

Sherman-Gilbert House
Heritage Park
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1967

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SHERMAN-GILBERT HOUSE

HABS No. CA-1967

Location: Heritage Park, (Juan and Harney Streets), San Diego, San Diego County, California.

Present Owner: County of San Diego.

Present Occupant: County of San Diego.

Present Use: Headquarters for the County Park and Recreation Department.

Significance: The Sherman-Gilbert House is a unique example of the Stick style, a late 19th century American architectural style. The Gilbert family, prominent San Diegans, was energetic in establishing early cultural activities in San Diego and entertaining many famous visitors as house guests.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The property was originally part of Horton's Addition, all owned by Alonzo Horton. In January of 1886 Horton sold lots J, K and L to a Mr. Jenkins for \$1,500. Jenkins then sold the same land to Joseph Smith, who waited a half year and then sold the property to Gilman Smith for \$3,000. In the spring of 1887, Gilman Smith sold Lots J, K and L in Block 224 to George Patton for \$7,000, who sold the holdings to John Sherman for \$9,500 in the autumn of the same year. A house was erected between the fall of 1887 and the new year of 1889 at a probable cost of \$20,000. The Shermans lived in the house only a short while. In February of 1889 they sold it to W. E. Allis for \$15,000, which was at a loss because of the depression the country was in. Mr. Allis rented the house in 1891 for \$50 per month. In 1897 Mrs. Augusta E. Gilbert acquired the house, and the property remained in the Gilbert family until 1965, when their daughter Bess Gilbert died.

Louie Pauletto, an Escondido contractor, purchased the house and kept it rented until it was purchased by SOHO. In 1969, SOHO (Save Our Heritage Organization) formed a task force to raise money (an estimated moving and restoration cost of \$35,000) and to find a site on which to move it. (The Gilbert House was to be torn down for a parking lot adjoining a convalescent hospital.) The Sherman-Gilbert House was moved to Heritage Park in 1971 and restored as offices for the County of San Diego, Park and Recreation Department in 1974. The actual moving and restoration costs were \$96,500, instead of the estimated \$35,000.

2. Date of erection: Between the fall of 1887 and 1889.

3. Architect: Attributed to Comstock and Trotsche of San Diego, who constructed many of the finest buildings in San Diego. Among these are the Pierce-Morse Block; Morse, Whaley and Dalton; the residences of Jesse Sheppard and Mr. Ralph Wright; the Southwest Institute; the new South Pacific Hotel at Oceanside; Carlsbad Hotel; San Marcos Hotel; the Bank Buildings at Oceanside, Escondido and Elsinore; the Coronado School house, and many others.
4. Builder: Comstock and Trotsche, San Diego.
5. Alterations and additions: The Sherman-Gilbert house has remained as it was originally built with moderate alterations. Electric lighting and bathrooms were installed around 1900. There was an addition of a sun room around 1920. Removal of supports and canopy on widow's walk in the 1940s due to required lighting of structures in aircraft flight pattern. It is the only known authentic widow's walk in San Diego.

B. Historical Events and Persons:

Alfred H. Gilbert established himself in the lumber business and was active in civic and community affairs in San Diego before his death in 1879 at the age of 46. Mr. Gilbert left his wife and three small children; Carrie Gertrude, Alfred, Jr., and Bess. Mrs. Augusta Gilbert bought the house in 1897 for herself and her children. Having to provide income for her family, she erected the first three-story brick building in San Diego, the Gilbert Block, in 1885.

Many pleasant events occurred in the Gilbert House. Gertrude Gilbert studied voice and piano in Chicago and Berlin. She did not continue to pursue her musical career very long after returning to San Diego. Instead she became deeply involved in the Amphion Club and served as president for almost 40 years. The Amphion Club's purpose was to educate the members and elevate the musical tastes of the community. Some of the club's activities brought many famous artists to San Diego. Miss Gilbert often met the artist whom the club had engaged when he arrived in town and would take him on a tour of San Diego and invite him to her home. Some of the artists who visited Miss Gilbert were Harold Bauer, pianist; Pavlova the great Russian dancer; Will Rogers; Arturo Rubenstein; Marian Anderson, the contralto; Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink; and many others.

Miss Gilbert's artistic background led her into many other important positions in the community. She was in charge of music for the 1915 Exposition. During the 1935 Exposition, she was on the Women's Executive Board and was also chosen Chairman of Music and Entertainment for the House of Hospitality. She also helped to save the Exposition Buildings in Balboa Park, which were condemned to be torn down in 1933. After her death in 1947, Bess, Gertrude Gilbert's younger sister, continued to live in the house.

Bess was also artistically talented, and was a pianist as well as a landscape artist. Her pictures cover many aspects of local interest, such as scenes in Balboa Park, the commercial activity on the waterfront, a ruined adobe building, and views of San Diego's back country. Bess Gilbert also actively participated in the cultural organizations of San Diego and served on several boards. She continued to live in the house until her death in 1965.

SOHO (Save Our Heritage Organization), a non-profit organization, took up the banner to save the Gilbert House from demolition for a parking lot. Many social events were sponsored by SOHO to raise enough money to move the house. Additional funds for renovation were secured from the Housing and Urban Development program of the Federal Government. In May 1971, the Sherman-Gilbert House was moved to Heritage Park.

C. Sources of Information:

San Diego Historical Site Board Files-San Diego Historical Site #8.

San Diego Library Files (California Room).

Newspaper clippings.

Gilbert House Report by Sylvania S. Smiley.

Prepared by: Mary Ward
August 7, 1969