



The Cupola

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Pardee Home Museum

JANUARY 2001

Oakland City Landmark, 1975

National Register of
Historic Places, 1976

California Historical Landmark,
1998

Introducing . . . The Cupola

With this first issue of the newsletter for the year 2001, we are proud to debut a new title (and a new masthead) for our publication. Since we first began publishing the newsletter in earnest approximately four years ago, we have simply called it *The Pardee Home Museum Newsletter* — not exactly an inspired appellation!

A colleague suggested to the editor awhile back that the title could stand to be livelier, so the editor scratched his head and — *voilà!* — *The Cupola* seemed perfect.

As many readers are aware, the cupola is the tower that rises atop the Pardee Home, as it does on thousands of Italianate villas throughout the country. The cupola is one of the defining elements of this most graceful of all nineteenth-century residential styles, so we use an Italian word for it — *cupola*, meaning little cup, and pronounced *kyoo'pələ*. Traditionally a cupola was a “small, domelike structure on a roof,” to quote Webster’s, but in the case of the Pardee Home and other Italianate villas built in the mid- to late nineteenth century, cupolas had evolved into a great variety of forms, including the essentially rectangular shape of our cupola.

The Pardee Home’s cupola is the “crown” of an architectural composition of exceptional grace and vigor, particularly as viewed from the front entrance. We hope, by choosing this title for our newsletter, to emphasize the importance of the house’s architecture to our mission as an historic site.

There are many artifacts and historical lessons to explore within the Pardee Home, but we should never lose sight of its status as the finest Italianate villa in northern California, according to one definitive guide. In fact, a special issue of *The Cupola*, to appear later this year, will be devoted entirely to the architecture of the Pardee Home, including the design of the

two outbuildings — the coach house and water tower — which are themselves notable structures.

The cupola is also important for the magnificent views it offers of downtown Oakland and beyond, including the skyscrapers of San Francisco, Mt. Tamalpais, the University of California, the container cranes lining the Port of Oakland, the Bay Bridge, and, even, occasionally, the Golden Gate Bridge.

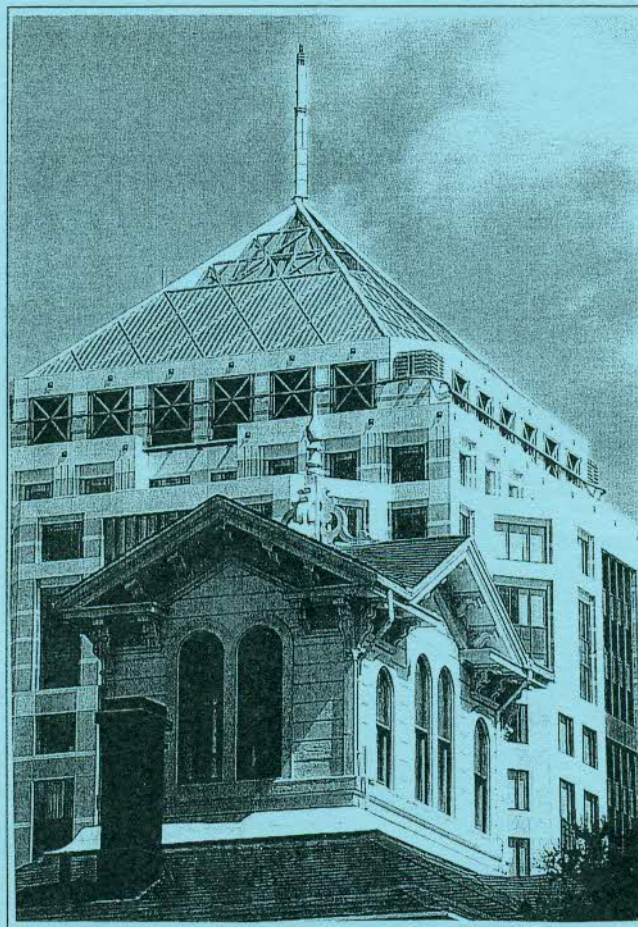
It has, for over 130 years, allowed family members and visitors to see far beyond the Pardee Home (in fact, Governor Pardee, an accomplished amateur astronomer and president of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, set up his telescope in the cupola for viewing of the skies, and his daughter Helen volunteered during World War II to look out for any approaching Japanese bombers from this space!).

So today the cupola is also a symbol of our aspirations to use the vantage point of the Pardee Home to explore the wider history of Oakland, the Bay Area, California, and beyond. Both Enoch and George Pardee led public lives which illuminate such broad historical themes as abolitionists in early California, nineteenth-century labor unrest, and the emergence of the progressive and conservationist movements in the early twentieth-century, and we shall continue to use these pages to tackle such “meaty” topics.

Furthermore, as the feature article in the previous issue about the Seventh-Day Adventist community which once thrived across

the street from the Pardee Home showed, we will continue to explore aspects of community history which might otherwise be lost to today’s public. As another example, an article on the historic Jewish neighborhood which once surrounded the Pardee Home is “in the works.”

Welcome, readers, to *The Cupola!*



The Pardee Home cupola with the Ronald Dellums Federal Building in the background
Photograph by Richard Nagler.

The Pardee Home Museum Wins Another Prestigious Federal Grant

Regular readers of this newsletter will remember a somewhat boastful article from last spring, when it was announced that the museum had won a Conservation Project Support Grant worth over \$2,600 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to create a supplementary archival storage space in a small, underutilized upstairs room. You can imagine how we are having to draw upon extra reserves of restraint to avoid gloating when we say that the museum received word last fall that the same Institute of Museum and Library Services has awarded us with a General Operating Support (or GOS) grant worth \$16,500, the maximum grant allowable to an institution with a budget the size of ours.

This grants program is widely viewed as the most competitive one available to U.S. museums. The main reason it is so competitive is found in the words *General Operating Support* — once awarded, the grants may be used however the museum's trustees and staff choose, from paying utility bills (perhaps an increasingly popular choice in present-day California!), to hiring staff, to working on a new exhibit. Such funding is very difficult to obtain from foundations and corporations, which generally prefer to underwrite high-profile projects. GOS support from the IMLS is, indeed, viewed as "manna from heaven" by most museum administrators, which is why last year 823 applications were received for the eventual 177 awards.

Receiving this grant is an important milestone in the Pardee Home Museum's endeavour to become a first-rate house museum. As one past recipient said, "An IMLS GOS grant is considered a 'mark of excellence' by museum professionals, and shows that the museum operates within the highest standards.

This encourages donations from foundations, private patrons and the business community, all of which contribute to the longevity of the museum."

According to Pardee Home Director David Nicolai, "Applying for this IMLS grant is quite unlike applying for any other grant in the museum field. It is not simply a matter of conceiving of and selling one particular project to a potential funder. Rather, the applicant must answer dozens of specific questions about all aspects of the museum's operations (e.g., audience, collections, exhibits, education, physical facilities, staffing, governance and management, support, long-range plan, etc.). Your application can be competitive if you are weak in two or three areas, but you need to show that you are improving in those areas. The applications are reviewed by panels of experienced museum professionals, and their comments, which are included with your notification packet, are enormously insightful and will play a big role in charting our course here at the Pardee Home for the next few years."

The Pardee Home was one of only five Bay Area museums so awarded last year, and one of eleven statewide. It was also one of only nine historic houses nationwide to receive the GOS grant! Mr. Nicolai was in New Orleans, attending the national conference of the American Association for State and Local History, last September, when the IMLS posted the winners on its website; he ducked into an Internet café in a lovely courtyard building in the French Quarter to see if, hope beyond hope, the Pardee Home might have been chosen, and he reportedly let out, upon reading of his museum's success, a cheer so deafening that it rattled the historic bricks for blocks around!

Museum Director to be Featured Speaker in Palo Alto

Reprinted with permission from the current issue of *The Tall Tree*, the newsletter of the Palo Alto Historical Association:

*"How Eleanor Pardee Park Came to Be:
A Dramatic and Little-Known History"*

General Meeting, Palo Alto Historical Association
Sunday, February 4, 2001, 2 p.m.

Lucie Stern Community Center, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto
Program Free and Open to the Public; Coffee, Tea, and Cookies

Eleanor Pardee Park, the peaceful nine acres of lawn and playground at Center Drive and Channing Avenue, shows not a trace of the turbulent events that underlie its past. The historic house that used to stand there was torn down in the 1970s, and there is not even a plaque to hint at a colorful story that reaches back to the mid-19th-century roots of California history. It involves a mayor of Oakland, his strong-willed wife, a governor of California, a bitter deathbed quarrel over an inheritance that became a cause célèbre — and, later in the story, acts of civic generosity what still benefit Palo Alto, and loving loyalty to the memory of a young daughter who died too soon.

So who was Eleanor Pardee and, more centrally, who was her forceful and complex mother, Emily Elliott Pardee? For

our program we are fortunate to have David Nicolai to answer these questions and relate a history that is worthy of a good page-turner novel. Mr Nicolai is the Director of the Pardee Home Museum in Oakland, the fascinating and excellently preserved Victorian house built by Mayor Enoch Pardee, first husband of Emily and father of Eleanor Pardee, the eponym of our Palo Alto park.



**Eleanor
(or Nellie)
Pardee**

