



JACK HOUSE, 536 MARSH STREET. One of San Luis Obispo's most impressive residences, the Jack House embodied a spirit of elegance and social prominence. Built c. 1875 by affluent civic leaders Robert and Nellie Jack, the two-story Italianate house had a highly decorative boxed cornice with dentils and brackets and a distinctive frieze. Water pipes ran along the home's exterior walls—the house was constructed before the advent of indoor plumbing. Servants drew water for cooking with a manually operated water pump located in the backyard. Inside the mansion, 12-foot ceilings and 8-foot doors created a sense of grandeur. The fireplaces were small, burning coal instead of wood. Robert Jack was active in ranching, politics, banking, and land development. Nellie, his wife, was known for her excellent education and fine book collection. The Jacks entertained numerous guests at their home, including railroad magnates Charles Crocker and C.P. Huntington, pianist Ignace Paderewski, and humorist Will Rogers. Over a span of more than 90 years, several generations of the Jack family lived in the Victorian-style home. (Courtesy of the City of San Luis Obispo, Community Development Department.)



Jack House Washroom and Carriage House

The Jack House was the residence of Robert Edgar and Nellie Hollister Jack. He was a prominent land developer, banker and rancher in central California from the 1870's until his death in 1916.

R.E. Jack was born in Maine and came to California in 1868. He started ranching the following year by buying half of Rancho Cholame from W.W. Holister. In 1870, he married Nellie, the niece of W. W. and the following year they moved to the City of San Luis Obispo. When her uncle died in 1874, Jack bought the remainder of the ranch from his widow. The ranches Circle C brand is the oldest brand registered with the State of California that is still in regular use.

At this time, the area was mainly ranching, both sheep and cattle. The drought of the 1860's had encouraged diversification into grains, dairy, fruit trees and vegetable production. However, transportation to markets north and south was generally slow (ship) and expensive (road). The West coast had just been linked by the transcontinental railroad to the East and the Southern Pacific line extended south to Solidad in 1873. Everyone expected it to be extended through San Luis Obispo to link Los Angeles. R.E. Jack was ready for the railroad.

Although wool growing was listed as his occupation as late as 1883, R.E. Jack was already an established banker by that time. In the early 1870's, he was the cashier of the First National Bank, which was later the Bank of San Luis Obispo. He was a principle in the Banks of Paso Robles, Santa Maria, and Lompoc.

By 1886 the rails had reached Templeton and the local business elite in San Luis Obispo were concerned that it continue through their town. To accomplish this, the Board of Trade (chamber of commerce) was established with R. E. Jack as the treasurer. He was already the treasurer of the West Coast Land Company which was selling land adjacent to the railroad in Templeton. He was also the secretary and co-treasurer of the California Southern Hotel Co. which had built the Ramona Hotel in anticipation of the railroad coming to San Luis Obispo. To get hotel guests from the narrow gauge Pacific Railroad, Jack bought the City's first horse drawn rail trolley. Consequently, he was most anxious for the Southern Pacific to arrive in San Luis Obispo.

In 1887, the Southern Pacific asked Jack, Isaac Goldtree and J. P. Andrews to procure the right of way for the railroad through the city of San Luis Obispo. Prominent citizens were enlisted for this job since the railroad expected landowners along the proposed route to give up their land for the "good of all" citizens in the community. Mr. Jack also represented the City as its mayor from 1890 to 1893.

This pattern of land sales and hotel building continued south to Los Olivos and Lompoc. However, much before the land boom was over, R.E. Jack was a millionaire. The San Francisco Examiner

listed him as richest taxpayer in the county in 1890.

Nellie Jack was known for her love of reading and was a founding member of the library in 1892 which eventually became the city library in 1898. She hosted many lawn parties at her house to raise funds for the library. For a time the Andrews building was used to house the collection until the Carnegie library was finished in 1905.

Spirit of pioneer family echoes through restored Jack House

This is the house that Jack built.

Nestled among the trees at 536 Marsh St. in San Luis Obispo, the Old Victorian home will be open for public viewing after years of restoration.

The unveiling was celebrated with a formal gala July 20 in the old-fashioned gardens and gazebo.

Plans for renovation began after heirs deeded the Jack House to the city in April of 1975. Before the youngest son Howard Jack died in 1974, he willed that the City Council appoint a committee to advise the council in the administration of the Jack House in order to maximize public use and enjoyment.

The Central Coast Interior Designers Association (CCID), a group of professional designers from San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, volunteered for the project and donated their time and effort, according to Suzanne Watkins, designer of the kitchen and master bedroom.

Members of the association were able to choose a room and recreate the atmosphere of the late 1800s. The original antique furniture was used and hardwood floors refinished, while new fabrics, carpeting, wallpaper and paint were utilized to render the original character of the house.

The intent was to create a "living museum" with the feeling that the Jack family still lived there, according to designer Angeline Vollmer of Eklekta in Morro Bay.

Vollmer chose to renovate the

room of the youngest daughter, Gertrude.

"I felt it was a very charming room," Vollmer said. "I've always wanted to do a young girl's room."

Vollmer, who is president of the CCID, tried to recreate the room that Gertrude might have lived in during her late teens.

The room highlights bisque, cream and carmel featuring a dreamlike quality with its ceiling done in a grid of slate blue. A window framed with a floral border of deep turquoise and dusty rose provides a clear view of the gardens from the second story room. Gertrude's room also includes an ornate fireplace, which contributes to its warm, inviting atmosphere.

The house was built by Robert E. and Nellie Hollister Jack between 1876 and 1880. It was owned and lived in by the family until it was donated to San Luis Obispo in 1975.

The first step toward renovation was in 1978 with the building of the gazebo. Then the gardens, equipped with winding paths and an array of flowers and foliage, were completed.

The cost to restore the exterior and 10 interior rooms was about \$70,000, which was acquired through donations and fund raisers, said committee member Katchy Andrews. However, the cost for the improvements would have been about \$300,000 if members of the community and CCID had not donated their time and efforts, she explained.

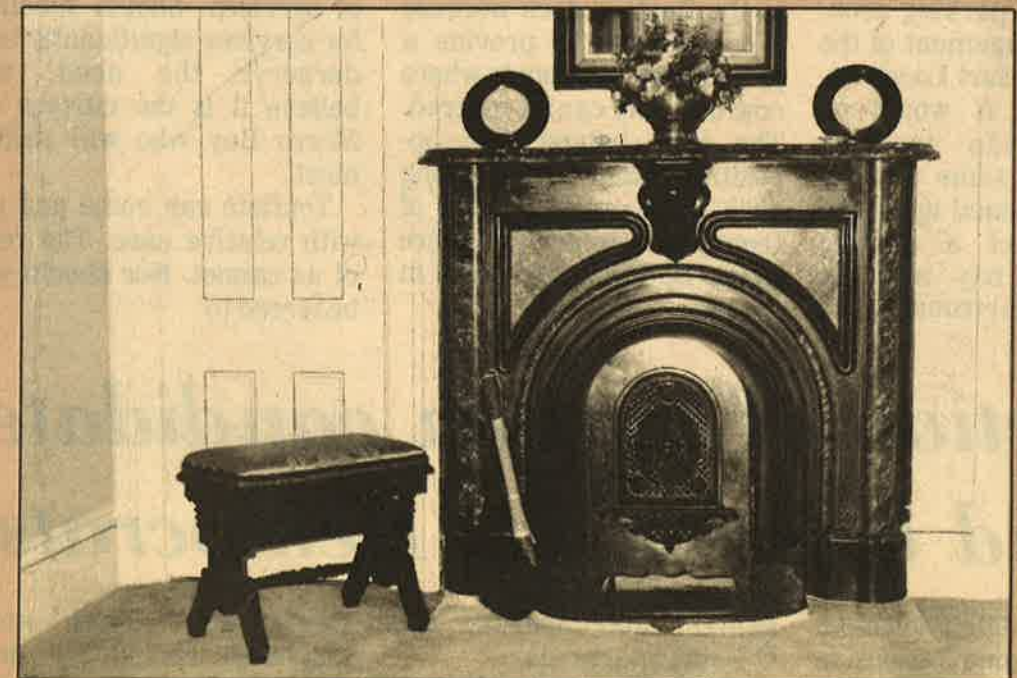


The recently-renovated, Victorian-style Jack House is now open to the public.

The gardens will remain a city park, which may be reserved for weddings, receptions or group activities. There are restrooms, a catering kitchen, lawn tables and chairs, which may be rented. Reservations may be made through the San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department at 549-7300.

Activities in celebration of the opening of the Jack House will continue through Friday, August 3. The house will be showcased from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday and until 7 p.m. on Fridays. On selected days, there will be picnic lunches available, musical programs, children's tours and other activities.

The cost to view the house will be \$5 during the two week celebration. The house will remain open thereafter on a regular basis for public viewing. For information or reservations, call 549-7300.



The ornate fireplace in Gertrude's room, designed by Angeline Vollmer of Morro Bay, helps recreate the warm atmosphere once enjoyed by the youngest Jack daughter.

Story and photos by Gail Pellerin

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

HABS		HAER	NR	3	SHL	Loc
UTM:		A	10/712390/3906080	B		
		C		D		

IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: Jack House
2. Historic name: Jack House
3. Street or rural address: 536 Marsh Street
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 03-511-22
5. Present Owner: City of San Luis Obispo Address: 990 Palm Street
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 Ownership is: Public ☒ Private ☐
6. Present Use: Tourism/Social Original use: Residential

DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: Italianate Villa (Carpenter Italianate)
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

The two story wood frame residence is built on a slightly raised foundation. This house is basically rectangular in plan. The roof shape is medium pitched hip gables. Roof material is composition shingles and shiplap siding covers the exterior walls. Built in the Italianate Villa tradition the residence features a highly decorative boxed cornice with dentils and brackets including a distinctive frieze. Window proportions are tall and narrow and are consistently proportioned around the house. Windows are double hung and have a shallow shelf above and below. A small covered porch is supported by decorative square columns. Grillwork has been placed on the roof. A bay window can be seen on the side. The site includes a picket fence, gazebo, and secondary structure.



8. Construction date: Estimated 1878 Factual
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)
Frontage 195' Depth 270'
or approx. acreage
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)
December 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ____ Good ____ Fair X 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.)

The Jack House is the most impressive example of a two story Italianate residence in existence in San Luis Obispo today. It was built between 1876 and 1880 for pioneers, Nellie Hollister Jack and Robert Edgar Jack. A banker and land developer and wool farmer, Robert Jack was born in Maine and came to California in 1868. Jack was president of the City Trustees before the turn of the century. Nellie Jack was educated in the East and called a fine library collector. The house was donated to the city as an historical monument in 1974 courtesy of the descendants of the original family. Frequently used for weddings, receptions and other public social gatherings, this structure stands as a vivid symbol of Victorian elegance that touched San Luis Obispo in the late 1880's.

20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)
Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure 4
Economic/Industrial 2 Exploration/Settlement ____
Government 3 Military ____
Religion ____ Social/Education 5
21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).
City of San Luis Obispo Historical Element (1977)
History of San Luis Obispo County by Myron Angel, (1883)
22. Date form prepared JUN 15 1983
By (name) Historic Res. Survey Staff
Organization City of San Luis Obispo
Address: P.O. Box 321
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401
Phone: (805) 541-1000

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

