Mt. Washington was founded in 1909 as a subdivision laid out by real estate developer Robert Marsh. Marsh built the Mt. Washington Hotel at the summit of Mt. Washington, and the Los Angeles and Mount Washington Railway Company was soon established as a funicular railway up the hill as an alternative to constructing roads up the area's steep hillsides. The railway operated until January 1919.

As Los Angeles grew outward from its core, Mt. Washington was eventually absorbed into the city proper. After World War II, it became a destination for middle-class families and artists. In the 1950s and 1960s Modernist homes, similar to those found in the Hollywood Hills were built in the district.

Mt. Washington is also home to the historic Southwest Museum of the American Indian , the

oldest museum in Los Angeles. The Southwest Museum, founded by Charles Fletcher Lummis, houses a 238,000-piece collection of Native American art and artifacts—one of the most significant and representative of its kind in the United States, second only to the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian.

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