

JUANA BRIONES HOUSE

Old wisteria vines adorn porch.



The effort to preserve this rare historic property dating to the 1840s when California was still part of Mexico is the mission of the Juana Briones Heritage Foundation. When the present owners applied for a demolition permit in November 1998, concerned residents gathered and eventually formed the Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation.

The City refused to issue a demolition permit because the house is under a Mills Act contract requiring maintenance and public access in return for almost complete cancellation of property taxes. The owners sued and the City counter sued.

The trial to settle the suit was set to occur on March 26th. Instead of starting the trial, Judge Herlihy spent the day talking with each side trying to settle the case by arbitration. His point, and the Foundation agrees with him, is that resolving the current dispute will yield only a temporary solution since the owner cancelled the Mills contract January 1998 making it effective January 2008. Regardless of the outcome of the trial, the owners will be able to demolish the house in 2008.

The week before the trial the owners made an offer to the Foundation to provide a half acre of sloping property at the cor-

ner where Old Adobe Road turns to the left so the house could be moved to a new location. The foundation decided not to be a party to the offer. Working with the Judge, the owners added \$350,000 to the half acre and the Judge instructed the City attorneys to take the offer to the City Council. When consulted by the City, the Foundation determined that moving the house would severely diminish its historic value and make it difficult to raise funds for the project. The Foundation then suggested the Council make a counter offer to swap an acre of Esther Clark Park which is directly across the road from part of the Briones house property for the Briones house and land.

The Council agreed at a closed session in May to investigate the land swap. Apparently they agreed with the Foundation that the setting played a significant role in conveying the history of the house and its residents and that swapping an acre of the 22-acre Esther Clark park for the one and one-half acre Briones property was a solution worth investigating. The park is located in the southwest corner of Palo Alto and borders mostly on Los Altos Hills. Of Palo Alto's more than 33 parks, Clark park is exceeded in size only by the Foothills and Baylands parks. It is undeveloped and enjoyed primarily by the homeowners adjacent to the park. The task now for both the Foundation and the City is to develop a proposal for the use of the house and estimates of the cost of restoration and funding sources so the Council can make a decision. This process will probably take several months.

To learn more, you may go to the Foundation's web site at www.brioneshouse.com. If you would like to help in some way, please call the President, Gail Woolley, 327-4977.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This is my first message as president of PAST Heritage. Perhaps I should start by introducing myself to the many of you I have not met.

I have lived in Palo Alto since 1970, having arrived from historic south central Colorado to do graduate work in electrical engineering at Stanford University, and intending to return. Instead, I'm at my Palo Alto third address—a well conserved 1905 Craftsman bungalow at 420 Homer Avenue—with no plans to move.

I have always felt an attachment to historic sites and the stories they represent, which I initially indulged by exploring ghost towns and abandoned ranches and mines near my former Colorado home. But I became involved in actual preservation only in 1998, when Karen Holman recruited me to PAST (many thanks, Karen). My initiation consisted of helping promote the recent new preservation ordinance, and then serving on the Neighbors for Preservation steering committee to defend it in the Measure G referendum. I joined the PAST board last year.

Being so new to this job, and believing in collective decisions and actions, I have no set agenda. It is my intent to carry on and build upon the solid organization that Prita Graves and her predecessors have built, and which the Board has entrusted to me. I take that trust very seriously.

But I have some ideas. Our most essential activity may be to expand PAST's outreach and education program to promote preservation at the individual and community levels. Ideally, preservation would be achieved at the individual level; we have notable examples of this in Palo Alto. But where that does not work, it is up to the community to decide what of its character and heritage are important to it, and take fair, reasonable steps to defend against the pressures of the day. For this to succeed, however, the community must first buy into the value of and necessity for preservation. Our mission should be to promote that awareness. The recent "Living with History" outreach to owners of historic homes was a sound beginning. We must build from it.

Another possible direction for PAST is, quite literally, new. The architecture of the mid twentieth century is gaining recognition in preservationist circles. (Who would have thought it then—those "futuristic" colored ellipses, ogives, and freeforms speared on vertical poles; those canted bird's beak roofs over aluminum and glass walls; those Eichlers.) Especially those Eichlers, of which Palo Alto has many fine examples, complete with *aficionados*. Our Greenmeadow Eichler neighborhood tour during this year's Preservation Week was a huge success. We may have a whole new, modern field to grow into. Why not?

Oh, yes. I expect we'll host our traditional Holiday House Tour this December, and we'll certainly celebrate Preservation Week next May.

It's going to be a good year. Let's move on with it.

David Bubenik, President

"Ideally, preservation would be achieved at the individual level..."



CRUNCHING PALO ALTO—A DEMOLITION UPDATE

PAST Heritage completed its project of tracking building demolitions in Palo Alto last March, after gathering two years of data. This date corresponds to one year after the defeat of Measure G, making the second year of special interest. We considered only what was being demolished, not what replaced it. That is a separate story, and lacks the urgency of a building about to disappear.

During the first year, 62 buildings went down. The total in the second was 138, an increase of 123%, a rate of double and then some.

Incredibly, and very fortunately, none of these 138 was one of the historic buildings on the current Palo Alto resource list. However, we have not compared the demolition list against the recent Dames and Moore survey.

So what went down where? The adjacent map tells part of the story. Each triangle shows an individual razing; the three-squares icons indicate clusters too closely packed to register individually.

Demolition fever hit the city fairly uniformly. A notable cluster occurs in Barron Park; Old Palo Alto also seems to have more than its share. College Terrace and Professorville were relatively spared. A surprising number occurred in the relatively newly built area south of Oregon Avenue.

The typical doomed usable structure seemed to be a small house on a relatively large lot, where a larger home could be built.

Accompanying this article is a limited photo gallery. We had planned to gather many more, but the project proved beyond the capabilities of our



—Map of building demolition permits issued in Palo Alto from March 1999 to April 2001. Triangles show individual sites; tri-square icons mark closely spaced clusters.

hard working volunteer shutterbug army (many thanks, Natalie Wells). The constraint was time - a properly filled out demolition permit was frequently approved on the same day it was applied for. We could seldom respond to that schedule, and too often all that was left to photograph was a pile of rubble or a hole in the ground.

But why did the post-G demo wave completely spare our historic inventory? We have not figured the exact odds

against that, but a rough estimate puts them at much better than even. The reprieve is therefore unlikely to have occurred by chance. Could the Measure G debate have raised some beneficial consciousness in our community? After all, only 25% of our registered voters actively rejected it. Maybe we can take hope and move forward from that.

In any event, we're happy to put this project behind us.

David Bubenik



The four El Escarpado Circle houses, built beginning in 1927 in the Tudor style feature steeply pitched gabled roofs, tall, narrow windows often in groups with leaded mullions, - important chimneys with decorative chimney pots, and recessed arched front doors.



**FOUR BUSINESS SCH
COMMISSIONED CHA
DEVELOP EL ESCARI
UNIT.**



ON JUNE 24, ABOUT 100 PAST MEMBERS ATTENDED THE PARTY HELD IN THEIR HONOR TO THANK THEM FOR THEIR SUPPORT THIS PAST YEAR.

The renovation architect with Jim and Susan Sweeney.



S SCHOOL PROFESSORS
O CHARLES SUMNER TO
SCARPADO CIRCLE AS A



Back of house from lawn.



RESCUING CUPERTINO'S OLDEST VICTORIAN-ERA HOME

Within the last year, our neighboring Cupertino Historical Society saved the last of the old Cupertino area Victorian-era homes from demolition by purchasing it from the Catholic Diocese of San Jose for \$1.00. The Diocese had sold most of the land around the home, the former St. Joseph's Seminary, to a housing developer, and the house would have been turned over to the developer as well and demolished without the agreement reached with the Historical Society.

According to Ethel Worn, Executive Director of the Cupertino Historical Museum, the Snyder-Hammond House, dating from 1881, was a wedding present from John Snyder to his daughter, who married a Dr. Hammond in the late 19th century. Mrs. Worn reports that John Snyder came to this area in 1840 and moved to the local foothills to farm. Members of the Hammond family lived in the home until 1920, after which it was owned by another family who rented it until recent years as a ranch house amid their large farming operation in the Cupertino foothills. The house, which

was once part of Snyder's vast ranch of over 1200 acres, perches near the top of a hill and has an unobstructed view of the whole Santa Clara Valley.

The Cupertino Historical Society was able to buy one acre of property along with the home. Visible from the upper roads of the Gate of Heaven Cemetery near Rancho San Antonio County Park and Open Space Preserve (off Foothill Blvd. and Cristo Rey Dr.), the house is structurally sound and in good condition. The Historical Society has earmarked funds and is seeking another grant to be able to perform a seismic retrofit on the dwelling.

Future dreams of the Historical Society for the Snyder-Hammond House include its use as an interpretive center or an extension of the Society's Cupertino Historical Museum. Although one can-

not visit at present, we will announce through this newsletter any word we receive that the home will be open to the public. There is the distinct possibility that the area around the house will be incorporated into county park land or an open space preserve in the future, with a trail running close to the house.



OUR OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS—MANY, MANY THANKS!

Each June, we eagerly welcome new members to the PAST Heritage Board of Directors. These fresh new faces join us with new ideas and enthusiasm. But as we welcome these new people, it is also time to thank those who have served faithfully and are retiring from our board at the end of their terms.

This year our retiring Board members are **Millie Mario, Carol Murden and Debbie Nichols**. Both Millie and Carol also served on the Historic Resources Board and provided an excellent way for PAST to keep up with the issues coming before that board. As a member of the real estate community, Debbie helped us understand issues and concerns from that perspective.

We are very grateful for all the hard work they each contributed and hope that they will continue to support PAST in the future. We will miss you all!

Pria Graves, Past President

OLD HOUSE RESOURCES

Have you wondered where to find an old doorknob that would match your existing ones? How about a missing pulley for an old double hung window?

How lucky we are that in the Bay Area there are many sources of old, original building parts.

A partial list includes:

Artefact Design and Salvage	408-279-8766
Berkeley Architectural Salvage	510-655-2270
Caldwell's factory Outlet	415-550-6777
Ohmega Salvage	510-204-0767
Reusable Lumber Co.	650-529-9122
Savvy Salvage	510-655-8877
Urban Ore	510-559-4460
Whole House Building Supply and Salvage	650-328-8731

It is amazing what you can find, and at very reasonable prices. Benefits of re-using old materials include: limiting land-fill volume, good economy, good aesthetics and a good feeling.

Martin Bernstein

PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

Following the defeat of Measure G last year, the Planning Department began work on a new voluntary preservation ordinance. The idea of this approach is to leave the existing 1970's ordinance untouched and to create a completely new voluntary Register of Historic Homes. There will be benefits associated with choosing to list one's home on the new Register, including additional allowable floor area, exemption of expensive flood hazard requirements, and other minor zoning exceptions not granted to other homes. In addition, demolition and inappropriate remodeling of the home would be permanently prohibited. Development of this new ordinance was proceeding nicely, with a draft version reviewed by the HRB in May and a Council hearing expected some time this summer.

Then in late May a few rumblings of opposition began to emerge. As in the Measure G campaign, the charges were mostly based on misinformation. Quoting from the 1970's ordinance language (not from the proposed new section), opponents again raised the specter of homes being regulated without owner consent.

Suddenly, over Memorial Day weekend, Ed Gawf, the Director of Planning and Community Environment, announced that he was postponing the new ordinance in order to allow time for more community consensus building. It is obvious he feared that the current Council climate would not allow the ordinance to move forward in the face of this barrage of opposition.

With Ed's pending departure, the future of the new preservation ordinance is uncertain. Ed had experience elsewhere in working with a voluntary ordinance and was confident that he could make it work here. Without his support, the effort may well be shelved permanently. We can only hope that Ed's replacement will continue to champion a strengthened ordinance and will eventually be successful in moving forward with preservation in our community.

Pria Graves



The other El Escapardo Circle homes



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Now through September 30—

Tools of the Trade at the Museum of American Heritage

351 Homer Avenue, Palo Alto, CA

650-321-1004

Coopers, joiners, wheelwrights, sawyers and blacksmiths used handtools to successfully craft their finished work. The current exhibit spotlights the skills and tools of craftsmen and their role in the development of the Bay Area. The museum is open Friday-Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free.

Saturday and Sunday, August 25 & 26—

Palo Alto Festival of the Arts,

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. *University Avenue*

Be sure to stop by the PAST table. See you there!

Sunday, October 7—

Prohibition on the Peninsula—Clifford Walker

2:00 p.m. *Lucie Stern Auditorium*

Join the **Palo Alto Historical Association** to hear Clifford Walter, author of *One Eye Closed and the Other Red, The California Bootlegging Years* tell about "enforcement" of Prohibition in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Ongoing

The **Presidio Trust** in San Francisco hosts historical tours and events including a program on the recent ecological restoration of a tidal marsh at Chrissy Field that was missing for over one hundred years. Look for their events calendar at: <http://www.presidiotrust.gov>

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PAST Heritage is a nonprofit organization advocating the preservation of the historic architecture, neighborhoods, and character of the greater Palo Alto Stanford area.

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