

A Walking Tour of Mission Hills

1. Calvary Cemetery/Pioneer Memorial Park.
A 5-acre Catholic Cemetery founded by Fr. Antonio Ubach in 1874. Preceded by Presidio burial areas, Mission San Diego de Alcalá, and El Campo Santo in Old Town San Diego. Superseeded by Mt. Hope cemetery. The Northern 3-acres had been designated as a Protestant cemetery, but was never utilized (site of tennis courts). 2nd oldest land development in Mission Hills, it is the final resting place of many of San Diego's pioneer settlers—including those surnamed Lopez, Bandini, Osuna, Ghio, Zolezzi, & Coutts. It has been estimated to contain over 1300 burials, the last c. 1960. Extensive renovations in, 1939 through the efforts of Albert Mayrhofer, restored the cemetery, adding the adobe wall (constructed by WPA).

Forgotten over the years and heavily vandalized, it was taken over by the city of San Diego and converted into a park—Pioneer Park—in 1970. Under state law, a municipality can convert a cemetery into a "passive" park if there have been no more than ten burials within the previous five years.

However, controversy arose over the tombstones. One community group favored the retention of all the stones; the other wanted their removal. A compromise was reached: 142 stones of great historical significance (as judged by educators from the University of San Diego) would be kept in place. A bronzed plaque would list some of the names of those buried at the site. The others would be carefully removed and stored at the city-run Mt. Hope Cemetery. In their place the city would build a memorial.

The tombstones were removed, and nothing more was said about them for 15 years until a trainload of city officials toured the proposed East County Trolley Line in 1985. The trolley line bisects Mt. Hope and many were shocked by the sight of the displaced tombstones just a few feet from the tracks. Instead of being stored upright or flat, as called for in the city contract authorizing their removal and storage, they were all haphazardly dumped in a pile strewn with weeds and bottles. Many were cracked or shattered. Out of the original 450 stones, only 288 could be accounted for. The manager of the cemetery was called to the office of the city manager for a meeting, and both agreed to have a retaining wall built between the tracks and the tombstones. The tombstones were to be buried because they had become an eyesore.

The plan was thwarted by the efforts of Mr. Corey Braun, however, who complained to the city's historical sites board that the city's and Mt. Hope's plan was illegal—Calvary Cemetery, and the tombstones, was a declared historic site.

Besides being a member of the San Diego Historical Society and a boardmember of the Save Our Heritage Organization, Mr. Braun's ancestors are buried in Calvary cemetery.

The board unanimously concurred, and the city proposed to embed the tombstones in an adobe wall at the southwest end of the Park. Finally, several of the tombstones were saved and set in a concrete foundation along the tracks back at mount hope.

Proceed up Randolph Street to Lewis Street. Left on Lewis Street to the intersection of Stephens Street.

2. Mission Hills Commercial Core\West Lewis Street Planned District

After a series of Planning Commission hearing, as well as a series of community workshops in coordination with the Uptown Planners organization, in April of 1985, the San Diego City Council adopted the West Lewis Street Planned District Ordinance. The Plan called for the protection and enhancement of the small scale visual quality of one of San Diego's earlier streetcar-oriented neighborhoods. The district, bounded on the north and south sides by Lewis Street, between Stephens and Lark Streets, was to remain a neighborhood convenience center, with adequate provisions to assure continued service to the surrounding single-family residential community.

The district consists of several historic and architecturally significant buildings which served as the commercial nucleus of the neighborhood. In addition, a block long row of Craftsman Era bungalows line the south side of Lewis Street, between Palmetto Way and Randolph Street.

3. Site of Kate Sessions Nursery, 1428-1528 Lewis Street (1903-1926). Previously located at 6th and Upas, the only access to the nursery site was by a dirt road along the canyon rim. In 1908 she convinced John D. Spreckels to extend the electric streetcar line to the entrance of her nursery. The resulting real estate boon eventually forced her to relocate the nursery's sales office and yard to the present site of the Mission Hills Nursery in 1925. In 1926 she sold the nursery to the Antonicelli Brothers and devoted all of her energies to her Pacific Beach nursery (On the southeastern slopes of Mount Ciliated).

4. Montclair Apartments

This Classically detailed commercial structure was designed and built by Nathan Rigdon, and his partner, Morris B. Irvin, in 1914, four years after the streetcar came to Mission Hills. Rigdon and his partner, both speculative real estate brokers who lived in the area, purchased and developed several tracts of land along the streetcar line's right-of-

way. The mixed-use commercial and residential building had apartment units built above storefront bays. Some of the early commercial activity at the time of its opening consisted of:

- A. 1619--Blanch Hensel, seamstress
- B. 1621--William J. Wild, confections
- C. 1623--Entrance to Montclair Apartments
- D. 1625--Omer and Pearl Berg, grocers

5. Rigdon Apartments

Designed and built by Nathan Rigdon in 1913 in Mission Revival Style. Some of the businesses which occupied the storefronts were:

- A. 1605--Harry E. Taylor's drugstore
- B. 1607--Andrus Pappas, fruit store
- C. 1609--Entrance to Rigdon Apartments
- D. 1611--Mrs. Ethel Kapy's delicatessen
- E. 1613--Mission Hills Restaurant

Cross Palmetto Way (Formerly Calhoun) to the southeast corner of Palmetto Way and Lewis Street.

6. Nathan Rigdon-built residences

- A. 1527 Lewis Street: 2-story Prairie Style house of Mrs. P. A. Douglas, built c. 1912
- B. 1525 Lewis Street: 1½-story side gabled Craftsman residence of L. Hoff, completed c. 1913
- C. 1515 Lewis Street: 2-story side gabled Craftsman residence of W. A. Galbreath, built c. 1912
- D. 1505 Lewis Street: 2-story, front gabled Craftsman residence of Norton Langford, built c. 1912

Walk back on Lewis to intersection. Observe sidewalk stamp of

O. E. Winders
(concrete mason)

4151 1st
7/11

on the Southwestern corner of Palmetto and Lewis Street. Walk down Palmetto Way to:

7. 4080 Palmetto Way: Residence of Lula A. Pauly. A modest front gable Neoclassic bungalow built c. 1912.

Double back to Lewis, turn west at the corner and walk back to the intersection of Stephens and Lewis Streets. Cross over to the southwest corner of the intersection.

8. 1705 Lewis Street: Spanish Eclectic commercial building of the Luthur B. Powers & Son Plumbing fixtures and repair shop. Built in 1924 during the peak of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style period in Southern California.

9. 1715 Lewis Street: The Russel and Mary Ellis residence. An early (1915) example of Spanish Eclectic style 2-story residential structure influenced by the 1915 Exposition then underway in Balboa Park celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal.

Return to the corner and cross the intersection to the northeast corner of Stephens and Lewis Streets.

10. Heller's Grocery Store Block
Built in 1921 for its anchor store, Heller's Grocery, which occupied the corner storefront at 1630 Lewis. Heller's was one of the pioneer "cash and carry" stores in San Diego. Locally founded in 1892 by Matt Heller, by June, 1929, he sold his grocery stores to the MacMarr chain. These were eventually absorbed by Safeway Stores, Inc. in 1931. The other businesses which occupied the Spanish style building were:
 - A. 1624--San Diego Radio Shop
 - B. 1620--John A. Gillespie's shoe repair shop
 - C. 1618--Leon Blancheri, cleaners
 - D. 1614--Mission Hills Department Store
11. Site of Safeway Store Block (1604-1608 Lewis Street)
Originally a brick commercial structure similar to the Heller's Grocery Store Block, nothing remains left of the structure but the common brick wall on the east side of the Heller's Block. It may have been incorporated into the 1960's era drive-in cleaners presently occupying the north half of the block. Besides the Safeway store, the building also housed the Mission Hills Hardware and Electric store (1608). In 1942 it was used to house an aircraft parts assembly plant operated by Irvin Aircraft. The building adjacent to it (4112 Palmetto Way) was used by the U. S. Army, probably to oversee the aircraft parts assembly process.

Double back to the northeast intersection of Lewis and Stephens Streets. Turn right up Stephens to Montecito Way.

Post WWI Housing Tracts

Prior to WWI, entire tracts of land were subdivided into individual lots by a developer, who then sold these empty lots to prospective residents. It was then the responsibility of the new property owner to hire an architect or an architectural designer to design his home. The architect would act as the contracting agent arranging for the subcontractors--carpenters, masons, electricians, roofers, etc.--to build the house under his watchful eye.

The post war period was a time of tremendous growth for the city of San Diego. Many new residents were attracted to the area because of its wonderful climate, magnificent vistas, and inexpensive land. Thousands of new residents came south

to San Diego by way of the new highway along the coast. The increased demand for housing during the post-war boom times created a demand for fast-built, yet durable, housing.

By the late teens and early 1920's real estate agents, insurance brokers, building designers and contractors formed companies which would speed-up the home building process. These companies would buy up tracts of undeveloped land in a subdivision or addition that was already divided into smaller lots, then their staff architectural designers would design variants of pre-designed homes from existing plans. The firm's construction department would build these homes on the lots before selling them. This uniformity in style and construction techniques let to rapid completion, lower initial investments, and more homogenous neighborhoods reflecting current architectural styles then in vogue.

Most of these late teen to early 1920's tract houses north and south of Lewis Street were built by several noted building contracting firms whose owners lived in the area. A number of Spanish Eclectic structural tile veneered bungalows and "eyebrow-shaped" porch hooded Craftsman bungalows were built by M. B. Irwin along Stephens Street. Irvin, who, like Rigdon, also lived in the area (4082 St. James Place) and developed lots within Mission Hills. Examples of this architectural feature can be found on other Irvin-built bungalows throughout the area, especially at 4101-4127 Randolph Street. Other bungalows built along Stephens were by another local builders Alex Schrieber and Martin V. Melhorn.

Turn right at the intersection of Stephens Street and Montecito Way to the northeast corner of Montecito and Palmetto Ways:

12. 4155 Palmetto Way: Schrieber-built home. Schrieber, who lived at 4135 Randolph Street, built this Prairie style structure as a spec house in 1918. Note the heavy beamed brackets supporting the wide eaves of the flat roof which give it its horizontal "prairie" look popularized by Frank Lloyd Wrights work.

Continue east along Montecito Way to the northwest corner of Montecito Way and Randolph Street.

13. 4152 Randolph Street: Schrieber-built home. Another Prairie style single-family bungalow. The unique feature of this home is that it is built entirely of concrete block. Its Prairie style is meant to reflect the wide, flat, horizontal plains of the Midwest. Looking at all of the period revival bungalows up and down Randolph Street, the Prairie style reflects a more "modern" movement to strip away any ornamentation and create a simple, easy to care for, truly American style of house. The bungalow was built in 1922 for Russell Engler, a local banker who worked at the First

National Bank of San Diego. Schrieber also built the 2-story Mission Revival style residence of T. R. Wilson catty-corner to this one (4145 Randolph Street) in 1918.

14. 4144 Randolph Street: Mrs. Jeanette S. Thearle Residence. Built in 1925 for Mrs. Thearle, this 2-story Spanish Eclectic structure is another variant of the popular Spanish Colonial Revival Period of the early to late 1920's in Southern California. Typical of the style are the smooth stucco siding, asymmetrical facade, red tile roof, canales (tile roof vents), and heavy wood beam balcony.

Continue east across the intersection to the northeast corner of Montecito Way and Randolph Street.

15. Site of Kate Sessions Residence (1432 Montecito Way)
In 1910 Miss Sessions built a two-story home for herself and her elderly aunt on the northeast corner of Montecito Way and Randolph Street (demolished). Although her aunt passed away in 1913, Kate lived in the house until 1925, when she built a new house nearby at 1406 Plumosa Way.

Proceed north along the east side of Randolph Street to the intersection of Randolph Street and Arbor Drive. Please note the red tinted sidewalk and the side walk stamps:

16. 4204 Randolph Street: John H. Ferry Residence. Built in 1909 by John H. Ferry, six time elected County Recorder (1906-30). Ferry lived here until 1930. The imposing 2-story home reflects a transitional phase between turn of the century Neoclassic styling to the more rustic Craftsman Era. Note the central, front facing extended gable with its large porch columns. Typically, this Greek temple-inspired gable would have been supported by Ionic or Doric columns. However, the exposed rafters and wood clapboard siding show a direction to the Craftsman Era.

Continue up Randolph Street to:

17. 4201 Randolph Street: Francis Parker School. Founded by noted San Diego architect William Templeton Johnson and his wife Clara in 1912. Named after Colonel Francis Parker, a famous progressive educator from Chicago. Colonel Parker argued for relevancy in education, capacity for independence, good citizenship and cooperation amongst teachers, parents, and students.

One of the first "California open air schools," with classrooms opening onto a central open air quadrangle, (the style was championed in San Diego by Theodore Kistner, architect for San Diego City Schools), the Mission Revival-influenced school buildings were built in stages.

Built on the site of Kate Sessions poinsettia growing area and packing house, the main building was dedicated on Jan. 1, 1913. An auditorium was added in 1919 through 1920, and the entire quadrangle was completed in 1924.

Walk around the northwest perimeter of the school building to:

18. 1406 Plumosa Way: Kate Sessions Residence. Built in 1920 by Miss Sessions, it was the last home she lived in Mission Hills before moving to Pacific Beach in 1927. It has been suggested that because of the flat roof, anti-ornamental style, and large outdoor patio almost hidden by lush landscaping, the house may have been designed by her friend Irving Gill.

Return to Randolph Street. Head on down Randolph Street to Montecito Way. Walk west along Montecito Way to Palmetto. Turn south on Palmetto Way to view:

19. 4111-4145 Palmetto Way: Alberta Security Company's Tract-- 1920-1. The Alberta Security Company was owned and operated by Martin V. Melhorn (The company was named after his wife, Alberta). He was also president of the Bay City Construction Company at the east end of Lewis Street (then 635 Broadway). Melhorn too lived in Mission Hills while he developed property there (1309 Ft. Stockton Drive). A master of the Craftsman style, Melhorn's construction company grew into today's Melhorn Construction Company, one of the largest locally owned and operated general contracting firms in the county. Many homes in the Mission Hills area were designed and built by Melhorn's company.

Walk south on Palmetto Way to Ft. Stockton Drive. Travel east along the south side of Ft. Stockton Drive to the:

20. Mission Hills Nursery, corner Ft. Stockton Drive and Randolph Street. Used by the Sessions Nursery as a growing and storage area. In 1925 the nursery's sales office and sales yard were relocated to the southwest corner of Randolph Street and Fort Stockton Drive. Primarily a sales yard under the supervision of Pasquale Antonicelli, it was sold to Pasquale in 1926. Pasquale built a comfortable Spanish Eclectic bungalow for himself at 4034 Randolph Street, behind what was formerly a corner gas station. Today it abuts the expanded nursery grounds.

Turn right onto Randolph Street, past Pasquale Antonicelli's house to the tennis courts. The tennis courts are on the site of the proposed Protestant Cemetery. Continue walking along the sidewalk to Washington Place and look at the passing trees.

A. Italian Cypress; B. Peppermint Tree; C. Pittosporum crassifolium;

D. Willow Pittosporum; E. Hottentot Fig; F. Pink Bottlebrush; G. California Pepper; H. Canary Island Date Palm; I. Lemonade Berry; J. Coast Live Oak; K. Black Oak; L. Cork Oak.

Continue walking along the sidewalk until you reach the last Cork Oak. Cross Washington Place and head up the northwest asphalt access road back into the park. Walk up the road until you come to the parking lot. Look for the depressions in the lot. These are caused by the sinking of the graves under the asphalt. The site is the location of the burial grounds for the priests assigned to Old Town San Diego. The most noted burial lies somewhere between these and the California Pepper tree nearby. This is the estimated gravesite of Fr. Antonio Dominic Ubach (see next entry).

21. Burial site of Father Antonio Dominic Ubach. Father Ubach is considered to be the "Last of the Padres." Born in Manresa, Spain in 1835, he was of Germanic and Moorish descent. He came to the United States in 1854 and attended the St. Vincent Seminary in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He arrived in San Francisco, California in 1860, where he was ordained a priest at the Chapel of St. Francis. He was assigned to the parish at San Diego in 1866. At the time it extended from San Juan Capistrano to Baja California, and east to the Colorado River (It was significantly reduced in 1905). Fr. Ubach's base of operations was the Old Adobe Chapel at Old Town San Diego. From here he travelled throughout his parish visiting all of the Indian rancherias.

The Indians regarded Fr. Ubach with the highest esteem. He often wrote to Washington, D. C. pleading for their behalf asking for honest and capable Indian agents.

"For God's sake, and the sake of the Indians," wrote Fr. Ubach, "stop this inequity."

Father Ubach was immortalized as being the model for Father Gaspara in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel Ramona. In 1867, he helped a visiting merchant named Alonzo E. Horton to organize a local election of trustees. This resulted in their authorizing the auctioning off of city pueblo land which was bought by Horton. Known as "Horton's Addition," it became the basis for New Town San Diego.

His other achievements include the founding of St. Anthony's school for Indian children in 1867; the original St. Joseph's church in downtown San Diego in 1873; the founding of Calvary Cemetery in 1879. He spent the remaining twenty years of his life working to restore the Mission San Diego de Alcala. He passed away on March 26, 1907, after forty-one years of pastoral service in an area the size of the state of Massachusetts.

Attempts are being made to identify the exact location of his grave so that his body might be exhumed and reburied in the grounds of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Old Town San Diego. It seems almost sacrilegious that the remains of such an esteemed personage in San Diego's history be subjected to dripping motor oil or dog droppings.

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