

*Tiles on the south wall of the Van Briggle Pottery, plus one of two iconic smokestacks, which were positioned above immense kilns.*

## CACS TOUR OF VAN BRIGGLE POTTERY

By Mark Davidson & Dennis Barrett

On a brilliant late summer day, a dozen Arts and Crafts enthusiasts visited the historic Van Briggle Pottery on the campus of Colorado College in Colorado Springs, for a tour of the property and a picnic on the grounds. The Colorado Arts and Crafts Society organized the event on the one day a year that the historic Van Briggle Pottery is open to the public, during an event hosted by the Women's Educational Society of Colorado College. As CACS tour director Robert Rust was out of town, Mark Davidson and Dennis Barrett as pinch-hitters organized the event. The tour of the building took an hour and a half, with a docent leading us around the exterior of the building, and then delivering us to several stations within the pottery, where experts expounded on the aesthetics and the long history of the iconic site. A highlight was the welcome accorded by a docent in the costume and the persona of Anne Gregory Van Briggle.

The pottery bears the date 1907 on several tiles. It was designed in 1907, by Anne Van Briggle, (who took over management of the pottery when her husband Artus succumbed to tuberculosis in 1904), and the company superintendent, Frank

Riddle. It is in so many ways a memorial to Artus! It was erected near Colorado College, and is now a part of the College - where Artus taught in the Art Department when first he arrived in Colorado Springs in 1899, and where he began, in space afforded by the chemistry department, to work toward his unique glazes. The building was large, 160 ft. long, 15000 sq ft., intended to expand both the production and distribution of the wares of the company, in greater demand after the prizes awarded to Artus' designs both here and abroad. (Additions since have made it even larger.)

The building features two huge iconic smokestacks which rose, originally, above two bottle-shaped kilns each 36 feet high. For the exterior, Anne designed 5500 tiles, and produced them with the help of one very adept student. 5500 of them! But the building was large enough that they never seem crowded, well spaced out among the red bricks.

And many of the tiles bear the company's logo, the conjoined A and A of Artus and Anne. (Alternatively described as an arch and cross - if you place a cross within an arch, you get

# Van Briggles Field Trip

(cont.)

conjoined A and A.) From the earliest days of the pottery, and before that in their student days in Paris, Artus and Anne were partners, in every way. (Later, in the Pioneers Museum we were moved to see the life-size plaster cast of their two joined hands.) The external tiles also served, of course, as a very tangible advertisement of what the company could produce. The building has been recognized as one of the top five art tile installations in the United States. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

Anne sold the Van Briggles Company in 1912. It operated under a succession of owners, at the historic site until 1968, then in a variety of Colorado Springs locations until finally closing in 2012. Colorado College bought the building in 1968, using it to house their Facilities Services Department, but carefully conserving the exterior.

At the last station in our tour, a very enthusiastic member of the Colorado College staff told a thrilled audience that the College now plans to restore the building to an arts function. It will move the Art Department, which Artus once directed, to the historic site! He also told us that when the pottery closed down, the College bought the Van Briggles designs, molds, glaze recipes etc. It is conceivable that in the future Colorado College art students will once more be producing Van Briggles vases and tiles in the pottery's early home!



*An original tile press, now in the courtyard. It was powered by a strong worker turning the long arms at the top.*

Following lunch in a shaded gazebo in the Heritage Gardens adjoining the pottery, we proceeded to the Pioneers Museum in downtown Colorado Springs where we viewed the permanent Van Briggles collection on the museum's main floor. There we admired the beautiful fireplace surround at the center of the collection, and the Lorelei vase, the Despondency vase, and many other Van Briggles pieces, all dating from the golden age before Anne left the directorship in 1912.

*A glazed ceramic cat gazes haughtily down from the south face of the east wing. This cat was mounted in 2005 to replace the original made by Anne Van Briggles a century earlier. Above it, one version in four tiles of the conjoined A and A*



*Van Briggles Pottery, on the Colorado College campus, in wooded surroundings, but not far from the freeway.*

# MABEL DODGE LUHAN HOUSE

## AN ESCAPE TO REALITY AT THE EDGE OF THE TAOS DESERT



By Cynthia Shaw

Having first discovered the Mabel Dodge Luhan House on a visit to Taos in the late 1980s, I can't imagine staying anywhere else. Over the last 30 years, I've returned at least 10 times to enjoy a few days of R&R inside the historic adobe dwelling she designed and built at the urging of her future husband, an enthralling Native American named Tony Luhan.

A wealthy, thrice-married, avant-garde socialite from Buffalo, New York, Mabel arrived in the Southwest in 1917 seeking a "Change". She later reflected, "My life broke in two right then, and I entered the second half, a new world that replaced all the ways I had known with others, more strange and terrible and sweet than any I had ever been able to imagine."

Like many Anglo expatriates who moved to Santa Fe and Taos after World War I, Mabel and her compatriots (including artists, musicians, writers and other creative folks) helped promote the utopian myth of the Southwest as an alternative Garden of Eden, with the climate, terrain and indigenous people offering a model for aesthetic and spiritual renewal and reform

they hoped would lead to a new cultural nationalism rooted in regionalism

Briefly married to the painter Maurice Sterne at the time, as she explored the ancient Taos Pueblo and began to understand and adopt vernacular thought and traditions, Mabel experienced a profound paradigm shift that changed the course of her future. It wasn't long before the deep connection she shared with Tony turned into a lifelong commitment. Their friends and houseguests included Georgia O'Keefe, D.H. Lawrence, Willa Cather and Martha Graham, to name a few.

After acquiring the property (owned and thoroughly enjoyed by Dennis Hopper in the 1960s!), a non-profit group adapted the former residence as a conference center and hotel. With its viga ceilings, kiva fireplaces and carved pillars, the original dwelling offers three prime quarters: Mabel's Room, Tony's Room and the Solarium (which has stunning views of the sacred Indian grounds that abut the property). There are more accommodations along a ground floor wing, and more within the Gatehouse Cottage and other nearby buildings. Guests enjoy a delectable breakfast in the dining room (at these communal gatherings I have met a descendant of Ansel Adams, a BBC podcaster and numerous other fascinating people).

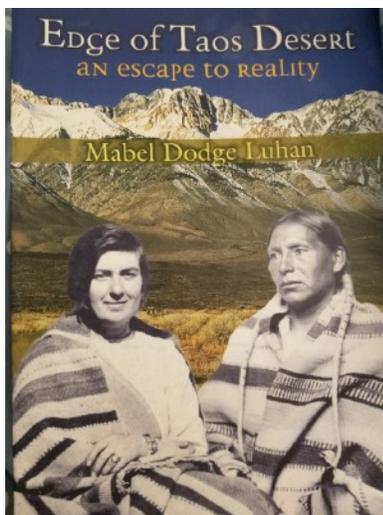


*A view from Tony's sleeping porch*

## MABEL DODGE LUHAN HOUSE (CONT.)

A stay at the Mable Dodge Luhan House is an experience like none other (the weekend before Thanksgiving, as a snowstorm moved into town, I stayed in Tony's Room, complete with a covered sleeping porch and a bathroom with windows painted by D.H. Lawrence). Having spent most of my time reading Mabel's memoirs warm beside the cedar-burning fire, I have a much better understanding of the old East Indian Proverb, "He who loves with passion lives at the edge of the desert".

CACS has long wanted to sponsor a weekend trip to Taos, to include visits to the Taos Pueblo, Nicholas Fechin House and the Georgia O'Keefe Museum. If you'd be interested in a southwestern sojourn, please email Cynthia at [cshaw@jeffco.us](mailto:cshaw@jeffco.us)



*Right: Mabel's Memoirs*

*Below: Bathroom windows painted by D.H. Lawrence*



## IDEALISM RUN RAMPANT IN THE BRITISH ARTS & CRAFTS



*Exterior of Little Holland House in the London suburbs, holding up well after 115 years.*

**By Dennis Barrett**

The British theorists of the Arts & Crafts Movement sought to restore to the artisan all aspects of creating an object – the design and all steps of the execution – in late Victorian times when the machine had taken over the various functions and the individual knew, at best, only one part of the process. John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) had died by the time their devotee, Frank Reginald Dickinson (1874-1961), determined to carry their ideals to the point of obsession. In 1902 he embarked on not only building his own house, but also making all its furnishings with his own hands! That house is Little Holland House, in the southeast suburbs of London. (For an opportunity to learn more about Ruskin, see page 7).

One of the advantages of serving on the Board of the Colorado Arts & Crafts Society is getting to meet with the other Board members, particularly Robert Rust, who knows pretty much everything worth knowing about the Arts & Crafts Movement. Some years ago I asked Robert what in England was worth seeing that I hadn't seen yet, and he suggested Frank Dickinson's Little Holland House. Without really remembering why I had accepted his suggestion, I made a few attempts to visit the place, without success. That is because Little Holland House is open only for a few hours, on the first Sunday of the month. But this year I found I could be in London on the first Sunday of August, and set out to make my visit. From Victoria, one must find the train to Carshalton Beeches station (**not** Carshalton station – don't ask me how I know.) And



*Built-in seating around the highly decorated fireplace in the living room. The ornamental repoussé copperwork was done by Dickinson, as well as the paintings above it.*

then it's a short walk to 40 Beeches Ave, and the not-particularly-impressive exterior of Little Holland House.

What is impressive, and so *very* Arts & Crafts, is to learn that, with no prior knowledge of any of the skills needed, Dickinson built the house, with the help of one hired bricklayer, and advice from trade journals, *The Builder*, *Spons Mechanics Own Book*, and the local bye-laws. And while the building was going up, he worked at night in his parents' cellar to construct the furniture: first the coal box, then, with growing confidence, the bed. A year after the house was built, plumbed and plastered, he had finished enough of the interior to marry Florence, his fiancée of five years, and move in. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon sanding and staining the floors. Florence's nest egg, intended for her trousseau, paid for slating the roof.

After 58 years of living in the house, Frank died. Florence carried on for another 11 years, then put it up for sale. And because of the protestations of one tough librarian, the London Borough of Sutton purchased it, and opened this gem to the public.

The house is furnished in simple but sturdy furniture (with wedged mortise and tenon joints showing its inspiration in the Arts & Crafts Movement), and decorated throughout with wood carvings on the timber joists, ornamental metalwork, decorative plaster, very good original oil paintings, as well as excellent copies of classic paintings by Turner and Watts – all done by Frank, and all the skills learned by doing! Well, there was the embroidery, done by Florence. But any cheap machine-made things were viewed with contempt.

*No unlovely or dishonest thing,  
The slavish work of illpaid men,  
Shall desecrate this hallowed place;  
What could not be is left undone,  
Till funds shall find the means.*

Note that, following the lead of Morris, his socialist hero, Dickinson has regard for those who are enslaved by the machine and poorly compensated.

But it was not all work and no play at Little Holland House. Frank and Florence and their two children lived full lives and fully enjoyed their house. The living room and sitting room together (with no door between them, an architectural innovation) created a large space for dancing; a small stage under the stairs allowed for plays; and there was always a piano. Frank said, "Our home became a centre for gatherings and festivities, country dancing, play acting, musical evenings and discussion groups." But of course the amusements, like the house, were all home-made! Here I found an echo of the accounts of Frank Lloyd Wright's family, living with all the architectural apprentices at Taliesin and making their own musical and dramatic entertainments.

My docent was Helen Westward, a historian, but the other docents gathered around, all very knowledgeable, friendly, and eager to share what they knew. They were incredulous when I revealed that I had learned in Denver about their House (credit Robert Rust and the internet) and come from Denver specifically intending to visit them. Last month, they'd had a visitor all the way from Surrey (the adjoining county) and that had been a major surprise. They were somewhat rueful that they could not recall Robert's visit more than a decade ago. Should you find yourself in London on the first Sunday of the month, do pay a visit to Little Holland House! (And tell them I sent you.)

*A silver teapot, made by Dickinson as a project in the evening class where he learned how to work with metal.*



# AN EVENING WITH THE GREENE BROTHERS

By Beth Bradford

November 15<sup>th</sup>, a fortunate few of our CACS members gathered at the Boettcher Mansion for a night of socializing, shopping and education. Everyone brought a dish to share, a few members brought items for auction and Robert Rust shared an Emmy-nominated documentary film by Don Hahn concerning the history of the Greene brothers and their architecture.

The evening began with cocktails and a perusal of the auction items. After we had a chance to catch up with each other on our lives and when all attendees had arrived, we sat down for a fantastic meal. We are privileged to have so many members with such wonderful culinary flare. The meal was varied in the types of dishes and flavors. Furthermore, everything was absolutely delicious.

Dinner was followed by the movie, entitled *The Gamble House*. The house, located in Pasadena and built in 1908, is an American Arts and Crafts modern blending of styles from the American East and Asia. The house maintains its original design, fixtures and furniture.

The movie's title is a slight misdirection as, although the Gamble House is the subject, this movie focuses additional attention on the lives of Charles and Henry Greene and on their clients, David and Mary Gamble (of the Proctor & Gamble Company). In the words of Don Hahn, the writer/director of the film:

"The most surprising part of the story of the Gamble House is that the architects really didn't want to be architects at all. Charles Greene would much rather have been a painter or a poet or a writer of some sort. Eventually he dropped out of his practice and moved to Carmel California

where he could practice all of those things, but the few years that he and his brother Henry designed and built houses in Southern California were the touchstone for modernism on the west coast."

"To me the story is all about Charles Greene and his father, Thomas. That's not to take away anything from Henry Greene, the pragmatic, gifted brother of Charles, but without Thomas Greene, and his unrelenting push to make architects out of his sons in the post civil war, there would be no Greene and Greene. And without Charles, the gifted, tormented, charming, perfectionist of an artist, there would be no Gamble House. Add to that the fearlessness of Mary Gamble, and her husband David, for commissioning the house and putting up with the cost overruns. And finally the Swedish carpenters Peter and John Hall, the brilliant craftsmen able to execute the Greene's plans like no other before or since."

We finished the evening with the closure of the silent auction. There were more than thirty Arts & Crafts related items up for auction. Items included a Greene & Greene style mirror, Van Briggie, Rookwood and Merlin pottery, various items relating to Elbert Hubbard and the Roycroft Campus, and books on Arts & Crafts architects and architecture. At the auction's closing, the majority of the proposed items were sold, netting over \$850 dollars in sales with a portion retained by the items' donors and a portion remitted to CACS.

Overall, the evening was a success. We only hope that more people are able to attend next time.



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*Professor James Spates Ph.D., marking the 200th anniversary of John Ruskin's birth, will be our symposium speaker. He will speak on Ruskin and his relationship to the Arts and Crafts Movement today.*

Make your reservation now by sending an email to Cynthia Shaw: [cshaw@co.jefferson.co.us](mailto:cshaw@co.jefferson.co.us).

**Jim Spates**, Professor of Sociology Emeritus at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York, has been researching and writing on Ruskin for nearly a quarter century. He was first introduced to Ruskin by Professor Emerita of English Claudette Columbus during a semester co-teaching "London in the Nineteenth Century" in 1985. He decided he had found his mentor in matters social and aesthetic for whom he had long been searching. His expertise in Ruskin has led to numerous publications, including many articles and the books "Availing Toward Life: A Summary of the Social Thought of John Ruskin" (contracted with Ashgate Publishers) and "The Imperfect Round: Helen Gill Viljoen's 'Life of Ruskin'" (Long View, 2005). He has presented at more than 50 professional conferences, and led tours of Ruskin sites throughout Europe.



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*The Arts & Crafts Messenger*, the newsletter of the Colorado Arts & Crafts Society, is published quarterly for the society's members as part of their membership contribution. Send comments to [polly@boxesandbuttons.com](mailto:polly@boxesandbuttons.com). All articles are ©2019 the Colorado Arts & Crafts Society, with rights reverting to the authors after publication.

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