

# Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden

## Master Plan Summary Report

June 2003



The City of Phoenix  
e group® landscape architecture/environmental design, inc.

## Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden

### *Park of Imagination Master Plan for a Landscape Heritage Preserve*



*Tovrea Castle & Carraro Cactus Garden: Circa 1930*

The City of Phoenix is pleased to provide this summary report on the Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden Master Plan. The planning process has been a patient search, exploring ways to preserve the historic resources of the site and create a public facility. This Master Plan sets a strategy for future development. It is a long-term vision to restore the historic castle and cactus gardens, creating a cultural place that provides public facilities, interpretation and amenities for residents and tourists.

The Master Plan has evolved through coordinated efforts of various City departments, including the Historic Preservation Office, and Parks and Recreation Department. The City has worked closely with individual citizens, public groups, such as Friends of Tovrea Castle, a variety of stakeholders, and consultants for several years.

This plan envisions a mosaic of cultural landscapes, respecting the historical integrity of past eras, while creating a planning and design framework for new public facilities in the future. Our dream is to help create a special place of imagination that will transform this historic private residence into a public facility for the Valley and the State. This report provides an overall framework the vision at the Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden. Future projects and site development will be developed to conform to this vision plan.

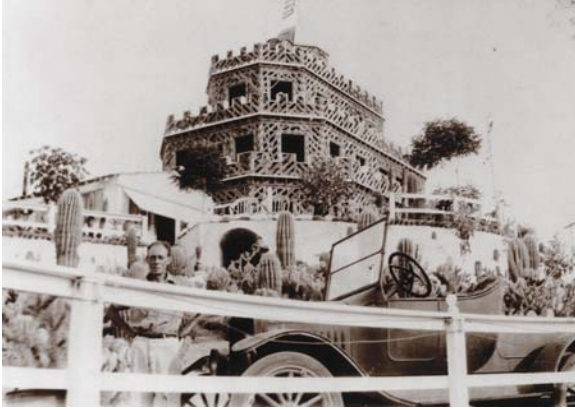
## Beginnings

The vision for the future of Tovera Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden is drawn largely from an appreciation of the site's rich cultural history. The story begins in 1928 when Italian immigrant Alessio Carraro and his family sold their San Francisco sheet metal business and arrived in Arizona searching for their American dream. Carraro found that dream in 277 acres of harsh desert landscape that stretched from Van Buren Street to the middle of the Salt River bed. While others saw a barren setting, Alessio envisioned a resort castle surrounded by dense desert vegetation and scenery.

From 1928 to 1930 Alessio, his son Leo and a crew of about 20 workmen shaped this barren desert landscape into a spectacular desert paradise. Crowning this landscape was a magnificent wedding cake "castle" reminiscent of his Italian homeland. During the summers of 1928 and 1929, "Mokta", a talented Russian gardener developed the gardens, while Carraro focused on the construction of the Castle and surrounding outbuildings.

While Alessio completed his fantasy castle in 1930, his dream for the property was quickly shattered when adjoining property owners began constructing sheep and cattle pens to supply the Tovrea family's nearby meat packing plant. Discouraged by these new developments, Carraro sold the castle and surrounding land to Della Tovrea in 1931, ending his dream for a "castle" hotel and resort subdivision in a remote desert environment. While E.A. Tovrea, Della's husband, passed away shortly thereafter in 1932, Della retained the Castle as her Phoenix residence for the remainder of her life. In 1936 Della married William Stuart, the publisher of the Prescott Courier and collector of Internal Revenue for Arizona. They spent most of the year in Prescott, but lived in the Castle every winter. Mr. Stewart died in 1960, and Della relocated to the Castle permanently until her own death in 1969.

Since the late 1960's the property has remained largely unused. Without regular upkeep and maintenance, the fragile cactus gardens declined rapidly and the historic castle fell into a state of disrepair.



Construction of the Castle building. Circa: 1930

## Introduction

The site and castle create an iconic image, emblem and symbol. The unusual desert hill surrounded with Saguaro cactus and the tiered castle building attract attention and create this unique icon. Today development adjacent to the site is separated only by the historic stone wall around the property.

The site is located near the southwest corner of Van Buren Street and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. The site is roughly defined by an existing stone wall between Van Buren Street on the north, Washington Street on the south, Loop 202 (Red Mountain Freeway) along the east and the U.S. Post Office along the west boundary. The site included the Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden and surrounding land within the existing historic wall.

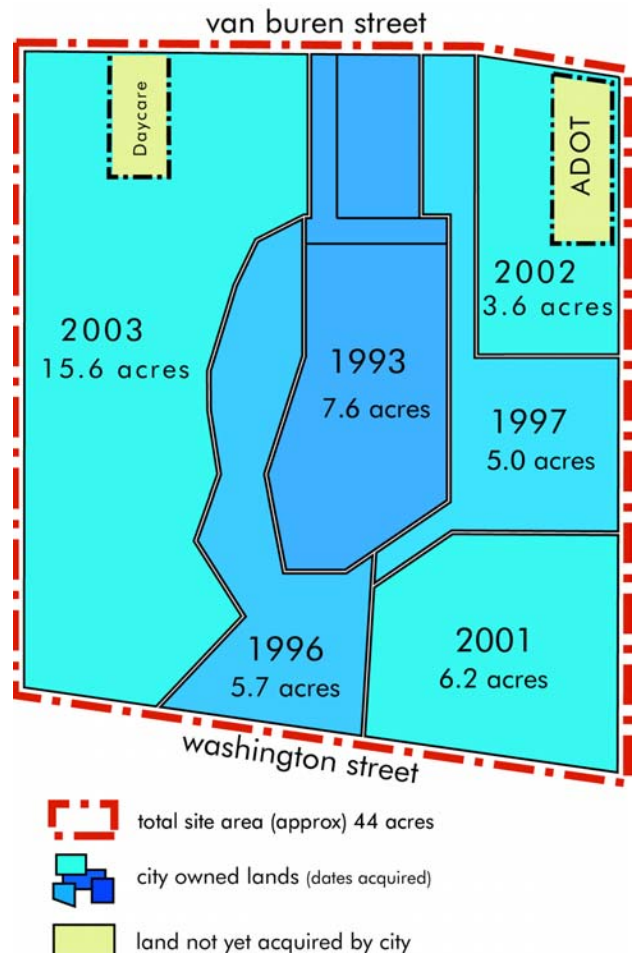
Historically the site was a private residence, through the Carraro and Tovrea eras. Our challenge today is to open the historic gardens and castle to the public. Future challenges will be to develop complementary uses and support facilities on the site, while still preserving and protecting the historic landscape and castle.



### Tovrea Castle & Carraro Cactus Garden on west hillside

Several layers of history will be preserved and interpreted, and new facilities are planned. Careful site development will need to weave the various historical eras together with future development. The landscape is a continuum through history. The site values include cultural, historic, park and eco-tourism opportunities.

The following section summarizes the City's acquisition history of the site, completed projects to date, and the overall site context. The Master Plan section of this report describes the vision framework for the park's future use and development. The report concludes with the timeline and next steps to complete the park.



## Site Context



Aerial photo showing the Tovrea site area.

The overall site area, about 44 acres, is largely bound by historic stone walls, with the exception of two lots on Van Buren Street. While development has continued outside the stone walls for many years, the wall has protected the historic site from intrusions and protected its visual integrity and quality.

Modern highway developments have also afforded the park a strategic location in the city. The park is situated immediately adjacent to Loop 202, approximately one mile southeast of SR 143 (Hohokam Expressway) and Loop 202 (Red Mountain Freeway). The castle's hilltop site makes it highly visible from Loop 202 and from other nearby roadways. Located approximately two (2) miles northeast of the Sky Harbor International Airport, the site is also advantageous for out-of-town tourists.

Other cultural sites and tourist destinations lie within close proximity to the Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden Park. These include:

- Pueblo Grande Historic Park
- Cross Cut Canal
- Papago Park
- Salt River Project's Papago Center
- Rio Salado Park and Lake
- Phoenix Zoo
- Desert Botanical Gardens
- Arizona Historical Society Museum

Opportunities also exist to link the Tovrea Castle and Carraro Cactus Garden Park to Papago Park via a planned trail system. Future regional trail connection opportunities for the park are shown with dots on the aerial photo.



Entrance Gateway and Stone Wall

## Recent Developments

Since the City's initial purchase in 1993, the City has completed a number of studies and projects related to stabilization, maintenance, planning, restoration and interpretation of the Castle's history. These include:

- Site surveys
- Building security
- National Register Nomination
- Cactus garden maintenance
- Site clean-up (entire 44 acre site)
- Historical & Archival Research
- Acquisition of historic photographs & maps
- Stone wall restoration and reconstruction
- Seismic investigations
- Waterline & fire-line design & construction
- Review by Mayors Commission on Disabilities
- Design & construction of Phase One garden restoration
- Temporary roof repairs
- Historic Structure Report
- Saguaro cactus inventory & workshop
- Video documentation & production
- Oral history research & documentation
- Archaeological surveys
- Management Plan
- Restoration of entry gates
- Irrigation system design & construction
- Asbestos & lead abatement survey
- Master Planning

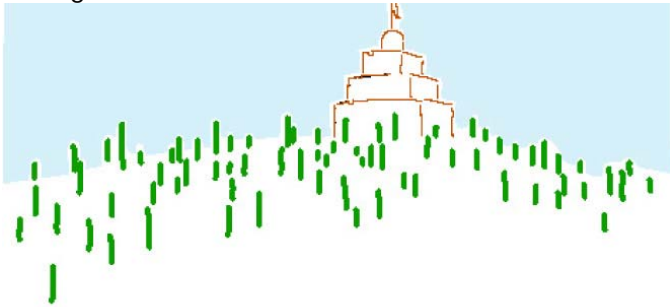
## Historic Garden Restoration

The original Carraro Cactus Gardens included a lush collection of Sonoran Desert cactus, planted in 1928. Cacti included a curious variation, collected and planted by Alessio Carraro, his son Leo and his Russian gardener friend Moktatchev, nicknamed “Mokta”.

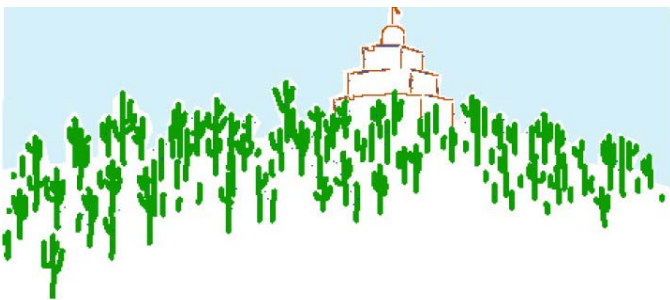


Historic Photo, Carraro Cactus Garden. Circa: 1930

The saguaro cactus grew into a unique collection of specimens today, creating a visual icon surrounding the Castle. Today the Carraro cactus gardens survive with saguaro specimens that provide a unique visual icon on the hillsides surrounding the Castle. However, most smaller cacti on the grounds around the castle were damaged over time.



Saguaro Icon – initial small plants around the Castle hillsides



Saguaro Icon- growing around the Castle hillsides



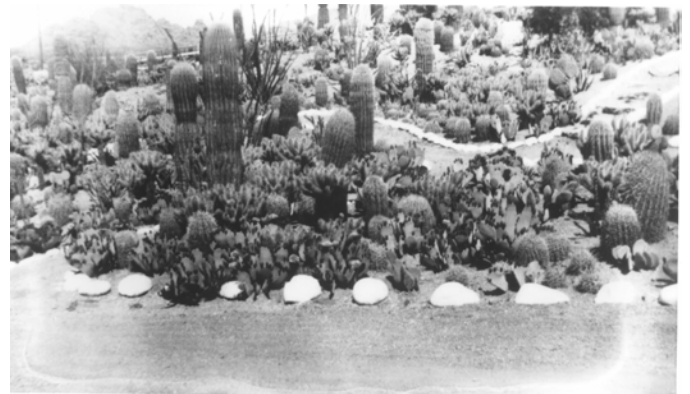
Carraro Garden Restoration. Phase One 2001.

The recently completed garden restoration planted over 400 new saguaros and over 1000 new cacti. This restoration has started to bring back the original landscape character, with a dense ground cover and lush combination of cacti, within the historic garden area.

Selected areas along main paths were restored with a historic fence. Lighting was added along the outer edge of the path and on both sides of the north path along the main entrance path.



Historic Photo, Carraro Cactus Garden. Circa: 1930



Historic Photo, Carraro Cactus Garden. Circa: 1930

## Master Plan

The April 2001 Master Plan highlights proposes uses and site development elements in the park:

A. Visitor/Tourist Center; B. Interpretative Theme Wall/Walkway; C. Tovrea Castle; D. Tovrea Gardens; E. Carraro Gardens; F. North Special Events Area; G. South Special Events Area; H. West Special Events Area; I. Machine Shop; J. Historic Buildings; K. Interpretive Trail; L. Landscape Buffer; M. Historic Perimeter Wall; N. Art Features (various locations).



## Tovrea Castle Park Master Plan and Garden Restoration

The master plan envisions a multi-use historic park providing a wide range of recreational, cultural and social activities 15 minutes from downtown Phoenix. The developed City park would accommodate a wide spectrum of public experiences ranging from hikes along interpretative trails, walks through historic gardens, guided tours through the castle, site information at the Visitor/Tourism Center, and social functions at various venues in the park. This plan encourages a multi-faceted and integrated park experience whereby visitors can flow easily between areas and activities.

The first priority for implementation is the restoration of fragile historic features in the park, such as the Castle, landscape features, and outbuildings. Another priority is to provide interim public access while work is underway. Subsequent work would develop new facilities, such as special events areas, theme walkways and visitor services, to enhance the public experience.

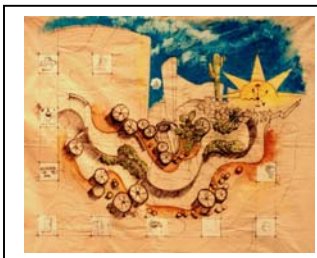
### A. Visitor/Tourism Center



As part of the overall programming plan a small Visitor Center and parking/orientation area will be located along East Van Buren Street. The building would include a park office, reception area

with tourist information, meeting rooms, kitchen, small auditorium and outdoor courtyard. This building would reduce the use of the fragile historic Castle yet allow for a wide variety of activities to take place at the site.

### B. Interpretative Theme Wall/Walkway



A critical pedestrian linkage from the Visitor/Tourism Center to the Castle will connect the lower orientation plaza and the upper plaza. The route is designed to sensuously curve horizontally and vertically

through the natural desert landscape. This tree linked shaded walkway and theme wall with interpretative signs and demonstration garden areas will tell visitors historical stories and provide an outdoor museum experience. Designed as an art feature using natural river rock and

solid panels the wall will accommodate specially designed copper plate interpretative signage. The upper plaza provides orientation with special paving and art inserts to illustrate directions to site features.

### C. Tovrea Castle



Once restored and furnished, the main floor of the historic Castle would be open for guided public tours. These tours could occur in conjunction with small receptions and events (similar to the way

the Rosson House is used at Heritage Square). The basement, with its unusual tunnels leading in and out of the gardens, would feature interpretive historical displays and be available for small social functions. Access to the building's upper stories would be restricted due to structural, building code, and ADA issues.

### D. Tovrea Gardens



The area below and east of the Castle will be a restoration of the historic garden used by Della Tovrea. Restoration will include replacement of historic planting at the gateways of Van Buren

and Washington Streets, as well as re-vegetation of the bare garden ground with specimen cactus and ground cover plants. The historic reflecting pond and water pump system will be restored. The lower terrace and light fixtures at the northeast tunnel entry will be repaired and a sloped access walk will be added to provide access to the terrace from the garden.

### E. Carraro Gardens



The area below, west, south and north of the Castle contains the historic cactus gardens completed in 1929. While the City of Phoenix started restoration of these

gardens in 2000, additional plantings and restoration work is needed.

### F. North Special Events Area



The north hill is a large platform area that would be used for special events and functions, including art exhibits, antique car shows and outdoor receptions. This area is ideal for large tents with

electricity and water, and offers memorable views south to the Castle building as well as views to Papago Mountain and the surrounding landscape.

### G. South Special Events Area



The south hill is a smaller platform area, similar to the North Special Events Area. This area links with the historic trails around the Castle building and will be used for special events and functions.

Water and electricity will be available as well as a view north to the Castle building and the surrounding landscape.

### H. West Special Events Area



This dynamic area is snuggled into the natural desert landscape, and provides a venue for outdoor functions, including BBQ grills and picnic area for large groups and catered events. The area

is located away from traffic and provides an area for live bands and music programs adjacent to the historic outbuildings and the Machine Shop. The site offers a relaxing desert setting, as an extension of the Carraro cactus gardens, with a view up to the Castle building.

### I. Machine Shop



This historic metal machine shop barn building, adjacent to the West Special Events Area, would be reconstructed as a meeting, gathering place and service center. The new building would

contain seminar meeting rooms, restrooms, a catering kitchen, and storage space.

### J. Historic Buildings



The site contains several historic outbuildings and structures, including a gas station, a well house, two wood frame houses, a bird aviary and a dovecote. The well house and outbuildings will be

restored to further historic interpretation. The restoration of these buildings will add interest to the site, as park users walk the established historic trails throughout the property.

### K. Interpretative Trails



The site has a system of historic trails that will be improved and upgraded to provide primary access to the historic Castle and gardens. A new Interpretative Theme wall and walkway will provide

visitors with access from the Visitor Center to the Castle. Themed trail loops will link Carraro Garden trails, Tovrea Garden trails and a Desert Botanical trail. A perimeter trail loop will provide visitors the opportunity to experience the site. Trail links will be provided to connect with the regional and Papago trail system.



## L. Landscape Buffer



A natural desert buffer of plants is needed for sound and visual mitigation to protect, screen and separate the site from Van Buren, Washington Street, Red Mountain Freeway and the US Post Office.

## M. Historic Perimeter Site Wall



The historic rock perimeter wall, integral to and surrounding the site, is a landmark. The stone wall was restored along Van Buren Street and Washington Street. The dry stack wall along the east and west sides

of the site needs to be repaired as part of a restoration project.

## N. Art Features



The conceptual master plan of 1999 provided ideas for a variety of art features to integrate the landscape with unique and functional design elements. Designs and models were produced by artist Kevin Berry.

Ideas included Ocotillo sculptures and sign at the pedestrian trailhead and an interpretative theme wall to guide visitors to the Castle and tell the site's historical stories. Other features include special paving at the Upper Plaza and garden armadas.

## Next Steps

In 2003, the City closed on the purchase of the last major parcel of land inside the castle walls still in private ownership. The current plans call for developing a 44-acre park which restores the Castle and Gardens, rehabilitates other historic features and outbuildings on the site and creates sensitive trails, interpretative paths, and other opportunities for public visitation.

Progress has been made in acquiring the historic Tovrea lands and stabilizing historic landscape features since the City first became involved in 1993. Still, much remains to be done. Completion of the Master Plan will require multiple phases of work, critical partnerships, and substantial funding. Some of the critical outstanding work items include:

### Castle stabilization and restoration

Complete restoration of the Castle is needed, which is to include new mechanical systems, structural improvements, asbestos abatement, and major interior and exterior rehabilitation work.

### Accessibility

Accessible paths will be provided to allow citizens access to the publicly-open floors of the Castle as well as the park site. Reasonable public accommodation to the site will be provided.

### Interim public access

The City plans to provide groups and citizens with the opportunity to experience the site as it evolves and is developed.

### Additional fundraising

Additional private fundraising efforts are planned, as well as future bond funding, to fully achieve the Master Plan. While detailed cost estimates will be developed in the near future, preliminary estimates suggest that at least \$12 million dollars will be required to fully open the park to the public.

### Detailed site plan and architectural drawings

Detailed plans are needed to move forward on individual improvement projects as funding becomes available. These projects include restoration of historic buildings on the site, such as the Well House, Gas Station, Aviary and Dovecote, as well as restoration/expansion of the historic gardens and reconstruction of the Machine Shop. New developments, such as interpretative trails, special events areas, and visitor center facilities could also be constructed as funding becomes available.

## Timeline

### Phase One – April – December 2003

- Initiate fundraising campaign
- Complete structural analysis of Castle
- Develop Phase I Restoration Plans for Castle
- Develop Cost Estimates for Completing Castle Restoration

### Phase Two – January – June 2004

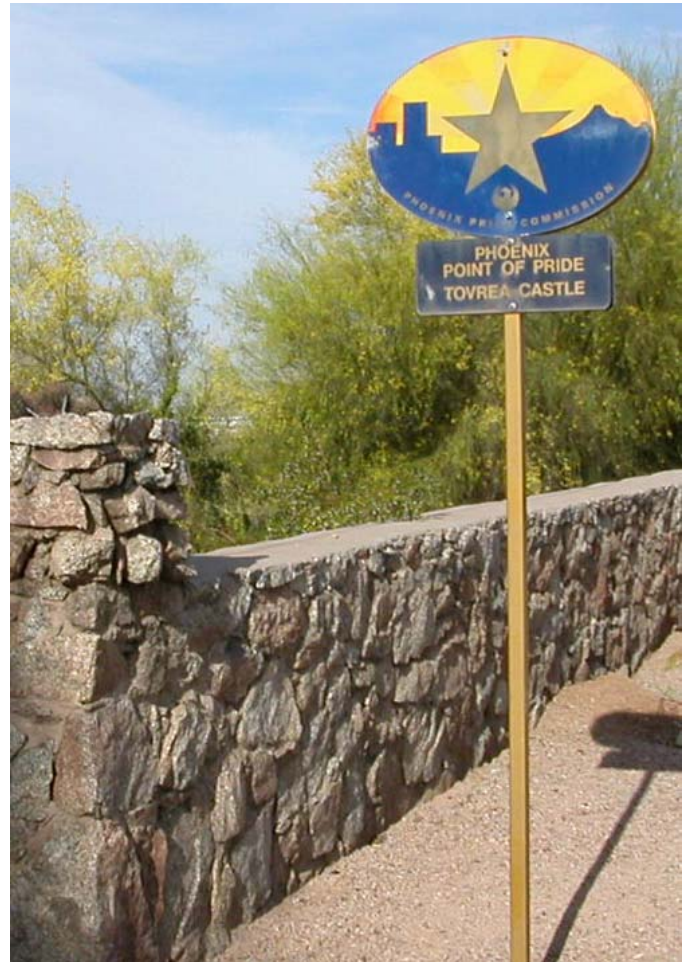
- Complete Phase I Restoration/ Stabilization Work on Castle
- Initiate Interim Public Access to Site

### Phase Three – June 2004 – 2006

- Develop Site Plan/ Architectural Drawings for Site
- Initiate Individual Park Restoration and Development Projects as Funding Becomes Available

### Phase Four – 2007 – 2009

- Achieve Full Funding for Tovrea Castle through New City Bond Issue
- Finish Phase II, Castle Restoration
- Complete all Unfinished Restoration/ New Development Projects
- Fully Open Park to the Public



*A Phoenix Point of Pride*