

Historic Restoration

Sandy Snider

AS A MAN of horticultural vision, Dr. Samuel Ayres, Jr. had investigated the old "Lucky" Baldwin homeplace in post-war Arcadia and seen in it the future Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. Mrs. Richard (Susanna Bryant) Dakin, historian, and one of the original incorporators of the administrative California Arboretum Foundation, also investigated, and she too had a vision. "The buildings were all going to ruin," Dr. Ayres had observed. "They hadn't had any protection for a long time and were a horrible mess." Concerned lest this bit of history go to permanent ruin, Mrs. Dakin in 1948 suggested and secured the establishment of a Historical Committee under the auspices of the Foundation to plan, promote, and oversee the restoration of the Arboretum's dilapidated historic buildings.

An all-star roster of experts and concerned citizens, co-chaired by Mrs. Dakin and Mrs. John (Georgina Hicks) Mage, held its first meeting March 19, 1949, on

the porch of the Hugo Reid Adobe. There, in the words of Committee Secretary (and noted California historian) W. W. Robinson, Mrs. Dakin explained "who was who and why." And within a short two years, the distinguished Committee "who's whos" demonstrated the "why" of their selection with a master plan for restoration of the historical section that encompassed not only historical research, but also structural examinations landscape consultations, archaeological investigation, and financial considerations.

The latest of the three extant historic structures to be built was the first to be restored—the Queen Anne Cottage had not been inhabited (by humans) since the death of "Lucky" Baldwin in 1909. "It had been neglected for many years," wrote caretaker Dewey Nelson, "and had a forlorn and desolate look . . . Nestled among the tall trees that crowded it close, it faced the elements bravely. There were no sagging roofs or crumbling chimneys to be seen . . . The sum-

mer sun and winter rain had only served to mellow the place, and give it an outer charm. The interior told a different story, however; here time and vandalism had been busily at work. The glass in practically every window was broken—there were no doors, and where the fireplace mantles had been, nothing but yawning soot-covered holes in the wall to be seen. The walls themselves were a somber gray, and the floors and thresholds worn by the tramping of many feet. Bats and owls used the darkest recesses for daytime hide-a-ways, and evidence of other animal intrusions was often visible."

Preliminary architectural and engineering reports were much more specific, revealing that even the "outer charm" of the old wood structure had hidden enemies. "Foundations are in good condition with the exception of settlement cracks," read the structural engineer's initial report in 1951. "However, the porch floor construction is in an unsafe condition entirely around the building due to dry rot, fungus, and termites . . . Roof construction is generally sound" . . . but "the tower is in dangerously bad condition . . . shows evidence of water damage and dry rot."

Spurred by the challenge of the Cottage, the Historical Committee intensified its fund-raising program (an eventual \$75,000 in privately solicited funds was spent), hired Philip Gresham as general contractor to carry out a structural restoration, and appointed Committee member Maurice Block, former curator of the Henry Huntington Art Gallery, to direct the interior restoration and refurnishing. Today the Queen Anne Cottage is recognized as California Historic Landmark #367, testimony to the concern, labor, and professionalism of these two men and the many who worked with them.

"Philip Gresham, as contractor, deserves great credit for his painstaking attention

to authentic detail and for his selection of carpenters and painters who worked a year and a half on the job," wrote Susanna Dakin. The minutes of the May 9, 1952, Committee meeting explain in more detail: "Mr. Gresham, the contractor, spoke with enthusiasm for what had been accomplished, told of how he found the tower and its condition now . . . 'If nothing had been done,' he said, 'the building would not have stayed up another year and the tower would have fallen during the recent earthquake.' The tower has now been righted, timbers restored, roof shingled in the original style, and the bees coaxed out leaving behind some 75 lbs. of honey."

With the structure secure, exterior and interior details and color were established by Maurice Block through the aid of written description, scraping, and calculated approximation, and a refurnishing plan instituted that would reflect the Mark Twain observation that "the best is none too good for Baldwin." "Intended exclusively for entertainment, the cottage would have been rather elaborately and colorfully furnished," surmised Mr. Block. "There should be a certain gaiety about it," he continued, "It should have an atmosphere of expectancy—as if living creatures might appear in it at any moment." To create a focus for the refurnishing, the Cottage's original fireplace mantles and tiles, its handsome black walnut doors, and the English stained glass windows were secured from the Coach Barn where they had been stored by Anita Baldwin after the death of her father. Cleaned and re-installed, these integral building parts were soon complemented by donations and purchases of period Victoriana (the original Baldwin furnishings had long since disappeared and had to be replaced with articles of similar vintage and taste).

On May 18, 1954, a structurally sound,



View of Queen Anne Cottage after being vacant for 40 years and shortly before restoration was started.

appropriately furnished Queen Anne Cottage was formally dedicated as a state historic landmark, with due recognition and appreciation going to the hard-working Historical Committee who had originated, planned, financed, and carried through the project. State recognition of the group's abilities, in fact, became a key factor in the California Legislature's later (mid 1950's) decision to include the Arboretum in a statewide dispersal of impounded tideland oil funds. Under the official auspices of the Division of Beaches and Parks Architectural Division, \$102,000 was appropriated for restoration of both the Baldwin Coach Barn

and the Hugo Reid Adobe. Ever alert, the Historical Committee was waiting with open hands, open minds, and decisive plans.

The Coach Barn, originally constructed in 1879 by "Lucky" Baldwin, was the first building restored with State monies. State restoration supervisor, Orvel Johnson, wrote that the barn "was fairly well preserved; however, extensive work was required in replacing deteriorated wood. A new roof was needed and a considerable amount of 'gingerbread,' doors, windows and other intricate building parts had to be replaced. Many coats of paint, applied over the years, were removed.

The original red and white colors were found and the building refinished to its original splendor." New roof shingles were made especially for the restoration, roof rafters and support beams were impregnated with fireproofing materials, new timbers and wall studs went in throughout the structure to insure future solidity, and original interior walls of alternating redwood and Port Orford cedar slats were carefully hand-scraped and re-nailed to the new studding to reflect the barn's rustic grace.

The year-long restoration was completed May 4, 1958 (at a cost of \$79,000), and was soon after enhanced by the addition of an original barn occupant. The "Tally-Ho," an English coach drag four-in-hand purchased by "Lucky" Baldwin at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition, was returned to its one-time home through the generosity of the Baldwin heirs. Completely refurbished by inmates at the Soledad Prison Training Facility,

who put in 1,864 hours on the project, the Tally-Ho was stripped (from dull black), repainted in its original royal blue with red trim colors, and re-upholstered in plush English blue velvet.

As the Queen Anne Cottage and Coach Barn restorations reflected the late Victorian "Lucky Baldwin" era, so too, the Historical Committee hoped, would the Hugo Reid Adobe restoration reflect the Mexican California life-style of the first private owner of Rancho Santa Anita. With the remaining state money (plus a supplemental \$115,000), the Committee implemented a plan that had been the object of study and often sharp disagreement from as early as 1950. The controversy revolved around the fact that the Reid adobe had undergone so many transformations by later owners (culminating in "Lucky" Baldwin's 1879 renovation) that the location, dimensions, and quality of the "original" house were relatively obscure. "The building that



Scaffolding set up for repair of roof of Coach Barn, part of year-long restoration completed in 1958.

stood on the site when work was begun had been remodeled several times," wrote restoration expert Orvel Johnson. "A wood frame unit had been added, interiors changed, a tile roof added and many other innovations. Just how much of the adobe wing was original was difficult to determine. There were actually three types of adobe block used and just as many types of construction."

The minutes of the sixth meeting of the Historical Committee (January 1950) indicate the decision-making process. "The detailed layout of the Historical Preserve, as part of the Arboretum's Master Plan, was exhibited and explained by Mr. Bent. He pointed out that basic surgery is necessary rather than the preservation of antiquities. To reconstruct the frame addition would require an 80% restoration, because of termite damage and other deterioration. Accordingly, the Committee recommended as fundamental the tearing down of the Baldwin wing and the putting in its place of a functional adobe wing of the Reid period . . . All members expressed themselves as unanimously in favor of bringing back the adobe age in line with Mr. Bent's views, considering it a glorious opportunity to restore the Reid manner of living."

Expert research, both historical and archaeological, was begun in 1956 in an effort to determine as nearly as possible the original appearance of the Reid adobe. Maps, deeds, letters, and journals were all carefully perused to no avail — apparently no written description of the adobe was ever recorded. Archaeological exploration proved much more fruitful, however, as members of the U.S.C. Department of Anthropology and the Archaeological Research Associates organization spent nearly a year and a half unearthing adobe brick foundations and other evidences of the original building.

Actual reconstruction began in 1958.

"As much of the original building was saved as possible," wrote Orvel Johnson. "Eroded blocks were repaired and new blocks were placed where blocks were missing or beyond repair. More than 15,000 adobe blocks for the building and courtyard wall were made from soil right on the site. Blocks were authentically molded; straw was added as a binder and the finished blocks stacked in the sun to dry. The roof was constructed of aronda cane, laid tight and laced to alder poles with rawhide. Roof beams, door and window lintels, jambs, thresholds and other wood members were all hand hewn." With private funds, furnishing of the adobe was accomplished by the Pasadena Committee of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America (under the professional guidance of Gregor Norman-Wilcox of the Los Angeles County Museum), and on Cinco de Mayo, 1961, the Hugo Reid Adobe was formally dedicated as California Historic Landmark #368.

The latest chapter in the Arboretum's restoration story belongs largely to the citizens of Arcadia and is entitled "Save the Depot." Since its closure by Santa Fe Railroad in 1940, the brick, Gothic Revival Santa Anita Depot had stood neglected on the north side of Colorado Boulevard, a haven for vagrants and a playground for daring youngsters. The deteriorating structure had withstood many trials since its erection in 1890, but it faced its strongest enemy in 1967 when it was announced that the new Foothill Freeway would be routed directly through the Depot site. At this juncture, "Save the Depot" became a rallying cry for the Arcadia Historical Society and the Arcadia Chamber of Commerce, as, post-haste, arrangements were made to relocate the old building within the Arboretum's Historical Preserve. County coffers were not open to finance the move,

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however, so a fund-raising campaign was begun in a community-wide effort to save a piece of the area's history. Over \$30,000 was collected to dismantle, move (brick by brick), and rebuild the Depot; hours of free labor were expended in painting, plastering, and woodworking; and, as the September 25, 1970, dedication date neared, family treasures and memorabilia were generously donated to refurnish the station in authentic turn-of-the-century style.

Today, due to the interest, the generosity, and the perseverance of concerned citizens past and present, the Arboretum

has become a microcosm of California history. Preservation and reconstruction have enabled this and future generations to step back in physical as well as mental time, from the days of the Mexican rancheros to the flamboyance of the Victorians. By providing the means for first-hand historic interpretation, the facts of history have been given a depth not easily achieved in books and the observer given an added appreciation of his California heritage.

Sandy Snider is an assistant in the historical section at the Arboretum.



Plants For A Contained Atmosphere — *Begonia ficicola*

John Provine

BEGONIA FICICOLA is a rhizomatous begonia with yellow flowers which have orange buds. Its foliage is a lush green with a pebbly texture that has hairs on the pebbles. The plant is grown both for its foliage and flowers.

The original plant was found in tropical Africa in the country of Cameroon near Kumba. It was growing on a fig tree near a waterfall.

It was introduced to the United States in the 1950's but is still rare in this country because there are few sources and few people have learned how to grow it.

In Southern California it must be grown in a greenhouse or a contained atmosphere. The following steps should help you to grow it:

1. Select a large, clear glass or plastic bowl—12-inches or larger (one pictured is in a 14-inch bowl).
2. Clean the bowl thoroughly with detergent and rinse with bottled water.
3. Cover the bottom of the container with chips of charcoal to allow for drainage.
4. *Begonia ficicola* is an epiphyte; therefore, a soilless mix is preferred. The Arboretum prefers one-half peat moss and one-half perlite. This is a light-growing mix and will allow for necessary drying. Only about one inch of growing mix is needed to support the plant. Add moist growing mix to the bowl.
5. Plant begonia in the growing mix.



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