

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

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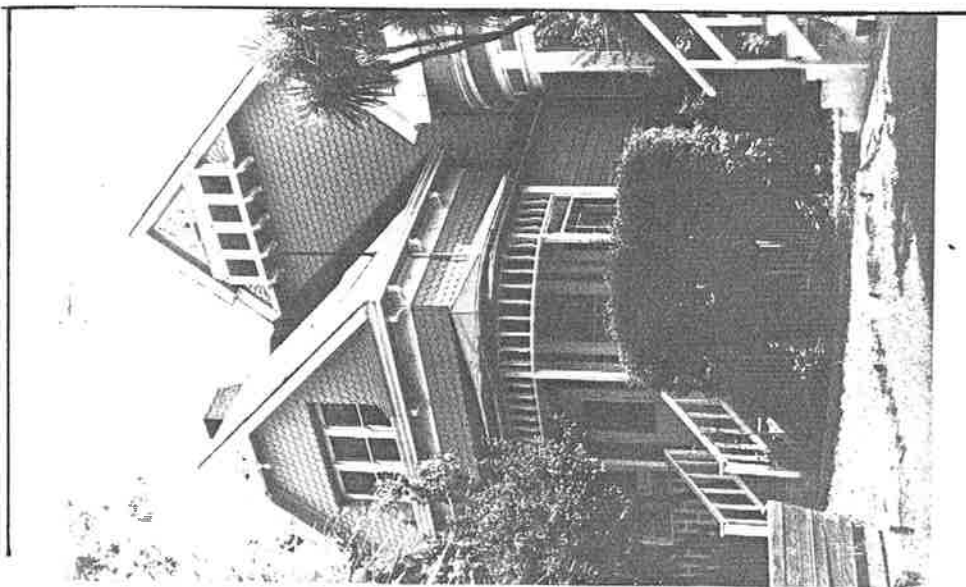
IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: _____
2. Historic name: Michael Righetti House
3. Street or rural address: 1314 Palm Street
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 01-223-08
5. Present Owner: Kalman, T. and I. Address: 1456 Tanglewood Ct.
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 Ownership is: Public _____ Private X
6. Present Use: Multiple Residence Original use: Residence

DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: Queen Anne
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

This large two story Queen Anne fronts on Palm Street, with an irregular L-shaped side entrance facing Johnson. The ornamentation and indentation are reflected in the multiple roof lines with gables facing in all directions at different heights. There is clapboard siding below and fishscale in the upper areas. Many richly detailed appliques and ornaments adorn the home. A verandah extends across the front, curving at the corner. There is a double door entry, topped with a mullioned transom. A door in three panel wood with etched glass in the upper left is there. A front window is one-over-one double hung, stained glass transom. A second floor balcony over the porch has an arched opening revealing multi-lite French doors. There is another curved verandah. A gable with overhead triplet has 1/1 double hung windows and roof brackets. The higher gable has a row of four fixed pane windows. "AD 1877" is carved into the pediment. The curved bay window is topped by a separate gable roof, and a multi-light window.



8. Construction date: 1887
Estimated _____ Factual _____
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)
Frontage 130' Depth 180'
or approx. acreage _____
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)
January 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ____ Good X Fair ____ Deteriorated ____ No longer in existence ____
14. Alterations: _____
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land ____ Scattered buildings ____ Densely built-up ____
Residential X Industrial ____ Commercial ____ Other: _____
16. Threats to site: None known X Private development ____ Zoning ____ Vandalism ____
Public Works project ____ Other: _____
17. Is the structure: On its original site? Yes Moved? ____ Unknown? ____
18. Related features: _____

SIGNIFICANCE

19. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site.)

A graceful Queen Anne home, embracing the corner of Palm Street and Johnson Avenue, with an entrance on each street, was the family home of Michael Righetti, his wife and two daughters. Presumably it was built in 1877, as the date is etched into a third floor cupola. This makes it one of the oldest surviving wood frame residences in the city today. The Righetti family, of Swiss background were dairy ranchers and producers of milk products for many years. Sold to the Welch family, the home was divided into apartments and remains a multiple dwelling.

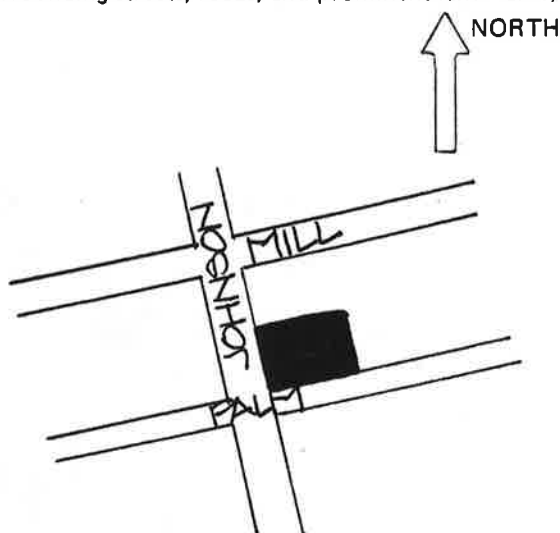
20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)
Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure ____
Economic/Industrial 2 Exploration/Settlement ____
Government ____ Military ____
Religion ____ Social/Education ____

21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).

History of San Luis Obispo County by
Myron Angel, 1883

22. Date form prepared June 15, 1983
By (name) Historic Res. Survey Staff
Organization City of San Luis Obispo
Address: P.O. Box 321
San Luis Obispo Zip 93401
Phone: (805) 541-1000

Locational sketch map (draw and label site and surrounding streets, roads, and prominent landmarks):



#slohistorymatters

By Eva Ulz

You and I know history matters, but how do we explain that to others? On January 20, a panel of six practicing historians led a community conversation at the History Center Museum to help us start answering this important question. A recording of the event will be available on our website.

Without meaning to, modern society often marginalizes history. There are so many experiences, ideas, and issues competing for our attention. Visual and performance arts are more actively engaging. Homelessness, health care, and nature conservation are more urgent. Technology and entertainment are omnipresent.

It's easy to forget that the ability to preserve and appreciate cultural heritage is a human right, protected by international law. "Cultural heritage is significant in the present, both as a message from the past and as a pathway to the future. Viewed from a human rights perspective, it is important not only in itself, but also in relation to its human dimension," said UN special rapporteur Karima Bennouna in October 2016.

San Luis Obispo County history is hardly under the kind of threat that requires UN intervention. But we, its supporters, still need to find ways to articulate its importance.

In early February, after our Motel Inn exhibition comes down but before we install *Tranquility Disrupted: Japanese Internment and San Luis Obispo County*, we'll cover the gallery walls in paper so we can keep asking, **why does history matter to you?** Come tell us in person, send a letter, or email eva@historycenterslo.org.

WHAT'S IN A (HISTORIC HOUSE) NAME?

By Allan Ochs

Who should an historic house be named after? Should it be the original or the current owner? Should historical chance determine the name? Should a house built in the nineteenth century, for example, be named after a twentieth century owner who just happened to be living there when the earliest extant photograph of it was taken?

Graves purchased the lot in April 1889. The architect was Major S.B. Abbott and the contractor was J.T. Coplin. Construction cost between six and seven thousand dollars, a very large amount for the time and place.

The *Tribune* followed the building of the Graves house closely. The May 24, 1889, issue reported that the grounds had been "staked off" so that



The Graves house, circa 1904. At the time it was owned by the Righetti family.

The so-called Righetti House at the northeast corner of Palm Street and Johnson Avenue is such a challenge for San Luis Obispo historians.

A recent article stated that it was "thought to be built" by North Coast dairyman Michael Righetti in 1877. This has been the prevailing opinion among local historians, but real documentation from the historical record was lacking.

In contradiction, one 1978 local history work sets the construction date of the house at 1887. This date seems to have been accepted by the current owners since there is "A.D. 1887" marked on the third floor pediment of the recently remodeled house.

In fact, the history of the three-story house can be traced in the *San Luis Obispo Tribune*. Articles show conclusively that it was built by local attorney Ernest Graves in 1889.

construction could begin immediately. On August 2, the *Tribune* reported on the progress of the construction. In its November 1 issue, the newspaper reported that the house was receiving its "finishing touches." An article titled "A Notable Building" described the exterior as "thoroughly modern and very ornate in design." The luxurious interior was minutely described as well: "Nothing, apparently, has been spared which would add to the beauty, comfort, and convenience of the residence."

Ernest Graves was a true Obispoan. He was born at the Old Mission in 1852, to William J. Graves, a transplanted Virginia attorney, and Soledad Pico, daughter of prominent Californio, Don Jose de Jesus Pico.

The younger Graves attended the local public school, followed by secondary schools in the Bay Area and

the University of California. He then studied law under the tutelage of his father. Early in his legal career, from 1880 to 1886, he served as San Luis Obispo County district attorney. In his subsequent wide-ranging private practice, one of the most notable cases was the trial of Juan Dallidet for killing his brother, Pierre Dallidet, Jr., in 1897. Graves acted as Juan's co-counsel.

The *Tribune* described the closing argument for the successful defense, as "the eloquent voice of Ernest Graves began to fill the court room with those well rounded periods and logical conclusions for which he is noted."

After two years of complications following a severe attack of pneumonia, Ernest Graves died in 1900 at the age of 48. His wife and daughters were forced to leave their home because of severe financial problems that arose before and after his death.

In the 1904 San Luis Obispo Fire Department souvenir book, there is a photograph of the former Graves home identified as "the Residence of Michael Righetti." The house was purchased by Righetti, a successful North Coast dairyman, in 1903. He and his family lived in the house for about a decade before moving to San Francisco.

Some writers believe the Graves/Righetti house was built in 1877 because the 1983 Historic Resources Survey of the Mill Street area mentions "A.D. 1877" being carved into the pediment of a third floor window.

A scan of the *Tribune* for 1877 does not reveal anything significant related to Ernest Graves. The closest connection is that on March 27, 1878, in San Bernardino, he married former Obispoan, Lucinda Holloway.

As mentioned before, the house now has "A.D. 1887" on the third floor pediment. Apparently, this date is derived from an inscription on the chimney at the side of the house.

Nowhere in the 1889 *Tribune* articles about the house is there reference to an inscription, whatever the date. The paper trail of contemporary newspaper articles, land transfers, property tax rolls, and legal notices fully support the contention that Ernest Graves bought the property and erected the house in 1889 and lived there with his family until his death in 1900.

Whatever the case, now that we know the true story of the house at 1314 Palm Street, let us resolve to call it the "Graves House." Doing so we honor a native son so prominent in our nineteenth century history.

Many thanks to Betsy Bertrando for showing me the ownership changes of the property (Lot 4 in Block 42) prior to the building of the Graves House. A file on the house and the Graves family is kept at the History Center. Surprisingly, the History Center has no photographs of any member of the Graves family except for Ernest's youngest brother Madison Graves. Any leads to such photographs would be appreciated! Please email researchroom@historycenterslo.org or call (805) 543-0638.

LA VISTA 2ND EDITION COMING SOON

We're excited to share a sneak peek at the articles and authors that will be featured in the History Center's next *La Vista* journal issue. History Center members will receive copies by mail in spring 2017. The journal will also be available in our local history bookstore, at Amazon.com, and by special order from any major book retailer.

Special thanks to *La Vista* editor-in-chief Jack San Filippo and his editorial team for all of their hard work this year!

Articles include:

Look Deeply Into Carp Lake and See the Wider World by Dick Miller; *iViva La Fiesta de San Luis Obispo!* by Matthew D. Herrera; *Loren Nicholson: A Tribute* by Joseph A. Carotenuti; *New Perspectives on the Life of David Patrick Mallagh (1825-1880)* by Zachary O'Hagan; *William Randolph Hearst During World War II* by Thomas Brown; and *Historic Places on the Cuesta Grande* by Tom Taylor.

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The Restoration of the M. Righetti House

By Sandy Baer

Sitting high on a hill in downtown San Luis Obispo, the regal Michael Righetti house at 1314 Palm Street was nearly lost to public view and deterioration over the years. But nearly two years ago, three partners bought the house with major restoration in mind.

Built in 1887, this quintessential Queen Anne Victorian house commands views of



The M. Righetti House at 1314 Palm Street

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several of the Seven Sisters as well as modern-day semi-urban life in San Luis Obispo. One of the oldest wood frame houses remaining in San Luis Obispo, this 6000 square foot two-story structure is highly detailed with extensive exterior and interior ornamentation.

True to most Queen Anne structures, it's a concoction of architectural details, including a recessed balcony, pitched gables and a prominent front porch trimmed with arched lattice-work. The double door entry has etched glass windows and is topped with a mullioned transom bearing the initials "EG."

The Righetties, one of many Swiss families that settled in San Luis Obispo County, first moved to Cayucos as dairy farmers in 1876 after immigrating to this country in 1873. Righetti lived in the Palm Street house with his wife and two daughters before moving to San Francisco after the turn of the century.

It is believed that local attorney Ernest Graves leased the house before Righetti sold it in 1912 to Joseph Welsh, a rancher from Clarke Canyon near Los Osos. Presumably the "EG" etched in the front door window derives from that era. Mr. Welsh lived with his wife Charlotte in the house that year but died only a year later in 1913.

His son Thomas Welsh moved his wife and four daughters from the ranch to live with his mother until 1915 when the younger family moved to Grand Avenue. Another son, Joseph Clark Welsh moved in with his wife, Lyda, and only child, Mary Lucille.

Mary Lu Henrickson (nee Welsh), now 91, remembers well living in the grand old house. "I was only a year old when we came in from the ranch to take care of Grandma Welsh. There was a very big kitchen and also a library."

Grandma Welsh died in 1919 and during the 1920s, the house was converted into the "Welsh



The M. Righetti House before the remodel

Apartments." As a child, Henrickson played on a swing hanging from the large tree in the front yard. "My playhouse was under the porch where I had orange crate furniture. It was a wonderful neighbor of friends and we had a club."

"My mother used this area for storage. Taxidermy was popular then and she had stored a stuffed coyote or fox, a small animal, in there. For club initiation, I would take the friend to the back in the dark to touch this furry animal, with its shiny, bright orange eyes," Henrickson recalls.

The Welshes lived in the big, downstairs apartment on the house's Palm Street side. "I wasn't shy about knocking on doors," Henrickson says. "I would visit our renters and get a cookie or an apple. And when people moved out, I got to scrounge around for stuff they had thrown away."



Rob Rossi, Vince Fonte and Dr. Brendan McAdams

In 1922, Joseph C. Welsh built a house next door as well where his family also lived for a number of years. After moving back into 1314 Palm Street after her father's death, Henrickson was married to Harry Borah in the bowed bay windows in the 1314 Palm Street house in 1936.

"I am so happy and pleased that it is being restored. It's a dream come true," Henrickson says. Thanks to Vince Fonte, Rob Rossi and Dr. Brendan McAdams, the Righetti house is undergoing major reconstruction. "In this town, the steepness of the roof's pitch, the dormers and its size make this a unique house of the Victorian era," Rossi says.

On January 18, 2005, the San Luis Obispo City Council approved a Mills Act contract for the property that helped pave the way for this

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extensive redevelopment, as there are numerous financial benefits. The house is in the city's Mill Street Historic District and on the Master List of Historic Resources and all restoration must meet the Historic Preservation Program Guidelines. Plans were submitted to the Cultural Heritage Committee for review and won unanimous approval before restoration began.

"We replicated as much as we possibly could of the original structure," says Vince Fonte, partner and general contractor on the project. The house has been seismically retrofitted, including a new foundation due to the deterioration of the original brick foundation, which was crumbling. The original front porch, curved on one side, and an outside staircase were torn off because they were unsafe and the porch has been replaced.

Rather than the original redwood lattice-work below the sweeping porch, the same pattern (taken from historical photographs) has been replicated using a synthetic, PVC material made from recycled products, according to Rossi. "It is dimensionally stable and complex details can be cut out such as the lattice work," he says.

Master carpenter Steve Casida, who has done much of the restoration work thus far, is building a wooden "heat box" to slide the 1' x 8' long forms into. After heating the "boards," he will bend them to fit the graceful curve of the front porch.



True to the character of the house, Michael Fairbrother replaced necessary windows as well as the doors with custom made ones to duplicate the originals. All of the gutters and fish scales used to reside the house are made from redwood milled in Eureka.

Master painter Steve Mowrey and crew painted the exterior a more subtle butter and burnt butter, monochromatic color scheme to



Dr. Brendan McAdams and Vince Fonte at tear down of the 4-plex hiding the Righetti House on the property.

replace the peeling green paint. Warm brown shingles replace the previous faded red roof.

Such an eye for a finer touch can be found in features throughout the house. "The detail work has been done by the finest craftsman in the community," McAdams says. Even though the structure will continue as a multiple-unit building, all of the public rooms, such as the foyer and curving stairwell to the second floor,

will be Victorian period, according to McAdams.

There are nine apartments, five units downstairs and four upstairs, each one with some interesting architectural elements and an outside entrance. There are four, one-bedroom units on the main floor and one studio apartment. The second floor has two one-bedroom units and two studios.

One of the premier apartments is partially the space that Mary Lu Henrickson remembers as her family's unit, with the one-over-one double hung window with a stained glass transom onto the front porch. The pocket door between what were the original parlors is being refinished, as is the woodwork in the foyer.

Our philosophy has been "today's code with yesterday's character," Fonte says. There is an all-new electrical system and the units will be heated with state-of-the-art gas-fired appliances that look like small fireplaces and are thermostatically controlled.

The apartments' architectural details, such as molding, will be consistent with the Victorian era but they will also incorporate modern, high-end features such as Corian countertops, according to McAdams. "We expect to be renting by early 2006. It's taken longer than we anticipated, but it is a labor of love."

A four-unit cracker box building nestled between the "big" house and Johnson Avenue has been demolished, as was a 1940's garage and laundry room to make way for a new three-car garage. The structure will also have two, one-bedroom units and a studio apartment, designed to complement the Righetti house in terms of roof pitch, window style and exterior colors.

"It's been a big team effort," Rossi says. "In economic terms it may not have been the best decision but in all other aspects, it's a winner," he continues. Henrickson concurs, "I'm so thrilled to be part of this project." As Jeff Hook, city planner overseeing the restorations says, "This house is a gift from Vince, Rob and Ben to the community." Thanks guys.

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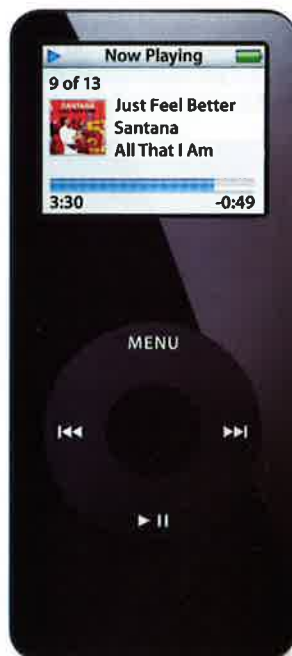
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