

Spring 2019

# newsletter Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

## Adaptive Reuse Should be the Default, and Demolition a Last Resort

Historic preservation encourages cities to build on the assets they have, unleashing the enormous power and potential of older buildings to improve health, affordability, prosperity, and well-being. Ultimately, it's the mix of old and new buildings, working together to fashion dense, walkable, and thriving streets, that helps us achieve a more prosperous, sustainable, and healthier future. By transforming the places we live to places we love, older buildings are a key and irreplaceable component of this future, and we are richer and stronger when they remain.

We all have places that matter to us—places that define us, places that challenge us, places that bring us together and tell our story. These places help form our identity and our communities. They create opportunities for growth and help us feel at home. They explain our past and serve as the foundation of our future.

The Chapman House, at 10th and J, represents adaptive reuse. It was a home and now it's a vacation rental. It has been exquisitely restored by Sandi and Scott Hunt. Join us on May 11 for a tour, tea and an opportunity to congratulate the Hunts on their good work!

### Tom Bair, Perhaps the Most Dynamic Personality in

**Humboldt History** He was bell boy on an early day pack train and then ran a pack train himself. He owned huge ranches at both Redwood Creek and Maple Creek. He saved Charlie Moon, one of the county's few Asians, from removal by a gang of Eureka vigilantes. He was president of two local banks and the Eureka Herald newspaper. He organized the Eureka Water Company and helped build the jetties at the entrance to Humboldt Bay. He started Eureka's streetcar system. He and his family owned three of the most notable houses in Humboldt County, including the Bair-Stokes House in Arcata at 13<sup>th</sup> and I. Most surprising of all, he was a wealthy Democrat, at a time when those two words were seldom seen together.





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## Mission

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

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This newsletter is published quarterly. Articles or photos may be submitted to  
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## President's Message

I am writing just after our successful annual meeting with Jerry Rhode filling us in about "Tom Bair" with his enlightening words and wonderful photographs. Jan Carr, Tom Bair's descendant, was in attendance. A perfect lunch.

Preservationists of the Year award went to Sandi and Scott Hunt for the Chapman House with its exquisite interiors and painstaking interior and exterior restoration. It is truly a jewel in the heart of downtown. Join us there for tea on May 11 from 3-5.

Bob Felter, contractor on the Chapman House and stellar volunteer at the Phillips House museum, received the Volunteer of the Year award. Joseph Tregle, an intern from HSU, worked with Bob to learn construction techniques for maintaining historic buildings.

Archivist and board member Edie Bulter has been processing Ruth Horel Caskey's papers. She gave me two folders she said I needed to read, and down memory lane I went. I get it, Edie, the need to save the past in the written form. Thanks to you I have read the letters to and from Ruth in the late 1970's when HSSA was just beginning.

We had created bright green note paper. Presidents Edith Stokes and Jackie Mottaz were in regular correspondence with Ruth, as were Louise Dean, Katy Knight and me. After the fashion show directed by my stepmother, Patti Stillman, there was more correspondence. Ruth saved a newspaper clipping of a display in the Arcata Chamber of Commerce. The mannequin in the above photo is wearing Ruth's dress.



May is Historic Preservation month. Each year the City of Arcata presents HSSA and HLC with a proclamation recognizing Preservation month. HSSA accepted the proclamation at the council meeting on April 17<sup>th</sup>.

I am delighted to report that our stalwart HSSA board of directors will continue to serve during the coming year. HSSA is recruiting volunteers. If you like history, become a docent in the oldest house in Arcata. If you like to work with dedicated people to preserve history join our board. If you would like to help us raise money, join us in pouring wine at Arts Arcata!

Alex Stillman

## Hauser-Nixon House

by Dan Hauser



I've been watching my across the street neighbor totally rebuilding the Chapman House with admiration and a certain amount of envy. Bob Felter and his crew are doing a remarkable job and the detail work is fantastic. Scott and Sandi Hunt have provided the inspiration, direction and the resources that have made this restoration possible. I have stated more than once that it was a good thing that I was still in my 20s when we bought the Nixon House because we did not have the financial resources to have the restoration work done by a contractor.

While the Nixon House had not deteriorated to the same degree as the Chapman House, when we bought it in 1971 it was still in very bad condition. The house had been rented out for nine years and the various tenants had not been kind to it. Since Beth Nixon Lubin was considering tearing down the house for apartments, the light fixtures and some of the hardware had been replaced with plastic and cheaper versions. The yards were neglected, and the front walk was totally overgrown. Using a power mower, it took me 8 days of late afternoons just to mow the lawns.

The walls and ceilings of rough wood were covered with layers of wall paper attached with cheesecloth. In some cases, we had to use a staple gun to reattach the ceiling paper. We started redoing with the dining room as it was in the worst condition. After stripping off layers of wall paper we put up  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch sheetrock to get a smooth surface to be able to put up new wallpaper and for better fire protection.

The kitchen had been remodeled sometime in the 1950s with bleached plywood walls, ceiling and cabinets. The counters and linoleum floor were both black with pink, yellow and blue flecks. The stove was a tilt down electric stainless steel and the oven was built in stainless steel. We wanted an older feel so painted the walls and cabinets a light green, replaced the stainless steel with a used white gas range and put fake brick behind the range. A friend helped me replace the counter tops with a butcher block style and replaced the linoleum with a brick pattern.

I got to paint the exterior the first two times it was done. At times I got as much on me as on the house. Now my daughter won't let me up on a ladder even to put up the Christmas lights. When we bought the house, it was on a water well with a lot of iron in the water. Shortly after I was elected to the City Council in 1974, we had to raise the water rates. Mayor Alex Fairless (now Stillman) publicly asked the question about my vote if not on city water myself. Over that next Labor Day weekend, I got to dig the trench and install the necessary plumbing to hook up.

It was finally in the late 1980s that we could afford to do major work restoring most of the rest of the interior. However, there are still three small rooms that need work and are on the "someday" list. Another point is that after almost 48 years of our ownership and occupancy, it is time to change the name to the Hauser-Nixon House. I thought about Nixon-Hauser House, but that sounds too much like a German restaurant or hofbrau.



## Arcata Recollections from Two Sisters

by Tamara Wolski

Mary Biehn (née Dolf), 92, and Barbara Cole (née Dolf), 90, have many fond memories of growing up in Arcata. Their family's history in Humboldt County dates back to the 1870s when their grandfather emigrated from Switzerland and worked as a cheesemaker on a Ferndale ranch. They were raised at 1540 G Street in Arcata, the building that now houses *La Dolce Video*. It was a short walk down 16<sup>th</sup> St. to Stewart School and later Arcata High School. The sisters remember Stewart School having separate playgrounds for boys and girls, and P.E. and dance classes held in the basement on rainy days. In the 1940s, Arcata High was an attractive brick building where both sisters participated in many activities, including the a cappella choir. Mary was voted homecoming queen, and Barbara received rave reviews as Joan of Arc in a school play. They enjoyed heading to The Varsity, a popular local restaurant and soda fountain where The Big Blue Café now stands. They also remember shopping at the large department store Brizards, located in Jacoby's Storehouse, where you could find anything from meat to furniture. In the back of the store was a beauty shop where Barbara got her first perm, with unfortunate results.

To afford fountain drinks and other treats, both sisters worked from middle school onwards. Barbara earned her money from babysitting and lawn maintenance. She remembers making 50 cents for mowing her neighbors' front and back lawns with a push mower, which she could then use to buy two movie tickets at the Arcata Theater. Mary spent Sunday afternoons working at Tatman's Bakery, where customers would come all the way from Fortuna for the tasty pastries. During World War II, sugar was rationed and was not used as a donut topping. Mary remembers a time she decided to treat herself to a sweet donut by surreptitiously dipping it in sugar, only to find she had inadvertently rolled it in the salt bin.

The effects of the war could be felt throughout Humboldt County. Mary and Barbara remember blacking out their windows, and the frightening experience of an alarm going off during choir practice to alert citizens that a Japanese submarine was spotted off the shores of Samoa. They do not know if this was true, but at the time they wondered if Arcata was under attack. The war provided positive opportunities as well. The local men's bands dissolved during the war because the men were in the service, so Mary was able to

participate in an all-female dance band. By 1944 she had joined a union to make \$3 an hour, and she often played from 9pm until 3 in the morning. Barbara corresponded with a French pen pal at the end of the war, which resulted in a lifelong friendship. Barbara sent her pen pal rations through the mail, and she even purchased her friend's wedding shoes after receiving a drawing of the outline of her foot for size. They wrote to each other for 25 years before finally meeting. Her friend visited Arcata three times.

Mary attended HSU after high school. She remembers the women outnumbering the men 5:1 during the war. There were organized bus trips from campus to attend dances hosted by servicemen stationed near the current Arcata-Eureka Airport. Mary married her college sweetheart whom she met when he returned from service, and Barbara married her high school sweetheart. Both women continued to live in the Arcata/Bayside area and raise their families here. They reminisce about the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades, weekend trips to their family's mountain cabin near Willow Creek, end-of-the-year school picnics at Arcata's Redwood Park, and countless meals at the Big 4 Inn and the Bella Vista Inn. As children they would visit their grandmother near Carson Park in Eureka, which felt like an eternity away on Old



Left to Right- Barbara Cole and Mary Biehn today



Left to Right- Barbara and Mary Dolf, at their G St. house in Arcata



Arcata Road before the highway was built. As adults they would travel to Eureka to get their hair done at Daly's and get dressed up to have a nice lunch at Bon Boniere. They speak especially warmly of their time hosting dances with a live orchestra at the Bayside Grange. The well-attended dances lasted nine years in the 1970s, and proceeds always went to a good cause. Mary and Barbara are still close and their houses are just a stone's throw from one another in Bayside.



**Davis House:** Mrs. Davis lived in this house next to the Chapman House on 10th Street for years. Recently, the owners of Los Bagels, who had been her friend for many years, bought the house and restored it. HSSA knows that Mrs. Davis would be thrilled. Thank you to Los Bagels for caring for another historic property in downtown Arcata.

## Interns at the Phillips House Museum.

A unique opportunity occurred when Bob Felter said he would like to have an intern to work with him on the Philips House Museum. Professor Jeanette Cooper agreed that she would add Bob's job description to the list of opportunities for interns. Joseph Tregle said he was interested in learning something he knew nothing about. Bob and Joseph have been repairing the fences, windows and the list goes on. Expect the fence to be shiny white soon again. HSSA is very lucky to have Joseph and Bob.



Shira and Joseph

Shira Kershner, another HSU intern, is fascinated by historic clothing. She has been putting together the next museum display of clothing of Ruth Horel

Caskey and Henrietta Chizzolla. She has also put our QR code (tour of the interior of the museum created by Gary Bloomfield) in the area of HSSA historic photographs in the hallway on the way to Salt or Arcata Main Street. She has been organizing the wallpapers from the museum interiors into a notebook.



Joseph and Bob

HSU intern Michelle Sommers worked with Edith Butler on the archives last fall. Michelle and Claudia Israel recently completed an exhibit that focuses on the story of beer and women brewers before the turn of the last century. Please visit the Phillips House to view these two interesting new exhibits.

## reUrbanism

Recently the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Trinity Hospital was released. The property has been owned by the HSU Foundation. In the past, the buildings were used for classes and offices. For about 10 years, the building has stood empty and has slowly deteriorated. The historic preservation term is "Demolition by Neglect".

Many uses for the building were suggested, but the presence of asbestos and some faulty air ducts precluded most of them. Urbanism is the term used for the replacement of historic buildings with "modern" ones in the 1960's. reUrbanism is the term for finding new uses for older buildings. An example of reUrbanism/reuse is the Sacchi auto repair building, which now houses *Slice of Humboldt Pie* and *The Local Cider Bar*. These two thriving businesses have re-energized that part of downtown Arcata.



P.O. Box 4521  
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*"Preservation lets me see  
How the world used to be.  
Now the job is up to me  
To preserve it for eternity."*

## Membership and Renewal Form

### Historical Sites Society of Arcata

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_(     ) Additional contribution

My gift is (   ) in honor of \_\_\_\_\_ (   ) in memorof \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide contact information so we can notify honorees.

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