

255 N. Mayflower Avenue
"Idlewild"

"Idlewild" is an elegant two-storey Queen Anne style residence built at a cost of \$12,000 in 1887. Its elaborate ornamentation includes a sunburst motif in the front facing gable, patterned shingles, a massive cornice, columns with a "stacked ring" pattern, art glass windows, and the name of the house in raised letters on the front gable. The house rests on a high granite foundation and is crowned by two massive chimneys. The original cupola, removed many years ago, has been replaced by the present owners with an authentic re-creation based on surviving pictures. Theodore Roosevelt is reported to have spoken from the second floor "Juliet" balcony when he was a vice presidential candidate.

"Idlewild", named after the residence of newspaperman N.P. Willis on the Hudson River in upstate New York, was built for General William Anderson Pile, a Civil War veteran who later served in the House of Representatives, as Governor of New Mexico Territory, and as Minister to Venezuela. He moved to Monrovia in 1886, became active in civic affairs, and was a prime mover in the incorporation of Monrovia in 1887. He died in his mansion in 1889 after a brief illness and was mourned by the entire community.

For his new Monrovia home, General Pile chose the architectural firm of Samuel and Joseph Cather Newsom, prominent San Francisco architects who opened a Los Angeles office during the great land boom of the 1880's. "Idlewild" is one of three large Newsom-designed houses constructed in Monrovia at the same time, and is now one of the handful of remaining Newsom works in Southern California.

255 N. Mayflower Avenue

Charles G. Erickson

md.

Aminda Anderson (b. Norway)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Mildred Erickson Diton | b. 31 Mar 1908 | d. Dec 1991 |
| 2. Robert Erickson | b. 15 Sep 1912 | d. Jul 1985 |
| 3. Irene Erickson | b. 1914 | |
| 4. Pauline Erickson Lilly | b. 1915 | |
| 5. Delbert Erickson | b. 23 Jun 1917 | d. 07 Apr 1999 |
| 6. Virginia Erickson | b. 1922 | |
| 7. Arabelle Erickson Danoff | | |

William E. Lilly

md.

Pauline A. Erickson

1. Gerald Lilly
2. Joyce E. Lilly (Wilkins)
3. Roger Lilly

The Lilly family came from Michigan to Monrovia in 1948 and stayed with the Ericksons at 255 N. Mayflower. Gerald and Joyce remember that the south porch was screened and that they slept there with Grandfather Erickson. There was an electric stove in the kitchen. The upstairs balcony was also screened and used as a sleeping porch. The upstairs hall closet was a small kitchen, as the front bedroom was rented out. Later the Lilly family moved to 207 E. Scenic Drive.

"Idlewild"

According to local tradition (undocumented) Teddy Roosevelt spoke from the front balcony of the house before he was elected President.

The art director for the third segment of the 1980 filming of "East of Eden" had already chosen the wallpaper used in the parlors at Idlewild before the house was chosen for the interior scenes. The flowers in the frieze were cut out by hand from the left over wallpaper and used as a unifying theme. The director won an Emmy for the third sequence.

The original china cabinet, described in the "Messenger" article as being on the south wall of the dining room, was apparently on the north wall, with access from the kitchen as well. The opening is still there, but the cabinet itself has been removed.

Roger Martinsen believes that both of the Newsom Brothers worked on the design for the house. He believes that Joseph Cather commuted to San Francisco on a frequent basis, taking the plans for Idlewild with him among others in progress.

"IDLEWILD"
255 N. Mayflower Ave.
Monrovia, California

Age: One hundred years old. Construction began in 1887 and was completed early in 1888.

Architect: Joseph Cather Newsom (1857-1930). The architect was only thirty years old when he designed the house.

Style: Queen Anne.

Cost: \$12,000 in 1887 dollars; \$260,000 in 1988 dollars based on the increase in value of one ounce of gold.

Square Feet: Approximately 3100.

Origin of Name: Idlewild was named for the estate of N. P. Willis, a prominent late nineteenth century newspaper man, located on the Hudson River in New York State.

First Residents: General and Mrs. William A. Pile. Later the property was owned by Mr. and Mrs. John H. Bartle, also prominent early residents.

Neighborhood: The house was originally surrounded by ten acres of land purchased from E. J. "Lucky" Baldwin. After the property was sold by the Pile family it was subdivided circa 1907 and the "Idlewild Tract" was placed on the market.

Landscaping: Most of the ten acres was set out with orange trees. The palm trees lining the driveway may be contemporary with the house.

Nearby Houses: Directly across the street stood the home of General and Mrs. Pile's daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. E. W. Little. Their home, also designed by Joseph Cather Newsom, was torn down in the early 1950s and the property subdivided. On the northeast corner of Mayflower and Hillcrest stands the winter home of Jerome I. Case, a wealthy manufacturer from Racine, Wisconsin.

Exterior Details: The house rests on a foundation of cut granite. Typical of Queen Anne houses, the first floor is sheathed in horizontal siding while the second floor is covered with patterned shingles. The original cupola on the east side of the building has been removed, and the front veranda has been altered. The original color scheme for the first floor was light chocolate brown for the body color and dark brown for the trim. The second floor body color was a yellowish brown with cream colored trim and an accent color of English vermillion red.

"IDLEWILD"

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The Parlors

Front Parlor: The room measures fifteen by twenty feet. Ceilings throughout the first floor of the house are twelve feet high. Both parlors were originally wallpapered with a plain ingrain paper from the baseboard to the picture moulding, a patterned paper for the freize, and ceiling papers with stiles and borders. The ceiling medallions were originally frescoed. The mantel of California onyx was unfortunately removed by a subsequent owner. The house was lit by acetylene gas when it was built, manufactured in a plant on the premises. Especially noteworthy is the magnificent spindlework arch which separates the parlors. The open areas in the base of the arch may have originally been decorated with art glass.

Back Parlor: This room also measures fifteen by twenty feet. The mantel is mahogany with a plate glass mirror. The fireplaces in the house, five in all, are shallow because they were designed to burn coal. A unique feature of the room is the sliding windows which allow access to the veranda on the south side of the house.

Dining Room and Kitchen

Dining Room: This room measures fifteen by twenty feet, and is wainscoted with curly redwood, one of the three types of redwood grain: burl, clear, and curly. The mantel is also of curly redwood, and the tiles are from the Minton factory in Stoke-on-Trent, England. The room was originally wallpapered in the same elaborate scheme as the parlors.

Kitchen: The kitchen measures twelve by fourteen feet, and was originally equipped with a large wood burning range. Adjoining the kitchen are a pantry and back porch. There is a large cellar under the kitchen.

Halls

Lower Hall: The wainscoting in the lower hall is also of curly redwood. One of the fine features of the house is the art glass window over the entrance doors. It has over 1000 pieces of glass and fifty cut jewels. It was personally selected by General Pile and manufactured in Los Angeles. The newel post was originally topped with a decorative gas fixture. The stairway is of Spanish cedar trimmed with orange wood. Another fine feature of the house is the etched ruby glass window above the stairs.

Upper Hall: At the head of the stairs is a sliding door which gives access to the "Juliet" balcony. The balcony was originally open but has been enclosed.

"IDLEWILD"

Bedrooms

Mrs. Pile's: This room measures fifteen by twenty feet. Ceilings in the second floor of the house are eleven feet high. The mantel is curly redwood with Minton tiles. The room was originally papered with a patterned paper to the picture moulding, a frieze paper, and ceiling paper with a border, stiles, and corner pieces. Another sliding door allowed access to the front balcony.

General Pile's: The mantel in this room is Mexican primavera, a light-toned hardwood. The fireplace tiles are American, manufactured in Cleveland. This room was originally called the blue room because of the blue figured wallpaper. There are also sliding windows for access to the balcony, from which the ocean could be seen when the house was built. General Pile died in this room in 1889 after a brief illness and is buried in Live Oak Cemetery, Monrovia. Mrs. Pile continued to live in the house for seventeen years after the General's death. Other rooms on the second floor, not open for the tour, are two additional bedrooms, a bathroom, and a linen closet.

Stephen R. Baker
May 4, 1988

Stephen R. Baker
512 S. Ivy Avenue
Monrovia, CA 91016

July 27, 2011

Historic Preservation Commission
City of Monrovia
415 S. Ivy Avenue
Monrovia, CA 91016

Re: Certificate of Appropriateness, 255 N. Mayflower Avenue

Dear Members of the Commission,

Since I am unable to be in attendance at this evening's commission meeting, I would like to share some of my thoughts with you in this letter.

1. An uncovered deck was not a typical feature of a house built during the Victorian era. Covered porches seem to have been the norm. An atypical deck seems especially inappropriate for a house designed by Samuel and Joseph Cather Newsom, premier 19th century builder-architects.
2. The proposed deck is enough in the line of public view to be obtrusive.
3. A deck would be less obtrusive if placed around the southwest corner of the house.
4. The funds required to build the deck might be much better spent restoring the missing arch over the entrance to the house, or recreating the porte-cochere on the north side of the house.

I know that you will give the request for a Certificate of Appropriateness a fair and balanced review. I do hope, however, that Idlewild, as one of Monrovia's premier Victorian dwellings, may retain as much of its original appearance as possible.

Sincerely,

Stephen R. Baker

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