

BROAD-BASED COMMUNITY EFFORT SAVES REFUGEE SHACKS

Four run-down little shacks, reminders of San Francisco's post-1906 recovery, came into the news earlier this year as the 99th anniversary of the great earthquake and fire approached.

Saved from the wreck-er's ball by the preservation community and a crew of volunteers, the humble dwellings on Kirkham Street near Ocean Beach have become the subjects of an effort to restore them in time for the centennial.

The four one-room houses were cobbled together to form two separate residences on one lot at 4329-4331 Kirkham Street. In August 2002, Heritage received word from Moses Corrette of the Planning Department that the owners had applied for a permit to demolish the buildings, which appear on a list of nineteen surviving shacks certified by earthquake shack advocate Jane Cryan. We, in turn, notified Woody LaBounty of the Western Neighborhoods Project (WNP).

WNP, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history of the western part of the city, launched a campaign to save the endangered relics, survivors of 5,610 shacks that housed 16,448 refugees of the 1906 disaster. Initially unaware of the importance of the little houses, owners Ron and Jeff Reich proved to be the very models of public-spirited property owners. They have made every reasonable accommodation to allow for saving and relocating these artifacts of San Francisco history, even pledging their \$8500 demolition budget toward their preservation.

Still, it has been no easy task. After more than two years of effort, the dogged persistence of Woody and WNP—and the patience of the Reich

brothers—paid off. The main sticking point was finding even a transitional home for the little houses. Pursuing many avenues without success, WNP turned to District Supervisor Fiona

as the shacks have been nicknamed, were moved to the zoo, where they are currently undergoing restoration. It took about six hours for a team of volunteer carpenters, truck drivers,

a crane operator, an iron worker, and two project managers to separate the four component shacks and relocate them.

To lift each shack, the crane operator lowered a four-sided metal frame, with long slings dangling from each corner, over the building. The slings were secured around eighteen-foot-long timbers placed under the cottage, and it was lifted off the ground. Two men used guide ropes to direct the building onto a flatbed truck.



Preparing to separate adjoining shacks for relocation from Kirkham Street. Below, crews carefully lower shack onto flatbed truck. Photo: Heritage Survey

Ma for help. She found a temporary home at the San Francisco Zoo, whose director, Manuel Mollinedo, agreed to provide space.

On March 5, 2005, “the Kirkies,”

Following the two-mile trip to the zoo, the crew lined the shacks up in a row on an undeveloped site, just as they had looked in the refugee camps.

On June 11, a work party of volunteers, among them some members of Heritage and volunteer docents at the Haas-Lilienthal House, began tackling the restoration. Included among their tools was an age-appropriate, 120-year-old plane. Research performed as part of the restoration of the two “Goldie Shacks,” relocated from the Richmond District to the Presidio in 1985, is guiding the work.

The relatively simple structures do not require artisan labor or expensive replacement materials. The project will retain, preserve and restore all salvageable original materials and features, and remove all materials and features from later periods, in returning the shacks to their original 1906-07 appearance. A report documenting the work performed will be available from the Western Neighborhoods Project, the San Francisco Public Library,





On a secure vacant site at the San Francisco Zoo, workers began restoration of the shacks June 11.

Heritage and other repositories.

The ultimate goal is to find an appropriate permanent home for the four shacks and open them to the public next year, in time to mark the Earthquake Centennial. The preferred context would be a park-like setting with the shacks arranged in an evenly spaced row, as they would have been in 1906. Interpreted as educational exhibits, their accurate restoration will reflect their original use and appearance during the period of significance of 1906-1907.

A decision possibly to house the restored cottages permanently at the zoo will be up to its board of directors and its landlord, the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. While their final home is undetermined at this time, one thing is known

for sure: thanks to the WNP and the larger preservation community, and a team of volunteers (cited in the sidebar), the Kirkies will not be destroyed!

For information regarding shack work parties and updates regarding permanent homes for the Kirkies, see the Western Neighborhoods Project website at www.outsidelands.org. For information about commemorative activities planned, see the 1906 Earthquake Centennial Alliance website at www.1906centennial.org.

—Thanks to Kaleene Kenning for generously providing this story and accompanying photographs.

A Heritage docent, Kaleene was on the volunteer crew that began restoration of the "Kirkies" in June.

BALLROOM LECTURES

John King, urban design writer for the *Chronicle*, inaugurated the 2005 Heritage Ballroom Lectures, on July 21, with a slide show of new buildings in San Francisco and a discussion of what they may tell us about where San Francisco wants to go, architecturally, in the 21st century. The series continues August 18, when N. Moses Corrette, of the Planning Department, shares his experience of Nepal's traditional architecture gained from a one-month sojourn in the Kathmandu Valley.

On September 15, geographer and historian, Gray Brechin, will discuss plans for a statewide network of informants who will gather information for a database that will let Californians learn what the New Deal did for their communities, by way of new schools, recreation facilities, public buildings and public art.

October 20, Alice Carey, preservation architect, explores the history of the Metropolitan Club (aka Woman's Athletic Club) as a backdrop for the parade of passing styles and the changing role of women in society. Concluding the series, November 17, author and designer Paul Duchscherer will speak on the subject of his latest in a series of bungalow books, *Beyond Bungalow: Grand Homes in the Arts & Crafts Tradition*.

All lectures begin at 6:00 p.m., in the Haas-Lilienthal House Ballroom, 2007 Franklin Street. Lectures are \$5 each for members/\$10 for non-members. Space is limited, so please call 415-441-3000 to reserve your seat.

KIRKHAM SHACK HEROES: Woody LaBounty and the Western Neighborhoods Project; Reed Walker of Mayta Jensen, who rallied fellow carpenters and other Bay Area companies to donate their labor; owners Ron and Jeff Reich and their representative Ridge Greene, of RGM & Associates, who believed steadfastly an arrangement could be achieved; Jane Cryan, who spoke on behalf of the Kirkies to the press and city agencies; Dan Cross and Bluewater Services, Inc., for removal of hazardous siding and other materials free of charge; Sunset Scavenger Company for donating debris boxes; Richard Battaini and his crew of Sheedy Crane for executing the move; Ron Macaire, Teamster Local 85; Clint Curtis, Teamster Local 85; Tobin Vannier, Operating Engineers Local 3; and Ed Robison, Ironworkers Local 378; Union carpenters Bruce Sealand, Tom Gibbons, Ruben Mungia, Dan Erhard, Danny Burke, Jimmy Hayes and Peyton Kayser; Supervisor Fiona Ma, for finding a temporary home at the Zoo; San Francisco Zoo and its director Manuel Mollinedo for providing space; Victorian Alliance for \$1,950 grant to replicate the original six-light windows; Ocean Sash and Window, who gave a generous discount on replicated windows and doors; Chris VerPlanck of Page & Turnbull, who did a detailed needs assessment, arranged for restoration blueprints and took photos.

Source: www.outsidelands.org