LONG BEACH HERITAGE

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SHUTTERED PORT ADMINISTRATION BUILDING MURAL IN JEOPARDY

By Louise Ivers

The Port of Long Beach Administration Building at 925 Harbor Plaza Drive is enclosed in one of the dreaded green fences that preservationists fear marks the death knell of an historic structure. Despite efforts to save it, the distinctive tile clad building will be demolished in 2017. Long Beach Heritage members Emily Tanaka and Louise Ivers attended a Port Commissioners meeting two years ago and presented information about the Gladding McBean mural on the façade to them. They voted to save this 74 foot wide work of art, which depicts the history of the Port of Long Beach, designed by Sheridan Stanton and Paul Souza. However, now the administrators are having second thoughts about saving the mural because of the cost involved in this project and the Port Commission will be voting again soon to determine its fate. It would be a terrible shame to see this unique work, the largest one of its kind in the area, turned into a pile of rubble.

Port of Long Beach Administration Building designed by Warren Dedrick and James Friend, 1958-60

PHOTOS BY LOUISE IVERS

Mural by Sheridan Stanton and Paul Souza depicting the history of the Port

In 1956 the previous Harbor Department Building at 1333 El Embarcadero, built in 1940 and designed by Warren Dedrick, was sinking badly due to subsidence caused by offshore oil drilling. The Port Commission chose a site on Pier A for a new structure and in March 1957 local architects Warren Dedrick and James R. Friend produced a perspective drawing of the now abandoned building. Ground was broken on 16 June 1958 and the first foundation piling was driven into place by William A. Harrington, president of the Long Beach Harbor Commission, and Sally Cannon, a ten year old girl. On 28 September the Los Angeles Times reproduced a photograph of the steel skeleton of the seven story $3,000,000 structure, which was rapidly rising on the pier. The mural, composed of numerous

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Buy Tickets Now for Craftsman Educational Event on April 10

Long Beach Heritage will be hosting an educational event on Sunday April 10 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Reeve/Townsend house in the Virginia Country Club neighborhood. It will feature Ted Wells, who will speak about the preservation of the property, and another speaker, who will detail the history of its early owners. It will also include a tour of this spectacular home designed by Charles and Henry Greene, the most famous California Craftsman architects. Tickets are available online at LBHeritage.org or by mail for $20 per person. Buy your tickets now because this event may sell out soon!

Owner and architectural historian, Ted Wells, purchased the house and began its restoration in 2004. Ted has overseen reproduction of many individual fixtures made with the same techniques that craftsmen used 100 years ago. He has also continued to work on the yard and the original rose garden, which has 12 types of roses grown from original cuttings. Ted's goal is to help everyone understand the historical context of the time and place of the Jennie Reeve house, the culture of southern California around the turn of the last century, and the people who made it happen. He says "It is a rare opportunity in historic architecture to see it in process during a restoration, and to share this learning experience with others is one of my goals."

PHOTO BY CHRIS LAUNI

Long Beach Heritage encourages you to invite your friends to this special event.

Historic Alamitos Branch Library Will Soon Receive Landmark Status

PHOTOS BY LOUISE IVERS

Exterior of Alamitos Branch Library built in 1928

Stairway with glazed tiles

Second floor community room

By Louise Ivers

Long Beach's oldest remaining branch library at 1836 East 3rd Street will soon be designated as an historic landmark after approval by the City Council. This is the first new landmark to come before the Cultural Heritage Commission in many years and it is in a remarkably excellent state of preservation. Designed in the Spanish Revival style in 1928, it retains original details both on the exterior and in the interior. Although the exact name of the architect remains unknown, the plans were created by the Long Beach Engineering Department. George W. Ferris was the architect who worked in this office in 1928 and he made the drawings for the Spanish style Recreation Park Band Shell and Houghton Park Clubhouse around this time, so it is possible that he was responsible for the design of the library as well.

The Alamitos Library Association was founded by a private group of citizens in 1895 in the Alamitos Beach Townsite, which was originally laid out by John Bixby around 1886. In 1910 Jotham Bixby gave the land upon which the present library is constructed and the old wooden building to the city of Long Beach. By 1928 this structure was no longer adequate for its purpose, so the City Council decided to replace it with a more modern one. The delightfully detailed Alamitos Branch Library opened 28 January 1929 and cost $38,000.

Spanish Revival elements on the outside of the library include asymmetrical gabled roofs, stucco walls, wrought iron grilles and railings, paneled wooden doors, and a fountain in the walled patio clad in colorful tiles. The main reading room inside the building has exposed wooden ceiling beams supported by corbels and painted with geometric and heraldic motifs. The stairs have terra cotta treads and glazed tile risers with floral motifs in blue, yellow, and orange. Original light fixtures resembling candle holders are placed in the stair well, which is also illuminated by a large mixtilinear (curved and stepped) window. The second story community room has ceiling beams carved with Moorish motifs. All of these decorative details are influenced by Medieval and Renaissance buildings found in southern Spain, which were known to local architects through a number of copiously illustrated books published in the twenties.

Kudos to the city of Long Beach for preserving this architectural gem!

Main reading room

the OCEAN BOULEVARD team

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Volunteer Spotlight: Michele St. Peter

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOGAN

Michele St. Peter, docent at the Bembridge House

By Chris Hogan

Michele St. Peter has been a tour docent at the Bembridge House for almost three years. And with her expertise on local history and Victorian architecture, she is a great docent.

After retiring from 28 years at a division of the biopharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers Squibb, she relocated to Long Beach five years ago. She wanted to combine her passion for "history, historical buildings, and antiquities" with volunteering. She first found the 1864 Victorian Banning House in Wilmington and became a docent there. In fact, she is currently the Head of Interpretive Training and has been in charge of training all future docents for two years. (It is an extensive 8-week course covering family, Victorian, and California history.)

Luckily for us, Michele also found the Bembridge House. Somewhere, she picked up a brochure or post card, which brought her to see the property and volunteer here. She loves the house itself, its structure, its original wood features, and its ornamentation. She says that her mother and grandmother had lots of antiques. She says that "I see things around the house that I have, like the sewing box (in the upstairs sewing room)." Looking around the home, she adds with a smile, "We are all antiques."

The Bembridge House is definitely grateful that Michele came to the home and shares her passion for history every time she gives tours!

North Pine Ave Walking Tour

Woolworth Variety Store Long Beach,CA

The debut of the North Pine Walking tour this past February was well-attended. Consider signing up for the next one on **Saturday, May 7 at 9:30am**. This quarterly two-hour tour celebrates successful restoration projects, the charm of some of our earliest extant commercial structures, and such on-going adaptive-reuse projects such as the Long Beach Professional Building and Vault 350.

Please note that the path of this tour has changed in order to increase awareness of our meeting place. It will begin in front of 345 Pine Avenue (Gold's Gym) at 9:30am, travel north to 8th Street and circle back to end at the old Press-Telegram building at 6th and Pine. The City Place Parking Garage with entrances from 4th and 6th Streets is conveniently situated nearby.

Please visit lbheritage.org for details and to purchase tickets. A donation of $10 per person is requested. In the event of rain, the tour will be cancelled; please call 562-493-7019 to make new arrangements if we are rained out.

Shuttered Port Administration Builing Mural In Jeopardy

(Continued from page 1)

individually painted tiles put together in a mosaic, was completed by November 1959 and the building was officially occupied on 23 February 1960.

Soon after the new Port Administration Building opened in 1960, an article in Harbor Highlights detailed information about the huge tile mural, calling it "one of the most spectacular pictures one could see in a lifetime." It was "executed with direct painting technique on terra cotta, in high fire underglaze" and was thought "to be the first done in this manner since Della Robbia's renaissance pieces" of the fifteenth century. ("New Administration Building Dedicated," Harbor Highlights, Spring 1960, page 1) The mural reads from right to left because the architects thought that people would approach the building from the north and walk southward to the entrance, which is behind the curved wall. The theme of the art work is the development of the port from the discovery of San Pedro Bay by the Spanish mariner Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542 to the arrival of a modern steam ship in 1959. Also pictured are Native Americans of the Canaliños tribe with canoes and fur seals; Sir Francis Drake's ship, the Golden Hind, which carried the first English explorers to the West Coast; a New Bedford whaler from Massachusetts; images of nineteenth century cattle hide traders during the Mexican period; the fastest Yankee clipper ship, the Flying Cloud; a Panama mail packet of the Gold Rush era; the SS Iaqua, the first steam ship to enter the Long Beach harbor after its official opening in 1911; fishing boats and private yachts; a contemporary freighter being unloaded with booms by dock workers; and the oil wells of Signal Hill. The subject matter, the execution, and the sheer size of this wonderful narrative mural make it worthy of preservation.

Sheridan "Sherry" Stanton became the director of Gladding McBean's tile department in 1952 and was in charge of overseeing the production of glazed terra cotta. He developed the theme of the Port mural. Paul Marciel Souza (died 2007) was the artist who painted the tiles before they were fired and he taught at Art Center in Pasadena for many years. He was a well-known watercolorist who created scenes of California, his native Hawaii, Spain, and Morocco. The figures and ships in the Port Administration Building mural are placed in front of a tan background highlighted by puffy white clouds and a strip of bright blue water. Other hues include yellow, brown, and turquoise.

The Gladding McBean Company was founded in 1875 in Placer County, California and by 1950 had nine factories in western states. One of these was at Tropico in Los Angeles County. They were the leading manufacturer of decorative glazed tiles in the United States and made both exterior and interior cladding for many types of buildings all over the country. Today, Gladding McBean products are prized by collectors and building owners for their high quality workmanship and unique designs. It will be a terrible shame if the Long Beach Port Administration Building mural is allowed to become a pile of rubble.

SAVE THE DATE

Annual Meeting

July 10, 2016 at 2:00 p.m.

Assistance League

of Long Beach

6220 East Spring Street

Details in the next newsletter.

Mills Act is Active Again

After a substantial hiatus, the City Council of Long Beach in 2015 voted to renew the Mills Act, a program that allows owners of historic properties to receive tax benefits for ten years if they actively work to preserve and rehabilitate their buildings. Presently, there are 42 structures that qualify for this program and Planning and Building staff is hoping that more people will sign up at mandatory workshops on March 12 at the Central Library and March 26 at the Dana Branch Library. The application deadline is April 1. The Mills Act is a great benefit for property owners because they get a tax break of up to 50% and they can apply the savings to projects that enhance the worth of their buildings. In order to qualify for the Mills Act, a structure must be a Long Beach Historic Landmark. Owners can now apply for landmark status concurrently with their Mills Act request.

Bembridge News

By Chris Hogan

It was another superlative Victorian Christmas at the Bembridge House. A year ago we had our most successful event ever, but, incredibly enough, the 2015 Christmas broke even those records and "blew them through the roof." In only one month at least 500 visitors toured the House. We even hosted the first Holiday Party for a private group. And it wasn't just in attendance that 2015 Victorian Christmas broke records. So many visitors commented that this season's decorative theme, "Visions of Sugar Plums," inspired the most beautiful rooms they had ever seen.

The gardeners outdid themselves as well – their ever-popular Garden Boutique brought in over $2000 in donations. The local charity, Love in the Mirror, held its most successful toy & book give-away for hundreds of children at the Bembridge Carriage House. Once again, Long Beach Pride supported Victorian Christmas by purchasing tickets and distributing them to people who couldn't otherwise enjoy the House. The media coverage for the House's Holiday Season was the most extensive, too.

Obviously, a huge shout-out is needed for all involved in the Bembridge House's recent Victorian Christmas success. Thank you to everyone who contributed – the many neighborhood associations, the afore-mentioned organizations, Project ALOFA, the South Coast Chorale, Santa Claus, and all the other individuals, volunteers, & docents. Special kudos go to journalist Kirt Ramirez for his meticulously-researched and well-written article about Dorothy Bembridge and the Victorian Christmas piece featured in the Beachcomber. One more extra-special "Thank You" goes to Christine Votava who created the spectacular Bembridge gingerbread house and then donated it to raise funds.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOGAN

Gingerbread house created by Christine Votava

For spring, I'd like to think that everything's coming up roses. The gardeners have been hard at work preparing the flower, succulent, and vegetable beds and the always-busy docents are gearing up for more visitors. But, the Bembridge House truly needs more volunteers. Besides leading tours or gardening, there are other ways to help out, too. If you only have a few hours to spare, we need people to serve as hospitality hosts/hostesses (to assist at any special functions, such as luncheons or small parties) or on our grant-writing committee. Please consider the Bembridge House if you're looking for a new volunteer opportunity.

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Great Homes Tour Long Beach

Save the date for our upcoming home tour on June 5th. Attendees will have an opportunity to view the Hyman House, an outstanding mid-century Killingsworth home and recent winner of a LB Heritage Preservation Award. Tickets will be available by mail and online at www.lbheritage.org.

Membership Report: March 2016

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Calendar

Jennie Reeve House Salon	April 10th
LBH Executive Committee	April 25th
LBH Board	May 23rd
Great Homes Tour	June 5th
LBH Executive Committee	June 27th
Annual Meeting	July 10th
Santa Anita Concert	July 23rd

Walking Tours

North Pine Tour on Saturday, May 7th at 9:30

East Village on the second Saturday at 10 a.m.

Downtown on the third Saturday at 9 a.m.

Willmore on the fourth Saturday at 9:30a.m.

Bembridge Tours

Every Tuesday & the fourth Saturday at 1:30 & 2:30 p.m.

Long Beach Heritage

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LBH Membership

Long Beach Heritage is a non-profit education and advocacy group promoting public knowledge and preservation of significant historic and architectural resources, neighborhoods and the cultural heritage of Long Beach. Dues are due on May 1st each year.

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