additions to the park is a rose garden which when completed will contain 6,300 rose bushes and fifty different varieties.”

John Morley noted in his 1916 Annual Report, “There has been planted in the park system, including the Exposition grounds, 2,597 trees, 12,152 shrubs, and 235,253 bedding and flower plants and bulbs; and 22,625 flowering decorative plants and bulbs furnished to the Conservatory and Botanical Buildings during the year.”

But John Morley did not limit his accomplishments to landscaping. Under his supervision, Park Avenue (Sixth Avenue) was extended from Date Street to Juniper; West Park Boulevard (State Route 163 Cabrillo Freeway) was re-graded and a sewer system installed; and Midland Drive (Park Boulevard) was relocated. Also, he recognized the importance of effective storm drainage, noting in his 1916 Annual Report: “I believe it will be necessary in the near future to provide well built, permanent channels to control the water, as under present conditions a large amount of damage is done by the water cutting new channels and washing away large areas of land . . .”

After many years of exemplary service, John Morley was honored when a letter was received from the "San Diegans" recommending that the Recreation Area in the northeast corner of Balboa Park be named Morley Field. In response, this resolution was adopted at the June 28, 1934 Park Commission meeting: "NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Recreation Area in Balboa Park along Upas Street from Alabama to Arnold Streets be, and it is hereby officially named 'Morley Field.'"

In a tribute that included the area that would be his memorial, Morley was praised in a January 1, 1924, San Diego Union, Park Section article:

"In addition to its supremely beautiful landscape effects, its museum exhibits and its attractiveness for lovers of art and music, Balboa Park provides facilities for the entertainment of those who have athletic tendencies. An 18-hole golf course, a battery of six concrete surfaced tennis courts, horseshoe pitches, miles of dirt road for equestrians, and many more miles of quiet trails for pedestrians afford ample enjoyment for outdoor exercise.

In charge of this great institution that is a park, and, at the same time, a small community in itself, embracing dozens of features not commonly found in parks, stands John G. Morley, superintendent of parks. To him, in large measure, is attributed the beauty of the landscape, the excellence of the miles of roads and trails, the efficient and quiet administration of park affairs, and the high regard that all San Diegans feel toward this magnificent park."