

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

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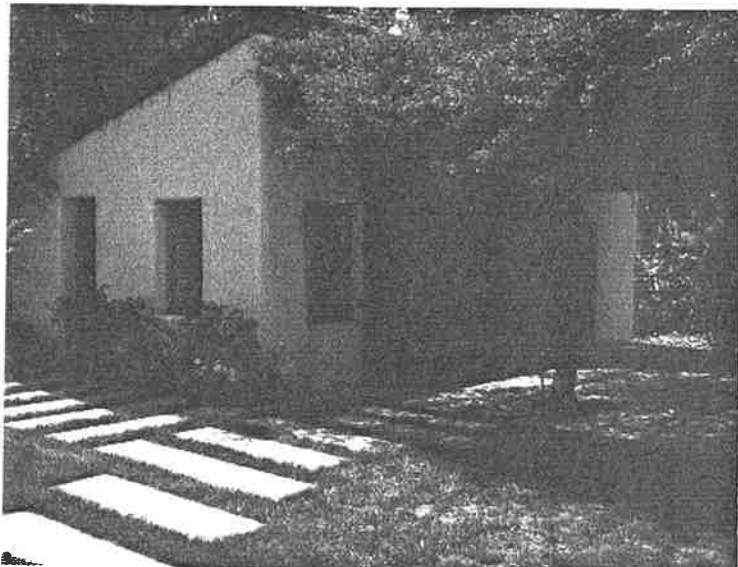
IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: Murray Adobe
2. Historic name: Murray Adobe
3. Street or rural address: 747 Monterey Street
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 02-423-06
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: Offices Original use: Residential

DESCRIPTION

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

The Murray Adobe is a small, two-room adobe and wood structure with a flat roof. The walls average about 14 inches thick and are composed of adobe (much of which has been replaced). There are two dutch doors at the west and north entrances. Each room has two, three-light sash vertically divided casement windows. The exterior adobe is sheathed in plaster except for one open portion which is left uncovered for visitors. Inside, the upper 1/4 of the adobe remains unplastered while the lower area is surfaced with plaster. At one time a large clapboard covered the wood frame addition adjoining the adobe, but it has since been removed to make way for Mission Plaza. The roof has been completely replaced and probably many of the adobe bricks have been replaced since 1850. However, the structure retains an authentic display of its original character.



8. Construction date:
Estimated 1850 Factual _____
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)
Frontage 85' Depth 90'
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: New roof, some of the adobe replaced, cement floor
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land _____ Scattered buildings X Densely built-up _____
Residential _____ 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: In Mission Plaza directly across from the Old Mission

SIGNIFICANCE

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

The Murray Adobe is estimated to have been constructed about 1850. Walter Murray came to San Luis Obispo in 1853. One of the properties he acquired was a square block of land in front of the Mission and on both sides of the creek. He had immigrated to San Luis Obispo in 1846 with Stevenson's Regiment. Co-founder and editor of the Tribune, one of the early local newspapers, Murray used the adobe for a residence and later to house a printing press. He was an attorney, an agent for Wells Fargo, and county official including District Judge of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties from 1873 to 1875. Murray was a leading spokesman for the Republican Party, and during San Luis Obispo's high crime era of bandits, he helped to form the Vigilante Co. of 1858. After considerable alteration, the structure has been almost totally restored and rebuilt in the last fifteen years. Property of the City of San Luis Obispo, it now houses offices for Mission Plaza Events and the Historic Resources Survey.

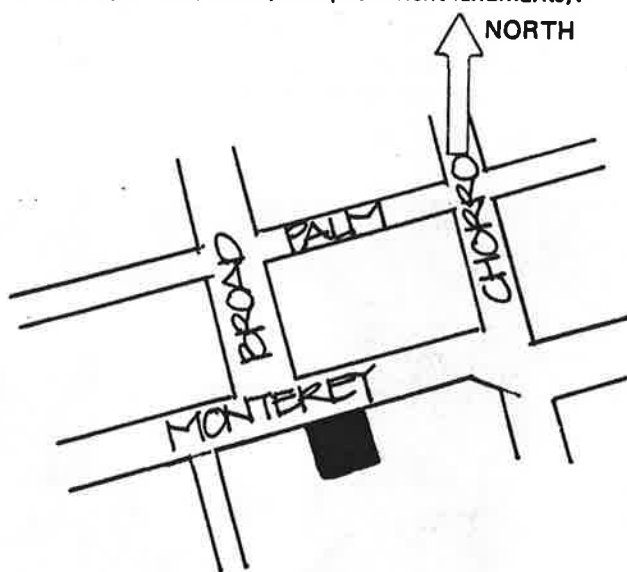
20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)
Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure _____
Economic/Industrial _____ Exploration/Settlement _____
Government 2 Military _____
Religion _____ Social/Education 3

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

History of San Luis Obispo County by
Myron Angel (1883)
City of San Luis Obispo Historical
Element, 1977

22. Date form prepared _____
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):



The saga of the Murray Adobe: A tale of historic preservation

Dan Krieger

times
past



May 12-18 marks National Historic Preservation Week. This is a week designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to recognize and encourage the efforts of individuals, businesses, communities and government entities toward the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures. This year, the theme for Historic Preservation Week is "The Action's Back on Main Street."

In last week's Times Past, we told of San Luis Obispo's first "preservation enterprise" — the creation of La Fiesta de Las Flores to raise funds to save Old Mission San Luis Obispo. The front of the Old Mission was the pueblo's first Main Street. It's appropriate to recall the process of saving a portion of another historic structure on San Luis Obispo's main street.

In the late 1960s, proposals to close off Monterey Street and demolish the dilapidated buildings across from the Mission were being debated. One structure in particular concerned former Telegram-Tribune Managing Editor, columnist Elliot Curry: The home of San Luis Obispo's pioneering journalist and jurist, Judge Walter Murray.

Let's go back in Times Past to March 31, 1967 as Elliot reports the state of this preservationist's dilemma:

The neat home at 747 Monterey St. with its white-painted siding has become known to San Luis Obispanos lately as the Walter Murray adobe. It's right in the middle of the proposed Mission Plaza development and one of the questions now being pondered by the city is how to straighten Monterey Street and still preserve this historic landmark.



Photo courtesy of County Historical Museum

The Murray Adobe before Mission Plaza was created. The wooden additions were removed, leaving only the original adobe.

Tear it down, try to move it brick by brick, restore it, or what? These are the questions which citizens and officials alike are considering.

One citizen who is riding out this debate with considerable equanimity is Mrs. Susie D. Westbrook. With her daughter, Olga, she happens to be the owner and occupant of the adobe and appears to have lived in it longer than Walter Murray or anybody else in the past 100 years.

Mrs. Westbrook first rented the adobe from Mrs. Virginia Burton in 1943 and bought it in 1949.

"It's really not much of a house," she said recently, "but I've enjoyed living here, it's so convenient and comfortable."

So far as Mrs. Westbrook knows, the old adobe walls are in good condition. The wood siding appears to have been put up long before anybody now remembers and the inside is well plastered.

Not particularly concerned about its historic implications, Mrs. Westbrook is only hopeful that she can stay in the old home until she reaches retirement age. She is an

employee of the French Hospital.

As near as can be judged from title records, Mrs. Westbrook's 24 years in the old adobe is longer than any of her predecessors.

Bill Williamson, assistant manager of Security Title Insurance Company, has looked up some of the history of the lot as put down in the county recorder's office.

Walter Murray recorded a deed to the property in 1859, but is believed to have occupied the building some time before that. There are various other recordings in the name of other members of the Murray family. In 1879 the Bank of San Luis Obispo acquired a "record interest" in the property followed by C.J. Russell and 1893; Emma Nichols, 1894; Mrs. A.C. Dennis, 1903; Mrs. Marie Moskiman, 1911.

Dr. H.S. Bokys first appears as owner of the adobe in 1919. He owned several lots in the block at the time and had both his home and dental office there. He sold the Murray property to Watkins L. Burton and Virginia Burton in 1929 and Mrs. Westbrook bought the home from Mrs. Burton.

If the old adobe can avoid the bulldozers, the next occupant may

be the dignified ghost of Judge Walter Murray, come back to the street where once he was the maker of history.

3/31/67.

Next week in Times Past, Elliot reports on the state of the Murray Adobe in January, 1972.

Readers frequently make important contributions to the understanding and knowledge of the history of our region. This past week, Dan Krieger received the following communication from Bill Cattaneo of San Luis Obispo:

Dan, I really got a kick out of your article on the Italian POW's.

My grandparents, my parents and I used to go out to the camp on Sunday to visit the Italians. I was about 10 at the time.

Going out the first time was a challenge to my bravery; here was all the barbed wire and guards, and I had been seeing all the war reports on Movietone News at the theaters. "What were we doing visiting those dangerous enemies?" I could barely believe it when we

got inside; it was pure Italian pandemonium. Everyone was talking at once. Hands were wildly waving in the air. People were dancing. There was food all over the place. Everybody was happy. For everyone, it was like being back in the "old country" again.

When it was all over, we piled back into our still fairly new 1939 Nash and drove wearily home. I was flat exhausted.

Dan, it was a graphic example of an old saying that "Italians are lovers, not fighters." The Italians will never win a war of any kind!

Bill has guest authored several wonderful columns for Times Past.

Cuesta musicians jazz it up at Spirit

The Cuesta Jazz Band and Vocal Jazz Ensemble will perform to raise funds for their 1985 Project Switzerland Tour in "Montreux Night at The Spirit" on Sunday, May 19.

The two Cuesta music groups, directed by Warren Balfour, have been invited back for a third time to the prestigious annual jazz festival.

The 8 p.m. concert will include instrumental jazz favorites "Melancholy Dance," "Ka-ju-moe Samba" and "Dirty Scott."

The Vocal Jazz Ensemble, which won a Down Beat magazine award for its 1982 performance in Montreux, will sing "Alice in Wonderland," "Joy," the parody "Bennies from Heaven" and "Blue Rondo ala Turk."

Tickets, \$5, are available through any Cuesta jazz group member, the Cuesta bookstore, Boo Boo Records and Cheap Thrills.

Tickets will also be sold at the door. Doors will open at 7 p.m.

For details call the Cuesta Music Department at 544-2943, ext. 268.

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In 1972, Murray Adobe was a blight on SLO plaza

Dan Krieger

times
past



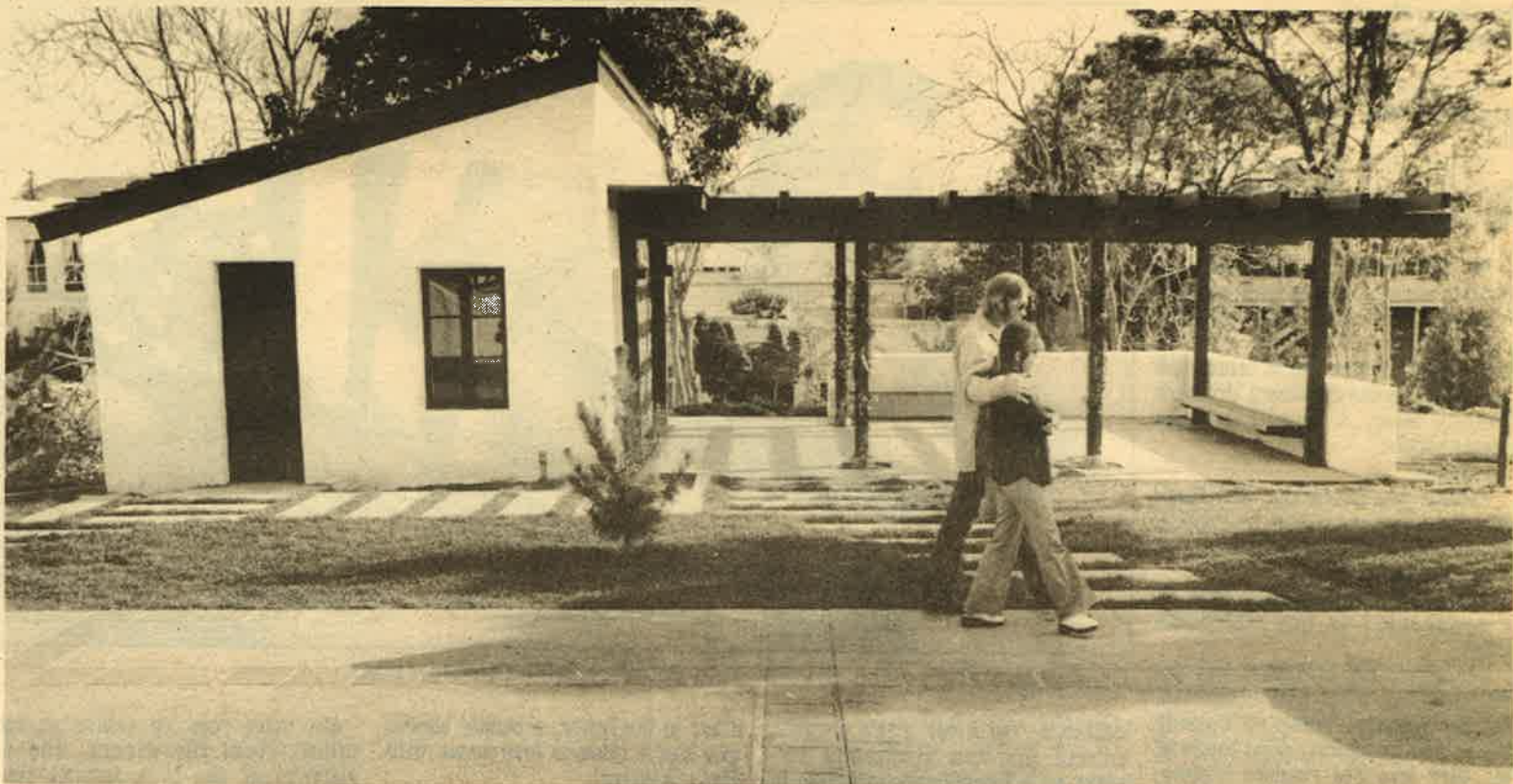
During the past several weeks we have been discussing structures related to San Luis Obispo's original "Main Street," the area now known as Mission Plaza. In our last column, we recalled Elliot Curry's 1967 report concerning the status of the historic Walter Murray adobe. This was written while the proposed Mission Plaza development was still a hotly debated topic downtown and in city government circles.

Now, let's go back to Jan. 6, 1972 and read Curry's comments about the state of the adobe at the completion of the plaza:

If Judge Walter Murray were to visit the "Murray Adobe" as it stands today in the Mission Plaza, he would probably say, "Ye Gods, can't somebody do something about this eyesore?" The judge was a peppery, candid man who had a way of spurring people into action.

The Murray Adobe is a hybrid, part adobe and part frame construction, all covered by clapboard siding. The arrangement of the walls indicates the present structure may encompass parts of two old adobe buildings.

From the outside, a visitor sees an oblong building with a lean-to on the Chorro Street side. It is only on the inside that the antiquity of the building is revealed. City employees have removed enough of the lath and plaster to show that the lean-to was doubtless a separate building at



Telegram-Tribune file photo

The Murray Adobe in San Luis Obispo's Mission Plaza as it looked soon after restoration work was completed in 1973.

one time. All four walls of the lean-to are of very old adobe and at least a foot thick.

The floor of the lean-to is on a lower level than the rest of the house, indicating that it was probably built far back in the days when the street level in front of the Mission was lower than today.

The adobe lean-to encloses one end of today's building, while at the opposite end (toward Broad Street) is another adobe wall. This wall and the lean-to are connected by front and rear walls of regular frame construction, no adobe.

There is little doubt that the building go back to very early days in San Luis Obispo. In sketches of the Mission made by Edward Vischer in the 1860s and by other artists, small buildings are invariably indicated along the creek bank.

Judge Walter Murray came to San Luis Obispo in 1853 and one of the properties he acquired was a square block of land in front of the Mission and on both sides of San Luis Obispo Creek.

The adobe buildings, of which we now have only the remnants, were probably already there. Within their walls, Murray conducted his many activities. He was attorney, agent for Wells Fargo and Co., held various county offices, founded the Tribune, and was a leading spokesman for the Republican party.

It looks today like the lean-to was built with its side toward Monterey Street. If that is the case, there is a logical explanation. It may have faced toward an alley-like street called the "Priest's Passageway" that led from the Mission to the Mission Gardens in the area that became Garden Street.

Both the City of San Luis Obispo and the County Historical Society are discussing plans for the future of the ancient walls. Ron Young, city planning director, would get rid of the wooden siding and give the

adobe walls a plastered finish like the old Mission. Old style windows would be installed and a wood shingle roof would replace the present composition shingles. The effort would be to fit the building once more to the Mission era.

With displays depicting the life and times of Judge Walter Murray, the old walls could become an added attraction in the growing complex of history, art, and commerce which makes up the Mission Plaza complex.

Judge Murray once wrote in the Tribune, "We trust that our city fathers will take early action in this matter and that the interest excited will be general, so as to secure united and energetic action in the

— See MURRAY, Page 5

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Murray Adobe restored in early 1970s

(Continued from Page 4)

premises."

He happened to be writing about the need for a city cemetery, but we feel sure he wouldn't mind having the sentiment applied to his old adobe.

1/6/72.

In October, 1972, the fate of the Murray Adobe was finally decided. With the wooden siding removed, architects claimed that the original adobe was too badly crumbled to save. Local members of the American Institute of Architects began restoration procedures to save the small portion of the adobe which remains on display today. The City of San Luis Obispo provided funds for this restoration along with a patio and trellis. The Adobe now serves as an office and display area for Mission Plaza activities.

Among the last words spoken to me by my dear friend Dorothy Unangst Bilodeau — Judge Walter Murray's granddaughter — were "Can't something be done about bringing the Adobe into historical contexts?" By 1983, even the Path of History sign identifying the Judge Walter Murray Adobe had been removed. There never have been displays depicting the life and times of Judge Walter Murray. Our community has unfinished business in urgent need of doing. Judge Walter Murray's words from 1870 — quoted by Elliot Curry in 1972 — remain an appropriate hue and cry for preservationists and community-minded citizens today.

The San Luis Obispo County Historical Society announces that the historic adobe home and gardens of pioneer California vintner Pierre Hyppolite Dallidet, located at 1185 Pacific St. just off Santa Rosa, will be open for free guided tours starting Sunday, May 26, from 1 to 4:30 p.m. and every Sunday throughout the summer.