

Fall 2020



To protect our members and visitors, the Phillips House Museum will continue to be closed until further notice.

Once Upon A Time In Sunnybrae

by Karole Munsell Ely

Russ, my husband at the time, and I purchased our first home in Sunnybrae, for \$18,000.00 in 1970, and it was where we raised our three children Kristina, Gregory, and Francoise. We had recently moved to Arcata from Berkeley, as Russ was hired by HSU to teach mathematics. We had the two story stucco model with three bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms. It was located in what is called “Pneumonia Gulch” on Beverly Drive. Our first years there were sunny as our next door neighbor Frank Jolly would climb the steep hill across from us and trim the trees. But after houses were built in that area, there was less sun as the years went by.



SunnyBrae circa 1954

At that time Sunnybrae was mainly the home for HSU college professors, fishermen, teachers, and mill workers. It was a great place to raise a family as it had an elementary school (later a middle school); a shopping center with everything you needed, and not far from the center of town. One could easily walk, ride a bike, or take the city bus.

Sunnybrae backed up to a forest area where the kids could play. My son Greg, with his buddies built forts high up in the many tall redwood trees. It was also home to the notorious “Sunnybrae Gang” that was comprised of a group of teenage boys. They would terrorize the younger kids by stealing their money and taking their

belongings, candy, etc. The neighborhood gang would also break into homes and steal. They hung out at two of the teenagers’ home where the parents had left them alone while they took a sabbatical in Europe for a year. The Arcata police had a difficult time catching them in the act. These boys would terrorize any family that interfered or “ratted” on them. They were eventually stopped and Sunnybrae became safe again.



Karole's House

Most of the Sunnybrae homes and the shopping center were built by Chet Spearing from Santa Rosa, California. There were four different models to choose from for purchase. The homes were built out of redwood and many had oak floors. Many of the houses had inferior plumbing. Dennis Musselman, an HSU professor, was often at my house fixing our plumbing. Dennis lived in a Sunnybrae house himself and had learned the plumbing trade from his father.

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Mission

Historical Sites Society of Arcata promotes recognition of the cultural heritage of Arcata and its environs, and identifies and encourages the preservation of historical and architecturally significant structures and sites within the Arcata planning area.

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President's Message

by Alex Stillman

I have enjoyed this summer with eight programs on the Modernism Movement from the California Preservation Foundation. Along with the presentations, each program recommended an accompanying cocktail. Dark and Stormy was the cocktail recommended for Trivia night. It's actually good and Trivia night was a blast. The last session presented how Alfred Hitchcock used modern architecture to create those scary scenes in his movies. CPF has all the presentations on the CPF YouTube site and also on their website. I recommend it and the cocktails too.

Following in the footsteps of Bob Felter and Don Tuttle, I was appointed to the Historic Landmarks Committee. Current HLA members are Jill MacDonald, historic preservationist and realtor, Bill Rich archeologist and Tim Keefe archeologist with Cal Trans. There is one more opening, which is posted on the City of Arcata's website and in Google search. Interested? Apply please.

Board member Tamara Wolski has been busy with *Then and Now*. She is excited to continue to increase viewership on Facebook of our historic structures. [arcatahistory](https://www.facebook.com/arcatahistory) has 914 likes and 957 followers as of 8/22/20. When I post a building on Instagram, it goes onto the Facebook feed. If you have not liked [arcatahistory](https://www.facebook.com/arcatahistory) on Facebook, please do. We would love to have 1000 followers who are learning about Arcata's past and present.

Have you seen the parking lot at the Phillips House Museum? It's lovely. There are no more dips in the gravel, which Julie Vassaide-Elcock so patiently filled with the help of her sons. Thank you Julie for being an HSSA past president and caring for the museum.

When I spoke to Jim Test today he reminded he was the first editor of the *HSSA Newsletter*. He told me when he was recently house cleaning, he threw away all the newsletters he had edited. Copies of many of these newsletters are in the files of the Phillips House Museum.

You may remember the article that our past intern Madison Hazen wrote for the newsletter about Jessie Woodcock, the first woman postal carrier. She got the information for the article from two scrapbooks she found at our museum. We were excited to hear that the Clarke Museum will be including the scrapbooks in an upcoming exhibit.

The last time I went to the museum to check on things, I stopped to look into the living room. I was reminded of HSSA past president Karole Ely on her hands and knees painting the floor. She also located the historically accurate living room wallpaper and oversaw its installation. Thank you Karole for making it a beautiful room.

I am fortunate to have a team to help with the HSSA newsletter. Shelley Mitchell creates the layout and design, Carolyn Otis and Shelley edit, The Central Office prints and mails it, Andy Alm posts it to the HSSA website and Claire Hashem-Hanlon creates the Mailchimp. As the saying goes, it takes a village. Thank you all.

Sunnybrae (continued)

Chet Spearing was run out of town twice because he didn't pay his subcontractors. Eventually he wasn't allowed to build in Humboldt County. Kent Stromberg became his partner and continued to build houses in Sunnybrae. Many of these later houses were more expensively built with higher quality materials.

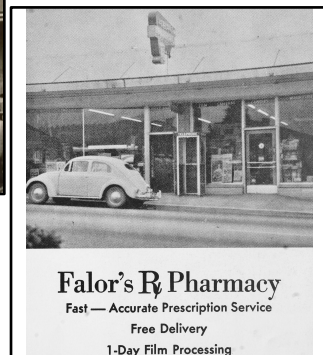
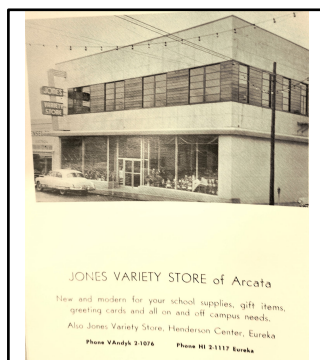
My family and I lived in our home for approximately twelve years. I moved to upper Sunnybrae, lower Fickle Hill and had a custom house built by Gene Callahan.

As I drive through Sunnybrae now I rejoice in the transformation from the 1970s where many of the houses were student rentals and had become run down. Now young families are back—remodeling the homes and giving them a new life. I recently drove by a home that is newly remodeled into the mid-century look which is the era of many of the Sunnybrae houses. It's wonderful to see my old "stomping grounds" back to being loved and cared for.

Then and Now: Sunnybrae Gas Station



Thank you to Terry Finigan and the "Arcata, Back in the Day" page on Facebook page.





North Coast Museum Alliance

by Tamara Wolski.

In March 2020, I joined the North Coast Museum Alliance (NCMA) on behalf of the Historical Sites Society of Arcata and the Phillips House Museum. The NCMA is a coalition that supports all museums in coastal northern California. The goal of the alliance is to strengthen the museum community through partnerships. The NCMA supports the region's museums through networking, promotion, and the development of standards and best practices. Members include the Clarke Historical Museum, the Humboldt County Historical Society,

the Humboldt State University Library, and many others. The NCMA meets quarterly to discuss museum updates, and throughout the year for special events. A recent endeavor undertaken by members of the NCMA was salvaging many decades worth of issues of the Times-Standard newspaper for posterity; it was a multi-day project.

At our recent virtual meeting we discussed the impacts COVID-19 has had on our organizations and the reopening process. Many of the museums in our community have embraced social media and their online presence during the shelter-in-place order. HSSA has stayed active with our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/arcatahistory.org/>), Instagram account (arcatahistory), and numerous website updates that include downloadable walking tours (arcatahistory.org). The Clarke Historical Museum engages in a regular series of Facebook Live videos entitled "Ask the Curator." They celebrated their 60th anniversary in the Eureka Bank Building in August with virtual events, including a scavenger hunt, videos, and an auction. The Humboldt State University Library has been updating its digital photography collection during the pandemic, and historical photographs of Humboldt County can be found on their website: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/photocoll/>.

Museums in our community are working to support one another during these challenging times, and the HSSA will be loaning Jessie Turner Woodcock's scrapbooks to the Clarke Historical Museum for their upcoming March exhibit. Ms. Woodcock was the first female mail carrier in the West. We all look forward to opening again for in-person tours and events once it is safe to do so, but in the interim, we hope you enjoy perusing the online materials that are available for public consumption.

Isaac Minor Houses

Isaac Minor built two houses for his daughters. Both are on I Street across the street from Los Bagels. The corner house was radically changed by enclosing the front. The other one, where Arcata Scoop resides, still maintains much of its original exterior and is owned by Mike Wilson and Laura Kadlecik. Circa 1973, this house was slated to be torn down. Jim Test who had returned from Vietnam and soon after moved to Arcata, decided it needed to be saved. I remember Jim with his long hair, lose fitting 60's clothes standing in front of the house rallying us to convince the owner not to demolish it and to get the City of Arcata on board to save it. It worked. Jim Test was a forerunner in the Historic Preservation movement. Subsequently, Sarah Grace Powers established Moonrise Herbs, her retail store. It existed there for many years. Recently I saw a post from Sarah that she and her sisters had visited their former home. I would love to know what they thought and hear the stories about this building that only Sarah knows. Meanwhile, I would like to thank Jim for stepping up and out to begin the anti-demolition movement in Arcata. By Alex Stillman





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City of the Month: Arcata

The Historical Sites Society of Arcata received some gratifying news in early October. The California State Library selected Arcata as the California History Section's City of the Month for October. This distinction highlights organizations involved in local cultural preservation and outreach, as well as the varied local history resources available to researchers at the State Library. The California State Library representative personally reached out to HSSA President Alex Stillman to give a heartfelt thanks for all of HSSA's hard work for California, and for Arcata in particular. "Without the efforts of organizations such as the Historical Sites Society of Arcata, local residents would lack a sense of community and shared past." The documentation for these acknowledgements is available on their website: <http://www.library.ca.gov/california-history/city-month/>.

This website contains a great deal of information. You can find out about other cities that have been honored and even download an Arcata Research Guide for studying the history of Arcata and its historic buildings.

An Unsung Heroine of Architecture

You've probably never heard of Minerva Parker Nichols. Even for architecture buffs, her legacy remains somewhat obscure. But this architect, whose story touches the Civil War and the suffrage movement, was a pioneer in her field. She was the first woman in the country to have her own independent practice, and the path she took to get there is fascinating.



Much of what is available on Nichols' career is from the work of one scholar, Molly Lester, who came across the story when searching for a topic for her Master's in Historic Preservation. You can find out more about Minerva Nichols and see some of the buildings she designed at [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#)

Saving Places

Every community includes a diverse mix of historic places that highlight the cultures, stories, and experiences of its people. With threats ranging from neglect to natural disasters to inappropriate development, these special places may be at serious risk. The HSSA is committed to identifying and preserving Arcata's story.



North Arcata



Sunnybrae



West Arcata



East Arcata



**P.O. Box 4521
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on Instagram at arcatahistory

"If you survive long enough, you're revered-rather like an old building." Katharine Hepburn

Membership and Renewal Form

Name: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email _____

____ (\$25) Individual ____ (\$35) Family ____ (\$100) Preservation Partner

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My gift is () in honor of _____ () in memory

of _____

Please provide contact information so we can notify honorees.

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