



Enriching the future by preserving the past.

Inside . . .

March 23, 2011 - Leo Politi, Artist, Author & Preservationist multi-media program at San Joaquin Gardens Page 2

May 26, 2011 - Tour the Library and Old Administration Building at Fresno City College Page 2

Crest Theatre and Cherin Home nominated to the Local Register of Historic Places Page 3

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Armenian Town Project to Begin this Summer

On February 3, 2011 the City of Fresno Redevelopment Agency Board approved a Construction Management contract to California Associates, Inc., for the relocation of the five historic Armenian Town homes and a summer kitchen to 450 "M" Street. California Associates will oversee the restoration project which will provide for relocation, exterior restoration of



the buildings and replication of landscaped yards commonly seen in Armenian neighborhoods of the time period. The structures will be moved this summer and the exteriors completed by the end of 2011. The interiors will be the final phase and will be built to suit the occupant.

Submitted by Terry Cox, Project Manager
Redevelopment Agency, City of Fresno

Saving the Fresno City College Old Administration Building

By Mabelle M. Selland, founder Heritage Fresno



Restored Old Administration Building

In August of 1973, *The Fresno Bee* carried a large picture of a wrecking ball demolishing the beautiful Little Theatre at what had been my alma mater, Fresno State College. Another headline announced the planned demolition of the Administration Building, completed in 1916 for Fresno State Normal School.

That Old Administration Building brought back as many memories as the Little Theatre did. The architecture of the courtyards has an atmosphere of a bygone era - handsome rounded arches, strong columns, and detailed brick work executed by skilled craftsmen not possible to replicate today.

A parking lot? - my head and heart just said, "No."

As the new Director of the Fresno City and County Historical Society, I took it up with our Board. They were sympathetic, but there was no budget for it. However, I was free to follow up as time allowed.

The Administration Building was only 59 years old. I had no knowledge of historic preservation and didn't know how to approach people. I attended a State Office of Historic Preservation meeting where the speaker gave a basic talk about what is and isn't historic. I asked, "Is a 59 year old building historic?" His answer, "It depends on the building." I replied, "The Administration Building of Fresno State College." He immediately answered, "Yes, such a building would most certainly be historic."

That was all I needed. I went to two Fresno County Historic Landmarks Commission meetings; they laughed me out of the meeting. At that time they had a list of 50 historic sites in Fresno County; sites, not buildings.

Later I discovered that the Old Administration Building (OAB) was the oldest State College building remaining in California. I continued to tell everyone I spoke with of the planned demolition. In October 1973, I spoke with Dr. Ephraim Smith, history professor at Fresno State about the demolition of the OAB; he was immediately interested and said, "Let me make some calls; I will get back to you."

Within an hour Dr. Smith called back. He had called administrators at Fresno City College, City Planning Department, architect, James Nargis, *The Fresno Bee*, and State Legislator, Rick Lehman, who had been student body president at City College. His assistant, Jim Costa, felt Rick would be interested. Dr. Smith also told me he planned a meeting at his home and the *Bee* would carry an article. Jim Nargis AIA, Val Comyges, David Wilkinson, Dianne Seeger, Gene Wong, structural engineer, Smith, myself and a few others from the community attended that first meeting.

See **Old Administration Building** Page 2

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Heritage Fresno Mission Statement

Heritage Fresno is dedicated to preserving historic sites, districts, buildings and objects. We encourage research and education in the field of historic preservation. We help insure that preservation law is upheld.

Ways to accomplish this goal are by

Research and publication of educational material on history and architecture of historic buildings, historic districts and sites.

Upholding Preservation Law to protect the public's interest in preservation of historic buildings, sites, districts and objects.

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Upcoming Events . . .

March 23, 2011—Leo Politi: Artist, Author & Preservationist

Denise Sciandra will present a multi-media program on the life and legacy of children's author and illustrator Leo Politi at 6:30 pm at San Joaquin Gardens. Born in Fresno in 1908, Politi spent most of his adult life in Los Angeles. Denise was a friend of the late Politi and continues to promote interest in his rich legacy and his efforts to preserve historic neighborhoods of Los Angeles through his paintings, books and activism. Join Denise and other Leo Politi fans for an optional dinner in the San Joaquin Gardens dining room at 5 pm. Dinner is \$12; please make dinner reservation before March 21st by calling 439-4770. Reservations are not necessary for the **FREE** program at **6:30 pm** sponsored by Friends of the Politi Library, Fresno County Public Library, the Arnie Nixon Center, San Joaquin Gardens, & Heritage Fresno. **San Joaquin Gardens Community Room, 5555 N. Fresno Street** (north of Barstow). Refreshments will be served. Phone 488-3856 or 431-3110 for more information.

May 26, 2011 - Tour of the Library and Old Administration Building

Heritage Fresno invites you to tour the Old Administration Building and Library at Fresno City College Thursday, May 26th. The architectural Library tour begins at 4:30 pm, followed by a tour of the Old Administration Building at 5 pm. Meet us in front of each building prior to the tours. For more information call 243-5848 or 261-1510.



Old Administration Building, c1916



Fresno City College Library, c1931

Old Administration Building (continued)

In January 1974, the Historical Society Board agreed unanimously that our committee could use the Society stationary, address and phone number for the activities of the committee to save the OAB.

Gene Wong, structural engineer was hired to study the Administration Building. He reported: "The building is sound, stronger than many buildings in downtown Fresno, but it didn't meet school earth quake standards of the State Field Act for Schools required for a Junior College."

An art professor at Fresno State who was a friend of State Legislative Analyst Alan Post, called Post, who requested a background statement from Smith. Post's reply in June 1974 put a hold on finances for new construction at State Center Community College District (SCCCD). **Also very important, he insisted the planned new construction must be moved away from the front of the OAB.** This was the first real progress we had made. This forced the SCCC to do an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). **The EIR recommended retention of the OAB.**

May 1974, the SCCC had published a negative Declaration of Environmental Impact (EIR). It was a small statement on a back page of the newspaper, but Smith saw it. The Historic Society filed a challenge which forced the SCCC to do an EIR. **The EIR recommended retention of the OAB.**

Dianne Seeger, one of our committee members, had knowledge of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Register for Historic Places. She and I pushed Smith to apply for the historic status and Congressman Sisk pushed it through in Washington D.C. The building was listed in 1975.

However, the SCCC was determined to demolish the building. Smith was deeply discouraged. We had managed to enlist William Penn Mott, State Director of Parks and Recreation on our side. I suggested that Smith invite him to come and make the announcement that the building was on the National Register of Historic Places. Mott came, made the announcement about the National Register and also recommended a much needed State Agricultural Museum for the site.

1976: State Parks and Recreation, County and City of Fresno shared an \$18,000 grant for a feasibility study to determine the use for an Agriculture Museum. Smith did the history and coordinated the rest of the study. In 1977, the Historical Society published the study recommending an Agriculture Museum at a cost of \$2.5 million.

Continued Page 3

Old Administration Building *(continued)*

September 1977: the City, County and State signed an operating agreement: the building was to be owned by the State, managed by a non-profit organization, overseen by the City and County.

1977-79: a non-profit organization was incorporated as the San Joaquin Agricultural Museum, spearheaded by Smith, myself, and the Agricultural community: Bill Allison, Nat Di Buduo, Jr., George Kitahara, Robert Kanagawa, John Wheeler, Thomas Corn, Lloyd Dowler, and others. I wrote the By-Laws taken from well- managed museums. Funds were raised for me to hire Consultants to evaluate the building for museum use.

The Consultants comments:

“...would be unique in the state...” Raymond M. Wik, agricultural historian.

“...the courtyards are magnificent...the auditorium lends itself to being the museum’s “Great Hall...” Thomas Frye, history curator, Oakland Museum

“...would appeal to and...open the unopened book...to appreciate the subject of agriculture...” Norman Bilderback, exhibit designer, State Industrial Museum.

Assemblyman Lehman carried a \$3 million restoration Bill in the Legislature.

1982: The OAB was turned over to the state by SCCCD with no utilities. John Wheeler, Historical Society Board member, set up an electrical generator and the Ag Museum was in business, with director, curator and much financial support from Foundations and Museum Board President, Walt Harpain.

1983-85: the museum created two outstanding exhibits with grants, “Immigrant Faces, Valley Soil” and Fresno City Centennial, “100 Years of New Neighbors.”

1986: the City of Fresno was to administer the \$3 million for the Agricultural Museum. As Cultural Arts Supervisor, I was to serve as City staff to oversee the funds.

1987: the State Parks and Recreation Commission voted against the establishment of the Ag Museum. The building went back to SCCCD ownership, the museum moved out.

1988-1993: many hours were donated by local architects to persuade the SCCCD Board to restore the building for needed use on campus in place of new construction. Historic preservationists lobbied for the SCCCD to “moth ball” the building (protect it from the elements) until it was needed; both were rejected.

1993-2000: the Historical Society continued to protect the building. James Oakes, AIA, spent many volunteer hours educating the SCCCD that the State Historic Building Code made the use of the Historic Building Code mandatory for historic school buildings, not the Field Act. **This made it against the law for the SCCCD to demolish the OAB.**

The Historical Society held two public tours of the building. Approximately 1,000 people came for each tour. The SCCCD was in need of passing a Bond Issue for educational expenses. Word began to circulate that the bond issue might be more likely to pass if it included funds to restore the OAB. The Fresno City College Foundation provided funds to do a survey to determine if that were true. The results of the survey showed 70 percent would vote “yes” if the OAB was included. A bond was written that included \$25 million for the OAB. Many Fresno City College groups worked on the Bond campaign. The Historical Society committee, Jill Moffet, Bruce Odum and I raised \$25,000 toward the Bond campaign. In July of 2002 the Historical Society agreed to the project’s scope, bond funding amount, and continued support to the project. **The Bond, Measure E, passed in the fall of 2002.**

There was much more work to be done by a City College Faculty committee, chaired by Olga Quercia and others on campus, to see the project through. The City College Foundation and faculty committee raised \$4 million for the restoration of the auditorium, which was not covered by Measure E. After architects were approved, a campus committee worked with them to determine educational and space programming for the building. An EIR was required before restoration could begin; by 2007 work began to restore the OAB. The restoration architect explained that great expense went into electrical, plumbing, heating, cooling, computer/internet technology and communication, which were not part of the restoration but brought the building up to current and future educational needs.

On Friday January 28, 2011, almost 38 years after that August 1973 *Fresno Bee* article announced it would be demolished for a parking lot, the Old Administration Building Ribbon Cutting ceremony opened the building for classes and other school uses. The program included Congressman Jim Costa returning from Washington D.C. for this momentous occasion and remembering to acknowledge Dr. Ephraim Smith, Rick Lehman, Jim Boren of *The Fresno Bee*, the Historical Society and Mabelle Selland, who just said, “No” to demolition of our heritage.

Join us Thursday, May 26th for a tour of the Old Administration Building and the Library - See Upcoming Events Page 2

Local Historic Register—Congratulations to the owners of the **Crest Theater** and the **Alfred and Minnie Cherin Home**.

With recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission and City Staff, both 1949 buildings were placed on the Local Register of Historic Resources at the February 3, 2011, Fresno City Council meeting. Elliot Balch (DCR staff), Sophia Pagoulatos (Planning), as well as, Midge Barrett (Heritage Fresno) spoke in support of both nominations. City Staff made the initial request that the Crest Theater, located at 1160 Broadway Plaza, to be designated to the local registry. Michael Weil, owner of the Cherin Home located at 233 East Cornell Avenue in the Fresno High area, requested that his property be considered for inclusion in Fresno’s Local Official Register of Historic Resources. The Crest Theater was built in 1948-49 as a “New Stadium Theater” by 20th Century Fox at an estimated cost of \$367,000. The Cherin Home, designed by Robert Stevens for clothier Alfred Cherin and his first wife, Minnie, has had very minor alteration. Robert Stevens is credited with pioneering the “Garden Office” property type, many of which were constructed of Hans Sumpf stabilized adobe brick along the Shaw Avenue corridor.

Source: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Fresno City Historic Preservation Project Manager



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If you agree with our goals, we would appreciate your active interest and financial support. If you have already contributed in 2011, we thank-you for your generosity and assistance to the cause of preservation in Fresno!

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