

Wisteria Cottage

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La Jolla Historical Society
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<https://lajollahistory.org/>
2023

Descriptive Summary

Title: Wisteria Cottage

Dates: 1921 - Present

Collection Number: RG005.61

Creator/Collector: La Jolla Historical Society

Extent: .5 linear feet

Repository: La Jolla Historical Society, La Jolla, California 92037

Abstract: The Wisteria Cottage Collection is made up of archival material, photographs and ephemera pertaining to the La Jolla Historical Society's Wisteria Cottage Historic Landmark. Located on the corner of Prospect Street and Eads Avenue in the heart of the Scripps/Gill Cultural District, Wisteria Cottage is by far the most prominent of the La Jolla Historical Society's facilities. Outstanding for its proximity to the ocean, rich architectural roots, and significance of past ownership and residents, Wisteria Cottage is one of La Jolla's most distinguishing structures. Wisteria, named for the wisteria-covered pergola in front of the entry, was built in 1904 by George B. and Edith M. Seaman, who relocated to La Jolla from Alameda, California. The Seamans owned the property only briefly before deeding it to a son whose ownership was also abbreviated. It was then sold to E. Virginia Scripps, half-sister of beloved La Jolla philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps. With this transfer, the Cottage began its long-standing association with the community as a historical landmark. Known for her generosity as much as her eccentricity, Virginia Scripps first offered the Cottage as a temporary home for the St. James by-the-Sea Episcopal Church from 1906-08 until the church could be relocated to its present site across the street on land she donated. During that time she also commissioned acclaimed architect Irving Gill to design an addition, completed in 1909, which added to the property's value a grand total of \$1,375! Although Gill's name is not specifically tied to the original cottage, the architecture is reminiscent of the craftsman style that characterized his early years before he turned to more modern veins in the La Jolla cultural center, in buildings such as the Recreation Center and Woman's Club. The original cottage and addition retains its historic character: a wood-framed house with a pitched hip roof. Gill's addition and remodel included enclosing a front porch on either side to create, in the architect's terms, a loggia, making the basement into living quarters and adding the trademark pergola. The final distinctive feature of Wisteria is the cobblestone masonry foundation, a detail repeated in the smaller cobblestone wall about a foot tall around the entire property line. In its hundred-plus year history, Wisteria Cottage has experienced a number of uses, all important to the cultural and educational life of the community. Although Virginia Scripps never used it as a private residence, her guests who visited La Jolla often occupied the house for long intervals. They included the naturalist John Burroughs who spent the winter of 1920-21 in residence. After Virginia Scripps' death, ownership of the property passed to her niece, Dolla, who lived there until 1942 when title went to Ellen Revelle, a member of the Scripps family and wife of University of California, San Diego founder Roger Revelle. The cottage then became the Balmer School, predecessor of the current-day La Jolla Country Day School. After the school relocated, Wisteria Cottage began a long period of tenure ship as a bookstore. From 1961-66 it was the Nexus Bookstore and from 1966 to 2005, the John Cole's Book Store. As John Cole's it became a landmark noted for book signings and visits by famous personalities, including actor Charles Laughton (who loved to sit in the attic and read) and Theodor Geisel/Dr. Seuss (the La Jolla children's' book author who lived just up the hill). It was during this time that the cottage was designated Historic Site No. 166 by the City of San Diego. With owner Barbara Cole's death in 2005, Wisteria Cottage began a whole new era of history – devoted to history. The La Jolla Historical Society signed a ten-year lease with the Revelle family with plans to renovate the cottage and surrounding gardens for use as a museum, gift shop, education center, and archival storage,

eventually being donated to the LJHS permanently. This material pertains to the history and heritage of La Jolla, California; its people, places and events. A container list is included on the PDF and HTML versions.

Language of Material: English

Access: The Collection is open for research

Publication Rights: The La Jolla Historical Society holds the copyright to any unpublished materials

Preferred Citation: Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society

Acquisition Information: RG005.61

Biography/Administrative History: The La Jolla Historical Society inspires and empowers the community to make La Jolla's diverse past a relevant part of contemporary life.

The La Jolla Historical Society's Collections encompass over 80 years of actively collecting archival material, books, maps, scrapbooks, ephemera, fine art, newspapers, street and land use files, business and personal documents and historic and archaeological artifacts. The Society boasts over 20,000 photographs, over 1000 postcards, 400-plus architectural drawings and approximately 200 oral history recordings.

Collecting was initiated by Howard Randolph and volunteers on the historical committee of the Library Association of La Jolla. The Collection began by gathering photographs and documentation in the late 1930s, which later became the nucleus of the La Jolla Historical Society's Collections. The Society was created in 1963.

Through many moves in location the Society continued collecting and expanding. Accumulated Collections took on its current construct in 2010 after the renovation of the La Jolla Historical Society's campus of structures in central La Jolla, which consists of the 1904 Wisteria Cottage and 1940s Balmer Annex used for exhibits and programming, and a 1909 cottage used for business and research offices. The late Ellen Browning Scripps' 1916 automobile garage was also renovated and now houses the Collection in a modern collections storage facility. Materials are housed in archival boxes, sleeves, envelopes and other archival-safe materials and are cared for according to standards and best practices of the museum profession. In 2016, the Society initiated new PastPerfect Museum Software to manage and catalog its Collections and in 2018 started using the Online Archive of California to upload searchable information from its Collections to enable improved public access. The Society will continue these processes and look forward to utilizing new opportunities to collect, preserve and share the history of La Jolla.

Scope and Content of Collection: The Wisteria Cottage Collection is made up of archival material, photographs and ephemera pertaining to the La Jolla Historical Society's Wisteria Cottage Historic Landmark. Located on the corner of Prospect Street and Eads Avenue in the heart of the Scripps/Gill Cultural District, Wisteria Cottage is by far the most prominent of the La Jolla Historical Society's facilities. Outstanding for its proximity to the ocean, rich architectural roots, and significance of past ownership and residents, Wisteria Cottage is one of La Jolla's most distinguishing structures. Wisteria, named for the wisteria-covered pergola in front of the entry, was built in 1904 by George B. and Edith M. Seaman, who relocated to

La Jolla from Alameda, California. The Seamans owned the property only briefly before deeding it to a son whose ownership was also abbreviated. It was then sold to E. Virginia Scripps, half-sister of beloved La Jolla philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps. With this transfer, the Cottage began its long-standing association with the community as a historical landmark. Known for her generosity as much as her eccentricity, Virginia Scripps first offered the Cottage as a temporary home for the St. James by-the-Sea Episcopal Church from 1906-08 until the church could be relocated to its present site across the street on land she donated. During that time she also commissioned acclaimed architect Irving Gill to design an addition, completed in 1909, which added to the property's value a grand total of \$1,375! Although Gill's name is not specifically tied to the original cottage, the architecture is reminiscent of the craftsman style that characterized his early years before he turned to more modern veins in the La Jolla cultural center, in buildings such as the Recreation Center and Woman's Club. The original cottage and addition retains its historic character: a wood-framed house with a pitched hip roof. Gill's addition and remodel included enclosing a front porch on either side to create, in the architect's terms, a loggia, making the basement into living quarters and adding the trademark pergola. The final distinctive feature of Wisteria is the cobblestone masonry foundation, a detail repeated in the smaller cobblestone wall about a foot tall around the entire property line. In its hundred-plus year history, Wisteria Cottage has experienced a number of uses, all important to the cultural and educational life of the community. Although Virginia Scripps never used it as a private residence, her guests who visited La Jolla often occupied the house for long intervals. They included the naturalist John Burroughs who spent the winter of 1920-21 in residence. After Virginia Scripps' death, ownership of the property passed to her niece, Dolla, who lived there until 1942 when title went to Ellen Revelle, a member of the Scripps family and wife of University of California, San Diego founder Roger Revelle. The cottage then became the Balmer

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Container List Below

CONTAINER LIST

RG005 – Subject Files Collection (Large) Box 61 – Wisteria Cottage

Photographs

Photograph (color). Depicts Wisteria Cottage's front façade painted light blue and yellow, looking west. ca. 2006.

Series of photographs (21, color, mounted on 8 pages). Depict Wisteria Cottage as John Cole's Book Shop from various angles all around the cottage. 1981.

Series of photographs (55, color). Depict Wisteria Cottage's interior shortly after John Cole's Book Shop was closed. Photos feature empty bookshelves and the vacant interior. "April 5, 2005."

Photograph (2 copies). Depicts Wisteria Cottage's front entrance and pergola, looking northwest. Before 1942.

Photograph (photocopy). Depicts Virginia Scripps standing on the sidewalk in front of Wisteria Cottage, looking north. Before 1921.

Series of photographs (12, photocopies). Depict the cottage's exterior from various angles during its occupancy by John Cole's Book Shop. "January 26, 1975."

Newspaper Articles

Newspaper article. "Wisteria Cottage preservation ensured by Revelle donation." *La Jolla Light*. 1981.

Press release (4 pages). "News Release." Re: Donation of conservation, façade, and scenic easements to the Save Our Heritage Association by the Revelle family to conserve Wisteria Cottage. *Save Our Heritage Organization*. ca. December 24, 1981.

Press release. "News Release." Re: Acceptance of scenic and façade easements by the Save Our Heritage Association from the Revelle family to conserve Wisteria Cottage. *Save Our Heritage Organization*. December 31, 1981.

Newspaper article (3 pages). "Revelle family donates Wisteria Cottage to the La Jolla Historical Society." *La Jolla Light*. July 25, 2008.

Newspaper article. "New life for an old cottage." *San Diego Union-Tribune*. October 8, 2006.

Newspaper article. "History in a Book Shop; La Jolla Wisteria Cottage – a Repository of Culture." *Los Angeles Times*. April 3, 1985.

Historical Designation & Easements

Nomination form (13 sheets). "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form." *US Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service*. November 1978.

Study (4 sheets, 2 copies). "The Wisteria Cottage." Re: Historical study undergone for the cottage's historic site designation.

Letter (2 sheets). From Gary Clyde Hufbauer to Alison Royle. Re: Royle photographing Wisteria Cottage for an "'essay' on the Wisteria site." October 27, 1981.

Memorandum (8 sheets). From Gary Clyde Hufbauer to "Persons Concerned with Wisteria Cottage." Re: Revised Easement. October 27, 1981.

Document (19 sheets, photocopies). "Grant of Conservation Easement, Architectural Façade Easement, Scenic Easement and Easement for Light and Air." From Roger Revelle, Ellen Revelle, and Mary Revelle Paci to the Save Our Heritage Society. December 22, 1981.

Nomination form (21 sheets). "City of San Diego Historical Site Board Register." Re: Application for Wisteria Cottage's historic designation, including an extensive history of the property. August 23, 1982.

La Jolla Historical Society Acquisition

Program document. "Program Document For Wisteria Cottage, La Jolla Historical Society Cottage, Carriage House." Plans for the renovation of Wisteria Cottage and adjacent carriage house and cottage for use by the La Jolla Historical Society. *Zagrodnik + Thomas Architects*. May 11, 2006.

Architectural plans (4 sheets, 3 copies). "Project: La Jolla Historical Society." Re: Converting the cottage's carriage house into archival space for the La Jolla Historical Society. August 31, 2009.

Document (5 sheets). "Capital Campaign Training Module: Making the Ask." *La Jolla Historical Society*. July 10, 2006.

Series of architectural drawings (10, photocopies). Floor plans and elevations of Wisteria Cottage.

Rehabilitation Document

Document (145 sheets). "Wisteria Cottage Rehabilitation." *La Jolla Historical Society*. October 12, 2007.

Miscellaneous

Webpage printout (2 copies). "History of Our Buildings. About Historic Wisteria Cottage." *La Jolla's Community Site*. Accessed October 20, 2009.

Yearbook (20 sheets). "La Jolla Country Day School, 1960."

Booklet (4 copies). "Historic Wisteria Cottage of La Jolla." *La Jolla Historical Society*. ca. 2006.

Not in folders

Booklet. "Renovation of Wisteria Cottage and Campus Planning Chronology." *La Jolla Historical Society*. April 10, 2009.

Booklet. "Wisteria Cottage - Side Door Restoration." *Grunow Construction*. October 11, 2011.

CONTAINER LIST

Booklet. "Procedures for Determining the Historical Significance of a House and the Expected Actions of the Historicity Committee." *La Jolla Historical Society*.
