

Save

OUR HERITAGE

Organisation



Historic Balboa Theatre

Survivors From San Diego's Theatrical Past
 North Park's Neon
 San Diego Gogole

FROM THE EDITOR

The Neon Majorette

Preservation of a San Diego Icon

One of San Diego's most recognizable landmarks is the Neon Majorette, a part of San Diego's viewscape for over six decades. What many may not know is that she belongs to SOHO.

The 46-foot-high, 3,500 lb, neon majorette was built in 1947, installed in '48 at the Campus Drive-In Theatre near San Diego State University.

The Campus was the largest drive-in theater on the West Coast at the time and the 4-story majorette, one of the tallest neon installations in the country, was affixed against a fantastic mural depicting the San Diego State University bell tower quadrangle, football goalposts, and background mountains.

The Majorette has survived the demolition of two prior locations and years of storage. In 1983 the drive-in was demolished, the Majorette was saved from being destroyed by the Save Our Neon Organization, a subcommittee of SOHO at the time, who stored it in a downtown warehouse until 1985 when the sign was restored and installed at the newly renovated Marketplace at the Grove.

It was placed at the Mann Theater at College Grove, where it stayed until 1998, when the shopping center was again renovated as College Grove Center.

On July 2, 2001, ownership of the Majorette passed, by way of donation from Vestar Development Co., owner of College Grove Shopping Center, to SOHO. As part of the donation, Vestar agreed to remain responsible for financial and physical maintenance of the Majorette, and to keep it lit during nighttime operating hours for the shopping center. SOHO has an easement for access and the right to remove the Majorette, although it will remain at the College Grove Shopping Center for the foreseeable future.

Austin Linn Gray and Joe Schmidt, two San Diegans, are credited with the design of the Majorette. It is believed that Gray used as a model for the sign a photograph of Marion Caster Heatherly Baker, a top California drum majorette in the 1940's and head drum majorette at San Diego High School, class of 1943, at San Diego State College, the Naval Training Center, and later the Los Angeles Rams.

This SOHO lady has been featured in photo spreads in *Time* and *Life*, as well as in numerous books and calendars. Under SOHO's stewardship the Majorette is certain to remain a part of San Diego's identity for generations to come.

On the cover The Neon Majorette today at the College Grove Shopping Center in Lemon Grove; **above** The complete sign as it stood originally at the Campus Drive-In Theatre. Photos courtesy Integrated Sign Associates.



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Interior of restored Balboa Theatre



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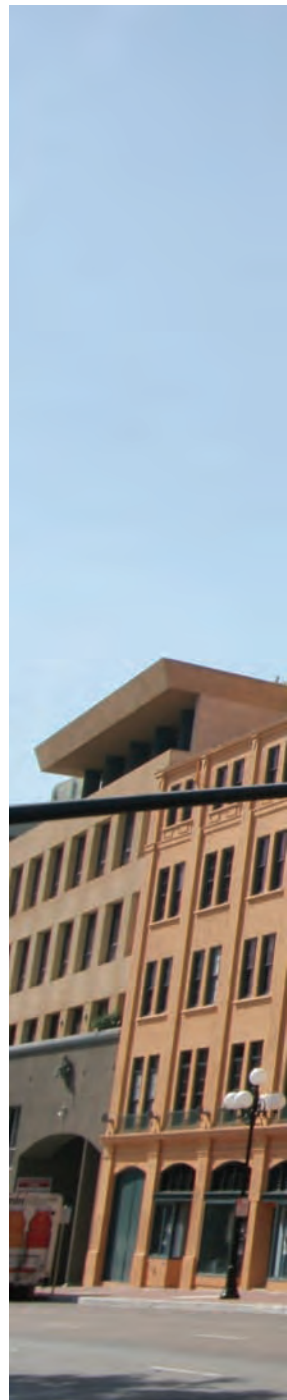
The Balboa Theatre Anatomy of a Restoration

BY DAVID MARSHALL, AIA

After 22 years of failed proposals by well-meaning but under-funded private interests, the Balboa Theatre at Fourth Avenue and E Street in downtown San Diego has finally been restored. The Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) came to the rescue of this historic landmark, digging into their own coffers of tax increment funds, they contributed over \$26 million to make the project a reality. Work on the 1924 icon included not only the restoration of finishes, but seismic strengthening, disabled access compliance, and all new utilities.

The Balboa Theatre was almost demolished in 1959 for a parking lot, but was spared by Russo Enterprises who turned it into an action-movie house. The former vaudeville and movie palace, designed by San Diego architect William Wheeler, was placed on the local Historic Register in 1972. The Balboa Theatre Foundation successfully added it to the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. In October 2002, the CCDC proceeded with renovation of the Balboa Theatre for use by non-profit performing arts groups and to host midsized Broadway shows.

My firm, Heritage Architecture & Planning (HAP), was the Associate Architect and Preservation Consultant for theater architects Westlake Reed Leskosky. Fellow HAP architect Curtis Drake and I were in the trenches during the five plus years of planning and restoration of the Balboa Theatre. This photo essay is intended to show the reader what it takes to successfully complete a project of this magnitude, complexity, and beauty.



right The Balboa Theatre in 2002 before restoration began. Note the non-historic white paint and red tile base. The original blade sign and ornate marquee had been removed in prior years. The mundane replacement marquee had plastic letters and covered up three historic art glass windows; *below* The theater's original coral-orange color was found under many layers of paint and was reapplied. The red tile base was removed and the wood windows were repainted their historic dark green. The missing blade sign and marquee were faithfully reconstructed and reinstalled. The missing arched windows were recreated with custom curved wood mullions and alabaster art glass.



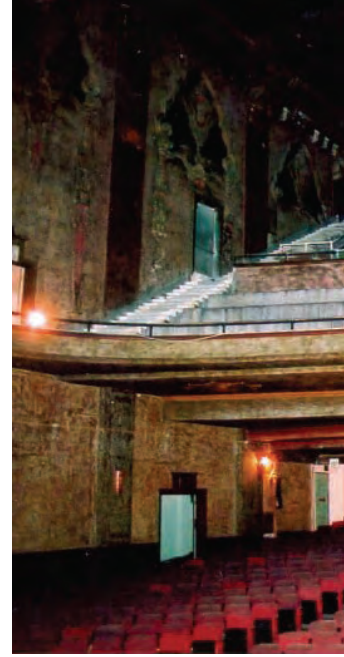


Above Balboa's ship appears at the top of the blade sign. A lot of guesswork was necessary to detail the ship since the historic photographs didn't have clear views of it. Just weeks before the completed ship was going to be hoisted into place, additional historic photos were found and the ship was sent back to the fabricator and repainted to be more accurate.

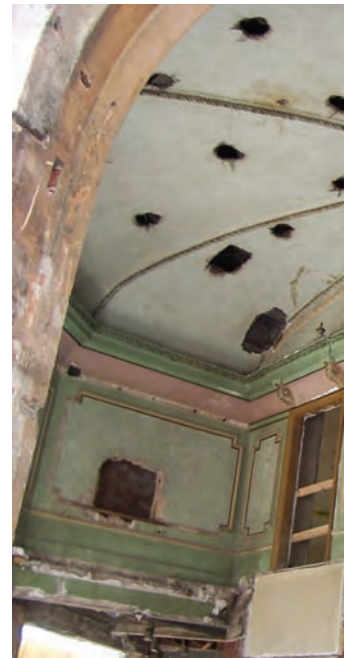


Right View of the main entrance and tile-domed tower showing the reconstructed blade sign. When private developers were planning to restore the theater in years past they were considering selling the naming rights of the Balboa Theatre. Such an arrangement could have resulted in the BALBOA blade sign reading RUBIOS or JENNY CRAIG instead.

The original marquee was missing since the 1930s and no drawings existed of its design. However, several historic photographs from the late 1920s showed the marquee in enough detail that building a replica was possible. The marquee canopy and blade sign cost \$216,000 to recreate.



Above This view of the restored entry rotunda shows the restored glass entry doors (left) and the new exterior doors (right). The new doors were added to enlarge the tiny lobby and to protect the etched glass and historic mosaic tile floor which depicts Vasco Núñez de Balboa's sailing ship and "1513," the year he reached the Pacific Ocean.





Above The interior of the theater in 2000, prior to restoration. Note the patchwork of non-historic seats and the heavily tarnished walls. The CCDC deserves much credit for keeping the building watertight and free from vagrants during its 20-year hibernation.



Above The same view showing the restored audience chamber in 2008. 1,300 new seats, restored lighting, and over \$800,000 worth of decorative painting combine to create a dramatic upgrade. It should be noted that the theater was originally built for \$800,000 in 1924.

Below A flat 1950's ceiling was removed from the entry rotunda, revealing that much of the plaster ornamentation was missing or damaged, the upper floor windows were gone, and there were gaping holes in the walls and vaulted ceiling. The pink and green colors were also not historic.



Below The completed rotunda with its ornamentation, windows, and lighting restored. The historic colors were identified through scraping tests and reapplied.





1 The right half of this photograph shows the original paint on the auditorium wall after the historic bronze powder paint had tarnished to a dark brown. The left half shows the “jewel box” look of the newly applied finishes as part of a paint restoration test. The entire theater was eventually restored using a non-tarnishing bronze powder paint to recreate the gilded historic appearance.

2 Bronze powder being dry-brushed on the auditorium ceiling. Many thousands of hours of decorative painting by New York’s Evergreene Studios were required during the restoration.

3 This “before” view shows one of the surviving chandeliers in the main audience chamber. All of the historic light fixtures were completely restored and rewired by Gibson & Gibson Antique Lighting. Also note the stained and tarnished decorative paint work in the background.

4 An artist uses a stencil above the proscenium to recreate the 1924 tapestry pattern. Decorative painting of the upper walls and ceiling required an extensive scaffolding system that cost \$100,000. The wood platform they stood (and sat) on high above the theater was nicknamed the “dance floor.”

5 Areas of damaged and missing plaster ornamentation required repair and replication. The white portions in this photograph are the recreated pieces of the Salon’s ornamental plaster prior to painting.

6 Perhaps the most dramatic transformation at the Balboa Theatre was the second floor “Salon” lobby. This 2000 photograph shows the non-historic paint colors, flooring, and light fixtures prior to restoration.

right The Salon as it appears today after restoration and decorative painting. The murals and stencils were recreated from a single 1924 photograph and paint scrapings were studied to establish the color palette.

David Marshall, AIA, is a former member of the city’s Historical Resources Board, a past president of SOHO, and author of “San Diego’s Balboa Park.” All photographs were taken by the author, Alex Eberle, and Curtis Drake, of Heritage Architecture & Planning.





Today the result, one of the most skillful, attractive, useful and sophisticated theatre restorations in the country, speaks for itself.



The Balboa Theatre, 2008.
Photo Sandé Lollis

THE BALBOA THEATRE

An 18-year redevelopment battle

BY WELTON JONES

The Balboa Theatre, now contiguous with the Horton Plaza Shopping Center, opened March 28, 1924, at the southwest corner of 4th and E Streets. The Balboa was the city's first big downtown theater built for the exploding popularity of motion pictures.

A well-designed combination stage and screen house from the era of palatial theaters, this 1,500-seat, single-balcony playhouse has fine acoustics, a commodious orchestra pit, a stage the size of most Broadway stages, a high and wide stage house for hanging scenery, a spacious assortment of dressing rooms and even a pair of live waterfalls on either side of the proscenium arch.

Designed by architect William Wheeler, himself a sometime stage performer, the Balboa was owned and operated by Robert E. Hicks, a former Colorado newspaperman and columnist for the *San Diego Union*, who also was involved with the Plaza and Cabrillo theaters around the corner on Horton Plaza.

During the 1920s, the theater presented a mixture of vaudeville performances and films, with several shows daily. The 426-pipe Robert Morton pipe organ installed in the Balboa was built in Van Nuys in 1922 and moved to the new Fox Theatre in 1929.

The Balboa was remodeled for sound pictures in 1930, when a new neon marquee was added, and soon became the city's leading venue for Spanish-language films and stage shows. After 1932, however, the theater was used mainly as a film house on "the wrong side of Broadway" with occasional stage shows.

In 1959, when the Balboa was to be razed in favor of a parking lot, it was purchased by the Russo Family Enterprises, remodeled and operated by the Fox chain. The Russo family took over its operation in 1976 and eventually leased it to Walnut Properties, which operated the Paris Pussycat Theatre nearby. Though no X-rated films ever were shown at the Balboa, its management by Walnut further tarnished its reputation at a time when downtown theaters were being demolished wholesale in the name of redevelopment.

Architects of the Horton Plaza Shopping Center incorporated the Balboa's distinctive tiled dome into the general look of the shopping center, thus guaranteeing that the exterior, at least, would survive. The City bought the Balboa in 1986 through condemnation, but a scheme to gut the theater and turn it into an art museum floundered. After that, years passed with various failed attempts to restore the theatre. The Centre City Development Corporation provided minimum maintenance and a handful of boosters sustained interest until, at last, the desirability of a restored Balboa Theatre became obvious to all. Today the result, one of the most skillful, attractive, useful and sophisticated theatre restorations in the country, speaks for itself and brings credit to CCDC, the City of San Diego and everyone involved.

Editors note: After an 18-year redevelopment battle, and a five-year, \$26.5-million restoration, the Balboa Theater again houses live performances open to the public. While there was a cast of many who helped preserve and protect the Balboa Theatre all along the way including representatives from SOHO, it was Steve and Mary Karo who founded Save Our Balboa Organization and kept the momentum moving. Through its receiving placement on the National Register of Historic Places to its now secure future, it is an irreplaceable piece of San Diego's heritage.

SURVIVORS FROM SAN DIEGO'S Theatrical Past

BY WELTON JONES

One day in February, 1898, a crew of cameramen from the Thomas Edison Company shot a fragment of motion picture film showing a double-decker trolley car moving through downtown San Diego. Undoubtedly, it was projected somewhere for somebody, though details of that first local movie premiere may be lost forever.

So is the story of the first public exhibition of the art that would dominate the 20th century, however some of the earliest public movie theatres are not only known but so far, at least, still exist.

The story of American movie theatres during the last century winds through a half-dozen distinct eras: early storefronts and existing theatres to the 1920s; movie palaces with stages into the 1930s; neighborhood film-only theatres well into the 1950s; drive-in theatres in the 1950s and 60s; centrally located big-screen houses in the 60s and 70s; and, beginning in 1969, multiplexes, mostly in shopping centers.

The California, 1927. Photo Sandé Lollis







Left Detail of the upper story of the exterior of the North Park Theatre. Built in 1928, it was renovated and reopened in 2005 as a live theatre venue; **right** The Loma (1945) is an example of adaptive reuse, its spectacular blade sign and marquee is a beloved community icon. Photos Sandé Lollis

A century of changes impacted the art. Talking pictures nearly killed popular live theatre. World War II brought a peak to the industry. Television wiped out B movies. Rising land costs doomed drive-ins. The concept of the art film was born, followed by a loosening of obscenity laws that inspired a small boom that brought blue movies back to some of the same storefronts used for the earliest films. Then video recordings killed that trend. The pattern was repeated all over the country.

In San Diego, the earliest movie shows were displayed either in existing legitimate (live drama) theatres like Madame Tingley's Isis Theatre (built as the Fisher

Opera House in 1892 on Fourth Street between B and C), and the Grand Theatre on Fifth Street between B and C (opened in 1887 as Louis' Opera House), or in flat-floored storefronts and saloons hastily converted for the purpose.

Apparently all these latter makeshift theatres included both movies and live entertainment called vaudeville, a pastiche of music, dancing and novelty acts. Information about these establishments comes mainly from a painstaking search of old newspaper advertisements.

The earliest known houses were the Unique, the Bijou,





Carteri, (1924). Its original terrazzo entry is still intact providing a colorful entrance to what is now a fabric store. Sewing notions and fabric are displayed in what would have housed movie playbills. Photo Sandé Lollis

The most interesting part of the record is a mixture of triumphant preservation and tragic misuse of the houses still standing in some fashion. The following is a list of theatres in the City of San Diego that were built specifically for or adapted for showing movies. In addition to the Electridom, the Dream and the Spreckels, these include:

Academy (1925) - 3721 University Avenue. A sad and abandoned victim of total neglect.

Balboa (1924) - 868 Fourth Avenue. The first downtown movie palace built for both films and live performance. The house was in continuous use until April, 1986, when it was bought by the city and rendered dark for the convenience of Horton Plaza Shopping Center. After a long battle, however, it has reopened triumphantly as a showplace of downtown live-theatre rebirth.

Cabrillo (1914) - 2171 Logan Avenue. Known by several other names: Logan Heights Theater (1917), Logan (1930), Southside (1934), and Metro (1935).

California (1917) - 665 Fifth Avenue. The name was changed to the Aztec in 1927 when the New California opened. Gutted, in use now as retail space.

Carteri (1924) - 3325 Adams Avenue. Later the Adams Avenue, it was closed in 1962. With its floor flattened, it now houses a fabric store; traces of its original festive terrazzo remain.

Casino (1913) - 647 Fifth Avenue. Gutted and its floor flattened, the building is now a chocolate shop.

Come Again (1914) - 2556 Imperial Avenue. Known as the Victory in 1930, it is still standing and used as a church. Original construction details visible from alley.

Fox (1929) - 710 B Street. The last movie palace opened just as the stock market fell. Long the downtown flagship theatre for first-run films, it spent years as a major legit roadhouse before being remodeled in 1985 as Copley Symphony Hall, home of the San Diego Symphony.

the Novelty and the Lyric, all bunched along Fourth and Fifth Streets south of D Street (now Broadway). The oldest one still standing may be the Electridom Theater, located at 759 Fifth Street in 1907, renamed the Union Theater in 1909. The same building may also have included the Dream Theatre, opened at 755 Fifth Street August 3, 1911 and later (1926) known as the U.S. Theatre. The site is now the home of the Olé Madrid Restaurant.

Without a doubt the oldest theatre still showing movies (occasionally) is the splendid Spreckels Theatre, San Diego's premiere show business treasure. Opened in 1912, the Spreckels (known briefly during World War I as the Hippodrome) has housed grand opera, symphony orchestras, ballet, all sorts of plays and musicals, popular concerts and first-run films. Built by John D. Spreckels as part of the city's ramp up to the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, the Spreckels was the first truly modern Broadway-type theatre built west of the Mississippi River and, although San Francisco, Denver, Dallas and Los Angeles soon caught up with that distinction, the

Spreckels remains one of the most beautiful and historic houses in the country.

Of the lost theatres, by far the most fascinating is the Airdrome, an outdoor theatre, which opened July 10, 1910, on the northwest corner of D Street (now Broadway) and Third Street (now Third Avenue) for a few months.

While Escondido seems to have had movies as early as 1911 with Emmott's Theatre (1911-1914) and the Midget (1913-15), the first major theatres outside downtown San Diego opened in 1913, La Jolla's Orient at 7877 Wall Street (still around as the Garden in 1924) and National City's Orpheum, at 726 National Avenue near WWII's "Little Times Square." (The city foolishly razed the Orpheum in 2001. Its sin, apparently, was its several years as a Paris Pussycat blue-movie house.)

Before 1990, when multi-screen complexes made the count meaningless, there had been at least 170 film theatres opened in San Diego County. Peak years were 1914 (10 theatres), 1930 (seven), 1950 (eight) and 1973 (nine).

Loma (1945) - 3150 Rosecrans Blvd. A lovely neighborhood house, now a chain bookstore.

New California (1927) - 1110 Fourth Avenue. By 1930 the theater became known as simply The California, and showed films and vaudeville. It closed on April 18, 1977, after which it was used intermittently for concerts and plays. The theater also served as the temporary playhouse for the Old Globe and the San Diego Repertory Theatre in the 1980s. It is now vacant and in a condition of advanced decay through neglect.

North Park (1928) - 2895 University Avenue. A neighborhood landmark for films and vaudeville performances, it was dark for many years, then restored in 2005 as a legitimate theatre.

Panama (1913) - 516 Fifth Avenue. The Building has been completely re-bricked, its original clay tile visible in rear alley.

Ramona (1922) - 3010 University Avenue. Now a retail store but original details still remain inside.

Rivoli (1923) - 656 Fifth Avenue. Across the street from the Casino and Aztec, this lovely small house was known by many names: Diana (1933), Savoy Penthouse (1974), Savoy Cinema X (1980) - and Bijou (1984). The floor has been flattened for restaurant use, the tragedy and comedy masks still visible on the façade, a bit forlorn.

Strand (1930) - 4952 Newport Avenue, Ocean Beach. One of the last single-screen, neighborhood theatre holdouts, its floor was flattened in the 1990s for retail.

There are several other structures still standing that were either built as or adapted in later years into movie theatres. Some of them, such as the Ken in Kensington, are still operating. Others, like Vista's Avo, have become live-theatre houses. Many of the wide-screen houses in Mission Valley and elsewhere now hold retail stores and retain no trace of their history; there is little of ongoing historical interest.

PROFESSIONAL THEATER COMES TO SAN DIEGO

BY DEAN GLASS

Although the American Dramatic Club, an amateur theatrical company comprised of United States soldiers of Company D, Third Artillery and their wives, presented theatrical performances at the San Diego Mission and the Franklin House in Old Town as early as 1858, it was not until ten years later that San Diego's first professional theater came on the scene. On November 1, 1868, Thomas W. Tanner rented the second story of the Whaley House in Old Town and use of Whaley's corral

for \$20 in gold coin as a venue for the Tanner Troupe, a band of entertainers lead by Tanner himself. With daughter Soledad as leading lady, the Tanner Troupe was to provide entertainment-starved San Diegans with "...a short season of his Moral, Chaste and Versatile Entertainments, consisting of Drama, Farce, Comedy, Singing and Dancing, Laughable Burlesques, Negro Delineations, &c..."¹ As it turned out, the season was even shorter than Tanner anticipated.

Tanner was permitted to remove twelve feet of studding to make an exhibition room large enough to seat "at least one hundred and fifty persons comfortably."² A flight of exterior stairs was added to the front balcony for access to the theater. In advertisements, the address of the new Tanner Troupe Theater was given simply as "the upper part of the BRICK HOUSE." In 1860's San Diego, this was sufficient.

With plans to make performances "a weekly affair"³, the Tanner Troupe Theater opened on December 2 at 8pm, with admission at 75 cents for reserved seats and 50 cents at the door (children were half price). *The San Diego Union* reviewed the opening:

THE TANNER TROUPE. The performance of this troupe on last Wednesday evening, considering the circumstances, was very creditable. The house was filled to utmost capacity; which is a matter of congratulation to the manager; and all seemed pleased with this first attempt in this place, at least, at a theatrical performance. Notwithstanding the perfectly apparent indisposition of Mr. Tanner, the bronchial affliction of Miss Soledad, the rawness of the novices, the defective musical arrangements, the want of capacity in the seating room, and the smallness of the stage, we may be pardoned for saying that our theater is a success. Owing to the continued indisposition of Mr. Tanner the performance which he announced for tonight is postponed until Wednesday evening next, after which the troupe will perform nightly.⁴

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

THEATER.

THE RENOWNED

TANNER TROUPE!

Proprietor, - - - T. W. TANNER

THE MANAGER has the honor to inform the citizens of San Diego, and Public generally, that, having Leased the upper part of the BRICK HOUSE, he has fitted up the Hall for the purpose of offering to the generous Public a short season, of his Moral, Chaste and Versatile Entertainments, consisting of Drama, Farce, Comedy, Singing and Dancing, Laughable Burlesques, Negro Delineations, &c., and hopes his untiring efforts to please, will meet with a Liberal Share of Patronage. He will offer his

FIRST EXHIBITION

On Wednesday, December 2nd.

☞ For Particulars see Programmes.

ADMISSION,..... 50 Cents
Children Half Price.
Reserved seats..... 75 Cents

Doors open at 7, Performance to commence at 8 o'clock, precisely.



Facing page Original advertisement for the December 2, 1868 opening of the Tanner Troupe Theater in “the Brick House.” **Above** Members of the Theatre Arts Guild of San Diego City College reenact the trial of notorious boat thief Yankee Jim Robinson in the Whaley House courtroom in the 1966 production of Frances Bardacke’s *The Ballad of Yankee Jim*. Although his trial actually occurred at San Diego’s first courthouse on the Plaza (now Old Town San Diego State Historic Park), Robinson was hanged on the property where the Whaley House now stands.

“The house was filled to utmost capacity; which is a matter of congratulation to the manager; and all seemed pleased with this first attempt in this place, at least, at a theatrical performance.”

- *San Diego Union*, November 21, 1868

**SEE THE
SPENCER & JACKSON
THEATRICAL TROUPE**



**Performing Three Days Only!
at the**

THEATRE IN THE WHALEY HOUSE

Friday • April 23 • 7:00pm

Saturday • April 24 • 5:00pm

Sunday • April 25 • 1:00pm

SOHO MEMBERS \$10 • NON-MEMBERS \$12

**Purchase tickets at (619) 297-9327 or (619) 297-7511
or at the Whaley House before each show
Call for availability**

Above Playbill for the Spencer & Jackson Traveling Theatrical Troupe, a group of actors, musicians and dancers who recreate a traveling Old West type show and gave three performances in the former Tanner Troupe Theater in 2002.

The 55-year-old Tanner's "indisposition" did not improve, and he died just fifteen days later on December 20. Nevertheless, the same issue of *The San Diego Union* that announced his passing also announced "there will be a performance at the Theater – Brick Building – Next Thursday evening."⁵ The show must go on, and it did:

TANNER TROUPE. On Thursday night the theater was filled with an appreciative audience to witness the second performance of the troupe. The performers are all youthful, but they acquitted themselves with credit and to the satisfaction of the audience. We have

not space in which to speak of the many excellencies of the youthful actors nor to point out the apparent defects which time and study may obviate. The music was one of the features of the evening; the dancing was graceful and the singing charming. We believe that the troupe is a permanent organization and will continue to cater weekly for the taste and pleasure of our citizens.⁶

Far from being a "permanent organization," the Tanner Troupe disbanded shortly after that performance. Soledad Tanner remained in San Diego, marrying Jesús Marrón and staging productions of *La Pastorela* performed by the children of Old Town. Notices in the *San Diego Union* indicate that for a short time after the Tanner Troupe vacated it, the Whaley House Theater was used by other performers: the San Diego Amateurs performed there on January 23; on February 9, the Minstrel Troupe gave "another of their varied entertainments" there, including "a match dance for the championship between Kennedy and a volunteer. Look out for fun."⁷; and a Mr. and Mrs. Connell appeared there on February 20. After this the Whaley House Theater closed, and by August the County of San Diego was renting the space for record storage. Around Christmas of 1869, a new theater with seating for 400 opened in Horton's Hall in New Town.

Although theater was to return to the Whaley House in 1966 with the production of Frances Bardacke's play *The Ballad of Yankee Jim*, a courtroom drama staged appropriately in the downstairs courtroom, it would not be until 133 years after the Tanner Troupe's premiere that theater returned to the original upstairs space.

Right The Whaley House Theater as it is today, restored in 2001. Photo Sandé Lollis.



In 2001 SOHO began restoration to transform the space, which had formerly been displayed as a bedroom/sitting room suite, back to its most historically significant use as San Diego's first commercial theater. Complete with a raked stage and painted backdrop, the room was ready by December 2001 when SOHO presented a new musical adaptation of O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*, directed and produced by longtime SOHO Board Member Welton Jones.

Today, visitors to the Whaley House Museum can see where professional theater first arrived in San Diego 140 years ago.

Notes

¹ Whaley Papers.

² *The San Diego Union*, November 21, 1868.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The San Diego Union*, December 5, 1868.

⁵ *The San Diego Union*, December 26, 1868.

⁶ *The San Diego Union*, January 2, 1869.

⁷ *The San Diego Union*, February 6, 1869.





Googie:

*An Architectural Link
to San Diego's
Midcentury Culture*

BY KRISTIN
REICHARDT KIRWAN

Here's a

POP QUIZ

for longtime residents and architecture buffs of San Diego: What architectural common denominator do the pre-renovation El Cortez Center, the former Aztec Bowl on 30th Street in North Park, and Oceanside's Surf Bowl and Star Theater share?

With their upswept roofs, bold angles and starburst shapes on their signs, these landmarks are classic examples of Googie architecture, the dramatic, pluralistic, and sometimes maligned style that first flourished in the 1950s and 60s in the form of Southern California coffee shops and bowling alleys, then spread across the nation. Here, the post and beam aspired skyward; roofs slanted as if suspended in the sky. A typical Googie interior, meanwhile, featured more organic elements: terrazzo floors, rock (or so-called "flag-crete") accent walls, and tropical leafy plants. Coffee shops, with staccato names like Ship's, Biff's, and Kit's, were not the uniform, green-awned franchises of today; architecture critic Alan Hess, author of *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*, describes them as places where "Fred Flintstone and George Jetson could meet over a cup of coffee." Similarly, Googie-era bowling alleys were spacious, mid-century public centers that served as much for relaxing and socializing as for racking up strikes and spares.

As Southern California orange groves were being bulldozed to accommodate postwar suburban development, Googie architecture popularized the emerging industries of aerospace and the automobile. The vast plate glass windows of Googie buildings functioned as paeans to the automobile in that they effectively broke down inside/outside barriers: the car was not to be hidden

Preserving these examples results in streets that are richer in character and variety, and for San Diego, also honors a crucial period of our city's industrial history.



or ignored. Today's best example of retro-Googie architecture, the In-n-Out Burger chain, was California's first drive-through. Meanwhile, Southern California in the 1950s was also ground zero for aircraft and aerospace development and manufacturing. Other aerodynamically eye-catching forms, including signs with starburst shapes and lettering that was both bulging and angular, reflected the clean and shining surfaces of rocket ships during the USA-USSR space race.

Locally, companies including Convair and Ryan Aeronautical distinguished San Diego as a leader in the aerospace industry. While Los Angeles and Orange County may have been Googie's epicenter, our city boasted its own treasures, some of which continue to be landmarks. In 1956, downtown's El Cortez Center was adorned with the glittering Starlight Express elevator, an

left The Star Theater, with its soaring, glittering mast, is one of Oceanside's Googie relics; **above** The bulging, angular letters of the Aztec Bowl sign are typical of the Googie style. The bowling alley itself, however, no longer stands.



exterior column of glass that whisked passengers up to the Starlight and Sky Rooms, whose angled wings, now removed, tilted up to the heavens. Another Googie creation of 1956 was Oceanside's Star Theater (note the recurring celestial theme). With *Moby Dick* as its inaugural feature, the bespangled Star boasted the largest marquee in San Diego County. Finally, two local bowling alleys, one demolished, one still very active, continue to impart their retro-futuristic character to local streets. The actual structure of the former, the Aztec Bowl on 30th Street, is no more, having been replaced by, surprise, condominiums, but the pointy letters and starbursts of its surviving sign testify to an earlier, more dynamic glory. The prominent sign outside the latter, Oceanside's Surf Bowl, hits the Googie trifecta, with an otherworldly amoeba, a spiky starburst and a tapering vertical pylon. For more examples of San Diego Googie, seek out neighborhoods that are yet to experience urban renewal: along El Cajon Boulevard, or

the Oceanside stretch of 101. The humbler Googie structures of these areas, often in the form of office buildings and liquor stores, may not evoke the clean lines and pure forms of other mid-century architecture, but are rarely boring or repetitive.

Just as compelling as the arguments for its preservation was the criticism directed against Googie. Firstly, its unashamed commercialism and reflection of popular tastes were enough to stoke the bias against it. Furthermore, many architectural critics preferred a minimalist aesthetic, in contrast to what they saw as Googie's "arbitrary flamboyance." Alan Hess compares these critics to "missionaries condemning the immorality of Tahitian natives who failed to dress for dinner." Finally, many distinctive Googie features: eaves, pylons with circular cutouts, were crafted for aesthetic value only and did not necessarily express the actual structure, leading Modernist purists to dismiss Googie as "dishonest," or a "corruption" of Modernism. The ornate nature of Googie violated the Modernist preference for minimalism and functionalism.

Like art deco, Googie was undervalued until many of its finest designs had been destroyed or permanently maimed. Some of its skyward-slanting roofs were relegated to junkyards, as was the final destination of the soaring, angled pylons of the Laurel Canyon Car Wash in the San Fernando Valley. Others were handed an equally inglorious fate: they were replaced in the 1970s by painfully dull mansard/Spanish Revival hybrid roofs. These unfortunate "restorations" were a result of attempts by well-meaning but uninformed organizations to preserve historically significant structures without first hiring a preservation architect or consultant. The namesake of the Googie style itself, a 1948 Los Angeles coffee shop, was demolished in the 1980s.

To be sure, not all Googie is great architecture, but the best designs reflected their culture, function, and geography as capably and colorfully as any architectural style. Preserving these examples results in streets that are richer in character and variety, and for San Diego, also honors a crucial period of our city's industrial history. Additionally, it was arguably no accident that this populist, pluralistic style reflected these establishments' role as gathering places for community life, opportunities that are increasingly difficult to find today. As an architectural manifestation of the era, therefore, it would be difficult to argue how preservation of better-received regional styles (the bungalow house, for one), would be more important in terms of capturing Southern California history.

Author Kristin Reichardt Kirwan is a native San Diegan and a freelance writer specializing in topics related to architecture, design, and history. She lives in Carlsbad with her husband and daughter.



left The toothpick-shaped pylon of the Surf Bowl still beckons groups of bowlers to its lively alleys; *right* The El Cortez Hotel with neon Sky Room sign, Starlight Express elevator, and the angled roof lines of the 1956 Starlight Room since removed.

All photos by Kristen Reichardt Kirwan, historic postcard image courtesy Sandé Lollis.

NORTH PARK'S NEON

BY GEORGE FRANCK

Neon is derived from the Greek word “neos,” meaning “new gas.” Neon light can be documented back to 1675, when French astronomer Jean Picard noted that mercury in a sealed barometric tube emitted a faint glow. Another Frenchman, George Claude, created the first neon light in 1855 by applying an electrical charge to neon gas enclosed in a Geissler tube.

The first neon lamp became available in 1902, but neon tubes were quite fragile and therefore difficult to ship. Local production of neon signs exploded when the patent for neon lighting expired in 1932.

While North Park's commercial districts began developing with the arrival of the Streetcar in 1907, downtown North Park experienced its greatest growth in the late 1930s and the decade following the Second World War. The popularity of neon signage peaked during this same period. Today North Park retains a handful of interesting neon signs, but it is uncertain how many neon signs along old US Highway 80, in North Park's commercial core and in its neighborhoods have been lost. During this same pre- and post War growth period, similar neon signage was being included in suburban San Diego town centers and along the region's highways.

Today, North Park's best-known neon signs are on University Avenue: the 1935 Pekin Café sign, the animated Wink's Shoe Repair sign just west of 30th Street, and the reconstructed North Park Sign, which was initially fabricated in 1935.



North Park's most elaborately detailed neon sign advertises a Chinese restaurant, located just west of the North Park Theatre. The building was originally built as a furniture store in 1921; the Cho Book You Restaurant opened there in 1931. Following the repeal of prohibition, the restaurant emerged as a dinner house with dancing. To advertise this evolution, the restaurant's name was changed to the Pekin Café and the façade was modified in 1935 with the addition of this early neon sign.

Located on a storefront immediately south of the North Park community sign, the animated neon sign for Wink's Shoe Repair Shop was originally designed in 1949 for a shop on Broadway in downtown San Diego. Wink's and this North Park shoe shop became part of the 30-store American Shoe Repair chain during the 1950s; the chain's owner moved the sign to North Park in 1960.

Designated as a San Diego Historical Resource, on this neon can sign an elf hammers on a shoe, with his arm and hammer moving into three positions. As the hammer strikes the shoe, neon sparks fly into the elf's eye, causing him to Wink.

The original North Park sign was purchased with money raised by the community's business group and its women's auxiliary, and first suspended over the intersection of 30th Street and University Avenue in 1935. The original was about the same size as the current one, but it had straight edges and its original color is not known and North Park was spelled with neon letters.

The sign was lowered after the removal of the streetcar wires in 1949 and was fabricated in the current scalloped shape sometime prior to 1958. It was removed for repair in 1967, but was never returned. In 1993, the current sign was placed on a column in the median of University Avenue, just

left Wink's Shoe Repair (1949), photo ©2008, Ashi Fachler, and **right** Pekin Café (1935) both on University Avenue, photo Sandé Lollis



Increasing automobile use after World War II encouraged the development of a suburban commercial corridor along El Cajon Boulevard, with off-street parking lots and neon signage.

west of 30th Street. Shortly thereafter, a new neon sign identifying old US Highway 80 - The Boulevard - commercial corridor was placed at the west end of El Cajon Boulevard, just east of Park Boulevard, also in North Park.

A number of neon signs remain just off of University Avenue. Most notably, the Stern's Gym sign identifies the second-floor gym that Leo Stern opened on

believed to be the oldest Chinese laundry still operating in San Diego. To the north of University Avenue, a neon sign locates the FLT-Sunset Temple on the Kansas Street side of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Hall, next to the Claire De Lune coffee shop.

Increasing automobile use after World War II encouraged the development of a suburban commercial corridor along El Cajon Boulevard, with off-street parking lots and neon

"In the early years neon signs stopped traffic as people stared in fascination and it wasn't long before neon was everywhere. Theater marquee, night club and restaurant signs became an integral part of the streamlined American landscape." - Joan Bramsch

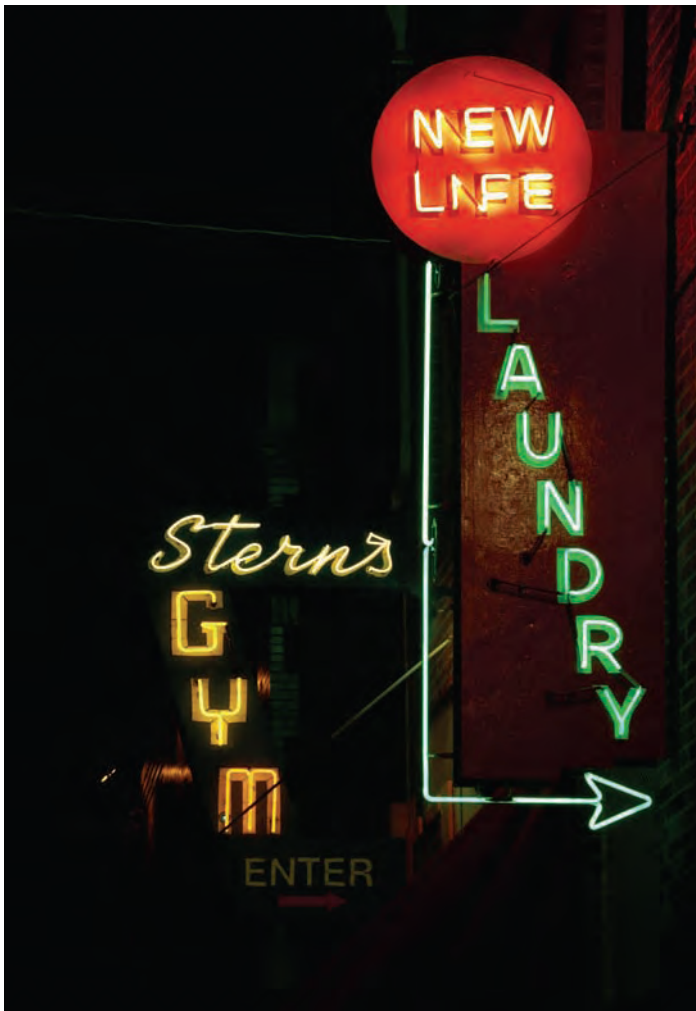
Granada Street in 1948. This sign was in use when Steve Reeves (movie's Hercules), Lou Ferrigno (television's Incredible Hulk) and now-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger worked out there. A second neon sign on the same brick building identifies the New Life Chinese Laundry. Founded in 1961, the New Life is

signage. The streamline Rudford's Restaurant storefront is topped with its name in neon script. Farther west at the up-scale Imig Hotel, now the Lafayette, the location of the Red Fox Room Restaurant is advertised in capital neon letters. Located just to the west of North Park, is Frank the Trainman's neon locomotive, although Frank's store was redeveloped, this wonderful historic sign remains.

During the 1950s, bowling alleys appeared in nearly every suburb in America. North Park was no exception, with the Aztec Bowl and its parking lot located on 30th Street just north of the Boulevard. A tall neon sign, with a separate, backlit Aztec face element was located over the building. When the Bowling Alley was redeveloped for housing, the sign was relocated to the edge of the project and remains visible from 30th Street just north of the Boulevard.

Although located slightly outside of North Park, no list of El Cajon Boulevard neon signs would be complete without noting Frank the Trainman's neon locomotive at Park Boulevard. Although Frank's store has been redeveloped, his wonderful sign was moved to the replacement office building. And, of course, a towering neon majorette used to mark the College Drive-In Theater on the Boulevard to the east of North Park. SOHO now owns this landmark sign, which was relocated to the College Grove Shopping Center when the drive-in was redeveloped.

Left Stern's Gym (1948) and New Life Laundry (1961) side by side on Granada Street; **facing page top** Frank the Trainman's animated sign, when lit up it appears to have smoke coming from the stack and steam from the cylinders as the drive rods and wheels roll. Photos Sandé Lollis. **Bottom** Jimmy Wong's Golden Dragon restaurant (1955) in nearby Hillcrest is a San Diego icon. Photo Dan Soderberg





And back on University Avenue, the Palisades Gardens Roller Rink at Utah Street was demolished in the mid-1980s. Although its large neon word signs are lost, a recent remodel of the replacement building now has cursive neon lettering that again declares: Palisades Gardens, but at a much smaller size.

The North Park Community Association History Committee published a book on North Park last year and is transitioning into an independent Historical Society for the community. The Society is working with several groups to develop historical neighborhood walking tours; the tour of the commercial district was the genesis of this article. As with the first book, the long-range objective of the Society is to document the history of North Park, perhaps with a second book on the community's mid-twentieth century events and architecture. Neon is a part of that history.

A retired SANDAG planner, George Franck (AICP) volunteers with the North Park History Committee and is a member of SOHO's Modernism Committee.



A General Plan of

Destruction 40 years of preservation progress at risk

BY BRUCE COONS

The city's single successful incentive to protect our historic resources is the Mills Act. Last month the Mayor of San Diego presented his plan for reforming the Mills Act. His misguided focus on this minor line item in the city's budget was the false claim that Mills Act contracts result in some tax loss to the community. This is an argument filled with factual errors, which resulted in erroneous conclusions and proposed remedies that would actually have tremendous negative impacts to both city revenues and the local economy.

The real story behind this push to destroy or render useless the Mills Act, is that the Building Industry Association (BIA), the development industry's lobbyist, has been pressuring the Mayor to pave the way for wholesale development in our historic neighborhoods. The BIA has been very public with great concern that they are running out of land on which to build and without the ability to scrape our historic neighborhoods they will be out of business.

SOHO has explained in detail the many ways that the BIA's members can continue to have sustainable growth while preserving and enhancing our city. However, this requires a paradigm shift in their thinking and they seem to want none of it. What they do want is the ability to run roughshod over the hopes, needs and desires of our communities for their short term financial gain resulting in permanent loss to all.

California's Office of Historic Preservation, (OHP) explains that the benefits to local governments are many, "The Mills Act allows local governments to design preservation programs to accommodate specific community needs and priorities for rehabilitating entire neighborhoods, encouraging seismic safety programs, contributing to affordable housing, promoting heritage tourism, or fostering pride of ownership. Local governments have adopted the Mills Act because they recognize the economic benefits of conserving resources and reinvestment as well as the important role historic preservation can play in revitalizing older areas, creating cultural tourism, building civic pride, and retaining the sense of place and continuity with the community's past."

The assertion is that the city coffers are being adversely affected by a total tax break of \$600,000 across the entire city, for the entire program. We think the mayor might want to look elsewhere for balancing the budget. He might want to begin, by looking at the money spent each year by the city to subsidize the building industry, an aberrant amount, and the compromises made to developers that leave communities without adequate infrastructure, a loss of integrity and an increased density that is not in keeping with the character of our neighborhoods. Juxtapose this with the Mills Act, a highly successful voluntary program that positively affects the quality and standards of life in communities. To be eligible for Mills Act a home must be designated first, and studies prove property values are higher for non-historic homes in the vicinity of designated homes or districts, providing a greater quality of life and additionally, an increase in property taxes overall.

While the Mayor's plan is off base, there are some areas of the Mills Act that can and should be improved. We are supporting a number of other reforms to the program; these reforms and others outlined in SOHO's recommendations are ones we have been advocating for years. Since these recommendations and response was issued to the City, SOHO has taken legal action on the city's General Plan including the Mill Act.

On April 14, 2008, SOHO sued the City of San Diego, challenging approval of the new General Plan and related amendments to its Land Development Code without compliance with state law protecting historic resources. The lawsuit also challenges the City's failure to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). San Diego County Superior Court Case No. 37-2008-00081864-CU-WM-CTL is now pending before Judge Ronald Prager.

The General Plan relies upon a mitigation framework to reduce impacts to historic resources. Mitigation includes, among other things, reliance on the Mills Act that provides tax incentives for rehabilitation of qualified historic

“So bleak is the picture... that the bulldozer and not the atomic bomb may turn out to be the most destructive invention of the 20th century.” - Philip Shabecoff, New York Times Magazine, June 4, 1978

properties. However, the City is already contemplating changes to its implementation of the Mills Act, upon recommendation of the Mayor that would significantly reduce protections to historic resources in contravention of law. While some of the changes proposed to the City's Mills Act program relative to monitoring and enforcement would be beneficial, some suggested changes would unlawfully reduce feasible mitigations of General Plan impacts to historic resources or are otherwise contrary to state law.

The lawsuit also claims that the EIR for the General Plan failed to include an adequate analysis of the environmental setting and of the impacts of build-out relative to historic, cultural, and archaeological resources; failed to identify areas most likely to face development-related impacts to historic resources; failed to identify and analyze feasible programmatic mitigation measures and a reasonable range of alternatives to address potentially significant impacts of the General Plan and its implementing ordinances on historic resources; and deferred adoption of programmatic mitigation to future study and to undefined community plans and the improperly deferred General Plan Action Plan.

We urgently require financial contributions to help pay for the legal, research and organizing efforts that are required in order to protect our region's treasures and identity. We cannot allow politicians and development interests to destroy the only tools we have for protecting the places that matter to us.

Our lawsuit regarding the General Plan's failure to adequately preserve our communities and the Mills act is the first of many such legal efforts in what likely will be a long and bitter battle to save the Mills Act and keep San Diego looking like someplace, not just any place. This filing was initiated with a \$25,000 payment and will require substantial financial resources to see this battle to a successful conclusion.

We cannot do this alone, you can make a real difference with your donation to the SOHO Legal Defense Fund. You may donate easily on line or by sending a check to SOHO at 2476 San Diego Avenue, San Diego CA 92110.

It is important to make your feelings known directly to the mayor, write, email or call. Office of the Mayor, City Administration Building, 11th Floor, 202 C Street, San Diego CA 92101. (619) 236-6330 JerrySanders@sandiego.gov

SOHO's Recommendations

1. SOHO could support moving up the application deadline from October 1 to an earlier date perhaps July 31, but not March 31.
2. SOHO would support fair fee increases to recover staff time to administer the program.
3. SOHO strongly supports inspections of Mills Act properties and we support annual inspections instead of every five years as suggested by the Mayor.
4. SOHO would entertain contracting with the city to perform the inspections. Fees should represent actual costs.
5. SOHO strongly supports tailored contracts for each property to insure the continued maintenance and preservation of the historic structure and to allow structures that are not already restored to be regulated and restored.
6. We are adamantly opposed to the Mayor's suggested eligibility requirements, as they would exclude virtually all historic buildings from the program. Eligibility requirements could reasonably be changed to read that Mills Act contracts must further the goals of the General Plan.

We are adamantly opposed to any sort of cap, as this would reduce the current protections in place and leave many historic resources vulnerable to demolition that are not currently in danger.

Items #5 and #6 would require preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) with adequate mitigation to implement. Some of the other items would also have this requirement if not modified. To avoid a lengthy and expensive EIR process will require cooperation of all parties arriving at a sensible solution.

SOHO is challenging the legality of the Mayor's suggested changes if they are not modified, as currently proposed they violate State law.

SOHO strongly supports recommendation to increase the HRB staff to effectively handle the demands of the program and ensure protection of our historic resources.

Preservation Community

People protecting the places that matter to them

Mission Hills Historic District Appeal BY BARRY HAGER

100 years after the filing of the original subdivision map of Mission Hills on January 20, 1908, the San Diego City Council unanimously voted to deny the appeal of the Mission Hills Historic District. The decision made by the Historic Resources Board (HRB) on July 16, 2007 to approve the district stands.

Over 60 Mission Hills neighbors and historic preservation advocates attended the City Council meeting to support the historic district. Letters of support also came from local preservation organizations such as SOHO, Mission Hills Heritage, Hillcrest History Guild and the University Heights Historic Society, as well as the western office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the State Office of Historic Preservation in Sacramento.



Dr. Leon Casper & Dr. Louise Davis Long House (1919), part of the new Mission Hills Historic District. Photo Barry Hager

UNIVERSITY HOUSE/CHANCELLOR'S HOUSE ***Saved from Demolition!***

After four years of community protest UC San Diego has withdrawn their plan to demolish the 56-year-old chancellor's house, known as the University House. University officials announced that demolition is no longer part of the plan and instead that they will be pursuing a renovation and rehabilitation plan.

Built in 1952 by master architect William Lumpkins for William Black, (Black's Beach, etc.), it is a rare example of the Pueblo Revival style. The historic home was acquired in 1967, along with 130 surrounding acres, by UCSD for \$2.7 million and has housed almost

every UCSD chancellor since 1967. UCSD had the home condemned in 2004 citing seismic deficiencies, plumbing, electrical and structural problems.

Fortunately, the Native American community took the lead and fought the plan from the start, noting the sacred Indian burial site underneath. They not only funded their own legal action but also provided funds for the designation report. The La Jolla Historical Society also took a vocal stand and commissioned the successful report that got the site placed on the National Register of Historic Places. SOHO provided both *(continued on page 39)*

“There may have been a time when preservation was about saving an old building here and there, but those days are gone. Preservation is in the business of saving communities and the values they embody.”

- Richard Moe, President National Trust for Historic Preservation

KENSINGTON Sign Receives Designation

BY MAGGIE McCANN & CELIA CONOVER

On Thursday, April 24th, the Kensington Sign earned a new name, Historical Resources Board Site #865. The board unanimously voted in favor, with one member commenting that they were surprised it hadn't already received one. Other board members acknowledged how wonderful the sign is in its simplicity, its authenticity and how it appears to float over Adams Avenue.

The sign has done so since it was installed in 1954 by a group of businessmen wanting to promote the Adams Avenue commercial district east of what is now SR-15. The sign epitomizes the Modern aesthetic, with its clean design, rounded corners, straightforward white letter forms and green background, complemented by the glow of rose neon by night. Even the support poles and suspension cables are understated.

Built of galvanealed steel with a baked enamel finish and hand-crafted neon tubing, the sign was purchased by the Kensington Park Business Association from the San Diego NEON Sign Company for a cost of \$1,166.

The Kensington sign, along with the Normal Heights sign, are the only two original neon community signs left in San Diego. Others, such as the Hillcrest sign, have been fully rebuilt or replicated.

The nomination came at a critical point in the sign's history because it was slated for demolition and replacement by the group that has owned and maintained the sign since 1964, the Kensington-Talmadge Community Association.

They had been led to believe the sign must be replaced and had raised a significant amount of

money through donations and a grant to create a new sign in its place. The historic designation will most certainly change these plans, and give the community the assurance that this very special icon will continue to identify the neighborhood of Kensington.

The Kensington sign not only marks the business district east of SR-15 as it was originally intended to do, the familiar icon has come to represent the entire neighborhood of Kensington.



The Kensington sign, Historical Resources Board Site #865. Photo Sandé Lollis

Toll Road



On February 7, 2008 California Coastal Commission denied the 241 Toll Road Extension that would cut across San Onofre State Beach. The Commission rejected the proposed Foothill-South freeway project, a 16-mile toll road extension of state Route 241.

Advocates from the Native American community, the Save Trestles organization, numerous environmental groups and SOHO turned out in record-breaking numbers to oppose the proposed toll road.

After more than twelve hours of testimony and deliberation, the Commission voted 8-2 to reject the shortsighted and devastatingly destructive highway plan.

The park contains seven archaeological sites, including a Juaneño Indian village; three historic sites include the first Christian baptisms in California, the Adobe Ranch House of San Mateo, the 1880's town of Forster; and of course, the world-famous Trestles surfing area, itself a cultural and historic site. Seven threatened or endangered species live within the park, and it protects significant portions of San Mateo Creek, one of the last relatively unspoiled watersheds in Southern California.

This victory was gained by thousands of concerned citizens who inundated county and state officials with phone calls and messages, and who turned out time and again in huge numbers to defend San Onofre over these past years. The State Coastal Commission staff is also to be commended for their comprehensive report, as well as the Commission



**Historic Trestles -
Renowned surf spot
at San Onofre State
Beach. Courtesy
Daytrippen.com**

itself who voted on behalf of the resource and did not bow to the enormous political pressure to do otherwise.

We thank all of the SOHO members who wrote letters, made calls and attended the hearings. The Irvine-based Transportation Corridor Agencies, which are proposing the toll road, have appealed the commission's ruling to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and have vowed to do everything they can to go against the will of the people of California. We will have to remain vigilant and persistent in our demand to protect this irreplaceable part of our heritage.

Contributed by SOHO Preservation Action Committee.

Neighborhood Historic Preservation Coalition

BY JANET O'DEA

The Neighborhood Historic Preservation Coalition, (NHCP), initially came together by organizing Uptown groups (such as the Hillcrest History Guild and the University Heights Historical Society) because of community-wide concerns over a proposed historic survey that threatened over half of the properties in Uptown. During review of the General Plan the Coalition focus shifted to become much broader. The concerns became the treatment of the historic resources in all of our established communities. Since significant policy decisions in the General Plan emphasized in-fill in many of our historic communities the direction of the Coalition rapidly shifted to encompass all of the historic communities.

How is SOHO involved? Since SOHO has always been involved in the treatment of our historic assets, they have naturally been involved as we have grappled with these issues. SOHO has provided expertise and guidance to us as we organized and attended meetings to galvanize community support for issues that so greatly impact the character and charm of our established communities.

How can you get involved? Our aim is to reach out to all of the neighborhood groups with concern for San Diego's historic resources. NHPC is now an organization of community groups. Its members are the representatives of organizations that also advocate for protection of some of the most significant resources in the city of San Diego. Member organizations include: SOHO, The Black Historical Society, Burlingame Homeowner's Association, Golden Hill Community Development Corp, Albatross Neighborhood Association, Bankers Hill/Park West Community Association, Heart of Kensington, Hillcrest History Guild, La Playa Heritage, Mission Hills Heritage, Normalites for Normal Heights, University Heights Historical Society and others are joining as of this publication deadline.

If your organization would like to align with us and become involved with the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition please contact Janet O'Dea at info@HazArts.com.

Unearthing the Long-Buried Whaley House Cistern

BY DEAN GLASS

In the summer of 2007 Dr. Seth Mallios, Anthropology professor at San Diego State University, brought a team of student and professional archaeologists to the Whaley House Museum to excavate the Whaley's long-buried rainwater cistern. A rainwater cistern is a receptacle for storing rainwater, in this case through a drainpipe from the roof of the Whaley House, as opposed to a well, which captures groundwater. Since the August 22, 1885 issue of the *San Diego Sun* referred to the structure as a "deep well," Dr. Mallios believes that the Whaley cistern did both.

The cistern played an important part in the dark history of the Whaley House, when Thomas Whaley's daughter Violet attempted suicide by jumping into it: "On July 5th, I was harnessing my horse and heard a scream, issuing from the cistern. Went there and found Violet holding to the pipe. Asked if she could hold on. She said yes. I ran to the house and told my wife Violet had jumped into the cistern."¹ Although this suicide attempt was unsuccessful, on August 19, 1885 Violet Whaley fatally shot herself with her father's 32-calibre Smith & Wesson pistol in the backyard privy.

The location of the Whaley cistern was pinpointed using Thomas Whaley's 1872 map of the property in which the cistern was indicated by a circle inside of a square approximately 20' behind the house, and a slight sunken circular indentation in the brick walkway in the same location.



Top Dr. Seth Mallios discusses the excavation with visitors to the Whaley House Complex; **bottom** Over 1,000 cumulative hours of fieldwork resulted in the recovery of over 30,000 artifacts, some of which date to the late 19th century. Pictured are Scott Mattingly and Hillary Sweeney.

¹Thomas Whaley, quoted in *The San Diego Union*, August 20, 1885.

“With its central location, public access, and rich history, the Whaley House site could become one of the premier programs for urban archaeology in the country.” - Dr. Seth Mallios



After twelve weeks of digging and over 1,000 cumulative hours of fieldwork, Dr. Mallios and his crew from SDSU’s South Coastal Information Center, David Caterino, Destiny Larberg, Jaime Lennox, Scott Mattingly, and Hillary Sweeney, unearthed more than 30,000 artifacts including numerous complete bottles, pottery, animal bones, architectural debris, and tools, some dating to the late 19th century. Dr. Mallios’s complete report on the 2007 dig as well as photographs is available in its entirety at whaleyhouse.org, under What’s New.



Dr. Mallios and his team will be back in the summer of 2008, beginning the third week in July, to continue excavating the cistern. You will be able to watch the dig as it progresses via streaming media at whaleyhouse.org. Dr. Mallios believes that “with its central location, public access, and rich history, the Whaley House site could become one of the premier programs for urban archaeology in the country. It has remarkable potential for annual summer field schools and year-round research and teaching programs.” When the excavation is complete, the cistern will be reconstructed as part of the ongoing restoration of the Whaley House and grounds.

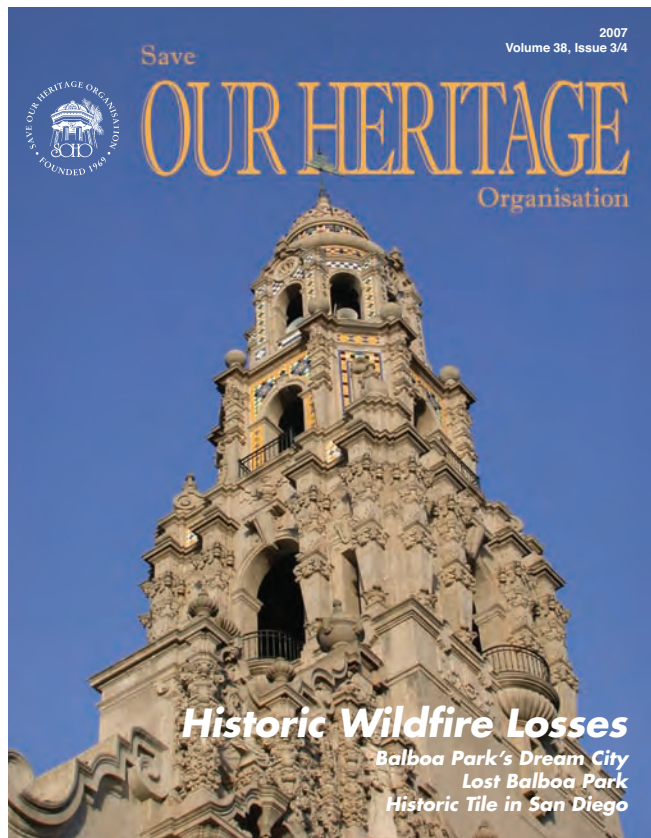
Top The team excavated the east half of the feature to a depth of 5 feet, and exposed an old brick path that was sealed by a more modern flower bed (top left corner.); **bottom** Excavators troweled and shoveled each layer into buckets and screened 100% of the fill through 1/8” steel mesh. They saved all cultural material, then poured all of the screened soil into sandbags which were stored at the site.

Editor’s note: This second year of excavation requires much more time and effort now that the extent of the project is known. In order to continue this important work, SOHO will be raising funds to help with some of the expenses. The University’s program is donating thousands of hours and we are asking for donations to help us reach the goal of \$5,000.

REFLECTIONS

Our Heritage magazine wins National EXCEL Award

Each year, the Society of National Association Publications (SNAP) holds a competition to recognize and reward the exemplary work of association publishers.



SNAP is a nonprofit, professional society serving the needs of association publishers and communications professionals. Their mission in part is to develop and maintain high editorial and advertising standards and to foster effective relationships among publishers, communications professionals, and industry providers.

The EXCEL program judges over 1,000 magazines, newsletters, scholarly journals, electronic publications and websites. A panel of publication and communication experts make up the jury and

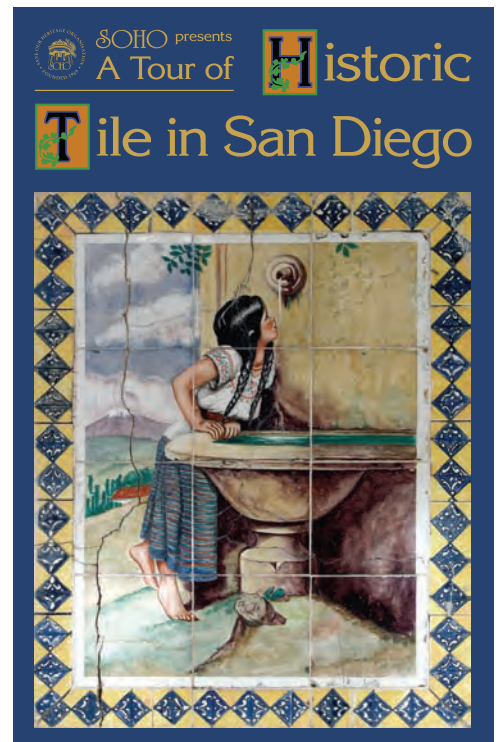
we are proud to announce that *Our Heritage* won in the most improved category. The award announcement letter stated in part that “Your submission displayed superior quality and truly is The Best and the Brightest in the association community.”

An awards ceremony is scheduled later in the year in Washington DC.

SOHO Chosen as Tile Heritage Hub

The Tile Heritage Foundation is a nonprofit charitable organization, dedicated to promoting an awareness and appreciation of ceramic surfaces in the United States. The organization has become a major voice in the preservation of existing installations of rare and unusual ceramic surfaces while enhancing the visibility of contemporary tile work as well.

Tile Hubs are designated locations throughout the United States where people can go to talk tile and to seek information about local tile installations. Joseph Taylor of the Foundation wrote us after he and cofounder Sheila Menzies presented the historic tile of San Diego portion of the 2008 preservation weekend and said, “Wow, what a tile treat you and your crew provided the folks of San Diego. In all the years we have held tile symposiums around the country, I can’t remember a time when more local people showed up to share in the experience. I was taken aback when the adobe church filled to capacity,



and then to find the two trolleys packed as well. I can only wonder how many people you turned away! Thanks so much for including us.”

The Foundation was so impressed with the level of interest here that SOHO was invited to become a Tile Hub. Joe further stated, “We require that a Tile Hub have a map or list of installations, and you certainly have that. Plus you have your vast assortment of tile books and catalogs for people to browse through and purchase and that a tile hub is basically a place where people can go to find out about local tile installations.

We ask that SOHO members email us photos and locations of historic tile installations that you know of so that they may be added to our online tile hub.

Preservation Weekend Wrap Up

SOHO’s annual preservation weekend was once again a successful three days of educational and interesting lectures, architectural tours and historic homes. The event drew attention in national magazines for our emphasis on topics not usually covered, such as historic tile and Tiki architecture. For the Home Tour we chose Mission Hills after a 5-year hiatus to celebrate that community’s 100th anniversary. With several Mission Hills Heritage board members opening their homes

and other community leaders following suit we had, by all accounts, one of the best home tours in years. Two stunning examples of William Templeton Johnson were shown, along with an early example of master architect Wayne McAllister’s work, and two of Mission Hills’ most beautiful Craftsman homes.

National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) Visits San Diego

Preserving Historic Places in Parks was the focus of a three-day Western Preservation Leaders Meeting in April, in partnership with the NTHP Western Office, SOHO, Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, California State Parks Foundation and San Diego County Parks and Recreation.

About sixty preservation leaders and professionals from eight western states gathered to examine preservation successes and ongoing threats to historic resources during a series of panel discussions and tours of San Diego.

A portion of the conference focused on historic preservation in state parks and preservation’s essential role in fighting global warming. Tours covered a wide span of San Diego’s preservation projects, including the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Old Town, currently undergoing its extensive restoration, and the newly restored Balboa Theatre. The downtown



Far left Cover of Volume 38, Issue 3/4, our award-winning magazine; left cover of our March 2008 Tile Tour booklet; above Western preservation leaders touring the historic Warehouse District. Photo Anthony Veerkamp

Warehouse District was the topic of a presentation and tours, as was Chicano Park's nationally significant collection of murals, and of course our great city park, Balboa Park was featured.

Special thanks to SOHO members who played a large part in the successful event, Anthony Block, Vykki Mende Gray, Mike Kelly, David Marshall, Marty Rosen, and David Swarens. We thank State and County park staffs, along with Whaley House Museum staff, and a very special word of appreciation for the planning and implementation prowess of Hugh Rowland and Anthony Veerkamp of the Western region office of the NTHP, which completed the picture of cooperation and work ethic that made this program so outstanding.

The SOHO Lady

Last issue we were remiss in not reporting on the nearly 40-year-old tradition of the passing of the SOHO lady to a deserving volunteer or leader in preservation work for SOHO. This is a special honor awarded for efforts above and beyond the call of duty. It is always a surprise presentation made totally and arbitrarily by the previous recipient, who presents it at our annual membership and board election event.

This award itself was originated by Courtney and Denise Gonzales who first presented it in 1969, the year SOHO was founded. That year's recipient was Peggy and Tom Shepley who added the stipulation to the award that it must always be on public display for the full year in the recipient's home and that SOHO members are apt to check at any time!

The 2007 winner is Erik Hanson who received it from the 2006 winner, Welton Jones. A wooden plaque with winners names engraved on brass hangs in the SOHO offices. When Welton was making his decision, which is always kept secret, he was astonished to see that Erik, who has been one of the stalwarts of SOHO for over 20 years had never received the honor. So he rectified the oversight with an eloquent, humorous and heartfelt speech in presenting the lovely lady to Erik.

Earth Day

SOHO exhibited at EarthFair this year for the first time to raise awareness of the huge environmental benefits of preservation; we spread the word through Carl Elefante's great words that "the greenest building is the one that is already built." Thanks go to the SOHO members who helped us man the booth and talk to so many people (this is the largest EarthFair in the world) who had never thought about the connection before and who were open to learning more. Learn more about sustainability and preservation online now at sohosandiego.org, where we have gathered articles, statistics and information, and an embodied energy calculator that will tell you just how much that historic building really means to the saving of our environment.

Get Involved! Join a SOHO Committee

We are embarking on a greatly expanded outreach program this year; we just exhibited at EarthFair and we will be at the Del Mar Fair next. Our goal is to reach every segment of the community and raise awareness of who we are and how we can help empower citizens and community groups to take back their neighborhoods, to protect what is meaningful to them and to save San Diego's past for the future, to save it for their children and grandchildren.

To do this we need your help; this kind of outreach takes manpower. Can you help us? There are many opportunities to get involved,



Above Erik Hanson accepts the coveted SOHO Lady award; right Janet O'Dea and Dean Glass man the SOHO booth at EarthFair



and make friends while making a difference. A two-hour shift can be meaningful to the cause, plus, it's fun and satisfying. If you would like to be part of a group of volunteers that would form a core group (Volunteers for SOHO), we could extend ourselves throughout the county, as we need to. Remember SOHO is the only countywide preservation organization, which is a lot to oversee. The Events and Education committee (E&E) meets at 11:30am on the second Tuesday of every month in the Conference room at the Derby Pendleton House. As a subcommittee, Volunteers for SOHO, can choose their own time and day to best suit their schedule.

Outreach and organizing within our communities is important, and if you can commit to just two hours a month for meeting, we could use your help. All SOHO committees are supported by Staff; we will arm you with all the tools, back up and information you need to put your ideas into action.

(continued from page 30) legal and consulting assistance, funded our own legal action, and added our expert testimony to the hearings.

All three of these groups worked in concert to save this important site. This example should encourage others not to be deterred by what may seem a daunting task. Gather together those citizens and organizations who care deeply for your community. Remember each community has the right to decide what's best for their community. ♦

Contributed by SOHO Preservation Action Committee.

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- **GoodShop.com** - This is an online marketplace that donates a percentage of your purchase to SOHO. You can choose from hundreds of popular merchants and it is the same as going to the retailer's websites directly.

It's easy to use, once you enter that the charity of your choice is SOHO, we automatically get a donation, no cost to you! We all use search engines, so why not use this one and help raise much needed funds for SOHO.

And if you enjoy online shopping, perhaps one of your favorites is on the marketplace list, it includes all the major shopping sites like Amazon and many others. This is another great way to make a donation to SOHO!

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SOHO Offices at Whaley House Museum Complex
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SOHO Board of Directors • 5:30pm • 2nd Monday
Conference Room in the Derby Pendleton House

Events & Education • 11:30am • 2nd Tuesday
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SOHO Museums Operations • 5:30pm • 2nd Tuesday
Adobe Chapel • 3950 Conde Street

Modernism • 6:30pm • 2nd Tuesday
In the Derby Pendleton House

Preservation Action • 5:30pm • 4th Monday
In the study of the Derby Pendleton House

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 30

People In Preservation Awards

June 19

Third Thursdays Author Series:

Frank Roseman & Peter Watry - *Chula Vista*

July 16

Celebration of San Diego's Birthday

July 17

Third Thursdays Author Series:

Diane Y. Welch - *Del Mar Fairgrounds*

August 21

Third Thursdays Author Series: Kim Fahlen &

Karen Scanlon - *Lighthouses of San Diego*

September 18

Third Thursdays Author Series:

Carol Olten & Heather Kuhn - *La Jolla*

September 20

Annual Membership Meeting & Elections

October 16

Third Thursdays Author Series: Seth Mallios &

David M. Caterino - *Cemeteries of San Diego*

October 24-31

Whaley House Halloween Events

November 20

Third Thursdays Author Series: Katrina Pescador

& Alan Renga - *Aviation in San Diego*

December 7

Annual Holiday Party

December 12 - 14

Fiesta Navidad

Keep up to date on tours & events at
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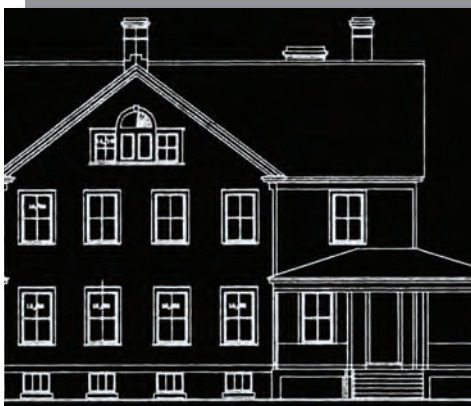
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LOST SAN DIEGO



In June of 1887 Warren Kimball built the National City Bank Block at McKinley and Twenty-first Streets. The building had a varied career as a bank, the Ammex Motion Picture Company, a casket factory and finally as a rooming house. Gone today is the spectacular brick building whose legacy included housing an early pioneer of the film industry in America. It was demolished sometime in the 1950's and is seen now as a lot used for storage.

The pencil notes are by one of the studio actors, Henry Stanley, pointing himself out in this cast photo taken October 7, 1913. Ammex filmed mostly Westerns.

