

# HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

Ser. No. 0018-04R  
HABS \_\_\_\_\_ HAER \_\_\_\_\_ NR 4  
UTM: A 10/712840/3906020B SHL \_\_\_\_\_ Loc \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: Silvaggio Home
2. Historic name: Stanton Home/Lewin Home
3. Street or rural address: 752 Buchon  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 03-533-14
5. Present Owner: Silvaggio, J.L. and L., c/o Silvaggio Address: 752 Buchon  
Joseph L. and Lori  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 Ownership is: Public \_\_\_\_\_ Private X
6. Present Use: Residential Original use: Residential

## 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 two story frame house has a bellcast shaped roof. One gable faces Buchon, one Garden Street. Between, a circular turret runs two stories. A porch runs completely across the front and curves around to the mid-point on the Garden Street side. The porch roof is supported by eleven columns. The porch is shingled while the major portion of the house is sheathed in narrow clapboard. The turret is shingled also. Two lamps at both the front and side doors flank the steps to the porch. A granite retaining wall runs the full length of Garden Street at the sidewalk. The turret contains curved glass double hung windows in both the first and second story. Other outstanding features are the numerous stained glass windows and different types of window openings such as bay, circular, semi-circular and elliptical.



8. Construction date:  
Estimated \_\_\_\_\_ Factual 1903-05
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)  
Frontage 85' Depth 125'  
or approx. acreage \_\_\_\_\_
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)  
December 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ☒ Good \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Deteriorated \_\_\_\_\_ No longer in existence \_\_\_\_\_
14. Alterations: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land \_\_\_\_\_ Scattered buildings \_\_\_\_\_ Densely built-up \_\_\_\_\_  
Residential ☒ Industrial \_\_\_\_\_ Commercial \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
16. Threats to site: None known ☒ 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.)  
Presently known as the Silvaggio home, this "Victorian Shingle Cottage", a peculiarly American adaptation of the Queen Anne style with distinct Neo-Classic elements rates as one of the architecturally most impressive homes in San Luis Obispo. It was built between 1903 and 1905 for Edward Stanton, an officer for the Pacific Coast Railroad. His wife, Irene Josephine Dana, was one of eight children of the county's legendary Charles William Dana, an early American pioneer in the region, both a long time County Clerk and Mayor in 1881. Later families associated with the house were those of Moses Lewin, a successful realtor and businessman in the teens and the Manderscheids. Located in the fashionable Murray and Church district, once the "Nob Hill" of San Luis Obispo, the house has several noteworthy architectonic features including the covered porch, curved glass windows (two story cupolas) fronting the porch, the gas street lamps which flank the entrance stairs, and ten stained glass windows (90% of original hand-rolled glass remains). The seventeen room house is distinguished by ornate woodwork and original granite curbs.

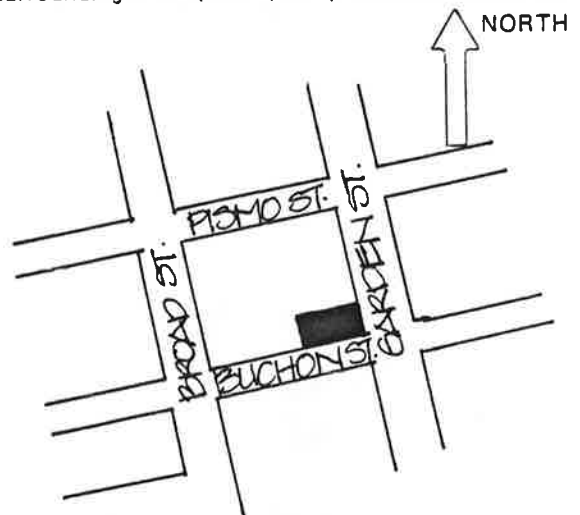
20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)  
Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure \_\_\_\_\_  
Economic/Industrial 2 Exploration/Settlement \_\_\_\_\_  
Government 3 Military \_\_\_\_\_  
Religion \_\_\_\_\_ Social/Education \_\_\_\_\_

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

"Heritage Homes Tour", 1982, OTNA  
City Directory (1914)

22. Date form prepared 21 June 1983  
By (name) Historic Res. Survey Staff  
Organization City of San Luis Obispo  
Address: P.O. Box 321  
San Luis Obispo Zip 93401  
City (805) 541-1000  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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





**STANTON/LEWIN HOUSE, 752 BUCHON STREET.** Edward Stanton, an officer of the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railroad, constructed this c. 1905 family home on the northwest corner of Buchon and Garden Streets. Stanton's wife, Irene Josephine Dana, was a daughter of Capt. Charles William Dana, an early San Luis Obispo pioneer and the city's mayor from 1881 to 1882. The Stantons' unique home featured a bellcast roof, circular turrets, a wrap-around porch, and a variety of windows, some with stained glass.

Source: Janet Penn Franks, *Images of America - San Luis Obispo: A History in Architecture* (2004)

# March of progress was viewed from, then choked the front porch

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — The front porch once set the stage for political campaigns, morning gossip sessions, late-afternoon naps, and evening romance. Then came TV, air conditioning and exhaust fumes, and America beat a hasty retreat to the family room. Here's a nostalgic look back at the front porch.

By Hugh A. Mulligan  
Associated Press

Three grizzled Vermonters sat enthroned in rockers on an ornate wooden porch that architects call "carpenter gothic" when a yuppie and his lady friend roared up in a low-slung sports car.

"We want to go to Burlington," the city feller hollered out the window.

Doing a deliberate rock of sages, the trio consulted among themselves. At last the appointed spokesman spoke.

"We have no objection," he twanged.

The story begs the question of what has become of the old front porch, that cool, shady cloister of philosophers, stage set for romance, gathering shed for gossip and launching pad for at least three presidents of these United States. No other part of the house could match it for charm and comfort and mystery.

Morning's at Seven, as Paul Osborn named his fine play that called for a front porch, the outside world unfurled at your door when the newspaper boy tossed up the local chronicle.

As the community stirred to life and headed off to work, this was the vantage point to keep up with the march of progress under the guise of watering the window boxes or snipping the lilac bushes.

"Morning, reverend. Hi, neighbor. School bus is late today. That new girl at the library got herself a perm. Got to be a sale on someplace, shoppers out early in droves.

Somebody sick across the way? Doctor's car outside. Must ask the postman."

With the sun climbing into the trees, it was time to put the fold-up gate across the front steps and let the baby crawl about in this enormous and safe playpen.

Afternoons were for sipping lemonade in the shade, stirring up a breeze with a cardboard fan courtesy of the local undertaker, swapping gossip with passers-by, knitting or dozing in the depths of a white wicker chair, listening to the bees buzz in the rose trellis. The grocery boy came by on his bicycle, the knife sharpener with a grindstone on his back, the insurance man hefting his big black book, and maybe a vacuum cleaner salesman working his way through college.

Kids home from school sprawled on the steps plotting their way out of homework, repairing their bikes or playing mumbletypeg.

Evenings brought an incandescence of fireflies, a chorus of crickets and katydids, the pulsing red glow of cigar embers in time with the creak of the rocking chairs, a whiff of citronella and, deep in the shadows, a ukulele strumming to the moon above from a porch swing built for two.

Heralded by a stir of sparrows in the eaves, dawn and the morning star's last blink beheld a row of empty milk bottles at parade rest in this gateway to America: The front porch, from the Latin, "portus," meaning gate or entranceway. Except, in the South, where the porch is grander and called the verandah.

In ancient Athens on a painted porch called a "stoa," the stoic philosopher Zeno held court with his disciples, forerunners of those Vermont sages.

In 1888, Benjamin Harrison ran for president from his front porch in Indianapolis, because his backers figured his 5-foot-6-inch frame wouldn't cut a very imposing figure on the stump.

The railroads ran special excursions to Canton, Ohio, in the summer and early fall of 1896, so politicians and newspaper types could view William McKinley campaigning from his front porch, where his mentor Mark Hanna reasoned he was more effective against a stem winder like William Jennings Bryan.

Warren Gamaliel Harding conducted the country's last front porch campaign from his home in Marion, Ohio, in 1920, the same year election returns were broadcast for the first time over the radio, which may have faintly signaled the approaching decline of the front porch in America.

"Radio, then TV and air conditioning killed the front porch," diagnoses Jack Coogan, a young Greenwich Village architect who loves rescuing old houses. "People began moving indoors and turned their backs on the street out front. They wanted to get away from the increasing noise and fumes of traffic. All that lacy gingerbread woodwork, which few craftsmen can duplicate today, went to waste as the action moved to the back of the house. Now people want a deck out back for barbecuing and sunbathing, or a patio by the pool. Outdoor living demands privacy these days, as a sort of garrison mentality takes hold and shuts out the outside world."

Dean of housing architects Herman York of Garden City, N.Y., who was elected to the Housing Hall of Fame with Frank Lloyd Wright in 1981, blames the "family room for the decline of the front porch. A room at the back of the house with sliding doors leading outside became the favored place for games and TV and storing boots, skis and bicycles."

What about romance?

"That, I suppose," ventured York, "has been relegated to the car." Certainly the car won out in Philadelphia when the design for the new

houses on Osage Avenue and Pine Street, replacing the 61 wiped out in the recent helicopter bombing of MOVE, called for a garage or parking space instead of a front porch.

Joe Martinich, a builder and carpenter in Ridgefield, Conn., thinks that building codes requiring treated wood helped doom the old front porch that he remembers fondly from his boyhood in nearby Stamford.

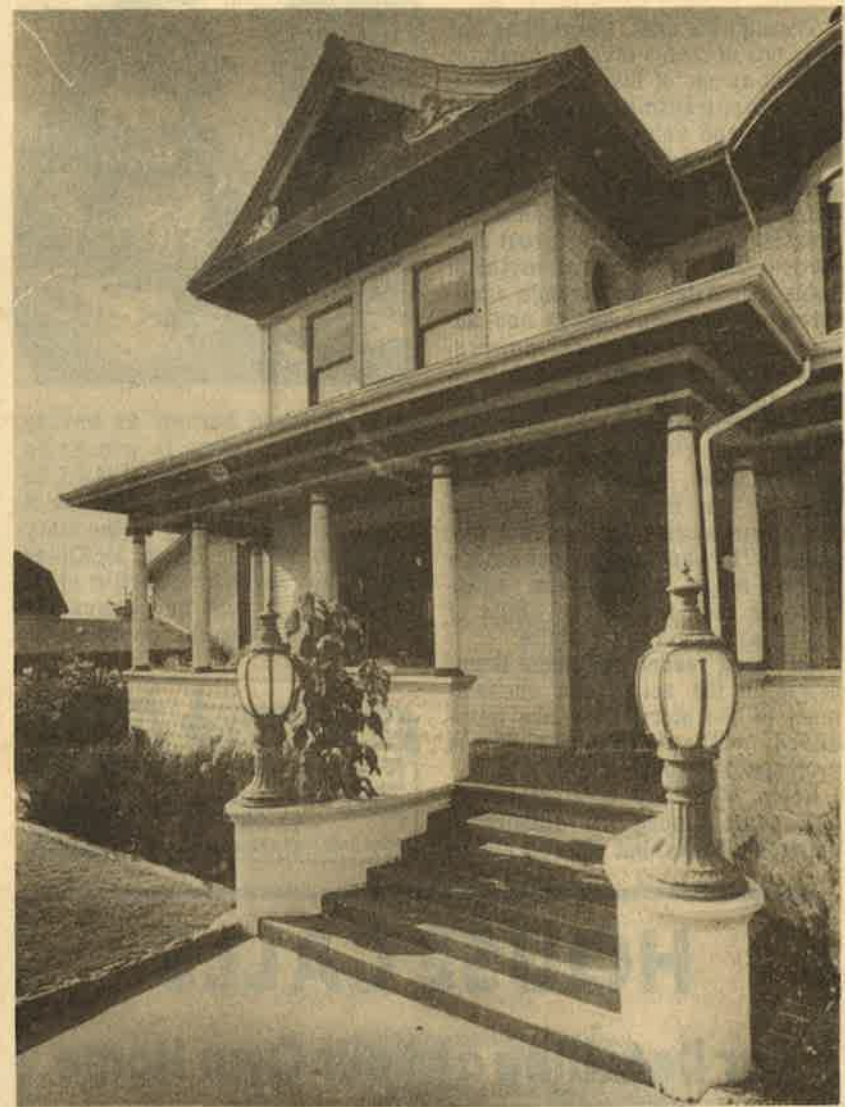
"I can't tell you how many hundreds of hours we spent on the porch under the street light, listening to the old timers on the block telling stories," Martinich says. He summons up those "wonderful bygone days when life was lived in front of the house instead of in the back. It was our conversation place, our summer school and free outdoor theater. You got to know people better back then."

In the recent flurry of new housing starts, architect York detects "something of a comeback for the front porch for aesthetic but not practical reasons. Houses are getting bigger now, fewer bedrooms but larger rooms and fancier facades. There's lots of money around."

He calculates "a front porch on a \$90,000 house will cost you about \$15,000," a price that rules out the intricate jigsaw fretwork that earned the name "carpenter gothic."

But the old Victorian front porch in all its curlicued grandeur — all 900 feet of it — lives on at the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, N.H., which could lay claim to the finest porch in the land.

The glory of Italian woodworkers, the Mount Washington's wrap-around porch, six times around it to the mile, has more open deck space than the QE2 and a magnificent view of the White Mountains Presidential Range. Its painted planks since opening day in 1902 have echoed the tread of Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, Winston



Telegram-Tribune

At 752 Buchon St. in SLO, the front porch of the Joseph Silvaggio home is an example of a classic gateway.

Churchill and Babe Ruth.

Wherever it survives, in weathered old seaside houses, riverview mansions, mountaintop ranches, prairie farmhouses, decaying plantations, along dying Main streets in mid-America, on the Charleston Battery or the New Orleans Garden

District, the vanishing grandeur of the American front porch should be checked with a preservation order before history turns its back on a friendlier, more open society.

Hand me that fly swatter, will you?