

250 North Primrose Avenue
"The Oaks"

This imposing mansion was built 1884-1885 for William N. Monroe, after whom the city of Monrovia is named. The architect, Solon I. Haas, also designed the Los Angeles City Hall. Monroe served on the Los Angeles City Council, and no doubt became acquainted with the architect while the city hall was being constructed. Finished entirely in redwood with five fireplaces and thirteen high-ceiling rooms, the house was one of the principal show places of the San Gabriel Valley, and a testament to the wealth and position of its owner. It originally stood in the midst of an orchard and park which contained many rare trees and shrubs. A large lawn, complete with granite fountain, stretched out in front of the house in its original southern orientation.

In 1890, four years after the founding of Monrovia, the house and grounds were purchased by E.F. Spence and J.D. Bicknell, co-founders with Monroe, who planned to open a "Young Ladies College" associated with the University of Southern California. Although the school was established, it closed after eighteen months of operation. In the years since, the surrounding orchard and park have been subdivided and the area immediately south of the house sold for development as well. In spite of this, the mansion still retains much of its former architectural glory and is being lovingly restored by its present owners.

"The Oaks" is an elaborately decorated Queen Anne style mansion with Eastlake detailing. Eastlake was a popular style of ornamentation named for Charles L. Eastlake, an English interior designer. It was frequently added to American homes in the Queen Anne style during the 1870s and 1880s. The long vertical windows, exposed decorative roof brackets, elaborate frieze below the roof line, rectangular corner tower and fancy gable decoration are all characteristic of the Eastlake style. Queen Anne style features of the home are its asymmetrical plan, ornate second story porch, multi-gable roof, and corbeled chimneys. To the second story porch, now enclosed, the present owners have added period stained glass windows. In the earlier days of this century, it was possible to see Catalina Island from that porch on a clear day.

Double doors with Eastlake detailing lead from the veranda into the large entry hall and stairway. Large pocket doors on the left and right, decorated with a fan or sunburst motif, enabled the front parlors and the entry hall to be thrown into one large area for entertaining. There is another parlor in the rear and a large dining room on the right. A single story wing of the house contains the kitchen, pantry, two bathrooms, an office, and service porch. The upstairs hall gives access to the guest bedroom, children's room, bathroom, master bedroom, office, and sewing room.

"The Oaks" has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its excellent architectural design and because of the important role it has played in the history of Monrovia.

THE OAKS - 250 NORTH PRINCE AVENUE

GENERAL: The Oaks as it was originally known, was built circa 1883-1885 by William Newton Monroe, the founder of the town of Monrovia. Its architect was Solon I. Haas, (HAAS) who also designed the Los Angeles City Hall. It is approximately 5,000 square feet in area, with 3 parlours, 5 bedrooms, 3 baths, kitchen, dining room, service porch, and a butler's pantry. Constructed entirely of local redwood, it has redwood faced fireplaces in 5 of its 13 rooms. The redwood woodwork as well as the fireplaces are hand carved. The home is an elaborately decorated Queen Anne style mansion with Eastlake detailing, so called for the English interior designer, Charles Eastlake who popularized it. This styling was often added to American Victorian and Queen Anne houses during the 1870's and 1880's. The exterior is decorated with exposed carved wood roof brackets, sawn wood panels, rectangular wooden corner tower, and fancy gable ends, all characteristics of the Eastlake style. It is however, basically a Queen Anne structure, with an asymmetrical plan, ornate upper story porch cut into the southwest side, and a picturesque roofline featuring gables, dormers, corbelled chimneys and pointed tower. It was originally situated in the midst of a park and orchard which contained rare trees and shrubs as well as having an extensive lawn with granite fountain and pool in front of the house, (south side). At one time, in the year 1890, the house and grounds were purchased by E. F. Spence and J. D. Bicknell, co-founders of

Monrovia along with Monroe, who intended to operate a "Young Ladies College" under the auspices of the University of Southern California. Some changes were made at this time, however, after only 18 months the venture failed. Subsequently, the house passed through a number of owners and the land was sold off for other homes. At one time, it was used as a boarding house. A number of rooms were fitted out with kitchenettes for the convenience of the tenants. The mansion maintains much of its original glory and is being painstakingly restored by its current owners, George and Sheila Dragan. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PARTICULARS: The current owners who purchased it in 1977, found the house wallpapered and woodwork painted white and gold throughout, and filled with trash. They have patiently stripped woodwork, repaired it, and removed wallpaper, as well as put up new ceilings ~~in all but one room~~. The walls throughout are 12 feet high. There are a total of five stained glass windows in the house, none of which are original to the home.

HALL: The double entry doors have a long transom light above. The Hall itself measures 39' X ¹³~~15~~'. Anaglypta or embossed ceiling panels are not original to the structure and were installed by the present owners (~~Sears product~~). The fireplace is original with shelves above and on the sides for display use. Woodwork in the hall, as well as the upper hall, dining room and front parlour is somewhat more elaborate than what is found throughout the rest of the house. Note the ad-

difional flourishes above the bullseye molding in the corners above door frames and windows.

FRONT PARTOUR: To left as you enter is the Green Room, the pocket doors are 9 feet tall and carved with a fan shape or sunburst design and trimmed with elaborate bullseye molding. The bay windows are on the first floor of the tower (southwest facing). The fireplace has half spindles, brick, and iron. Note the ~~fanciful wicker furniture and color scheme of pink and green which gives the room a light, airy feeling.~~ In the ^{room} ~~corner~~, a working Victrola (cabinet style) can also be seen.

BACK PARTOUR: This room is currently in the process of restoration and ~~is not available for viewing. It does however, feature wall stenciling done by Patti and Jeff Rocklin, which they do professionally.~~ A dressing area and small bathroom are adjacent to this room.

STAIRWAY: Features a spindle gallery, turned posts, two pendants, and a baluster with stickwork. The posts at the foot of the stairs presented quite a challenge, they had been "antiqued" by a previous owner who used white and gold paint. In this area, as you ascend and descend the stairs, take note of the wall paper which has been applied in one continuous strip from baseboard to ceiling. Above the north facing end of the house, over the landing, there is a coved ceiling and another of the stained glass windows, which lends light and interest to this area.

KITCHEN: Originally food was cooked in a cook house

building and brought to the kitchen. There is a food pass through in the pantry for convenience in transferring food from kitchen to dining room. The present owners installed the cabinets which are old, and they chose and executed the frosting design themselves. There is wainscotting and the bullseye molding here is more simple than elsewhere in the house. The owners also installed the Ben Franklin stove which is both attractive and functional. Through a french door at the back of the kitchen can be seen an attractive stained glass panel window which was made by one of their daughters. ~~In the area between the dining room and kitchen be sure to~~ note the "Hoosier Cupboard" and its self contained flour bin and sifter. *Stove (range) is new.*

Dining Room: The double-doored china cupboard is original, it now contains some of Mrs. Dragan's favorite pieces including ~~a porcelain set manufactured in Czechoslovakia.~~ Here too is seen another of the five carved and decorated redwood fireplaces. The trim here is also redwood and echoes the motif found throughout the house. The color choices are the Dragan's own, and complement the French Inaltera wallpaper (~~which pattern is no longer available.~~) Here again is the bullseye motif in the molding around doors and windows. Mr. Monroe had buttons installed under the table with which he could summon a servant simply by stepping on it. At the present time, a carpet covers this area so they are not visible. (Note the carved cherub seated ~~above the buffet,~~ *on mantle* his name is Patrick.)

MAIN PARLOUR: To the right as you enter the downstairs hall is the 35 by ¹⁸ foot main parlour, which has recently been redone. It is actually a double room with a door at each end entering onto the main hallway. It has large pocket doors facing the Green Room. These doors are also decorated with a fan shape or sunburst motif with the bulleye molding detail above. This area contains a handsome large fireplace at its north end. The wallpapering was selected by the Dragans and the job itself completed by Mr. Dragan. This parlour contains an eclectic mix of furniture in styles representative of the era, in both large and small scale. Many items have sentimental attachments for the owners, such as the marble topped coffee table in front of the sofa. It originally belonged to Mrs. Dragan's family and was modified by her father from a taller piece.

BACK PORCH: Originally was open. Note pendant of stairs when passing back into main hall.

SECOND FLOOR

GUEST BEDROOM: Contains some handsome oak furniture of which one piece is known as a "Texas" highboy. Mrs. Dragan's collection of pink glassware and modified oil lamp accent the dresser. On the Eastlake style table by doors leading into adjoining Children's room, is a unique traveling toilette case.

CHILDREN'S ROOM: This room contains the upper window of the tower (southwest facing) which was originally open but was closed in by a previous owner. This room contains Mrs. Dragan's antique children's furniture collection.

Green room →

All walnut Victorian bedroom set purchased from man who did not know if it was Victorian. He did not think so.

BATHROOM: The house at one time (during WW II) was used by boarders. The bedrooms had sinks and kitchennettes for the use of the tenants. The clawfooted tub was initially under the windows, but the current owners moved it into an alcove borrowed by using closet space from the adjoining room and installed fretwork above. The stained glass window is 1 of 4 identical windows installed by the present owners, ~~but the only one with blue glass.~~ The wainscotting here is partially original and partially supplemented by duplicated pieces by the current owners. The gas stove is both attractive and functional. The vanity is an adaptation of a small dresser, ~~a clever idea.~~ The double medicine cabinet above is original. ~~Note here the cobalt blue collection of medicine bottles in front of the window.~~

MASTER BEDROOM: A large room, it measures approximately 16 by 20 feet. This room contains several attractive oak pieces, ~~including a small desk with pigeonholes and writing platform ideal for housekeeping records.~~

SITTING ROOM/OFFICE: Some very nice ~~oak~~ pieces here, including large roll top desk and chair. Unusual feature is the double doorway above the closet which leads to the attic. There is much storage room above, the peak of the attic is 15 feet in height. The ceiling here is the only one left as it was by current owners.

SEWING ROOM: ~~This room was originally used to store trunks and luggage, hence its large size.~~ It features a gas stove particularly helpful to supplement during cool days.

Adjacent to this room is the laundry area with washer and dryer. *It was originally a room to store trunks & suitcases* Very convenient for family use, nearest the source and storage of most laundry. (Not open for viewing).

UPPER HALL: The molding in this area is slightly more elaborate than elsewhere with additional flourishes in top corners above bullseye molding detail. Very wide area gives access to all rooms on upper floor. Note large gentleman's dressing mirror and ~~storage unit to right~~, very unusual piece.

FINAL NOTES: All the rooms of the house are interconnected with either single or double doors, pocket doors or conventional style, these all of redwood. ~~Some of the color choices for wallpaper and paint are no longer available from their manufacturers.~~

*Sylvia Dohmel
April, 1986*

7. 250 North Primrose Avenue (The Oaks)

Known as "The Oaks" this mansion was built in 1885 for William N. Monroe, Monrovia's founder, by architect Solon I. Haas, who also built the Los Angeles City Hall. Constructed entirely of redwood with five fireplaces and thirteen high-ceilinged rooms, the house was one of the new town's principal show places and a testament to the wealth and position of its' owner. It originally stood in the midst of an orchard which contained many rare trees and shrubs. A large lawn, complete with a granite fountain and pool stretched out in front of the south-facing entrance.

In 1890 the house and grounds were purchased by E. F. Spence and J. D. Bicknell, co-founders of the town with Monroe, who planned to open a "Young Ladies College" associated with the University of Southern California. Although the school was established, after about eighteen months the venture failed. Over the years the surrounding area along with the pool and fountain have fallen to development, however, the mansion still retains much of its' former architectural glory and is being painstakingly restored by its' present owners.

The Oaks is an elaborately decorated Queen Anne style mansion with Eastlake detailing. Eastlake was a popular style or ornamentation named for Charles Eastlake, an English interior designer, which was often added to American Victorian and Queen Anne style houses in the 1870's and 1880's. The long, vertical windows, exposed decorative roof brackets, sawn wood panels ringing the house below the roofline, rectangular corner tower and fancy gable ends are all characteristics of the Eastlake style. While the house is decorated in Eastlake style, it is still basically a Queen Anne structure, with its' asymmetrical plan, ornate upper story porch cut into the south side, and picturesque roofline featuring gables, dormers, corbelled chimneys and pointed tower.

The second floor of the tower was once an open porch, from which Catalina Island could be seen on a clear day. It was subsequently enclosed and the present owners have added period stained glass windows.

Because of its' excellent architectural design and as the home of Monrovia's founder "The Oaks" played an important role in the city's history and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dear Joe,

I have gone through the index to the excerpts from the "Monrovia Planet" and the "Monrovia Messenger" from 1886 to 1891, and read all the entries pertaining to the Monroe family. I could find only one entry regarding social events at "The Oaks", and it follows:

WILL RECEIVE

Mrs. W. N. Monroe, assisted by Mrs. Tom Monroe and Mrs. W. H. Cook, will receive their friends at the residence of W. N. Monroe on Monday next, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

This news item is from the "Monrovia Planet" of December 31, 1887. Since New Year's Day 1888 fell on Sunday, it was observed on Monday instead. Mrs. Tom Monroe was the wife of W. N. Monroe's uncle, Thomas Monroe. Mrs. W. H. Cook was the wife of the Cashier of the Granite Bank, in which W. N. Monroe was a director and stockholder.

"The Oaks" is listed for sale in the "Monrovia Messenger" of April 11, 1889, without a purchase price being mentioned. The sale included the ten acres surrounding the house, which had been landscaped with many trees and shrubs from around the world. W. N. Monroe had signed a contract to build a railroad in Chile, hence the sale of the home.

Best regards,

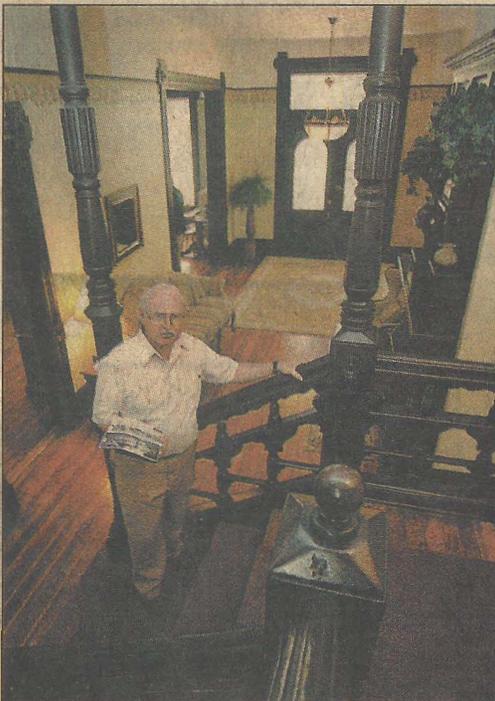
Steve



Staff photos by MIKE MULLEN

THE HISTORIC HOME of William Monroe, founder of Monrovia, is for sale with an asking price of \$1.25 million.

Monroe home fixed up, on market again



MONROVIA HISTORIAN Steve Baker walks through the Monroe mansion, which was built in 1885.

By Sonya Gels
STAFF WRITER

MONROVIA — In 1885, Monrovia's founding father built a lasting monument to his family — a spectacular Victorian mansion with 16 rooms and a corner tower.

Barely four years later, William Monroe and his family moved away.

The house's most recent owners have also poured their hearts and labor into the house, only to put it up for sale after 22 months for \$1.25 million.

In 2002, Paul and Jill Steed and their two young children came from Princeton, N.J., where they lived in an inn from the 1750s that they had restored themselves.

They moved to Monrovia for work opportunities, and are now moving to North Carolina for the same reason.

They leave behind a buffed and shining relic of Monrovia's history.

Previous owners of the house at 250 N. Primrose Ave. had painted its wood friezes white with gold accents. The exterior was several shades of

Monroe mansion

- **Year constructed:** 1885
- **Listing:** National Register of Historic Places
- **Style:** Queen Anne Victorian
- **Number of square feet:** 5,000
- **Number of rooms:** 16
- **Number of fireplaces:** 5
- **Architectural features:** Multi-gabled roof; Eastlake detailing on windows; fireplaces and doors; finished entirely in old-growth redwood; wood-burning stove in kitchen; new or restored antique fixtures in bathrooms
- **Price:** \$1.25 million

pink and purple.

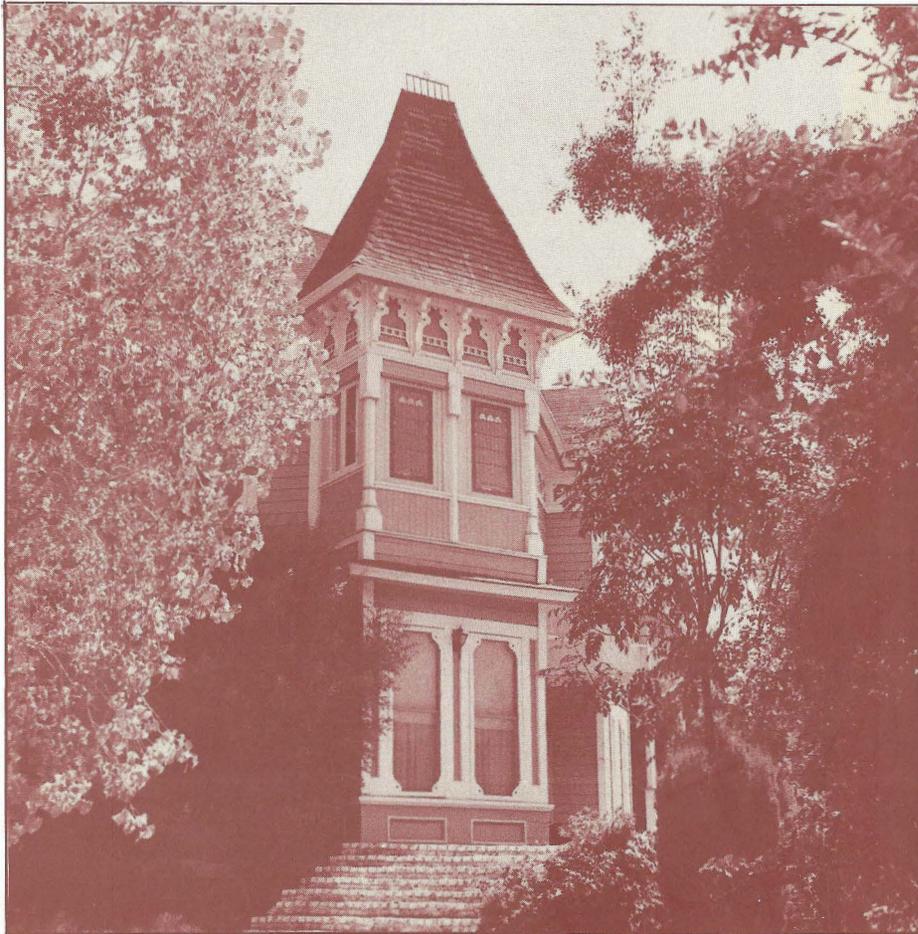
"Older houses are very, very beautiful," Paul Steed said. "But over the decades, instead of fixing things right, (owners) tend to cover them."

The Steeds set about transforming the cavernous mansion into a museum piece. They oiled hinges on redwood doors to make them slide smoothly in their built-in pockets. They ripped layers of carpet, paint and linoleum from

Please turn to MANSION / A6

© William Newton Monroe's ©

THE OAKS



"The OAKS"

The founding of Monrovia in 1886 was surely a grand day in the life of founder William Newton Monroe, but no less significant was the building, in 1885, of his grand residence "The OAKS". The showplace home is built entirely of redwood and boasts 12 foot ceilings, two story Victorian Eastlake styling, sliding solid wood doors and interconnected doorways from room to room.

The home has been restored to its original splendor by the present owners, George & Sheila Dragan. Their pride in restoration is evident throughout the house in the authentic interior decor. Features include five fireplaces, five bedrooms, two parlours, three bathrooms, a large entry hall, a dining room, living room, and butler's pantry by the period kitchen. The owners are pleased to offer the house to any location or film production company seeking to use all or part of the property for filming.



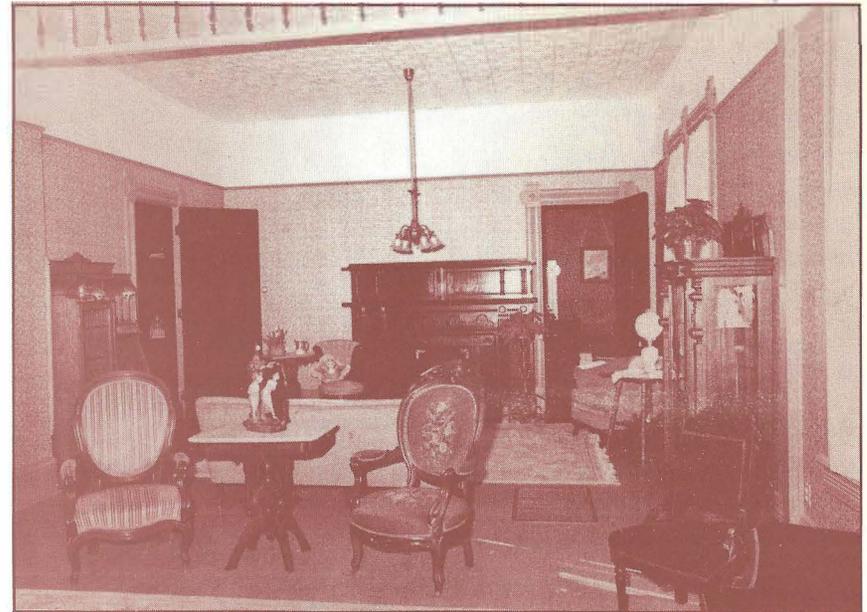
Contact George or Sheila Dragan at (818) 358-5594 or write to them at 250 North Primrose Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016.



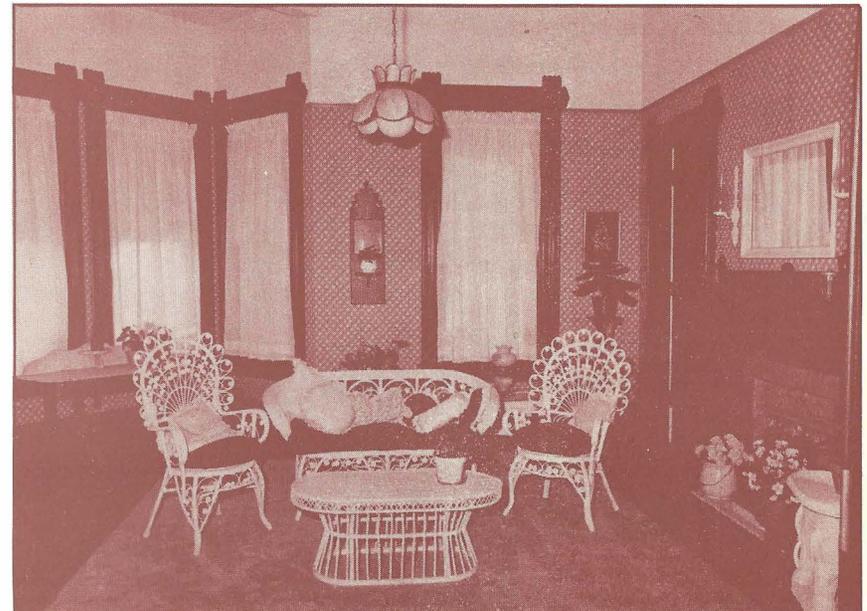
THE OAKS



The entry hall shows off the wood floors, spindle gallery stairway with turned posts, and is the center point between the large living room and west parlours. The entry includes a fireplace near the stairway.



The living room & front parlour feature nine foot tall carved wood doors trimmed with bullseye molding. The doors slide for privacy, atmosphere, etc.



Parlour 1 features a lovely conversation area in furniture true to Victoriana.



The child's room is highlighted by stained glass in the boxed bay window.



All bedrooms are light & airy and decorated in the style of the period.



The kitchen contains a Ben Franklin stove and other decor indigenous to the 1880's.



Diners at the OAKS could appreciate the built-in china closet and fireplace with Eastlake carving. Those features remain in the dining room today.

THE OAKS

The OAKS is only 18 miles from the heart of Hollywood and Los Angeles in nearby Monrovia. It is nestled in the foothills, north of the 210 Foothill Freeway and west of the 605 San Gabriel River Freeway. It is in a residential neighborhood on a quiet street that is easily accessible to all vehicles.

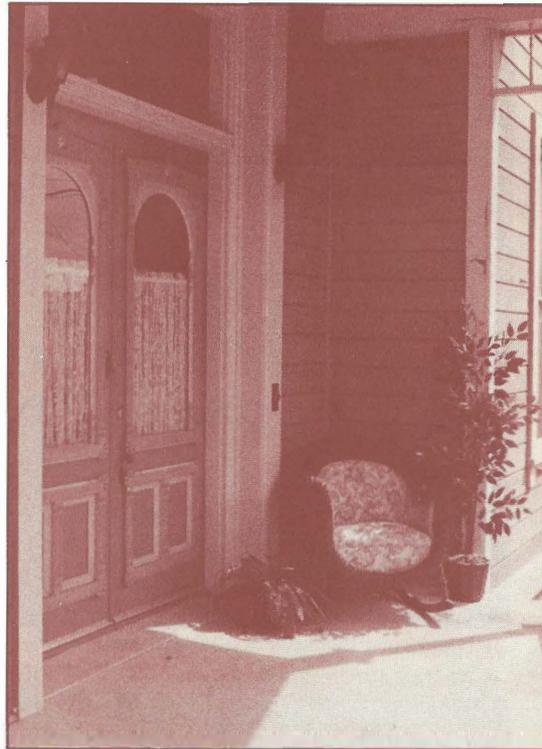
To reach the OAKS, exit the 210 Freeway at Myrtle Ave. & turn north (toward the mountains). Continue up Myrtle Avenue to Foothill Boulevard and turn left. Go west on Foothill Boulevard two blocks to Primrose Ave. and turn right. Continue up Primrose Ave. to the OAKS at 250 North Primrose Ave.

Many film production companies have enjoyed filming in Monrovia. To make an appointment to see the OAKS, please call George or Sheila Dragan at:

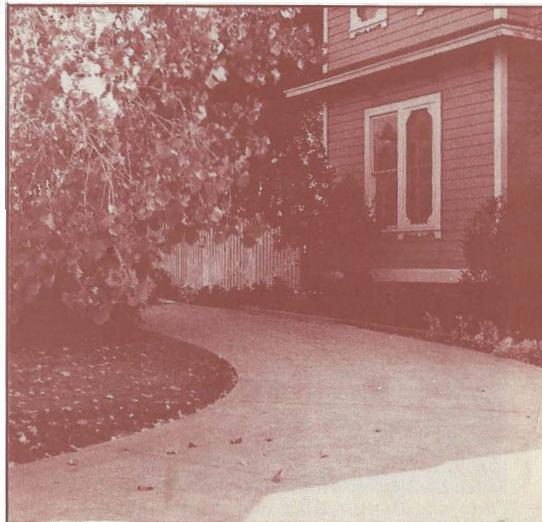
818/358-5594

or write to them at:

250 North Primrose Avenue
Monrovia, California 91016

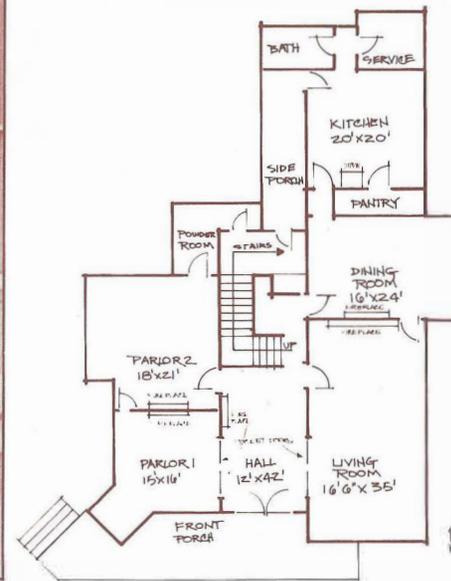


Exterior features include a circular driveway, tower with bay windows and brick stairway & porch.



FLOOR PLAN

Downstairs



Upstairs

