

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS  
CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
305 City Hall

George Hjelte, General Manager

"EL ALISAL" THE PLACE OF SYCAMORES

A California State Monument Administered by The  
Department of Recreation and Parks, City of Los Angeles

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"Who Built This House"

By Althea Warren

The building of the Lummis home is a romantic story. It is also a story of persistence and courage. The house stands today as a monument to a man who never gave up.

When in 1897 Charles Fletcher Lummis determined that his family should have a home, he was a poor young editor supporting four people with \$50 a month, but he did not let finances stop him.

He spent many months searching all over Los Angeles for an ideal site. When he discovered this three-acre tract of land on the bank of the Arroyo Seco, he put to work his capital of Yankee ingenuity and native intelligence. He dug the material out of the very ground the house was to stand on. He used his sensitive hands that had assisted a famous surgeon. He relied on the steely sinews of legs and back that had been toughened by his tramp across the continent. He built El Alisal with the love of a man for his creation and with the joy of knowing that it would endure. Each year he brought one or two Indian boys from Isleta to help with the heavy digging, and his two young sons gathered boulders and followed his directions. But in fifteen years the fourteen rooms were not all completed. The foundations are deep. The front door weighs 2000 pounds. The walls

are from 2 to 4 feet thick, every yard hand-tamped, reinforced and of the hardest concrete. In structural problems he consulted with two authoritative California architects, Sumner Hunt and Arthur Benton. This house must stand against time. In the final quarter of his life he conceived the broader vision of the Lummis home as a working museum, a place of pilgrimage for his community and for all who adopted the slogan he invented, "See America First".

He is no longer here, but El Alisal is rich with memories of his fiestas and Spanish banquets, times of wit and song. The shades of great dancers, singers, artists, sculptors, and scientists still seem to throng its halls. Hark! Can you not hear the ring of the "Carlist March" or the magic whirr of Will Roger's rope?

Today El Alisal welcomes you with the same courtly gesture with which Don Carlos himself would. Cross its threshold! John Muir has been here before you and also Schumann-Heink, Mary Garden, John Burroughs, Maud Allan, David Starr Jordan, Charles Cadman, Douglas Fairbanks, Carrie Jacobs Bond, William Allen White, Helena Modjeska, Gutzon and Solon Borglum, Henry Van Dyke, and hundreds like them.

"Pasen, amigos," its builder says to you "La casa est suya"! Enjoy its treasures. A man who cared what might come to you and your American heritage preserved them for you. Find here, like those earlier visitors, something of his inspiration and courage. The old stone castle is not just another California landmark. It is a symbol of the spirit of one who could say in the midst of paralysis "I can be bigger than anything that can happen to me."

What Kind of A Man Was He?

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"My name is Lummis, I'm the West!  
 For culture I don't give a hang!  
 I hate the puny East although  
 I can't conceal my Yankee twang.  
 My trousers, they are corduroy,  
 Likewise my jacket and my vest,  
 For I'm the wild and woolly boy,  
 My name is Lummis, I'm the West!"

This doggerel from a San Francisco newspaper caricatures three of Lummis' most dramatic traits:

1. His knowledge and love of the Southwest.
2. His courageous challenge to pretense and convention. He dared to be different when there was a good reason to be. Instead of the black frock coats and stiff hats of his contemporaries, he dressed to suit the life and climates of Southern California and New Mexico. In winter he wore a corduroy suit which he called his "senior greens" and in summer, white jeans and a mesh shirt. His shoes were usually moccasins. For the festivities at El Alisal which were known as "Noises," he had a handsome doeskin charro costume with a drawn-work shirt made for him by the Indians, a red Pueblo belt, and his silver bracelet. In his clothes, as in many of his other daring breaks with custom, he was merely two generations ahead of his day, as is proved by men's present comfortable, light-hearted sportswear.

3. His third dominant quality was his power of getting things done. He had the power to let himself go, but his enthusiasms were grounded on knowledge and scientific accuracy. Layers of energy and endurance enabled him to bring a long procession of "impossible" projects to fulfillment.

He was a small, slight man (5 feet, 7 inches in height) with blue eyes, a staccato speech and a figure like a hickory sapling. None of

his other achievements excel his originality and charm as host in this house. On March 1st he often held a March Hare party to celebrate his birthday. An invitation to one of these occasions reads as follows:

"Dear Bunny,

The hounds are after you, and the April Fool's next! Here's the only safe place! Postpone Death, Marriage, Taxes, and all other Disasters, particularly your own and scurry to this Warren at Rabbit Time 6 p.m. sharp. Cabbage at 6. Madness begins later.

The Grey Hare (C.F.L.)

Long tables were set up in the patio. Hassenpfeffer was sometimes one of the appropriate dishes. Don Carlos played Spanish or Indian songs on "Acomita," his guitar. All sorts and conditions of men and women were the guests of this many-lived, myriad-minded, golden-hearted reveler, from leaders in the arts, politics and affairs and his cherished neighbors to his Mexican and Indian friends.

He had a most endearing habit of naming the inanimate companions of his daily life. His Blickendorfer typewriter was "The Blick" in his diaries. A redwood cabinet which he made for his writing materials was called "Miss Minerva Allwood." His correspondents numbered over a thousand, and he often wrote until sunrise. Then he'd drink a cup of chocolate and, after a few hours of sleep, would rouse himself relentlessly with a cold shower and eat what he called "breklunch," which usually included chicken gumbo or mock turtle soup. There is a tradition that he coated his pies with mustard and lighted his cigarettes with a flint and steel. It is sure that when he was public librarian he branded the valuable books with a hot iron.

## What Did the Builder of This House Do?

Lummis was born March 1st, 1859, in the Fanny Davenport House in Lynn, Massachusetts, where both his parents had taught in the high school. His mother, Harriet Fowler Lummis of Bristol, New Hampshire, died when he was three years old. His father, Henry Lummis, was a Methodist minister and teacher of splendid capacities who spent his last years as professor of ancient languages at Lawrence College, Appleton, Wisconsin. He taught his son Latin when he was six, Greek, at eight and Hebrew when Charles was nine.

Charles entered Harvard at eighteen and made a fine record in athletics, running 100 yards in 10 seconds and competing in boxing, wrestling and walking. "Poetry and poker," he said, "were his favorite diversions." But above all else he loved fishing for trout. Theodore Roosevelt was a member of his class (1881) and never forgot "Lum"'s pugnacious defiance when some of the boys posted a notice ordering him to cut his hair.

During his sophomore vacation he printed on twelve small pages of birch bark 14,000 copies of his "Birch Bark Poems" which earned praise from Longfellow, Emerson, Whittier and Andrew Lang. In his junior year, he was secretly married to a brilliant young medical student, Dorothea Roads. An attack of brain fever prevented his graduation, but twenty-five years later Harvard awarded him his bachelor's degree. His wife's father owned several farms in the Scioto Valley near Chillicothe, Ohio, and offered his son-in-law the management of one of them. He soon changed to journalism, however, becoming editor of the Scioto "Gazette" where he worked for six years. He held office in the "Young Republicans Club," introducing William McKinley to his first Ohio audience.

To escape the malaria of this low river country he wrote in the fall of 1884 to Harrison Gray Otis, owner of the Los Angeles Times, proposing to walk across the continent and send him weekly reports on the way. Colonel Otis answered that he would publish the articles if he liked them and a job would be waiting for him on the Times. He more than kept his word for on the 143rd day after Lummis left Cincinnati, he arrived in Los Angeles and was told to begin next morning as city editor.

Four glorious years of activity followed in the city which he took completely to his heart. There were 12,000 people in Los Angeles when he arrived here on February 1st, 1885. Like every frontier town the saloon owners were the "bosses" in municipal politics and vice, gambling and drinking were wide open. The Times started a fight for high licenses and, contrary to expectations, it won. Another success with which he was associated was a report on the Indian war going on in Arizona. He was sent to get the truth about General George Crook, Geronimo, and the War Department. The money being misspent on government contracts was what kept the Apaches in revolt. "Lum" became a close friend of General Leonard Wood who was put in charge of the situation.

Persistent overwork brought on a stroke of paralysis which rendered his left arm useless. He went to New Mexico to recover and lived for three years at the pueblo of Isleta with the Tigua Indians. They called him "Kha-Tay-Deh" ("Withered Branch"). He learned all their customs and beliefs. One night in August, 1888 Adolph Bandelier, one of the greatest Southwest ethnologists and anthropologists, stumbled into camp in a dust storm. They became

inseparable friends, Lummis expressing their relationship as "being glad together." Bandelier called Lummis "Younger Brother" and taught him as an apprentice so that when Henry Villard of New York (owner of the Northern Pacific Railroad) put Bandelier in charge of an expedition to excavate in Peru, Lummis went as an assistant. They had expected to be gone three years but Mr. Villard's financial losses terminated the researches after a year and a half.

Lummis was divorced by his first wife and in March, 1891 married Eva Douglas, a schoolteacher from New England who had taken care of him during his second and third strokes of paralysis at Isleta. She is an authority on Hispanic subjects and a translator who wrote under the name of Frances Douglas. They settled down at Isleta and there, June 9th, 1892, their daughter Turbese was born. She was given an Indian name which means "Sunburst."

Ever since the later '80s, Lummis had been writing Indian legends for children and stories of the Southwest for such magazines as Century, Harpers, Scribners and Saint Nicholas. When his illness was at its worst, he had made some money sending jokes to the humorous papers, Puck, Judge and Life. From 1891, when his "New Mexico David," a story for boys, was published until his death at 69 he was constantly writing.

Charles Dwight Willard, secretary of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, started a magazine in 1894 called "Land of Sunshine" and invited Lummis to be its editor. He took over the little monthly rather against his will in January 1895 and continued to head it until 1903. His column of comment in each issue he called "In the Lion's Den." His policy he stated as "trying to be popular enough

to live and substantial enough to deserve to live." He developed young artists and writers who later brought fame to California, among them Edwin Markham, Charles Warren Stoddard, Charlotte Perkins, Stetson Gilman and Joaquin Miller. Later came Mary Austin and Eugene Manlove Rhodes. During his eight years as editor he himself was its most frequent contributor, supplying more than 250 stories, poems, articles and essays. He changed its name to "Out West," saying that "Land of Sunshine" "smacked equally of Sunday School and the Immigration Bureau."

Among the valuable Spanish documents which he published in translation were:

"History of Mexico (1538-1626)," by the Franciscan missionary Geronimino de Zarate de Salinero

"Memorial on New Mexico," by Alonso de Benavides (1630)

"History of California (1768-1793)," by Viceroy Revilla Gigedo

"Diary of Junipero Serra on his march from Loreto to San Diego," (1769)

From 1905 to 1910 Lummis was librarian of the Los Angeles Public Library. He scandalized the American Library Association by going to their annual meetings wearing his sombrero and carrying his guitar. He organized a group of his solemn brotherhood of librarians into "The Order of the Bibliosmiles." His annual reports are the crispest, most amusing in library literature and their recommendations are even ahead of practices in the 1950s. He advocated, for example, advertising a library as much as a shoe store; outdoor reading rooms for our climate; emphasis on good salaries for library workers. His slogan was "In its simplest terms, the public library



idea is the spread of reading that will do the most good." About censorship he said, "The modern feeling is that adult readers are responsible for their own minds. I myself have never banished any volume from the library." During his later years he concentrated on the Southwest Museum and on his writings. When in 1928 the doctors told him that his time was short, he worked heroically to complete a new edition of "The Spanish Pioneers" which had won him a decoration from the King of Spain. He collected all his poetry in "The Bronco Pegasus," the first copy off the press reaching him less than a month before his death. A telegram told him that "Flowers of Our Lost Romance" was accepted for publication only a few hours before he lost consciousness. Two volumes that he had begun were never finished, "The Right Hand of the Continent: A History of California," and his autobiography, "As I Remember."

He died November 28th, 1928, at El Alisal. His daughter Turbese describes the last rites.

"Wrapped in a chief's blanket and laid on a board among joyous red flowers, he lay facing El Alcalde (the four-fold giant sycamore in the patio)."

Recognition came to him from all over the world. The Spanish Academy elected him to membership for his historical research. What he considered to be his greatest accomplishments are listed on the bronze plate where his ashes are placed in the wall of El Alisal.

Charles Fletcher Lummis  
March 1, 1859 - November 28, 1928

He founded the Southwest Museum  
He built this house  
He saved four old missions  
He studied and recorded Spanish America  
He tried to do his share

Three organizations he established to attain his ardent purposes.

#### The Landmarks Club

When Miss Tessa Kelso, remarkable city librarian of Los Angeles, left for New York in 1893, she had started a movement to repair the missions in the south part of the state where they were literally falling to pieces. She asked Lummis to use his magazine to promote the cause and turned over to him the small fund she had collected. He started the Landmarks Club "to save for our children and our children's children the missions and other historic monuments of California." San Juan Capistrano was restored first and San Fernando, next. Mrs. Phoebe Hearst gave \$500 towards saving Pala, an asistencia of San Luis Rey mission where the Palatingwa Indians from Warner's Ranch were later given lands through Lummis' efforts. Lastly, in 1899, the San Diego Mission was restored. Lummis also led the club in protection of the Plaza, "the historic centre of Los Angeles." He persuaded the city council to retain more than a hundred of the Spanish street names which the War with Spain had made unpopular. He used to say that "perhaps the most extraordinary thing he ever accomplished was at the first public meeting of the Landmarks Club when the Catholic and Episcopal bishops sat side by side on the speakers' platform." Lummis was accepted by all denominations, for his own religion was simply expressed in his creed "that God is the best we know."

#### The Southwest Museum

On the urgings of the Archeological Institute of America, Lummis founded in 1903 a southwestern branch for which he secured 260 members in four years, four times as many as those in the parent

society. Out of this group grew the mightiest of all his endeavors, the Southwest Museum. It stands on a wooded eminence to the northwest of El Alisal and contains not only Lummis' library and the materials amassed in his Hispanic and Indian studies, but other valuable Indian collections from the plains, the Northwest, the Southwest and even from the Mayans of Yucatan. Its Caracol tower which is 125 feet high is named for Lummis.

#### The Sequoya League

In 1902 Lummis was so concerned over the condition of the California Indians that he established the Sequoya League designed "to make better Indians by treating them better." David Starr Jordan was its first president. Theodore Roosevelt gave support to a bill passed by Congress to provide \$100,000 for new lands for the Warner Ranch Indians who had been dispossessed and driven onto the desert. Help was also supplied to the starving Indians of Campo through the efforts of the League. Finally, a competent special agent was secured under the Indian Bureau to look after all the tribes in California.

Turbese Lummis Fiske in her brief manuscript of her father's life, which is in the Southwest Museum, analyzes the qualities in him which made his life count for so much in the development of Southern California.

"He possessed the gift of seeing deep into the past, far into the future."

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#### Some Things He Said and Things Said About Him

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I should have gotten more instruction out of college if I had been looking harder for instruction.

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