Arcata: Then and Now

by Tamara Wolski

I was born and raised in Arcata, and I have always treasured the varied architecture that can be found here. For many years I have wanted to create a “then and now” photographic comparison project to showcase the buildings that have remained while also raising awareness to the historic structures that we have lost to demolition. This project combines two of my passions: photography and history. “That’s what is incredible about photography; still images can bring people together and make us laugh, cry or want to scream” said Jonathan Flau, a New York photographer. I hope my photographic comparisons engender similar reactions, whether a chuckle at the cows grazing on the Arcata Plaza or the dismay at seeing what has replaced an ornate Victorian home.

During this period of COVID-19, I have had the opportunity to take photographs of places around Arcata and beyond. With fewer cars and pedestrians on the streets, it seemed like an ideal time to capture the same angles from the original pictures. Many of the shots were taken in the middle of G or H Streets. I hoped the comparisons of popular places could be a pleasant distraction while also promoting historical preservation efforts in our community. It’s gratifying to see that Jacoby’s Storehouse has endured the test of time, along with the Bair-Stokes House and the Pythian Castle. Adaptive reuse has also assisted in the preservation of many local structures, such as the building that houses the Sanctuary and the Humboldt Creamery complex. Sadly, in time we have lost the Falk House, the current location of Wildberries Marketplace, and the Brizard House on G Street, among others.

This project is ongoing and has transitioned beyond Arcata’s city limits. Recently I created a now and then comparison of Moonstone Beach from the 1890s and today (left). In the 1890s you can see well-dressed men with their horse and carriage; today you can see beachgoers lounging in less formal attire and the addition of surfers. The rocks remain virtually untouched. You can follow HSSA’s Facebook page to see more photographic comparisons, including the Whaley residence (above), one of Arcata’s oldest homes, and the USS Milwaukee.
President’s message

Thanks to ZOOM, I was able to attend the California Preservation Conference from the comfort of my dining room table. I have missed attending their conferences over the past few years and this was a chance for me to see CPF friends with whom I had served on the board. Plus, it’s always interesting to learn what’s happening at the state level in Historic Preservation. The California Residential Tax Credit is the newest opportunity when restoring a residential property.

Tamara Wolski continues to post “Then and Now” to the HSSA Facebook page. She has increased viewership from under 200 to over 500. The Lost Coast Outpost featured her “Then and Now” a few months ago and that was another boost to HSSA. I hope you’re enjoying this as much as I am. I continue to post on Instagram which connects to HSSA Facebook showcasing our built environment whether buildings, retaining walls, steps or sidewalk patterns.

As our post WWII neighborhoods thoughout Arcata age, we have gradually begun to understand their value in the era of the Modernism movement. Gabrielle Gopinath helps bring this to light in her article.

I came across this photo recently from the mid 1970’s and it took me down memory lane. We would go to Greenwood Cemetery to be part of a memory celebration for one our passing members. This photograph seemed appropriate as we have “Stayed in Place” for months now while missing out on our usual activities and gatherings with friends for dinner, movies, games or crafting.

Don Tuttle was one of the contributors to HSSA newsletters. He provided us with the “new nuggets of history he has just discovered”. When you reread our newsletters, Don’s name often appeared. This is his last article for us. It bought tears to my eyes to use RIP after his name.

Alex
UNCOVERING THE PAST—LITERALLY: Diking and Un-Diking the Arcata Marsh

A historical tidbit from Don Tuttle

Many of us are enjoying walks in the Arcata Marsh as a brief respite from our sheltering in place. Properly masked and distanced, we relish the fresh air, the long views, the cycle of the tides and saying hello to our familiar ducks and shorebirds.

But many of the marsh scenes we enjoy today are only here thanks to the efforts of a network of hard-working advocates, scientists and governmental agencies who have coordinated since the 1970’s to reverse an equally-diligent effort in the 1880-90’s to turn all these lands into pasture. As noted in The Weekly Humboldt Times of April 27, 1893:

“The Arcata Land and Improvement Company in early 1893 incorporated for the purpose of reclaiming a large strip of marsh land in front of Arcata. The incorporators are M. P. Roberts, President; George Zehnder, Vice President; J. C. Bull, Secretary; O. H. Spring, Treasurer and S. Myers, Superintendent. The new dredge has a ¼ cubic yard bucket of the Barnhart make with a 20 Horsepower engine. It is now working near the mouth of the Daniel Slough. They hope to reclaim about 1500 acres of marsh land extending from the west side of the Arcata railroad around the edge of the marsh to the Daniel Slough.”


“During the 1880s numerous reclamation projects created farmland and railroad beds on these marshlands, with the majority of the dykes and levees constructed on the North Bay by 1885. The flooding of the Mad River Bottom and sedimentation of North Bay led to the closure of the Mad River canal in 1887. … The first permanent efforts at reclamation in the Bottom was undertaken by Thomas Bair, President of the Bank of Arcata, in 1892, and the following year the Arcata Land Improvement Company was incorporated to reclaim marsh land west of the Harpst and Spring dike, which ran from Butcher Slough to Jacoby Creek. When the Arcata Land Improvement Company completed the dike on Daniels slough in 1895, about 1800 acres of marsh land had been converted for agricultural use …”

So, at the time, filling these tidelands was seen as a progressive, entrepreneurial project to bolster dairy production and grow the local economy. Now the City of Arcata, over a dozen agencies and local groups have contributed to taking out some of those old levees, removing tide gates and deepening slough channels in order to restore tidal action to the former tidelands and create new freshwater habitats.

Today’s excavators undo the work of their predecessors. Before our eyes, we’re watching nature and the tides reclaim these lands and restore their benefits to the birds, the fish and ourselves. More on the restoration project at McDaniel Slough can be found on the City of Arcata website

RIP

Don Tuttle, one of our favorite local historians, passed away on May 15, 2020

Painting a Mid-Century Modern Home in Arcata
Gabrielle Gopinath

In a quarantine-induced moment of home-improvement zeal, my husband and I seized upon a project that had lingered in the concept stage for years — painting the kitchen and beamed living room ceiling of our 1955 Sunny Brae home. Hadn’t the pioneer abstractionist Wassily Kandinsky written, “Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings?” By the sixth week of working from home, the appeal of Scrabble, Netflix and Zoom had waned. It was time to treat our souls by exposing them to more emollient vibrations.

The house I mentioned is one of the mid-century modern designs in this neighborhood of well-preserved 1950s and ’60s tract homes that charmed us when we first came to the area in 2014. We liked its flat, pitched roof, timbered ceiling, and 14-foot window panel with an unencumbered view of redwood forest. Its angular lines and integration with outdoor space reminded us of Joseph Eichler’s contemporaneous designs for the Bay Area and Orange County.

We loved the house... not so much the 1970s oil-based stain that had been used on the timbered ceiling, lending a pseudo-rustic effect that clashed with the structure’s modern bones. The 1990s paint job in the kitchen, which featured a golden oak stain with teal accents, also needed a refresh. An open floor plan meant one space flowed into the next, so the colors we chose would need to harmonize. Our intent was not to copy the most typical effects of the era in which the house was originally built, but rather to use paint in a historically informed way to reinvigorate its spaces for today's world.

Approaching the kitchen, we decided on a deep golden orange — Clark & Kensington California Poppy — for the walls. The cabinetry was painted using Clark & Kensington Charcoal Cashmere, a violet-tinged gray that matched the color of the kitchen tiles. On the ceiling Clark & Kensington Aromatic Gardenia, a warm white, resonated with the orange walls to lend the space a peachy glow.

In the living room, two coats of Clark & Kensington Ivory over an oil-based primer covered up the timbered ceiling’s original stain. Using a light color emphasized the ceiling’s dramatic profile. For these rough-hewn beams a warm off-white, rather than a pure white, seemed the better choice. We contemplated painting the crossbeams to match, but opted for contrast instead. Clark & Kensington Strong Influence, a cocoa brown with gray and purple undertones, stood out against the Ivory while echoing the color of the kitchen cabinets. Dark crossbeams reiterated at regular intervals now divide the pale ceiling timbers into five bays of equal size. This accentuates the space’s visual impact, calling attention to the height of the ceiling and the spaciousness of the room.
Having lived with our completed project for several weeks, I’m happy to report that the effect exceeds our expectations. When afternoon sun meets the living room’s southwest-facing windows, ivory beams now hold the natural light; the room seems taller, the pitch of its ceiling more in evidence. In the evening, recessed lighting under the kitchen cabinets heightens the warm glow of the orange walls. The moss green walls in the living room, which had looked a bit muddy beneath those rusty red beams, acquire more delicacy and nuance when seen against this airy backdrop.

We are finding color’s capacity to reinvigorate space to be especially welcome at a time when movement is restricted, and travel is not possible. Color’s immediate gratification can supersede quarantine ennui, transforming even the most familiar spaces into optically stimulating destinations.

You may view this article in color and see a list of the colors used at our website. arcatahistory.org

Meet Arvel Jett Reeves, Our Newest Intern

"I’m a geography major from southern California. I have lived all around the state. I enjoyed working with the HSSA because it allowed me to get a glimpse of the rich history of Arcata while also making our history more accessible than ever."

The City of Arcata has been busy this past month installing a sidewalk, curbs and gutters at the Phillips House Museum. (at left)
"Like" us on FaceBook or follow us on Instagram at arcatahistory

“Preservation is a path to narrative – who lived here, what happened here, why is this stone wall here? The questions and the answers they seek continue; for without preservation how do we know our story? This quest to understand is the key to our humanity”. – Mr. Chuck A.

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