



West Adams Matters

The Last Zanja *by Don Sloper*

There is much history in the block of Figueroa Street between Adams Boulevard and 23rd Street. At the north end is Kate Slauson Vosburg's white, colonial mansion (1887), now part of New Designs Charter School. At the south end is St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church, a Churrigueresque landmark since 1925. Between them stands Thomas Stimson's sandstone castle (1891), once the most expensive house in Los Angeles.

But as you stroll along the sidewalk between the church and Stimson's mansion, you could easily miss a rare piece of history lying at your feet. Half hidden behind a three-foot-high ornamental fence is the only remaining evidence of the once ubiquitous, open-air canals whose life-giving water allowed the City of Los Angeles to spread south to West Adams and beyond.

The 105-foot section of concrete channel that fronts St. Vincent's parking lot is the last portion of an irrigation system that extended throughout the central city, more than a century ago. Known by their Spanish name of *zanja*, the channels were integral to the founding and growth of Los Angeles. The city's most important, highest-paid official was the *zanjero* who controlled the flow of water.



Children playing by the Zanja Madre on Figueroa a century ago

Back in 1781, a canal called the Zanja Madre, or "Mother Ditch," was the first public project for the newly arrived settlers of Los Angeles. Completed in October, one month after the pueblo's founding, it brought water from the Los Angeles River to the pueblo and adjacent farm land, allowing the small settlement to become a thriving agricultural community. Of the 21 California missions, only the nearby San Gabriel Mission produced more food than the pueblo of Los Angeles.

The availability of water had decided Los Angeles' location when it was established by the Spanish government, and it has remained the most critical, and sometimes most controversial, factor in the city's growth. For 87 years, the original *zanja madre* and its offshoots were sufficient to serve the small pueblo's

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Deal or No Deal? Henry Obee Cottage in Peril *by Laura Meyers*

The circa 1890 Henry Obee Cottage appears to be down for the count, at least in terms of its City of Los Angeles Cultural-Historic Monument designation. However, there may still be a chance for a new angel to step in to move the historic Queen Anne cottage, currently located at 1408 West Washington Blvd., to a new site.

In mid-2007, we reported about the strong case several preservation advocates made to successfully convince the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission to ignore a staff report and vote instead to declare the Henry Obee Cottage a Cultural-Historic Monument (HCM). But that vote came with a caveat: the Victorian cottage has lost its original context and should be moved to a more compatible site, near residences of similar character.

However, after WAHA and others spent months attempting to identify an appropriate location as a new home for the cottage, the City Council's Planning and Land Use Committee voted to overturn the Commission vote and instead to adopt the original staff recommendation that the Obee Cottage NOT be declared a City landmark. At press time it was unknown when the decision would be scheduled for the full City Council. But, unless a Council Member calls the agenda item "special," the matter will be over – at least in terms of HCM status.

The back story:

The Henry Obee Cottage is the olive green Victorian that sits by itself on a large, paved-over lot on the corner of Washington Boulevard and New England Street. Its maintenance had been deferred but the cottage had been occupied for the past 25 years, since WAHA was founded – until the Anastasi organization purchased the property

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Read about the Sabichi Mansion, a grand residence once located on Figueroa Street (see page 7)

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Henry Obee Cottage

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for multi-family development in October 2005. Eventually, Anastasi abandoned the house, since it was not to be a part of the development and, they have stated in public hearings, the company and its representatives were "unaware" of its heritage or potential historic status.

The local neighborhood council met with the developer in mid-2006. At that time, according to Ben Davis, one of the Pico Union Neighborhood Council (N.C.) Governing Board members, he and others advised the Anastasi representatives that the house, as a character/vernacular Victorian cottage, was likely historic. However, the Pico Union N.C. also voted to support the development project.

In 2006, Anna Marie Brooks took the initiative and nominated the property for official Historic Cultural Monument status. She prepared a 28-page report and a ten-minute PowerPoint presentation demonstrating the significance of the cottage as both an architectural specimen (an example of Queen Anne Cottage style) and for its association with its original owner. But, after the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission agreed to pursue the matter in January, the City's Planning Commission staff failed to notify owner Anastasi.

In March, there was an incident in which it appeared to witnesses that men with a portable generator and tools were stripping the interior of the house of architectural elements. Those witnesses, including WAHA members David Raposa and this writer, saw the men carry large plastic-covered items from the house and load the material onto a nearby truck. In part because of this incident, WAHA wrote a letter to the City that states, in part: "...on March 27, 2007, the owner seems to have permitted an architectural salvage company or other building sub-contractors to begin to 'harvest' certain architectural elements." (Anastasi representatives later testified that the work was done by "vector control" personnel they hired. In any case, architectural elements that had been in place when Ben Davis photographed the interior in July 2006 had now gone missing.)

After that incident it became apparent that the City had failed to follow proper processes. Anastasi was subsequently provided legal notification of the HCM nomination, and the property was toured by the Cultural Heritage Commission and staff in April.

By the time this matter went to the Commission for final determination, however, staff had recommended AGAINST the inclusion of several Victorian and Craftsman cottages on the City's roster of landmarks, arguing that these cottages were "not distinguished" enough to merit HCM status.

Brooks, Davis, WAHA, and several other preservation activists, including Mitzi Mogul, rallied to the cause, playing a seminal role in having this home's historic status recognized. We attended the May hearing and argued, in part, that in fact vernacular cottages are as much a fabric of Los Angeles history - telling the story of Southern California's development from pueblo to cosmopolitan metropolis - as are mansions designed by famous architects.

(continued on next page)

President's Message

by Lore Hilburg

It's that time of year when we make plans for good things to happen. I don't just mean a sale at Liz's Antique Hardware. (Is there such a thing?) I'm talking about the annual waste of time (I mean pastime) of making our New Year's Resolutions. I do not usually engage in this sedentary sport, since I am constantly setting goals in my head that I never reach. Writing them down seems like a piling on for the guilt that will surely come later. But a request has been made, so I will give it my best effort.

1. **BE GREEN.** I believe living or working in a historic building does not mean you must give up on efforts to reduce your carbon footprint. Simply by maintaining an old structure (for California, 45 years qualifies; we're not in Greece), one is recycling or at least not cutting down trees or using materials to build new. Although it is argued that the old buildings lack some of the energy-saving components found in newer structures, in many ways they were built to accommodate nature and are thus energy saving. Anyone who has spent time in one notices how cool it stays in hot weather, especially where there are a basement and attic.

2. **PICK THE LOW-HANGING FRUIT,** as Ed Begley Jr. would say on his HGTV show, *Living with Ed* (I do not get a fee for mentioning the show). Do the easy stuff, such as changing the incandescent light bulbs into compact fluorescent. They work fine in my sconces (those with glass shades) and my other original fixtures. I still have the cute bulbs in the chandeliers, but I do not turn those on very often.

3. **PICK THE HARDER-TO-REACH FRUIT.** When renovating, use materials from sustainable sources or find used items such as wood window frames, floors, etc. It takes some research to find the right ones, but there are lots out there and it will give the structure the right feel, which can only help the value. WAHA often lists people who have extra doors, windows and other architectural materials. If you missed it, call us. We love to help on such projects.

4. **LEARN MORE WAYS TO GREEN UP MY LIFE.** Besides watching Ed's show, I am trying to get good information by consulting with others who have made changes. I hope WAHA will be able to provide more information as well. It is an up-and-coming area of concern. It was also an argument used by those opposing the HPOZ in Hancock Park. They claimed the designation would hinder those wanting to install solar panels or new, energy-efficient windows (vinyl, anyone?), thus hampering efforts to limit greenhouse gases. Of course, that was not realistic since there had not been a mass application for solar panels before the vote to become an HPOZ. Moreover, an HPOZ would not necessarily prevent environmental improvements. There are now solar tiles that look like roof tiles, and other improvements will be coming. I went to a business meeting organized by a neighbor which happens monthly for green businesses. There were 40 to 50 people there with new or established businesses created to invent or advise ways to reduce our carbon footprint.

I would welcome anyone who wants to contribute to a program on the greening of historic structures. And I hope everyone has a healthy and productive 2008. May all of your goals but, even better, my goals be reached.

*Lore Hilburg can be reached via e-mail,
hilburg@ca.rr.com*

Henry Obee Cottage (continued from prior page)

The Commission agreed, voting to declare the Henry Obee Cottage an HCM. The preservation victory was short-lived. CD1 Council Member Ed Reyes and his staff decided to link the final decision to the outcome of the process of finding a new location for the cottage, and postponed City Council action. Again, many WAHA members, particularly Jim Childs and Roland Souza, became involved in an effort to identify such a parcel. One possible parcel, owned by the Sung Kwang Church, was eliminated when pastor Samuel S. Lee asked Anastasi to not only move the house but oversee its restoration.

By October, Anastasi's representatives thought they had made a tentative deal with a local contractor, Steve Pallrand, to take the house. Anastasi agreed to cover the moving costs, offering \$50,000 based on a quote of \$42,350 proposed by the house moving company Cen-Cal Heavy Moving, according to a reported submitted by Anastasi to the public record. Souza, Brooks and other West Adams advocates also thought a deal had been struck.

Unfortunately, WAHA learned just after the rescheduled Council committee hearing on December 11 that that deal was collapsing. We had been given one week to bring a final signed letter of intent to the next hearing, scheduled for December 18. But for a myriad of reasons the potential new owner, Pallrand, dropped out of the process.

As a direct result, Council Member Reyes moved to adopt the original staff report and findings that the Henry Obee Cottage was not distinguished and did not meet the criteria to become a City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument.

Anastasi Development still has some steps it must take before it can begin construction of its project. The company returned to the City Planning Department in April to apply for additional variances plus new environmental clearances triggered in part by Brooks' research and the monument application.

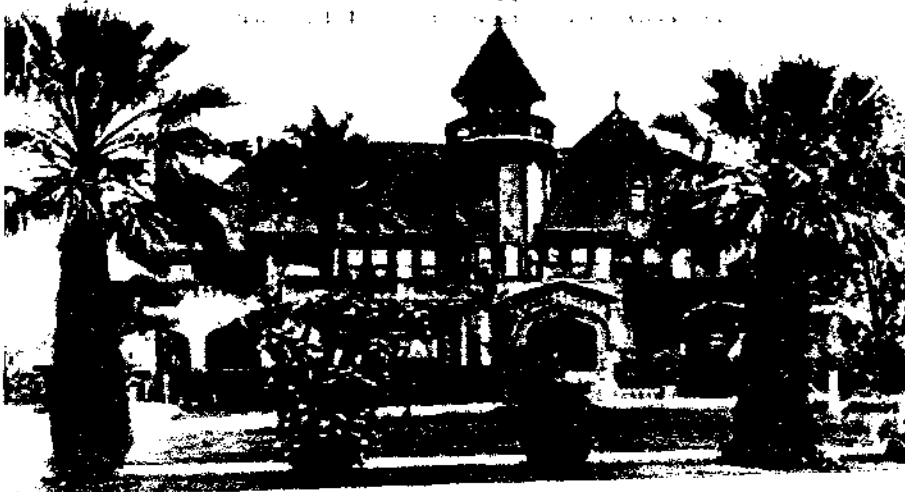
Thus, there is still a small window in time to save the structure. ●

Stepping Out

Doheny Mansion Tours

Saturday, March 1 and Saturday, September 13

Mount St. Mary's College continues its schedule of public tours of the historic Doheny Mansion in 2008, with outings slated for March 1 and September 13.



The Gothic Renaissance-style Victorian mansion was designed by Theodore Augustus Eisen and Sumner P. Hunt in 1898 and was home to the Doheny family for almost 60 years. Frequently remodeled by oil baron Edward L. and Carrie Estelle Doheny, the mansion boasts the famous Pompeian Room with iridescent Tiffany glass dome and imported Siena marble.

Public tours, which cost \$25 a person, include the first floor of the mansion and surrounding grounds. Seniors are \$15, and other discounts apply.

Call 213-477-2962 for tour information or visit the newly-created web pages for information on tours and other mansion news at <http://www.dohenymansion.org>. ●

Free Pico Union Preservation Workshop/Tour Series

HPOZ Walking Tour: Saturday, January 19, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Pico-Union Branch Library, 1030 S. Alvarado Street

The Pico-Union historic district (Historic Preservation Overlay Zone, or HPOZ) is a living example of Los Angeles history, with a wide range of architectural styles from the early twentieth century. You can help preserve the unique character of your neighborhood while adding your own history.

In January, the LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY, CRA/LA and CORO will present a series of free educational workshops on historic preservation in Pico-Union. The workshops will explore the history of Pico-Union and its architecture, the benefits of historic preservation and the HPOZ, and ways to help save this beautiful neighborhood for future generations.

Along with Thursday evening leadership training sessions on January 10, 24 and 31, there is a heritage tour on January 19. This HPOZ walking tour will explore the history and architecture of Pico Union.

To sign up, please contact the Los Angeles Conservancy at 213-623-2489 or visit www.laconservancy.org. ●

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Esotouric's Weird West Adams Crime Bus Tour

Saturday, January 26, 1 to 5 p.m.

\$55 per person

Check in at 12:30 p.m. at Benny H. Potter/West Adams Avenues Park, 3rd Avenue & 25th Street

Esotouric, the folks who bring you unique tours of literary Los Angeles and crime scenes throughout Southern California, are returning to Historic West Adams in January with their "Weird West Adams" bus tour.

Esotouric is not, as they point out, "your ordinary tour bus company. Our routes veer off into fascinating neighborhoods. Our expert guides are passionate, brainy and hilarious. Our tour themes are provocative and complex, but never dry, mixing crime and social history, rock and roll and architecture, literature and film, fine art and urban studies...."

On this tour through West Adams, "the Beverly Hills of the early 20th Century, passengers thrill to the carjacking horror of silent film starlet Myrtle Gonzalez, shiver as Dream Killer Otto Parzyjgla chops his newspaper publisher boss to pieces with the paper-cutting blade, shudder at the pickled poignancy of the murder-by-brandy of Benjamin Weber, marvel at the Krazy Kafitz family and their litany of murder-suicides, attempted husband slayings, Byzantine estate battles and mad bombings, then gag at terrible fate visited on kidnap victim Marion Parker by The Fox.

"There will be some celebrity sites along the route, including the death scenes of Motown soul sensation Marvin Gaye and 1920s star Angels baseball catcher Gus Sandberg. And the architecture too is to die for."

For more information, visit: <http://esotouric.com/westadams>. ●

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Preservation Matters

The Last Zanja

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residents and fields. The ditches carried water past the plaza to the low-lying areas to the immediate south and east.

But as the city grew, the limitations of the old zanja led to a demand for a higher-elevation canal to serve the area along Figueroa Street and bring water to what was to become the West Adams district. In 1868, George Hansen, who had surveyed the city's boundaries in 1855, formed a private company, the Los Angeles Canal and Reservoir Company, which created a second "mother ditch." In 1877, the company was purchased by the city, whose original zanja system it had leased to another company, the Los Angeles City Water Company, from 1868 to 1902.

The second "mother ditch" tapped into the Los Angeles River five miles north of the city limits and brought water to Reservoir Number 4, designed to store 150 million gallons of water. A remnant of that reservoir is the lake in Echo Park, immediately northeast of the 101 Freeway and Glendale Boulevard. The water continued south from Echo Park, in what was called the Woolen Mill ditch, until it reached Pearl Street (now Figueroa) in the vicinity of Sixth Street, where it dropped 78 feet to provide power for the mill.

From the Woolen Mill, the zanja ran south along the west side of Pearl and Figueroa streets. (At that time, the street was called "Pearl" north of Pico Boulevard, and "Figueroa" south of Pico.) The Figueroa Street zanja, designated number 8-R, had five branches veering west from the main conduit. The Adams Boulevard branch extended at least to Hoover Street, while one reached Vermont Avenue and another stretched beyond Western Avenue, more than fourteen miles from the river source.

At first, the Figueroa zanja and its branches were just earthen ditches. Then, the City Council, in its 1885-1886 term, authorized \$187,000 to improve the system. The Figueroa ditch was replaced by open-topped, concrete channels, two 2 feet wide and 18 inches deep. In residential areas, they were bordered by ornamental walls or fences, with concrete bridges at carriage entrances. The branch lines off Figueroa were placed in cement pipes as far as the western city limit, at what is now Hoover Street.

It was the availability of water that determined the value of land in Los Angeles. The Figueroa Street zanja led to early development of the West Adams area, beginning with a row of stately mansions constructed south along Figueroa Street, and with sea captain Nathan Vail's 1871 home on West Adams Boulevard, west of Figueroa. The old gates to Vail's home serve today as the south entrance to Chester Place, a private street that forms the nucleus of the Doheny Campus of Mount St. Mary's College.

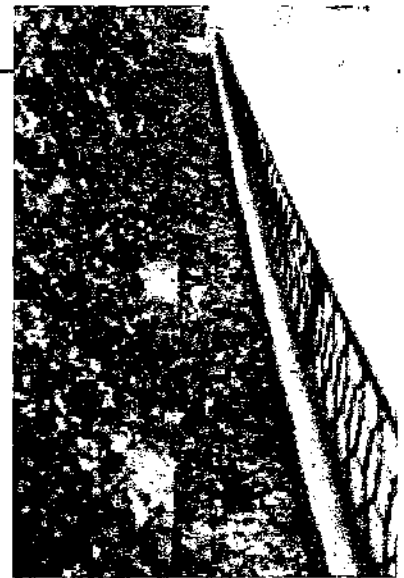
During the 1880s, the demand for water grew explosively as the population increased. To improve efficiency, the city switched to water pipes and began closing the open-air zanjias, leaving only the Figueroa Street line. According to Blake Gumprecht in his book, *The Los Angeles River*, "... the last two zanjias, the Woolen Mill Ditch and the canal along the west side of Figueroa Street, Zanja No. 8-R, were eliminated in the spring of 1904."

Meanwhile, in 1888, Frank Sabichi, former president of the Los Angeles City Council (1872-1874), had built a two-story home at 2437 S. Figueroa St., immediately east of Nathan Vail's property. The house remained in the Sabichi family until March 30, 1948, when it was purchased by Carrie Estelle Doheny, widow of oilman Edward L. Doheny. Upon her death in 1958, her will left the property to an order of priests, the Vincentian Fathers, who serve as clergy for St. Vincent's Church. The house was razed to provide a parking lot for the church.

Yet remarkably, almost 50 years later, traces of the house and its surroundings remain. The old Sabichi gateways now serve as entrance and exit for the church parking lot. The old, semi-oval driveway encloses a well-kept lawn, its diamond-patterned central walkway flanked by towering twin palms. And out at the sidewalk, half-covered with leaves, lies the city's last section of open-air zanja.

In 1939, Charles Owens, a *Los Angeles Times* newspaper artist, drew the zanja section in front of 2437 South Figueroa for the *Times'* June 30 edition, and remarked on its uniqueness. "There was a time when Los Angeles owned no more outstanding feature than her zanjias - the concrete water ditches which brought irrigation water to the city. Even today, remnants of the old zanja system can be seen, particularly on the west side of Figueroa Street, north of Adams Boulevard." ●

Don Sloper is the author of Los Angeles's Chester Place (Arcadia Press, 2007)



The Zanja today, on Figueroa



West Adams' Californio Heritage: The Sabichi, Wolfskill and Coronel Families Connection

by Laura Meyers

In the 1830s, three pioneer families whose paths would soon cross arrived in the dusty El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora La Reina de los Angeles de Porciuncula — some 50 years after the City of Los Angeles was officially founded and some 65 years after the first Spanish soldiers had set foot in an Indian village in what is now Downtown L.A.

The Sabichi, Wolfskill and Coronel families would all play pivotal roles in the development of Los Angeles for the next 100 years. They were all "Californios" — Spanish-speaking residents of Alta California who included both the descendants of European settlers from Spain and Mexico, and also included other European settlers, Mestizos, and local Native Americans who adopted Spanish culture and converted to Christianity. In West Adams, their married descendants would erect one of the many fine mansions on Figueroa Street, alongside the Zanja Madre, with remnants of both now imperiled by a proposed development.

In 1769, Spain had declared all of Alta California would belong to the crown, its claim soon secured by the establishment of missions, presidios and settlements throughout the territory. Gaspar de Portolá left San Diego with a company of sixty-four soldiers, mule-drivers, a few Indians and priests, including Fray Juan Crespi, the expedition's diarist. This company arrived here on August 2.

(continued on page 8)



The Sabichi Mansion in the 1890s

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE WHILE PRESERVING THE PAST:

NEW DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED FOR THE FIGUEROA CORRIDOR

Several West Adams preservation advocates along with University Park neighbors recently previewed plans for a proposed 145-unit market rate residential complex, to be located on the west side of Figueroa between the Stimson Mansion and St. Vincent de Paul Church — both City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monuments.

The site at 2437-55 South Figueroa is also a part of the National Register Eligible Chester Place Historic District. Its long-demolished, 3-story house was the home of Maria Magdalena Wolfskill Sabichi, the daughter of pioneer William Wolfskill, and her husband, Frank Sabichi, the son of another Los Angeles pioneer and a lawyer, real estate developer, railroad promoter, and Los Angeles City Council member. In 1884, Sabichi was instrumental in securing water rights for the city on the Los Feliz Rancho — a historic milestone for the water-dependent city.

While the Sabichis' home has been gone for decades, their concrete walkway and curbed, circular carriageway continue to be the property's entrances, as they have been since 1888. A low wrought iron fence borders the front of the property. Two towering palms rise on either side of the entrance walkway. The proposed apartments would remove all of these historic elements.

The Figueroa Street frontage also boasts the city's only remaining section of open-air zanja — the system of concrete-lined ditches that permitted Los Angeles' expansion in the late 1800s. The proposed project calls for new, wide driveways off Figueroa that would destroy or cover much of this rare artifact of Los Angeles' past. In addition, the City's own Bureau of Engineering has stated it would require the developer to "dedicate" frontage to the future widening of Figueroa, thus eliminating the remaining portion of the zanja.

The project's developer has hired a historic preservation consulting firm, along with other land use consultants, to help in the environmental and permitting processes. The project may well be altered from the initial plans that were shared late in 2007. WAHA along with other organizations will be monitoring this project as it wends its way through various City and State approval processes, and we will report more fully about the development itself in the next issue of *WAHA Matters*.

In the meantime, a "public scoping" meeting has been set for Tuesday, January 22, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the St. Vincent Elementary School Auditorium, 2333 S. Figueroa. This is a session where you may share your thoughts on elements that you feel should be included in the upcoming project Environmental Impact Report. It is not really a public hearing, but it is a legal part of the public process. Written comments may also be submitted by February 4. For more information, please contact Jimmy Liao, at jimmy.liao@lacity.org or 213-978-1331. ●

Preservation Matters

Californio Heritage: Sabichi, Wolfskill & Coronel

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1769. Looking out over the vast lands south and west of the village, Crespi wrote: "This plain has all the requisites of a large settlement." A dozen years later, California's Governor, Felipe de Neve, brought the first Mexican settlers — 11 families recruited from Sonora and Sinaloa who together comprised the "Pobladores" — to establish the Ciudad de Los Angeles, "City of Angels."

Spain governed Alta California until a newly-independent Mexico took over in 1822. Under Spanish rule, California had been a neglected territory with fewer than 4,000 citizens, the majority of whom now pledged their allegiance to Mexico. But Mexican governance wasn't much better. Historian R. Coke Wood called the period of Mexican rule in California "one of plots, counter-plots and small-scale civil wars" and the rulers "arrogant, tactless, self-seeking and incompetent." Mexican governors came and went, and graft and speculation ran rampant.

In 1833 the Mexican congress passed the Act of Secularization, beginning the process of taking the missions from the Franciscans who had built them, thereby opening more than eight million acres to colonization. Although most of the settlers were Mexican, hundreds, perhaps thousands, were not. A second piece of legislation known as the "Farias Bill to Colonize California" provided further impetus. Article 16 of the bill read: "All foreigners who become colonists in the Californias, who observe the constitution and laws of the Republic, will be Mexican citizens as soon as they build their own houses and begin to cultivate their lands."

Early the next year, signs appeared in Mexico City inviting men, women and families to join a colonial adventure to settle California. Adults were to be given four reals and children two reals per day during the waiting period and journey. Among the three hundred or so colonists who left Mexico on August 1, 1834 was a trader and merchant named Matias Sabich (later known as Matthias or Mateo Sabichi). Sabich settled in Los Angeles, becoming a well-known and apparently wealthy member of the community. It is said that Sabich loaned Solomon Lazard, a dry goods dealer, thirty thousand dollars for "so long that they began to think he would never come back for it." According to this story (one of many tales about Los Angeles in its early days which may, or may not, be true), when he did recover the loan, after Lazard had become one of the largest merchants in Los Angeles, Sabich accepted no interest on the sizable sum.

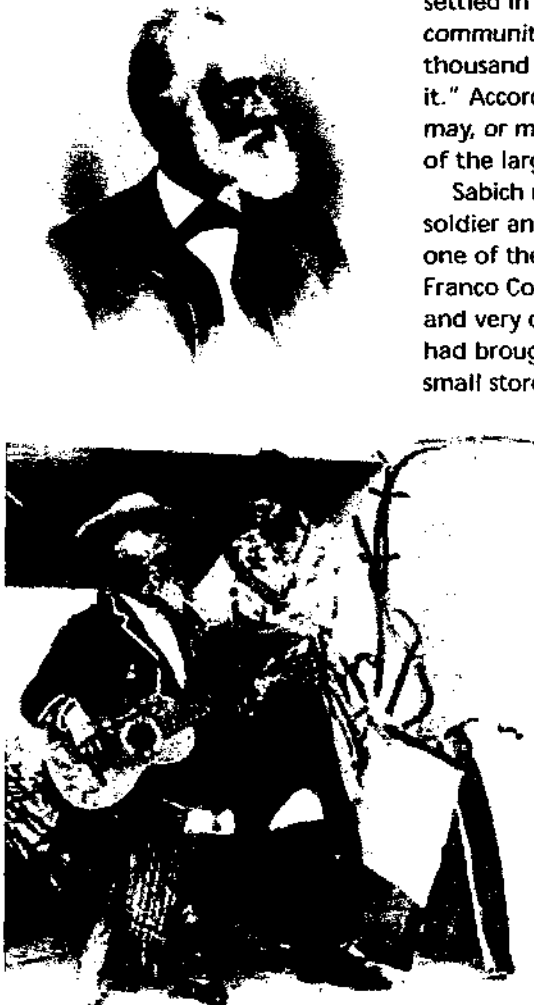
Sabich married fellow colonist Josefa Franco Coronel, daughter of Ygnacio Coronel, a soldier and educator, and sister of Don Antonio Franco Coronel, who eventually became one of the first mayors of Los Angeles and California State Treasurer. Jose Ygnacio Franco Coronel was born in Mexico City around 1795. Coronel joined the Spanish army and very quickly rose to the rank of corporal of the cavalry. By 1837, Ygnacio Coronel had brought his family to Los Angeles, and started a new life as a civilian. He ran a small store, farmed, served as secretary of the Ayuntamiento, and as a justice of the peace, and founded the city's first school. Along with Ygnacio, his daughters Soledad and Josefa served as teachers.

The Coronel family's adobe blocked the north end of the Plaza from side to side, according to a later biographical sketch. "In the leisureliness of the times, the traveler either turned around and sought another exit from the Plaza, which resembled a maze, or squeezed through narrow side alleys."

Don Antonio Franco Coronel was one of the few Spanish-Californians to continue in public life under the American regime. Reared and educated in Mexico City, Antonio Coronel joined his family when they emigrated to Alta California in 1834. After California became part of the United States, in 1848, Coronel was elected as the fourth mayor of Los Angeles, serving from 1853-1854 — the first Spanish/Mexican Californian to hold the post. Before that, Coronel served as the Los Angeles County Assessor (1850-1853). After his stint as Mayor, during which time he established Los Angeles's Public Works Department, Coronel served on the Los Angeles City Council (1854-1867), and then as California State Treasurer (1867-1871).

Don Antonio also became one of the City's most colorful characters. He had a full beard, moustache, and a receding hairline, and was frequently photographed wearing a sombrero and Mexican (or Spanish style) clothing.

Along with influence, Antonio Coronel attained great wealth. In the 1840s, he made money in mining ventures, and began acquiring land in



Don Antonio Coronel was one of early Los Angeles's most colorful characters, but he also could strike a conservative pose.

the San Juan Capistrano area. He was granted Sierra de los Verdugos in 1846. He owned vineyards and orange groves near his adobe home at 7th and Alameda Streets in Los Angeles, adjacent to the Sabichi and Wolfskill holdings. In 1883, Coronel helped to form the Historical Society of Southern California and served as its vice-president. He was an avid collector of Spanish, Mexican, and Indian artifacts, and today much of his collection is housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History in Exposition Park.

In one of Los Angeles's more interesting sidetracks in history, Coronel also notoriously stole the Los Feliz Rancho from its rightful heirs. Don Antonio Feliz died of smallpox near the end of the Civil War. He had been living on the rancho with his sister, Soledad, and his niece, Maria Refugia Petronila Feliz-Ortega, who expected to inherit the property. Instead, Don Antonio Franco Coronel was named the beneficiary, a bequest that was later upheld by a judge. (Eventually the rancho passed into the hands of Col. Griffith J. Griffith, and from him to the City of Los Angeles.)

According to Major Horace Bell, a turn-of-the-century teller of (often-embellished) tales about Southern California, Petronila was enraged by the loss of her inheritance. In this folklore version of the story, as she stood in the corridor of her uncle's adobe, she swore a curse upon Coronel and the rancho:

Your falsity shall be your ruin! The substance of the Feliz family shall be your curse! The lawyer that assisted you in your infamy, and the judge, shall fall beneath the same curse! The one shall die an untimely death, the other in blood and violence! You, senor, shall know misery in your age and although you die rich, your substance shall go to vile persons! A blight shall fall upon the face of this terrestrial paradise, the cattle shall no longer fatten but sicken on its pastures, the fields shall no longer respond to the toil of the tiller, the grand oaks shall wither and die! The wrath of heaven and the vengeance of hell shall fall upon this place.

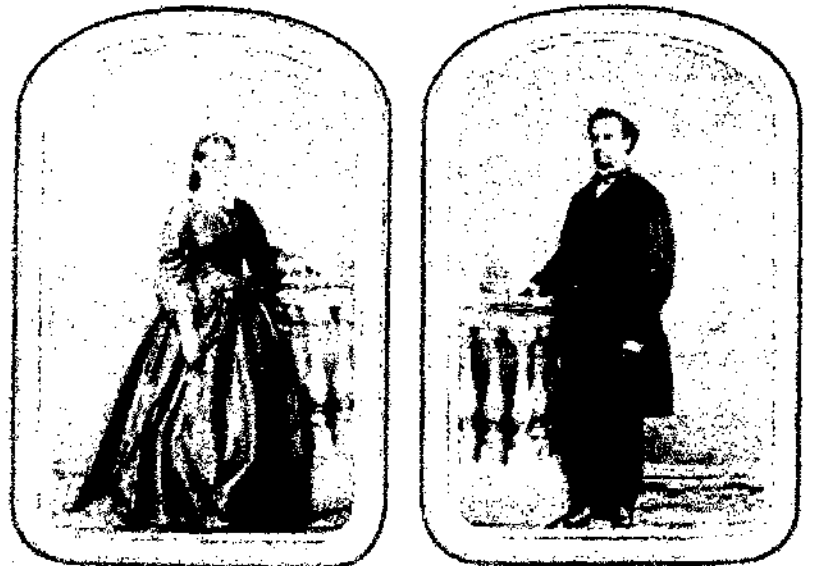
History does not make clear what role Don Antonio Franco Coronel played in the life of his nephew, Francisco "Frank" Sabichi, the son of Matias Sabich and Coronel's sister, Josefa. But like his uncle, the younger Sabichi served on the Los Angeles City Council, and in other public and civic offices. He is credited with securing the water rights to the Los Feliz Rancho, when the City expanded its water system. Sabichi and Coronel farmed on adjacent properties along what is now 7th Street, and when Coronel died, Sabichi was one of his estate beneficiaries.

Francisco Sabichi was born in Los Angeles, in 1842, his brother, Matthias, Jr., having entered the world a year earlier. Their mother, Josefa Coronel, died while they were youngsters, and in the early 1850s the boys and their father boarded a ship headed to Europe, reportedly to further their education. Unfortunately, Matias Sabich, Sr., died on board during the voyage. When the ship docked in England, Sabich's two sons were taken in by the American consul in Southampton, Joseph Rodney Croskey. Croskey as a foster father provided for their education, including the study of the French language, Spanish being their native tongue along with English. Frank Sabichi was sent to school at the Royal Naval Academy at Gosport, and then, despite his youth, joined the British Navy as a petty officer. He participated in the Sepoy Indian Rebellion in 1857, and made several visits to the Philippines while sailing the world on a man-o-war.

In 1860, Frank and Matthias Sabichi returned to Los Angeles. Matthias, alas, was soon killed in a hunting accident, but Frank began the study of law in the offices of Glassell, Chapman & Smith. He was admitted to the bar, but soon developed extensive business interests, including investments in land syndicates and railroads.

In 1865, Sabichi married Maria Magdalena Wolfskill, the daughter of another important early Angeleno of the 1830s. Her father, William Wolfskill, was literally a trailblazer who, in 1830, pioneered the famous Old Spanish Trail between Santa Fe and Los Angeles.

William Wolfskill was, in his lifetime, a frontiersman, explorer, mountain man, fur trapper, botanist, investor, trapper, rancher, carpenter, sea otter hunter, pioneer settler, vintner, citrus magnate, and trader of goods. The Kentucky native is credited, along with the Walker brothers (Joseph R. Walker and Joel P. Walker), Bill Williams and Ewing Young, as being among the first to



Magdalena Wolfskill Sabichi and Francisco "Frank" Sabichi, from a family album

(continued on page 10)

Preservation Matters

Californio Heritage: Sabichi, Wolfskill & Coronel

continued from page 7

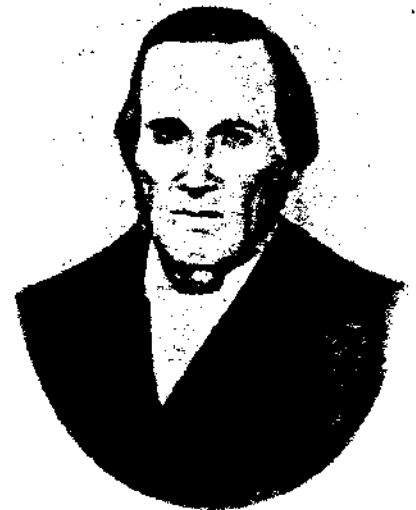
explore what would be known as the the Spanish Trail as they trapped for beaver, following in the footsteps of Jedediah Smith, the famous pathfinder. These "Taos Trappers," as they came to be known, not only blazed the trail, they opened up the route to thousands of migrant settlers, who traveled from Santa Fe, New Mexico into the Los Angeles Basin. The Old Spanish Trail witnessed a brief but furious heyday between 1830 and 1848 as a trade route linking Santa Fe, New Mexico and Los Angeles, California. During that period, Mexican and American traders took woolen goods west over the trail by mule train, and returned eastward with California mules and horses for the New Mexico and Missouri markets.

Wolfskill came to California in 1831 seeking to further his fortune. Initially, Wolfskill trapped sea otters along the coast of Alta California, and, over time, he would also try his hand at carpentry and saloon keeping. He experienced limited success in these ventures but enjoyed the contrast of the mild Southern California climate compared to the harsh winters of his Kentucky home and his recent adventures, so to stay on, he began a limited farming operation.

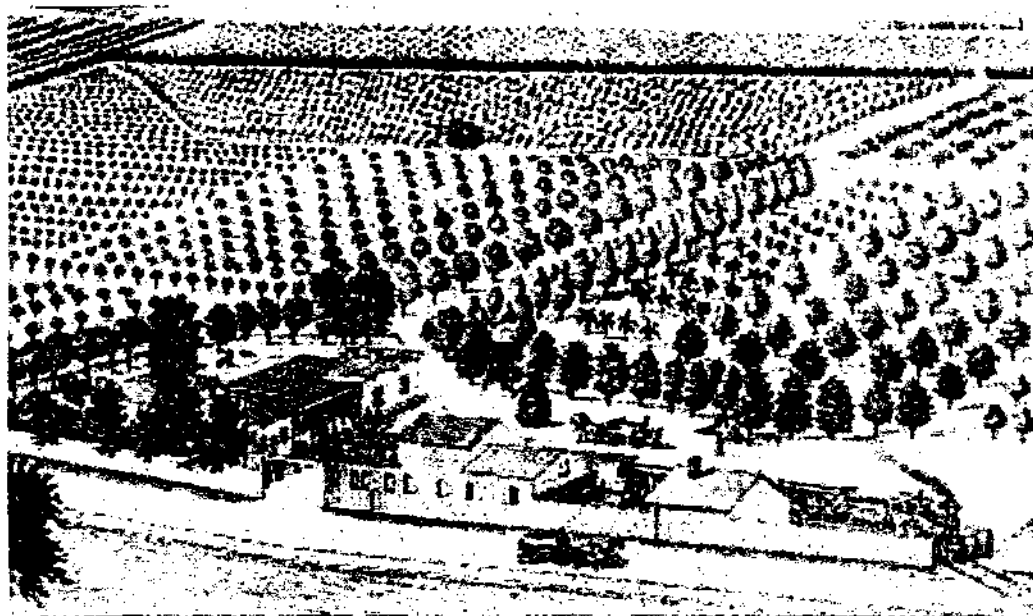
Wolfskill is credited with planting the first commercial orange grove in Southern California (apart from those run by the Missions) and with being the first Californian to cultivate table grapes for fresh eating (the Spanish missionaries established vineyards and had been producing sacramental wine for 200 years). Like many new settlers, he married into the Spanish/Californio aristocracy of the time. His wife was Magdalena Lugo, daughter of Jose Ygnacio Lugo of Santa Barbara.

During the mid-1830s the pueblo at Los Angeles was thriving. Seeing the potential demand for large-scale grape and citrus farming, Wolfskill set out to meet the demand. He prepared citrus seeds by visiting the Mission San Gabriel, then in February 1836, he filed a petition with the Mexican government, and was granted possession of a ranch on a hillside slope near what is now downtown Los Angeles. This land would become his first farm. After a few years of successful experimenting, Wolfskill had all he needed to pursue farming full time, on the first 100 acres and on an additional plot at what is now around 4th Street and Central (then called Wolfskill Avenue.) In 1839, Wolfskill planted the first vineyard of table grapes in California. He was the first person to ship grapes to Northern California gold miners. And in 1841, he planted his first two-acre plot of citrus from seedlings of the Spanish sweet Valencia orange obtained from the Mission padres. In a short time, Wolfskill's Valencia farm had increased to 28 acres of planted citrus.

When the gold rush of 1849 hit, Wolfskill was in full production and took advantage of the new market for his fruit. By ship, he sent his produce up the coast to San Francisco, where miners were willing to pay as much as \$1 each for lemons and oranges as they offered the only local prevention for scurvy. Wolfskill is considered the father of the early California citrus industry.



William Wolfskill in 1831



The Wolfskill citrus farm, near today's San Pedro and 7th Streets

Before he passed away in 1866, a year after his daughter married Frank Sabichi, Wolfskill had become Southern California's largest purveyor of citrus and table grapes. Frank and Magdalena Sabichi by then were also firmly ensconced in farm production, on acreage directly across from Wolfskill's ranch, in what is now the area roughly between San Pedro and Alameda Streets, at 7th Street. Here, and on other agricultural lands, Sabichi produced lemons and oranges. The couple would live on these rural acres until 1888, when they built a mansion at 2437 South

Figueroa, next-door to the still-extant Stimson Mansion.

Sabichi's business interests grew beyond agriculture, though he was still growing and shipping lemons and oranges through the mid-1880s. In 1875, Sabichi helped organize the broad gauge San Pedro Street Railway, which was capitalized with \$50,000 and had a depot at 4th and San Pedro Streets. Sabichi also was a director of the San Jose Land Company, and of several railroad companies. He became a land investor, real estate promoter and developer, even while holding onto his family homestead. In 1885, while still growing citrus next to the Wolfskill orange grove, Sabichi sold off another large holding of 92 acres – 66 acres planted in vineyards — for \$60,000. Finally, in 1897, Sabichi subdivided his 20-acre plat at the 7th and San Pedro into a tract of 176 parcels.

Not surprisingly, Sabichi also involved himself in civic affairs. In 1871, Sabichi was elected to the Los Angeles City Council, where he served until 1874. He returned a decade later, serving from 1883 to 1884, during which time he made his most important mark on history: Sabichi took up the negotiations to acquire the important water rights on the Los Feliz Rancho. He also served on the City's fire and park commissions. In 1893, Sabichi received a presidential appointment as a diplomatic minister to Guatemala.

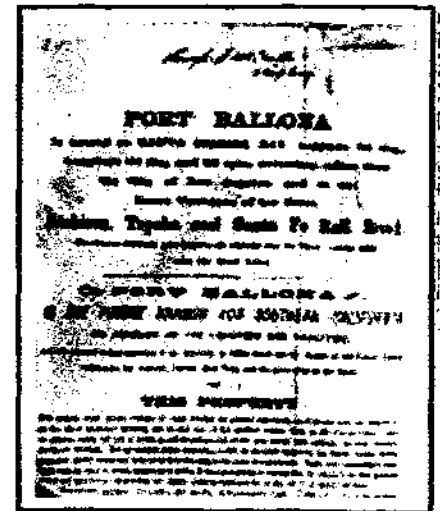
As Frank Sabichi rose to prominence, his paternal family roots grew more murky, though his maternal family (like that of Magdalena's) traced its heritage squarely to Mexico and Spain. It is quite possible that his father, Matias Sabich, hailed originally from the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, according to several accounts. However, his ancestry has been variously also described as "Italian" (Genoa) and "Austrian" (Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.) In 1883, Sabichi, who had long since dropped the name Francisco, joined with "fifty influential English gentlemen" to help found the St. George's Society of Southern California, whose members would be residents of English descent (Sabichi's eligibility apparently based on his service in the British Navy.) By then, contemporary biographical accounts sometimes called Frank's father "Matthew."

The former lawyer-turned politician-turned developer played an active role in Los Angeles's growth from pueblo to metropolis. One such venture was a proposed new international harbor at what is now Playa del Rey. On August 23, 1887, 300 "prominent citizens" were escorted to La Ballona Harbor, among them: Jonathan Sayre Slauson, O.W. Childs, Andrew Joughin, Charles Lummis, Andrew Glassell, and of course Frank Sabichi, whose Ballona & Santa Monica Railway would open one week later running twice daily each way from Downtown Los Angeles to the new port.

The Ballona Harbor and Improvement Company, under the guidance of M. L. Wicks, H. W. Mills, R. F. Lotspeich, Sabichi and others, was organized the previous year, with a capital stock of \$300,000. The port's primary promoter, Moyer Wicks, advertised that "Port Ballona is the future harbor for Southern California on account of its location and facilities, and will command a large proportion of the commerce of China, Japan and the Islands of the Pacific Ocean destined for Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and the great cities of the North....it is also one of the prettiest marine views on the Pacific coast. Here the pleasure seeker will have in winter as well as summer and all the year round, surf bathing, yachting, boating, fishing and shooting. The surrounding waters abounding in fish of all kinds native to the Pacific water, ducks, geese, rail, curlew, plover, and other water fowl that delight the heart of a sportsman." However, in 1888 Los Angeles entered another of its endless bust-boom-bust cycles with another collapse of the local financial markets. The Ballona Harbor and Improvement Company failed. A year later, a major winter storm destroyed the Ballona Harbor.

Still, Sabichi thrived. That same year he erected an imposing, turreted three-story Second Empire-style Victorian mansion on two acres fronting on Figueroa near Adams Street, hiring architect Frank J. Capitain to design an equally-impressive carriage house and stable on the rear of the grounds. A period photo shows a horse and buggy (and its driver) on the circular carriage drive – with the same Victorian-era low wall and driveway that remain extant on the site today.

Sabichi's wife, Magdalena, raised 13 children and survived her husband by many years. After Frank Sabichi died, in 1900, Magdalena Sabichi continued to reside at the Figueroa mansion until her death at age 84 in 1930. She had been active in numerous charitable institutions, including Orthopedic Hospital, St. Vincent's Hospital, Barlow Sanitarium, and the Sisters of Charity. She also pursued her own business interests. In 1913, Mrs. Sabichi commissioned the architectural firm of Morgan, Walls & Morgan to design two commercial buildings – one, a four-story mixed use hotel/retail building with 35 guest rooms, the other, a five-story loft "block" – north of 8th Street between Main and Los Angeles Streets. Several of the Sabichi children and grandchildren continued to occupy the family mansion until the late 1940s, when it passed into the hands of the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese. The still-handsome residence was torn down to make a parking lot in [YEAR TK], leaving only the remnants of history for future generations to study. ●



WAHA Matters

Volunteers Needed for WAHA Website

We are looking for a few good volunteers to post materials to the upgraded WAHA website. Volunteers should have some computer experience and know a little bit about html. After that there are possibilities for volunteers with web skills at a wide range of levels.

The new WAHA website now runs a full content management system with an administrative back end where articles and photos are routed to different pages and sections. There is an online membership signup, payment system, and database, as well as a databased gallery program for photos, including high res images for print publications. There is a threaded discussion forum. For the technically savvy, the website is running on a Linux server using Apache and PHP. The main pages run under the Mambo content management system. Mambo, the discussion forum, the membership database, and the photo gallery programs all use MySQL databases, as does a shopping cart system for some ticketing events.

Volunteers can be trained at the level they are interested in, from helping to format and post articles to building new content sections or administering parts of the site as it grows. Those who want to can become competent to set up and operate this kind of advanced interactive web-based system.

We are also looking for people who want to contribute written content, such as articles on the history of West Adams and its former residents, photos, and videos. If you are interested please contact our webmaster, Leslie Evans, 323-734-7391, cell: 323-574-5586, or e-mail to web@westadamsheritage.org. ●

WAHA can be found at www.WestAdamsHeritage.org

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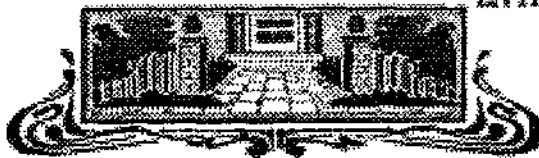
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Calendar ✓

WAHA's Annual 2008 "No Excuses" Calendar

Important future dates - Please cut this out and save!

February:

Sunday, February 24 — A Stroll in Jefferson Park

March:

Monday, March 10 — WAHA Board Candidates Statements due

April:

Saturday, April 12 — WAHA Board Elections

Saturday, April 26 — Special Native Plant Garden Event

May:

Saturday, May 3 — WAHA Board Retreat

Saturday, May 31 — WAHA's Annual Preservation Meeting

June:

Saturday, June 7 — WAHA's Annual Spring Historic Architecture Walking Tour

July:

Friday, July 4 — WAHA's Annual 4th of July Picnic

August:

Thursday, August 7 — WAHA new member event

September:

Saturday, September 27: Living History Tour at Angelus Rosedale Cemetery

October:

Sunday, October 26 — Frightful Halloween Festival

December:

Saturday and Sunday, December 6 and 7 — Holiday Tour

Sunday, December 14 — WAHA Holiday Party

WAHA's Board of Directors usually meets on the 4th Thursday of the month, at 7 p.m. WAHA members may attend. Check with the WAHA president for specific details of location and date, and/or if you wish to have an item placed on an agenda.

The WAHA Newsletter is a publication of the West Adams Heritage Association. Members and supporters of WAHA are invited to submit articles to the Newsletter. Lett will be published subject to space constraints and will be cut for length if necessary. Articles will be published subject to acceptance by the editors of the WAHA Board. Advertising is subject to the approval of the publishers. Although the Association appreciates its many fine advertisers, the Association does not accept responsibility for claims made by advertisers. Services and products are not tested and appearance of advertising does not imply, nor does it constitute, endorsement by the West Adams Heritage Association. Copyright 2008. All rights for graphic and written material appearing in the newsletter are reserved. Contact Director of Publications for permission.



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