



CONTINUITY

Newsletter of the Preservation Action Council of San José

Volume 5, Number 5, September/October 1994

Scheller House Temporary Restraining Order Obtained

Tom Simon

On September 20, Preservation Action Council of San José filed suit and obtained a temporary restraining order to prevent demolition of the historic Scheller House on the San José State University campus. PACSJ has hired attorney Susan Brandt-Hawley, who specializes in historic preservation law, as legal representative. PACSJ took this action because it appeared to be the only way to prevent demolition of the Scheller House.

The University had planned to demolish the building by the end of September. Several attempts in recent years to save the house by moving it have fallen through, leaving the building to face demolition. The house has existed at its current location for 90 years. The University has attempted to eliminate the Scheller House since 1990 and has allowed it to fall into disrepair. The University says that it must tear down the Scheller House to make room for a new science building. However, construction of a new science building is at least five to 10 years away. The house would make an excellent contribution to the adjacent San Carlos pedestrian mall, on which the University is spending \$3.7 million.



*Courtesy of Don Skinner,
Architectural Graphic Artist*

Under state law, the University must evaluate the impact that the demolition will have on the environment, which includes historical resources. So far, the University has not acknowledged that the building has any historical or architectural significance. In fact, they have categorized the building as a temporary structure. The 5200 square foot residence is filled with distinctive architectural details. It was the home of Victor Scheller, Santa Clara County's youngest District Attorney and founder of what is now known as the San José Chamber of Commerce.

At an upcoming hearing in Superior Court, tentatively scheduled for October 14, Judge Fogel will consider extending court protection by issuing an injunction that would last for the duration of the suit. After the hearing for the injunction, another hearing will be held to argue the merits of PACSJ's case. It is also possible that PACSJ and the University could come to terms and agree on a settlement outside of court.

Preservation Action Council of San José was founded to ensure that San José's historical resources are preserved for present and future generations. PACSJ recognizes that historic and architecturally significant buildings contribute enormously to the quality of life in San José. This action is a direct result of pursuing these goals.

Urgent assistance is needed to meet legal costs associated with this effort. Any contributions to this cause can be sent to: Preservation Action Council of San José, P.O. Box 2287, San José, CA 95109. Designate that you wish your donation to go to the Scheller House project in the memo section of your check.

Penny Rolling Party Set for December 4

Start saving your pennies again! Last year's penny rolling party was so much fun that PACSJ board members voted to hold another one this year. On December 4 the party will get underway at 6 p.m. at Hochburg von Germania, 261 N. Second Street, San José.

PACSJ members, families, and friends are invited to bring pennies and other coins and enjoy an excellent dinner. Make your reservations by calling PACSJ's phone at 408/947-8025. Leave a message stating your name, phone number, and number of people who will attend.



Ellen Garboske

The pot is boiling – and the main ingredients are the River Street homes and the Scheller House, seasoned with Costa Hall and a pinch of other projects. Could this be called Preservation Stew?

Seriously, it's a very busy time for PACSJ, and our members have been stepping forward and volunteering their time and talents to support preservation. A big thank you to all!

By now the community is aware that PACSJ has filed for a temporary restraining order to prevent demolition of the Scheller House by San José State University. The judge granting the restraining order stated, "It would cause irreparable harm ... if the Scheller House were demolished." There will be a court hearing on October 14. On the same day that PACSJ requested the restraining order, Santa Clara County Supervisors voted to direct their staff to find a site for the Scheller House. PACSJ member Tom Simon has done a fine job organizing this effort, dealing with the attorney, and appearing in court and before the Santa Clara County Supervisors. The media continues to cover our efforts, and this has been very helpful in informing the public. A big thanks to Tom! Donations to cover costs of this litigation are needed. If you can help, any amount would be welcome.

Lots of activity for the River Street project. The River Street Forum was well attended, resulting in many offers of assistance. A rally was held, with tours of the River Street area, explanations of the project, and great accordion music by retired San José State art professor John DeVincenzi. PACSJ stresses that we *fully* support the Guadalupe River Park project. The park will be a beautiful asset for San José. What we are asking is that the River Street area structures be integrated into the park, with possible use as artist studios, park information center, history center, small cafés and other businesses which could support park activities. This early Italian neighborhood could be an interesting addition to the park.

Our congratulations to the Campbell Historical Museum's recent move to the Ainsley House. The restoration and use of the 1926 house is a fine addition to the area historic and preservation picture.

Many thanks to Club Almaden for providing a beautiful spot for the recent board retreat. The accommodations, service, and food were outstanding. A lot of good ideas came out of the 5½ hour session. Focus was on ways to build our membership, strengthen our working relationship with local government agencies, fundraising, improving task force efforts, and providing preservation education. One important point – we all need to try harder to recruit members and get people involved. So talk to your friends and neighbors! Our members are our best recruiters!

Our annual garage sale was a huge success; thanks to all who donated "stuff" and staffed the sale. A

much-needed boost to our budget! Special thanks to John Froli, who gathered all of the architectural salvage items and trucked them to the sale. Also thanks to Chuck Volwiler for use of his home as the site for the sale.

So here we are, into the fall season, with lots of action. Suppose I should end this column correctly by tying into the opening, so here goes! Let's all get involved in a project – every PACSJ member should sample at least one portion of Preservation Stew!

Macy's Shopping Day Benefits San José Historical Museum

Laurel Perusa

Soon the holidays will be upon us. Why not get a head start on your holiday shopping and enjoy Macy's Valley Fair for the Benefit Shopping Day? This fun-filled day entitles shoppers to great discounts, delicious food, and wonderful entertainment. Those who attended the Benefit Shopping Day last year remember what a great shopping opportunity it was.

If you were not able to attend last year's event, mark October 26 on your calendar. Macy's outdid themselves last year; I guarantee you will not be disappointed. The fun begins at 10:00 a.m. and goes the entire day until 9:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$10.00 each, a bargain considering the discounts that await each shopper. For tickets and additional information, contact Barbara Johnson at the San José Historical Museum Association Office, 408/277-3780.

This issue of *CONTINUITY* is sponsored by Renasci,
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Foundation Celebrates Silver Anniversary

The California History Center, headquartered in le Petit Trianon at de Anza Community College, will celebrate its first 25 years with a dinner on Friday, October 21. "A Taste of California" is the theme of the buffet dinner which will feature cuisine from California's rich ethnic heritage. It will be held at the Marjorie Hinson Campus Center. Following the dinner, the formal ribbon cutting and exhibit opening of "Silver Anniversary - Golden Opportunity" will be held at le Petit Trianon. The commemorative exhibit will focus on the past, present, and future of the California History Center Foundation.

Tickets for the silver anniversary dinner are \$25 per person and are available until October 14 at the California History Center Foundation, de Anza College, 21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA 95014 or by calling 408/864-8712.

Dinner to Benefit Renovation Project

Nearly five years after the Loma Prieta earthquake, the renovation of Sacred Heart Church on Willow Street in San José is nearly complete. Gli Amici, an Italian-American organization, is hosting a benefit dinner and show on Wednesday, October 12, at the Italian Gardens. The Gaylords are the featured entertainment for the evening.

Built in 1927 in the shape of a cross, Sacred Heart Church was so severely damaged during the Loma Prieta earthquake that its inside structure required immediate shoring.

The neighborhood surrounding Sacred Heart Church has changed dramatically in the last half century. In the 1920s the area was referred to as "Goosetown," and Italian-American parishioners attended Sacred Heart. After tours of the damage were conducted, many Italian-Americans who remembered their own baptisms, confirmations, and weddings at Sacred Heart began fundraising efforts.

Toeniskoetter & Breeding, Inc. of San José has served as the construction company for the renovation efforts. They were relieved to discover that most of the interior walls of the church had been constructed of concrete instead of bricks as was common during the 1920s. In addition, not a single stained glass window within the church was broken. The original plans for the church, discovered in the archives, proved invaluable in the renovation efforts.

For additional information on the fundraising efforts, contact the Gli Amici at P.O. Box 90006, San José, CA 95109 or by calling 408/225-6636.

The "Grand" Letitia

Ellen Garboske

When Peter Hardeman Burnett was elected the first governor of California, he lived in San José and had three reputedly lovely daughters. Rumor has it that Burnett was elected governor solely on the basis that the many bachelor members of that first legislative session wanted Burnett's daughters to remain in San José. Whether true or not, at least one of those daughters did remain in San José, and her name graces one of San José's most interesting and historic buildings.

Caius Tacitus Ryland came to California in 1845, eventually became secretary to the new governor, and married one of the boss's daughters, our own Letitia Burnett. C.T. Ryland went on to become an early San José banker, lawyer, businessman, and civic leader. C.T. (as he was known, do you blame him?) and his Letitia were prominent in early San José social circles.

The Letitia Building stands at 66-72 S. First Street. Constructed in 1890 in the Romanesque design, this imposing brick building was designed by Jacob Lenzen, one of early San José's most famous and active architects. Few Lenzen designed structures remain in the area. C.T. Ryland named the building in honor of his beautiful wife, Leticia.

Originally built as a deluxe rooming house, the Letitia was one of the most substantial buildings of that period. Its excellent construction has been credited with saving much of the business district during what is considered San José's most devastating fire. On July 4, 1892, an unknown prankster threw a lighted cigarette into a Chinese fireworks factory. The resulting conflagration destroyed more than forty buildings in the area bounded by First, San Fernando, Third, and Santa Clara streets. Among the buildings burned were the California Theatre, Methodist Church, Lick House, Krumb's Brewery, and the Empire Firehouse. The sturdy brick walls of the Letitia Building helped stop the fire on First Street. Over the years the upper three stories were converted to use as offices and small business locations.

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River Street Project Update

André Luthard

Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the River Street Historic District represents one of the last intact group of historic buildings in San José, a resource that can add life and vitality to the proposed Guadalupe River Park. The development of the park, especially with these buildings, will draw visitors to the park and enhance San José economic base, furthering its goal to become a destination city.

To save this historic district, the Save River Street Task Force has been working on many fronts to increase awareness of the district.

Educational Forum

To kick off its campaign to save the district, PACSJ held an educational forum in late August at Le Petit Trianon. The forum included slides, presentations, and strategy discussions regarding the background, current status, and important next steps for the Task Force. Over 60 people came and listened to information presented by Franklin Maggi, Karita Hummer, and John Frolli. Also in attendance and speaking at the forum was John DeVincenzi of the Italian-American Heritage Foundation, who captivated the audience with stories relating to the history of River Street and the rise of Italian culture around the turn of the century.

About the Study

By law, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the agency developing the Guadalupe River Flood Control Project, had to commission an alternatives analysis and market

plan study prior to proceeding with the flood control project. The firm of Michael Garavaglia, AIA, of San Francisco was commissioned to conduct this study. Briefly stated, it is the conclusion of the preliminary report that all contributing structures in the district are worthy of rehabilitation (and relocation, if necessary, to available land within the District). PACSJ has been working with the Army Corps and copies of the preliminary report have been out for some time. The final report is due out early this month and will contain the final recommendations to the Army Corps on disposition of the district.

Tour

On Saturday, September 17, tours were conducted through the River Street District. The earliest structures now in existence were built in the mid to late 1870s. Most of River Street's architectural styles are representative of the era between 1875 and 1910. These styles range from simple utilitarian accessory buildings to more ornate Victorian interpretations. Styles represented in the district include Italianate, Gable Front, Craftsman Bungalow, Queen Anne Cottage, Gabled Ell, Saltbox, and Carriage (only two of this type survive intact in the district).

Delicious cookies provided by Paradiso's bakery, Italian ices, and other refreshments served by Greg Casella, as well as wonderful accordion music played by John DeVincenzi, helped entertain those interested while chatting with task force members and awaiting the next tour.

Landmarks Commission

At September's Historic Landmarks Commission meeting I



made a presentation urging the Commission to recommend to City Council that River Street become a San José City Historic District. A lively discussion, involving city and redevelopment staffers, ensued.

Further consideration of this designation will take place at the October Landmarks Commission meeting. At press time, the results of these discussions were not known.

Concerned?

Spend a few minutes reading the goldenrod insert to this newsletter. The River Street Task Force is seeking additional community input about how these homes might be used. Your opinions *do* matter! Fill out the questionnaire, fold it in thirds, stamp it, and drop it in the mail. Sign your name or leave it anonymous, as you so choose.

The next meeting of the River Street Task Force will be held on October 24 at 7 p.m. at 134 S. Twelfth Street. All PACSJ members and friends are welcome to attend.

If you can't attend your help for the River Street project is still needed in many ways. If you are interested in participating, call 408/947-8025, and a task force member will contact you.

Letitia Building Renovation Underway

(Continued from page 4)

In 1922 the Ryland family sold the Letitia Building, and the street level was altered to accommodate retail establishments. A tour of the vacant building several years ago revealed remnants of some of the occupants of the upper floors. Faded signs and lettering on glass doors were for Webbs Photo Studio; Bischoff's Hospital Supplies; Scaglione Tailor; Ebert School of Music; Stanley Innes, Chiropractor; W.J. Shaw & Co.; and Garden City Band, "Best in Town."

This unique building has a center atrium and skylights to bring in natural light. The lower half of the walls on the second and third floors were covered with "lincrusta," a linoleum wallpaper popular in that period. Gas fixtures converted to electricity are still intact. Wide hallways, graceful stairs, and galleries surround the atrium. Fireplaces, hand-carved finials and posts, pilasters, wrought iron railings, and other accoutrements of a luxurious building were still there at the time of our visit.

The fourth floor is smaller, built with an arcade effect. Our examination found this area had been occupied by Denninger's Photo Service. Wonderful notations of business dealings abound on these walls. Appointments were listed as early as 1892 and what was evidently a chemical code for a developing solution. Faded photos were stuck to the plaster walls with instructions for number and sizes of pictures to be developed, again dated to the 1890s.

Barry Swensen is currently restoring this unreinforced masonry building. Barry has done some fine restoration of area historic buildings. When the Letitia restoration is completed, we hope the unique features of this historically and architecturally important building will be retained.

In 1992 the Letitia Building was designated City of San José Landmark #65. Somehow I believe C.T. and Letitia would approve. The Rylands lived out their lives in San José. A visit to Santa Clara Mission Cemetery, Old Block #4, reveals the following: C.T. Ryland, born 6/30/1826, died 12/5/1897; Letitia M. Ryland, born 4/29/1833, died 4/17/1917. In the same plots are to be found markers for California's first governor, Peter H. Burnett, and his wife Harriet, and many other Burnett and Ryland family members.



Watchdog Report

April Halberstadt's lengthy hiatus from this column has led us to find a new dog. Watch's cousin Hot will take over snoop duties until April can get her mind off Indian motorcycles.

Costa Hall

Councilmembers David Pandori and Margie Fernandes succeeded in delaying the wrecking ball from this buttress to the Century Center Historic District on South Third Street. The Public Works and the Streets and Parks Departments, frustrated by preservationists running amok in downtown San José, countered with an RFI (Request For Insanity) placed in the San José Merc asking those to step forward who want to kiss off

\$2 million (their amount) on this 10,000 square foot building. The Dog smells something fishy going on here. The report should go to the San José City Council in early October explaining why this reinforced concrete building is alleged to be too expensive to save. Any ideas out there?

The Fox California

The Fox California Coalition backed Councilwoman Margie Fernandes' efforts in obtaining \$1.3 million in the '94-'95 Redevelopment Agency budget to kick-start this renovation (oops!) restoration. The Technical Committee, consisting of two Agency staffers, two City Hall staffers, Landmarks Chair Franklin Maggi, and Jim Zurr of Camera Cinemas, will meet in early October to haggle out the future of this dream house. Planning Director Gary Schoennauer had a birthday party in the Fox lobby on September 24, and the most repeated statement emanating from the crowd was, "WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!".

Zanger House

Private parties (people, not events, Stupid) who have surfaced recently with an interest in taking the Scheller House home with them have also been eyeing the Zanger House at South First and Alma streets. The Bold Knight is alleged to be interested in the site as a new quarters for their vinyl cushioned booths. Capp's Folly, one of the historic names for the house, may take on new meaning soon. Placed on this site in 1889 by Hazzard Construction (funny, these name games), the Dog thinks the building arrived on skids. Stay tuned ... the Dog's been sniffing over on Sherman Street north of Humboldt and smells an old building site in the middle of the block.

(Continued on page 7)

Watchdog

(Continued from page 6)

Andrew Hill House

Located at 1350 Sherman Street, the Zanger family of *Casa de Fruta* fame is the lucky owner of this recently-identified historic house. But what does all that plywood on the windows mean? Of course, Andrew Hill was known for something more than Andrew Hill High School. As founder of the Sempervirens, he was the key person responsible for saving Big Basin Redwoods and obtaining State Park status. A plaque at Big Basin states, "He saved the redwoods." A plaque is ready that says "He/she saved the Andrew Hill House." Apply here.

Men's Gymnasium, SJSU

A couple of years ago University officials fished around with PACSJ members to see if there would be any objection to tearing down this incredible California Art Deco masterpiece. Ha! The Dog noticed that a recent reroofing project took place, and thinks maybe recent preservation

controversies may have rattled the cages of Future Think. Anyone for a quick pick-up game?

Those Old Brick Buildings

The deadline approaches for unreinforced masonry buildings that will require them to comply with seismic code requirements or

get crunched. Expect prices for used bricks to be dropping soon at Payless Rockery as the market gets saturated with the remnants of vintage San José. Accessory buildings under 200 square feet are exempt from codes, so I got this great little dog house I'm going to build myself...



The Preservation Action Council of San José is a non-profit 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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Fill in the form, enclose with your check, and mail to: Preservation Action Council of San José, P.O. Box 2287, San José, CA 95109.

Calendar

October

- 15 (Saturday) Opening Ceremonies for Highway 85. Take a leisurely stroll on the freeway before it's open to cars. Organizations from five cities will be selling food. PACSJ will have a booth, complete with membership brochures and task force information.
- 17 (Monday) PACSJ Open board of directors meeting at Mother Olson's Inn, 72 N. Fifth St., 7 p.m.
- 21 (Friday) California History Center celebrates its silver anniversary with dinner and exhibit opening, de Anza College, 21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, x p.m. Call 408/864-8712 for details.
- 29-30 (Sat.-Sun.) Friends of the San José Library book sale, MacDaniel Room, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, 180 W. San Carlos St., San José, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

November

- 21 (Monday) PACSJ Open board of directors meeting at Mother Olson's Inn, 72 N. Fifth St., 7 p.m.

December

- 4 (Sunday) Penny Rolling Party, Hochberg von Germania, 261 N. Second St., San José, 6 p.m. Call 947-8025 for dinner reservations.

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