

Historical Resource Evaluation



Acacia Mansion
205 S. Lomitas Avenue, Ojai
Lots 1, 2, 13 and 14, Block A of Hall Tuttle Tract No. 1
19 MR 23

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Section I

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the structures located at 205 S. Lomitas Avenue, in the unincorporated area to the West of Ojai California known as Meiners Oaks, to determine whether it meets the requirements as a historical resource in accordance with Section 15064.5 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines more specifically for the purpose of designation as a Cultural Heritage Landmark by the County of Ventura, California. The ultimate conclusions in this report represent the professional opinions of the author and are based on the data that has been found through research of the historical and architectural background of the subject property that was available at the time of preparation, as well as the application of local, state and federal criteria of eligibility as well as the best professional practices.

This report has been prepared for the property owner, Kristina Knapic, for the purpose of nominating the resource as a Ventura County Cultural Heritage Landmark in order to establish eligibility for participation in the Mills Act program. The report looks at the resource at the National level in order to determine a California Historical Resource Status Code, however it is specifically discussed at the local level for the purpose of establishing its eligibility under the Ventura County ordinance.

The author is a professional historian with extensive experience in property research and historic preservation, dating from the mid 1980's. This background includes the research, preparation and/or advocacy of over 114 Historic Cultural Monument Nominations for the City of Los Angeles, as well as research and documentation of numerous other historic structures. Other qualifications include work as a past president and board member of the Highland Park Heritage Trust, past co-chair of the Cultural Resources Committee of the Los Angeles Conservancy, president of the Heritage Coalition of Southern California and 28 years doing property research for Transamerica Real Estate Tax Service.

The resource to be evaluated is a 2-story, single-family residential building built in 1929 located at the center of the property, referred to as the Acacia Mansion. This Structure has also been referred to as the Baird Mansion, named for its original owner. It is sited on Lots 1, 2, 13, and 14, Block A of Hall Tuttle Tract No. 1, which is recorded in Book 19, Page 23 of Map Records of Ventura County, and is identified with County Assessor's Parcel No. 017-0-196-060. The main house is in the center of Lots 1 and 2, which comprise the Eastern portion of the property. A two-story garage-guesthouse is situated on the Western part of the Lots 1 and 2 with a small orchard on Lots 13 and 14 to the West.

The structure is not presently listed on any local, state or federal register nor is it listed as a contributor to any local, state or federal historic district. The residence was documented in 1991 by Merri Ann Harbert of Oxnard College.

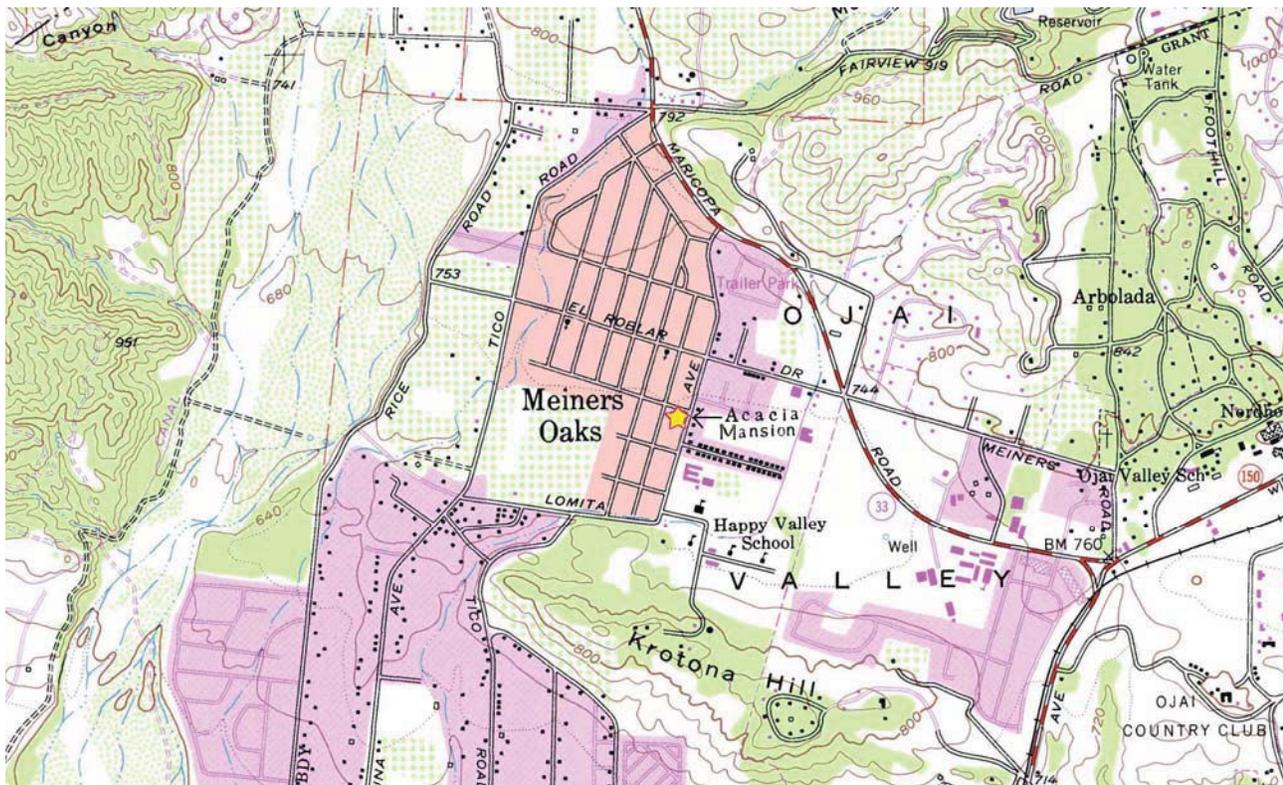
A newspaper article on the mansion was also published in the Ojai Valley edition of the Ventura County Star/Free Press on February 21, 1991.

The site is located within the unincorporated Meiners Oaks neighborhood at 34°36'788"N 119°16'639"W.

Meiners Oaks is located at in the mid-northern section of the Ojai Valley, and is bordered by the town of Mira Monte to the south, and the City of Ojai to the east, and is located at 34°26'59"N 119°16'31"W / 34.44972°N 119.27528°W (34.449684, -119.275274), within the boundaries of the original Rancho Ojai.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the neighborhood has a total area of 1.4 square miles (3.5 km²), all of it land. Meiners Oaks is in the heart of the Ojai Valley, very close to the Ventura River Bottom, where there are several hiking trails and waterholes.

There does not even to appear to be an extant historic context statement for the area, so most of the research performed for this report will be new.



Acacia Mansion sited on detail of United States Department of Interior Topographic Map of Matilija Quadrangle, Ventura County, California.

Section II

Methodology

In evaluating a potential historic property, several criteria are employed, including an analysis of architectural and historical significance, as well as specific evaluations as to whether the subject property meets the various requirements for it to be considered historic.

These requirements may include the age and rarity of the design, significance of an architect, builder or owner/resident of the property, along with how the structure relates to its historic context, how much of its own architectural integrity has survived as well as whether non-historic alterations can be easily reversed.

Age and integrity are important criteria here because the structure was built 81 years ago, as one of the earliest commercial buildings within the Meiners Oaks area.

The architect of the building was John Roine who served as contractor as well records show that it was built for Madeline Baird, who was associated with the Theosophical Society which had just established its Happy Valley School and Krotona Institute in Ojai.

A site visit was made on December 7, 2009 when photos were taken both the interior and exterior of the subject property.

An analysis was also made of the history of the structure including owners, occupants, using various public records, such as census data, death records and newspaper citations. Some historical context was also gathered from previously published books and articles as noted in the bibliography.

Section III

Historic Property Regulations

In a determination of eligibility a potential historic resource must be considered under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to determine if it is either eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources (California Register). The California Register is modeled after the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). There are only a handful of differences in the standards for the National and California Registers. The California Register has a slightly lower integrity requirement than the National Register. A resource is also presumed to be historic if it is locally listed or has been identified as historically significant in a historic resources survey.

However, a preponderance of evidence could show that a property so is either no longer historic due to alterations subsequent to a survey or further examination has found that it does not meet the criteria and requirements set forth in the California Register. The National and California Register programs are discussed below.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register is described in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations as “an authoritative guide to be used by federal, state or local governments, private groups and citizens to identify the nation’s cultural resources and to indicate what properties should be protected from destruction or impairment.”

To be eligible for listing in the National Register, the resource must normally be at least 50 years of age and must possess significance in American history and culture, architecture or archeology. To be considered significant, a property must meet one or more of the following four established criteria:

- A. It must be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. It must be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. It must embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

- D. That it yield, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The resource must also have integrity so that, according to National Register Bulletin #15 on How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, “to be eligible for the National Register, a property must not only be shown to be significant under National Register criteria, but it must also have integrity”, which is the ability of the resource to convey its significance. In other words, a property must not be so altered from the condition during the period of significance, that it fails to show the reasons for that significance.

A resource should also be significant within a historic context to be eligible for listing. According to National Register Bulletin #15, historic contexts are “those patterns, themes or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning (and ultimately its significance) within history or prehistory is made clear.” The significance of a historic property can be determined only when it is evaluated within its historic context. The resource must represent an important aspect of the area’s history or prehistory and still have the integrity to convey that to qualify for the National Register.

The National Register also allows for the establishment of historic districts, where the properties may not be eligible for individual listing, but as a grouping, convey both the integrity and context to meet one or more of the four criteria.

California Register of Historic Resources

The California Register was established in 1992, when Governor Pete Wilson signed Assembly Bill 2881. Like the National Register, the California Register is used by state and local agencies, private groups and individual citizens to identify and list historic resources and to help determine which resources are to be protected, to the extent prudent and feasible, from substantial adverse impacts.

The California Register consists of all California properties that are listed on or determined eligible for the National Register and all California Landmarks from No. 770 up, which are automatically listed, as well as others that are directly nominated by an application processed through a public hearing process and are determined eligible for listing by the State Historic Resources Commission (SHRC). In addition, those California Points of Historical Interest that have been evaluated by the Office of

Historic Preservation (OHP) and have been recommended to the SHRC are automatically listed.

To be eligible for listing in the California Register, the resource must normally be at least 50 years of age and must possess significance in local, state or national, under one or more of the following four criteria:

- 1.) It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States; or
- 2.) It is associated with the lives of persons significant to local, California or national history; or
- 3.) It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values; or
- 4.) It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important in prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

Historic resources eligible for listing in the California Register may include buildings sites, structures, objects and historic districts. Resources less than 50 years of age may be eligible if it can be demonstrated that sufficient time has passed to understand their historical importance. While the criteria for the California Register is less rigorous with regard to the issue of integrity, there is the expectation that the resources reflect their appearance during their period of significance.

Ventura County Cultural Heritage Landmark

Historic resources as defined by CEQA also includes properties listed in “local registers” of historic properties. A “local register of historic resources” is broadly defined in Section 5020.1 (k) of the Public Resources Code, as “a list of properties officially designated or recognized as historically significant by a local government pursuant to a local ordinance or resolution.” Local are defined in essentially two forms:

- 1.) Historic resource surveys conducted by or for a local agency in accordance with the procedures and standards set by the State Office of Historic Preservation and are adopted by that agency. These surveys are to be periodically updated in order to maintain the most current list of potential historic resources.

- 2.) Landmarks designated under local ordinances or resolutions. These properties are “presumed to be historically or culturally significant.” (Public Resources Guide Sections 5024.1, 21804.1 and 15064.5)

The County of Ventura first adopted its first Cultural Heritage Ordinance in 1968. The ordinance was re-enacted in 1973, amended in 1991 and subsequently repealed and reinstated in 2000. This current ordinance No. 4225 amends Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 5 of the Ventura County Ordinance Code, covering Sections 1360 to 1373 of said code. It gives the Cultural Heritage board the authority to designate Landmarks within the unincorporated area of the County as well as within the boundaries of those incorporated cities whose Councils have authorized the County Board to serve as their Cultural Heritage Board.

Section 1365-5 of the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance delineates the following criteria for the designation of a Ventura County Landmark:

- 1.) It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the County’s social, aesthetic, engineering, architectural or natural history;
- 2.) It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Ventura County or its cities, regional history, or cultural heritage of California or the United States;
- 3.) It is associated with the lives of persons important to Ventura County or its cities, California, or national history;
- 4.) It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of Ventura County or its cities, California or the nation;
- 5.) It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master builder or possesses high artistic value;
- 6.) Integrity: Establish the authenticity of the resource’s physical identity by evidence of lack of deterioration and significant of the characteristics that existed during its period of importance. This shall be evaluated with regard to the retention of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship.

Section IV

Architectural Description

The subject structure is a 2-story 10-room frame and stucco residence, built on an L-shaped plan, located in the center of lots 1 and 2. The Spanish Colonial Revival structure also has a heavy Moorish influence. The main architectural features include Spanish clay tile roof, exterior stucco, a large arched porch topped with a covered balcony dominates the outside corner of the asymmetrical facade. The main transverse gable is capped by an octagonal turret at its Southeast end. A similar turret is also located at the most Northerly corner of the house, to the right of the main porch. A secondary gable continues to the Southwest along the Southeast façade of the edifice. The two wings flank a rear courtyard.

The roof has various low pitched hips, gables, sheds and turrets. There are narrow eaves with decorative rafters, topped with gutters and small circular window/vents in the turrets. A chimney is on the Southwest gable with a diamond vent under the roof. A circular balcony is atop a circular bay on the courtyard side of the gable. Other feature include double hung, fixed pane, tall arched, Palladian, multi-light casement and stained glass windows. Many of the windows have squared stucco sills.

There is decorative wrought iron, including rear balcony railings and awning supports for several rear facing awnings. Balcony supports are sectioned square columns, with a slat wooden railing on the main front balcony. The four columns and two pilasters for the front porch are square with simple square capitals at the base of the arches and tall square bases on each. An arched colonnade at the first floor level faces the courtyard.

The two-story garage/guest house is also of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, with a tile roof and tile awning above the garage door, which has a multi widow sectioned wooden door. A second-story bay with three arched windows faces the main house. A concrete and wrought iron fence with a corner gate surrounds the property.

The main entry consists if an inset arched front door set to the left of the front porch. The door is surrounded by decorative Batchelder tiles of varying sizes set in a symmetrical pattern, with a wrought iron and amber stained glass awning above the carved wood door, which consists of 16 circular and two half circular floral designs. A porch light hangs at the center top of the doorway.

Interior feature include a two-story front entry foyer with a patterned vaulted ceiling and tiled terrazzo floor. A three flight staircase rises opposite the entry along the walls opposite and left of the entry to a second floor arched balcony with decorative iron banisters and railings. Arched stained glass windows line the second-story sides

of the exterior facing walls with tall rectangular stained glass windows at the first floor level. A wrought iron and glass light hangs from the center of the foyer. A large carved wooden double door opens to the left into the living room.

The large rectangular living room has a decorative ceiling with a gold crown molding, inlaid oak hardwood floors, wall sconces and a Batchelder tile fireplace opposite the main entry. A brass and crystal chandelier is in the center of the ceiling.

The formal dining room also ports a decorative ceiling with a different elaborate crown molding, inlaid hardwood floors and a more intimate brass and crystal chandelier.

All of the bathrooms are lined with tile wainscoting with various picture tiles in each. A second Batchelder fireplace is located in the master bedroom.

Section V

Construction History

The house was designed and built over a two year period by local architect-contractor John Roine, using materials and fixtures obtained in Europe, including Italian chandeliers and lighting fixtures. Roine, a native of Finland, hired artisans from his native land to do much of the work. One non-European feature were the two fireplaces and some of the decorative tile which was from the Pasadena factory of Ernest Batchelder.

The Main house and guest house appear to have little change with the exception of a second-story balcony enclosure that occurred sometime between 1960 and 1991.

One fortunate aspect is that the original blueprints for the residence still exist and have remained with the property throughout the various ownership changes.

Section VI

Architectural Significance

The Acacia Mansion is a large, intact, elaborate and finely detailed example of the Spanish Colonial Revival design that was popular Southern in California from about 1915 until World War II. The structures Moorish influence is also important as the impact of the Moorish period in Spanish architecture has left a lasting mark in the characteristics of the architecture throughout Spain itself.

The American Spanish Colonial Revival design is a direct descendent of the earlier Mission Revival design, which was both a product of the nostalgia for the early Colonial history of both Spain and Mexico as well as a product of the Arts and Crafts movement that evolved during the period immediately before and after the turn of the 20th Century.

As the Arts and Crafts period began to wane, various European styles began to take hold, bringing the many Revival styles such as English Tudor, the various French styles, as well as the Story-Book styles that were popular in the 1920s. However, it was the Spanish and Mediterranean designs that captured the largest proportion of this period in residential construction, mostly due to the local Mediterranean climate that made these designs so much reflect the historic designs in that Southern part of Europe.

The Spanish Colonial design, in particular, was utilized in both modest and elegant homes throughout the region. The Acacia Mansion is an example of the high end use of the Spanish Colonial Revival design, displaying much in custom work that was designed to transport one to the Country of Spain itself, with its unique blend of European and Moorish architecture.

Locally the house is significant as one of a handful of lavish residences to be built in the Ojai Valley during the 1920s, when most of the homes being built there were modest bungalows. The architect/builder, John Roine, is responsible for most of these large residences, including the “Taj Majal”, another elaborate Valley residence that he designed during the same period for Edward Martin, another prominent Theosophist.

This property is not currently listed at either the National, State or local level. However, due to the high level of design as well as a high level of integrity, the structures appear to architecturally meet the criteria at all three levels as an individual architectural resource.

Section VII

Historical Outline

The Acacia Mansion is one of the earlier homes to be built in the Meiners Oaks neighborhood of the Ojai Valley.

The Ojai Valley, which had been originally settled by the Chumash Tribe, came under the influence of the Mission San Buenaventura, after its founding in 1782. Following the secularization of the Mission under the Mexican Government, the Rancho Ojai was granted to Fernando Tico in 1837 by Governor Juan Alvarado. The Rancho was confirmed to Tico by the United States Land Commission and patented on December 22, 1870. In 1853, Tico sold the 17,717 Rancho to Henry Starrow Carnes of Santa Barbara. Three years later, Carnes sold the land to Juan Camarillo, who transferred it to John Bartlett in 1864 so he could buy the Rancho Calleguas where he established the town of Camarillo.

Bartlett split the Rancho Ojai in 1865, selling a third of it to John B. Church and the remainder to John Wyeth. Both of the new owners were associated with Thomas Bard, the early oil pioneer. The first town in the valley, Nordoff, was founded in 1874, named for East Coast journalist Charles Nordoff. The town's name was changed to Ojai in 1917.

In the 1870s, John Mieners, a German born Milwaukee brewer, received title to a large parcel in the valley floor as payment of a debt. He asked a friend, Milwaukee banker Edward D. Horton, to check out his new property on a trip he was making to California. Horton stated that "it is the most beautiful valley I have ever seen" when he reported back to Meiners.

It was several years before Meiners was able to come out and see his land, which partially consisted of one of the largest grove of live oaks in Southern California. Mieners, who soon found the climate excellent for his asthma, established a ranch on the land and built a large house and barn on the property, which soon became a very successful agricultural concern. Meiners divided his time between his Milwaukee brewery and his ranch, where he passed away in 1898. The barn was destroyed by fire in 1896, but the Meiners ranch house remains on a hill behind the Ranch House Restaurant, built where the barn had been located.

The ranch remained in the Meiner family who began to sell off parcels for development. Some of the land was purchased by Hall Tuttle an executive with Howard Automotive Company, a Los Angeles Buick dealer. Hall Tuttle subdivided his land into two tracts during the 1920s. In 1926, four lots in Block "A" of Hall Tuttle Tract No. 2 were acquired by David and Madeline Baird of St. John's, Newfoundland.

David Baird was known as ‘The Sardine King’ as he had made his fortune in the Canadian fishing business. However, being in poor health, he rarely came to the valley during the two years it took to build the house, leaving Madeline in charge of the home’s construction. David Baird passed away shortly before the completion of the home and his widow officially moved in after it was completed on January 9, 1929.

The Bairds were both ardent followers of the Theosophical Society, which at that time was headed by Dr. Annie Besant, who had recently moved the society’s regional headquarters from Hollywood to the Ojai Valley.

The Theosophicals were an Eastern based belief system that had been founded in New York City by Helene Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge. Originally founded as a means of studying the Eastern philosophies, the society had embraced much of Hindu and Buddhist thought and beliefs, amassing adherents throughout the world.

Annie Besant had come to the Theosophical Society through an unusual route. Born Annie Wood in England on October 1, 1847, she married Anglican clergyman Frank Besant when she was 19. The marriage was ultimately a disaster as Annie became more an independent thinker in a very conservative setting. She left Frank, ultimately losing all custody of their two children to him. However they never divorced. While Frank spent the remainder of his life as an Anglican Vicar, Anne drifted away from her Christian faith, becoming a secularist, socialist and ultimately a Marxist, though never an atheist. A brilliant speaker, she worked tirelessly for the promotion of unions and woman’s rights.

As a member of the Fabian Society, she was closely associated with George Bernard Shaw. At one point she even invited Shaw to live with her, but the writer declined. She continued her union work which ultimately brought about considerable change in the attitude toward the working class.

Eventually she was led to Marxism by Edward Aveling, who lived with her while he translated the major works of Marx into English for the first time. While he greatly influence her thinking, their personal relationship ended when Aveling left her to live with Marx daughter, Eleanor. Another major influence in Annie’s conversion to Marxism was the artist William Morris.

In 1889, she was asked to write an article for the Pall Mall Gazette on one of Helene Blavatsky’s books. After reading it, she sought an interview with the author whom she met in Paris. She was transformed yet again. She had always retained a spiritual element in her life and in Theosophy, she had found her calling.

Over the next several years she severed ties with the various Socialist groups as she became more involved with her new belief system. By the time Madame Blavatsky died in 1891, Annie Besant had already become one of the leading figures in the Theosophical movement. Her most important early proclamation of faith came in 1893 when she went to present it at the Chicago Worlds Fair. That same year she made her first trip to India, the country that was to become her primary home.

In 1902, Besant joined Co-Freemasonry and became a major influence there as well, establishing lodges in a number of countries. While not officially recognized by most Masonic bodies, Co-Masonry remains the one Masonic organization that allows women to join and be an equal partner in the fraternity. Ultimately Besant would receive the 33rd Degree in the Co-Masonry Scottish Rite.

Besant became the head of the main branch of Theosophical movement in 1907. The body made its home in Adyar, India. Besant had for a number of years been pulling the society toward Hinduism and less toward the Theravada Buddhism that many of the early founders had embraced. Besant and others believed that a new “World Leader” would eventually emerge and that the Theosophical Society was to prepare the world for this great teacher.

In 1909, Jiddu Krishnamurti, then a 14 year old boy living with his widowed father and several brothers, was brought into the Society in the belief that he was to be the vehicle for the “World Teacher”. Eventually Besant was able to obtain guardianship of the boy and his youngest brother, Nityananda and raised them raised as her sons.

Jiddu Krishnamurti was to become well know for his scholarly writings and was heavily promoted as this future leader. However, two decades later, he became disenchanted with the “World Teacher Project” and repudiated that role with the Theosophicals. He did remain close to Besant in spite of this philosophical split.

Several splits had occurred in the Theosophical Society over the years, including with the United States society, which split under the leadership of William Quan Judge. As the society was nearing its United States zenith, which was to occur in the 1920s, Besant and Krishnamurti established u US branch of the Indian faction in Hollywood. In 1924, the growing body moved to the Ojai Valley, establishing the “Happy Valley Foundation” settlement in the Western valley in 1926 on 465 acres of land acquired by Besant, part of which was developed as the Krotona Istitute of Theosophy.

One of the highlights was the annual Ojai Star Camp where Krishnamurti presided. At \$45.00 per adult, the camp was also a means of raising money for the organizations work throughout the world. Krishnamurti, maintained a part-time home in the East part of the Lower Ojai Valley that he named Ayra Vihara. He also published “The Star” magazine, which touted the valley as well as the message.

Annie Besant continued her work, traveling the world and promoting the Theosophical values as well as Indian independence. She was a member of the Indian National Congress and worked hand in hand with Mohandas K. Gandhi and his closest collaborator, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been educated by a Theosophist tutor. In 1918, after several months in detention over her nationalist activities, she served as President of the Congress for a year. She passed away at her home in Adyar, India on September 20, 1933 at the age of 85.

The Theosophical Society remains in Ojai as the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, which maintains the Krotona Library. Today's local organization is affiliated with the Theosophical Society in America, headquartered in Wheaton, Illinois. The Happy Valley School was recently renamed Besant Hill in honor of its founder.

Many of the Theosophical followers were wealthy individuals who were searching for a spiritual enlightenment and found the teachings of Besant to be of their liking. These people were much of the financial backbone of the society.

The Bairds were typical of this group. Madeline Baird had been born in Essex, England in 1865 and was drawn to the order in the early 20th Century. When they purchased the land in Meiners Oaks, she set about to build her dream house. She contracted with John Roine, who did several other designs for Theosophical Society members during the same period. It was a good match, with Roine's attention to quality and detail fitting well with Madeline Baird's high expectations. Many Finnish artisans were in the Ojai area and Roine employed them during construction. The artist Uno-Pal Kangas lived in Meiners Oaks and was employed to design a sunken marble pool for the grounds and a volcanic rock fountain with a statue of a young girl at its center.

The split with Krishnamurti and the Theosophical Society occurred a few months after Mrs. Baird took up residence, but she chose to remain in her new abode. After her death, the home was left to her niece in England, who sold it to Leon Walker, who owned a large furniture store in Ventura. In the early 1950s, the Walkers sold the house to Dr. Hilary Mangan, a prominent surgeon. With five bedrooms, the house became home to Mangan, his wife Mariann, their three children, Mariann's sister, Elizabeth Purling and her daughter, Merri Ann.

A devout Catholic, Hilary Mangan built a small brick structure in the yard facing Mesa Drive as shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1960, the Mangan's sold the property to Bernie and Della Williams. The Williams were to become the longest term owners of the Acacia Mansion, living there from September 1, 1960 until 1976,

when they sold it to do some extended traveling. Bernie Williams had owned a prosperous lumber and hardware business in West Virginia. They had come to the Ojai Valley because the climate was good for Della's asthma.

After seven months of cross country travel, the Williams found the house back on the market. Their buyer, R. Michael Berrard, had converted the house to an elegant retirement home but the business had not done well. It was during the short Berrard period that an upstairs porch was made into a spare room, which is believed to be the only real alteration made to the house since its construction. The Williams bought the house back in December of 1976 and lived in it until Della Williams, by then a widow, sold it on May 20, 1991 to James G. Cenicerros, an accountant and his wife, Peggy.

In 1998, the Cenicerros' sold the house to Edward Morgan and Dixie Dakos, who lived there as newlyweds. On October 15, 2004, the home was transferred to present owners, Kristina Knapic and John DeVito.

Today the house serves as the couples home under the name "Acacia Mansion". During the short Berrard ownership, it was known as the Acacia Manor. The name may actually go all the way back to the original Baird ownership, as the acacia is specifically called out by the Theosophists as a sacred plant for its symbolism of purity in Hinduism, Buddhism and other philosophies. It was also important to the early Hebrews as the tree which supplied the sacred Shittim wood.

The Acacia is also significant as an emblem of innocence in the Third Degree of Freemasonry, which gives it an extra level of importance to Annie Besant and her belief system as the head of the Theosophical Society.

Section VIII *Historical Significance*

The Acacia Mansion is tied to the Theosophical Society due to the adherence of the original owners, David and Madeline Baird, more particularly of Madeline, as David died before the house was completed. The Theosophical Society has a strong history in the Ojai Valley that begins in 1924 and continues to the present day.

The house is one of several substantial homes built during the 1920's by Theosophical adherents who wanted to be there to support the society and the leadership of Annie Besant and Jiddu Krishnamurti, both of whom maintained part time homes in the Ojai Valley.



Dr. Annie Besant, 1897.



Annie Besant as a 33° Co-Mason.

Dr. Besant, is of particular note due to her leadership involvement in numerous social and religious organizations as well as her work in the Nationalist causes of both Ireland and India.

While no direct connection has been found linking either Besant or Krishnamurti to the Acacia Mansion, other than the adherence of the Bairds, the design of the house as well as the architect, John Roine, are of importance, as well as Madeline Baird's association to the Theosophical Society.

Section IX

Conclusion

The Acacia Mansion is one of only a handful of large early homes in the Ojai Valley, more specifically the Meiners Oaks community. It is one of several that have a direct connection to the early period of the Theosophical Society history within the valley.

The architect of the building, John Roine, was not well known outside of the local area, however, his level of design and attention to detail is a well known aspect of his local designs. Records show that he did build homes in Los Angeles, especially during the Great Depression when local work was not readily available. One of these homes, a spec design he built in Hollywoodland was advertised in the Los Angeles Times in 1929.

Still, Roine's work is not generally known outside of the Ojai area, so it would be hard to determine how much influence he may have had in design outside of that area without further research.

The Acacia Mansion is also on the historic periphery of the Theosophical Society presence in the Ojai area, in that its direct connection is from a supporter of the society rather than one of the principals in the organization.

However, as a representative type specimen of the elaborate Spanish Colonial Revival domicile of the period prior to the Great Depression, the house displays both a high level of artistic merit as well as an outstanding level of integrity in both its original design and materials.

The design is both representative of the Spanish Colonial and the Moorish designs that influenced it as well as being a unique one of a kind structure that shows the combined talents of a number of individual artisans.

Therefore, based on its merits as an architectural type specimen and the high level of artistic merit, the Acacia Mansion appears to be individually eligible for the National Register under criteria "C", with a California Historic Resource Code of 3S.

As such the property would also qualify for local listing under criteria 5 and 6 of the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction, may represent the work of a master builder and possesses high artistic value. It also retains a high level of integrity in both the structure itself and its immediate surroundings.

In addition the resource appears to qualify under Ventura criteria No. 2 in that it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Ventura County or its cities, regional history due to the association with both the local history of the Theosophical Society and being one of the early homes built in the Meiners Oaks community.

*Section X
Photographs*



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion shortly after completion in 1929



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, satellite view (Google Earth)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, rear wing, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, rear balcony, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, rear patio, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



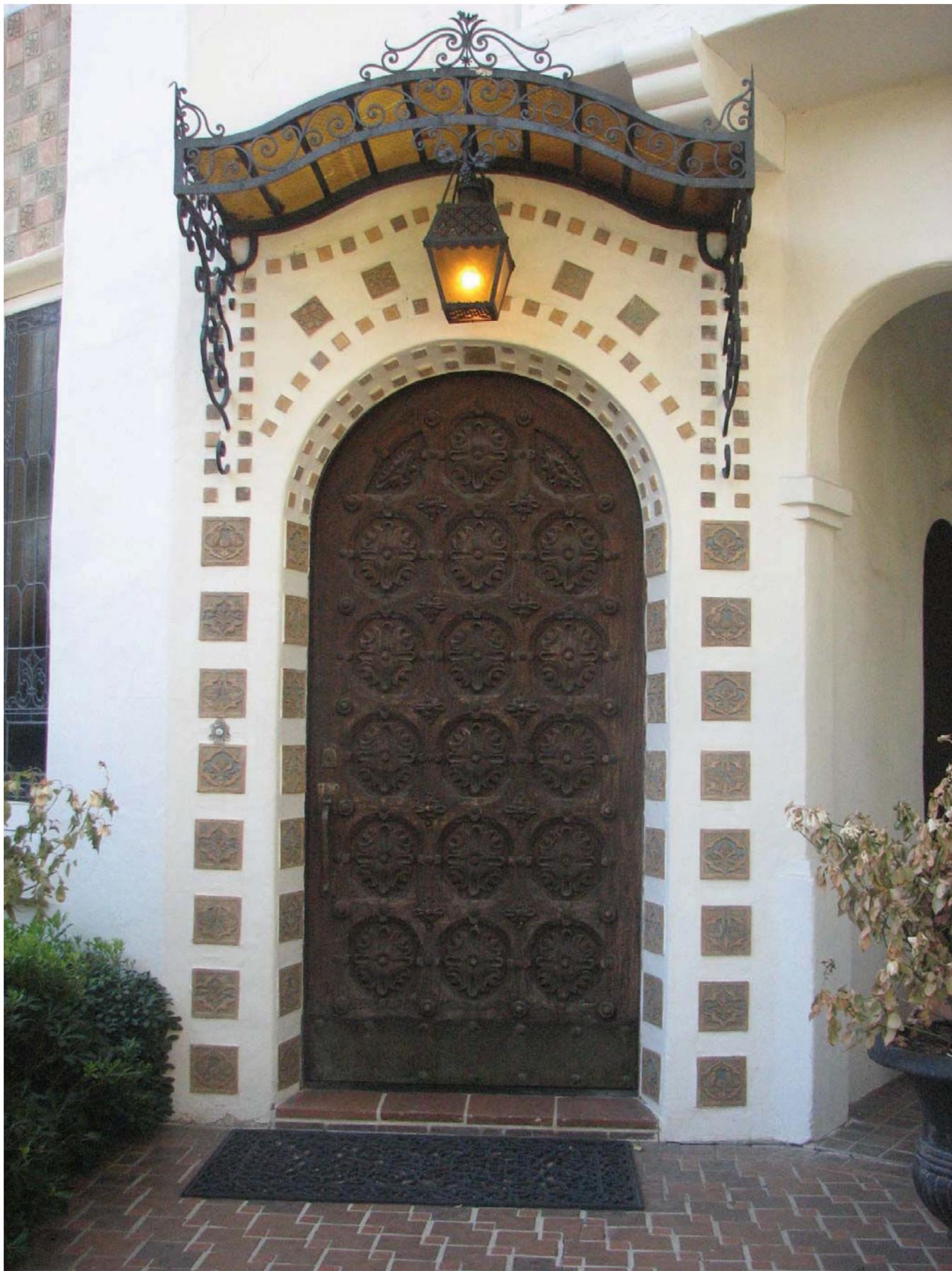
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, garage-guest house, Dec 8, 2009 (Google Street View)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, Mesa facade, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, front porch, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, front door, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



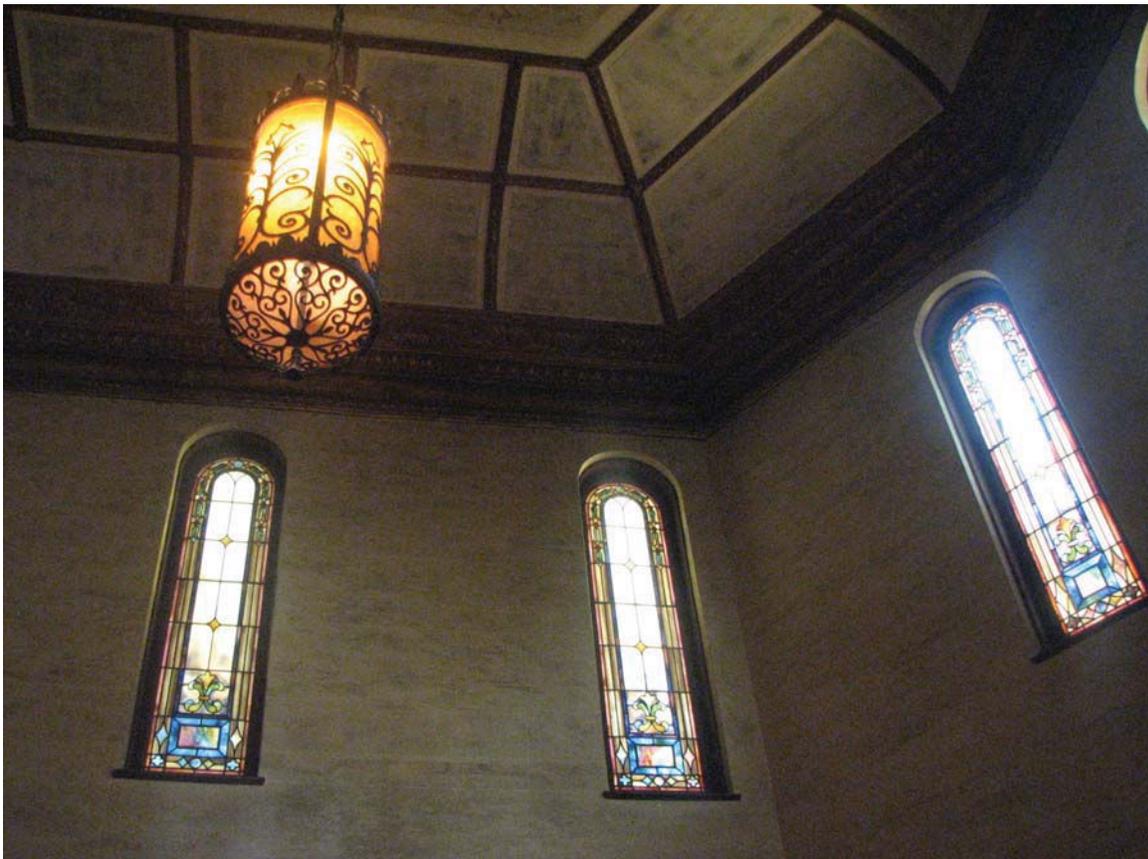
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, decorative peacock tile by entry, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, decorative lily tile by entrance, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



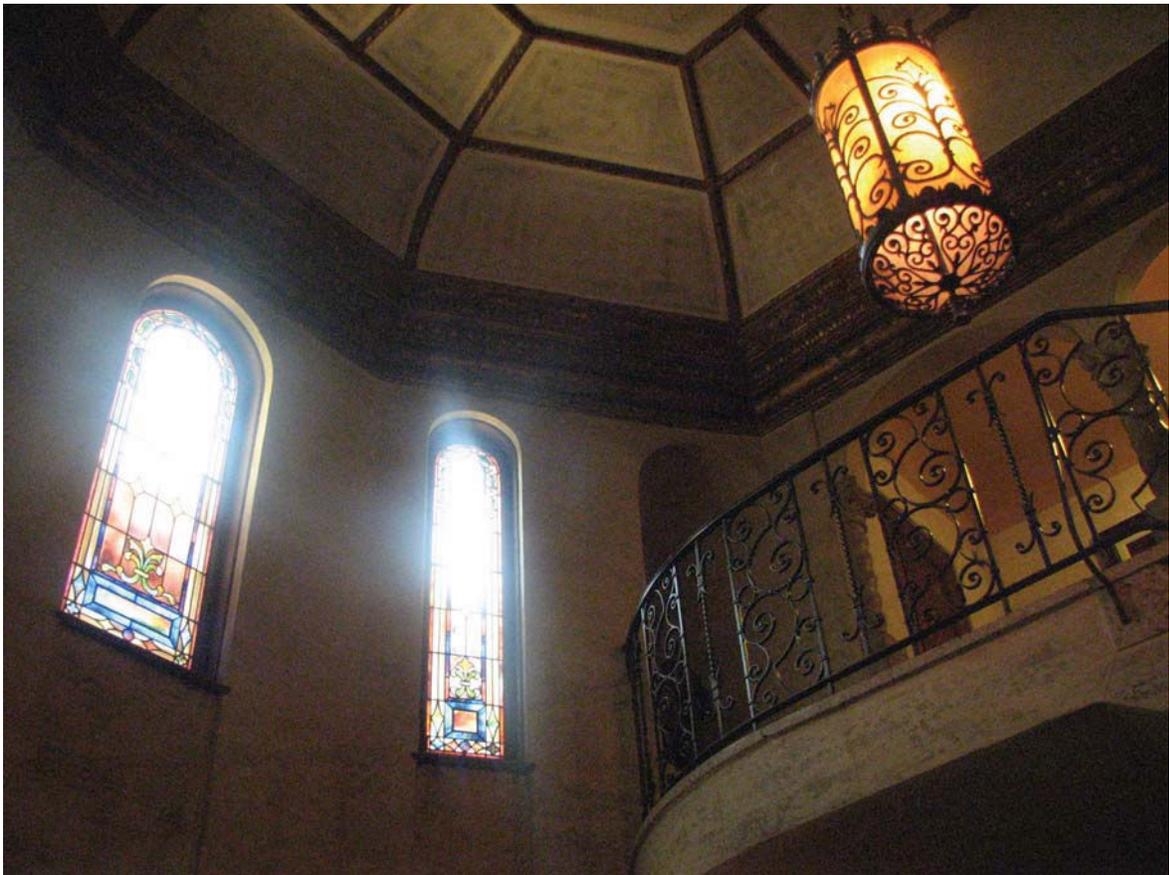
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



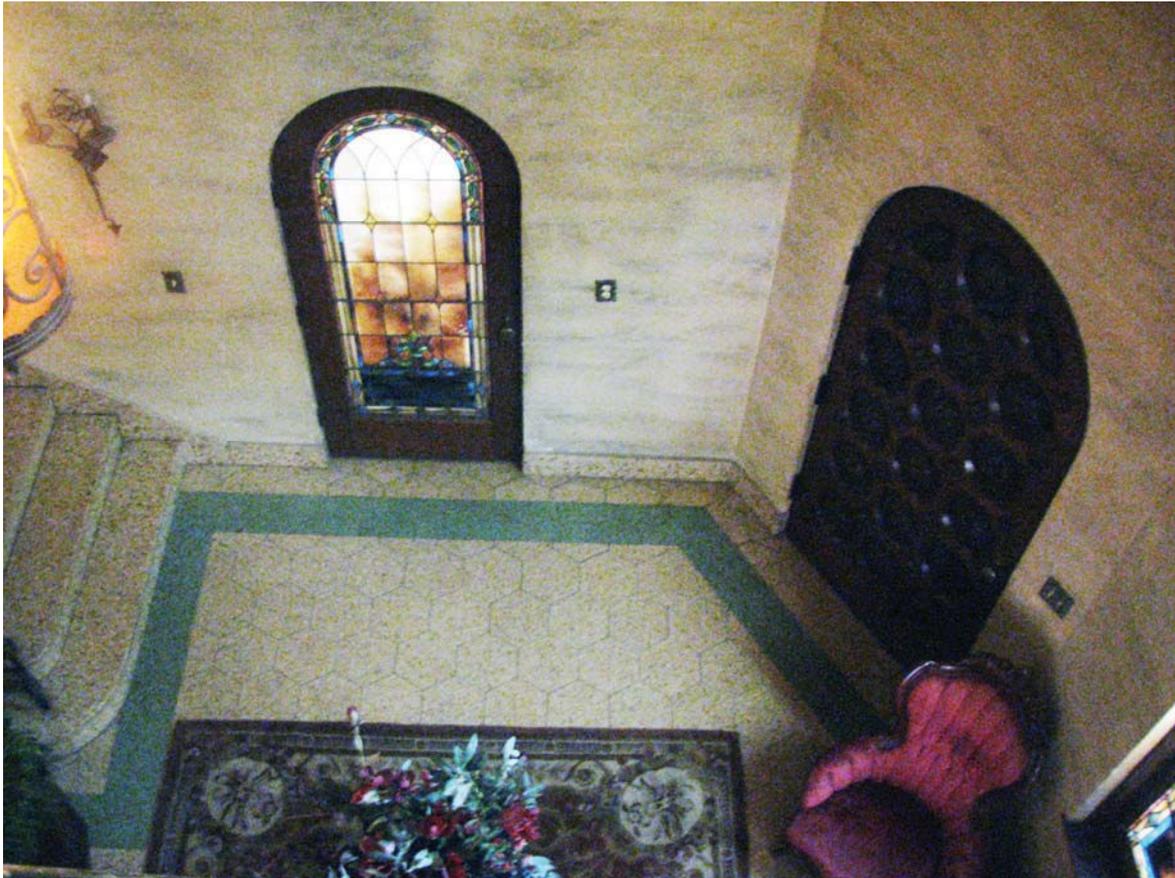
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer ceiling, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



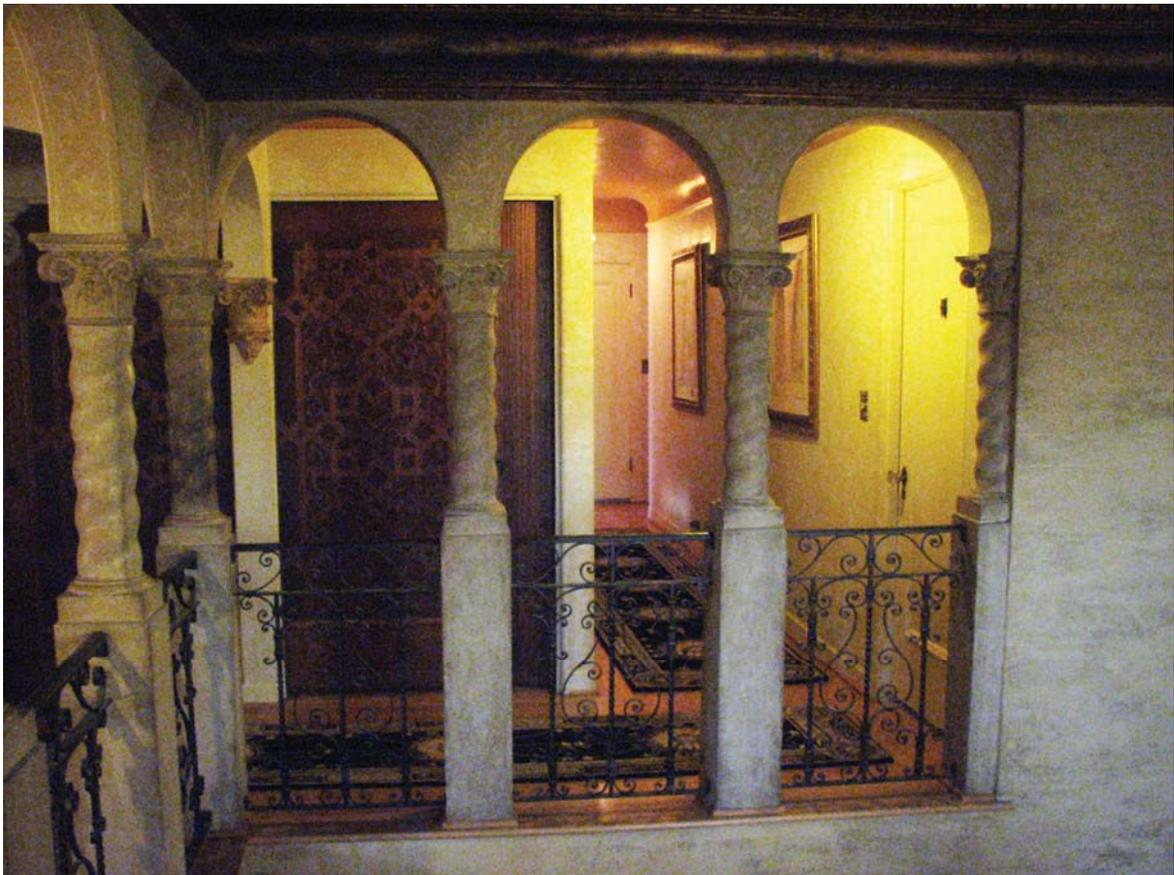
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer ceiling, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



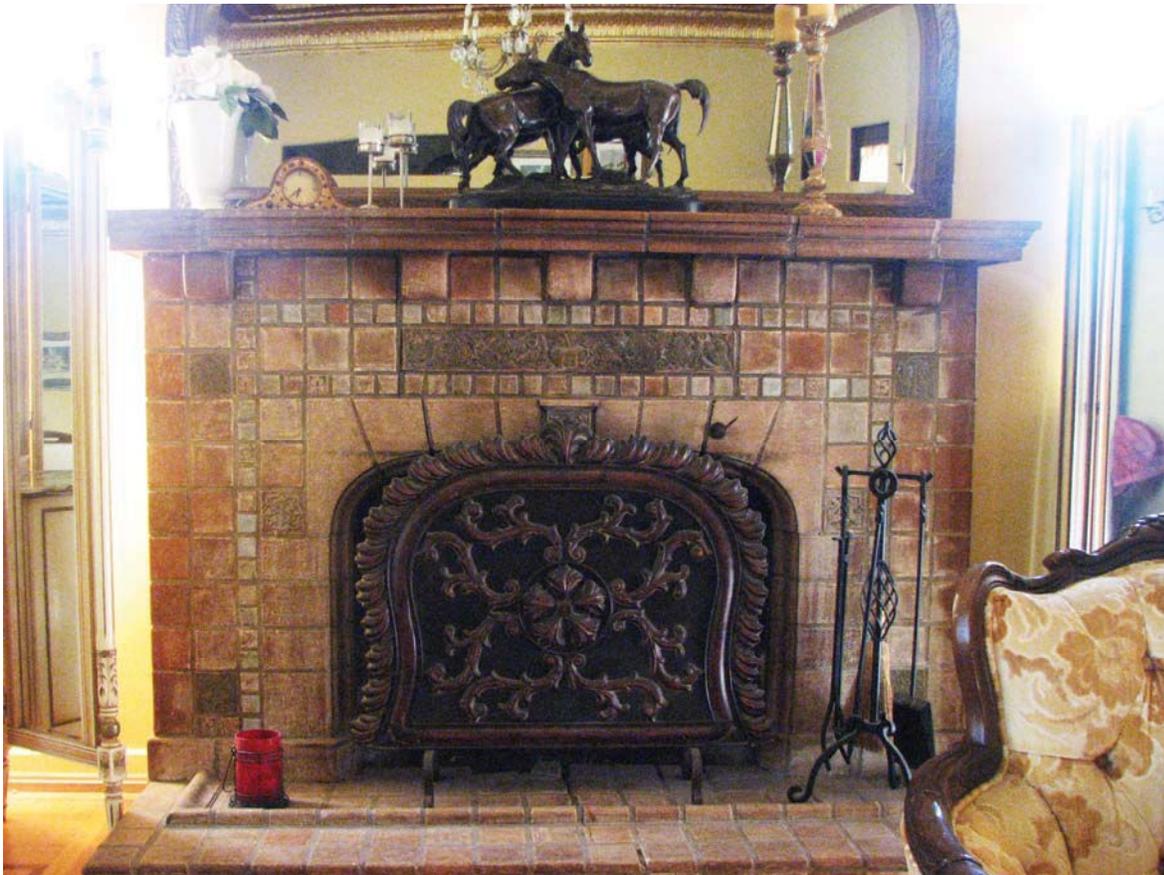
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer at second floor, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, Batchelder fireplace in living room, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, living room crown molding, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, dining room, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



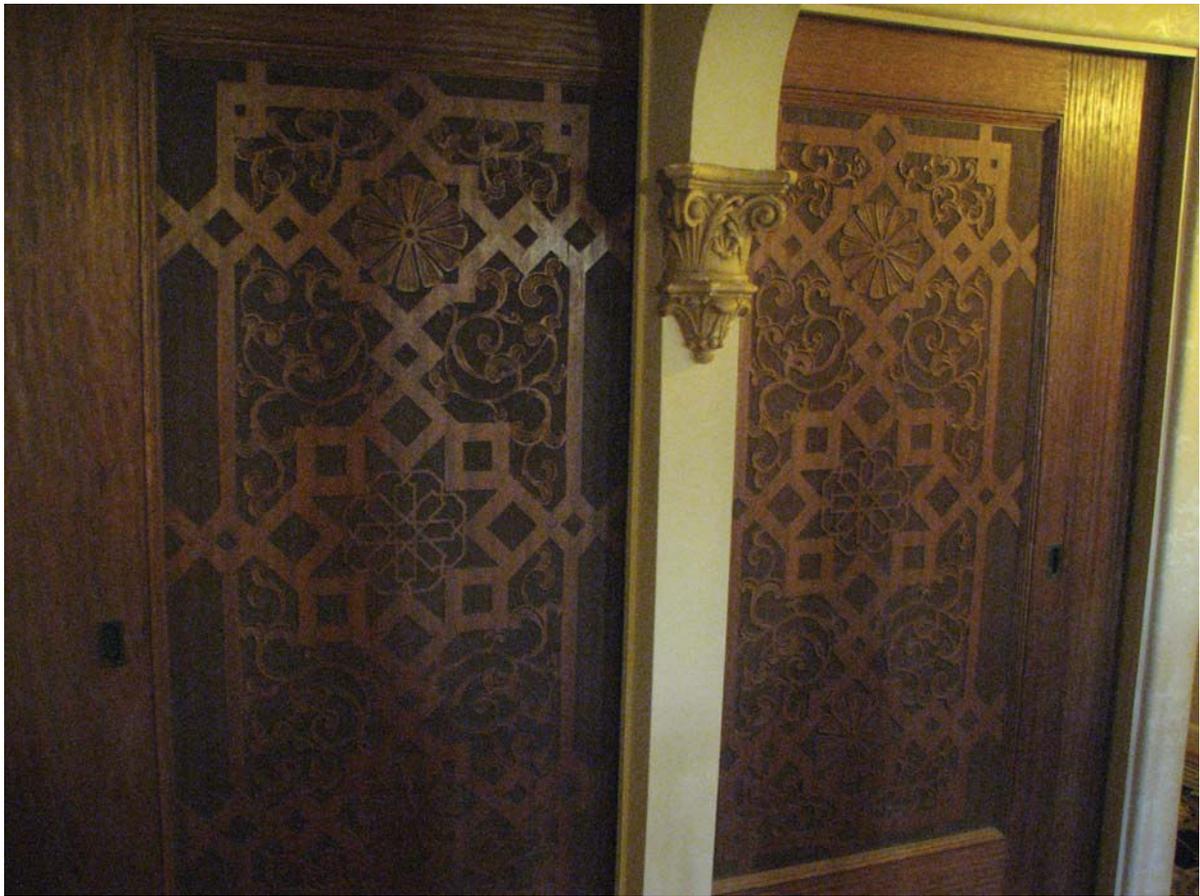
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, dining room, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, dining room crown molding, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



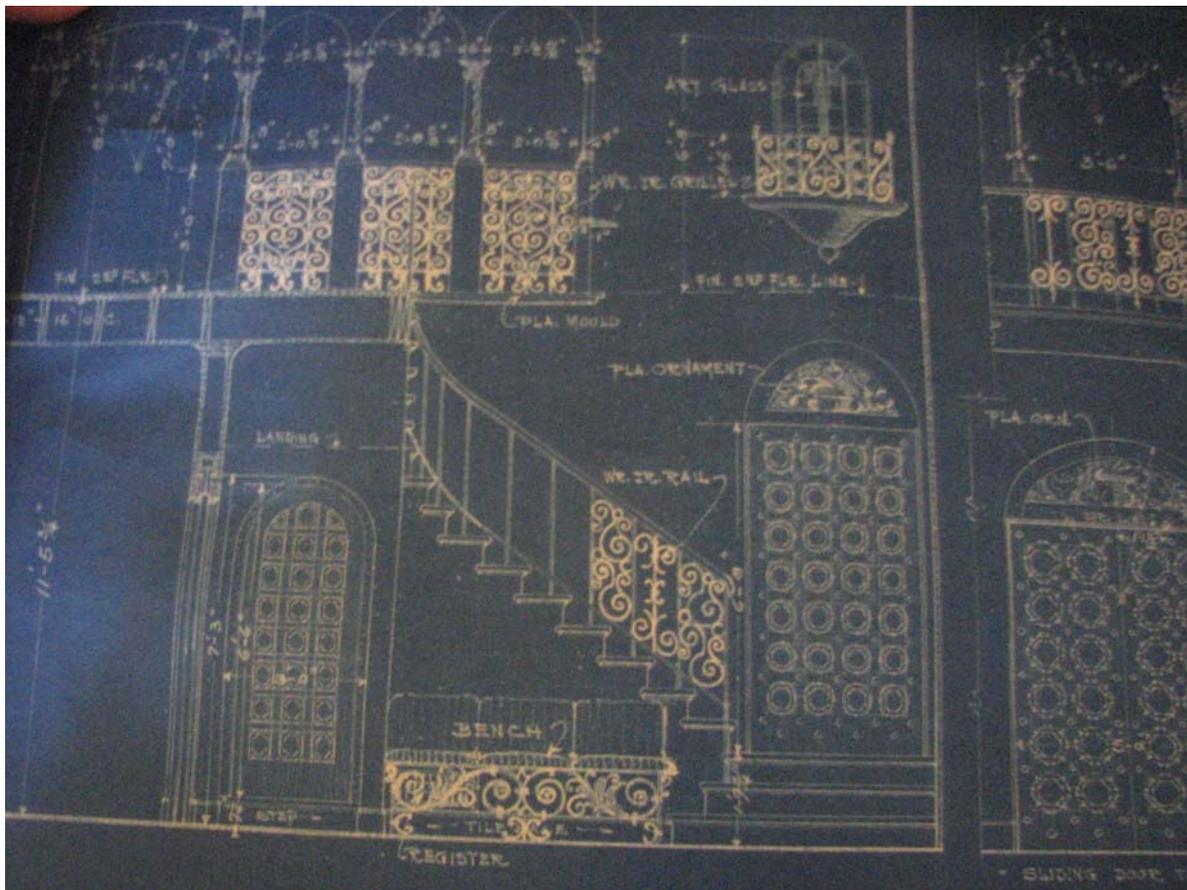
Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, dining room crown molding, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, carved closet doors in hallway, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, Batchelder fireplace in master bedroom, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, original blueprints of entry foyer, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)



Acacia Mansion 205 S. Lomita Avenue, client and architect data on blueprints, Dec. 8, 2009 (Charles J. Fisher photo)

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