

270 N. Myrtle Avenue

William Wolfskill could never have envisioned the impact he was to have on Southern California and Monrovia in particular when he planted his first orange grove in 1841. True, the Spanish padres had brought citrus trees with them to Southern California during the Mission Period, but Wolfskill was the first to demonstrate the profitability of large scale citriculture. It is not too great a stretch to say that had there not been William Wolfskill, Monrovia as we know it today would not exist.

It is also interesting to note that William Wolfskill also owned, immediately prior to his death, the vast majority of the land that was to become Monrovia. In 1862, he purchased 6,370 acres of the Rancho Azusa de Duarte at a foreclosure sale. Three years later, in 1865, he purchased 11,319 acres of the Rancho Santa Anita, and moved into the old adobe by the lake in what is now the Arboretum. Wolfskill died in 1866 and his son, Louis, sold both ranchos. Rancho Azusa de Duarte was subdivided into forty acre parcels in 1872, and Rancho Santa Anita was subdivided into thirty acre parcels in 1883, thus paving the way for settlement and the birth of towns—most notably Monrovia.

The first orange trees in Monrovia were probably set out in 1884 at the time William Monroe came to the area that was later to bear his name. Monroe bought a number of thirty acre parcels from Elias J. “Lucky” Baldwin with the goal of establishing a fruit ranch in the country. The 1887 panoramic picture of Monrovia clearly shows that pioneer grove surrounding the Monroe’s first home at 225 Monroe Place. A later picture, taken from the roof of the house circa 1893, shows a sea of orange trees marching off in the distance toward Monrovia Canyon. The citrus era in Monrovia’s history had definitely arrived.

To this agricultural paradise came Silas Austin and Lois Scofield Wilbur, pursuing the California dream. Silas Austin Wilbur was born August 24, 1835 in Ellery, Chautauqua County, New York, the son of Shepard and Ruth Austin Wilbur. Lois Ingham Scofield was born in July of 1839, also in Ellery, Chautauqua County, New York. Lois was the daughter of Smith W. and Eliza Brown Scofield. Silas Austin Wilbur and Lois Ingham Scofield were married on January 27, 1857 in Ellery, New York. They were the parents of four children: Emogene, Bertha, Blanche, and Austin Ray. Sadly, only their eldest daughter, Emogene, lived to maturity; the other three died in childhood and are buried at the Bemus Point Cemetery in Ellery.

Austin Wilbur was raised and spent his entire life as a farmer. As he neared sixty years of age, Austin and Lois decided, as did countless others, to leave the eastern winters behind and to find a milder climate. They discovered Monrovia, and decided to settle here. They purchased their first property in 1894, and built a small cottage in the midst of the orange trees in 1895. Austin and Lois acquired additional property, so that at one point they owned four lots on Myrtle and three lots on Encinitas—enough property to realize a tidy profit from their orange crop.

Austin Wilbur died in his home on March 25, 1906, and was buried in Live Oak Cemetery. Lois Wilbur survived her husband for a little over three months. She died in their home on July 9, 1906, and was buried next to Austin at Live Oak Cemetery. Their remains were subsequently removed to the Bemus Point Cemetery in Chautauqua County, New York on September 22, 1907, so that parents and children would be buried together.

Emogene Wilbur, who had married Harry W. Flahavin, inherited the property upon her parents' death. She and her husband decided to rent the property rather than sell it, and they did so for the next thirteen years. Title to 270 N. Myrtle passed to Daniel J. Shea on April 25, 1919.

There is no listing for 270 N. Myrtle in the 1908-1909 Monrovia City Directory. By 1911, the house had become the residence of Howard H. Hotchkiss and his family. Howard was the younger brother of Charles C. Hotchkiss and Leonard E. Hotchkiss, who were early prominent residents of Monrovia. Charles Hotchkiss arrived in Monrovia in 1886, and operated the Mills Hotel on Myrtle Avenue as well as the Grand View Hotel, located where the Monrovia Civic Center now stands. Both Leonard and Howard Hotchkiss arrived in Monrovia in 1888. Leonard remained in Monrovia, but Howard did not make his permanent home here until some twenty years later. Leonard Hotchkiss served as Monrovia City Clerk from 1904 until 1910, when he resigned to become a Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff. He served with the Sheriff's Department for many years.

Howard Hotchkiss and his wife, Kate, continued to rent 270 N. Myrtle until 1916, when it became the home of Harrison A. Putnam and his wife, the former Rose Sabichi. Harrison Albert Putnam was born February 15, 1877 in Bridgeport, Ohio, the son of Daniel Proctor Putnam and his wife, the former Anna R. Rice. Harrison Putnam graduated from medical school in Kirksville, Missouri circa 1902 and moved to California in 1903, settling in Inglewood, where he established a medical practice. In the course of time, he met Rose Clarisse Sabichi. Rose was the daughter of Francisco Sabichi and Maria Magdalena Wolfskill, who was in turn the daughter of William Wolfskill, founder of the citrus industry in Southern California. Harrison Putnam and Rose Sabichi were married on January 12, 1910 at St. Vincent's Church in Los Angeles, near Rose's family home at 2437 S. Figueroa. They began married life in Inglewood, and became the parents of two daughters. Margaret Magdalena Putnam was born on November 23, 1910, and Beatrice Elizabeth Putnam was born on February 24, 1915. Shortly after the birth of Beatrice, Rose was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis, the devastating disease of her era. A year after Rose's diagnosis, in 1916, Harrison and Rose Putnam moved to Monrovia, which had achieved fame as a health center largely due to the success of Dr. Francis M. Pottenger in treating tuberculosis. Rose no doubt sought help from the tuberculosis specialists practicing in Monrovia, and Harrison went into practice with Drs. Kalb and Kirschner, also tuberculosis specialists, at the Monrovia Clinic. The clinic was located at 137 N. Myrtle Avenue in a converted Victorian residence, and small cottages were available at the same location for the treatment of tubercular patients. Dr. Kalb, in fact, became Rose Putnam's primary care physician. Dr.

Kirschner had been on the staff at Pottenger's Sanatorium from 1911 to 1914 before he established his own practice.

In spite of the medical expertise available to Rose Putnam, her tuberculosis proved fatal, and she passed away at her home on December 1, 1920. The funeral mass was conducted at Immaculate Conception Church in Monrovia on December 2, with burial following at Calvary Cemetery in Los Angeles.

Dr. Putnam remained a widower with two small girls for two years. On April 12, 1923, he married Ruth Evans Patterson. Ruth, formerly of Colorado Springs, was a widow with a young daughter, Virginia. The blended family continued to live at 270 N. Myrtle, and Dr. Putnam purchased the property, continuing to make it his home for the next twenty years. In addition to private practice, Dr. Putnam was the staff physician for the Monrovia Health Camp, located at the end of Norumbega Drive in Monrovia. The facility originated as the Monrovia Preventorium, where young boys at risk for contracting tuberculosis were placed.

By 1944, Dr. and Mrs. Putnam had moved to 1423 E. Lemon Avenue, now located in the City of Bradbury, and 270 N. Myrtle was rented to Philip and Helen French. Dr. Putnam established a health care facility at the Bradbury location known as the Putnam Rest Ranch. Harrison and Ruth Putnam apparently divorced circa 1948, as Ruth Putnam was listed by herself living at 270 N. Myrtle Avenue once again when the 1948 Monrovia City Directory was compiled. Ruth's daughter, Virginia, had married Arthur Dore, and they were living with her. Harrison Putnam had apparently moved out of the immediate area, as there is no listing for him in the directory. The last listing for Ruth Putnam appears in the 1952 Monrovia City Directory. The property had been sold to Don and Thelma Westbrook when the 1952-1953 Monrovia City Directory was compiled, and Ruth Putnam had moved out of the area as well. She died in Marin County, California on January 22, 1988 at the age of 96 years.

Dr. Putnam practiced medicine for forty-eight years. He must have retired in 1950, as he petitioned the California Medical Association for retired status in March of that year. Little is known of Harrison Putnam's activities after he left Monrovia. He spent the last few years of his life in Elizabeth Manor, a convalescent facility on West Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles, where he passed away on October 27, 1968 at the age of 91 years.

While 270 N. Myrtle Avenue is not an architecturally imposing structure, it is one of only a handful of survivors from the 1890's, the era when Monrovia and indeed all of Southern California suffered from the collapse of the Great Boom of the Eighties. Very few houses were built in Monrovia during that troubled time. It is a symbol of endurance and survival. And it should continue to survive. It has a number of associations that make it a symbol of the various eras in local history. As the final home of Austin and Lois Wilbur, it represents the hopes of those who came west, wanting to claim a share in the California Dream. Originally situated in an orange grove, it represents the citrus era in local history, when citrus was king and most of Monrovia was covered in orange

groves. Through Howard Hotchkiss, the house is associated with the Hotchkiss Family, early movers and shakers in Monrovia. Howard's nephew, Thomas Myron Hotchkiss, was Monrovia's first official historian. Through Dr. Putnam, it is closely associated with Monrovia as a health center, when scores of sufferers from tuberculosis came here hoping to find a cure. Many of them did, and many of them remained in the community where they had found healing and contributed to its corporate life. And it is linked to William Wolfskill through his granddaughter, Rose Sabichi Putnam. Wolfskill brought a way of life to Southern California that was to persist for over a hundred years. It is ironic that Rose should end her life in a community whose beginnings were made possible by her grandfather.

It is my hope that rather than being demolished, 270 N. Myrtle Avenue can be saved and incorporated into a new development. Once it is gone, we will not see its like again.

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