

NORTH STAR HISTORIC CONSERVANCY

THE STAR

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2020

Great Houses Made for Great Friends

By Gage McKinney

Many things made Grass Valley exceptional among the mining districts of America and one of those things was the building of three great houses.

The Empire Cottage (1897), North Star House (1905) and Ophir Cottage (1917) rose on highly mineralized ground in the state's richest gold mining district. Each was designed by a distinguished California architect: Willis Polk, Julia Morgan and Arthur Brown, Jr. Polk is remembered especially for overseeing the design of the 1915 Panama Pacific Exhibition; Morgan for Hearst's San Simeon estate; and Brown for San Francisco landmarks like Coit Tower.

Inhabitants of these great houses, the mine's managerial elite, had relationships with employees, especially mine workers, from shift bosses to muckers. They had relationships with mine owners, shareholders and accomplished men who came to exchange technical knowledge. Also, they had relationships with the inhabitants of the other great houses.

One of the most important personal relationships in the history of our region was the friendship between industrialist William B. Bourn, Jr., and geologist James D. Hague. They resuscitated two great mines and made mining a long-term

investment. They were sometimes partners, sometimes rivals, and always friends. Bourn built the Empire Cottage as his home at the mine and Hague built North Star House with rooms for when he visited and as a residence for the mine's general manager.



Empire Cottage: William Bourn's Grass Valley house served as more than a residence.

When the Empire and North Star mines had boundary disputes, negotiations were held at the Cottage.

An equally close relationship developed between Agnes Bourn, William's wife, and Mary Hallock Foote, who with her engineer husband, Arthur D. Foote, permanently resided at North Star House. Though Agnes was 13 years younger than Mary,

the two native New Yorkers recognized one another as women of breeding, empathy and taste. In 1906, when Agnes was in Grass Valley as a refugee from the San Francisco earthquake and fire, the highlight of her year was growing closer to Mary. As they aged, their closeness deepened.

The third great house in the district was the Ophir Cottage, a later addition, and the one which hasn't survived – fire destroyed it in 1935. Ophir Cottage was built for George Starr, managing director of the Empire mine, and his wife, Libby Crocker Starr.



Ophir Cottage: The managing director's house at the Empire mine hosted visitors from around the world, including Japanese geologists and a professor from the imperial university in Sapporo. Fire destroyed the house in 1935.

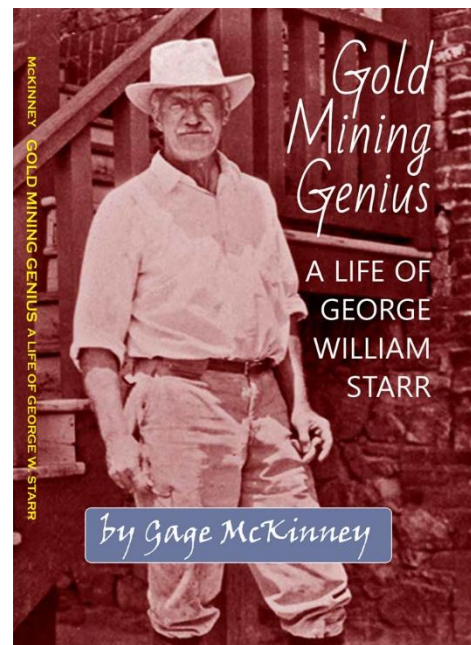
The Starrs had a close relationship with their neighbors in the Empire Cottage and North Star House. Starr was Bourn's cousin and managing director of his most important asset. He was A. D. Foote's colleague and bound to him by mutual respect. Libby Starr enjoyed teas with her neighbors, Mary and Agnes.

The Starrs were serious and also fun-loving. They especially sought the companionship of younger people and were close friends to Arthur and Mary Foote's son, Arthur B. Foote, who succeeded his father at the mine. George and young Arthur played tennis and went shooting together. They visited New Orleans and traveled through the Panama Canal. The Starrs hosted Arthur's engagement party and together they attended the

weddings of their mutual young friends. The Starrs and younger Foote's family shared holidays and other jolly occasions.

In 1911 Starr and Foote, the younger, shared a legendary adventure in the High Sierra. They raced through deep snow, driving, pushing and dragging Foote's Model T to the luxury hotel at Tahoe City, modestly called the Tahoe Tavern. Winning the race, they brought home a silver cup and were acclaimed as sportsmen in newspapers throughout the state.

My new book, *Gold Mining Genius: A Life of George W. Starr*, released this month by Comstock Bonanza Press, tells more about the bond between George and Arthur B., and describes others George Starr mentored – all brilliant, sophisticated, and highly-educated young men drawn into the orbits of three great houses.



Gold Mining Genius: A Life of George W. Starr is being released this month by Comstock Bonanza Press. It's available at The Book Seller in Grass Valley.

President's Message

By Betzi Hart

2020 has been a challenging year. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. However, the North Star Historic Conservancy remains resilient. Although our very full calendar of events for the year had to be cancelled, we are poised for a terrific 2021.



We have rescheduled 2020 speakers for our lecture series to do their presentations next year. And we plan on rolling out Friday Nite Locals concerts next year as well. Sierra Stages and Center for the Arts are interested in having outdoor events on the North Star property next year. We're looking forward to being on the Soroptimist Garden Tour, which was rescheduled from 2020 to May, 22-23 2021. We are also contemplating the feasibility of an art show and a car show for next fall.

Plans for the second floor have not been slowed by the pandemic. The draft plans are being reviewed to further assess use of the existing layout and County requirements. Some artwork for the gallery is in storage, awaiting its new home. A lot of preparation work has been done on the second floor to get ready for new construction. Check out the "Construction Update" article in this issue to learn more.

Most significantly, the pandemic has not chased our supporters away! We are proud to say that although the financials were looking bleak, our members have come through for us. Because of the continued generosity of our members, we have not had to borrow funds to keep the North Star House afloat. We are so lucky to have individuals,

organizations, and businesses that believe in our mission and want to see the North Star House be a major part of the Grass Valley Historical District!

Thank you to all of our members and volunteers for supporting us through this extremely challenging time. We have proven that we can survive and that our mission is strong. Stay safe and healthy. Betzi

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Editor's Note: If you are interested in reading any back issues of The Star, they are all posted on our website. Look for "Newsletters" under the "About" menu.
www.TheNorthStarHouse.org

Decorating an Historic Home

By Laurie Harrison-Dayton

The North Star Historic Conservancy recognizes that the interior furnishings of the House are important in conveying the House's historic character. The Conservancy's Interiors Committee focuses on acquiring furnishings that are representative of the time period and style in which the House was built and originally occupied, 1905 – 1920. Architect Julia Morgan designed the house in the Arts & Crafts style. Furniture in that style is generally defined as possessing the following characteristics:

- Clean simple lines
- Mortise and tenon joinery
- Use of multiple woods, often oak, frequently stained to a dark finish
- Leather or tapestry upholstery
- Hammered metal work, especially copper and silver
- Ironwork

The committee wants to honor, as best as it can, the tastes of Arthur and Mary Foote, for whom the home was built. Mary's letters (archived at Stanford University) and photographs of the rooms are used to learn how the Footes decorated the house.



The home had a simple, open, uncluttered feeling, which they enjoyed after living in the small, crowded cottage. The simplicity also resonated with Mary's Quaker upbringing.

In a letter to Margaret Collier Graham, Mary wrote::

"We rejoice in its spaciousness, and in the absence of things. We have put our things away, the so-called ornaments. We have adopted the Japanese idea of the 'go-down,' and only the things we really care for are around."

According to one of Mary's letters, one of the things the Foote's apparently "really cared for" was a pair of Mexican vases. Mary liked the Mexican culture and she accompanied Arthur on a mine-consulting job to Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico. We don't know if they purchased these vases on that trip. The vases can be seen in photos on the bookcase in the cottage and on the mantle of the library at the North Star House.



Mary's letters have told that she selected the Messien "Blue Onion" china pattern from a San Francisco importer. Unfortunately, we do not yet have any of this china. Donations would be greatly appreciated.

The current Interiors Committee members are Lisa Robinson (chair), Laurie Harrison-Dayton, Betzi Hart, Sherian Kutzero, Richard McRay, Carole Miller and Marrilee Shannon. The committee has a small budget to purchase items, and also assesses the appropriateness of items that are offered or donated to the House. Please contact us if you have items you are interested in donating and we'd be happy to talk to you.

admin@thenorthstarhouse.org or 530-477-7126

Construction Update

By Joan Clappier

In the December, 2019 newsletter we wrote about acquiring a load of cedar lumber which we needed to finish the interior of the first floor. Cedar is very hard to get and it took an interesting set of connections to make that happen. [Back issues of newsletters are posted on our website under “About” / “Newsletters”]

With the cedar on hand and the house shut down due to covid, the construction crew is making the best of the situation by focusing their attention on the first floor. With masks and appropriate social distancing, they have spread out to work simultaneously on restoration in the dining room, living room, library, and study ... plus ongoing shingling of the exterior and some grounds cleanup.

To protect the furniture and rugs as well as to make working downstairs more efficient, a lot of the furniture and all of the rugs were moved to second floor rooms.



Living Room without rugs or furniture

Early restoration work focused on the living room and dining room, doing significant work to restore them to the original design and elegance ... ready for public use and enjoyment. The Julia Morgan



Furniture is stored in several 2nd floor rooms

room (formerly Arthur and Mary’s bedroom) has also been restored. This room is used as the bride’s room during weddings. We are fortunate that both Arthur D. Foote and his son Arthur B. Foote were avid photographers and we have photos of some of the interior. Our volunteer craftsmen study the photos very carefully to replicate the original design.

Some of the cedar paneled walls on the first floor had the original wood – damaged but salvageable. Those panels were taken down, restored and re-installed. While the panels were down, the wiring was brought up to modern standards in the walls.

In some areas, however, the original woodwork was missing or severely damaged, so new wood was cut to integrate perfectly with the existing woodwork. Windows and doors throughout the house were smashed by vandals. As the project progresses, new doors and windows are being made in the style of the originals.

Living Room

The first pass on the living room was completed, making the room classic and comfortable. But the front area (terrace side) needed new woodwork, windows and doors. This is now completed and is looking beautiful.



The *final* corner!

Rich working in the Living Room



Note: The door from the living room to the terrace was not in the original house, but has been built in the style of other doors and windows to provide ADA access.

Dining Room

Three of the dining room walls were restored a while ago and the dining room was ready for use. With the new shipment of cedar, the room can now be finished. The end wall, with the cabinets, buffet and window, is now getting its beautification. The buffet top has been nicely refinished and new cedar doors are being made for the side cabinets and the area below the buffet, replacing the temporary curtains. Finishing touches are also being done around the top of the room.



The cabinets originally had wooden doors, which we're replicating. The five top windows will be paned like the side windows.

Note: The wooden "thing" outside the window is a chute from a 2nd floor window to a parked trailer, for dumping debris from 2nd floor cleanup.

Library

All of the original woodwork was removed by the school that bought the property. Using old photos for guidance, the room is being redone the way it originally looked. The corner bench seating next to the fireplace is already installed. There will be wood cabinetry to the right of the fireplace as in this photo. And the ceiling beams in the living room will be replicated in the library.



Library, from the time of the Footes

Work is progressing on a bookcase that will be the full width of the library, below the west window (terrace side). Mary and Arthur were both well-educated individuals and one can imagine them sitting in the warm, cozy library with a good book and a crackling fire in the fireplace. We know from family descendants that there were bookshelves and lots of books throughout the house.

This beautiful, long piece of cedar will be used for the top of the bookcase. It is seen laying on the veranda.



Ken enters a “meditative” state while sanding shelves.

Study

This room was Mary Hallock Foote’s office where she did her writing and illustrating. Her autobiography was written in this room. The study is getting a major facelift. As you can see in the picture, the walls have been stripped down to studs, new wiring is being installed, and cedar paneling is starting to be installed to match the living room and dining room. Windows and doors will be replaced as needed.



Mary’s Study gets a facelift.
New cedar paneling installation starting at doorway.

Second Floor

Much time has been spent on the second floor removing old, badly-damaged walls and floor coverings. Many trailer loads of debris have been hauled to the transfer station. That preparation gets rooms ready for the new construction.

The crew is taking advantage of the unfinished state of the second floor to pull up floorboards and run wiring to the first floor. That avoids having to open up the ceilings on the first floor, which would be a major undertaking considering the complexity of those ceilings. We’ll also be installing a sprinkler system this way.

A lot of thought and planning has gone into the wiring and ductwork so that the work being done now will support both our current and future needs.

Gallery

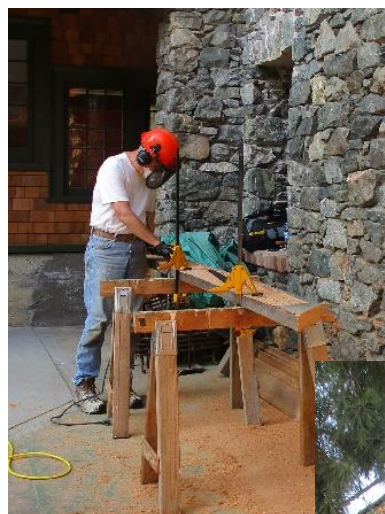
First draft gallery plans have been drawn and are under review. Some artwork is in storage, awaiting its new home.

You can see in this picture that a lot of pre-reconstruction work has been done. Wiring is visible where floorboards are removed, and some downstairs furniture is being stored here temporarily.



Gallery – a work in progress

Outside



The courtyard is often used as a workspace.

Dennis hard at work.

Roger & Val on scaffold, doing shingling



And the shingling goes on! Great progress is happening on the exterior shingling. In recent months, the north wall has been completed and the two end walls on either side of the courtyard are just about completed. Then work will begin on the south wall of the house and the SW front corner.

It is exciting to see the work being done.

We look forward to sharing it with you when we are able to open the house again.

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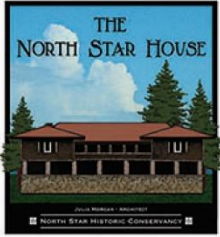
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NORTH STAR HISTORIC CONSERVANCY

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www.TheNorthStarHouse.org 530-477-7126

Our Vision is to restore the unique rural roots of Julia Morgan's North Star House as a center for exchanging ideas, nurturing the arts and fostering learning. Your support makes this possible.

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