

STORY of the MABEL and THOMAS GOULD, Jr. GREENE & GREENE HOUSE

Ventura, California

by

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History of the Mabel and Thomas Gould Jr. Greene & Greene House (1923-1994)

Shortly before the United States entered World War I, Tom and Mabel Gould commissioned the Greene & Greene Architectural firm of Pasadena to design a family home for them. It was planned the house would be located on approximately ten acres on the hillside above Poli, east of Crimea Street. The property was a portion of one-fourth of a block at Crimea and Poli that Tom's parents purchased in 1890. The ten acres were given to Tom and Mabel at the time of their marriage (1911). The view was magnificent. The design of the house was equally magnificent; much larger and more sophisticated than the Lynn Drive house. In fact, Mabel expressed concern that people would think they were "toney". Henry Greene also expressed some concern in letters to the Goulds in which he advised the young couple to carefully consider the size of the rooms and upkeep of the house. These letters are a part of the memorabilia stored in the house.

The project was first put on hold due to failure of the bean crop planted on land east of town in an area known as "the Mound" that Tom and Mabel had purchased in 1912. By 1923, after the Goulds had acquired additional acreage, the "ranch" consisted of approximately 60 acres. The property was bounded on the south by what is now Loma Vista Road (but was then the original or old Foothill Road). The northern boundary was slightly above what is the present Foothill Road (constructed by WPA workers during the Depression). It was bounded on the west by the County Hospital. Its eastern boundary followed the barranca from Foothill between today's Willowick and Dorothy Sts., then cut westward above the Glen Ellen subdivision and south along the eastern edge of the current Loma Vista School property.

Access was from ranch roads from today's Loma Vista Rd. and along the present Foothill Road.

The project was again put on hold in the spring of 1920 when the family decided they would like to try country living and moved from their home on Poli Street on June 22, 1921, to live in an old frame house on "the ranch". They were satisfied they liked country living, so abandoned the Crimea project and in 1923 called upon Henry to design a house for them that would be comfortable, not "toney," and would reflect their country lifestyle and modestly express the Greenes' rich architectural vocabulary.

In late spring of 1923 Henry Greene spent a weekend with the family in order to become acquainted with their "country lifestyle" and to assist in the selection of the building site. Mabel often told how nervous she was to have Henry Greene as a house guest as he had by that time become a prominent architect. All went well however, and they enjoyed a warm relationship for many years.

It is interesting to note that it was not uncommon for either Charles or Henry to spend considerable time visiting with clients before they undertook a project. They both strongly believed that the lifestyle, personalities, tastes and interests of their clients should be reflected in the design as well as the furnishings. They were so successful in portraying the characteristics of their clients that long after the original owners no longer occupy the house their presence remains.

The property offered a number of attractive locations for the house. Throughout the spring and summer Henry spent many days metering the light at various times of day, monitoring the breezes and taking into account various vista corridors before he positioned the house or sketched the design. He was particularly concerned about providing the maximum light for the interior as well as capturing the play of light and shadow on exterior post and beams. He was also as determined as the Goulds to capture the best views of the sea and islands.

While Henry was giving his careful attention to the selection of the site, Mabel was busy drawing floor plans. According to Tom she had as much to say about the floor plan as Henry. On July 21, 1924, Henry Greene placed the stakes for the new home.

Henry supervised Clark Still, a Ventura contractor. Tom often spoke about the fact that Henry insisted the workmen wear soft gloves when removing rocks from the site in order not to disturb the lichens attached to the rocks. Tom also remarked that as a consequence of the amount of tedious hand-sanding of wood trim Henry demanded the workmen would have to take a few days off to heal their hands.

Mabel was pleased that Henry used butterflies and hummingbirds in the motif of the leaded glass doors of the China case in the dining room. Henry carved the molding and drawer pulls, adding a tint of color to his carvings. The niche on the stairway was designed for the mirror Henry designed. It was constructed in the Peter Hall workshop in Pasadena. Randell Makinson claims that Henry's design of the mirror and his carvings and design of the China case leaded glass panels demonstrate that Charles was not the only artist in the Greene firm. Henry also designed the light fixtures still in the living room and the wall light fixtures (sconces) by the mirror in the stair landing and on either side of the fireplace in the sun room.

Tom, Mabel and their two children, Richard, twelve and Margaret, nine, moved into the house in January of 1925. The upstairs was not completed as the cost of the house had been more than the Goulds anticipated. Consequently the north side of the upstairs, planned for sleeping porches and dressing rooms was not built. Instead, the north side ended with a hallway that provided access to the two bedrooms, and a walk-in storage room. The bathroom plumbing was roughed in. The lower level provided more than adequate space for the family.

Around 1943 Mabel's sister, Effie Bartlett Daly, a widow, came to live with the family. Effie occupied the east upstairs bedroom. The bathroom was completed, and the bedroom wood trim was painted. The west bedroom was used by granddaughter Jean as a playroom for her dolls and then for storage of family furniture and other treasures.

Theodore Payne was commissioned to do the landscaping. Mabel, an avid gardener and Stanford Botany student, was a joy to Mr. Payne as they had the same compelling interest in promoting native gardens. The Goulds' relationship with Theodore Payne went back to at least 1914, according to an entry dated Dec. 22, 1914, in the Goulds' Seed Ledger, kept by Tom. Receipts from the Payne Nurseries and letters from Mr. Payne and his landscape architect are among the memorabilia stored in the house. Tom claimed the addition of the three giant native California Oaks as he transplanted them as saplings from beds of the Sespe River.

When the Goulds bought the Foothill property they inherited "Old Doi" a Japanese immigrant who lived in an old house on the ranch. He and Mabel were the gardeners. Old Doi, Tom, and Richard hauled rocks, fitted and balanced them against one another to form the rock walls of the terraces. Old Doi remained in the family until the United States' entry into war with Japan. By this time Doi was an old man who had lost all contact with his Japanese family. Nonetheless, immigration officials insisted he return to Japan. This action injured his pride, broke his heart, and he died soon after his arrival in Japan.

Access to the house roughly followed the present alignment of Lynn Drive. The family parked their cars in the barn with the tractor and horse tackle. The horse corrals were accessible from the back door. People approached the house from the driveway up narrow stone steps and a narrow flagstone walkway on the upper terrace along the front of the house. The present walkway along the lower terrace was part of the "face lift" and was done in part because the growth of the sycamore (planted sometime in the 1940s) was such that people could no longer

duck under its branches to reach the front porch.

In 1921, the Goulds sold 5 acres of land to L. J. Brown who built a home located at the current northwest corner of Lynn Dr. and Gale Way. In 1950 (after the city council, some years earlier, had voted to annex the property into the city) the Gould's sold 10 acres that had been their walnut orchard east of today's Lynn Dr. and north of Loma Vista Rd. to the Ventura Elementary School District for the new Loma Vista School. In 1952, the Goulds sold the property located directly below the county ditch that runs below and in front of the house, east of their driveway, and extending to the north boundary of the Loma Vista School to Ruby and Oma Freeman. In 1954-1955, the city approved Gould's plans to develop first a nine-home subdivision names the Cairns tract and then a 15-lot subdivision, Foothill Estates No. 3. These pieces constituted the remaining farmland (their avocado orchard) to the west and northwest of the house and the barranca that ran from the house north into the foothills between Foothill Rd., the hospital, and Gale Way. By the mid-1950s only slightly less than 2 acres remained of the original acreage. The house, garage and gardens occupy approximately three-quarters of an acre. The remainder of the area has not been developed and serves as a buffer on the north and east portions of the property.

Following Tom's death in 1981, Richard and Virginia decided to move into the house and give the house a Face Lift. The Face Lift Project took approximately seven months. It was a very happy and educational experience.