

623 CABRILLO AVENUE

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(11 CABRILLO)



1905 ~ Shingle style

ARCHITECT: Arthur B. Clark

OWNERS: Durand ~ Kirkman ~ Donoho

BY ROSEMARY C. HORNBY; REVISED IN 2006 BY MARIAN LEIB ADAMS

For almost a hundred years, this house was dominated by a giant oak tree, but since the tree fell several years ago, a victim of root rot, the house stands alone, almost as grand as the day when Professor William F. Durand and his family moved in.

Shortly after arriving in California, in 1904, the Durands rented a house in Palo Alto's Professorville neighborhood, but almost immediately they began searching for a campus site on which to build. They chose the lot on San Juan Hill because of the spectacular valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), several hundred years old. At that time, Jane Stanford's brother Charles Lathrop was business manager of the university, responsible for issuing building permits. According to Professor Durand, Lathrop "didn't like faculty at all," and said that Durand shouldn't build way out in the country. However, Durand finally obtained Lathrop's permission.

The Durands, who had become friends with Arthur B. Clark, an architect and professor of art, asked him to design a house that would have the feel of New England but the style of California. The shingle-style house is an example of the First Bay Tradition practiced in the West by architects Bernard Maybeck, Willis Polk, Julia Morgan, Ernest Coxhead, and others.

The design of the house illustrates Clark's awareness of current trends in architecture, and it is a good example of American shingle style. The house was constructed of local redwood. Shingles cover the exterior, while the porch and chimneys are rusticated stone. Double-hung windows have leaded glass on the upper portions; a bay-view window on the second floor landing has art glass in a water lily pattern. Benches, drawers, and a sideboard are built in. Clark also hand-carved flower decorations on banisters, shelving, and panels.

The basic layout of the 4,300-square-foot

house still exists, with porches and interior rooms remaining much as they were first designed, though their functions may have changed. From the southwest corner of the house, stairs lead from the driveway onto a covered porch (8½ by 44 feet) along the entire west side of the house; four pillars support it, and the front door is in the center of its length.

To the left, one corner of the 15¾- by 16-foot entrance hall has a corner fireplace with brick surround and a wooden mantel. A bench built into the side of the staircase faces the fireplace. Professor Durand explained to the second owner, Gladys Kirkman, that guests could wait there, unseen, until the family had finished dining and was ready to receive in the living room—a formality not typical of the campus then or now.

To the right of the entry, the 17½- by 28-foot living room has a beamed ceiling and a large fireplace on the south wall directly ahead. This fireplace has a tile surround and redwood burl paneling above the mantel. Off the left side of the living room, an outside entrance leads to a porch.

Pocket doors from the living room lead to the dining room, which has a corner fireplace with red brick surround; on the hall side of the room is a built-in china cabinet with leaded-glass doors. Paneled wainscoting decorates the plaster walls to a height of 3 feet. To the left of the dining room, a butler's pantry with built-in cabinets leads to the 12- by 14-foot kitchen. It has a porch on the northeast corner. Off the kitchen, stairs lead to the basement and the second floor.

The original second floor had five

bedrooms; two had fireplaces, both with brick surround and hearth. One bedroom had a corner basin, and two shared a washbasin in a small room between them. There were two full baths off the upstairs hall, and a third bathroom off one of the bedrooms. Over the first-floor porch, a sleeping porch had access to both a bedroom and a bathroom. Original plans of the exterior show a Queen Anne–style tower above the second story, but it was never built.

Woodwork downstairs is redwood, and upstairs is Oregon pine. Before the Durands left New York, they arranged to have white oak flooring shipped around the Horn because they did not think they would find good-quality flooring in California.

The attic has only one finished room (11½ by 14½ feet) for storage. The 12- by 24-foot basement has a 7½-foot ceiling, a coal chute, and the furnace.

THE OWNERS

William Frederick Durand. He was born in March 1859 in Beacon Falls, Connecticut, and grew up on a farm near Derby. In 1880 he graduated from the United States Naval Academy, where he was second in his class. He spent three years on sea duty, then the Navy sent him to Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. He married Charlotte Kneen in October 1883. After receiving his Ph.D. from Lafayette in 1885, he resigned from the Navy and began his teaching career in 1887 at Michigan State College. From 1891 until he came to Stanford in 1904 to head the Department of Mechanical Engineering, he

was director of Cornell’s postgraduate program of naval architecture and marine engineering. He later established the Department of Aeronautics at Stanford and became emeritus in 1924.

Durand’s training was in marine engineering, but over the years he became interested in, and was best known for, his contribution to the science of aeronautics as well as the design and construction of dams including the Hetch Hetchy project. He served on many federal government boards and consulted with government agencies; his groundbreaking work in aeronautics was recognized with many awards and honors.

During World War II, Professor Durand worked on the development of the jet propulsion engine. He continued to do research on airplane propellers and was professionally active well into his 80s. In 1953 he wrote his autobiography, *Adventures in the Navy, in education, science, engineering, and in war: a life story*. Durand was a close friend of Charles Lindbergh, who often came to Stanford to visit with him.

The Durands lived in the house until 1950. They had one son, who later married and had three boys. After Mrs. Durand died, in 1950, Professor Durand sold the house and moved to New York to be near his son and grandsons. He died in Brooklyn in August 1958 in his hundredth year.

Hadley Kirkman. Kirkman and his wife, Gladys (Gladdie), bought the house in 1950. Kirkman was born in Richmond, Indiana, in March 1901. He received an A.B. degree at the University of Iowa (1925), an M.S. at the

University of Chicago (1929), and a Ph.D. in 1937 from Columbia University. He taught zoology at Iowa State and then taught in various positions at Ohio, New York Medical College, and Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons.

In 1942, Kirkman married Gladys Tracy, who was born in May 1907. They had one daughter, Tracy Leigh Kirkman-Liff. In 1936 he came to Stanford as professor of anatomy on the recommendation of his professor at Columbia.

He became emeritus in 1966 but remained active in the department until 1987. His research, which centered on endocrinocarcinogenesis and origins of spontaneous tumors, was reflected in more than a hundred publications. He died in September 1997, and his widow sold the house in 2003. She now lives near her daughter in Tempe, Arizona.

The Kirkmans made few modifications to the house. In 1951, when they moved in, they replaced the icebox, which the Durands had still been using, with a refrigerator. They also modernized the sink area, enclosed the back porch, and glassed in the porch off the living room.

The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake damaged the house: plaster ceilings fell, the brick chimney collapsed, and leaded-glass windows were broken. Although there was no structural damage—a tribute to Clark's architectural talents and Durand's engineering skill—the house was in a shambles. The windows and chimney were carefully restored. Fortunately, the decorative carvings Clark had

crafted on the stairway and fireplace were not damaged, nor was his stained-glass window on the stairway.

In 1957, the original lot was divided and Dr. Henry Kaplan, a professor of radiology at the Stanford Medical School, and his wife, Leah, who later became university ombudsperson, built a house on the site.

Professor Durand was interested in plants, and the garden contained specimens he brought back from around the world as well as gifts from his friend Luther Burbank. Except for a large cactus from Burbank, little remains of the original garden and orchard, which were located mainly in the subdivided area.

However, it was the huge valley oak at the front of the house that dominated the exterior. The Kirkmans treasured it and made it accessible for weddings, children's parties, art classes, and university functions.

Professor Steven Marx wrote an article in *Stanford Magazine* about this 500-year-old tree, now called the Durand oak. Marx introduced the tree in this way:

The tree in question was hidden from the street by a thick hedge. We walked down a narrow driveway that tunneled through the hedge and came out on a sight that stopped me cold. Near the edge of a sloping lawn rose a colossal creature with a massive trunk, serpentine limbs and deliquescent twigs. Its gnarled attenuated forms seemed to crouch, grope and stretch filling every inch of the hedge-enclosed yard. As I came nearer to the trunk I felt the quality of that longevity.

Beneath the oak sat a small wooden bench from the chapel at Cornell University, a gift to Professor Durand when he left Cornell for Stanford.

When the oak fell several years ago, the Kirkmans pruned the tree and left part of it lying on the front lawn as a sculptural “jungle gym” for children to climb. As proud as the Durands were of the oak tree that inspired them to select their lot, there is no view of it from inside the house. When Gladys Kirkman asked Durand about this, he told her that New Englanders go outside to look at trees; only Californians would sit at a window and look

out at one.

David and Miriam (Miki) Gasko

Donoho. They bought the house in 2003. David Donoho is Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of Humanities and Sciences and professor of statistics, and his wife is professor of statistics and decision sciences at San Jose State University. They plan a major restoration of the house in the future.

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