

Orange Preserves



Vol.11 No.2

Old Towne Preservation Association

February 1994

Mary Louise Wirtz 1913 - 1994

by Dean Hiser

Mary Lou Wirtz died very early on New Year's Day. Somewhere between the revelers and those of us who rose early to drive to the Rose Parade, she lost a last battle with her erratic breathing.

You probably did not know Mary Lou, but she was an institution in our little neighborhood and her passing is a time for sorrow and reflection. We lived next to her for only a little more than 8 years, but that is because we were newcomers. She moved into the house next door with her parents when she was a small child and stayed for more than seventy years. She married and raised a family and buried a husband there. As a result, she knew many things about this neighborhood and we were enriched by her knowledge.

She knew, for instance, that our house had been divided into apartments at about the time of World War II which explained the old gas pipes lying in the attic. That also explained why the design of the outside back stair didn't match the architecture of the house. For the first thirty years of its history, she explained, the upstairs back door and porch had served only for ventilation and to shake the rugs.

Sometime early in the century, the Clements received permission to add a small closet in the Wirtz flower bed where that little house backed up toward Mary Lou's driveway. All these decades later, she thought it might be a good time to get that closet floor out from under her camellias.

Mary Lou was also one of those neighbors with

whom one shared things. One of our children would be sent over with produce from the garden and would come back with oranges from her tree. The oranges were good, but the exchange between elder and child was far better.

Her knowledge of the history of our house and the fact of who she was increased its value in a way that cannot be priced. That value, in turn, led indirectly to spending some of our time promoting preservation efforts in Old Towne. Her passing reminds me that what we try to preserve is not buildings of a certain age, but a sense of neighborhood.

We Americans seem to have lost our knack for building new neighborhoods that contain many generations. It is here, in places like Old Towne, where that mixing continues and has been preserved. It is one of the things we should consider whenever we think about tearing down and replacing.

I know that opponents of OTPA sometimes assume that we simply oppose new building, yet I have not met anyone in the organization who holds to that view. Rather, they seem to me simply conservatives in an old sense of the word: people who believe that the value of what exists deserves careful consideration before we replace it. Included in this belief is the realization that the value of a property includes its history and its relationship to the properties around it.

Mary Lou reminded me of those things every time she told me, in her rapid, always interested and interesting

Mary Lou Wirtz

continued from page 1

style, another story about Orange and the neighborhood and our houses. She reminded me that we learn something about who we are from getting to know those older than ourselves. She reminded me that knowledge of our history adds a degree of stability when the present seems difficult. She reminded me that knowing something more about those who preceded us adds value to what we inherited from them and deepens our sense of place.

She will be missed, but, for many of us, she left a legacy which she gave freely and happily. We will carry in our minds a picture of her tall figure gesturing animatedly, talking rapidly, pausing for a quick labored breath, hurrying on with her tale and then laughing in recollection. It is the laughter that keeps returning in my memory. She knew great tragedies, but she shared the joys in life. May we, in our turn, pass on our legacies as generously.

OTPA Mission Statement

To preserve and enhance the unique Old Towne Orange area through education, communication and community involvement.

An Invitation to Participate in 1994!!!

We are beginning to organize our work force for the wide array of activities and events OTPA has planned for 1994. We invite all of our members to pick at least one activity that you would like to participate in. We need "leaders", "followers", and just about everyone who is willing to give a little time.

Our organization is always looking for new ideas and we depend on our volunteers to help carry them out.

So, come and join us . . . meet new people, have lots of fun and get involved.

Following is a list of activities and events for 1994.

- Presidents Day Bake Sale
- Historic Home Plaque Research
- Oral History Night
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Ice Cream Social
- Historic Preservation Week Activities
- Newsletter
- Street Fair Booth
- Candidates Night
- Halloween Party
- May Dance
- 1995 Calendar
- Christmas Decorating Contest
- Membership Survey

Please call (714) 639-6840 (OTPA Message Center) and leave your name, telephone number and the event(s) you are interested in. Thank you for your help.

Orange Camera & Photo, Inc.

Serving Old Towne Orange Since 1948

We Do Our Own Color and Black & White Printing
\$ Copy Old Photos \$ Passport Photos \$ Camera Repair \$

For the Holidays, Choose from

Our Large Selection of:

- Photo Greeting Cards •
- Various Photo Frame Ornaments •

538-1157

141 North Glassell Street
Orange, CA 92666

Hours:

M-W-F 8:30 to 5:30

Tu -Th 8:30 to 7:00

Visa*Master Charge*Discover*American Express



M & M
NURSERY

specializing in
color baskets

380 N. Tustin
Orange
California
92667
714 • 538-8042

