

Summer 2022

# Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

## *People Saving Places in Arcata*

### **Nana's House**

by Julie Fulkerson

My roots are viscerally connected to Arcata to very early memories. I still hear the sound of my stroller wheels, click-click-click, as they glided over the Redwood-planked sidewalks from my very tiny childhood home at the foot of Fickle Hill. My Nana lived nearby on Harpst Street adjacent to WW II campus housing. While my parents played, performed and taught music, I spent many hours with her in Nana's old Victorian two-story home and productive garden.



**Original Location. Now Student Dorms and Soccer Field**

Lena Fulkerson was self-reliant and resourceful. She had been a cook at Camp 32, in a tent near Bullwinkel. Her hand-written recipe book reveals the massive amounts of ingredients to feed hungry loggers and references "pounds" not ounces or cups. When she moved to Arcata, she was a cook at Hunter's Boarding House in what is now North Town. Unbelievable as it seems, she purchased her Victorian on Harpst Street for \$3500 with cash she saved from this grueling work over hot fires.

By the time I knew her, she had an apple orchard, chickens, rabbits and vegetable garden filling her Arcata backyard. I spent most of my time in a highchair, then on a stool, as I watched her peel apples for the Varsity Cafe on the Plaza. She delivered the apples to the Plaza restaurant in large glass jars and fed her chickens the peels. I am sure my frugal genes stem from Nana...waste not!



**Scary Load**

When the State of California took my grandmother's house, I was too young to understand but I didn't think it was "fair". Decades passed and I bought her house back in an auction when the College was going to demolish it. They had bull-dozed other fine homes nearby, and when I saw the piles of redwood mixed with wiring, kitchen appliances and plumbing pipes, I was moved to act. I contacted the authorities and asked if they could auction any remaining structures. This was not a fresh idea. Alex Stillman and Edith Stokes had moved many houses during the freeway expansion. Somehow campus administration had forgotten how to save this valuable housing resource. (continued on Page 3)



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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.

HSSA is aware that Arcata stands on Wiyot lands. We acknowledge the original preservers of our community.

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## President's Message

by Alex Stillman

This newsletter continues the theme of *People Saving Places*. Thank you to Julie Fulkerson, Rick Benoit and Joyce Plath for sharing stories of their connection to saving historic homes in Arcata. The Phillips House Museum is open for the summer months from 2-4 on Sundays.



HSSA hosted the Family Nature Summit after nearly three years of Covid delays. A highlight for the participants was a tour of the interior of the Lady Anne and a photo-op on the porch of the Baer-Stokes house. Local historical figures, including Mrs. Brizard, dressed in period costume surprised the participants in front of the Jacoby's Storehouse. More about this in the next newsletter.

In August the HSSA Board of Directors finally met in person following a COVID hiatus of over two years. The board welcomes new member Ron Perry. Be sure to check out the HSSA FaceBook page edited by Tamara Wolski. This informative page continues to attract new viewers.

HSSA Board Member Jeannette Cooper was clearing out the basement of her home and found a collection of old matches from local businesses. It is a trip down memory lane. Many of the businesses no longer exist. We highlighted the Big Four Restaurant, an old Arcata favorite, that went out of business when the freeway was built. Visit our website or the display in the museum to get a closer look.



Our Daisy Rose, pictured by the display reminds us of days past - going out on the town dressed to the nines, drinking cocktails and smoking cigarettes. Stay tuned as Daisy Rose (channeled by Karole Ely) sneaks out of the museum to explore some of Arcata's night life.

## Fundraising Sale of

## Vintage Clothing and Accessories

**Saturday, September 24, from 10 to 3**

**Phillips House Museum.**





**Scarier Ride**

### Nana's House (cont.)

It was not good timing. Interest rates were sky high. A bank could not give me a loan for this risky move. But like my grandmother, I was determined. I was a renter and would likely be one for years. I had saved \$3000 from my years as a teacher. I bought my grandmother's house back for \$500. The home had been converted to a "Crab Lab" and offices for the Psychology Department and was deeply neglected. It featured a leaking roof, mildew, rotting materials, knob and tube wiring. It seemed like a bargain. Ultimately it was.

Even then, there were few empty lots in Arcata and no houses on the market. I had to find a lot within six weeks, get permits and find someone to move an old house onto a new foundation. And, most importantly, the lot needed to be close by to limit the expense of removing overhead telephone and utility wires.



**Movers were able to lift the house over existing hedge!**

Here is the short list for a long story. I walked the neighborhoods radiating out from Harpst Street and knocked on the doors of any home that had a lot next to it. I found a willing seller who owned a home with a lot adjacent. He carried the note. I arranged a lot split. I used credit cards (at 18%!!!) and borrowed money



**Safely in place at 17<sup>th</sup> and I Streets**

from many friends including high school students who were waitresses at the Samoa Cookhouse. I offered a higher interest rate than the bank and re-paid everyone when I arranged a real mortgage with a bank. A house mover came from Redding and hauled the two story Victorian over the 7<sup>th</sup> Street overpass onto its new foundation at 17<sup>th</sup> and I Streets. It looks like it belongs where it is.

\*Note: I think there could more houses on campus for removal. Now is the time to act.

## The Mermaid Inn at Moonstone Beach

by Tamara Wolski

As the weather warms up, many of us may choose to spend an afternoon at Moonstone Beach. Though overnight camping is not permitted, 100 years ago you could stay at an inn on the beach and fall asleep to the sound of crashing waves. The Mermaid Inn was situated near what is now the northwest corner of the parking lot next to Merryman's Beach House (see the comparison photos). We can glean from Cal Poly Humboldt's digital archives that the inn was built circa 1915 and was demolished by 1930. It was operated by the Doane Family (daughter Eva). We imagine the roaring fire in the brick fireplace was a welcome respite from the coastal fog.



# My Old House

by Joyce Plath



When I returned to Arcata in 1979 with a toddler and a brand new masters degree in architecture, I sold a small studio I had built to purchase a two bedroom home at 955 12th Street in historic Downtown Arcata. The house was built at the turn of the twentieth century; it had great bones and the original woodwork. The sellers had stripped the old wall paper leaving loose cheesecloth dangling from redwood lath, requiring some imagination



to see finished walls. At the time, I had no idea that the expansion of this house to three stories with two kitchens, two laundries, six bedrooms, three guest sleeping spots, and painting and architecture studios, along with a separate tiny house, would become a forty year design project.

During the early years I focused on getting southern light into the house as well as adding needed space. A back porch room became a functional kitchen with a giant skylight throwing southern light deep into the living room. A second floor was created after two dormers were added along with a new floor. The result was two bedrooms, a bath with a sunken tub, and a “play” room including two sleeping alcoves. This made enough space to support three kids, my design office, and assorted foreign exchange students. The kids built forts, dug fox holes in the yard, and used the dirt basement as an adventure area. I have fond memories of Easter egg hunts, Fourth of July cookouts, slumber parties, and celebratory dinners.

After the kids grew up, the house became The Redwood Lily Guest House. I rebuilt the surround porch, including new railings, upgraded electrical and plumbing, and poured a radiantly heated concrete floor in the new lower area. I added a patio with dining area and outside kitchen, tree fort, and hot tub. The yard became a food forest with blueberry bushes, fruit trees, veggies and flowers. We built a papercrete shed with a living roof just to be able to demonstrate these possibilities.

My son Tim and a friend dug out at least three feet of dirt from the basement a few years later. They installed a new continuous concrete foundation, along with a focused drainage system to divert seeping from a spring. A radiantly heated slab was poured. In the newly excavated lower level we focused on recycled or sustainable materials like sheep wool insulation from Oregon, recycled wood and metal roofing, cork, flooring from used tires, and light fixtures made from large Fire and Light recycled glasses. A new entry deck was built with recycled plastic wood. Solar collectors were installed. Although The Lily got shut down by someone who saw us as a threat, I appreciate the opportunity to have made careful, sustainable choices that honor both social and environmental best practices. From decisions for cleaning supplies to organic cotton bedding, we considered the health of both users and makers. As I currently explore the idea of turning the top two floors into a group home for foreign students, I continue to think carefully about the choices I make.



COVID inspired the development of our outside space. We just cut in a gate so that our backyard neighbor can stop by for a visit. Next I am going to add some sculpture.



## **The Gastman House**

**1492 H Street**

by Rick Benoit, DDS

The Gastman house at 1492 H Street was built by Herman Gastman in 1898, several years after the original house had been destroyed by fire. According to Reflections of Arcata's History: Eighty Years of Architecture, Gastman offered the house for sale in December, 1899, but it didn't sell until 1901. Several years later Noah H. Falk, Arcata lumberman and real estate investor, purchased it for rental property and it became the home of the Garcelon family, remembered for their Arcata livery and drayage business. During the World War II era, it served as a boarding house. Early on in my dental practice, I had a few patients tell me about living there, especially remembering the great meals the landlady cooked. The rear of the house has a nonconforming structure grandfathered in by the City of Arcata. The house comes right to the sidewalk and is not set back. A patient told me this portion of the house had been the kitchen. In the past a door had been present and wagons drove up on the sidewalk and tossed in wood for the kitchen's wood stove. Later, the house became a popular rental property catering to HSU students.



Eventually, as is often the case with older buildings, the house became quite rundown and demolition was seriously considered. In the late 1980s, Stephen Patek, a former Arcata Community Development Director, and his wife Maureen Brandman, a local dentist, bought the building and had it listed on the Historic Registry. With the improved tax benefits, they began a restoration/remodeling project. Following the addition of a perimeter foundation, new electrical and updated plumbing and other major improvements, what had once been a single family home slated for demolition had become a dental office with a one bedroom rental downstairs and a three bedroom rental apartment upstairs. I bought the building in 1991. My family and I lived upstairs for three years, enjoying the proximity to downtown Arcata. I practiced dentistry in this beautiful building for 30 years.

A large wax myrtle tree with initials carved in the trunk from the early 1900s, graced the front of the house for almost a hundred years. Sadly, it died and had to be cut down this year, but fortunately sprouts are growing from the stump and will eventually be a new tree. The Gastman house remains as beautiful and strong as ever. Because of the Brandman-Patek remodel and a change in city ordinance that allowed for commercial use in older buildings, this wonderful building has been preserved and is a great reminder of the history of this community.

## **Jim Test Remembrance**

by Alex Stillman

The Minor theater cottages stand on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and I Streets. The first time I met Jim he was protesting the demolition of the one of the Minor Cottages. This cottage is now occupied by The Scoop



He advocated for the historic built environment and we became lifelong friends. He was the first editor of the HSSA newsletter. Recently a friend mentioned the support Bug Press gave to the local arts community through the monthly posters. Jim was the owner of Bug Press and his expertise took him to Arcata Economic Development Corporation, Arcata City Council, the Humboldt Waste Management Authority. He served as the treasurer for the Arcata Main Street Program, for which I am grateful. He gave a lot to his adopted community, and I will remember him fondly.



**P.O. Box 4521  
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*"In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we created, but by what we refused to destroy" John Sawhill.*

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