

Jan 76



# Reflections

Post Office Box 3571, San Diego, Ca. 92103

225-1033

## BUILDING CODE STUDY URGED

"A matter of economics" was the way a structural engineer described it. "It should be a broadly based decision", said one planning commissioner. "It boils down to saving a building or not saving it", argued an architect in the audience. There was no consensus, but that wasn't surprising, considering the topic was the building code and how it is applied to older buildings in San Diego. The occasion was a joint meeting early this month between the city Planning Commission, the Historic Site Board, and the Building Inspector on how the city should cope with older structures which don't meet modern building standards. After a long afternoon session, the Planning Commission and the Site Board voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council form a task force to study the matter and return within 90 days with recommendations for action.

If anyone had illusions the problem would be simple, they were quickly dispelled by Building Inspector Bill Curtis, who said his department

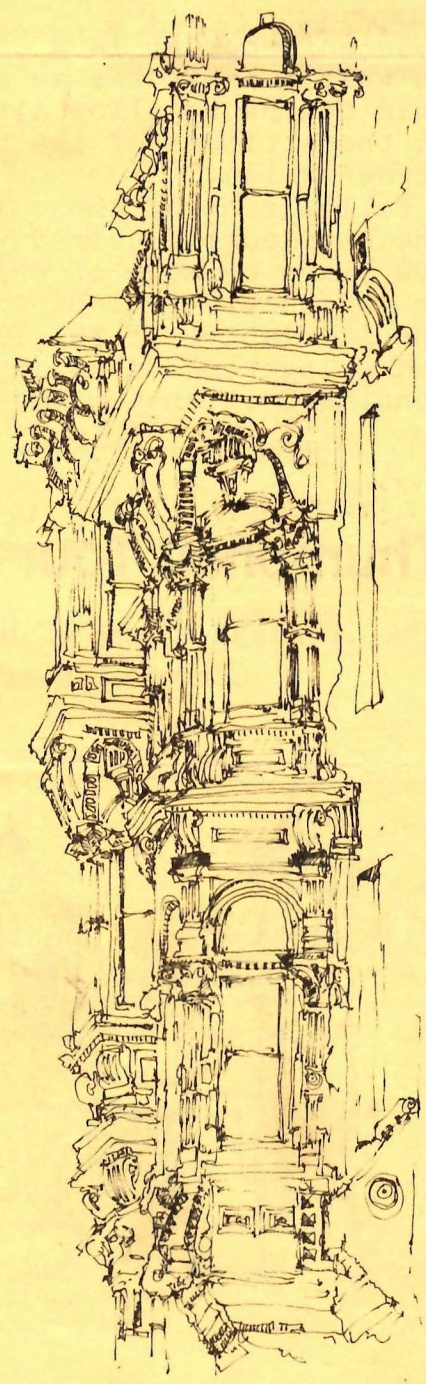
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## MEETING!

### CHRISTIAN HOUSE TO HOST GENERAL MEETING

SOHO members will be treated to an unusual tour of the Christian House at the General Meeting on Thursday, February 5th at 7:30 p.m. This will be the only opportunity to see the house on its original site prior to moving and restoration in Heritage Park. The Christian House, named for Hartfield Timberlake Christian, is one of San Diego's finest examples of simple Queen Anne Victorian styling. The house, built in the late 1880's, is located at 1940 Third Avenue.

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# OPINION

## BUILDING SAFETY AND PRESERVATION

Although still only a proposal, the recent recommendation by the Planning Commission and the Historic Site Board for formation of a city task force to investigate the building code and its application to older structures is heartening. There are a great many complexities involved in weighing the safety of building occupants against the benefits of preservation, but it seems clear from the examples of other cities that it is indeed possible to make earthquake risks tolerable while keeping restoration costs reasonable. San Diego already has special fire code provisions for historic structures. Seismic safety is a more difficult problem, because it is the ultimate test of a building's strength. In fact many of the structures now threatened with demolition under earthquake safety laws are sound in all other respects.

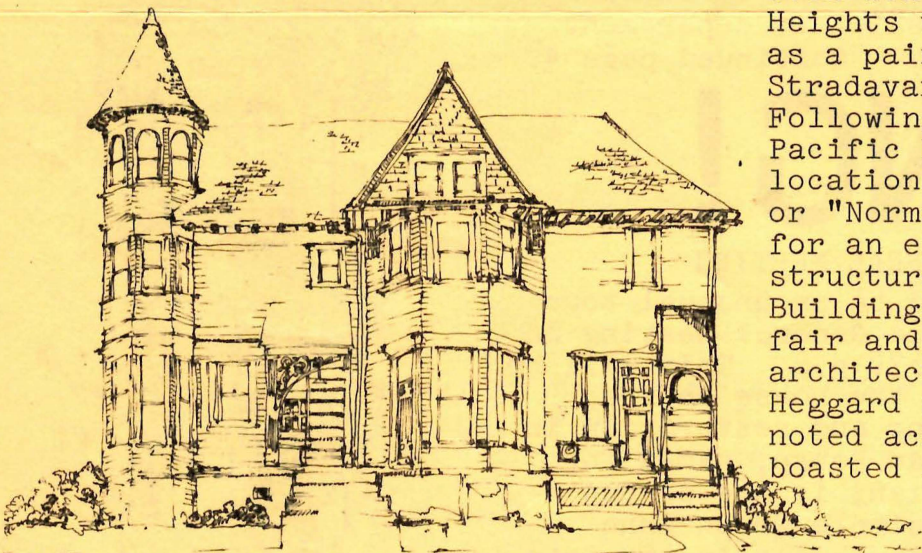
Code enforcement is a controversial area because many experts disagree on what constitutes an acceptable risk. And some cities seem more likely than others to allow alternative methods of code compliance, depending on the attitude of the building inspector and the political climate for preservation.

A full airing of these issues is needed so the community can share in the knowledge required to make the final decisions. The tradeoff of 100 years or more of our elegant structural heritage for the elusive or impossible goal of total building safety must be well considered. The initiative of the Planning Commission and the Site Board is a bold and enlightened step in the right direction. It deserves our continued attention and support.

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## Thumbnail Tour:

The "Torrey" House of Normal Heights.



Around the turn of the century real estate men had high hopes for the area known as Normal Heights. In spite of the fact that much of Golden Hill and Uptown remained vacant, lots in Normal Heights were touted as "rare and valuable gems in the sun." One entrepreneur even went so far as to claim "Normal Heights will grow in value as surely as a painting by Rubens or a Stradavaruis Violin."

Following a protracted tug-o-war with Pacific Beach and other areas for location of a new state university or "Normal" school, ground was broken for an elaborate classical revival structure patterned after the Art Building of the Chicago World's fair and designed by the new architectural partnership of Heggard and Gill. Among its more noted achievements the school boasted one of the state's finest

Continued page 3.



# HERITAGE PARK

Pass go, collect \$600,000.

## HERITAGE PARK BACK TO SQUARE ONE

Around and around they go and where they'll stop, who knows? That seems to be an accurate summary of the County Board of Supervisors' attitude about the future of heritage park. Following lengthy public hearings on the project, the supervisors pondered their options and decided to ask again for contractor bids on the cost of moving and restoring the three houses now on Third Street. Rejected was a proposal to move the houses and leave renovation costs to future tenants in exchange for rent-free occupancy.

The next decision on whether to proceed with the project will thus be made when bids are in. Meanwhile, long term prospects for the Park appear to hinge on whether enough continuing grass roots political support can be mustered on its behalf.

## Thumbnail Tour (Continued)

women's field hockey teams, and vigorous tournaments were staged before large crowds on the school's playing fields.

Little remains in Normal Heights today which reflects this colorful era. The Normal School long ago changed its name to San Diego State and moved east. The buildings of the Gill partnership were demolished. Mission Cliffs Gardens the elaborate valley overlook conceived by J. D. Spreckles to promote street car travel and real estate in what was still remote part of town has withered and died. One of the most conspicuous surviving monuments is the so-called "Torrey" house, an imposing late-Victorian mansion on Campus Street. Probably the largest house of its era remaining in San Diego, little apparently is known of its history. Links to the famous biologist Dr. John Torrey, for whom the pine is named, are inaccurate; Torrey never lived in San Diego. Our cursory attempt to trace down other references was unsuccessful.

Early photographs show that the house was one of the first built in the area and that it originally wore the somber colors characteristic of the period. Sometime since then, the house was moved to a different position on its lot. Later, probably in the 1920s, a small bungalow court was built on the front lawn. Today the paint is peeling and two German Shepards lounge on a once elegant front porch which now overlooks an alley, but the stately turret is a neighborhood landmark and a reminder of boom times in Normal Heights.

# SOHO

## GENERAL MEETING

**Feb. 5**

**7:30 pm**

**CHRISTIAN HOUSE**

**1940 3RD**



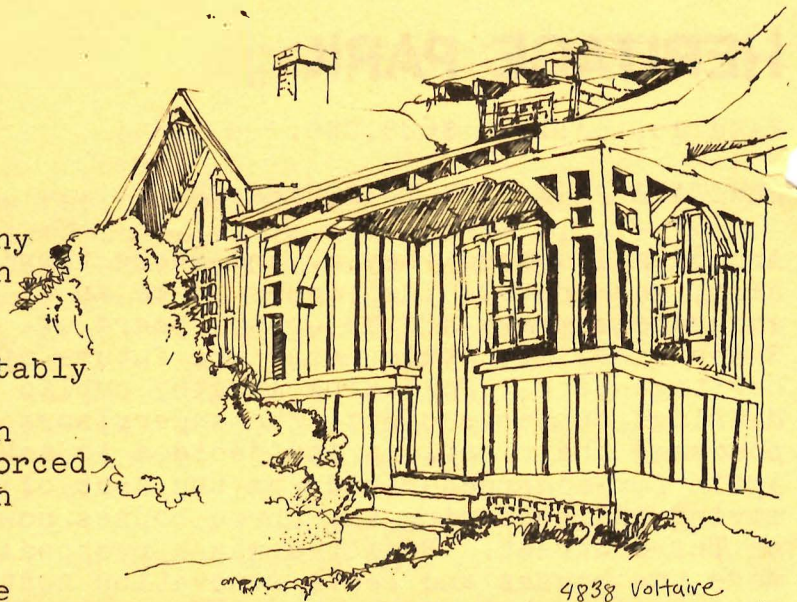


## Building Code (Continued)

would continue to deny permits to any renovation proposals which do not in his opinion comply with earthquake resistance standards. Many older commercial buildings, most notably those downtown, can not meet these standards without major modification because they were built of un-reinforced brick or hollow clay tile. Although there is no way of knowing for certain whether an earthquake of sufficient magnitude to cause damage might affect San Diego, seismic safety standards as administered here require older buildings be exhaustively overhauled before being converted to new uses.

Such work includes spraying interior walls with a cement-like substance, a procedure often costing several hundred thousand dollars or more, depending on the size of the building. Another procedure currently proposed for the Santa Fe Depot, calls for ripping away exterior walls in order to install iron supporting rods. These requirements mean added cost which may preclude economical reuse of older buildings.

Some critics of present building code application contend that there is an element of risk in every structure, no matter how it is built, and that the historic and architectural value of older buildings make certain seismic risks acceptable. Strict application of reinforcing standards devised for new construction, say these critics, is unfair to older buildings and would deprive the city of variety and tradition important to civic well being. Other cities, notably San Francisco and Seattle, have apparently been successful in reaching compromises which protect the safety of building occupants while permitting economically feasible preservation. How these compromises were achieved would undoubtedly be of interest to the three-agency task force as it considered code options for San Diego.



## BRIEFS

\* An Ocean Beach property owner has come to the Historic Site board for help in moving a turn of the century beach bungalow. Alex Brown told the Board he admired the house at 4838 Voltaire and had agreed to purchase it from its present owner, who had planned demolition. The only barrier to preservation said Brown is the city building inspectors iron-clad rule against moving single-walled structures unless expensive alterations are made. Brown hopes the Site Board will declare the structure to have architectural merit. Under a special provision in the building code, the move could then take place. A hearing on the matter is set for early next month.

### General Meeting (continued)

Because a large turnout is expected, members are urged to bring something to sit on. This is a chance for us to get together and review our projects and our plans for the future. 1976 is shaping us as a watershed year for preservation in San Diego and SOHO can plan a large role in developments. All members are urged to attend and help plan for our heritage.



# Concern for Heritage

Editor: I have recently read in the Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO) newsletter, "Reflections," of a plan by Los Angeles developer Ernest Hahn and San Diego architect Frank Hope to demolish nine blocks in the heart of downtown San Diego in order to construct a behemoth "Park and Shop" complex. Buildings destroyed would include the Spreckels Building, the Balboa Theater and the Horton Grand Hotel. This plan has already been approved by a 6-1 vote by the City Council.

As a lifelong resident of this city and as an artist who has documented much of downtown's most neglected architecture I am both shocked and sickened by this plan of action. I promise you that if this hideous measure is acted upon that the true spirit of San Diego will die, as Los Angeles died. A richness will be gone from the lives of the many people, like myself, who daily make use of downtown commerce. Low income housing will be taken from the elderly who have nowhere else left to go.

I say act now to stop this destruction. Our heritage is being stolen from us daily all over the city, as beautiful buildings are razed to make way for 24-hour convenience stores, gas stations and barren parking lots. Downtown San Diego is an area rich in history. Should these buildings be renovated, San Diego could not only restore its cultural heritage but create a booming area of economic success attractive to both city residents and tourists alike. To take downtown and its spirit away from us is to cut us off from our past and from our future as a city well-known for its charm and beauty. Cities are for the people who live in them, not just for the few who hope to turn a huge profit.

-MIMI POND

Reprinted from the San Diego Evening Tribune.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE:

After last month's feature on redevelopment downtown, sources informed SOHO the city was intending to keep the Golden West Hotel and had begun to tentatively explore the possibility of reusing the Balboa Theatre, subject to certain unspecified financial conditions. The Spreckels Building is also to be saved, although the project architect is less than enthusiastic about the idea. Such news is welcome, but it points out the continued need for public interest in downtown redevelopment. Although the City Council now has gone on record in favor of the principle of preser-

vation, the developer and his architect are to say the least not overwhelmingly sympathetic. As last month's feature indicated, re-use of the historic landmarks downtown would make sound economic sense and add immeasurably to the ambience of Centre-city, an extremely important factor for any area which seeks to attract the tourist dollar. The opportunities for adaptive re-use can benefit all of San Diego and San Diegans deserve to know of that potential. Avenues of preservation must be found, not only for the Golden West and Spreckels Building, but for the Horton Hotel and the Balboa Theatre as well. The best architectural talent should be used in restoration.



# New Members

SOHO extends a warm welcome to our new members for the month of January:

John B. deCastro  
Roger Hedgecock  
Mrs. Verl F. Smurthwaite  
Virginia B. Yettason  
Richard and Lucie Smith

## WHY NOT JOIN US?

SOHO is a nationally recognized, one-of-a-kind organisation dedicated to fostering enjoyment and preservation of those older buildings and neighborhoods

which make San Diego such an interesting and attractive place to be. SOHO offers an opportunity to let elected officials know that our heritage is too valuable to be needlessly discarded. We provide financial and technical know-how to individuals and groups which seek to save older buildings. And we conduct tours and other events which let ordinary people share in San Diego's fascinating past. If you appreciate the intricate craftsmanship of an earlier era, are planning to buy and restore an older home, or just enjoy a weekend walking tour of an old San Diego neighborhood, then SOHO has something to offer you.

## Membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Memberships available    Individual \$7.00    Family \$12.00    Corporate \$20.00

I am interested in joining an action group. Please contact me !

### Tax Exempt Status

SOHO is exempt from Federal Income Tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and has been classified by the I.R.S. as a charitable, educational organization.

# SOHO

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