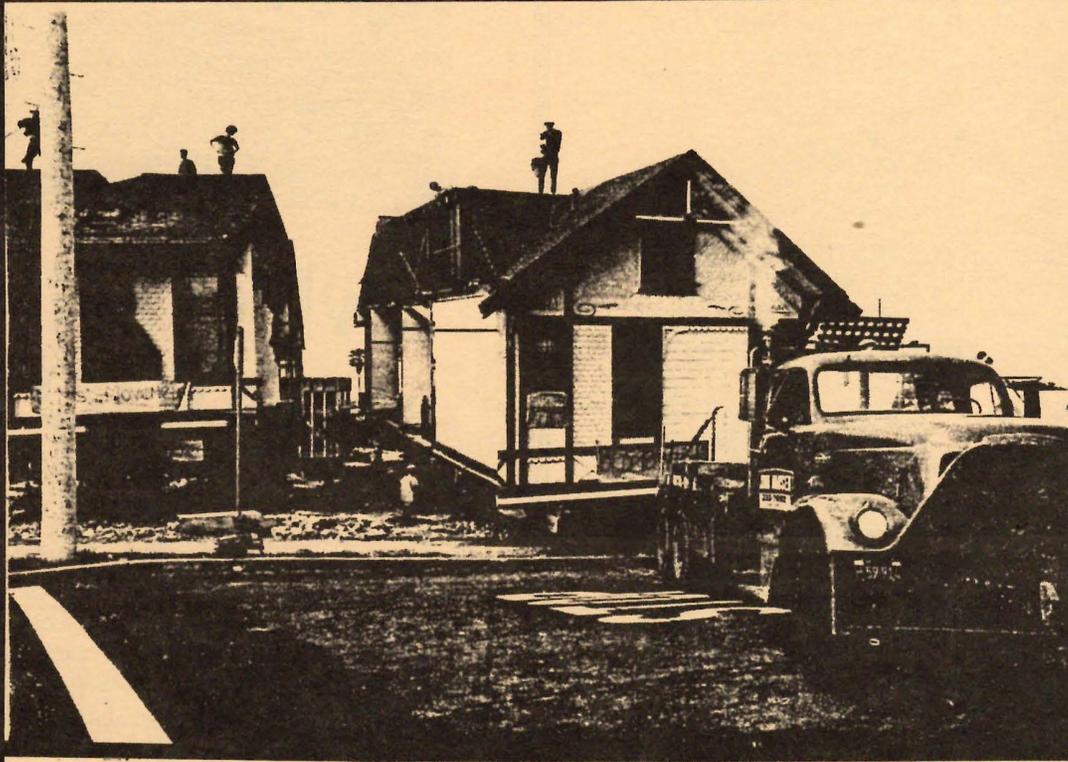




REFLECTIONS

THE S.O.H.O NEWSLETTER

VOL. XVIII NO. 1 JAN-FEB 1986



SHERMAN-GILBERT HOUSE MOVES TO NEW HOME

The membership application on the back page of this issue has a new, old look, featuring the first SOHO logo from the first SOHO Newsletter, published in March 1969, shortly after Robert Miles Parker Placed a "SAVE THIS OLD HOUSE" sign on the Gilbert House in a primitive effort to preserve it for our children and grandchildren. At the time the first newsletter went to press, there were 164 members; today, there are more than 600.

In the seventeen years since Miles started a unique, grassroots movement to preserve one old "hippy" house, SOHO has accumulated a list of achievements which those first few members could scarcely have imagined. They not only saved the Gilbert House, but through their singular efforts, Heritage Park was born. The park thrives today, a kind of monument to the hard work and dedication of a few determined people, who had the foresight, will and knowledge to make a dream come true.

But the SOHO story does not end with one house and one park. As early as July, 1970, the fledgling group began a systematic assault on city planners in an effort to save

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The SOHO newsletter, *Reflections*, is published monthly. Letters to the editor and contributions are welcome.

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why join SOHO ?

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.

(Reprinted from Reflections 3/76)



President's Letter

At the end of the year the term "facade easement" begins to be heard. A phrase, which many find baffling, involves tax credits, right of ownership and preservation. Although confusing, it is a useful means to preserve a structure in perpetuity.

What is a facade easement? It is a property right; in the case of a preservation easement, it is a voluntary agreement between the owner and a non-profit preservation organization (SOHO). The owner relinquishes his right to alter or disturb the face of the building, and/or the surrounding landscape. The agreement runs with the land and binds future owners. This agreement is a legal document recorded like a mortgage or deed of trust.

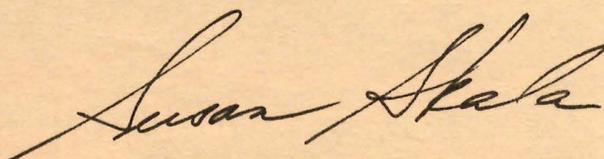
What properties are eligible for facade easements? Properties eligible are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or are listed as contributing to an Historic District. SOHO can help you determine if your building is registered.

Why should a easement be considered? First, an easement is a means to protect the integrity of a property into the future. A property's facade is secured from demolition or severe alteration regardless of change of owner, zoning ordinances or land use. Second, the owner realizes a tax advantage. An easement is a charitable donation and may also reduce the tax assessment on the property by restricting the highest and best use of the property to the current one.

Facade easements are enforced with yearly inspections conducted by the non-profit organization. The inspection is to insure the historical integrity of the property, as well as alert the owner to any restoration or structural problems. The owner may alter the building, but must give written notice and detailed drawings to the non-profit organization for review. The owner and the organization join efforts to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation.

SOHO has six facade easements: the Senator Hotel, 105 West "F" Street; The Callan Hotel, 500 Fifth Street; the Brunswick Building, 363 Fifth Street; 1930 First Avenue; 1116 Loma Avenue, Coronado; and 2204 Cliff Street. Admire the beautiful work these owners have done, but please do not disturb the owners or their tenants.

Soho is proud to be a part of saving and protecting these structures. We hope to add many more to our list in the future.



THE BALBOA

The controversy over the Balboa Theater continues and, with each passing day, intensifies. Should it be altered for a restaurant, bookstore, cabaret and modern art center? Or should it be restored as a theater?

The answer is simple—it already is a theater! As such, it is a rare, living legacy of a wondrous period in American history, a period rich in architectural style and elegance. It is needed and desired now by already-established performing arts organizations, and it will certainly be needed in the future. Downtown San Diego is already critically short of first-rate, restored, available and affordable theater space.

Why did the city build Horton Plaza around the Balboa? Because it was too unusual and precious to destroy, and the city realized the value of a theater for drawing people back downtown.

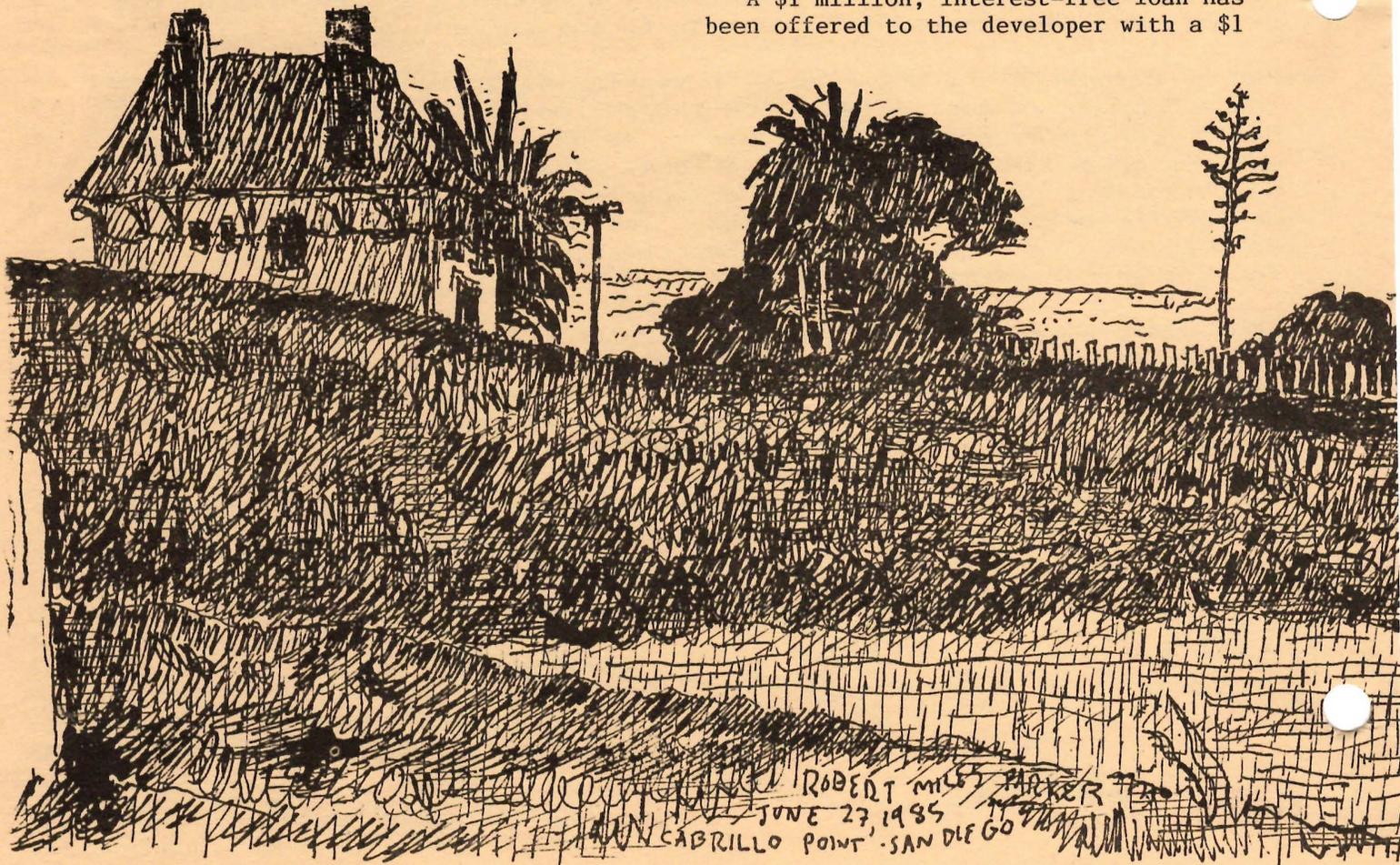
By STEVE KARO

That is why the original Urban Design Plan for Horton Plaza called specifically for the restoration of the Balboa. Unfortunately, the city took only the first step. The building was saved but never restored. All financial burden was placed squarely on the shoulders of the performing arts groups. According to a 1984 city staff report, "There will obviously be city financial assistance to the art center, but the discussion of alternative reuse as a live theater is couched in terms of little or no city assistance.

Two years ago, a group formed to create an art center downtown. The Centre City Development Corp. (CCDC) offered it the Balboa Theater.

CCDC has offered all possible assistance, in effect becoming the agent for the art center. A developer was brought in and the theater was condemned. The city has offered \$1.7 million to the owners, but after litigation the price could rise to \$2.5 million.

A \$1 million, interest-free loan has been offered to the developer with a \$1



per-year lease. At the condemnation hearing, Gerald Trimble, executive director of CCDC, stated that this initial investment will allow the developer to privately finance the remaining \$4.5 million needed to complete the project. Now the plans have been drastically altered with a possible additional subsidy being required.

By contrast, Starlight offered to lease and maintain the building (in 1976) if the city would pay the \$1.5 million restoration cost. The offer was rejected.

In 1972, the Balboa was designated a "Historic Site." Architectural surveys done at the time referred to the interior as "truly out of this world...a work of art." The building was said to be "exceedingly well-built" and had a "well-planned and elaborate theater layout."

In 1974, a feasibility study was done, recommending complete restoration because of the Balboa's architectural style and value as an intimate theater.

In 1981, the city applied for a for a National Endowment of the Arts grant for a market study and structural analysis for restoration as a theater. In support, the Gaslamp Quarter said that the restoration was long overdue and should be the "focal point for downtown redevelopment." Trimble stated that for "legitimate theatrical use...revitalization of the theater will enhance both the proposed Horton Plaza retail center and contribute to the historic character of the Gaslamp planned district."

CCDC is on record as saying that the Balboa can be "truly one of San Diego's finest legitimate theaters." The NEA grant application states that "community interest and support is focused on the rehabilitation of the historic Balboa Theater." Unfortunately, the application was dropped and not pursued.

Continued next page

[first published in the San Diego Union Opinion Section]



The Balboa Theater compares favorably in size, stage dimensions, construction and beauty of architecture to restored historic theaters across the United States. Similarly constructed facilities are also being used all over California. Some have been seismically strengthened, such as the Wiltern in Los Angeles and the Pasadena Playhouse; others, such as the Arlington in Santa Barbara and the Fox in San Diego, have not. The point is that, contrary to the self-serving and misleading opinions being bandied about, the Balboa Theater is a soundly constructed and beautifully designed theater. It can be restored economically for the good of all San Diego. Horton Plaza and the Gaslamp Quarter would benefit from its great variety of activity. According to the San Diego Repertory Theater, which will operate the much smaller Lyceum Theater, "For every dollar spent on theater, there are two to three more spent on food, drinks and parking. Puttin together a center that has parking and shops and food and live entertainment make sounds business sense.

Performing groups would benefit from having an affordable, well-located and available facility. Starlight, one of San Diego's best-managed theater companies, has expressed interest in using the Balboa for three months a year, the Gilbert and Sullivan Company for five weeks. Nederlander, Pacific Chamber Opera and others have expressed interest.

Economic Research Associates estimates the Art Center would draw in downtown 58,500 to 73,200 patrons per year. At eight performances a week, with two-thirds capacity, a theater would draw 64,000 patrons in only eight weeks!

It should be made very clear that "Save Our Balboa" has always supported the San Diego Art Center. We are simply trying to save an irreplaceable theater. It is our belief that the Balboa Theater and the San Diego Art Center can coexist side by side. With a spirit of fair play, a sensitive City Council and flexible Art Center, this can be an all-win situation. If we honestly want to be America's Finest City, we can't settle for less.

(Steve Karo is a theater music contractor and chairman of SAve Our Balboa)

Horton Plaza, the Senator Hotel and many other old San Diego landmarks which were slated for destruction in the name of progress and through the auspices of Urban Renewal....

In 1972, SOHO began efforts to save the Santa Fe Railway Station from the bulldozers. A long-standing tradition of offering the finest in historical tours was started in 1973, with Terri Recht and Claire Kaplan in charge. Dedication of Heritage Park took place on January 26, 1975. Members picnicked on the grass, Miles Parker was the honored speaker of the day. By December, 1975, members were turning to a concerted effort to save Golden Hill and Horton Plaza was once again threatened with destruction.

1975 closed with SOHO receiving an award from the San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Earlier honors had been received from the City Historic Site Board and the San Diego Press Club.

In May, 1976, SOHO conducted its fifth annual train tour --- a trip to the J. P. Getty Museum and historic Los Angeles, cost? --- \$20. The May, 1976 issue featured a new column, "My Corner", written by Claire Kaplan, a charter member who is still with SOHO. This issue sought volunteers for the Horton Action Group and noted that President Ford proposed slashing the U.S. Historic Preservation Funds by 50%.

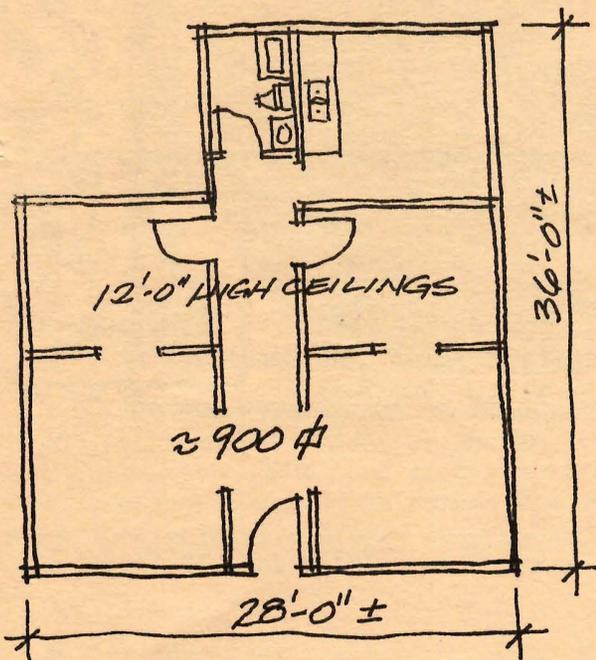
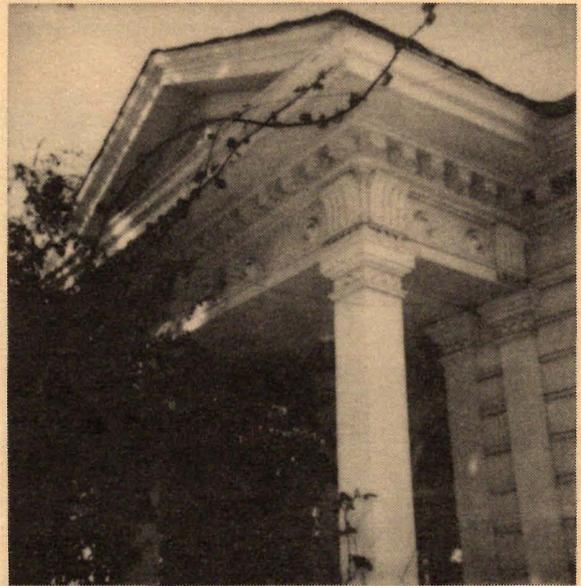
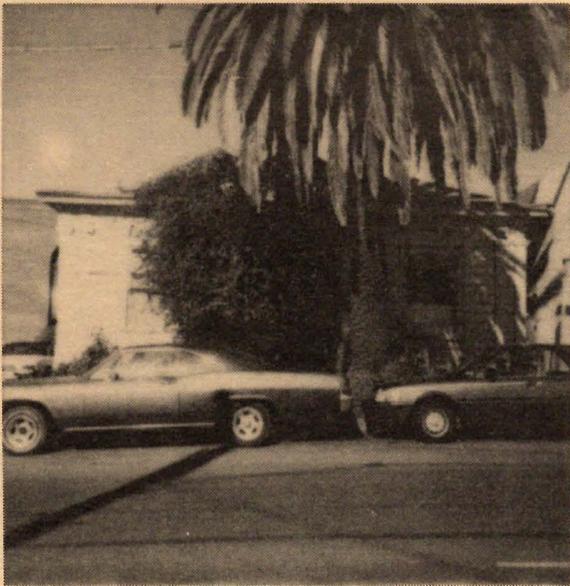
The summer of 1976 ended years of work when the Bushyhead, Christian and Burton houses were finally akayed for removal to Heritage Park. The General Election in 1976 was held on September 19, at the San Diego Rowing Club.

to be continued.....

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