

The Silver Sixpence

Newsletter of The Olompali People

Fall 2007

Special issue on the Burdell Garden rehabilitation project

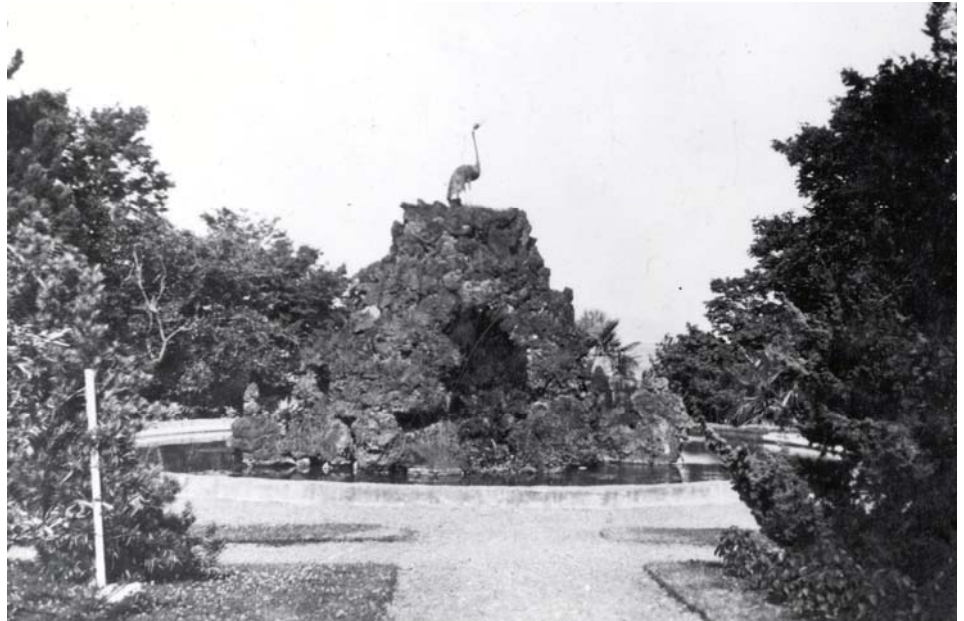
You're Invited to a special garden party

You're invited to a Mary Burdell Victorian Garden and Grounds Reception.

Historic Photographs as well as the Rehabilitation Plan and Preliminary Site Plan to scale for the Mary Burdell Victorian Garden and Grounds Rehabilitation Project will be on display at Olompali State Historic Park Thursday, November 15th from 4 to 6 p.m.

Please take this opportunity to attend and take a 4 p.m. garden tour then study at length the to scale plans that will be on display in the park's visitor center.

Project team members will be on hand to answer questions and take comments.



Mary Burdell's garden during its heyday in the late 1800s

Olompali lands big planning grant in move to restore Victorian garden

What is the CCHE?

The California Culture and Historical Endowment was established in 2004 to fund projects through a competitive grant process to tell the stories of California as a unified society and of the many groups of people that together comprise historic and modern California. Funding for the Capital Projects is from voter-approved bonds from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002, more commonly known as Proposition 40. It called for a program for the "acquisition, development, preservation, and interpretation of buildings, structures, sites, places, and artifacts that preserve and demonstrate culturally significant aspects of California's history and for grants for these purposes.

In 2006 The Olompali People successfully applied for a \$100,800 planning grant from the California Culture and Historical Endowment (CCHE) for the planning and construction documents for the Mary Burdell Victorian Garden and Grounds Rehabilitation Project at Olompali State Historic Park.

This successful planning grant application transitioned from a reservation of funding to a signed agreement in April of this year when work could commence on this important project to create the planning and construction documents for the garden and grounds rehabilitation.

The project team, led by PGA design, Inc., has completed site review of the ranch buildings, grounds and garden, the historical research and survey information. Because Olompali State Historic Park is not only a California

Historic Landmark but is also on the National Register of Historic Places, the team delivered an analysis of the significance of the site, its contributing elements, and examined its integrity using National Register criteria. Additionally, they submitted a Mary Burdell Garden and Grounds Landscape Treatment Plan document that provides information on developing treatments for the site using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the treatment of historical properties with guidelines for cultural landscapes. They also prepared and developed a Preliminary Site Plan to scale. Next steps include Master Planning/Design Development and Construction Drawings.

Once this CCHE Planning Grant is completed, The Olompali People will work to secure the necessary grant funding for the actual construction.



Burdell Gardens and Grounds Rehabilitation Plan

PGA Design, 2007

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CREEK 2. RUIN OF STUCCO MANSION 3. WOOD FRAME HOUSE CONVERTED TO OFFICES FOR STATE PARKS. PROVIDE PARKING FOR 2 STATE PARKS VEHICLES ON NORTH SIDE 4. REINSTATE GLASS CONSERVATORY 5. RESTORE STONE FOUNTAIN AND GROTTTO AND CONTOURS OF ITS CIRCULAR TERRACE 6. RESTORE ORNAMENTAL STONE ROCKERY (WATER TRICKLES OVER ROCKS) AND RESTORE CONTOURS AT CIRCULAR TERRACE 7. WATER LILY POND, CONCRETE LINED. RESTORE BASIN 8. HISTORIC GRAVEL ENTRY DRIVE FROM PARKING AREA AND RT. 101 9. GRAVEL DRIVES WITHIN FARM COMPLEX 10. PRESERVE STONE STAIR FROM DRIVE TO GARDEN 11. REINSTATE 2 WOOD STAIRS; AXIALLY ARRANGED AT STONE GROTTTO FOUNTAIN. 12. RESTORE CONTOURS OF SLOPE FROM DRIVE LEVEL TO GARDEN LEVEL 13. RESTORE GRAVEL PATHS. SEE NOTES. 14. RESTORE ROCK RUBBLE BATTERED WALL RETAINING SLOPE 15. REINSTATE WHITE GAZEBO THAT TERMINATES AXIAL PATH 16. ORNAMENTAL TREES WITHIN NORTH GARDEN AREA, SUPPLEMENT EXISTING TREES WITH SOUTHERN MAGNOLIAS 17. RETAIN EXISTING ELM TREES THAT DEFINE EAST EDGE OF THE GARDEN. ADD DECIDUOUS TREES WITH RANGE OF FORMS ON NORTH AND EAST SIDE OF GARDEN (WEEPING WILLOW, CHESTNUT, ELM). 18. RETAIN EXISTING PALMS 19. ORNAMENTAL SHRUBS, DOMINATED BY CONIFERS, PARALLEL | <p>AND ON EAST SIDE OF THE MAIN AXIAL PATH.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. SPECIMEN SHRUBS AND PALMS IN LAWN 21. SPECIMEN SHRUBS IN GARDEN BEDS 22. GROVE OF SMALL PALMS; BANANA 23. BEDDING PLANTS 24. RETAIN EXISTING GROVE OF MYRTLE (<i>MYRTUS</i>) TREES 25. RETAIN AND SUPPLEMENT EXISTING BOTTLEBRUSH (<i>CALLISTEMON</i>) TREES 26. RESTORE POMEGRANATE HEDGE ALONG DRIVE 27. HEDGE ENCLOSES ORNAMENTAL STONE ROCKERY. 28. SERPENTINE HEDGE AT LILY POND AREA 29. REPLACE SAGO PALM (<i>CYCAS REVOLUTA</i>) ON NORTH SIDE OF HOUSE WITH CLONE OF EXISTING CYCAS. 30. IRRIGATED LAWN, LIMITED TO FOCAL AREAS OF THE GARDEN (WEST SIDE OF VICTORIAN GARDEN, WEST SIDE OF CENTRAL DRIVE AT EARLY 20TH CENTURY GARDEN). 31. REINSTATE FLAGPOLE 32. RESTORE CONTOURS OF GRADED SLOPE BETWEEN CONSERVATORY AND GRADED LEVEL AREA. 33. RONDEL OF ORNAMENTAL BEDDING PLANTS IN OPEN LAWN AREA 34. CITRUS TREES 35. HEDGE ENCLOSES GARDEN UTILITY AREA 36. WOOD STEPS 37. ORNAMENTAL SHRUB AND PERENNIAL PLANTING (ROSES, LILIES). 38. PROTECT REMNANT BAY TREE, ADD NEW BAY TREE IMMEDIATELY NORTH OF EXISTING BAY 39. RELOCATE PETROGLYPHS THAT WERE PLACED IN THE GARDEN IN RECENT YEARS |
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Olompali's significance lies in 8,000 years of human history

Listed as California Historic Landmark #210 in 1932, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, and designated a Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) project site in 2005, Olompali's significance lies in its preservation of 8,000 years of continuous human history.

The Olompali People (TOP) works in partnership with California State Parks to preserve and interpret Olompali State Historic Park. The Olompali People funded the park's General Plan as a gift to the people of California in 1988, and since then TOP has actively worked with California State Parks to insure completion of the restoration

and interpretive projects and programs dictated by this document.

Particularly critical is the interpretive program development of Olompali's natural and cultural histories.

TOP's future purpose and goals also include the construction phase of the Mary Burdell Victorian Garden rehabilitation, support of the Historic American Landscape Survey documentation of Olompali's 8,000 year human history, and the restoration of the historic buildings at the park.

Significant and unique are Olompali's pre-history of Native American habitation as a trading and manufacturing village; its Rancho Olompali

Mexican land grant era, 1820s through 1850s; the Burdell period as a Euro American landscape garden and grounds, as they existed from the late 1800s through the 1940s; and its 20th century incarnations as an entrepreneur's estate, Jesuit retreat, and hippie commune that was frequented by the Grateful Dead rock band.

Olompali's garden and grounds are major elements representing the Burdell period (1860s to 1940s) and when restored can tell the story of the "flow of history" reflecting changes in human culture and land use that occurred in the Victorian to Modern eras.

Mary's garden augments Olompali's National Register Listing

Excerpt from Statement of Significance—Mary Burdell Victorian Garden at Olompali State Historic Park

By Carol Roland Nawi, Ph.D.

The Burdell Victorian Garden is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C, as an example of a formal Victorian garden design. It represents the distinctive characteristics and aesthetics advocated by garden designers and horticulturists of the period 1850-1890 such as Andrew Jackson Downing and was one of the earlier gardens of this type to be designed in the Bay Area.

The garden was developed under the direction of Mary Black Burdell, the owner of Rancho Olompali. In the 19th century the garden and its adjacent residential complex lay at the heart of an 8,800 acre agricultural property which is now an expansive 760 acre State Historic Park.

Olompali was representative of the Bay Area estates developed by many wealthy Californians in the late 19th century which generally exhibited a residential "core" with a main house, auxiliary buildings, a wide entry path, and formal landscaping. These estates were surrounded by working agricultural land that often included orchards, pasturage and vineyards. The period of significance is 1866-1874, the period in which the garden was constructed, and 1911, the year that Mary Burdell's son, James, constructed a new house and made alterations to the original garden.



Mary Burdell

While a number of formal Victorian gardens were developed in the Bay Area in the late 19th century, very few remain. Factors ranging from cost and labor intensiveness to dramatic changes in taste resulted in many of these designed landscapes either being removed or so substantially altered that their Victorian design aesthetic has been completely lost. Although Olompali has become naturalized over a number of years, the design and planting patterns of the garden continue to be discernable and it retains

many of its major architectural features and substantial elements of its plant palate.

Unfortunately no papers have survived in the form of letter, diaries, or daybooks that provide written documentation regarding the Olompali garden. Although its physical layout and development have been very well documented in photographs, we know little about the personal motivation, inspirations, or horticultural knowledge that guided Burdell. We also know little in regard to any professional help Burdell may have had in designing her garden. It is clear that a garden of the size and complexity of the one at Olompali required a substantial staff of gardeners working under knowledgeable supervision. A well-educated woman, Mary Burdell may have gained information from the many publications of the times. She certainly had access to a wide range of nurseries, trained nurserymen and public gardens in the Bay Area. Given her social status, she was no doubt familiar with the San Francisco gardens of the city's elite and may well have known about or visited some of the private estates in Marin and the Peninsula. We know that she was friends with Mercedes Call who maintained a less formal, but substantial garden at Fort Ross. Maria Sweetser, the friend with whom she traveled to Japan in 1874 also maintained a specimen garden. Whatever her immediate influences, the garden at Olompali stands as a testament to Burdell's sophistication, taste, and awareness of

(Continued on page 4)

Why Victorian garden is significant for the National Register

(Continued from page 3)

Victorian garden philosophy and aesthetics.

Mary Black Burdell owned the Rancho Olompali from 1863 until her death in 1900. The major elements of the garden were constructed between 1866 and 1874 and embody the essential design characteristics of the international Victorian garden and exemplify its development in California in the late 19th century. Although now subject to invasive trees and other plants growth, it retains important elements of its original design. The garden at Olompali remains one of the few examples of this type of garden that has survived in the Bay Area and California.

Mary Black was born into a wealthy Anglo/Californio family in 1845. Her father, James Black, Jr. had been put off ship in Monterey in 1832 to recover from typhoid fever. Following his recovery, Black, took up residence in Marin County in 1834, where he benefited from Mariano Vallejo's efforts to stave off the Russian penetration of the Northern California coast in the 1840s. Black was the largest landholder in Marin at the time of his death in 1870. As a part of his vast holdings he purchased the Rancho Olompali in 1852. The rancho had originally been granted to Camilo Ynitia, one of the only Native Californians to secure a land grant from the Mexican government. In addition to agricultural land, Black's purchase included Ynitia's adobe house and other improvements, as well as the remains of one of the largest Native American villages in the Marin area.

Mary Black led the life of the privileged daughter of an upper class family of substantial wealth. She was educated at boarding school in San Jose, and at eighteen, married Galen Burdell, the first dentist to practice in San Francisco. As a wedding present in 1863, James Black gave his daughter the Rancho Olompali.

In 1866 the Burdell's moved to Olompali. They constructed a house which enclosed Camilo Ynitia's adobe within a wood clad frame and created a substantial second-story frame addition to the rear of the existing house. Although a comfortable size, the house might best be described as an unpretentious picturesque country dwelling of the type recommended by Andrew Jackson Downing in his *Architecture of*

Country Houses, (1851). Galen Burdell left his dental practice and occupied himself full-time with the management of the ranch and with his many horticultural interests.

It is not clear precisely when Mary Burdell began to develop her garden, although those appears to have been completed by 1870, and photographs circa that date indicate that the garden was well underway by this time. It seems most likely that landscaping around the house and plans for the garden were begun in the late 1860s and that formal garden continued to be elaborated into the mid-1870s following Mary Burdell's trip to Japan. The year 1874, in which the garden was extensively photographed, appears to have represented a "culmination" of sorts in which the garden took on the form that it more-or-less maintained until late in Mary Burdell's life.

The garden and the residential compound form a single unified entity that was visually and functionally related. The ornamental garden was sited to the east of the main house with the entry and views from the front windows and porch oriented to the garden. Consistent with the tenets of Victorian landscape design, the entry drive culminated at the front of the house which had a large inviting porch suitable for sitting and entertaining. To the south of the house was an open graded and terraced area that contained the more utilitarian garden spaces, including a large glass house and a "field" used for the growing of vegetables. A kitchen herb garden also was located on the south side of the house.

The formal ornamental garden was bounded by Burdell Creek and the 19th century entry road on the north, by the main drive in front of the house on the west and by an extensive pomegranate hedge that extended beyond the garden to border the terraced area of the vege-

table garden and glass house. This hedge functioned to tie the ornamental and the utilitarian portions of the garden together and outlined the circulation path that led around the south side of the formal garden and provided access to the conservatory and large farm building at the rear of the residential complex. On the east the border of the garden was less finite, distinguished by an informal line of border trees that separated the garden from the Petaluma River marsh, which Galen Burdell reclaimed into agricultural production in the 1870s.

The ornamental garden exhibited all the defining features of a Victorian garden. It was approximately 300 X 150 feet, organized along an axial path running north-south. A number of smaller curvilinear paths radiated off of this central axis, leading the visitor to wander among specimen plantings, both individual examples and groupings of plants, and to architectural features that provided focal or destination points within the garden. Although there were several paths, the primary pattern consisted of two large roughly circular paths that moved around the major and minor rockeries. A third smaller circle encompasses the pond in the southeast corner of the garden. The paths were graveled and may have been edged with brick. The central path was slightly wider than the curved paths. At the north end of the garden the path commenced at a gazebo and ended at the smaller of two rockeries to the south.

A terrace ran along the western and southern boundaries of the formal garden. This engineered slope dropped from the level of the road and house to the level of the garden, approximately four feet. This slope was covered with grass. There were two access points from the road down the terrace; one just slightly north of the entry portico of the house and one across from the lawn to the south of the house. By 1874 a formal stair was sited at each location. Terracing was also present around the two rockeries. A common device in the Victorian garden, the sloping terrace, in addition to delineating the boundary of the formal garden, enhanced the vistas from the house.

Mary Burdell's Victorian garden at Olompali State Historic Park remains one of the only surviving examples of the gardens of the 1870 period in the Bay Area and California.

The Silver Sixpence is published by The Olompali People, P.O. Box 1400, Novato, CA 94948. For more information call 415-892-3383.

The Olompali People is the nonprofit support organization of Olompali State Historic Park, and is a committee of the Marin State Park Association.