

# The Villa Montezuma Museum at 125: Surviving and Thriving with Friends of the Villa Montezuma

Charles Spratley and Louise Torio

For over 125 years, rooftop gargoyles have held a protective watch over the Villa Montezuma Museum, located on the corner of 20th and K Streets in San Diego's Sherman Heights Historic District. The Victorian mansion, built in 1887 for pianist and celebrated spiritualist Jesse Shepard (also known as author Francis Grierson), remains one of San Diego's architectural and cultural treasures.

In 1969, five dedicated members of the San Diego Historical Society (SDHS), now



*The Villa Montezuma Museum by George T. Kern (1921-2007), circa 1976. George's son Phil Kern, PE, is an Advisory Board member of Friends of the Villa Montezuma (FOVM). Courtesy of FOVM*

the San Diego History Center (SDHC), led by Kathleen "Kay" Porter, worked to purchase the house for use as a neighborhood museum and cultural center. For the next forty years, volunteers known as the Friends of the Villa Montezuma (FOVM) helped in the care, restoration, and stewardship of the house museum. They also contributed their time and talents to the lives of inner city residents who had

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no cultural center in their District. Incorporated as a non-profit, FOVM continued to watch over the Villa after the SDHC decided, during difficult economic times, to consolidate focus on its Museum of San Diego History in Balboa Park.

Regrettably the Villa Montezuma Museum closed in 2006, and FOVM began focusing on raising funds for much needed restoration. Today, the museum's future is brighter than ever thanks to the efforts of its friends, who have not wavered from their sole mission of restoring and re-opening this splendid historical landmark.

### The Villa's path to becoming a cherished house museum



*Kay Porter, 2008. Kay Porter has been a supporter of the San Diego Historical Society and the Friends of the Villa Montezuma for more than 40 years. Courtesy of FOVM.*

The Villa Montezuma Museum (also known as the Jesse Shepard/Francis Grierson House) has been described as one of San Diego's "monuments in gingerbread." With its stained glass windows, detailed woodwork, and elaborate turrets and tower, it represents a high point in the history of Queen Anne Victorian architecture. Shepard, who described it as a "Palace of the Arts," built and furnished it according to his own design, and "the original intention has been successfully carried out in every particular by the architects Comstock and Trotsche," although later authors would claim that it had been built in accordance with instructions from the spirit world.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, Victorian houses became the focus of preservation efforts as once-fashionable neighborhoods fell into disrepair. Jim Moss, then Executive Director of the San Diego Historical Society, said, "In 1953 the San Diego Historical Society decided to preserve historically significant structures in the area, but it wasn't until 1969—16 years—that it began to do it."<sup>2</sup> Until then, the organization focused on the establishment of a research library and the Serra Museum.

In 1970, Kay Porter and her friends and SDHS supporters and board members Dr. Nicholas Fintzelberg (chairperson of the Villa Montezuma Committee); John Henderson, FAIA, and Homer Delawie, FAIA (partners in the architectural firm of Delawie, Macy, and Henderson); and Harry Evans pooled their personal funds to purchase the Villa and spearheaded the campaign to get the City to purchase the house if SDHS did the restoration. The group worked hard to identify funding sources. The restoration took nearly three years, the painstaking work paid for

by a mixture of civic pride and City funding. Over \$82,000 for restoration came from SDHS, the City of San Diego, the Junior League of San Diego, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), the San Diego Model Cities Program, and individual donors.<sup>3</sup> To provide matching funds for the HUD grant, “benefit dinners, cocktail parties and receptions were separately hosted by the San Diego Historical Society’s Women’s Committee, by the Contemporary Arts Committee of the Fine Arts Society, and by the Native Daughters of the Golden West.”<sup>4</sup>

The 1970s were boom times for local history. The Bicentennial celebration led to a reawakening of appreciation towards the nation’s historic landmarks while, at the same time, museums around the country sought to bring history into urban and ethnic communities. SDHS found that it could use the Villa Montezuma to branch out from its singular location in Mission Valley above Old Town to reach out to the community and, at the same time, save a San Diego architectural treasure.

The opening day for the Villa Montezuma



State Senator Jim Mills spoke at the 1972 dedication ceremony. At left is Clarence Pendleton. At right is Nick Fintzelberg, who currently serves on the FOVM Advisory Board. Courtesy of FOVM.



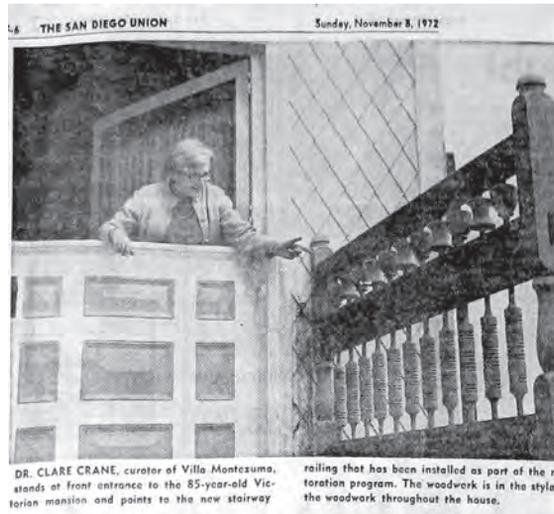
City of San Diego Councilman Leon Williams presents an award to a young Villa volunteer for her work at the museum, 1973. Courtesy of FOVM.

Museum—November 12, 1972—was momentous. SDHS staff estimated that over 1,800 attendees came that day for the ceremonies, while over 1,000 people visited the Victorian mansion each month during its first year as a museum.<sup>5</sup> It was not only restored to its former architectural grandeur, but also decorated with antique furniture from the SDHS’s collections and donations from generous historical society members. Florence Chambers (Mrs. Richard) Newkirk, for example, gave a “warehouse” full of antiques from

her parents' former furniture stores.<sup>6</sup> Speakers included State Senator and historian James R. Mills, former curator at SDHS, who praised the use of the Villa for being a place for art and the encouragement of local artists.<sup>7</sup> SDHS now had two museums, the Serra and the Villa, and a new logo to celebrate that fact.

### Villa Montezuma Museum programs and events

Dr. Clare Crane, the first curator of the museum, created innovative programming for the new museum, assisted by volunteers from SDHS, the Junior League, and the Assistance League. A few years later, these dedicated women from all around San Diego County would become the core of the official Friends of the Villa Montezuma auxiliary group. Dr. Crane made the Villa a safe haven that introduced



*Dr. Clare Crane (1926-2011) was the first curator at the museum. The porch was put back in its original location in 1972. In 2013 the porch is again being rebuilt. San Diego Union, November 8, 1972.*

neighborhood children to music, art, and history. When she and the Friends realized that many area youngsters had never been to Old Town or to Balboa Park, they arranged for field trips. When the Friends found that so many neighborhood children had never been to the beach or played in a pool, they arranged for swimming lessons. Violence and high crime were prevalent in many inner-city communities in the 1970s, including Sherman Heights. The Villa Montezuma after-school programs served as an oasis and an alternative to gang-related activity. In 1986 Larry Malone, the live-in Community Projects Coordinator, was recognized by the



*Jill Porter was instrumental in organizing Villa volunteers from various committees into the official Friends of the Villa Montezuma auxiliary group. La Jolla Light, November 23, 1972.*



Larry Malone, circa 1986. Larry's great relationship with area youth made the Villa a popular place and helped kids stay out of trouble. SDHS Newsletter, January 1986.

County of San Diego with the Bechefskey Award for outstanding contribution to the prevention of juvenile delinquency for his work on these programs that kept kids out of gangs.<sup>8</sup> The FOVM was there to provide the funds, the volunteers, and the staff augmentation that allowed important programming to flourish.

A new use for the Villa Montezuma Museum came about when SDHS member (and later board member) Jerry Ferm married Karen Elizabeth Cooper in the Music Room on March 31, 1973. This was the first marriage

at the Villa since opening as a museum. Between 1973 and 2006 there would be hundreds of subsequent weddings, providing a steady revenue source for the Historical Society. Both Jerry Ferm's sister Tonita "Tonnie" Moss and Tonnie's husband, Jim Moss, who was then the Historical Society Executive Director, continue to support the Villa today, more than 40 years later, by serving on the FOVM Advisory Board.

The year of 1974 was extremely busy at the Villa Montezuma Museum and for the friends who swore to

protect and keep it open. Additional restorations

within the basement of the Villa were funded by both the Junior League and the Assistance League, and included creation of the "Bistro" room next to the kitchen. The Assistance League provided low cost/no cost meals to area seniors in the Bistro. Volunteers from the SDHS's Women's Committee and from other women's clubs donated funding, time, and talent in an era when civic participation was celebrated. These well-educated volunteers were recruited under the genteel term "hostesses," rather than museum docents, and served as guides and program managers for the Villa Montezuma Museum.<sup>9</sup> Teenagers learning civic



San Diego Union, Feb. 24, 1973.



The Cooper-Ferm wedding was the first of many at the Villa since opening as a museum. San Diego Union, April 2, 1973.



*Young ladies held their own events at the Villa, including these Assisteens of San Diego County. The Sentinel, May 9, 1973.*

involvement from their mothers held their own fundraising events at the Villa.

### FOVM founding and activities

The many volunteers who loved the Villa Montezuma Museum—and had been doing so much for the museum since Kay Porter and friends purchased the house six years earlier—coalesced into the officially recognized Friends of the Villa Montezuma auxiliary group in 1976, led by Jill Porter of the Junior League. The mission of the Friends was “(a) to develop and encourage interest in the work of the Villa; (b) to interpret its programs, and (c) to fund raise and create projects as shall be in keeping

with current needs of the Villa Montezuma and in accordance with general policies of the San Diego Historical Society.”<sup>10</sup> To qualify as a member of the Friends of the Villa, one had to be a member of SDHS and a person who was “known to have a deep interest in service to the Villa and who subscribe[s] to the objectives of the Society.” The Friends were at last officially recognized for all the support they provided.

Planned events held by the FOVM included the annual Victorian Valentine Tea, which continues to this day as a key fundraiser and awareness tool for the Friends, and the most beautiful decorating of the museum for the Christmas holiday. The FOVM members were docents at the annual Designer Showcase House, started initially as a fundraiser for the ongoing restoration of the Villa, and then later as a means to raise funds for all the other SDHS



*FOVM members Patty Molyneaux, Lois Harris, and Sherry Coffey decorate the Villa for Christmas 1981. Lois Harris is still a member of the Friends of the Villa. Courtesy of FOVM.*

sites. In April 1976 the San Diego Historical Society opened the Marston House, former home of George Marston, the founder of the San Diego Historical Society, as its second house museum. It was also that same year, 1976, that emergency repair of two-thirds of the Villa's foundation was required.<sup>11</sup> Why only two-thirds of the foundation? One reason was because the Assistance League's meals program for senior citizens operated out of the museum's kitchen, so the western third of the foundation, which then was not failing structurally, was left as-is so as not to disturb the meals program.

Sherman Heights did not have its own community center until 1994, when the Center, designed by Rob Wellington Quigley, opened on Island Avenue only a few blocks away from the museum. Until then, Dr. Crane and the growing Friends volunteers ran the Villa as an unofficial community center, with the Friends staffing the museum Mondays through Fridays for afterschool projects. One of the children who attended these after-school programs was California State Senator Ben Hueso who, a few years before Dr. Crane's passing, wrote to her of his fond memories being one of those kids who learned to love music at



*A Friends volunteer tours area teens through the Drawing Room, circa 1982. Courtesy of FOVM.*



*Teens learn Victorian crazy quilting with the Friends of the Villa Montezuma. Activities and programs matched the changing displays in the museum. Courtesy of FOVM.*



*Sherman Elementary students in grades 4, 5, and 6 came to the Villa to learn about San Diego history (photo circa 1993). Courtesy of FOVM.*

Friends' events (Ben is an accomplished pianist). The Villa Montezuma Museum, christened by Jesse Shepard as a "Palace of the Arts," became the arts and culture center for the area with regular art exhibits by local artists, guest lecturers, craft demonstrations, dance programs, and even volunteer pianists every Sunday who performed in the beautiful Music Room.

In 1978 a fire in Balboa Park's Electric Building, which housed the Aerospace Museum, gutted that historic structure, and the Aerospace Museum relocated to the Ford Building. This provided the opportunity for SDHS to further expand, but not without a price. More funds needed to be raised for such an expansion. In 1981, the Society successfully moved to the reconstructed building (renamed Casa de Balboa) from its old headquarters at the venerable Serra Museum in Presidio Park. Right about this time, however, both the City and County of San Diego reduced annual funding of SDHS in order to take care of more pressing regional capital improvement needs. This funding reduction was not unique to San Diego; all around the nation, governmental financial support of civic institutions came to an abrupt end. Rising costs and failing infrastructure seriously reduced funding of historic, cultural, and artistic organizations by supportive but cash-strapped elected officials. This was a challenging time for museums everywhere.

By the mid-1980s many museums and cultural institutions had to make across-the-board budget cuts, and SDHS could no longer staff the Villa Montezuma Museum as it had in the past. In 1984, the Historical Society was forced to charge admission to the house for the very first time. It had been free entry since opening

in 1972. Since the Historical Society could no longer afford a full-time staff curator devoted only to the Villa, the Friends filled the staffing gaps that were critical to keep the museum running. FOVM members were experts at social networking long before the age of social media; they brought in volunteers from other social committees, took field trips to other museums throughout Southern California to educate themselves on museum programming and best practices for youth involvement, and formed strong friendships. The FOVM was inspired and motivated to keep the Villa running without interruption.

Fire again played a role in the lives of the San Diego Historical Society and FOVM members. In March 1986 an accidental fire swept through the second floor and through the Music Room ceiling of the Villa Montezuma, destroying the office space, the Gallery, and over half of the museum's roof.<sup>12</sup> Sherman Heights had already lost the 30-room Garrettson House at the corner of 21st and K Streets to fire in 1974, and the Livingston Mansion at 24th and J Streets to relocation by barge to Coronado in 1983. The loss of the Villa would have been unbearable. Water and soot did substantial damage, but FOVM members were there to carry out items to be cleaned or repaired, and later to aid in the fundraising. A newly restored Villa Montezuma Museum reopened on June 28, 1987, in time for the 100th anniversary of the house. That same year Jesse Shepard's neighborhood was officially recognized by the City of San Diego as the Sherman Heights Historic District, San Diego's largest historic district by the number of contributing historic structures (almost 400 buildings).

By the 1990s many Friends had given more than 20 years of volunteer service to SDHS for the Villa Montezuma Museum. As the original members of the Friends



*The Friends hosted after-school arts and crafts. Mural on the wall depicts the Villa and the neighborhood, created with local kids and muralist Victor Ochoa, c. 1993. Courtesy of FOVM.*



*In 2003 FOVM members submitted images of the Villa for the Sherman Heights Snapshots photography show. This photo by FOVM members Jalela and James Justus shows the glowing stained glass at sunset. Courtesy of James and Jalela Justus.*

of the Villa looked forward to retirement, new volunteers began to step forward from families moving into the Sherman Heights Historic District—residents participating in the annual Dia de los Muertos celebration at the Sherman Heights Community Center, and participants in the Sherman Heights Neighborhood Cultural Council (SHNCC). The City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture took the lead on this cultural council pilot program, which was inspired by the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Share Your Heritage” initiative to promote what is unique and authentic in historic communities in order to encourage cultural heritage tourism. By 2003, a new roster of FOVM members was ready to take the helm of the Friends of the Villa Montezuma as the historic mansion’s protector. That same year Friends contributed to the SHNCC organized “Sherman Heights Snapshots”

call for photographs, where over 400 images were displayed in an exhibit at the Sherman Heights Community Center on May 24, 2003, and then again displayed at San Diego’s City Administration Building at 202 C Street on July 14-25, 2003. The Villa was a popular subject for photography, and the promotion of the historic district caused renewed interest in the museum.<sup>13</sup>

### **Significant changes in the recent past**

By 2005, major changes were taking place at SDHS. The direction was clear: the Historical Society would focus on the Museum of San Diego History in Balboa Park, while the Serra Museum, the Villa Montezuma Museum, and the



*Incorporated in 2006, the new Friends of the Villa Montezuma logo was designed by FOVM member Steve Veach.*



San Diego Councilman Ben Hueso presented a check to FOVM president Louise Torio at the FOVM at the 2007 Victorian Valentine Tea. At right is Chula Vista Councilmember Pamela Bensoussan. Photo by Todd McKerrow.

Marston House would need to find a different path to a successful future. In 2005, the 1976 replacement of two-thirds of the Villa's foundation was doing fine, but the original 1887 porous Victorian brick foundation on the west side of the house was failing. As a precaution, all artifacts were removed from the kitchen and structural bracing was set up; large groups and parties were no longer allowed to rent the museum, and no tours went downstairs.

The FOVM committed to extensive efforts to find restoration funds for the Villa. At the urging of Executive Director David Watson of SDHS, the Friends of the Villa Montezuma incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in 2006. No longer would the FOVM be an auxiliary group of the historical society; it would become the only non-profit solely dedicated to the magnificent Villa Montezuma Museum.



Exterior sign. ©SDHC #82:13527.



*Preservation contractor Owen Sutton restored the tower roof through a State of California grant, 2008. Photo by Steve Veach.*

Joining the FOVM Advisory Board were some very long-term, original friends who purchased the Villa in 1970: Kay Porter, Dr. Nick Fintzelberg, and John Henderson, FAIA. In addition, the FOVM Advisory Board had the guidance of original curator Dr. Clare Crane, past SDHS executive directors Jim Moss and Bob Witty, and past interim executive director Linda Canada. Owen Sutton provided extensive historic preservation construction experience, and licensed engineers Mike Ruth, Phil Kern,<sup>14</sup> Mack Williams, and Ryan Boley provided their expertise.<sup>15</sup> City of Chula Vista Mayor Cheryl Cox supported the FOVM's efforts

as her mother had been a Villa docent in the 1980s. In addition, a number of current and former historical society site administrators and staffers became FOVM members. Working successfully with local elected officials, the Friends were able to secure some key funding to move the project forward.

On February 28, 2006, SDHS's Board voted to close the Villa to the public. Old Town Trolley Tours had stopped running the nightly "Ghost and Gravestones" bus tour, leaving the Villa without a regular source of revenue. This, combined with both a major downturn in the economy and safety concerns about the foundation, left no alternative.<sup>16</sup>

The FOVM immediately requested the San Diego Police Department Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVPs) to visit the museum daily, and took turns themselves making daily checks on the Villa. The FOVM took over quarterly reporting on the State of California grant given to SDHS, a grant used for necessary repair work to the Villa's tower done by preservation contractor Owen Sutton. The Friends met extensively with elected officials at the local, State, and Federal levels to explore funding options since, with the deep recession, philanthropic giving was significantly curtailed for all non-profits. The FOVM convinced the City of San Diego to





*The Friends of the Villa Montezuma were honored by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board for finding funding, May 2010. Standing: Owen Sutton, Judith Swink, Dr. Clare Crane, Pita Verdin, Ricardo Medina, Dr. Maria Bolivar, Rita Collier, Romila Driese, Louise Torio, and Alessandra Moctezuma. In front: Todd McKerrow. Photo by Ross Porter.*

include the museum in a comprehensive structural evaluation of City buildings, and the Friends Advisory Board engineers met with City Engineering to prioritize structural repairs.

In February 2009, to no one's surprise, SDHS, now operating as the San Diego History Center (SDHC) decided to no longer operate the house museums, and gave notice to the City that the Villa Montezuma Museum and the Marston House would revert back to Park and Recreation.<sup>17</sup> After almost 40 years of memorable stewardship, the historical society would no longer be part of the Villa's future. Later in 2009 SDHC was again in the news when it sold the beautiful antiques inside the Villa at auction in Los Angeles.<sup>18</sup> The Friends purchased the bedroom set that had been on display in Jesse Shepard's bedroom, thanks to a supporting gift from Dr. Clare Crane.

Meanwhile, the FOVM continued to get to the table all who could help fund the Villa's restoration. FOVM member Sheila Hardin, Community Relations

Manager at Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) encouraged the FOVM to get CCDC's board interested in helping the Villa, which was one block away from the CCDC's redevelopment area. At that time, state law allowed redevelopment agencies to spend money outside their areas if it would benefit the redevelopment area. The Sherman Heights Historic District was indeed a downtown community: Matthew Sherman's Addition begins in modern day East Village, split in half by Interstate 5. For months, FOVM President Louise Torio, a Sherman Heights resident and Villa docent since 1994, took CCDC, East Village, and downtown stakeholders on a tour through the museum. Many had never been to the Villa



*Kay Porter volunteering at the annual Sherman Heights Dia de los Muertos celebration, still supporting the museum she helped make possible over 40 years ago. Photo by Steve Veach.*

before, but eventually all were convinced to help the museum. The Friends and CCDC worked out a way for CCDC to lend support if the City of San Diego could match that support.

The Friends turned toward then District 8 City Councilman Ben Hueso, who later became City Council President before continuing his career in state politics. Ben knew the importance of the Villa not only to the community but also to the region. Through vigorous work with Hueso and his staff, the City identified \$500,000 that could be contributed to the cause, and CCDC identified \$550,000.



*Wade Lindsey shows Councilman David Alvarez and San Diego Police Capt. Mark Jones the plans for the sewer work. Photo by Steve Veach.*

Thanks to the years of effort by FOVM, against all odds and in a deep economic recession, the City and CCDC entered into a memorandum of understanding in November 2009 that \$1,050,000 would be used to restore and reopen the Villa Montezuma Museum. Finally, sweet success after years of effort. City Engineering hired Platt/Whitelaw Architects of San Diego to develop a comprehensive restoration plan and provide a thorough analysis of the building's needs.

The Friends of the Villa Montezuma's efforts were recognized by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board in May



December 2012: City of San Diego Councilmember David Alvarez (center, back row) with City staffers, the contractor for the sewer work, the San Diego Police Department Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol, and the Friends of the Villa Montezuma. Back row, to the left of Councilman Alvarez, is contractor Wade Lindsay of Wade Company. To the right of David is SDPD Captain Mark Jones of Central Division. Front row: City of San Diego Park and Recreation manager Francisco Castruita at far left. Third from left, front row, in hard hat: City Engineering project manager Lauren Graham, next to liaison officer Suzy de la Pena and RSVP members. FOVM members are at right. Photo by Steve Veach.

2010 with the Preservation Advancement Award, given to those who advance the cause of historic preservation through on-going work or a significant single project, effort, or accomplishment. The FOVM made the impossible happen by not giving up and by getting so many stakeholders together. Thanks to Ben Hueso, the San Diego City Council declared November 30, 2010, as “Louise Torio Day” to



May 2012: City of San Diego Engineering staff with the archeological team that unearthed the Victorian fountain buried in the museum’s yard. Photo by Louise Torio.



*A tour group listens before embarking on the FOVM walking tour of "Jesse Shepard's Neighborhood," the Sherman Heights Historic District. In the center, under the tent, is Shep Wickham (1947-2012), who was a live-in site administrator for the museum for seven years. Photo by Todd McKerrow.*

honor the Friends President for her efforts supporting the Villa Montezuma Museum.

Despite the story of success, there would be difficulties ahead. In 2011 the State of California decided to end all redevelopment agencies and take those funds for State use, effective February 1, 2012. That meant that CCDC would no longer exist and the \$550,000 for the Villa Montezuma Museum could not be utilized. The Friends waged a successful campaign with state-level elected officials to lend support to

allow Civic San Diego, the successor agency to CCDC, to keep the funds for the museum, although these "frozen" funds cannot yet be used. The Friends needed to find replacement funding. In addition, the Villa's restoration using the City's \$500,000 was slowed when the sewer line under the museum collapsed. This needed to be fixed before other restoration work could proceed. Amid all these challenges in 2011, a highlight came in July 2011 when CBS's Larry Himmel had the FOVM show him around the Sherman Heights Historic District, which resulted in a supportive television segment showcasing the museum and the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup>

In April 2012 two acts of vandalism affected the Villa. Eggs were thrown at historic buildings all along 20th Street; an egg thrown at the Villa's front door cracked the glass in the door. The window was removed, boarded up, and painted to match the door. In a separate incident later



*Shep Wickham in costume, celebrating Jesse Shepard's 140th birthday in 1988. Courtesy of FOVM scrapbooks.*

that month, the glass in a window leading to the Bistro was carefully removed but not broken, triggering the silent alarm. The San Diego Police Department was on the scene within minutes with a canine unit. No one was in the museum, and the front door was not found unlocked as mistakenly reported.<sup>20</sup> The police department stepped up patrols in the area.

Preparing the sewer dig in the Villa's backyard in May 2012, City Engineering conducted an archeological dig to map and identify the brick circular structure buried under dirt. It indeed was the remains of the old Victorian fountain, which was then reburied and preserved in place. The City was now ready to get a contractor for the project. In December 2012 City of San Diego Councilman David Alvarez invited City Engineering, Park & Recreation, the San Diego Police Department and Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP), the contractor (Wade Company of Lakeside), and the Friends of the Villa Montezuma to the museum to preview the sewer restoration work. The new sewer line was completed in April 2013.

## **The future of the Villa Montezuma Museum**

Thankfully, there is more good news for the future of the Villa Montezuma Museum. The Friends of the Villa Montezuma sought replacement funding for the frozen funds from CCDC. City of San Diego Park and Recreation grantwriters identified Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds as a possibility. This money can be used for public benefit capital improvement projects in lower-income census tracts. The FOVM collaborated on the grant application by providing the narrative of how important the Villa is to the neighborhood, what programming and resources would be possible again at the reopened museum, and the evaluation of who would be served within the census track and surrounding areas. In March 2013, after a long evaluation process, the City application for the Villa Montezuma Museum restoration was allocated a CDBG grant for \$882,000. In other good news, as of May 2013, the worn-out front steps of the Villa were being replaced by the City.

Without a doubt, the Friends of the Villa Montezuma will continue to be a bridge between City departments, funding sources, and donors so that the major restoration work can commence and the museum reopened. The



*Victorian Tea Party, 1980. ©SDHC #82:13535-4.*



A CCDRC banner featuring the Villa, 2013. Courtesy FOVM.

*El Dia de los Museos*, and giving lectures and talks at gatherings from Rotary Club meetings to the annual Gaslight Gathering Steampunk Convention.

At 125 years old, the Villa Montezuma has a bright future. The dedicated and determined members of the nonprofit FOVM are much like the young San Diego Historical Society members who had a vision for the museum in the late 1960s—full of civic purpose and the desire to create a meaningful inner-city museum and cultural center. You are invited to learn more or join the efforts of the Friends of the Villa Montezuma by visiting [www.VillaMontezumaMuseum.org](http://www.VillaMontezumaMuseum.org).<sup>21</sup>

FOVM takes pride in all it has done over the decades, how it has evolved to meet the needs and challenges of the museum, and what it has accomplished with the Sherman Heights community. The Friends Heights hope to be the future operators of the museum; there would be no greater honor after all these years of service. In the meantime, the FOVM continues to raise awareness of the Villa's beauty and significance and raise funds for its future reopening. There are fund raisers with Victorian Valentine Teas and monthly walking tours of the Sherman Heights Historic District ("Jesse Shepard's Neighborhood"). One finds the Friends engaged in community outreach with booths at events like the Golden Hill Old House Fair and the San Diego Museum Council's



The steel Villa Montezuma sign is a prominent part of the artwork at the trolley station. Photo by Louise Torio.



African American artists gather at the Villa Montezuma in 1982. ©SDHC #82:13535-7.

## NOTES

1. "Villa Montezuma," *San Diego Union* (September 25, 1887), and Clyde V. Smith, "Monuments in Gingerbread," *San Diego Union*, June 16, 1957. For more information on the history of the Villa Montezuma, see a special issue of *The Journal of San Diego History* (hereafter *JSDH*) 16, no. 3 (Summer 1970) including the following article, Clare Crane, "Jesse Shepard and the Villa Montezuma," 4-14; and a special issue of *JSDH* 33, nos 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1987) including the following articles, Clare Crane, "The Villa Montezuma as a Product of Its Time," 81-106, "Jesse Shepard and the Spark of Genius," 107-22, and Lucinda Eddy, "Restoration of a Grand Historic Site," 123-40.
2. Lew Scarr, "San Diego Cherishes Historical Landmarks," *San Diego Union* (October 31, 1971).
3. "Salute to Contributors," *Butterfield Express* VI, Villa Montezuma Museum Dedication Program (November 1972).
4. Elinor Richey, "Sanctum for a Strange Genius: Villa Montezuma," in her *Remain To Be Seen: Historic California Houses Open to the Public* (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1973), 150.
5. Attendance quotes at opening, San Diego Historical Society Newsletter, January 1973.
6. Jeannette Branin, "Historical Society Honors Donor," *San Diego Union*, January 18, 1972.
7. "75 Years Old: Jesse Shepard House Given a New Life," newspaper article from the FOVM scrapbooks, November 13, 1972.

## THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

8. "Larry Malone Receives Bechefsky Award," San Diego Historical Society Newsletter (January 1986).
9. "Hostesses Are Needed for Mansion," *San Diego Union*, March 11, 1974; "Hostesses Sought for Villa," newspaper articles from the FOVM scrapbooks (1973).
10. FOVM General Policies, September 1980.
11. "Fund Plea Due: Repairing of Home Urged," *San Diego Union*, July 25, 1975.
12. Eddy, "Restoration of a Grand Historic Site," 130-31.
13. Amy Oakes, "Exhibit Spotlights Sherman Heights; Photographs Show Off Little-Known Site," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 25, 2003.
14. Phil's father, George Kern, was the architect at the County of San Diego who created Heritage Park near Old Town.
15. Serving on the 2013-2014 Friends of the Villa Montezuma, Inc., Board of Directors: Louise Torio, President; Charles Spratley, Vice President; Michael Ruth, P.E., Treasurer; Alessandra Moctezuma, MFA, Secretary; Gregory DePena, AIA; and Todd McKerrow. Barbara Busch, Membership Secretary. Currently serving on the Friends of the Villa Montezuma Advisory Board are Kay Porter; Dr. Nicholas Fintzelberg; John Henderson, FAIA; Klonie Kunzel; Jim and Tonnie Moss; Bob Witty; Linda Canada; Pamela Bensoussan, Deputy Mayor, City of Chula Vista; Owen Sutton; Carol Hann; and Pita Verdin.
16. Roger Showley, "Shutdown of Historic S. D. House in Dispute," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 10, 2006.
17. Jeannette Steele, "High Cost of History: San Diego Society Shedding Two Sites It Can No Longer Carry," *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 12, 2009.
18. Roger Showley, "Mansion's Furnishings Give Way to Gavel," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 8, 2009.
19. "Villa Montezuma: History Repeats Itself," Larry Himmel reporting, <http://www.cbs8.com/story/15103418/history-repeats-itself> (accessed May 5, 2013).
20. Roger Showley, "Villa Montezuma Hit by 2 Acts of Vandalism," *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 18, 2012.
21. Contact the Friends of the Villa Montezuma at [www.VillaMontezumaMuseum.org](http://www.VillaMontezumaMuseum.org) (must have "MUSEUM" to be the FOVM site) or at [FOVM@VillaMontezumaMuseum.org](mailto:FOVM@VillaMontezumaMuseum.org). Two-hour walking tours of the Sherman Heights Historic District are on the third Sunday of the month at 1:00 p.m. RSVP required. Special group tours can be arranged.