

1270 HILLCREST AVENUE

PASADENA

Style: Monterey Revival

Year Completed: 1939

Architect: Jonathan Ring, South Pasadena. Little information could be found about Ring in local libraries. During the late 1930s he was living at 1611 Marengo Avenue in South Pasadena with his wife Sylvia. In the earlier years of that decade he seemed to specialize in quite formal Colonial Revival houses, often in association with architect Cabell Gwathmey. Later, Ring showed more experimentation in other types of revival design and began to include elements of the emerging California Ranch style in his work. Examples of his designs were featured in several issues of *The Architectural Digest* in the early 1930s. All the examples were built in the local area, including Pasadena, South Pasadena, San Marino, and Los Angeles.

Builder: J. Pierre & Son, San Marino. This building contractor company, founded by Joseph Pierre, was well-known for its quality work--in fact, a "Pierre-built" home was a mark of quality. The son, August Pierre, served as the firm's designer. Pierre & Son first appears in the 1930 city directories and was located in Alhambra at that time. Unfortunately, little information about the firm was discovered in local libraries and archives.

August Pierre lived with his wife Elsie at 1317 Oxford Road, in San Marino, where they remained until 1941. Joseph Pierre lived with his wife Sidonie at 1146 Oxford Road, San Marino, but had moved elsewhere by 1937.

First Owners: William D. and Maude C. Murphy. Mr. Murphy had come to Pasadena for his health in 1905, after a career as a lighting company executive. He built a house at 1299 Hillcrest and lived there for thirty years before building his new home at 1270 Hillcrest. Mr. Murphy was both an outdoors-man and a student of literature. His gun collection was said to be one of the best in the country. Both Mr. Murphy and his wife were active in social circles. Mrs. Murphy

served on the boards of a number of charitable and civic groups. Please see the attached biographical material for more detail on the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Murphy.

Nels M. Jensen, a gardener, and his wife Christiana also lived on the property, probably in the residential space in the garage.

Cost To Build: \$22,000 total--a sizeable amount of money in 1939.

Original Building Permit: #1873H, issued on March 20, 1939 for a two-story dwelling that was to measure 84.5 by 49 feet and was to be 36 feet at its highest point. It was to have a concrete foundation, frame walls, steel and wood joists, a shingled roof, a brick chimney and a marble fireplace.

A separate permit, #1765H, had been issued on February 1, 1939 for the foundations of the house and the garage.

Copies of both these permits are attached.

Other Building Permits On File: The house has remained remarkably unchanged since it was first constructed. The only permits on file with the city are for two re-roofing jobs, one for the house in 1965 and another for the garage in 1985.

Assessor's Records: The Pasadena City Assessor first visited the property on September 30, 1939 and found a newly-constructed single two-story residence and garage. The house had a concrete foundation reinforced with steel beams, plaster walls, and a hipped shingled roof. Heat was provided by two fireplaces and a gas furnace with 29 registers. There were 25 plumbing fixtures. Windows were made of steel sash. The Assessor estimated the square footage at 7,506. On the first floor were four living rooms, a kitchen, a storage room, a toilet room, a laundry room, and a pantry. The second floor had seven bedrooms, four bathrooms (three of which were fully tiled), and a storage room. There were hardwood floors throughout the house. The Assessor also mentioned that the interior had been framed for a future elevator. The basement totaled 1,250 square feet, which included a gun-room under the rear terrace.

The Assessor also noted that there were living quarters under the garage, which consisted of a bedroom, bathroom, and tool room. Like the house, the garage also had a concrete foundation and a hipped shingled roof. It had four plumbing fixtures, cement floors, and a finished plastered interior.

Copies of the Assessor's records are attached.

Other Owners and Residents: Mr. Murphy was able to enjoy his new home for only just over two years, as he died in May 1941 at the age of 72. His widow went to live at the Huntington Hotel. By 1942, Charles O. and Helen W. Chandler were residing in the old Murphy home. Mr.

Chandler was a lawyer.

By 1951, Lynn Allen Smith and his wife Mary McKenna Smith had purchased the property. Mr. Smith was the owner of PICCO, Inc., an aircraft metal-castings firm located at 335 South Raymond Avenue in Pasadena. He also served as President of the Annandale Golf Club, and was known for his philanthropic activities. Please see the attached obituary, published upon his death in 1991.

Notes: The Murphy house replaced an older home that had been on the property since 1911. This 2-story, 15-room house had been built for an astounding (for its day) \$15,000 by the Los Angeles contracting firm of French & Rossiter for Alexander (Alex) M. and Florence W. Drake. It is speculated that Mr. Murphy, who lived nearby at the time, disliked the rather florid style of this old house and jumped at the opportunity of demolishing it in 1938, after Mr. Drake died! A copy of the demolition permit is attached.

A photograph of the original house, that appeared in the 1913 Tournament of Roses souvenir program, is attached. The Oriental-style stone lanterns at the driveway entrance remained in place long after the new house had been built.

The City Assessor commented that the garage for the new house was actually the old garage that had been remodeled.

Significance: This property is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources due to its contribution to the historical and architectural significance of the Oak Knoll neighborhood. The neighborhood itself is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources:

City of Pasadena, Planning Dept., Design & Historic Preservation Section (Archives)
Pasadena Public Library (Centennial Room)
Pasadena Historical Museum (Library & Archives)

Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. *Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide*.
Salt Lake City, Gibbs-Smith, 1994.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*.
New York, Knopf, 1984.

Pasadena Community Book, 1943.

City Directories: 1911-

Pasadena Daily News, Tournament of Roses edition, 1913

Pasadena Star-News: May 26, 1941; April 13, 1991

Internet Resources, including California Index, California Death Index,
Gale Biography Master Index, Ancestry.com, and Historic *Los Angeles Times*
Database.

Tim Gregory
The Building Biographer
400 East California Blvd., #3
Pasadena, CA 91106-3763
Phone: 626-792-7465; Fax: 626-793-5219
e-mail: timgregory@sbcglobal.net

Copyright
1999; revised January 2010