



**169 N. Baldwin Avenue  
The Richards/Jenkins  
Residence  
1910**

**By Frances Powell and Shirley  
Rosenkranz  
2014**

Photo: John Johnson

Can you imagine not having an official name until you are over 100 years old? Our home had several names over the years such as: Sierra Madre City Landmark #26, Victorian/Craftsman Transitional, the Money Pit, Cottage Cheese, the Blake House and Wistaria Hall.

Not until Debbie Henderson, SMHPS archivist, suggested we engage the services of famed building biographer Tom Gregory did we know who had built the house.

Unfortunately, the designer of the house remains unclear. It is possible that it was basically a kit house or a pattern-book design with some modifications.

The construction began in 1908 by builder James Arthur Gilbert, a local contractor and real estate man. He was from Kansas, but settled here on Highland Avenue in 1908. In 1909, he was appointed chief of the City's fire department.

Mr. Gilbert advertised that he had "fully equipped shops for the manufacture of Mission furniture and all kinds of cabinet work." He also built the first Sierra Madre Woman's Club in 1909.

The first owner was Richard D. Richards, who never lived in the house. An article in the *Sierra Madre News* of February 7, 1908 stated that "the house promises to add much to the appearance of Baldwin Avenue, costing in the neighborhood of \$4,000."

It was finally completed in 1910 by Mrs. D.C. Jenkins. After her death, the property passed to her heirs. Now our home proudly bears an official historical landmark plaque mounted on the front porch naming it the Richards/Jenkins Residence, 1910.

Although there have been 11 owners before us, we, along with the City, chose to honor the Quarnstrom family by placing a plaque and planting a crepe myrtle tree in the boulevard in front of the house. They lived here for 35 years, raising their 5 children, and providing love and support to many foster children.

David Weckerly purchased the property from them and started a year-long restoration effort, before taking his talents to restore the Pinney House, however his work did not remove the spirit of love for children that still lingers in the home. We have found many little drawings inside small niches on the second floor, where every space was used to house the kids.

As educators, we love the warm feeling in this home. Over the years, several of the foster children and family members have visited our home, and they have shared many happy memories, including those of good times around the swimming pool, which was built in 1954.

In the 40s, according to an ad in the *Los Angeles Times*, rooms in our house were available for rent to "elderly women, rooms with bath, beautiful grounds."

Barb Heasley, our former neighbor, told us that, during World War II, she earned the affectionate name of "Hot Stuff" when she worked in the restaurant dining room in our house. At that time there was a swinging door from the dining room to the kitchen and Barb would call out "hot stuff coming through" as she brought food into the dining room.

Before we bought the house, we realized that there was a lot of work and expense for anyone who wanted to restore it. In spite of that, and partially due to the urging of our dear friend and favorite realtor, Judy Webb-Martin, who also helped us obtain Mills Act status, we purchased the property in 1987. It wasn't long before we found out how naïve we really were....

Shortly after moving in, we experienced the Whittier earthquake which hit hard twice. Then we suffered damage from the Northridge quake, and finally the Sierra Madre quake in 1991 hit us hardest. We had to move out for 4 months while repairs were made. We gained a new kitchen and pantry, as well as a rebuilt fireplace since our lovely old river rock fireplace had exploded into the living room and also the mantle and large boulders flew off onto the furniture. We were grateful we hadn't been sitting there. Most of the boulders were reused to rebuild the new fireplace, and what was left over, mostly brick, was used to build garden paths, walls and planters in the backyard area.

Our home features furniture and art from the mid-west and the south where the present owners, Frances Powell and Shirley Rosenkranz, grew up.

Years of restoration effort reflect many hands-on projects. The first summer we owned the house it took 25 gallons of Formby's furniture stripper to restore the moldings and trim in 3 rooms! Friends that we hired to help thought we were crazy to undertake this massive re-d. They were right! But we have found that restoring a house is similar to education – you bring out the loveliness already there, polish it, use patience and dedication, proceed with confidence, and hope for the best outcome.

Newly-planted grapevines and the old wistaria vine grew and matured, and powder-coated steel beams were fashioned into pergolas to support their weight. Work was done by a local craftsman, one of many who worked with us over the years. He helped design, and then build, a period-style covered patio which leads to a rose garden, an orchard and the swimming pool. Last year, local Renaissance Man John Johnson constructed four large, raised garden beds to extend our organic gardening project.

In spite of a history of setbacks caused by Mother Nature, we did win the coveted Wistaria Award in 1990 and we have hosted open houses for the Historical Preservation Society in 1999, 2004, 2007 and hosted assorted meetings.

The Historical Preservation Society is a dynamic and proactive group and through our preservation efforts, we have been able to continue to assist our community in saving and enjoying our past, present, and future.

The City has been most supportive. It realizes the importance and benefits of preserving and restoring our historic homes. Whenever we've had to make changes to our house, and needed names of craftsmen who could help us, they have assisted.

Our town values its historic structures and we feel blessed to live in one of them, a proud place named the "Richards/Jenkins Residence."

[Ed. note: At the time this home was given Landmark status, the name used was "The Craftsman Bungalow" and the date used was 1908.]