

**Winter
2026**

Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

The Phillips House Project

by Alex Stillman

The Phillips House project began in the early 1980s when the City of Arcata placed a bond measure on the ballot to purchase property from the Brizard family. The bond passed and the property is now home to the Arcata Community Center, HealthSPORT, parks maintenance building and yard, a park and soccer field and the Phillips House Museum. The acquisition was contingent upon logging the Arcata forest to pay the bond's payments.

After the bond measure had passed, I approached Alice Harris, then the City Manager of Arcata, on behalf of HSSA to discuss the prospect of establishing the Phillips House, which is considered the oldest home still standing in Arcata, as a living museum of Arcata's history. She agreed to lease it for one dollar per year with HSSA paying for the remodel and some maintenance.

The rehabilitation of the house by HSSA was carefully orchestrated. At the time there was a program called CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) which trained youth in the trades. The program paid the crew. We had two contractors and several young people working on the house. The house needed a new foundation, although the logs that originally supported the house are still there. The porch railing, front and back, needed to be replaced and we added an ADA ramp to the west porch door. We decided to close two doors, one to the front porch and one to the barns, from an open porch area where a clothesline was on a walkway towards Union Street. The interior was sheet rocked and painted. We added cupboards, an undercounter refrigerator and a sink to one room, and a window was added to the east façade. The chimney was removed to create stairs that complied with current building codes. A door at the foot of the stairs was removed. This prevented the heat from rising to the bedrooms and kept the downstairs warmer. Due to the change in the stairs, a landing was



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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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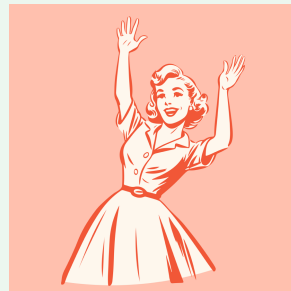
President's Message

by Alex Stillman

As we move into 2026 I am thankful for the HSSA Board of Directors and all who support the organization through donation of their valuable time. We are small yet strong in our mission of promoting and preserving the built environment and how it tells the story of Arcata so we can appreciate the past as we thoughtfully move into the future.

Our newsletters are full of information. I am so pleased to have many contributors to the newsletter, each with their own style and a variety of information. We are so fortunate to have them.

As usual, we take our winter break and return with enthusiasm for the New Year and the Valentine's Day Tea. We reopen on Sunday, February 15 with tea, delicious cookies and other tea-time treats. Join us 2-4 p.m. We look forward to seeing you.



Our Collectibles Sale was a success. We couldn't have done it without you. I cannot thank Jeanette, Kel, Bridget, Megan, Jaffa and Cindy enough for planning and managing the sale in October. Also, thanks to the donors who contributed to make this our biggest year yet.

The devastating fire on January 2 reminded me of other experiences with fires in Arcata. My first memory of a fire was in summer 1979 when the buildings on the corner of H and Ninth Streets caught fire. Harry Bistrin, who owned two clothing stores, stood next to me waiting to see if his buildings were next. Fortunately they weren't, and today Hook and Bell occupies one of them. I was able to buy this corner 40 years later and rebuild it. Now Caravan of Dreams and Arcata Artisans occupy it with apartments on the second floor.

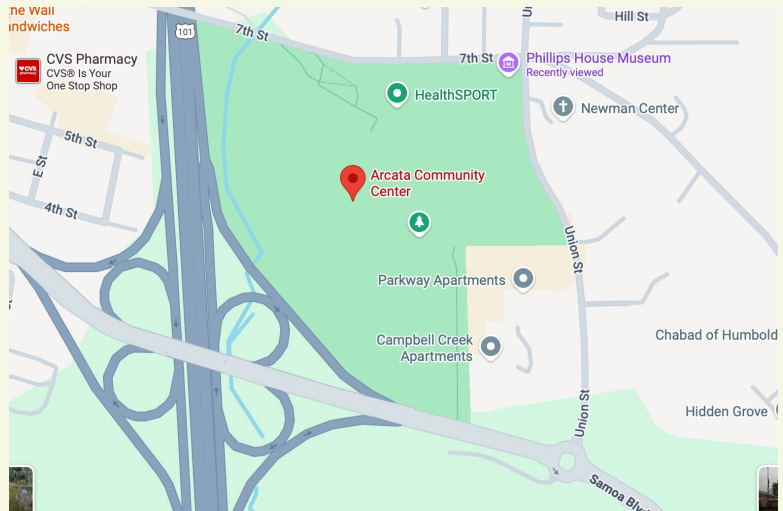
The quonset hut that housed Hensel's Hardware caught fire in 1990. It stood at the corner of I and Ninth Streets. It has since been rebuilt as the main store for Hensel's Hardware. The Fuerwerker Building was ablaze on New Year's eve in 1994. It was rebuilt to house the expansion of Hensel's with the addition of apartments and offices on the second floor.

Marinos, a stately turn of the century building at Ninth and I Streets, housed a bar with apartments on the second floor. It burned on July 26, 2001. Its former site is now Campground Restaurant, offices and apartments. To continue down the block, Northcoast Environmental Center's office and an auto paint store were destroyed in the same fire. These were rebuilt and now this lot houses a dental office with two apartments on the second floor.

The Seely & Titlow building, along with the Jones Building and the half block between it and Northtown Books caught fire on January 2, 2026, and is now a heap of rubble. I feel certain that in a few years that half block will rise again.

created at the top of the stairs to access the four bedrooms. The railings at the landing are of craftsman design so not to fool the eye that they were original. The bedrooms are now their original size. I am sure there were many other details, but this is a brief overview from my memory of 50 years ago.

We celebrated the completion of the remodeling and now it was time to get to work on the inside, including but not limited to flooring, lighting, wall paint or wallpaper and finally the furniture. More interior details in the Spring newsletter.



(The top photo on page one shows the Phillips House during the 1964 flood. The lower photo is a more recent shot of it.).

Ruth Horel, who became Ruth Caskey, was the first benefactor of the Phillips House Museum. When she contacted us, she was living in Tucson, Arizona. On one of my trips to visit my parents in Scottsdale, Arizona I drove down to see her and she showed me all the things that she had that are now in the museum. Her house in Tucson had a basement where she was storing items from the Horel House in Arcata, her childhood home. The stove in the kitchen, the table that matches the stove, and the rocking chair in the corner of the kitchen were there. Other pieces of furniture now in the living room include the organ stool, bric-a-brac shelf and arm chair next to the organ. Upstairs is the full Victorian bedroom set. Ruth also donated clothes and boxes and boxes of books from the early self-help movement, which she was immensely involved with. Her donation was the inspiration for the Phillips House becoming a living museum. We found a home for the books and Ruth's clothes occasionally appear in our exhibits.

The adorable photo is of two year old Ruth Horel. It was taken by Elizabeth "Lizzy" Ayers, an early California photographer and a women's rights advocate who actively promoted photography as a viable profession for women in the late 19th century. Ayers operated her own photography studio and was a vocal champion of women pursuing professional careers in the field during the 1880s and 1890s. She encouraged women working in factory jobs to consider the more lucrative and independent work of running a photography studio. Historical Documentation: Her work and advocacy were researched and documented by the late Peter E. Palmquist, a prominent historian who compiled an extensive archive of information on previously unknown female photographers of the 19th century. His archives, which include a biographical file on Lizzy Ayers, are held in the Cal Poly Humboldt Special Collections.



THE FIRST RAILROAD IN CALIFORNIA

By Dan Hauser

California's first railroad was the Union Plank Walk, Rail Track and Wharf Company Railroad and started in operation in January 1855. The railroad was created because the shallow mud flats on the north end of Humboldt Bay kept sailing ships from delivering freight to Union as Arcata was then known. By May of 1855, a wharf was extended to a deep- water channel about two miles into the bay to a point known as Sand Island. Oceangoing ships could then reach the wharf bringing cargo to Arcata, and shipping lumber. The remains of the wharf pilings can still be seen on Sand Island.



The first depot was where the Arcata Post Office stands today, and the railroad angled to what is now South I Street leading to what is now the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. An interesting remnant can be found in the property line in the block containing the Hospice Thrift Shop. The property line behind the new apartments has the angle that the railroad took from the Plaza to South I Street. Also there are remnant pilings on the west side of Klopp Lake and out into the bay.

Another property line is on the north side of the small mobile home park on Seventh Street between J and K Streets. There was a rail line that angled from the first railroad to what became the main line running down L Street. That main line followed the current right of way to what is now the northern part of Arcata and out to Blue Lake.

Another interesting railroad historical issue had to do with the Shay locomotive No. 7 now at the Timber Heritage Association roundhouse in Samoa. No. 7 had been used for many years hauling log cars in the woods north of Korb. In 1956 the Shay was given to the City of Arcata and displayed near the Arcata Ball Park. Simpson Timber took the locomotive back in the 1960's, restored it and operated an excursion train between Blue Lake and Arcata.

The excursion train was not a success, abandoned after about three years and put into storage at Korb. In about 1977 Simpson decided to demolish the railroad shops in Korb and to move the Shay. We negotiated for its return to Arcata, cleaned it up and put it on display for a day. Afterward it was put into storage at Humboldt Loaders (now the new Cal Poly dorms). In 1982 the building it was stored in caught fire and the locomotive was severely damaged. It was donated to the Timber Heritage Association where it was restored again.

At the time that the Shay was returned to Arcata the city was expanding the park system. The plan was to display the locomotive at the park at Foster and Alliance Road. Thus the name Shay Park.

Detailed information of the First Railroad can be found in Journal of the West Volume III, Number 2 – April 1964 by Lynwood Carranco and Susie Baker Fountain.

AT THE PHILLIPS HOUSE

COCKTAILS ANYONE?

Before World War II, companies started to make aluminum embellished and decorative household items. After WWII, massive amounts of aluminum were available. As the cocktail culture started to become popular in the 1950s, lightweight, durable, anti-tarnish and inexpensive household items became the rage. It appealed to those not able to afford silver. The Phillips House Museum's tray is an example from the 1940s.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DOCENT

Great day at the Phillips. We had 6 visitors, including a couple from LA. My daughter really enjoyed interacting with the visitors. She will be back in the future. All secure. I did notice a mannequin without a hat. Is there one missing?

by Ron Perry



*Join us for the Annual
Valentine's
Day Tea.
Sunday, February 15, 2026
2:00 p.m.*



Phillips House Museum

The Phillips House Museum will be closed until February 15 while we take our winter break.



**P.O. Box 4521
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on Instagram at [arcatahistory](#)

It is a new year and time to renew your membership. You can complete the form below and send it to HSSA, PO Box 4521, Arcata, CA 95518.. We look forward to hearing from you and appreciate you for helping to keep the Phillips House Museum open.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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email _____

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