

City: Landmark Houghton Donner House to be Preserved!

INSIDE:

Presidents' Report	Page 2
Watch Dog Report	Page 3
Houghton Donner House Update by Don Gagliardi	Pages 4-5
Le Petit Trianon Theater by Don Gagliardi	Pages 6-7
Underground Parking at St. James Park?	Page 8
Update on River St. by April Halberstadt	Page 9
Update on Montgomery Hotel by Ellen Garboske	Page 10
Update on Jose Theatre	Page 11
Architect Series: Aaron Green by Jack Douglas	Pages 12-13
Book Review: <i>Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper</i> Reviewed by Don Gagliardi	Page 15
ULI's Troubling Report by Don Gagliardi	Pages 16-17
PAC*SJ Spring Fling at Picchetti Winery	Page 18
Preservation Shark Membership/Renewal	Page 19
Board Members	Page 20
Calendar	Page 20

***House May be Condemned and
Moved. Details Inside on Page 4.***





From the President

PAC*SJ is pleased to welcome our first intern, **Dawn Hopkins**, who is working with us this summer in our first official office, a pleasant space provided by longtime member Keith Watt, at Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St. in San Jose (see pages 6-7). Dawn is majoring in architectural studies and minoring in art at Connecticut College in New London, Ct. She was named a Lawrence Scholar for outstanding high school performance. She has worked with a Historic House Ass'n in Old Lyme, Ct., was a 2000 intern for William Maston Architect in Mountain View and attended Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo in 1997. She is living at her parents' home in Sunnyvale and has a stipend from the college to work with PAC*SJ.

Dawn's assignment includes regular office coverage, attending meetings, organizing events, making referrals, communication, creating new membership brochures, assisting with the Preservation Shark (see page 19), the garage sale, shadowing San Jose's historic preservation officer **Courtney Damkroger**, and much more. Dawn is a delightful person the whole preservation community should meet. *You can reach Dawn at the office at (408) 998-8105 or snickpoh@aol.com. Drop by Office No. 1 at Le Petit Trianon and take her to lunch!*

PAC*SJ is seeking donations of office items to furnish its new office: a fax machine, laser printer (and spare cartridges), digital camera, typewriter, staplers and staples, pencils, pencil sharpener, scotch tape dispensers and tape, three-hole punch, letter-sized notepads, printer, copier, computer paper, zip disks, recordable CDs, letter-sized file folders and Pendaflex hanging folders. *If you can help, please call PAC*SJ at (408) 998-8105. Donations are tax deductible.*

What is "Very San Jose"? *San Jose Mercury News* columnist **Joe Rodriguez** has asked readers. Unlike many other cities, the list won't include an intact historic downtown commercial district. The Redevelopment Agency (SJRA), taking its direction from the Battle of Britain, has been SJRA lost direction early on by not supporting the existing infrastructure downtown.

blitzing whole blocks downtown for over 40 years, levelling historic buildings and leaving bomb craters. SJRA's most memorable contribution are the Park Plaza fountains, now threatened by the plan to put parking under Cesar Chavez Park (see page 8). SJRA is also turning loose New York's Palladium Group to level several buildings still remaining with character and stories to tell. They will no doubt be replaced by faceless, multi-story concrete bunkers.



*PAC*SJ intern Dawn Hopkins*



*PAC*SJ President Pat Curia*

'PAC*SJ is seeking donations of office items to furnish its new office. . . . If you can help, please call 998-8105.'

SJRA engaged in wholesale destruction of downtown's unique architectural features, eliminated all semblance of ethnic businesses and intends to replace them with a bland shopping mall atmosphere by importing national retail chain stores. Had SJRA provided existing businesses low cost rehab loans, free paint, earthquake retrofitting, and subsidies during light rail installation, downtown would be much different today. Instead of looking like Anytown, USA, it would proudly be on any list of what's Very San Jose.

San Jose Library California Room librarian **Bob Johnson** reports that the 88 1931 San Jose aerial photos purchased from the Fairchild Aerial Photo Collection in memory of former PAC*SJ president **Rick Sherman** have arrived and are in great demand. Memorial funds also purchased books on California pottery, art and architecture.

The western office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation has moved. It's now at 8 California St., San Francisco, CA 94111. 415-956-0610.

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Watchdog Report

The choker chains are rattling and it's tough times for some home-grown businesses in the downtown area trying to compete for the city's favor against those saccharine, nationwide chains the top dogs seem to be courting. With the Twohy Building slated for rehab, the city slammed the kitchen door in the face of Casa Castillo in favor of a yet-unnamed chain restaurant. And House of Blues may or may not be a great addition to the Post and First St. area, but all us old dogs wonder whether it's really fair to other long-term establishments to grant House of Blues virtually the whole of Lightston Alley for their exclusive loading and unloading zone? Howzabout sharing some of those favors with locally owned and operated enterprises that are UNIQUE to San Jose! Hope you didn't miss Mark Fiore's recent cartoon in the *San Jose Mercury News*. It showed a street scene with big signs for a series of national chain stores, House of Blues, Improv, Planet Hollywood, Applebee's, Hard Rock Cafe, Johnny Rockets, and gave you a multiple choice of where you were, a franchise trade show, San Jose, or Anytown USA. Sad as it was, it tickled my belly.

The Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) continues to bring in outsiders to plan the future of downtown San Jose. The top dog of imported development designers is New York's Palladium Group. Maybe they will bring a fresh idea or two, and that's not bad, with some provisos. There must not be any more hit-and-run actions condoned by our esteemed local top dogs. Don't dare touch any more of the remaining historic structures in the downtown San Jose historic commercial district, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places! And plans to build in-fill structures adjacent to or within the historic district should be sensitive and respectful of the existing historic structures.

Need I rattle the bones (and chains) of SJRA's past gigantic mistakes in determining what will or or will not work downtown? Good examples are the failed Pavilion and United Theatres projects. The economy has cooled, I remind you humans. Let's not end of with a bunch of vacant, non-descript buildings downtown. There's no shame in taking cautious steps before plunging into the fray. All dogs show their pedigree best with grace and good breeding!

Meandering down another favorite path, the group hired by the city redesign historic St. James Park has been holding meetings to strut their designs before the public. These plans don't raise my hackles. But parking under the park does! (See page 8). I'm no engineer, but don't all those fumes created by gassy human monsters (er-r-r, cars) have to be vented someplace? Do these fumes come out at ground level? Instead of barking in the park, all us dogs would trotting through fast holding our snouts. Considering the million or so dollars being spent on a playground in the park, while at the same time presenting plans to tear up the park and build parking underneath, how are we supposed to have faith in the cognitive abilities of our leaders? 'Nuff said.

— The Dog

Anytown, USA? Without its historic downtown business district and local retailers, San Jose will be, barks the Dog.

Below, a 1946 postcard typifying a popular mid-century design appropriate for any town, with virtually nothing but the name changed.



'The Redevelopment Agency continues to bring in outsiders to plan the future of downtown San Jose. The top dog of imported designers is New York's Palladium Group. Maybe they will bring a fresh idea or two, and that's not bad, with some provisos. . . . Don't dare touch any more of the remaining historic structures in the downtown San Jose historic commercial district, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places!'



The Houghton family in a late 1800s family portrait. Photo courtesy of Ann Smith, granddaughter of Sherman and Eliza Donner Houghton.

'There's no question the House will be saved. . . . Count on it being saved.'

Redevelopment
Agency Director
Susan Shick

Houghton Donner House Given Landmark Status; Yet Its Ultimate Fate Remains in Limbo

by Don Gagliardi

"There's no question that the [Houghton Donner] House will be saved," San Jose Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) director Susan Shick told a group of community leaders, including both PAC* SJ president Pat Curia and the author, in the presence of councilwoman Cindy Chavez on June 13. "You can count on the House being saved," Shick reiterated during the meeting.

While the question of the Houghton Donner House's survival may have been resolved, questions still remain concerning: the site the building will ultimately occupy, either its current location at 156 E. St. John where it has been for more than 90 years or elsewhere; ownership, whether by current owner, PAC* SJ advisory board member Keith Watt, who also owns the nearby Le Petit Trianon theater (see pages 6-7) or the SJRA; and restoration or renovation and ultimate use, whether by Watt as a conference center or another developer targeted by SJRA for an undisclosed purpose.

The Houghton Donner House, which is in the path of the new Civic Center Plaza employee parking garage and a proposed

'While the question of the Houghton Donner House's survival may have been resolved, questions still remain concerning the site the building will occupy, ownership and restoration and ultimate use.'

high-rise housing complex, was unanimously granted City Landmark status by the City Council on June 5. Local Landmarks Commissioners had recommended the action, calling the Houghton Donner House "the most historic building in San Jose" (see, D. Gagliardi, "Commission Recommends Landmark Status for Historic Houghton Donner House," *Continuity*, Spring 2001, at pp. 4-5). The large Victorian Italianate style structure had been home to two historically important San Joseans, early mayor Sherman Houghton and his wife, Donner Party survivor Eliza Donner Houghton, who wrote some of the earliest and most authoritative accounts of the tragic 1840s wagon train party.

However, the ink had hardly dried on the landmarking proclamation when procedures were put in motion to acquire the Houghton Donner House from its current owner, Watt, by process of eminent domain, despite the fact that the City had not formulated a plan for the building's site or restoration. A hearing on a "resolution of necessity," the first step for condemning the

property, was scheduled before the same City Council on June 12, only a week after it was declared a Landmark.

Community leaders from the Downtown Neighborhood Leadership Forum (DNLF) intervened and induced councilmember Chavez to postpone the hearing for two weeks to June 26, which they hoped would allow Watt and SJRA an opportunity to negotiate an amicable agreement allowing the Houghton Donner House to remain onsite or nearby, be restored to its original grandeur and developed in a way that would make the interior as well as the exterior accessible to the public. On June 26, with no agreement in place and at PAC*SJ's urging, the resolution of necessity hearing was further postponed two months until August 28.

In the meantime, troubled by the absence of a clear plan for ensuring the Houghton Donner House's survival, PAC*SJ engaged San Jose land use attorney Jeffrey B. Hare to protect the interests of the preservation community. (Watt, the building's owner, has his own attorney, Norm Matteoni.) Hare has been exploring PAC*SJ's legal options, including the impact of the massive proposed City employee parking garage adjacent to the landmark's current site, the site PAC*SJ prefers consistent with its policy of preserving buildings where they are. (The 120-year old Houghton Donner House has moved previously, but not in nearly a century.) The parking garage, at 70-feet, would stand cheek-to-jowl with and tower over the Victorian home, making it a less than optimal neighbor. Either the garage will require dramatic re-design, something the City is not voluntarily inclined to do, or the Houghton Donner House will need to find another parcel.

Other locations have been mentioned as possible "receiver sites" for the Houghton Donner House, including the southeast corner of Fifth and St. John Sts., the empty lot across the street on St. John St. and the empty parcel at the southeast corner of Fourth and Julian Sts. Shick and her staff discussed these sites at the June 13 meeting, and SJRA's Bill Ekern led a tour of the possible alternative sites on June 26. The author participated along with DNLF co-chair Ken Podgorsek and PAC*SJ summer intern Dawn Hopkins. The Fifth and St. John site, adjacent to Le Petit Trianon on the Fifth St. pedestrian corridor which will connect the new City Hall to Japantown, emerged as the DNLF's favorite,



*'PAC*SJ president Pat Curia told Shick that SJRA has a poor track record as owner of historic buildings. Curia brandished a snapshot of the First Church of Christ Scientist, which SJRA has let languish and deteriorate rather than be developed for compatible use. "Compare this with that," Curia said, showing another snapshot of the newly repainted Donner House.'*

provided the existing homes on site could be relocated.

The building's current owner, Watt, hopes to keep the Houghton Donner House in the Horace Mann neighborhood, within a block or so of his Le Petit Trianon theater. Watt's recently written business plan calls for developing the house as a meeting and conference center so as to create synergies between his two high profile properties. "The Houghton Donner Conference and Cultural Center would be a thriving cultural arts complex serving the needs of our area's unique and diverse community," the business plan gushes.

SJRA has reportedly been underwhelmed by the lack of details, especially concerning financing, in the business plan as well as Watt's lack of a proven track record as a developer and his failure to develop the property during nearly two decades of ownership. Rather than negotiate with Watt, Shick has made clear that her preference is to acquire the property and send out a "Request for Qualifications" (RFQ) to developers to determine interest in the house. Watt, she says, could submit his plan along with those of other interested developers. In the meantime, SJRA would own the building and could leave it next to the parking garage or relocate it on another of its many parcels in the downtown area.

PAC*SJ president Pat Curia told Shick on June 13 that SJRA has a poor track record as owner of historic buildings. Curia brandished a snapshot of the First Church of Christ Scientist alongside St. James Park, which SJRA has let languish and deteriorate rather than be developed for compatible use. "Compare this with that," Curia said, showing another snapshot of the newly repainted Houghton Donner House. Other community leaders agreed. DNLF's Podgorsek, who also chairs the Civic Center Project Area Committee and is president of the Campus Community Ass'n in Naglee Park, said that, absent a clear plan for the restoration or renovation of the Houghton Donner House, he prefers Watt's continued ownership instead of the "uncertainty" of SJRA taking possession. What assurances does the community have that the Houghton Donner House will not deteriorate if SJRA gains ownership?, this author asked Shick. "You have my word," Shick said.

PAC*SJ is following developments closely nonetheless.



Le Petit Prince: Trianon Theater adds Regal Element to Downtown San Jose Performing Arts Scene

by Don Gagliardi

Le Petit Trianon, at 72 N. Fifth St. within the new Civic Plaza area, is fast becoming *the* gathering place for San Jose's political and cultural elite. Yet, according to owner Keith Watt, like many a business downtown, unless the City's redevelopment plans make allowance for its parking needs, this historic treasure may soon no longer be a viable commercial enterprise.

In recent months, the elegant foyer and auditorium of Le Petit Trianon, formerly known as Mother Olson's Inn, has hosted a reception for new city councilpersons, another for the new publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, a pair of televised Strong Neighborhoods Initiative election candidate forums, and a board meeting of the San Jose Downtown Ass'n, in addition to its regular diet of classical music performances. PAC*SJ has long held its board meetings there, and now maintains an office in the building also.

Le Petit Trianon is supported by 126 parking places in lots nearby. But these parking lots, and perhaps the theatre building itself, occupy sites coveted by the San Jose Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) for high density housing. Owner Keith Watt, a PAC*SJ advisory board member

'Although not currently a City Landmark, Le Petit Trianon is eminently eligible for such status. . . . The building (has) a rating of 106 points on San Jose's historic resource rating system.'

who also owns the historically significant but embattled Houghton Donner House just around the block (see pages 4-5), says that "the Trianon doesn't make sense as a performance space unless it has plenty of available parking."

Although not currently a City landmark, Le Petit Trianon is eminently eligible for such status. An historical and architectural evaluation of the building commissioned by Watt and performed by the Dill Design

Group (DDG) in November 2000 gave the building a rating of 106 points on San Jose's historic resource rating system. (Anything above 67 merits landmark status.)

Constructed in 1923 as home to the Christian Assembly, and "organized more as a school than as a church," according to the DDG study, Le Petit Trianon remained a church property for nearly 60 years until 1982, when Watt acquired it. The building was designed by architect William Binder, who also designed several other local buildings, including the Carnegie Library and the Hall of Justice (both since demolished) and the Jose Theatre and the Montgomery Hotel (both previously under sentence of death but given reprieves following lawsuits filed by PAC*SJ). His firm, Binder and Curtis "is recognized as being one of the more significant local architectural firms during the early part of the Twentieth Century; many of its works are listed on the National Register of Historic Places," says the DDG report.

Binder based his design on the Petit Trianon in Versailles, France, which was built for Madame du Barry in 1763 and later altered for Marie Antoinette "with whom it is mainly

associated,” per DDG. “Used by the queen as a private refuge from the formality of mid-Eighteenth Century court life, the Petit Trianon [in France] is a retreat surrounded by an informal ‘English’ garden. Because of the elegant simplicity of its design, the building became a popular icon that was replicated during turn of twentieth century America.”

“The design of the building is representative of a studied implementation of Neo-classical Revival, based on formal training promulgated by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in France, the era’s premier school of architecture,” effuses the DDG study. “It embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Neo-classical period of architectural revival forms, and is a representative work of a local master . . .”

After acquiring it nearly two decades ago, Watt renovated and renamed San Jose’s Petit Trianon to reflect the architectural design of the structure. Two-stories tall and rectangular, its interior includes a large auditorium which originally served as a sanctuary behind a sizeable reception area with a large hearth and fireplace flanked by formal staircases leading to a balcony circling the area. On the second floor, accessible from the balcony, are small apartments and a large meeting room. The entry porch is recessed “under a portico of six Corinthian columns supporting a classical entablature with cornice, modillions and dentils,” according to the DDG report.

Le Petit Trianon plays host to numerous local musical groups, “giving them a rare opportunity to perform in a quality theatre in a city where performance space is a at a premium, both in availability and cost,” according to Watt. These groups include the San Jose Chamber Music Society,



‘The Trianon doesn’t make sense as a performance space unless it has plenty of available parking.’

— Keith Watt,
owner

the San Jose Chamber Orchestra, the San Jose Flamenco Society, the San Jose Symphony’s children’s and youth orchestras, the Vietnamese Philharmonic Orchestra, the Saigon Chamber Music Society and Saigon Philharmonic Orchestra, the Steinway Society, the South Bay Guitar Society, the Machu Pichu Andean Music Group, Mission College Chamber Orchestra, and the California Music Teachers Ass’n.

Also, several groups host meetings at Le Petit Trianon, including PAC*SJ, the Commonwealth Club of California, the Downtown Neighborhood Leadership Forum (DNLf), the Horace Mann Neighborhood Ass’n, the Romanian Cultural Society, the Corvinus Hungarian Cultural Society and the African American Methodist Church.

Most of these groups perform and/or meet several times a year and as often as once a month. The combination of meetings, events and performances average over one per day every day of the year, with over 20,000 attendees annually.

“Le Petit Trianon is simply a fabulous cultural resource,” says local activist Christi Welter, co-chair of DNLf and an avid fan of the Trianon’s chamber orchestral concerts. “It provides a respected venue for multi-cultural performing arts groups as well as to talented and aspiring youth. It’s really indispensable to the vibrancy of our downtown residential community.”

Watt has been negotiating for more than a year with SJRA to retain his properties and ensure that he has sufficient parking to keep them viable. Watt’s properties, including Le Petit Trianon, were among 40 sites identified by SJRA in the greater downtown to propagate “requests for qualifications” (RFQs) to developers for high density housing complexes. The high density housing RFQ initiative has raised uncertainty and anxieties among affected property owners and local residents alike, casting a cloud as it has on landmark properties like the Houghton Donner House, historic districts such as the Hensley and St. James Park, established neighborhoods like Japantown, and longstanding businesses, including Tico’s Tacos (offering what is reportedly San Jose’s best chimichanga for more than 40 years) and Memorabilia of San Jose (Leonard McKay’s quirky den of inimitability).

Watt is encouraged by a recent warming in relations with SJRA, which he attributes to community pressure to preserve his historic properties. Watt is optimistic that he may be able to retain his 48-space surface lot at 117 N. 5th St. and negotiate for dedicated spaces in the Civic Center employee garage to be built directly across the street from the Trianon. “I know I’m the *bete noir* at 50 West San Fernando (SJRA headquarters), but I have to believe the Agency realizes how important this place is to the community.”

*Councilmember
Cindy Chavez (center)
chats with a
constituent at a
reception for new San
Jose Mercury News
publisher Joe Natoli
hosted by the
Downtown
Neighborhood
Leadership Forum
(DNLf) May 30 at
Le Petit Trianon.*





A forested St. James Park from an early 20th century postcard. Critics of a proposed parking garage underneath the park say that a garage would mean the park could no longer support mature trees.

‘Putting a parking garage under St. James Park would violate the City’s own design guidelines.’

Update: SJRA’s Assault on St. James Park

Public Derides City’s ‘Study’ of Parking Garages Under St. James and Cesar Chavez Parks

San Jose’s city council caused a stir on May 9 by authorizing a “study” of possible parking garages underneath Cesar Chavez Plaza Park along Market St. and under St. James Park in the St. James Square historic district. The proposal has met with almost universal derision by the public and the press.

The study, expected to be completed by September, was instigated by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Report on downtown San Jose, which recommends putting garages under these public parks (*see pages 16-17*). Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) Director Susan Shick has publicly endorsed the concept, though no details concerning how it would operate have been released.

Board member Ellen Garboske told the council PAC*SJ opposes the plan. Putting a parking garage under St. James Park would violate the City’s own design guidelines for the historic district. The guidelines stipulate that parking structures “should not have frontage onto St. James Park, nor should they be accessed from the

PAC*SJ is not alone in opposing garages under the parks. The underground garages have been ridiculed from several quarters. Former mayor Tom McEnery, speaking before the Rotary Club, called the notion the “silliest idea” from City Hall in years.

San Jose Mercury News columnist Joe Rodriguez concurs: “What St. James Park and the surrounding neighborhood need isn’t an underground parking garage.” Based on his experience in Los Angeles where Pershing Square’s old trees and park benches were razed to put in an underground garage, Rodriguez says “bad things happen when you put parking garages under main squares: It scares away families with young kids who don’t want to get run over by confused tourists or executives late for downtown meetings.”

The *Mercury News* on July 1, citing public skepticism, editorialized against the garages: “Our admittedly unscientific survey found widespread uneasiness about whether the city can dismantle and then reassemble the parks without ruining them.”

Carol Savoy, mother of a 7-year-old and past president of the Horace Mann

(HMNA), voice of residents nearest St. James Park, opposes even studying an underground garage. Savoy told the *Mercury News*: “Imagine our reaction when we read that our children will be sharing the park with 600 additional cars! . . . The City has to stop joking around when it comes to our kids’ safety. It’s time to stop pushing City problems into spaces intended for kids.” Says Sue Cam, another HMNA past president: “I don’t believe they can put a garage under St. James Park without absolutely destroying the park.”

Walk San Jose, a pedestrian advocacy group, sent a letter to Mayor Ron Gonzales taking a stand against the underground parking garages. Although “desireable to . . . boost the supply of short-term parking for visitors to downtown, quarrying one or both beloved downtown parks to accomplish this goal is unwarranted,” Walk San Jose president Jill Escher wrote. “(SJRA’s) statement that trees can be restored in these parks is a gross distortion of the truth. Parking garages would impose stringent limitations on landscaping and would spell the end of our parks as inviting, shady green spaces. . . . Mature, leafy shade trees . . . would become an impossibility.”

Update on River St. Project

PAC*SJ Responds to RFQ on River St. Project

by April Halberstadt

After ten years, the first phase of the River Street Historic Neighborhood project is drawing to a close. Phase I construction included nine houses and a barn that were moved from the Guadalupe River flood plain, put on new foundations and renovated.

PAC*SJ met with the Redevelopment Agency in mid-July to submit its preliminary plans for Phase II of the project, which will involve renovating the remaining 14 unrelocated buildings clustered around a much loved San Jose barbecue restaurant, Henry's Hi-Life.

PAC*SJ assembled a development team which included Garavaglia Associates, the architectural firm which has guided the design work on this project for ten years, and DeMattei Construction, a local builder with nearly

*'The PAC*SJ vision for the remaining River St. houses calls for renovation to provide live/work space for artists.'*

thirty years experience in building unique homes.

In addition to our outstanding architect and contractor, PAC*SJ will be joined on River Street Phase II by two other unique entities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and San Jose's Convention and Visitors Bureau. Both

groups wish to invest in the project and have indicated their financial support.

Two other firms are also submitting proposals for the project, Barry Swenson Builders and Diamond Development Company. We expect the team for Phase II development to be selected within the next thirty days.

The PAC*SJ vision for the remaining River St. houses calls for renovation to provide live/work space for artists and other low to moderate income individuals. The houses are all relatively small, unique structures not generally suitable for large families or the pressures of retail spaces. But the art community has expressed a strong interest in developing a small enclave of homes for artists and others who would enjoy this unique living area. PAC*SJ is very excited about the benefits that artists would bring to the area.



Fresh coats of paint do wonders to the appearance of some River St. project houses.



The Montgomery Hotel as shown in an old postcard.

'The project, as conceived, will be an 83-room boutique hotel with an upscale restaurant on the ground floor.'

Update on the Montgomery Hotel

Interior Plans For Refurbished Montgomery Hotel Brought Before PAC*SJ

by Ellen Garboske

PAC*SJ was invited to attend a recent presentation of the conceptual renovation plans for the historic Montgomery Hotel. The Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) recently awarded the Montgomery Hotel development contract to Divco West, heading the project with partners Pacific Caribbean Hotel Group and local realtor Ritchie Commercial.

Designed by William Curtis, the Montgomery Hotel was built in 1911 by T. S. Montgomery, who changed the face of San Jose in the 1920s and '30s. Montgomery built San Jose's first skyscraper, the 7-story Garden City Bank (demolished), followed by the Twohy Building, the St. Claire Building and the elegant Hotel Sainte Claire. Since the exciting 186-foot move of the Montgomery Hotel in January 2000, preservationists, historians and the general public have been waiting to see how this grand hotel would be treated. The project architect claims it will be a gem, comparable to the best in the world.

Frederic Knapp, the renovation project

architect from the firm of Page & Turnbull, Inc., discussed the plans for the Montgomery and presented renderings illustrating the proposed hotel renovations. The project, as conceived, will be an 83-room boutique hotel with an upscale restaurant occupying the ground floor. Page & Turnbull listed their renovations of the Palace and Fairmont Hotels and the Ferry Building in San Francisco as qualifications for this project.

According to the conceptual plans, the historic lobby, with its barrelled ceiling, will remain. The flooring, walls, friezes, pilasters and other details will be replicated. The restaurant will be both to the left and right of the lobby. The biggest change in this area will be the mullioned windows installed in the front of the two restaurant sections. Since the move eliminated the basement, the back left portion of the first floor will be the service area, containing the heating, air conditioning and other operating equipment. The historic lobby will continue its L-shape to the right back portion where the hotel registration desk will be located. On the north wall

near the desk there will be an entrance door from which hotel guests will arrive and depart.

According to the architect, guest rooms on the second, third and fourth levels will be compatible, but not historic. The rooms will be gutted and made larger than the originals, using all new materials and differing layouts. The trellis and roof-top terrace will possibly be rehabilitated, as will the ladies writing room.

The ground floor has been enclosed and the roof and exterior sealed. Seismic retrofitting is scheduled to begin in August. Construction is expected to take about 18 months, with re-opening expected early in 2003.

With a total of 83 guest rooms, a meeting area, board room, "white tablecloth" restaurant and the elegant historic lobby, project leaders suggested the Montgomery, as a boutique hotel, would compare with the Hotel Griffon on San Francisco's Embarcadero waterfront. Perhaps preservationists might wish for fuller restoration of historic interior details and appointments, but at least this grande dame of San Jose hotels lives on!

Update on Jose Theatre

City Council Agrees to Ten-Year Lease with Improv Comedy Club for Historic Jose Theatre

San Jose's city council on June 27 agreed to lease the Jose Theatre to the Improv Comedy Club for ten years at below market rent. The theatre, which will open by Spring 2002, will seat 500.

The Jose, built in 1904 as a vaudeville house, is the oldest theater in San Jose. Once host to well-known performers such as Harry Houdini, "its existence was threatened in 1996 by a developer who wanted to demolish the audi-

torium," wrote *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Edwin Garcia. "Preservationists fought to save the building and eventually the city took it over" in settlement of PAC*SJ's lawsuit for violation of the California environmental impact law.

"A lot of people in the preservation community spent a lot of time advocating for that building," PAC*SJ president Pat Curia told the *Mercury News*. "So we're happy a tenant is going to use it. Its

walking through downtown."

The Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) solicited proposals from developers selected The Improv from among five solid proposals for reopening the Jose. (See, "Marquee Set to Glow Again at the Jose Theatre, *Continuity*, Winter 2001, at p.8). "Almost all potential tenants would have needed a great deal of ongoing assistance," SJRA director Susan Shick said in the *Mercury News*.

Although the City will restore the theatre for \$3.4 million and pay tenant improvements, "the lease is greatly improved over past deals we've done," according to councilmember Dave Cortese.

"A lot of people in the preservation community spent a lot of time advocating for that building. So we're happy a tenant is going to use it."

— PAC*SJ
President
Pat Curia
as quoted in the
**San Jose
Mercury News**





The late, great Weir Building.

*The Weir Building, the only Aaron Green - designed structure ever built in San Jose, was demolished by the Redevelopment Agency in 1993 despite PAC*SJ's and Green's own pleas to save it.*

Photo by Franklin Maggi, courtesy of Jack Douglas.

They Left Their Mark: Architect Series

Aaron Green: Departed Disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright

by Jack Douglas

The Bay Area and the world lost a major architectural talent with the death of Aaron Green in early June. Green was an associate of Frank Lloyd Wright, with whom he interned at Wright's Taliesin groups in Wisconsin and Arizona.

Born in Corinth, Mississippi, Green was drawn into the arts at an early age. He attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and New York's Cooper Union prior to joining Wright.

After serving in the Air Corps during the Second World War he set up a practice in Los Angeles. When Wright moved to San Francisco he asked Green to join him as his partner. Green was virtually co-designer of Wright's buildings from that period, including the Marin County Civic Center and the circular V.C. Morris store in San Francisco's Maiden Lane. After Wright's death, Green carried on the Wright tradition in numerous projects around the country.

Sadly, Green's only building in San Jose, the Weir legal offices, formerly at 93 W. Julian St., was demolished by the

"... brick and wide eaves mark [the Weir Building] as a descendant of [Frank Lloyd] Wright."

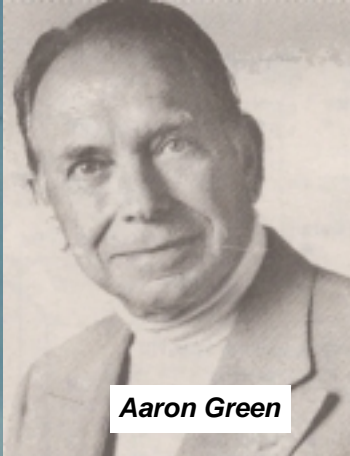
**— Alan Hess
*Mercury News***

Redevelopment Agency. In his column in the *San Jose Mercury News*, architectural critic Alan Hess described the Weir building as "a most charming little building on the worst possible site in town . . . its compact offices are as efficient as a ship's cabin. A palette of natural red brick and warm woods makes some of the most comfortable offices in town. Outside, brick and wide eaves mark it as a descendant of Wright." In some ways, the Weir building resembled our Taliesin-designed Center for the Performing Arts.

Green came to San Jose in 1993 and joined members of PAC*SJ when it petitioned the City Council to preserve the Weir Building as a City landmark. It was to no avail.

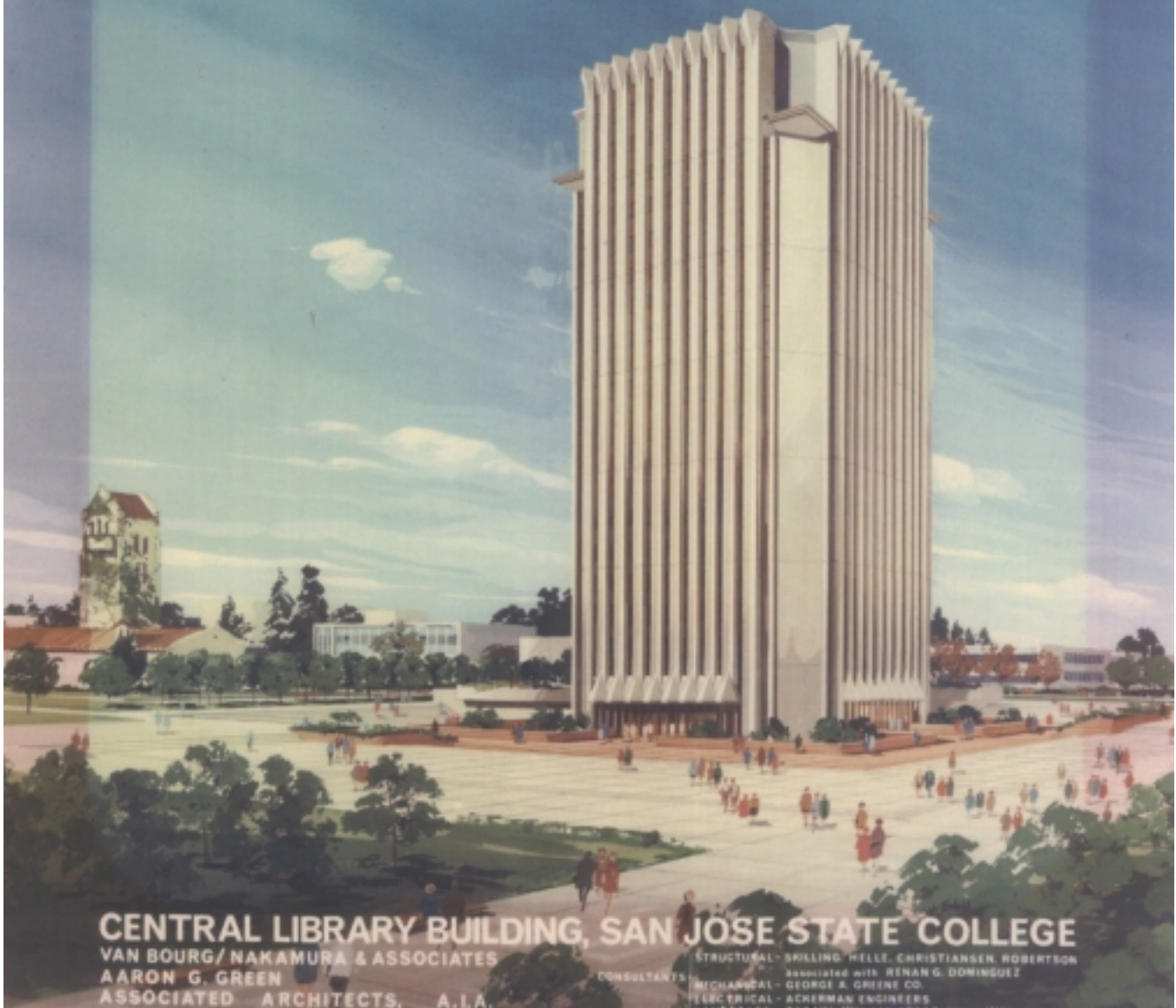
In the mid-1960s, Green designed a revolutionary new library building for San Jose State University. This "library tower" was to be eighteen stories high, which would have made it the tallest building in town. The new library was approved all the way up the system but was shelved by the lawmakers in Sacramento. The University had to wait another twelve years before the inadequate five-story Clark Library was built in 1980. Had Green's library been built, we probably would not be tearing up the campus for the newer, "revolutionary" joint City/University library.

Wouldn't it be fine to be able to say that the distinguished modern architect had left an indelible mark in San Jose. Unfortunately, that mark was knowingly and deliberately erased by the Redevelopment Agency.



Aaron Green

'In the mid-1960s, Green designed a revolutionary new library building for San Jose State . . . This "library tower" was to be 18 stories high, which would have made it the tallest building in town.'



Above: Aaron Green's San Jose State Library that never was. Had it been built, we might not need a new one today.



Left: The old Carnegie Library at 4th & San Fernando Sts., demolished in the 1950s. Below: a conceptual drawing of the monumental City of San Jose/ San Jose State University Joint Library under construction at the same site.



‘Double Fold is timely for San Jose and its new main public library being constructed on the site of the city’s original Carnegie Library, long since demolished. . . . There is a risk that the first and greatest casualty of the new Library will be . . . **books!**’

PAC*SJ ANNUAL GARAGE & SALVAGE SALE

Fri. 9/29 6 pm to dusk; Sat. 9/30 7:30 am to 3 pm; Sun. 9/30 8 am to 2 pm
260 South 13th Street, San Jose

Please start gathering and saving all your good stuff to donate to the cause. No clothing or music, please. We particularly need antiques and architectural elements such as door knobs, doors, any items with historic architectural interest or for re-habbing structures. Good kitchen and household items go very well. Interior decorating items and yard or exterior items are very popular. Toys, only if in good condition. Any unusual or interesting pieces; it’s amazing what people consider wonderful or a bargain!

*To donate items or to volunteer on one or more days of the event, call PAC*SJ at 998-8105.*

Book Review:

Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper

by Nicholson Baker

New York, Random House, 2001. 353 pp. \$26.

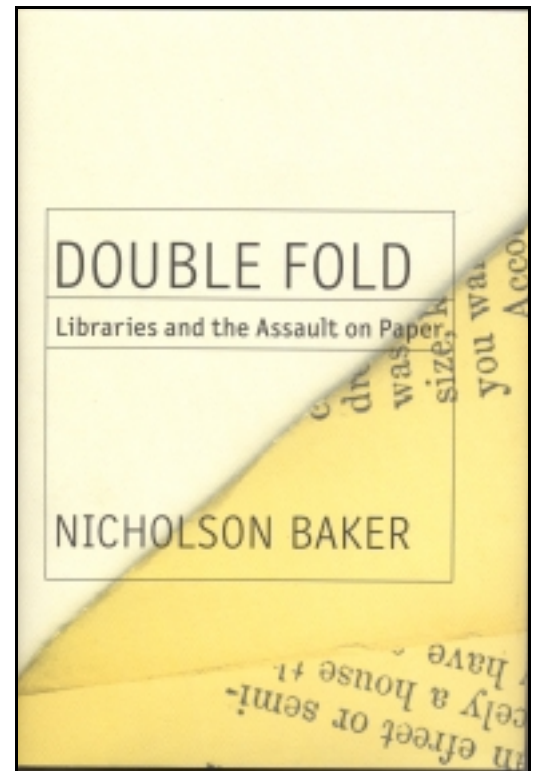
Reviewed by Don Gagliardi

Why review a book about books in a bulletin devoted to historic preservation? First, because PAC*SJ is concerned with preserving historical records as well as buildings (see, B. Wyman, "The Paper Chase: The Ongoing Effort to Preserve and Archive Historical Records in Santa Clara County," *Continuity*, Spring 2001, at pp. 16-17). Second, because *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* happens to be a book advocating *preservation* of books, newspapers and other historical records. Indeed, it contends they, like buildings, are subject to national historic preservation legislation. Third, the same people who are said to be assaulting paper (local government potentates) are the ones who also pose the greatest threat to our architectural infrastructure. Fourth, *Double Fold* is timely for San Jose and its new main public library being constructed (unprecedentedly, in joint venture with a local university) on site of the city's original Carnegie Library, long since demolished. San Jose's new Joint Library, with its grand foyer, over-stuffed seating and espresso bars (no kidding), manifests the same sort of megalomania that so characterizes the Ceaucescuian Civic Center Plaza going up a block away. And just as the new City Hall is being built as an affront to the very constituency it supposedly serves, having desecrated an historic neighborhood it was to revitalize, similarly there is a risk that the first and greatest casualty of the new Joint Library will be . . . *books!*

As *Double Fold* author Nicholson Baker explains in a carefully crafted work guaranteed to make your blood boil, there is precedent for public libraries jettisoning perfectly serviceable volumes, including in San Francisco, which was scandalized by news that its new main library on a grandiose civic center plaza (noticing a trend?) was, despite all its new accoutrements, too small for its existing collection. Thus, *librarians*, of all people, relegated literally tens of thousands of books to a landfill. All too typical, says Baker.

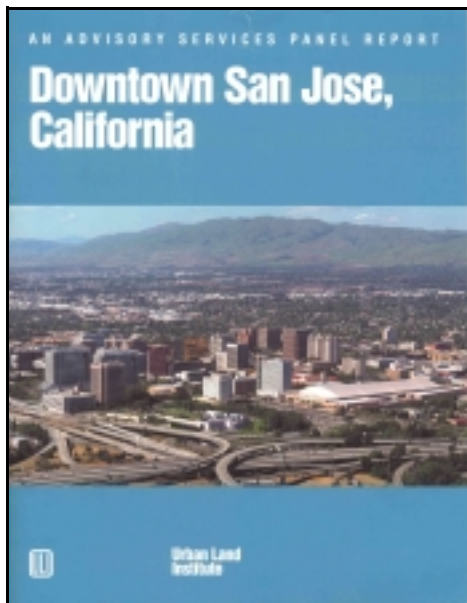
For decades, seduced by new technological innovations such as microfilm and encouraged since the 1980s by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), libraries have been purging their paper-based collections. NEH "makes no requirement that libraries actually preserve, in the physical sense of 'reshelve,' their originals after they have been sent out for federally funded filming. The effect of all this NEH microfilm money has been to trigger a last huge surge of discarding, as libraries use federal preservation grants to solve their local space problems." Engaged in the perverse process of "destroying to preserve," as Baker calls it, libraries have cannibalized ever larger collections of original source materials to save space. Indeed, librarians have taken up their anti-paper programs with crusading fervor. An ad in a 1976 issue of *Microfilm Review* says, "We don't have enough of it. Space. Not in the cities. Not on the land, and, as we don't need to tell you, not in the libraries. . . . [microfilm] is our own *slum clearance* program." (Emphasis added). You can imagine the mischief made when the metaphor of choice is urban renewal.

Libraries, says Baker, embarked on "the latest form of book burning" based on a pseudo-scientific practice of "fold testing" to gauge the brittleness, and thus the supposed life expectancy, of old books. A small desktop machine turns the corner of a page of a book back and forth at the rate of 175 "double folds" per minute (hence, the name of Baker's polemic). "The research . . . indicated that 97 percent of all non-fiction books printed between 1900 and 1939 will have deteriorated to the point of being useless by the end of the century." A false prophecy. "There are today millions of usable library books dating from the first half of the twentieth century," says Baker, because "the fold test is the wrong test to be using on books. . . . A leaf of a book is a semi-pliant mechanism. It was made for non-acute curves, not for origami." We are indebted to Baker for exposing such folly. Libraries should be sanctuaries for books, not monuments to library administrators.



Excerpt

'[T]he library has not in the past felt any obligation to alert the public to what they are planning to micro-mutilate or to sell off. It is a strangely secretive place . . . its maladministration undetected by virtue of its reputation as an ark of culture. The library has gone astray partly because we trusted the librarians so completely.'



Left: The cover of the ULI Report. Above: First St. in the 1950s when downtown San Jose retail was vital and historic buildings abounded.

Urban Land Institute Report on Downtown San Jose Gives Short Shrift to Preserving Historic Buildings

by Don Gagliardi

From a historic preservationist's perspective, "troubling" is a charitable description of the long anticipated Urban Land Institute (ULI) Advisory Services Panel Report on downtown San Jose and its retail revitalization strategy.

The City's Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) commissioned ULI to interview more than 160 government officials, community leaders, businesspeople, and citizens (including the author) in June 2000 and make recommendations for development. A year later, the ULI panel, consisting of a half dozen real estate development consultants from across the country (the closest is from Berkeley), issued its 43-page, glossy, magazine-style Report replete with photos of the existing downtown.

The ULI Report concludes that "a solid foundation exists on which to conceptualize and implement an effective retail revitalization program," citing the convention center, museums, the Arena, Plaza de Cesar Chavez and the 1st and 2nd Sts. transit corridor. However, the Report says, "downtown San Jose has many stand-alone projects but no sense of place. . . . San Jose currently offers its citizens nowhere near the menu of entertainment, retail and residential experiences that they demand. What it does offer is a collection of disconnected

'ULI urges San Jose to "Take a Sensible Approach to Building Retention," which involves only a paean to preservation instead of an actual effort to conserve historic structures.'

activities — much like a multicourse meal in which each course is served at a different restaurant." The solution, according to ULI: "Manage the downtown real estate asset as an integrated whole (like a shopping mall)." ULI recommends increasing downtown retail space by 320,000 square feet or 30 percent.

The recommendation that San Jose effectively turn its downtown into a shopping mall, which SJRA is implementing by retaining Palladium to shepherd its Mixed Use Retail/Housing project on 5 downtown parcels, has ominous implications for the ever-dwindling historic structures downtown, such as the Wilcox Block at 1st and San Fernando Sts.

ULI urges San Jose to "Take a Sensible Approach to Building Retention," which involves only a paean to preservation instead of an actual effort to conserve historic structures. According to the ULI Report, downtown San Jose's historic buildings should all face one of two fates; evisceration (saving the facade alone) or demolition.

"Some of downtown San Jose's historic buildings and building facades make a major contribution to its sense of place and to its 'branding' as a unique retail location. The fact that some of these buildings' historic value resides only in their facades creates an opportunity for the adaptive use of buildings that would have required prohibitively expensive seismic retrofitting to retain them in their entirety." ULI notably does not specify what buildings it is referring to. (By comparison, the ULI Report is not shy about naming national retailers SJRA should target to inhabit the downtown.) PAC*SJ is unaware of a single building whatsoever in the downtown deemed historic solely for its facade. Further, PAC*SJ, as previously proclaimed in these pages, opposes ripping out the guts of historic structures while retaining their facades, such as was done to the Scottish Rite Temple on St. James Park with appalling effect and as was proposed for

the Jose Theatre until PAC*SJ sued to stop it.

But the historic buildings which get to keep their facades in ULI's apocalyptic vision of downtown San Jose are the fortunate ones. The rest will be demolished altogether. "Not all of downtown San Jose's older buildings have historic value or are worthy of even partial retention," says ULI. Again, the Report fails to identify the buildings being alluded to, but it asserts that "[a] blanket policy to retain obsolete buildings will frustrate downtown retail revitalization." As if there was any danger that SJRA would pursue an unfettered policy of preserving all existing structures.

Because of the rapacity with which SJRA is remaking the downtown, specific guidance from ULI would have helped. "[T]he need to have decisions by the Palladium deadline has created a sense of urgency," says San Jose Downtown Ass'n president Henry Cord. "Developers, owners and preservationists need to know in advance what buildings are untouchable, which can be rehabilitated, and rules for how new construction should relate to historic districts." They won't find it here.

Not a word is said in the ULI Report about buildings which are inviolate and cannot be sacrificed on the altar of shopping mall-style retail. Impliedly, there are none — not the Bank of America tower, not St. Joseph's Basilica, not the Old Post Office, not the DeAnza Hotel. (One of the ironic elements of SJRA's editorially uneven Greater Downtown Strategy Plan — not to be confused with the ULI Report — is that it prescribes erecting "a world-class designed building to terminate the vista up Almaden . . . at Santa Clara St.," ignoring the fact that an attractive, refurbished, landmark art deco hotel *already* sits on the site. When I raise this with City officials, I'm always told the Plan is merely conceptual and that I shouldn't start rumors about an initiative to tear down the DeAnza Hotel.)

The inference that ULI sees no historic building as immune from desecration is furthered by an off-hand ULI comment in a section of the Report imploring higher densities of development. "Even historic properties should be made denser over time," says ULI, "although their street-level impact and appeal [presumably meaning the facade]

should be maintained."

ULI's indifference to San Jose's history is on further display in its words of caution about how demolition should occur. ULI does not admonish that demolished buildings be salvaged for architectural elements. Instead, ULI takes pains to instruct that "[a]ny building demolitions should be carefully managed to ensure that they do not create long-term vacant lots or inactive sites on downtown retail streets." Otherwise, ULI is unconcerned with the destruction of our architectural patrimony.

Adding insult to injury, ULI expressly advocates installing a parking garage under St. James Park. The park, ULI says, "needs to be redeveloped as San Jose's great urban park and made convenient to the retail areas. This can be done by providing parking beneath the park." Consistent with the rest of its Report, ULI says nothing about the fact that the park sits at the center of an historic district nor does ULI acknowledge let alone analyze the impact of an underground garage on the historic characteristics of St. James Park. Instead, ULI obliquely asserts that "[m]any of the city's existing design guidelines are not conducive to development of downtown retail space." A paranoid



The Wilcox Block at 1st & San Fernando Sts., c. 1920. Historic and still standing, it's in Palladium's path yet unmentioned in ULI's Report.

'Not a word is said in the ULI Report about buildings which are inviolate and cannot be sacrificed on the altar of shopping mall-style retail.'

preservationist (redundant, I know) might take this as an invitation to discard the design guidelines enacted to protect the St. James Square Historic District, which is what SJRA is now attempting. (See, "Requiem for an Historic District? Redevelopment Agency Plots Assault on St. James Park," *Continuity*, Spring 2001, at p.8).

As one of the many local citizens interviewed by ULI, I can say that the Report is almost entirely unreflective of my comments or those of my fellow interviewees — albeit the Report does observe that "[m]any of the people interviewed by the panel expressed deep frustration about their past dealings with the redevelopment agency and its previous decision-making style." Indeed, I recall San Jose Police Captain Dewey Hosmer (truly one of San Jose's finest and as concerned a friend to the downtown as ever existed) suggesting that the last thing San Jose's downtown needed was more "Soviet-style" (Hosmer's words) planning from above. Unfortunately, the shopping mall theme park blueprint advanced by ULI and being slavishly followed by SJRA via its Palladium project strikes me as exactly the sort of top-down planning that is likely to fail, and fail grandly. (Palladium's CEO Ken Himmel, who lives in New York City, expressly envisions Carmel-on-the-Guadalupe, with tony art galleries unaffordable to most of San Jose's inhabitants. Is that what you see when you close your eyes and envision a revitalized downtown?)

Sometimes we forget that SJRA has been around a long time, since 1956. Yet, by ULI's reckoning, "[u]ntil the early 1960s, the downtown was a thriving retail district" (and, not so incidentally, had a lot more historic buildings). When SJRA came into existence, downtown retail wasn't broken and didn't need fixing. It would seem incontestable, then, that SJRA bears part of the blame for the predicament that downtown retail now finds itself in, inasmuch as it happened on SJRA's watch.

Why, I wonder, can't SJRA learn from its past mistakes, and take some counsel from people who actually live in downtown San Jose and care deeply about their community, people who understand the reality of our City's present *and* past, not merely a fantasy-land future? Even ULI urges that "the agency [SJRA] should reach out to the community and allow individuals and organizations to have their voices heard with respect to the agency's decision making for downtown San Jose." Yet, ULI only gets it half right. SJRA also needs to *listen*.

PAC*SJ Holds Annual Spring Fling Social Gathering at Historic Picchetti Winery in Cupertino



Snapshots from the event held April 28: left: Jim Arbuckle, April Halberstadt and Bill Thomas taste wine: 3 boys feign indifference to one of the ubiquitous peacocks (from l to r: Chris Holley (son of Tenth Street Pharmacy Owner Bob Holley) and Kevin and Ryan Diggs (grandsons of Patti Phillips)); children play on a fence amidst spectacular scenery; and Sherrin Van Etta keeps an eye on a peacock who seems intent on absconding with her picnic basket and wine bottle. Far below: couples enjoy a picnic lunch in the shadow of the beautiful, brick wine tasting building; on the left is Ellen Garboske and her husband, John; on the right, Ron and Judy Borchering.



Endangered Species: the Preservation Shark

PAC*SJ is part of the largest public art program in San Jose's history, having commissioned one of 100 life-sized fiberglass sharks dotting downtown from August through October as part of San Jose Downtown Ass'n's SharkByte Art. The Preservation Shark, designed by Leslie and Harry Dill, inhabits Park Center Plaza behind Wells Fargo Bank. Proceeds from its auction in November will benefit PAC*SJ.

Right: Preservation Shark, encased with postcard views of San Jose landmarks, evokes the electric tower once located astride Market and Santa Clara Sts. at the turn of the 20th century. Below, a postcard rendition of the original tower.



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 San Jose, CA 95109-2287**

CALENDAR

August

- 20 PAC SJ Board Meeting
7 p.m. Le Petit Trianon
72 N. 5th St.

September

- 17 PAC SJ Board Meeting
7 p.m. Le Petit Trianon
72 N. 5th St.

- 28-30 PAC SJ Salvage Sale
260 S. 13th St.
(see page 14 for details)

- 30 Victorian Preservation Ass'n
Naglee Park House Tour

October

- 15 PAC SJ Board Meeting
7 p.m. Le Petit Trianon
72 N. 5th St.



The Preservation Action Council of San Jose is a nonprofit membership organization providing information to property owners and education to the public and promoting programs and policies for historic preservation and compatible new architectural design.

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