

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: NOVEMBER 1, 2004

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF "EL ROBLE," 141 NORTH GRAND AVENUE, FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that the application for designation of El Roble, located at 141 North Grand Avenue, as a landmark is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (Class 8); and
2. Find that El Roble, located at 141 North Grand Avenue meets Criterion 3 for landmark designation under §17.52.040 of the Pasadena Municipal Code; and
3. Approve the attached resolution designating El Roble located at 141 North Grand Avenue as a landmark (ATTACHMENT 1);
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached declaration of designation (ATTACHMENT 2); and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On September 20, 2004, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council find that El Roble meets the criteria for designation as a landmark and approve the designation.

BACKGROUND:

Nomination:

On July 25, 2004, staff received an application from present owners of the property, Mr. & Mrs. Albert Rodriguez, to designate this house, designed by the Postle Co., as a landmark.

Description and Analysis:

The subject property is an early 20th century estate comprised of a 20-room, 7,300 square-foot mansion, a cottage style, two-story freestanding gatehouse, a garage, a formal garden terrace and a pergola. The property's Spanish name, "El Roble," recognizes a very large oak tree that once stood in the middle of the east lawn facing Grand Avenue. Set on a ridge overlooking the Arroyo Seco, "El Roble" is a three-story English Tudor Revival Style house with an irregular cross gable plan. A three-story (south) wing is set at an obtuse angle to the left main wing. The large leaded glass windows of the ceremonial stair hall highlight the main facade. The ground floor and gardens walls are clad with red-and-black clinker bricks, while the second and thirds floors are faced with white stucco and false-timber framing. Stonework and multiple flues top the tall chimney faced with clinker bricks located at the northeast corner of the facade. Windows on the ground and second floors are double-hung wood frames arranged in an asymmetrical pattern. Windows on the third floor are one-over-four wood-framed casements. The most striking window is the double height leaded-glass window of the stair hall. The mullions and transoms divide the window space into 10-diamond pane panels, the top center of which features a colored glass cartouche.

One enters the house through the rectangular vestibule of the crenellated stone porch into a two-story walnut paneled stair hall. Twisting balusters and an elaborately carved lion at the foot of the banister highlight the monumental staircase. A paneled hallway under the stairs leads to the oak paneled library. The stair hall leads to the large living and dining rooms. A conservatory is accessed from the dining room. A large window alcove in the living room provides access to the covered terrace that runs the full length of the living room. The terrace originally overlooked the Arroyo Seco before trees obscured the view. Formal steps lead to a fountain encircled by a cast concrete garden balustrade that perched on the edge of the Arroyo Seco. A flight of steps leads to the oak forested hillside below. The gatehouse and garage were designed in the same style with the equivalent attention to detail as the main house.

The residence was originally completed in 1902 in the Craftsman style for Chicago novelist Gertrude Potter Daniels. In 1922, heiress and businesswoman Susan Bransford Emery Holmes and her husband, Col. E.F. Holmes, commissioned the Postle Co. of Los Angeles to transform El Roble into the Tudor style property we know today. Susan Holmes, better known as the Silver Queen of Salt Lake because of her considerable fortune earned through mining interests, is the most famous past resident of El Roble, although other locally prominent women are also associated with the property.

For more detailed information on El Roble and its architectural significance, the statement of significance to the Historic Preservation Commission (Attachment 3) and photographs (Attachment 4) are attached. A Sanborn Map of the property is included for site context (Attachment 5). A short biography of Susan Bransford Emery Holmes, the Silver Queen, the past owner who refashioned El Roble into its present form is also included (Attachment 6).

Findings in Support of Landmark Designation

The Commission found that El Roble is a significant historic resource for the following reason:

- It represents a landmark example of the English Tudor Revival Style possessing high artistic values that are locally significant, and is a major work by a regionally significant architectural design and engineering firm, the Postle Co. (Criterion 3, §17.52.040).

Landmark Designation:

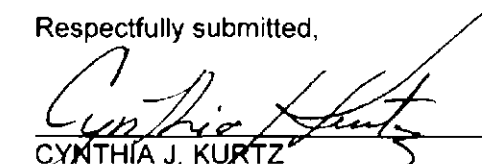
Since 1969, the City has designated 58 individual properties as landmarks or monuments. The last designation of an individual property was 683 South Los Robles Avenue on June 14, 2004. If a property is designated, exterior alterations or proposals for demolition are reviewed by staff or the Historic Preservation Commission for compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. For Category 1 Resources (designated landmarks), proposals that do not meet these Standards can be denied. Proposals for alterations that meet the Standards may be approved or approved with conditions.

The designation has no legal effect on zoning, land use, or the sale of the property.

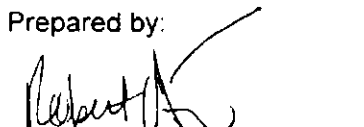
FISCAL IMPACT

A decision on the designation has a negligible effect on revenues to the City. The General Fee Schedule exempts designated landmarks from fees for Certificates of Appropriateness (permits) from the Historic Preservation Commission (except for applications to demolish a building). The City does not, however, waive any other fees and taxes (e.g., plan check, construction tax) for projects affecting designated landmarks. Some staff time may be needed to review a proposal to expand or alter the residence in the future. In addition, owners of properties with a landmark designation may apply for a Mills Act contract with the City. The fiscal impact of a Mills Act contract for a single-family residence is modest. The City Council has authorized a maximum of ten Mills Act contracts each year for residential properties.

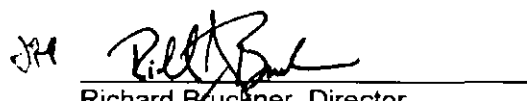
Respectfully submitted,


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:


Robert Avila
Associate Planner

Approved by:

JRH 
Richard Bruckner, Director
Planning & Development Dept.

- Attachments:
1. Resolution
 2. Declaration of Designation
 3. Statement of Significance
 4. Photographs
 5. Sanborn Map
 6. Biography of Susan Bransford Emery Holmes

RESOLUTION NO. _____

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PASADENA
ADOPTING A DECLARATION OF LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR "EL ROBLE"
141 NORTH GRAND AVENUE, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission has found that the property at 141 North Grand Avenue, also known as "El Roble," meets landmark Criterion 3, as set forth in §17.52.040 of the Pasadena Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, El Roble contributes to the heritage of the City because of its exemplification of the English Tudor Revival Style architecture in Pasadena; and its identification as the work of a prominent regional architectural design and engineering firm, the Postle Co., the creator of several other major public and private buildings in Southern California; and

WHEREAS, Albert and Mercedes Rodriguez, the current owners, nominated the property for landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, the City Council may approve a recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission to designate a landmark and evidence such approval by adopting a declaration executed by the Mayor pursuant to §17.52.050 of the Pasadena Municipal Code.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Pasadena that the attached declaration of landmark designation for the property known as "El Roble," located at 141 North Grand Avenue, Pasadena, is hereby adopted.

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Adopted at the _____ meeting of the City Council on the _____ day of _____, 2004 by the following vote:

AYES:

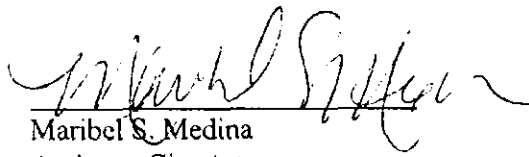
NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Jane Rodriguez, City Clerk

Approved as to form:



Maribel S. Medina
Assistant City Attorney

DECLARATION OF LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR:

**EL ROBLE
141 NORTH GRAND AVENUE
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA**

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 17.52.050 of the Pasadena Municipal Code, the City Council of the City of Pasadena by this declaration hereby designates as a landmark certain real property described in Exhibit A (attached).

Under Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.52.090, all work affecting designated landmarks except ordinary maintenance and repair, such as but not limited to new construction and additions, exterior alterations, relocation, and demolition, is subject to review by the City of Pasadena Historic Preservation Commission.

DATED: 10/28/04

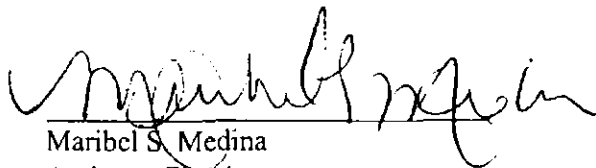
ATTEST:

CITY OF PASADENA
A municipal corporation

Jane Rodriguez, City Clerk

By: _____
Bill Bogaard
Mayor of the City of Pasadena

APPROVED AS TO FORM:



Maribel S. Medina
Assistant City Attorney

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BUILDING and SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Applicant:	Albert & Mercedes Rodriguez
Present Owner:	Albert & Mercedes Rodriguez
Location:	141 North Grand Avenue
Zoning:	RS-4 (Single-family residential/4 units per net acre)
Dates of Construction:	1902
Architect(s):	1902—J. J. Blick 1922—The Postle Co.
Contractor:	1922—The Postle Company
Original owner:	Gertrude Potter Daniels

Description of Structures:

The subject property is an early 20th estate comprised of a 20-room mansion, gatehouse, garage, formal garden terrace and pergola. The estate is named "*El Roble*" after a large oak tree once located in the back yard. Set on a ridge overlooking the Arroyo Seco, "*El Roble*" is a three-story English Tudor Revival Style house with an irregular cross gable plan. A three-story (south) wing is set an obtuse angle to the left main wing. The large timber-framed cross gable and projecting front-facing gable of the stair hall present an imposing main. Between the south wing and stair hall is a stone-framed entry porch with crenellations and pointed arch. The attached wrought iron and glass canopy is a later addition. The ground floor and gardens walls are clad with red-and-black clinker bricks, while the second and thirds floors are faced with white stucco and false-timber faming. Stonework and multiple flues top the tall chimney faced with clinker bricks and the northeast corner of the facade. Windows on the ground and second floors are double-hung wood frames arranged in an asymmetrical pattern. Windows on the third floor are one-over-four wood-framed casements. The most striking window is the double height leaded-glass window of the stair hall. The mullions and transoms divide the window space into 10-diamond pane panels, the top center of which features a colored glass cartouche.

One enters the house through the rectangular vestibule of the stone porch into a two-story walnut paneled stair hall. Twisting balusters and an elaborately carved lion at the foot of the banister highlight the monumental staircase. A paneled hallway under the stairs leads to the oak paneled library. The stair hall leads to the large living and dining rooms. A conservatory is accessed from the dining room. A large window alcove in the living room provides access to the covered terrace that runs the full length of the living room. The terrace originally overlooked the Arroyo Seco before oak trees screen the view. Formal steps lead to a fountain and cast concrete garden balustrade. A flight of steps leads to the oak forested hillside below.

The grounds of the property are open and park like. At the main gate off Grand Avenue is an elaborate wrought iron gate and monumental pilasters. Directly adjacent is a two-story gatehouse designed to complement the mansion and displaying similar attention to detail. The gatehouse is a two-story cottage with a steeply pitched slate roof defining a front facing timber and stucco gable. The façade has a symmetrical arrange with one bay one either side of the clinker brick veneered ground floor. The windows are paired in the timber-framed gable above the main entrance. A stone cartouche of two horses flanking a shield demonstrates the attention to architectural detail. Windows for the second floor are located in the timber and stucco side

gables. Like the main residence, the gatehouse entry features a stone surround and recessed entry vestibule.

The garage, located between the main house and the gatehouse, is also designed to complement the main house. It shares common design features like the steeply pitched slate roof, stone capped buttresses, clinker brick veneer, and false timber framing found on the mansion and gatehouse. In conclusion, the entire property is contributes to a unified design that is both picturesque and grand.

SIGNIFICANCE

El Robles meets the following criterion for historic landmark designation:

CRITERION 3: *It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant historic resource property type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder who is locally significant, or that possesses high artistic values that are locally significant.*

El Roble is a locally rare high style example of a Tudor Revival mansion that exemplifies the luxurious lifestyle of wealthy residents that were drawn to Pasadena for the mild winter climate and natural beauty of the Arroyo Seco. Gertrude Potter Daniels originally built *El Roble* in 1902 as a Shingle Style mansion overlooking the Arroyo Seco. However, the property underwent a dramatic \$37,000 makeover in 1922 by its second owner, Susan Bransford Emery Holmes. Inspired by her extensive travels across Europe, the "Silver Queen" hired the Postle Co. of Los Angeles to remodel the house in the English Tudor Revival style by extending the dining room, installing the oak paneled entry hall and library, and adding two sets of elaborate iron gates to the property, the picturesque gatehouse and garage. At that time, the principal orientation of the house was reversed from facing the Arroyo Seco to facing Grand Avenue. The stone framed entries, half-timber framework on the upper stories, and brick veneer on the lower floors are all hallmarks of the style. The house remains intact after years of careful stewardship under several different owners and retains its original windows, doors, oak paneling and fixtures. This underscores the importance of *El Roble*, an estate always recognized for its high-quality materials and expensive fixtures.

The Postle Co. was a successful design and contracting firm that worked to meet the demand for luxury housing by southern California's elite residents and wealthy visitors. The company was skillful at interpreting the popular stylistic modes of the day with virtuosity—Chateausque, Beaux Arts, Spanish Colonial, Tudor Revival, Mission Revival, and Regency to name a few. Some examples of their work already has been recognized with landmark status such as Roseleigh Court (1922) at 529 South El Molino¹, and Euclid Court (1921) located at 545 South Euclid Avenue². Other notable examples of their work can be observed locally at the Casa de Adobe (1917, building contractor for Theodore Eisen) in Highland Park, the Gunther House (1923) at 1960 Mendocino Lane, Altadena, the 1924 conversion of the Castle Green into apartments, and the Pasadena Playhouse (1925, building contractor for Elmer Gray).

The entire property at 141 N. Grand Avenue is unified through architecture and landscape to imitate the grand Elizabethan country houses in England. In their book *Architecture in Los*

¹ Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in July 1983.

² Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in July 1983.

Angeles. David Gebhard and Robert Winter describe the Arroyo Seco area north of the Ventura Freeway as one of the richest architectural districts in the West.³ El Roble contributes to this artistic legacy as an example of the Tudor Revival applied on a grand scale.

CONCLUSION

El Roble is a high-style example of the Tudor Revival in Pasadena and exhibits finely articulated construction details throughout the house. The house clearly demonstrates the free interpretation in this Tudor Revival expression, with its emphasis steeply pitched, front-facing gables, clinker brick veneer, false half-timbering and expansive park like grounds. From the stylized rafter tails on the exterior roof eaves to the elegant leaded glass windows of the stair hall, and rich oak paneling of the interior, the El Roble captures the spirit and charm gained from high quality architectural elements and decorative finishes.

³ Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. Architecture in Los Angeles: A Compleat Guide. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985.

Photographs

ATTACHMENT 4



Figure 1. Street Elevation.

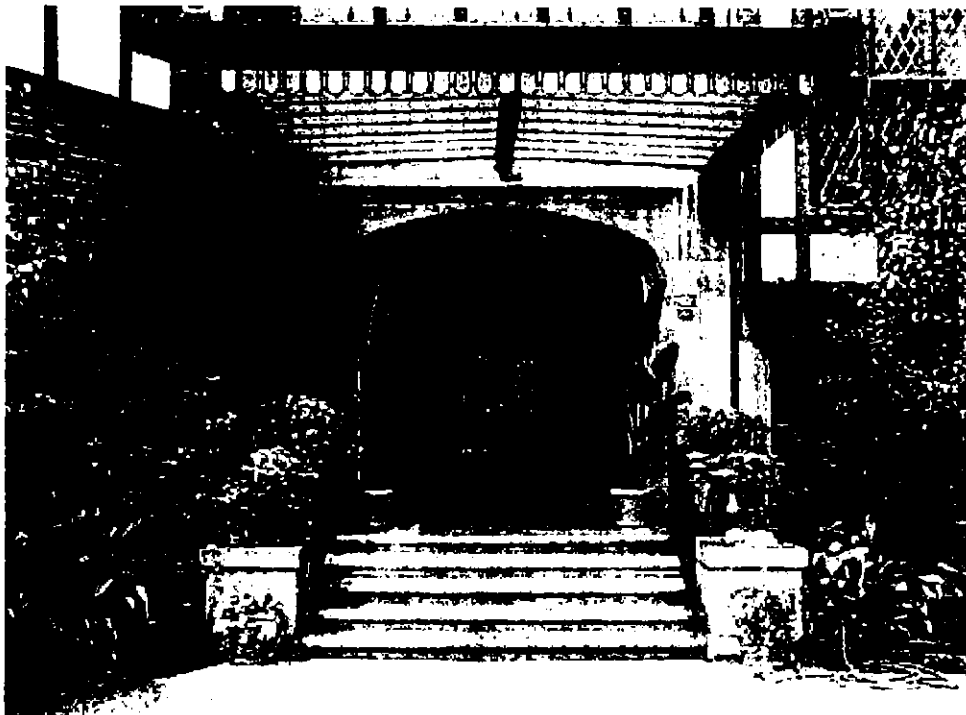


Figure 2. Detail of Front Porch.



Figure 3. Rear Elevation and Rose Garden.



Figure 4. Stair hall window. Note tracery at top of panels and projecting gable.



Figure 5. Close up of buttress detail found on all buildings throughout the property.



Figure 6. The tall chimney, false timber framing, brick veneer, and steeply pitched roof create a picturesque façade and demonstrate the hallmarks of the style.



Figure 7. Gatehouse at front of property.

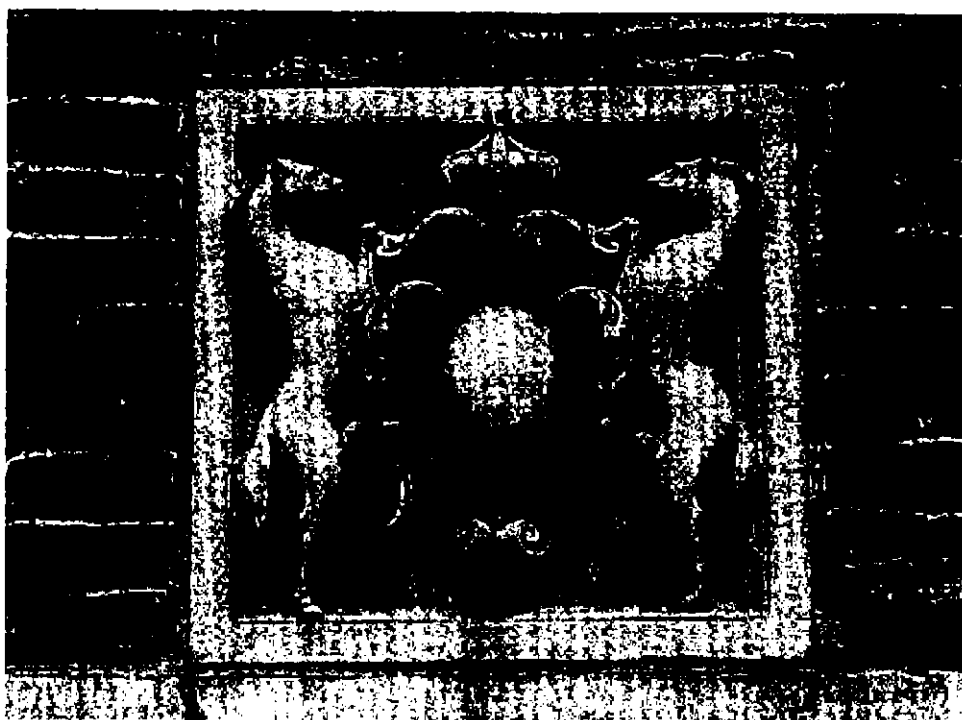


Figure 8. Detail of cast stone escutcheon over gatehouse entry.



Figure 9. Garage--primary elevation.

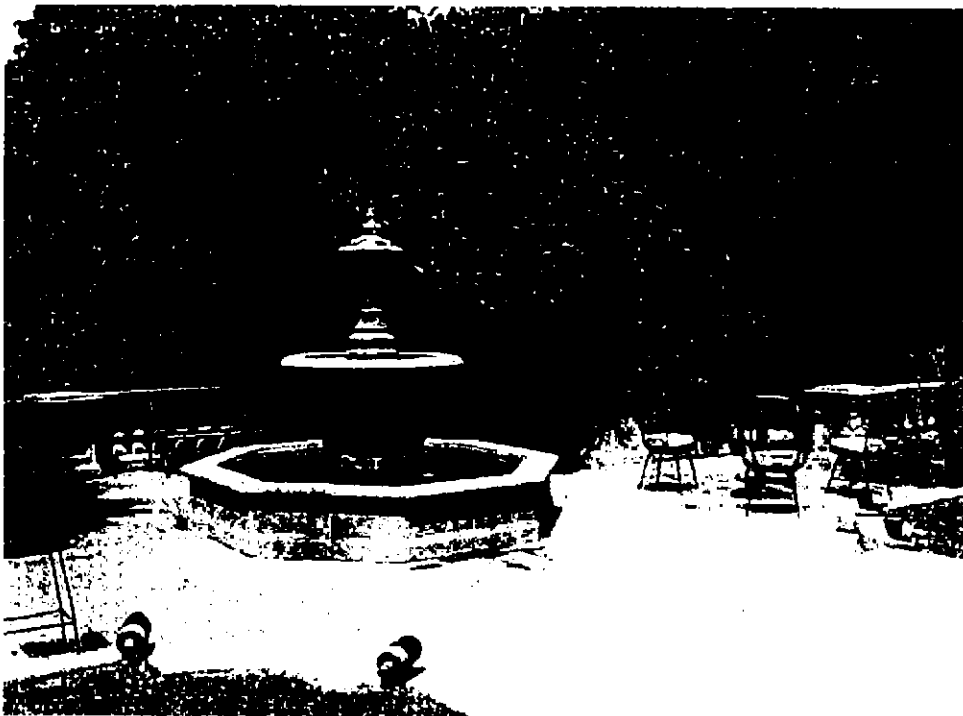
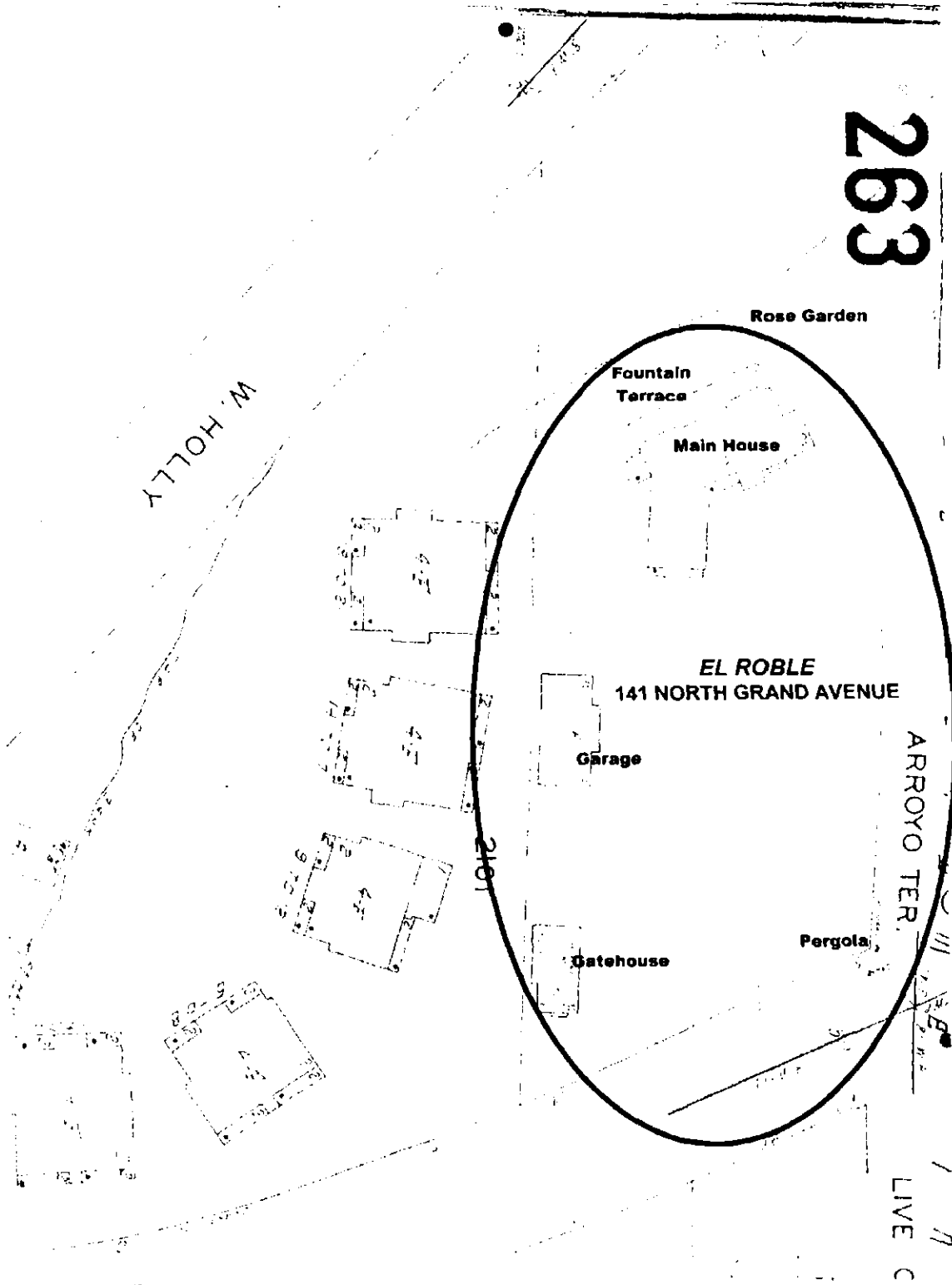


Figure 10. Terrace on the Arroyo Seco.

Sanborn Map

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Susan Bransford Emery Holmes
(1859-1942)

Biography of Susan Bransford Emery Holmes
Susanna: The Silver Queen

ATTACHMENT 6



SUSANNA: THE SILVER QUEEN

Reading adapted from *Brigham Street*, by Margaret D. Lester, published by the Utah State Historical Society

Author: Utah LessonPlans

Created Date : Feb 13 1997



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Comments, e-mail: resources@uen.org

Born in Richmond, Missouri, and reared in California gold country, Susanna Bransford came to Park City to visit relatives in the year 1884. There she met and married Albion B. Emery, who by a trick of fate would become responsible for Susanna's future as Utah's Silver Queen. As baggageman and secretary to several infant mining companies, Emery had been asked by R. C. Chambers, superintendent of Ontario Mine, to front for some mining stock where Chambers could not invest openly. When Emery died suddenly in 1894, an aghast Chambers was forced to stand by while investments grew that would a few years later put a reported price tag on Emery's attractive young widow of one hundred million dollars. Whether by good business sense or intuition she had held on to Emery's stock and watched for opportunities to buy an interest in most of the major Park City mines, including the Silver King.

In 1895 Susanna accepted an invitation from Thomas Kearns to meet a wealthy Chicago lumberman who had mining interests in Idaho and Utah. That the man was worth about seven million dollars, and that he was a widower, surely piqued her interest. For his part, after the first meeting, Col. Edwin F. Holmes was so enamored of the lovely brunette that he prolonged his visit to court her and then invited her to visit him in New York City. Dinner at Delmonico's with a group of Utah friends saw a surprised Susie hearing her own engagement announced by the colonel. He had proposed several times previously and several times had been turned down. But upon hearing the announcement, Susie decided that marriage was not a bad idea at all. They were promptly married in the Astor Parlors of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and left for a two-year honeymoon in Europe.

Colonel Holmes lost no time upon his return to Salt Lake City in securing the grandest home in the valley for a permanent residence. The Gardo House, which by this time had gained the name of the Amelia Palace, was purchased from the LDS church. It took its popular name from one of Brigham Young's wives, but Susanna Holmes was the one who enhanced the Palace and placed it on the society map of the world. The distinctive Second Empire architecture became a showplace for nearly twenty years except when the hosts were on their world tours. William J. Sinclair of Marshall Field & Company was in charge of the interior design and made repeated trips between Chicago and Salt Lake City as he planned sumptuous settings for the many pieces of furniture, some having belonged to royalty, acquired by the Holmeses on their tours. The wall coverings for the Louis XVI salon, or drawing room, was of old rose satin brocade, and the ceiling was elaborately frescoed. Midway between the drawing room and dining room was a Tiffany electric fountain; on dining occasions the tables could be arranged so as to use the fountain as a centerpiece.

The dining room was a rich combination of gold leaf wall treatment, silver, cut glass, delicate lace, and embroideries. The beautifully hand carved chairs had belonged to Brigham Young. The upholsteries in the dining room and elsewhere in the Palace were the finest Europe could produce, comparable to those in royal palaces. The breakfast room had a carpet of rich red and draperies also of red with appliqués of cloth of gold. The interior wood of the Palace was of Belgian oak; the grand stairway swept from the first to the third story, and all the way up niches filled with statuary and bronze figures holding electroliers presented a scene of enchantment when lighted. In the tower with its books one could recline on a divan to read, or just sit to enjoy the view.

Although Susanna declared she was bored following Holmes from art gallery to art gallery while on their travels, a building was planned west of the Palace to house the many acquired treasures. The gallery contained works of the great artists as well as contemporary Utah artists, all in great gold frames; sculpture and ornate cabinets holding smaller art objects completed the collection. A grand opening was staged on February 21, 1904, to which four hundred guests were invited. Colored electric lights illuminated the outside. An orchestra played from a small platform or stage that was partially screened off from the dancers by a profuse display of flowers. Peter T. Huddart decorated for entertainments at the Palace, every room being resplendent with blossoms. Perhaps no other private home equaled the elegance of the Amelia Palace in the several years it was occupied by Susanna and Colonel Holmes.

Susanna epitomized an era of quick fortunes and expansive living from the gay nineties to the early nineteen hundreds. "Susie" to her friends, but "Utah's Silver Queen" to society writers, she was lauded by Washington newspapers as entertaining like a princess. Her exquisite gowns, rare jewels, and her \$10,000 circular charm of platinum and diamonds were of paramount interest. She spent a great deal of time in Washington, much to the delight of that city's socialites who considered her vivacious, witty, sparkling, charming, and "much to behold." The Philadelphia North American called her by far the most interesting woman in Washington and reminded a gossip-loving American public that she had fifty million dollars in mining properties. Colonel Holmes stayed at home and took care of his more meaningful civic duties. At various times he was commissioner of water supply, president of the Commercial Club, a member of the Utah legislature, and prominent in the Masonic Order. Susanna's long visits in Washington were not to his liking. Increasingly annoyed by his butterfly toasting her wings so far away, he finally ordered her to return home upon threat of selling the Palace at once. She came home.

Susanna's parties were both lavish and unique. She often invited friends for a preview of a coming attraction at the Salt Lake Theatre by hiring the featured artist to entertain. At one time the world-renowned pianist Alberto Jonas from South America, who was to appear at the theatre, entertained a special group of friends at the Palace. Local talent included the Desert Mandolin Orchestra, chamber music groups, popular vocalists such as Karl Scheid and Mrs. Mont Ferry, and a famous fortune-teller who delighted the guests with her gift of clairvoyance. Sometimes there was a dinner for one hundred with dancing to follow; sometimes there were small dinner groups of eight or ten with cards to follow; and her "at homes" where she would receive from two to three hundred callers were a weekly event whenever she was in town. Always there was that touch of something special.

The Holmeses invested in real estate. The apartment building on the northeast corner of State and South Temple streets has been known at various times as the Emery-Holmes, the Bransford, and in later years as the Eagle Gate Apartments. On First Avenue at State Street they built another apartment building bearing the name of Grace Louise Emery in stained glass

over the three entries. Grace Louise was the only child born to the Silver Queen. She died at the age of thirty-one.

In 1910 the Holmeses moved to *El Roble*, their home in Pasadena, California. The Palace was then rented until 1926 when the property was sold to the LDS church who resold it to the United States government for the construction of a federal reserve bank.

Edwin F. Holmes died in 1927, and roving Susanna, who said it was best his first family bury him, continued on her travels, not returning for the funeral. Three years later she married Radovan Nedelkov Delitch, a Serbian doctor. After two years she became impatient with his jealousy; and since they could not reconcile their differences, Susanna suggested an ocean voyage for him, promising that all legal matters on the divorce would be complete upon his return. While lunching with her niece at a prominent Los Angeles hotel Susanna received a telegram that she quietly folded and placed in her handbag. It said that Delitch was dead-had hanged himself on shipboard-and was to be buried at sea. In an unconcerned manner she continued with her lunch and conversation.

A year later she married Prince Nicholas Engalitcheff of ancient Russian lineage. Two years later the two were on shipboard when the prince was suddenly taken ill and died. Susanna ordered that his body be removed at the next port, planning to collect it when she returned from her trip, but when Russian nationals received word of his death they ordered a royal burial at sea.

Travel-weary after thirty-five years of luxurious globe-trotting, the silver-haired princess in 1937 signed into the Hotel Utah as Her Royal Highness Princess Engalitcheff, accompanied by her young business manager, Culver Sherrill. She declared that Florida was too cold for the season, New York too hot, California much too sad, Newport banal, and Maine too monotonous, so she had come home to check on her six silver mines. She was described as a striking blend of grand dame, businesswoman, cosmopolite, and breezy westerner.

Susanna was to return "home" only once more. On August 4, 1942, she died in Norwalk, Connecticut, en route to Virginia from her home in Massachusetts.

At eighty-three years of age the sands of her colorful and exciting life had run out. She was buried in Salt Lake City's Mount Olivet Cemetery beside her first husband, Albion Emery.