Save Our Heritage Organisation presents

MISSION HILLS HOME & WALKING TOUR

Saturday, November 10th, 1979
Mission Hills

by

Bruce Kamerling

Mission Hills, one of San Diego's most prestigious residential communities, was little more than scrub-brush until after the turn-of-the-century. The first development in the area was Calvary Cemetery established in 1876, which became the resting place for some of San Diego's most notable pioneers including Father Antonio Ubach, Cave Johnson Coutts and Ysidora Bandini de Coutts.

Henry J. Johnston, captain of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's sidewheel S.S. "Orizaba," bought 60 acres to the west of the cemetery at $25 an acre, and called the tract "Inspiration Heights." His daughter, Sarah J. Cox, built the first house in Mission Hills, Orizaba Villa, on the property in 1887 using pieces of the dismantled steamship. It still stands (though somewhat remodeled) at 2036 Orizaba Street.

The level land between the many canyons in Mission Hills was used for citrus groves and olive orchards as well as a few small dairy and chicken farms. Kate Sessions moved her nursery from Balboa Park to occupy four blocks north and east of Lewis and Stephens Streets in 1903, thinking she would be far away from city encroachment. In 1907, however, a syndicate was formed which bought 60 acres north of Sarah Cox's property and laid out the Mission Hills subdivision.

The original Mission Hills map was filed on January 20, 1908 and the syndicate stated in all deeds that no house should cost less than $3,500, making the area San Diego's first restrictive subdivision. Streets were laid out in keeping with the natural topography, creating many unique building sites and odd-shaped lots. L. Eugene Fuller purchased the first lot and built the first house on the southwest corner of Sunset Boulevard and Sheridan Way.

At a time when the residential section of San Diego only extended to First Avenue and Washington Street, the new subdivision seemed too far out. With
the initiation of the San Diego Electric Railway Company's #3 car to Lewis and Stephens Streets in 1908, things started to happen. California bungalows, Mission Revival residences and "Craftsman" cottages began to spring up all over. A redwood chapel designed by Emmor B. Weaver for the Congregational Church was constructed in 1911, and was soon followed by buildings for the Methodist and Catholic Churches. Mission Hills was on its way.

In the early 1920's, Mission Hills began to make its next important transformation. When George Marston began to lay plans for Presidio Park, he was concerned with the area around it. He began to develop a tract called Presidio Hills as a fine residential neighborhood within Mission Hills containing many large Spanish style homes that would compliment the museum that was to be the focal point of his park.

Driving through Mission Hills today, one may find an occasional bit of Victorian gingerbread, many broad-porched bungalows, and spacious Spanish mansions as well as some very unusual and eclectic creations, all showing the individuality and personality of this unique community.

**Pioneer Park**

by

Bruce Herms

Pioneer Park, at the south side of Randolph St., and Washington St., is the beginning point of the 1979, SOHO, Mission Hills Home Tour. This lovely neighborhood park with its grassy knolls and meandering walks has an interesting history.

In 1873 Reverend Antonio Ubach realized that the Old Town Cemetery was reaching capacity. This posed a problem, what with the many new families arriving in San Diego. He approached the City Fathers about providing a new cemetery site, and they set aside ten acres of land on top of the Pringle Street hill. This site was divided into two five-acre plots, the southern plot to be used as a Catholic Cemetery; the northern plot as a Protestant Cemetery.

The southern plot was named Calvary Cemetery and became the resting place for many of San Diego's pioneer families of the Catholic faith. It is believed that the (final) last remaining grave sites were sold sometime between 1912 and 1916, although burials are known to have continued into the 1940's. There are over 1650 persons known to be buried here.

The northern plot was never used as a Protestant Cemetery. This may have been due to the shift in population away from Old Town toward Downtown, Golden Hill, Sherman Heights and the National City area, which favored the use of the city's now larger Mount Hope Cemetery.

In 1909 the northerly plot was designated as a city park. Through the years it was used as an alternate playground for Grant Elementary School. Today it provides public tennis courts at the northwest corner of Randolph and Washington.

In 1939 the Catholic Church relinquished its control over the southern plot so that the W. P. A. funds could be used to construct an adobe wall around the cemetery. But, without a caretaker or perpetual care fund to maintain the area, on an ongoing basis, the 1939 improvements were shortlived. Headstones were vandalized, trash accumulated, and even the adobe wall began to disintegrate.

As a result of citizen concern over the sad condition of this important piece of land, in 1970 the City of San Diego converted the cemetery into a public park. Descendants of those buried at Calvary Cemetery were contacted in advance and given the option of moving the remains or leaving them at the present location. Some of the headstones were retained and moved to the southeast corner of the park; the rest were moved to Mount Hope Cemetery.

In honor of the many individuals and families interred in the park who contributed to the founding and development of San Diego and California, the city changed the name of Calvary Cemetery to "Pioneer Park." From a vantage point along the easterly wall, a ground level memorial, made of granite blocks and numerous metal plaques, lists and commemorates all of the known persons buried in the park.

A short distance away from the memorial stand a number of the remaining headstones--a sampling of...
those persons whose names jump out of the pages of San Diego history.

Most prominent, perhaps, is the cross honoring Father Antonio Ubach, sometimes called "the last of the California Padres." Although he was born in Spain, he arrived in Old Town in 1866, long after the missions had been secularized. Nonetheless, he did minister to Indians, Mexicans, Spanish families and American families alike. It is said that through Fr. Ubach's influence, Alonzo Horton was able to arrange for the special election and land auction that brought about the development of downtown San Diego.

Father Ubach's parish extended from the ocean to the mountains and deserts; from the border to San Bernardino. His constant travel over this vast area brought him into close contact with the Indians, whom he admired and befriended. It was Father Ubach who married the real Ramona and Alessandro, later immortalized in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel "Ramona."

It is said that Helen Hunt Jackson was inspired to write "Ramona" after talking with Father Ubach. "Ramona" focused on the white man's mistreatment of the American Indian with the same impact that Harriet Beecher Stowe focused on the institution of slavery in "Uncle Toms Cabin." The impact of her novel resulted in reforms being instituted and land being set aside for Indian Reservations. The impact of the novel can also be measured in part by the fact that a town was named in Ramona's honor; a song that was written about her remained popular for many years; two movies were produced (one by Cecil B. DeMille starring Loretta Young and Don Ameche); and in Hemet, the annual Ramona Pageant still draws people from all over the world. All of this based on the lives of an anonymous but real life Indian couple whose sad story a sympathetic Father Ubach knew and related to authoress Jackson.

When Father Ubach died in 1907, more than 2,000 mourners of all faiths and from all over the state, crowded into St. Joseph's Cathedral in San Diego. A line of carriages extended 1-1/2 miles in the funeral procession, while hundreds of Indians and Mexicans walked behind the procession all the way to Calvary Cemetery—a final tribute to a beloved community leader.

Among the headstones you will also see Cave J.

Couts, the handsome and dashing Army Lieutenant who mapped Old Town and designated many of its streets. In turn, a street in Mission Hills honors his name. He served in California from 1848 to 1851 in the Army assigned to the Boundary Commission establishing the border between Mexico and the United States. In 1850 he was appointed to the County Grand Jury. In 1853 he married Ysidora Bandini, the beautiful daughter of the prominent Juan Bandini.

Ysidora's younger sister, Arcadia, had earlier married the wealthy Los Angeles pioneer businessman, Abel Stearns. At the Coutts' wedding, Abel presented the Rancho Guajome to Cave and Ysidora as a wedding present. In 1854 Cave was appointed as a County Judge. Although he, his wife and his heirs lived most of their lives at Rancho Guajome, a grandson of Cave Coutts also lived in Mission Hills during the nineteen thirties, not far from Coutts St. Today their remains repose at Pioneer Park among many other prominent San Diego pioneers.

Along the east edge of the park you will also see the partial remains of the 1939 adobe wall that once surrounded the cemetery. Next to it is the U.S. Grant Elementary School. Many people do not realize that Ulysses S. Grant was not only a famous Civil War General and President of the United States, but that his son, U.S. Grant, Jr., was a long-time resident of San Diego. It was he who built the U.S. Grant Hotel. U.S. Grant, Jr., and family lived in an impressive Victorian Mansion at Seventh and Ash, on the site of what is now the El Cortez Center. His granddaughter, Mabel Hazard, was a long-time resident of Mission Hills who was much beloved and admired in the community for her many good works.

Inspiration Heights

by
Bruce Herms

Although the immediate results of Alonzo Horton's efforts were to switch the focus away from Old Town to what is now "Downtown" San Diego, there were some who continued to stick by Old Town. Interes-
tingly, it was a skipper of one of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's sidewheelers, "S.S. Orizaba," who first saw the possibilities of Mission Hills as a residential area. Captain Henry James Johnston, known as "Ninety Fathom Johnston," was impressed by the promontory that greeted him everytime he sailed the "Orizaba" into San Diego Bay, past Point Loma and North Island. He referred to it as "Inspiration Point" and decided that was where he wanted to build his dream house when he retired. In 1889 he purchased 69 acres of choice Mission Hills real estate overlooking Old Town and San Diego Bay for the kingly sum of $16.25, or, about .25 an acre. Incidentally, these were better terms than even the shrewd Alonzo Horton had managed when he bought Horton Addition for about .27-1/2 per acre.

Unfortunately, Captain Johnston did not live long enough to realize his dream. His widow inherited the property and, in turn, it was passed on to their daughter, Sarah Miller Cox. In 1895, she subdivided the property and named it "Johnston Heights" in honor of her father. The limits were approximately: Withersby Street on the west, Arguello Street on the east, Guy Street on the south, and Sunset Blvd., on the north. The main access road was also named in her father's honor, Johnston Avenue.

In 1887 Sarah Miller Cox started the project that her father dreamed of, building the first home on Inspiration Point. This same year she learned that the Pacific Coast Steamship Company was planning to scrap her father's ship, the "Orizaba," in San Francisco. She made arrangements to obtain parts of the "Orizaba" including the sideboard from the grand saloon, the railings of the companionway to the social hall, and other timbers. These were incorporated into a two-story frame building with a gable roof and the typical Victorian iron-picket roof ornamentation popular in those days. A generous covered front porch was provided from which one could enjoy the view. The building was painted red with green trim. This was the first residence to be built in Mission Hills. Today the "Villa Orizaba" still stands at the northeast corner of Orizaba Avenue and Miller Street; although, it has been greatly remodeled to resemble the many "Prairie-Box Style" homes common in Mission Hills.

In 1904 Sarah Cox discussed the possibility of re-subdividing the area with Oscar Cotton, a well-known pioneer developer who was instrumental in developing much of Pacific Beach. She envisioned a highclass subdivision with lots that would sell for $1000 each. Cotton advised her against it. He felt that the property was too far from town to ever amount to anything.

Yet, three years later another pioneer developer Percy Goodwin, his father and several others formed a syndicate to buy 60 acres adjoining Johnston Heights for $36,000 ($600/acre). Like Sarah Cox, Percy Goodwin envisioned a first class subdivision catching to the well-to-do. Lots were offered for $800 and homes were required to cost no less than $3500. The first lot was sold to L. E. Fuller who built the first house in this subdivision. This house is still standing at the southwest corner of Sunset Boulevard and Sheridan. Within two years the $800 lots were re-selling for as much as $6500.

Part of the reason for the sudden interest in this area was due to the efforts of Kate Sessions, the Mother of Balboa Park. Kate had moved her nursery operation from Balboa Park to Mission Hills about 1903 and shortly thereafter began to work on her friend John D. Spreckles to provide streetcar service to her sales office at Lewis and Stephens. Appreciating the popularity of her nursery and the potential for growth in this area, he agreed, provided she could convince the landowners along the route to contribute more land for a wider right-of-way to accomodate the streetcars. In 1908, the number "3" car began rumbling over the tracks to Lewis and Stephens and a few years later the tracks were extended to Fort Stockton and Trias.

In 1908 a third subdivision adjacent to Johnston Heights was initiated by George Marston, Charles Hamilton, Elisha Babcock and others. To lay out this 22 acre subdivision Marston retained George Cooke of the prestigious New York landscaping firm of Parsons and Cooke. Marston earlier had brought Samuel Parsons, Jr., and George Cooke to San Diego to help design a master plan for Balboa Park. It is said that George Marston took a great interest in this new subdivision and personally named many of the streets. He is also thought to have coined the name "Mission
Hills," which became the name for this distinctive community.

In 1909 Captain Johnston's grandson, Henry L. Miller, observing the success of Goodwin and Marston, decided to take action on his mother's earlier plans to build an elite subdivision. Johnston Heights was re-subdivided and renamed "Inspiration Heights."

To identify both the subdivision and street names, unique street pillars were constructed along Johnston Avenue which was renamed Sunset Blvd. Streets and lots were laid out to take advantage of the canyon terrain and views of the bay. The smallest lot was one-hundred feet wide. Restrictions required that no residence could cost less than $5000. Villa Orizaba was joined by other impressive homes such as the Guyman Mansion, the Bishop's House, the Leake House, and many others. Thus, what started as a dream in the minds-eye of a sea captain evolved into one of San Diego's loveliest and most prestigious residential communities.

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Open House Tour
by
Joan Easly & Cathy Grigsby

The Craftsman Style of architecture, one of the most visible contributions to the pre-World War I domestic cityscape, is directly derived from the work illustrated in Gustave Stickley's Craftsman Magazine, published from 1901-1917. The genesis for this movement was the English work of William Morris and his followers—intrinsically a revolt against the fanciful, over-designed and emphatically machined Victorian design. It emphasized a return to a simpler way of life, a life which prized the hand-crafted look in fabrics, manuscripts, furniture and dwellings. The houses, often low-ceilinged, have an intimate scale and informal charm; they have an affinity to their natural settings, often hugging the ground on foundations built of rustic materials. The movement in California was centered in Pasadena, where the Greene Brothers built quintessentially elegant shingled bungalows, and surrounded themselves with talented crafts-people of all disciplines to adorn them. Throughout the West the movement spread through the work of other architects, as well as by the carpenter-built houses which often copied plans circulated in the magazine.

On our tour today we will observe five essentially Craftsman Style houses, expressed in differing idioms. All of them, however, they differ, are comfortable to live in, warm, and sensitive to their surroundings—they protect those who dwell in them, while at the same time they draw the outdoors in.

Brainerd House
1884 Lynden - 1914

This house, known as the Brainerd House, (named after the original owner, Minnie Brainerd) is an excellent example of the shingled Craftsman
house. Notice the chains apparently supporting the porch roof—this was a popular embellishment of the day. The wood panelling in the dining room (probably gum wood) has its original finish. The built-in features curved leaded glass. The cross-beamed ceilings are typical of the style. The lighting fixtures with their original iridescent Steuben glass shades in the living room are outstanding. (The dining room fixture is not original to the house.)

The tortoise shell tile around the fireplace will be seen in several of the houses. The house is both aesthetically and functionally in harmony with its site; the position of the sleeping and sun porches provide natural air conditioning as the window design circulated the prevalent canyon breezes.

**Harman House**

1840 Montecito - 1919

All lines of this 1919 California Bungalow make a strong statement—from the diagonal effect of the tiered roof lines to the dramatic pyramid porch supports, painted red to contrast with the body of the house. Notice the porte cochere on the east side of the structure, which provides covered entry in case of inclement weather. The cobblestone retaining walls reflect the Craftsman influence.

**Kigdon House**

The interior features extensive use of southern gumwood in its wainscoting, stained glass built-ins and panelled hallway. Like many old homes which have been inhabited by different owners, there have been some structural changes. Originally the only radiator was in the front room.

"I like this house. It looks like Christmas, Thanksgiving and birthday parties," said the current owner when she first saw the house in 1945. This bungalow is still a gathering place for family celebrations. Original owner Frederick Harman sold the house to Scott A. Palmer in 1920. Palmer was part owner and managed San Diego's Savoy Theatre, which was part of the vaudeville circuit.

1866 Montecito, c. 1917

This Craftsman house exemplifies sensitive restoration and remodelling, providing an outstanding environment for a growing young family. Progressing from room to room, one can see how the owners have made the house suit their life style without changing its character.
Most of the window design has been implemented by the current owners; only the double hung livingroom/diningroom windows are original. Note the bevelled glass art work in the livingroom and the kitchen greenhouse window. The addition of a west-facing window in the stairway lets in more hall lighting--developing a previous dead space.

The original idea of gumwood panelling is carried throughout the interior with the addition of natural wood cabinetry and livingroom bookcases. The remodelled kitchen, sewing room, laundry and planting center feature natural wood panelling.

Similar floor plans are repeated in houses throughout the neighborhood. In fact, this style house is seen throughout much of Mission Hills--to such an extent that many have dubbed it the "Mission Hills Box."

Richard Requa, one of San Diego's outstanding architects, built this house in 1911 for himself and his bride. He had just opened his independent practice, having been a member of Irving Gill's firm for several years. The house shows the influence of Gill's strong design; but it also reflects the Craftsman idiom. It is, however, most importantly a unique statement of a young and individualistic architect designing for himself as the client.

The house is approached through a handsome gate, embellished with square nails, leading to a walled garden which was designed to be the exterior extension of the living area. The brick walks and circular barbecue are original and lead in to an entryway which originally was brick floored. The design of the garden illustrates Requa's interest in enclosed patio design. He subsequently studied in Spain for several years. He published lengthy illustrated works on Spanish gardens and architecture. He was appointed architect for the California-Pacific International Exposition of 1935 in Balboa Park, for which he designed the Alcazar Gardens.

The garden has been lovingly tended and added to by the present owners, Gene and Anna Price. Gene Price, a concert pianist, was born in San Diego, grew up on nearby Sheridan, and attended San Diego schools before going to Julliard. His mother, Alice Barnett Stevenson, was also a musician, and was a friend of Richard Requa--a fact which adds to the feeling of continuity. Mr. Requa also built a house for his father and mother next door to this one. Access from the garden was through the gate in the north patio wall.

The Gill influence is most noticeable in the entry arch and the storage wall in the bedroom. The low-ceilinged interior is dramatically lightened by the addition of double skylights which, with the Prices' addition of interior fixtures, illuminate both day and night.
The house is small (the lower level was made into an apartment at a later date; the deck which overlooks the beautifully planted and lighted canyon to the west was also added by the Prices,) but the convenient and compact plan and the dramatic use of light makes it seem spacious. It provides a gracious setting for the Prices' Oriental art objects and enamels made by Mrs. Price; Mr. Requa's dining area niche seems designed for the Prices' Mexican santo.

Leake House

4115 Miller - 1927

The Spanish Colonial Revival house at 4115 Miller is handsomely detailed with a graceful facade, arched windows, and exterior wrought iron. The interior woodwork is beautifully finished; it is gumwood in entry, living room and dining room; it is mahogany in the den, back hall and upper floor.

The decorative tile around the living room fireplace is of a similar style to that made in Bachelder's Pasadena studio. One should notice the handsome silver-toned hardware throughout the house. The dining room features a fine bay window (with bay view!); there is also a built-in phone booth on the opposite wall.

In the central hall, the original skylight has been effectively replaced by stained glass designed by the present owner, whose charming bedroom opens off this hall. The handsomely panelled den has wooden Venetian blinds, which may well be original. The kitchen is an excellent remodel.

Upstairs there are two charming dormer rooms, and a bath which boasts the original shower controls which can be adjusted from "Cold" to "Warm" to "Scalding."

Boland House

3945 Alameda, c. 1920

The William Boland House exhibits the sweeping horizontal lines reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Midwestern Prairie Style employed by 1910 architects across the country. All lines of the structure contribute to the strong horizontal design—the broad expanse of the roof, supported by heavy corbels, runs flush to wide casement windows.

According to the current owners, the Boland House was built by a Nebraska lumberman as a summer home and controlled a large amount of property in the area.

The interior holds extensive detailing in its gumwood walls and ceilings. The fireplace is impressive with its copper hood and tile work. Note the original pewter lighting fixtures in the dining room.
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