



# PARDEE HOME MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

Oakland City Landmark, 1975  
National Register of  
Historic Places, 1976  
California Historical Landmark,  
1998

MARCH 2000

## ***Pardee Home Museum Announces \$12,000 Grant from Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to Begin Grounds Restoration***

Christmas arrived a bit early at the Pardee Home in 1999, when, in early December, we received notice of a \$12,000 grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to begin work on an ambitious, long-range plan for a major renovation of our historic grounds. Plans for this restoration project were first hatched in 1995, when Chris Pattillo, a well-known Oakland landscape architect and historic preservationist, visited the house with her mother's Castro Valley Garden Club. She commented to her tour guide, David Nicolai, that the grounds looked as though they could use some professional attention and tentatively suggested that her firm, Pattillo and Garrett Associates, might be able to work *pro bono* on a master restoration plan for the site.

Chris and David continued communicating about the gardens, and finally, in 1997, a lull in business allowed Chris to ask her business partner, Cathy Garrett, to take the lead in developing a restoration plan. Cathy met with museum trustees and staff a number of times to gather all available documentation on the historical evolution of the gardens and to explore other goals of the renovation, besides historical accuracy. As in the case of the Pardee Home's interiors, our documentation of important changes to the gardens over the years is often sketchy, so it was decided to seek the spirit of a turn-of-the-century garden, rather than to try to adhere to an unattainable historical accuracy. The consultations also identified as important goals providing attractive spaces for outdoor events, responding to important changes on surrounding properties, and creating demonstration gardens to encourage the interest and participation of school children in particular. Cathy presented a draft plan to the museum's board in February, 1999, and a final plan, incorporating further recommendations by trustees and cost estimates, in August.

A key aspect of the Pattillo and Garrett restoration plan is its phased implementation, which is particularly appropriate for the gardens surrounding the 1868 Pardee Home, since they were clearly divided, as was so typi-

cal of that era, into three components. The formal front gardens faced 11th Street and reflected the elegance of the home's fine Italianate front facade; the casual gardens to the rear were devoted to the private outdoor relaxation of the family and their guests, and the utilitarian portion of the yard was dominated by the carriage house, although during the Pardee family's heyday this rear portion of the yard, which was fenced off the rest of it, was also where they kept their veritable menagerie of animals, including a cow, a sheep, and a goat! These three areas are reconfigured somewhat according to the current restoration plan, with the casual gardens in the eastern portion of the rear yard and the utilitarian portion, including the historic water tower and new demonstration gardens, to the west.

The restoration of the front gardens is clearly the most urgent task, since this is the most public portion of the grounds and probably the most threadbare in its current state. The \$12,000 grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust will allow us to commence work on these gardens, particularly the mundane but vitally important task of tilling the soil and adding soil amendments. We have already undertaken a long overdue trimming of the two grand live oaks in the front garden (all the historic trees surrounding the house will be retained). We are also in the first stages of talking with Pattillo and Garrett, as well as landscape contractors, about a new irrigation system, plans for new planting, and other aspects of the restoration.

This should be an enormously exciting project for visitors and members of the museum, as well as its staff and trustees. The phased nature of the restoration means that it will be receiving a great deal of attention for the next two to three years. For details about the progress being made, and for information on possibilities for individual or corporate gifts to this worthwhile endeavor, including "naming" opportunities, please refer to future issues of this newsletter, or call David Nicolai at (510) 444-2187.

*See related articles  
on page 4*



Tree trimmers clear the understory of the oak tree in the front yard of the Pardee Home as the first step of the landscape restoration funded in part by the Smith grant.

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE



### Phyllis Brislawn

Phyllis prepares our current exhibit featuring the shoes and shoe trees which graced our Christmas tree over the past holiday season.

*With this issue we are beginning a series of profiles of our museum volunteers, who enliven the Pardee Home each week, not only with their outstanding contributions toward the enhancement of our historic site, but also with their wonderful personalities. We begin with our regular Friday volunteer, Phyllis Brislawn, who explains her path to the Pardee Home as follows:*

Beside the elegant, old building, the wrecking ball hung motionless. The back of the mansion was gone, and it looked like some giant's dollhouse. The dining room inside shone with warm, rose-hued paneling. From the ceiling hung a huge crystal chandelier, sparkling in the unaccustomed sun. I was standing on the edge of a grand swimming pool, enchanted by the vision and frightened by the destruction. I was about seven or eight years old. Both the destruction of the mansion and my presence to witness it were results of the crash of '29 and subsequent economic depression.

My family lived in San Mateo and my father worked for "Ma Bell" in San Francisco. At the time he had only three days a week of employment. On his days off he cleared eucalyptus

trees from the Hillsborough estates, which were being divided into potentially saleable parcels. I loved going with him on these days. He was not nearly as strict as my mother.

From these experiences came my love of old houses and abhorrence of their destruction. Sixty some years later, in September of 1998, I rang the doorbell at the Pardee Home and told David Nicolai, the museum director, who answered the door, that I wanted to volunteer to help in any way I could. Since that day most of my Fridays have been spent with Vicki Wiese, the museum registrar, and David in a wonderful variety of activities: cataloging artifacts, monitoring the "Damp Rid" humidity control system, helping to set up exhibits and decorate for special occasions, serving tea, and "backing up" group tours to answer questions, provide folding chairs, escort to restrooms, and guide the strays. Of the many working environments I have encountered during my career, this is the most compatible. Vicki and David are so dedicated to maintaining and promoting the home and the museum that they are an inspiration to me.

While I am now able to enjoy travel abroad with my husband, I am strictly a product of the Bay Area. I received my B.A. from Mills College in 1952 (major in psychology, minor in art), my M.A. from Stanford University in 1955 (educational psychology), and had an additional year of post-graduate study at U.C. Berkeley. I am licensed by the State Board of Medical Examiners as a psychologist and hold School Psychologist and Administrative credentials. For about nine years I had a private practice; for thirty-three years, I was a school psychologist. I have three children and three grandchildren, all living in this area. When I retired nine years ago, I decided it was time to pursue the interests in art and architecture that I had put aside during my working years. For eight years, I built an eleven-room dollhouse, which represents a middle-class home at the turn of the last century. When it was done, I decided to work on the real thing — hence, my volunteer service at the Pardee Home Museum.

## Odds and Ends

The new officers of the Pardee Home Foundation are Stan Stidham, Chairperson; Arnie Lerner, Vice-Chairperson; Marion Reich, Treasurer; and Melissa Rosengard, Secretary. . . . Last year the Foundation was able to raise over \$27,000 total, including matching funds from the Gerstacker Foundation, from its trustees, members, and the general public. We wish to thank in particular the many of you who made our November mail solicitation the most successful such effort in the museum's history. . . . Museum trustee **Arnie Lerner** was featured in a *Sunday Examiner* article on March 5th, detailing his commendable efforts to save the historic "JCC" (Jewish Community Center) building in San Francisco from probable demolition. This Spanish Revival building, designed by noted San Francisco architect Arthur Brown, Jr., has stood at the corner of Presidio and California for sixty-six years. . . .

**Mia Perkov, Suzanne Boles, Mayra Rivas, and Kirsten Kvam** comprise our new "class" of collection management interns from the museum studies program at San Francisco State University, and over the next two months they will be busy cataloging books in our impressive library in the billiards room, cataloging and curating the historic shoes currently on temporary exhibit, cleaning out the notoriously messy closet between Madeline's bedroom and the twin bedroom, and completing the project begun by last year's interns of cataloging and restoring over 1200 objects in the walk-in china closet. . . .

Director **David Nicolai** is the president-elect of the Alameda County Historical Society and vice-president of the Bay Area Chapter of the Victorian Society of America. Anyone interested in becoming involved in either of these organizations should call David at (510) 444-2187.

