

REFRAMING THE WHIMSY GARDEN PROJECT

By

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## ABSTRACT

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In 2005, a community endeavor known as the Whimsy Garden Project ran into great difficulty and was in danger of being abandoned. Foreclosure on the property was imminent. The person in charge of the project, remembering my prior involvement 18 months earlier, asked for help in attempting to save the project. I agreed to take the leading role in getting the project “back on track”. My work on the Whimsy Garden became my field placement required for my Master’s in Sociology at Humboldt State University. My actions linked to meeting a number of key objectives: recruiting a new board of directors, incorporation as a non-profit, finding a new entity to underwrite the mortgage on the property, and soliciting new partners to move the project forward successfully. I also led a visioning session for a successful re-framing of the project as the Ryan Family Historic House and Garden Project. Within this new frame the project was able to once more move forward toward a successful outcome.

In this master’s project document, I provide descriptive detail on the history of what became the Ryan Family Historic House and Garden Project, as well as my own work with the project as linked to my field placement. In addition, I draw on sociological theory to frame my work and the project within a larger literature on community development, social capital and historic preservation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of professors, project participants, and family. The original project chair was Dr. Mary Virnoche who encouraged me in this endeavor and taught some of the graduate classes where I learned sociological principles such as framing techniques and focus group principles that proved to be valuable during the project. When Dr. Virnoche was considering leaving the University for another position, Dr. Elizabeth Watson agreed to assume the chairpersonship. Dr. Watson also was my instructor in a number of classes that proved to be very useful in the project, particularly one in Conflict Resolution. Other instructors that encouraged and mentored me through my studies in Sociology were Dr. Sing C. Chew, Dr. Judith Little, Dr. Jennifer Eichstedt, and Dr. Jerald Krause. I owe them a great debt of gratitude. I want to thank my wife Melanie for her unending patience with me as I worked on this project, and her insistence I complete this paper as a matter of principle. In a way I owe it all to her. A special debt of gratitude is due Carol Green who originally conceived this project, and put an incredible amount of time and effort into attempting to make the Whimsy Garden a reality. I simply stepped into her shoes, and worked to allow her dream to be realized.

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## INTRODUCTION

Carol Green, a Eureka third grade school teacher, conceived the Whimsy Garden project as a way to preserve history, educate both school children and adults, and benefit the community. By taking advantage of an opportunity to purchase an abandoned historic home and adjacent vacant land in pursuit of these goals, she was able to work toward social change through building social capital.

While Green was focused on these opportunities, and was not attempting to use social capital as a means to an end, this was actually the underlying engine that allowed her to successfully move the project through its various stages toward completion. While personal issues interceded and prevented Green from completing the project, social capital was a major instrument this author depended on in carrying the project forward.

This paper will explore a number of key sociological principles that were the basis for the Whimsy Garden project from its inception to the present day. These are social capital as a driving force behind action sociology, the strength of weak personal ties in establishing linkages to external entities critical for success, public and community gardens and historic preservation as a rationale for the project, and finally history as the most important contextual element. Focus group dynamics provided a vehicle for developing a new frame for the project deemed essential for its success. Accordingly we will explore the project's history, new directions, and how all of these concepts coalesced together in action sociology for a stronger community.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ryan Family Home and Garden Historic Site, formally the Whimsy Garden, is an amalgamation of various land-use and social principles. This includes public and community gardens, historic preservation, and history. Each principle plays an important role in the project vision, goals and objectives. Additionally there is a need for this to be a project that can be eventually completed and become self-supporting in terms of both finance and operations.

In the early years of this project all of these principles appeared to be effectively applied. However when the project began to fail it became problematic whether the project could actually be completed and sustained. After much research it was determined that framing the project differently would be necessary to get the interest and public support sufficient to both complete the project and to ensure its effective operation into the future.

Because this project was taking place simultaneously with my work on this academic master's project, the review of the literature proved to be very valuable in helping develop this new frame. This review covered the following areas: social capital as a key concept in the analysis of contemporary society, framing theory in improving communication and promotion, weak ties in establishing linkages to externals critical for success, the role of public and community gardens in modern society, historic preservation as a rationale for the project, and history as the most important contextual element.

## Social Capital

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu first introduced Social Capital and its implications for the social world in 1986. His influential work investigated three major forms; cultural, social, and symbolic capital. He states in *The Form of Capital*, "...capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights, as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications, and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections') which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility" (Bourdieu 1986:2-3). It is social capital in particular that draws our attention in the Whimsy Garden Project. While the Whimsy Garden has its share of physical capital, such as its building, land, and historic trees, and a base of cultural capital in its association with education, it is the social capital that gives the project its direction and possibilities by adding in the human resources so necessary for success. In other words the immediate future of the project is grounded in a need to mobilize resources to develop a common vision, raise necessary funds, and actually put the physical and cultural capital to work in a productive fashion.

Another renowned social theorist, James Coleman, in 1988 expanded the examination of social capital to one of how it can be deployed as a tool for sociological action. In his words a "...resource for action is one way of introducing social capital into the rational action paradigm" (Coleman 1988:S95). However, Coleman also argues that



when social capital is used in a real world setting it can result in real change. He postulates that when “actors” are empowered with social capital, they are more effective in trying to accomplish their goals. He states, “If we begin with a theory of rational action, in which each actor has control over certain resources and events, then social capital constitutes a particular kind of resource available to an actor.” (1988:S98). In this way it can be a catalyst for change. As Coleman states “Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (1988:S98). From this we can conclude that when the social capital is placed in the hands of real world actors, it can result in real change.

In 1995 Robert Putnam in his essay and later book titled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, addressed his concern with our decline of "social capital" in the United States since 1950 and its implications for democracy. He defines social capital as “...connections among individuals --- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 1995:8). He also set forth the difference between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the links between like-minded people, and bridging social capital is the building of connections between heterogeneous groups. While bonding helps to develop and maintain solidarity, it is the bridging form that brings the opportunities for action in solving social problems. He also refers to the notion of “weak ties” as a force in expanding social networks to greater effectiveness (Putnam 1995).

This notion of weak ties was investigated by Mark Granovetter in *The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited* (Granovetter 1983). Weak ties are those casual acquaintances with which we are socially involved, as opposed to our close friends, defined as strong ties. This has profound implications for the Whimsy Garden project for it is through these weak ties we gain access to the many diverse views and economic support necessary for this project to be successful (Foley 2001).

Finally, Putnam in his follow-up book, *Better Together*, published in 2002, brings the relationship between social capital and the Whimsy Garden project into sharp focus. While this work is nominally a set of case studies of vibrant and new forms of social capital building in the United States he also states, “social Capital is usually developed in pursuit of a particular goal or set of goals, and not for its own sake” (Putnam 2002:10). This is in essence what the Whimsy Garden project was all about. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the goals of preserving history and the education of both school children and adults, combined with the benefits of health, healing, neighborhood solidarity, are the real meaning of the project, and the utilization of social capital simply a means to an end.

### Framing

Framing is a subject integral to the overall project success. Ultimately, it was a re-framing of the project that led to many of the strategic and tactical decisions that moved the project in a new direction, and in the view of this author is critical to its long-term success. Framing was defined by Goffman in his 1974 essay:

"I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events ... and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify" (1974:10).

This suggests frames are basic cognitive structures, which guide the perception and representation of reality. In reviewing the literature on frames an often-quoted definition appears. Todd Gitlin observes, "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters." (Gitlin 1980:6). It is hard to imagine improving much on this crisp analysis. Can framing be a deliberate action? Robert Entman suggests it can be. He states, "...to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993:52). This project was approached in much this manner, and the switch of the primary frame to the Ryan Family history while retaining the Whimsy Garden as an embedded principle allowed the project to be better communicated and promoted, just as suggested by Gitlin.

### Public and Community Gardens

Public and community gardens have a long history in the United States. A lot can be learned from the principles Frederick Law Olmsted used to develop some of the great public gardens of our nation. Olmstead was most famous for New York's Central Park along with such monumental works as Brooklyn's Prospect Park, Chicago's South Park,

and the Boston Emerald Necklace. Other large-scale works included the US Capitol and the Biltmore Estate. In total, Olmsted was responsible for over 6,000 commissions. Many, however, were small and involved modest homes or small parks. Throughout his life, all his works were guided by concepts that became the fundamental precepts for designing the American Landscape. While Ryan Garden is so small it may seem odd to compare it to the monumental works of Olmsted, a few fundamentals are still applicable.

Olmsted believed strongly that public parks and gardens had a social purpose, namely to provide a refuge from urban living. They were to be egalitarian, bringing together all races and economic status into a non-threatening environment where they could interact in relaxed fashion and find peace and tranquility. To accomplish this he emphasized the use of native landscapes, curving walks, and natural vistas. He eschewed regular square lines, artificial looking gardens, and the planning of shrubs and flowers that had no reason to exist in that location in nature (Beverage and Rocheleua 1995). Social capital is increased when people are drawn together in park like settings, and are allowed to interact.

Interestingly many of these concepts can be used to understand the development of the Ryan Garden. As a result, the design emphasizes the large heritage Monterey Cypress trees, and two extensive native plant gardens to augment the historic cottage garden. All paths are designed to curve to provide a greater sense of space, and benches and tables should provide visitors an opportunity to sit and contemplate the natural

surroundings. It will be a pleasant place to sit and visit, or for groups to congregate, especially school children.

A major use of public garden space today is for community gardens, both ornamental and vegetable. Gardens non-profits are often started on land that has little market value, and then when economic conditions change governments often withdraw their support and concentrate on profitable real-estate development on the former garden plots (Schmelzkoff 1955). Gardens in low-income areas have been hailed as safe havens that provide residents with a sense of nature, community, rootedness, and power (Breslav 1991). Community gardens facilitate improved social networks, and organizational capacity in the communities they are located (Armstrong 2000). They are especially valued for improving the mental health of developmentally disabled individuals and in this fashion build and nurture community capacity (Twiss et. al. 2003). Eureka has few gardens of this nature so this appeared to be a good possible venue for some of the garden areas. When a non-profit group approached, interested in vegetable gardening for developmentally disabled adults, and asked if they could have some of the space for the purpose of implementing on the property a small community garden, this seemed like an appropriate usage. This garden is now installed and successfully operating. Finally community gardens may lead to an increase in social capital by providing an opportunity for individuals to plant foods consistent with their heritage (DeWolf 2009). Some space has been allocated for this purpose.

Community Gardens have been shown to have the capacity to increase social capital. This is important because for such endeavors to remain successful they need to

not only have adequate financing for start-up, but to sustain this effort over time. To accomplish this requires building membership in the organization, and convincing outsiders to support the cause (Glover, Parry, and Shinenw 2005). Strong supporters of such an effort as a Ryan community garden are other garden groups, and they have been solicited for their support. These include the Humboldt Botanical Garden Foundation, Humboldt Rose Society, and Humboldt Native Plant Society, and Heather Society all of which have contributed time and expertise to helping make the gardens successful. They in turn generated interest in some of their members who have become more deeply involved in the project in terms of a direct contribution of both time and money. This shows how strong ties can work through weak ties as predicated in theory (Granovetter 1983).

## Historic Preservation

### *National Initiatives*

While Eureka has a large stock of well preserved historic homes, virtually none are open to the public for viewing or interpretation. The Annie B. Ryan house is designed to be an exception, allowing visitors to step into the late 1800's and experience what life was like in historic Eureka.

Historic preservation in this country also has a long history. It generally began in 1853 with the Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site; the first property designated an historic site by a U.S. state (National Register of Historic Places 2007). The preservation of George Washington's Mount Vernon home in Virginia was initiated

by Ann Pamela Cunningham's desire to save the home of George Washington; the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union was formed a year later. When its members began their efforts to save Mount Vernon, the mansion was dilapidated, and only three objects belonging to George Washington were left on the property. In the more than 150 years that have followed, the Association was responsible for not only purchasing and maintaining Mount Vernon, but also transforming the mansion back to its appearance of 1799 and returning many Washington family objects to Mount Vernon through acquisitions and loans. The successful salvation of Mount Vernon propelled the Association into the forefront of historic preservation, where it served as a model for other preservation projects and organizations that followed (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association 2011). The social implication of this was a recognition that our history was important, and major cultural icons help focus and shape our understanding of that history.

The next major effort in historic preservation was again a private endeavor. In 1923, the Reverend Doctor W.A.R. Goodwin began the campaign to restore Williamsburg, a town that had seemingly lost its historic significance when the capital of Virginia moved to Richmond during the Revolutionary War. Goodwin was in search of monetary support for the project to restore Williamsburg. He met Mr. John D. Rockefeller at a meeting of the Phi Beta Kappa Society in New York City to discuss a possible Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall for Williamsburg's College of William and Mary. After Rockefeller visited Williamsburg, Goodwin received the necessary financial

support from him in 1926, and Colonial Williamsburg became the first entire town to be preserved (Goodwin 2000).

At the same time Williamsburg was undergoing restoration, Henry Ford was developing Greenfield Village. Established in 1929, the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village illustrates the history of America's growth and development by documenting America's traditions of resourcefulness and innovation through its collection of American material culture. Featuring an extensive collection of original artifacts, this remarkable historical museum showcases the constantly evolving worlds of transportation, manufacturing, domestic life, entertainment and technology, and is considered an early milestone in the field of preservation (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association 2011).

At about the same time the Preservation Society of Charleston was founded. It is the oldest community based historic preservation organization in America. Originally called the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings, it was founded by Susan Pringle Frost and a small group of individuals who were concerned about the future of the circa 1802 Joseph Manigault House, which was eventually restored. Frost was an active suffragette and thought to be the first woman realtor in Charleston.

In 1931 the Society was instrumental in persuading Charleston City Council to pass the first zoning ordinance enacted to protect historic resources. The ordinance established the first Board of Architectural Review and designated a 138-acre "Old and Historic District." The district has since been expanded to include over 4,800 historic structures (Preservation Society of Charleston 2011).



The French Quarter in New Orleans was the second historic preservation ordinance and was enacted in 1836 (Blevins 2001). It also became the first, and possibly the most dramatic example of the battle between preservations and developers, which typifies many historic towns today, including Eureka, CA. The following description of this history is from the French Quarter Citizens, a "grass roots" organization founded in 1994 as the "Upper Quarter Citizens for Residential Quality" due to concern for their neighborhood's quality of life.

“By 1920 the reputation of the French Quarter had become ‘raffish’, it had fallen into decay and neglect, and many wanted to simply tear the whole area down. Luckily there were also those who wanted to keep the French Quarter alive: old families who were clinging to their traditions (and still spoke French!), new Italian and Sicilian families who had settled near the French Market in the early 1900's, artists and writers (such as William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Lyle Saxon and other "Bohemians") who enjoyed the quaint charm as a backdrop to their creativity, and preservationists who began to realize the historical importance of this neighborhood which had managed to remain intact over the centuries by the very neglect it had endured. Soon the Vieux Carré began to gain attention and popularity again. Art galleries, theatres and tearooms opened up. The streets were repaired, electric streetlights were installed, and in 1925 the City passed an ordinance to preserve at least 1/3 of the Quarter. In the 1930's the French Market was rebuilt and the Vieux Carré Commission was established to protect the architecture of the various periods. More artists and writers, including Tennessee Williams and Ernest Hemingway, were attracted to this historic treasure.

After World War II the French Quarter began to change rapidly. It soon became a battleground between developers and preservationists, which has continued to this day. On one side, developers have come in, attempting to demolish old structures in the name of ‘progress’, e.g. the plan to build an expressway along the riverfront. Although that plan was defeated after a ten-year battle, many old buildings have unfortunately been torn down elsewhere in the quarter. On the other side, preservationists have succeeded in obtaining ‘National Historic Landmark’ status for the Vieux Carré, which has created a means of helping to preserve it. Lovely old residences, which had become rooming houses and warehouses, have been

restored to their original charm and single-family status (St. Roman, B.B. 2005:3).

The success of preservationists in restoring the French Quarter and the resulting boom in tourism gave impetus to other preservation movements around the country. A national movement was begun in 1949 when a privately funded non-profit organization was formed. Known as the US National Trust for Historic Preservation, the goal of this organization was to provide leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities according to the Trust's mission statement. Since 1951, the Trust has assumed responsibility for twenty-nine sites across the county, which they operate in their entirety (National Trust 2011).

A major component of success in historic preservation is education. Advanced degrees are offered at Columbia University, Cornell, University of Vermont, Boston University, Eastern Michigan University, and the Savannah College of Art and Design (Murtagh 1997). Before we conclude that these programs are strictly found only in the eastern United States, it should be noted that only three community colleges offer an Associates Degree in Historic Preservation. These programs include: Colorado Mountain College in Leadville, Colorado; Belmont Technical College in St. Clairsville, Ohio; and our own College of the Redwoods Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology program here in Eureka, California (Tomlan 1994). The local program has been instrumental in the restoration of the Annie B. Ryan house with over 14,000 student hours applied to everything from foundation repair to a new roof. The educational value of this "field school" should not be underestimated, as it includes such skills as historic

building assessment, restoration carpentry, historic interior finishes, seismic retrofit, residential wiring, and repair strategies for wooden rain gutters and windows.

### *Historic Preservation in Eureka, CA*

Historic preservation has been a major force here in Eureka since about 1976, and its history is well documented in the City of Eureka Historic Preservation Plan of 2006. From here we learn that Fort Humboldt was the first site in Eureka recognized and preserved for its historic value. Established in 1853 as a United States army post, it was built in response to demands from local settlers and government officials, who requested assistance from the military in order to subdue the local Native American population. The last military company left Fort Humboldt in the late 1860s and it was abandoned in 1870. W.S. Cooper purchased the property in 1893 for \$6,000 but his attempts to transfer it to the State met with opposition. The Cooper family continued to preserve the fort site until W.S. Cooper's death in 1929, at which time his wife and daughter donated the land and the one remaining building to the City of Eureka and it was then transferred to the State on January 24, 1955 (Eureka Community Development 2006).

During the 1950's quite a few significant buildings in Eureka were demolished, including the old courthouse, damaged in a 1954 earthquake. However at the same time, another highly significant building was saved. As stated in the *Eureka Historic*

### *Preservation Plan:*

“In the late 1940s, the famed Carson Mansion was offered for sale by Sarah Bell LaBoyteaux, granddaughter of famed lumber magnate William Carson. Because of the large size of the mansion, it was unlikely that it could be sold as a single-family home. LaBoyteaux reportedly offered the mansion to the City of Eureka for a moderate price, in return for the provision that the City would permanently

preserve the house as a museum. However, the City did not purchase the mansion, and instead a group of approximately 65 local businessmen banded together and contributed \$35,000 to buy the property. These men formed the private Ingomar Club and used the mansion for social and recreational purposes. The deed of sale included a requirement that the building be maintained for at least ten years. Fortunately, the Ingomar Club has continued to maintain and preserve the Carson Mansion up to the present, and it has been recognized as one of the most outstanding Victorian era buildings in the United States. Although the Carson Mansion/Ingomar Club is not open to the public, it draws visitors to Eureka every year and is reputedly one of the most photographed houses in the nation.” (Eureka Community Development 2006:20)

Several other large Victorian era homes came up for sale in the 1950s and 1960s with less positive results. One of these was the Buhne Mansion, built in the mid-1880s for H.H. Buhne and located on the block between 7th, 8th, E and F. Plans for demolition of the building were announced in 1954. The Eureka Woman’s Club sponsored tours of the house in October 1954, and more than 5,200 people passed through the home. It was demolished April 13, 1955 (Eureka Community Development 2006).

In 1968, Eureka lost another grand home, the Sumner Charles and Amelia Carson House, located on J Street between 6th and 7th. The house was built in 1914 and was a two story dwelling with a red tile roof, stucco walls and classical porte cochere. The Eureka Woman’s Club again held tours of the condemned house. The house was replaced with a very modern looking structure, which today houses the Times-Standard newspaper (Worthan 1948). These homes were just a few of many that were demolished during the 1950s and 1960s. Others included the historic Clark estate, which was demolished and is now occupied by the Clark Street post office, Broadway Cinema (originally a Safeway grocery store) and a gas station (Eureka Heritage Society 1987).

Following in the wake of these demolitions, in the early 1970s a group interested in preserving Eureka's historic buildings began to coalesce. One of the key persons in this group, Dolores Vellutini, owned property at 422 1st Street, the E. Jansen Building. In 1973, Vellutini caused the property to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This is significant as it was the first building in Eureka to be placed on the National Register (two archaeological sites had been listed previously). Vellutini also invited her friend Robertson Collins, a chapter president of the Society of Architectural Historians and a trustee for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to visit Eureka. A group from the National Trust, including Collins and John Frisbee III, held a workshop in Eureka in May 1972. The National Trust representatives urged Eureka residents to conduct a survey of architectural resources. Dr. William Murtaugh, director of the National Register program, also paid a visit to Eureka around that time and recommended that the City form a heritage committee (Eureka Heritage Society 1987).

This led to the creation of the Eureka Heritage Committee which a few months later became the non-profit Eureka Heritage Society. The Society undertook a major survey of over 10,000 structures and working with the Architectural Resources Group of San Francisco published a book in 1987, *Eureka: An Architectural View*.

This was popularly known as the "Green Book" due to its cover color and became the basis for Eureka's major historic preservation efforts up to today (Eureka Community Development 2006). The Annie B. Ryan house is one of these structures.

## History of Eureka

Marvin Shepard's excellent biography of Captain H.H. Buhne, tells the story of the founding of Eureka, in 1850, located on Humboldt Bay. Jonathan Winship originally discovered Humboldt Bay in 1806 and named it the Bay of Rezanov. However he never returned and for this next 44 years this information was effectively lost until a crew boat from the Laura Virginia piloted by H. H. Buhne sailed across the bar and into the bay on April 10, 1850, followed a few hours later by the Laura Virginia herself. One reason that this entrance went so long without being rediscovered was due to the many sea stacks along the coast. For safety, ships traveling up and down the coast tended to stay quite a few miles offshore, and a hill behind the harbor entrance created an illusion of an unbroken coast.

This rediscovery was the culmination of a mad rush up from San Francisco by no less than 15 vessels all looking for a location for a port that would allow supplies to be transported across to the gold mines on the Trinity River near Weaverville. The crew from the Laura Virginia was successful because a group of six men led by Major Elias Howard traversed southward on foot along the coast from Trinidad and discovered the entrance to Humboldt Bay.

The Laura Virginia party immediately laid out a city directly across from the entrance they called Humboldt. The new city stretched along the coast for over four miles, and ended about a mile south of the Eel River. Ironically this town of Humboldt lasted only until 1851, and then pretty much vanished.

Within days of the establishment of Humboldt, three other towns were established on the bay as other ships, learning of the bay from the Laura Virginia's successful crossing, followed them in. One party, the Union Company, arrived by land from San Francisco. The town they laid out, which they named Uniontown, is now known as Arcata. The third ship into Humboldt Bay was the Eclipse, carrying the Mendocino Exploring Company, under the command of James Talbot Ryan. They decided the deeper water half way between the towns of Humboldt and Uniontown was the superior site, and named the town Eureka.

J. T. Ryan and James R. Duff built a lumber mill on Humboldt Bay in February 1851, which became the first successful lumber mill on the bay. The trees cut and milled were spruce, pine, and fir. It would not be until 1855 before the technology would be developed to cut down and saw up the giant redwood trees. Over the next fifty years a very large number of steamships and sailing vessels left Humboldt Bay carrying lumber to the far reaches of the world (Shepherd 2011).

With dozens of lumber mills operating in the region, Eureka grew into a town with a large demand for mercantile goods. The city expanded rapidly to the south, with many new homes springing up. So when Pierce Ryan arrived here in 1857 there was a demand for products for daily living, and he opened a mercantile store that made him a successful man (Fountain 1966). This allowed him to construct his home in 1869 on E street that later became the site for this project.

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

The Ryan Historic Project had its roots in an abandoned freeway project in Eureka, CA. Back in the late 1960s, Caltrans had adopted a freeway route through Eureka that would result in a recessed freeway running from approximately Washington and Broadway on the West, crossing Myrtle and 6<sup>th</sup> and continuing on to the East to the Eureka Slough Bridge. The right-of-way for this planned multi-lane highway, with numerous over-crossings, ranged from one to two city blocks wide, removing all housing and other structures from nearly 400 square blocks of the city.

This right-of-way would remove or relocate many of Eureka's older homes, including some very historic structures such as the Vance-Simpson house on the corner of 9th and G Streets. As result, in 1990, Caltrans, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, contracted for an historic survey of all buildings in the corridor, with an eye to determining which should be moved to new locations and which should be demolished. This survey was completed in 1976 (Eureka Community Development 2006).

Freeway right-of-way can become one of the more expensive aspects of a freeway project. A dramatic example of this was the Century Freeway in southern California, running from Los Angeles International Airport to Norwalk. Beginning in about 1964 this project took almost 30 years to complete. Also known as Interstate 105, this 17 mile long, 2.3 billion dollar project (including a light rail line) resulted in right-of-way costs of \$800 million and a construction cost of \$1.25 billion for the freeway portion alone. The



Century Freeway was completed in 1993, but not before generating huge controversy. Much of this stemmed from the freeway's path through predominately African-American communities. Because many prior Los Angeles area freeways had displaced many black communities in the past there was much resentment over this project. Eventually the original route was changed to reduce this impact, but in some ways the days of Caltrans simply having its way in a community was over (Hestermann, et. al. 1992). This backlash would eventually lead to demise of the Eureka Freeway, which will be discussed later.

In the 1950s, Caltrans had developed a strategy to reduce right-of-way costs. This was to purchase properties in the proposed freeway right-of-way many years in advance of the actual construction, sometimes as much as 25 years. Caltrans would then fix up the property to rental standards, and rent them out as a landlord. By doing this Caltrans avoided inflation-based increase in property values, and provided a cash flow to Caltrans during the period construction funding was being secured, and bids for building the freeway solicited. So during the period from 1975 to 1980 Caltrans purchased over 100 properties in the proposed Eureka Freeway right-of-way (Eureka Community Development 2006).

Three of these are the properties that now constitute the Ryan Historic Project. Two of the properties had homes on them, dating from 1892 when they were constructed, and one was a double sized lot with no structure. The vacant lot was the site of the former Pierce Howard Ryan home. After his death, his widow Annie B. Ryan, built the two remaining structures for rental income.

## PIERCE HOWARD RYAN HISTORY

One of the two structures, this one at 944 F Street, was rented from Caltrans by Carol Green, a third grade teacher at Pine Hill School in Eureka. A virtual twin to the house next door, it was popularly known as one of the Annie B. Ryan homes, built by Mrs. Ryan after the death of her husband, Pierce Ryan in 1884. Pierce was 15 years younger than his brother James Talbot Ryan, who was famous for having been one of the very earliest settlers of Eureka, coming here on April 15, 1850 on the Eclipse just three days after the re-discovery of Humboldt Bay. James Talbot Ryan is generally credited with naming the settlement "Eureka" in 1850 and is sometimes called the "Father of Eureka" (Irvine 1915).

Susie Baker Fountain, Humboldt State University's first graduate in 1915, was a local historian and professional columnist for the Blue Lake Advocate. She developed an extraordinary clipping file and collection of materials on Humboldt County and Del Norte County people, activities, and history from 1850-1966. Local historian Bob Libershal compiled the following information about Pierce Howard Ryan from her papers. They are located in the Humboldt Room at Humboldt State University:

While somewhat overshadowed by his famous older brother, Pierce Howard Ryan was accomplished in his own right, and arrived in Eureka in 1857. Pierce was born in Ireland in about 1832. After his mother's death, his father, Joseph Ryan, sailed to New Brunswick with the children in about 1835. He later moved to Boston where he was a merchant. In Boston, Pierce attended school

and went into merchandising at a very early age. He was naturalized there on October 15, 1856. Pierce and Annie B. Rice married in Nova Scotia in 1855.”

Pierce was a pioneer merchant and civic-minded Eureka. Upon his arrival here, he operated a dry goods store at the northeast corner of First and E streets. But it seems that he moved his business often, and occasionally changed its name. Susie Baker Fountain stated, “The history of the Ryan store is difficult to follow.” (Fountain 1966). This business, with different names and locations, was continued by his family into the 20th century as the Ryan Dry Goods Company.

In 1866, Pierce bought the Methodist Church building and moved it five blocks to the northeast corner of First and E streets where it was remodeled into Ryan’s Hall, a venue for meetings, dances, social events, etc. Further modified in 1869, the hall housed Ryan’s Eureka Theater for staged entertainments. Pierce sold the property in 1876.

He began operating a livery stable in 1869, at the southeast corner of Second and D streets. By the mid 1860’s, P.H. Ryan was back in the mercantile business.

It seems clear that Pierce H, Ryan was a reasonably successful businessman in early Eureka. Add in Ryan’s Hall and Ryan’s Eureka Theater and he shows a civic and political minded tendency to go with his business and entrepreneurial skills ((Libershal 2009).

Bob Libershal also developed the following list, which shows Pierce Ryan was, as Bob put it, “An active public man” (Libershal 2009:2):

- 1864 - 1867 - One of the organizers of the Eureka Volunteer Fire Company, aka the Volunteer Fire Department in 1864 and in 1867 was Chief Engineer.

- 1870 – A Democratic Party committeeman for Eureka.
- 1871 – Humboldt County Grand Jury Foreman.
- 1871 – Demonstrated a gas lighting system at Ryan’s Hall on March 9, 1871 – the first gas illumination in Eureka. He then unsuccessfully sought a franchise to provide municipal gas service.
- 1872 – Was one of the trustees of the Rick’s Prairie Homestead Association, Inc. The association had plans to sell shares, raise \$19,000 from capital stock and develop Rick’s Prairie.
- 1874 - 1881 – Involved with the Workingman’s political movement in Humboldt County.
- 1875 - 76 – Sergeant-at-Arms and Embossing Clerk at the State Legislature.
- 1879 – State appointment to organize the Eureka Guard, with rank of Major.
- 1879 – As the candidate of the Workingman’s Party, elected State Senator to represent Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino Counties.
- 1882 – Re-elected as a State Senator, but this time as a “Regular Democratic candidate”, and served until term expired in 1884.
- 1882 - 84 – one of the first directors of the Eureka Chamber of Commerce.
- 1886 – In June was nominated by President Grover Cleveland to the position of Register of the U.S. Land Office at Humboldt. In July Cleveland changed the nomination and Ryan’s name was withdrawn.

From this we are left with the overall impression that Pierce H. Ryan was an important individual in Eureka's history. Following the failed nomination to the Land Office, during the last three years of his life, we find no additional mention of him in Eureka history, but his obituary, published on November 8th, 1899 indicates he was still active in running his dry goods store up to the time of his death. His obituary states the following:

“Just one month before his death, he was busily engaged in moving his stock of goods from his store on Third Street to the Cooper Building. Besides his wife Annie B. Ryan, Pierce Howard Ryan left a daughter (Margaret), and three sons (Edward, George B., and Pierce H. Jr.) when he died on November 7th, 1889” (Humboldt Times November 9, 1889:11).

## THE PIERCE RYAN HOME

A title search of the property where Pierce Ryan had his home shows that George Tilley originally homesteaded the land in 1850. This was very early in Eureka's history, and dates from the year the city was founded by James Talbot Ryan.

Tilley did not hold on to the property long, and on July 15, 1850 he sold it to Isaac Wilson, J.C. Mathews, and William Cornwell. A little less than five years later it was sold to C.S. Ricks and J.S. Murray. Pierce H. Ryan purchased the property on October 10, 1863 and in 1869 constructed a 2,700 square foot, two story, three bedroom home at 949 E Street, with a detached garage and two smaller dwellings on the site. While not a palatial home by any stretch of the imagination, it served as the family home until his death in 1889, and continued to serve as the residence of Ryan family members, beginning with his widow, Annie B. Ryan followed by his son Pierce H. Ryan, Jr., and finally his granddaughter Eleanor Ryan in the period 1955 through 1959. The house was converted into a duplex in 1952, and sold in 1959 to C.J. Fairhurst who treated the property as a rental until May 1, 1969 when the home and all accessory buildings were demolished as a practice burn by the local fire department.

While the front of the property fronted on E Street, with its grand circular driveway which still remains, the property went all the way to the next street to the east, which is F Street. When Pierce was alive, this easternmost portion of the property contained a well with windmill, a carriage house, and two modest one and a half story dwellings.

After Pierce's death his widow demolished the carriage house, the windmill, and the two smaller dwellings. In 1892 she constructed in their place two nearly identical, relatively elegant Queen Anne homes that were intended to provide her with rental income.

On December 16, 1974 Caltrans purchased both of these homes, along with the vacant property, where the Pierce Ryan home had stood five years earlier. This was in accordance with its program of purchasing property well in advance of freeway construction and when appropriate, putting the property up for rent. The home at 944 F Street was rented to Carol Green. The home at 1000 F Street was left vacant. Over the next 24 years the vacant home suffered vandalism as windows were broken, it was stripped of its light fixtures, and door and cabinet hardware disappeared.

In 1993 the California Transportation Commission made a decision to abandon the Eureka Freeway. At this point Caltrans was left holding title to over 60 historic properties. These were declared excess lands, and in accordance with public policy most were put up for bid. The first properties were sold in 1996, and auctions continued until 2002 when the last property was sold (Eureka Community Development 2006).

Carol Green's home at 944 F Street was an exception to the bid process. During the period 1974 to 1998 Green made major improvements to the home she had been renting from Caltrans for 25 years. In 1998, Green was able to convince the California Transportation Commission to change the government code to add a "right to buy" clause so as to avoid going to public bid for homes such as hers where the renter had made substantial improvements. So Green's home at 944 F was "surveyed out of the historic

acre parcel” (Green 2005:15). The lessons learned by Green in the process were to become valuable later in securing the remaining property for a public venue.



## THE WHIMSY GARDEN HISTORY

The following description of the Whimsy Garden history is derived from The Whimsy Garden Cultural History Center Business Plan dated June 1, 2005 and prepared by Carol Green. The concept of the Whimsy Garden dates back to 1998, shortly after Green concluded the successful purchase of her home from Caltrans. Green taught third grade at Pine Hill Elementary School, and she combined her love of gardening and history, with a vision of a venue school children could visit for cultural enrichment. This eventually culminated in a plan for an indoor-outdoor learning center for children, tourists, and the public, designed for the study and appreciation of local history, preservation, and horticulture.

In 1996, working together, Green and Libby Maynard, Executive Director of the Ink People Center for the Arts, began a series of meetings with Eureka City Manager Harvey Rose and members of city staff to investigate the feasibility of a history museum and garden project titled the Whimsy Garden. The Eureka City Council unanimously voted to support the project, and a Memorandum of Understanding was initiated between the City of Eureka, the Ink People Center for the Arts, and the Whimsy Garden Program. In 1997 the City Council agreed “in concept” to “support the acquisition and establishment of the Whimsy Garden.” City Manager Rose was directed to enter into negotiations with Caltrans for an unusual “land swap”, where the City land needed for the Caltrans retrofit of the Samoa Bridge would be traded for the Whimsy Garden site owned

by Caltrans. But when City Manager Rose abruptly left office the land swap discussions ended (Green 2005:14).

Caltrans, meanwhile, decided to add this property to those surplus lands from the former freeway right-of-way being auctioned off. State Law required that properties in the rescinded freeway bypass be sold to the highest bidder, the only exception being a negotiated transfer to another public agency.

This proposed auction caused quite a furor. The site, located as it was in a high density zoning area, made the land attractive to developers seeking to construct apartment complexes. Quickly the list of interested buyers grew to over 100. Because the property contained a historic house it was even advertised in a national publication, *This Old House* magazine.

The members of the Whimsy Garden Program, realizing that their only hope in securing the property was centered in securing cooperation from two public agencies began a series of meetings with both the City of Eureka and Caltrans for a negotiated sale. With the pressure of impending auction coming up there was a sense of urgency among the project supporters.

Caltrans agreed to postpone the sale for a few months to allow for an agreement to be reached between the Whimsy Garden Program, the City of Eureka, and Caltrans. A Valentine's Day fundraiser was held to raise the remainder of the funds for a 20% down payment on a negotiated purchase price of \$131,000.

Between 2001 and 2003, under Green's leadership, the Whimsy Garden Committee had prepared a draft business plan. This included a volunteer and committee

flowcharts, committee mission statements and responsibilities, development, fundraising and marketing plans, program budget, project timeline, site plan, historical research format, and a proposed educational curriculum.

In June 2003 Green produced a Project Plan for the Whimsy Garden Cultural History Center in application for a loan by the Redwood Region Economic Development Commission (RREDC) to purchase the property. The purchase was culminated on August 18, 2003, for a sales price of \$151,000 with a down payment of \$20,000 and a loan from RREDC of \$131,000 (Green 2005).

Green had put together a comprehensive management structure with herself as Executive Director, a Steering Committee, and a number of active committees including one on Development. I served on both the Steering Committee and Development Committee.

As 2003 drew to a close I found myself frustrated with the slow progress in making the Whimsy Garden a reality. As a member of the Development Committee I attended an all day workshop on Grant Writing put on by the Humboldt Area Foundation. The point was strongly made that without the status of incorporation it would be very difficult to be the recipient of a grant. I argued to both the Development Committee and the Steering Committee the benefits of incorporation, which I felt was necessary if we were going to successfully apply for grants. Green seemed to have her own ideas about how to proceed. Feeling I was actually being disruptive rather than helpful I decided to resign from both committees.

Later I would review the files to determine what had transpired during the next 18 months while I was uninvolved. Except for a handful of brick sales nearly every activity had come to a halt. I also learned later that a personal family crisis had fallen on Green, and she was no longer able to give the project the direction it required. Effectively the project had come to a stop soon after my departure.

## NEW PROJECT DIRECTION

In late August 2005, I received a frantic call from Green, the Executive Director of the Whimsy Garden Project. She said she had received notice from a member of the Board of Directors of The Ink People Center for the Arts stating they were probably going to vote at their next board meeting to sell the property to pay off the note that had been financed by the Redwood Region Economic Development Corporation (RREDC). Apparently RREDC had contacted the Ink Board and expressed concern the promised monthly interest payments that were supposed to begin after two years had not been forthcoming for six months.

I told Green I had been detached from the project for over a year and half and would need a great deal more information before I felt comfortable becoming involved again. I also told her I had to choose a Master's Project for my degree in Practicing Sociology at Humboldt State University, and would approach the school to see if this project might be agreeable. I explained if I could accomplish both the work necessary for my project and help the Whimsy Garden out of its predicament then I would consider it.

I approached my faculty advisor with a concept paper for a community action project and was told to submit it for approval. I then called Green back and we agreed to meet so she could brief me. I told her I would be documenting my required 240 hours and activities in great detail, though I expected that this project would continue long beyond the time period required by my master's project. I agreed to begin at once.

I began by calling the attorney for the City of Eureka to discuss the city's current involvement, because they were a party to the original transfer from Caltrans to the Ink People. The City Attorney agreed that as long as the effort stayed within the general parameters of a public space they would have no objections to a new group taking over the program.

In a purely accidental meeting just a few days after my re-involvement with this project I had lunch with the great grandson of James Talbot Ryan, Pierce Ryan's older brother. His name was also James T. Ryan, and he was visiting from Florida with his wife. He regaled me with some fascinating history of the Ryan family. This gave me a greater understanding of the importance of both Ryan brothers, and would become of prime importance when it was decided to develop a new frame for the project.

On the evening of September 13, 2005, Bill Cody, and I met with the INK People Center for the Arts Board of Directors. Bill was a supporter who had shown great interest in the project back when I was originally involved. We discussed the status of the Whimsy Garden to-date, summarized our meeting with the City, and made a proposal. We told the Board that in association with other key individuals, we planned to incorporate a new group as the Whimsy Garden, Inc, replace the old group, rewrite the Business Plan, and develop a plan to refinance the existing note with REDDC. Under these conditions we wanted an assurance that the INK People Board would recognize this new group, and subsequent to this when the Board felt the new organization was operating effectively would turn over the Whimsy Garden properties and other assets to the new organization. Following this meeting the INK Board met in private, and then

informed us that our proposal was acceptable. We agreed to make regular appearances at each of the next three Board meetings to report progress.

Five days later, on September 18, 2005, I met with Green at her home. I briefed her on what the INK Board had agreed, and asked her how much she wanted to remain involved in the Whimsy Garden. She said at the moment she would rather step completely aside. She was quite emotional about this after devoting so much of her life to the effort to bring the project to fruition, but felt it was the best thing because of her personal problems. She agreed to turn over all six full file boxes of papers she had accumulated to-date. The following day I took these to the Eureka Heritage Society office for safekeeping.

At this point things happened quickly. Within a week a tentative new five-person board was put together with some holdovers from the previous one and new volunteers. I made a report to the INK People Board of Directors, and told them the next effort would be to find a new lender for the loan. Since little maintenance had been done at the house and grounds for the past couple of years, major clean-up work was needed. I rounded up a number of volunteers, and within a week the yard was cleaned up (lawn cut, invasive plants removed, brush and debris hauled off, and trees pruned for safety). A safety inspection was done at the house and it was re-secured with a new lock. The Executive Director of the INK People was given a key.

On September 25, 2005 the Ink People board reinstated the Whimsy Garden's DreamMaker program status. In exchange I agreed to develop a timeline to effectively deal with delinquent payments, and to retire the entire RREDC debt by having a private

lender underwrite a new note. I further stated that I would have a new business plan for the program's re-instatement. A representative of the INK People board was assigned as liaison between the Whimsy Garden board, the INK People board, and community partners. This representative also agreed to help put the recent developments before the RREDC for their approval. Bridging social capital was the force at work here that allowed the reaching out to the many entities necessary to solve this problem.

In early November it was suggested by Zuretti Goosby, one of the new board members, we consider talking to the Humboldt Botanical Garden Foundation (HBGF) about a possible partnership with the Whimsy Garden. A meeting was set up between myself, a representative of the HBGF, and Goosby. I explained the history of the Whimsy Garden and asked if the Humboldt Botanical Garden Foundation might be interested. I was told no, as this would be distracting from the HBGF mission. I mentioned the possibility of the sculpture garden in partnership with the Morris Graves museum. The HBGF representative was very opposed to this, and stated she was on the Board of the Arts Council, and that in no way were they interested in a sculpture garden anywhere. She also said the money for such projects was very difficult to obtain, and expressed great skepticism that we could raise the money necessary to make the Whimsy Garden a success.

While this was discouraging, another idea developed from this meeting. This was to bring in other garden related organizations to possibly assume responsibility for a segment of the garden area. This would mean no single organization would be responsible for the actual planting and maintenance of the entire garden, but only for their



selective portion. Letters of interest were sent to the local Heather Society, Rhododendron Society, Native Plant Association, and the Humboldt Rose Society

The period from late November through early January found the forces of nature playing a major role at the Whimsy Garden. On November 29, 2005, Carol Green informed me a large Monterey Cypress limb had fallen from one of the trees on the Whimsy Garden property and was partly on her fence and yard. She wanted the INK people insurance to pay for damage to one of her yucca trees. She was also concerned about a possible hazard due to teenagers playing in the fallen branch. I wrote to the Executive Director of the INK people who replied that there was a \$500 deductible on the insurance policy. I informed Green that it would probably not be worth making a claim. So the following day I contracted with a tree service to remove the limb.

Another example of bridging social capital came in to play when it came time to find a way to restore the home on the property. In 2002 I earned a Certificate in Historic Preservation and Restoration from the College of the Redwoods. The program manager and one of my instructors was Bill Hole. Based on this relationship, I then met with Hole on December 9th to discuss the Annie B. Ryan home at 1000 F Street as a project house or field school for the Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology and similar classes at the College of the Redwoods. Hole was familiar with and quite interested in the project and felt that CR President Casey Craybill would be enthusiastic as well. He said he would approach the administration about a possible agreement.

In late December the solicitations for possible involvement in a portion of the garden brought the first result when the Humboldt Rose Society expressed interest in the

Whimsy Garden. They said they would discuss it at their next Board Meeting and then bring it before the membership at the general meeting in mid-January to see if the society was interested in involvement. They suggested a meeting sometime in the New Year. I replied and asked they get back to me with a time to meet.

The next item that required attention was the overdue note. I contacted the Executive Director of the INK People to see if a new note could be secured with the property. She said she would have to find a copy of the current note, and would have their representative work with me to see what could be accomplished.

On December 31, 2005, the forces of nature again came to visit the Whimsy Garden property with a vengeance. In the late afternoon unprecedented hurricane force winds struck from the west, blowing down or damaging many trees throughout the region. The storm broke the entire top off of the middle Monterey Cypress tree, and some large limbs off the other two cypress trees. The top of the tree fell through the roof of the garage next door, and other large limbs fell in Carol Green's yard doing some substantial damage. I spent the next few days documenting the damage, and working with the INK People to determine what insurance company would be responsible for repairs.

A massive clean up was required. My son volunteered his time and his equipment. Trailer loads of broken branches were hauled off to green waste, and many broken limbs were pruned from all three trees. After consulting with an arborist it was finally decided the middle of the three cypress trees was damaged beyond repair due to the loss of its top making the tree unsafe, so a decision was made to remove it. This turned out to be a major undertaking due to the size of the tree, but it was finally successfully toppled to the

ground. A count of tree rings in the stump showed the tree was approximately 150 years old, which meant the three Monterey Cypress were planted in about 1857, or just seven years after the founding of Eureka. This made these possibly the oldest trees in Eureka planted by early settlers and quite historic.

Also in early January I met again at the Annie B. Ryan house at 1000 F ST with Bill Hole, the program director of the College of the Redwoods Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology program. We carefully examined the house together, documenting its condition. Generally the lath and plaster walls and ceilings in the house were in excellent shape and the floors were in decent condition. There were five broken windows, not much was left of the kitchen, and the bathroom was in poor shape. There were no light fixtures or door hardware. We discussed what needed to be done to the building to stabilize and renovate it. We agreed that the house was most certainly capable of being restored. We were not sure how long this might take, but estimated from two to four years. The notion was the College of the Redwoods Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology program might be able to use the building as a project house for a field school. Hole said he was still very much interested and agreed to write a letter to the President of the College of the Redwoods outlining our proposal.

With possible incorporation as a non-profit an objective, I did research on how to best do this. Because so many corporations are incorporated in the State of Delaware, I compared California with Delaware. I finally concluded that it would be best to incorporate in California, as Delaware provided no clear advantage for small non-profit corporations. I looked up how to accomplish this. The best suggestion was obtained from

NOLO, the publisher in Berkeley, California that produces do-it-yourself legal books and software that reduces the need for people to hire lawyers for simple legal matters such as making wills or writing business partnerships. I purchased the book and CDROM titled “How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation in California” by Anthony Mancuso. When the book arrived in the mail the following week I read it from cover to cover. I now had an overall understanding of the process, from why to incorporate in California, name searches, incorporation itself, gaining tax exempt status, bylaws, record keeping, and a host of other related issues. This excellent book gave me much greater confidence that I could accomplish this without the services of an attorney. With the book as a guide, I prepared the necessary papers to incorporate the Whimsy Garden Association as a non-profit corporation in the State of California. These only needed to be signed by the new officers and directors and submitted to the California Secretary of State.

I was now confident I could meet with the Executive Director of the INK People Center for the Arts, and principle parties of the Redwood Economic Development Corporation (RREDC) to discuss the status of the note on the property. At a meeting held at the RREDC office, I explained I had a private lender willing to refinance the note on terms favorable to the proposed Whimsy Garden Association. I wanted to verify that the note would be fully secured by the property. I was assured this could be done, and that RREDC would assist with the process in working with the Title Company to prepare the new deed of trust and all necessary agreements. The timing of this was discussed. I explained that securing five directors for the new Board was taking longer than I had

anticipated, but should be accomplished by mid-February as which point we could proceed with the new note.

I asked Bill Hole about his willingness to become a member of the Whimsy Garden Association Board of Directors. Hole expressed concern with the workload, but I explained we would also be forming a steering committee and his role as a director would be corporate governance. He agreed to serve and agreed to come by the house to sign the incorporation papers.

The first formal meeting of the new Whimsy Garden Board of Directors was held at the home of Paula Blackshear on February 16, 2006. In attendance were proposed directors Ron Kuhnel, Zuretti Goosby, Paula Blackshear, Bill Cody and Bill Hole. The group discussed the overall progress of the project, including the status of incorporation, refinancing, and the MOU process. The directors signed the incorporation papers and I said they would be mailed the next day to the Secretary of State. The board also discussed the overall history of the project. All agreed we needed a new approach, structure, and fundraising. The most important item agreed upon was the need for a new vision. It was suggested a visioning workshop be held.

Visioning is a process that generates a common goal, and provides for encouragement, change, and the ability to move ideas forward. Visioning may involve data collection and analysis, but these tasks usually come after there is some agreement on the direction the community should take and the issues the community is facing (Haines 2011). An excellent method of gathering such data and establishing value metrics is the focus group. I mentioned I had facilitated focus groups last year for the

Area 1 Office on Aging as part of a sociology class in my masters program and felt I could facilitate such an endeavor.

A tentative date of May 6, 2006 was selected. It was suggested we invite the Humboldt County Historical Society and the Master Gardening Program to the visioning workshop. At this first board meeting I explained the relationship between this project and my Sociology Master Degree project. I promised confidentiality as appropriate. All the new board members said it would be agreeable to them to have their names used in the project paper when it was submitted for approval and publication.

The last couple weeks of February were a frenzy of agreements and paperwork. A meeting with the Executive Director of the INK People, resulted in a revision to the original Memorandum of Understanding signed by Carol Green as Program Director and the INK People to recognize the new, soon to be approved Whimsy Garden Association, reaffirm the transfer of all improvements, assets, and liabilities to the new association upon request. The new directors then signed this agreement.

A presentation was made to the Board of Directors of the INK People to give an update on the status of the Whimsy Garden project and let them know of the status of incorporation, by-laws, 501 C (3) status, MOU preparation, Steering Committee, and the Visioning Workshop. One suggestion related to the Personal Recovery Program, a program of the Breast Health Project's gardening related health program. The Board gave their enthusiastic approval to the progress-to-date.

After some discussion with a private party, a decision was made to privately finance a new note to replace the one with the Redwood Economic Development

Corporation (RREDC). So on March 1, 2006 I met with RREDC officials at the RREDC office to begin the process of opening the escrow at Humboldt Land and Title for refinancing the note. Escrow would close when notification was received back from the Secretary of State that the Whimsy Garden Association nonprofit incorporation has been approved, or as soon thereafter as possible. This was a critical step in the project as it precluding any chance of foreclosure and all the resulting negative results that would possibly ensue.

In a meeting with Paula Blackshear, the secretary of the new board, we discussed the plans for a May 6th Visioning Workshop. Possible locations were discussed and we agreed it would be nice to be within walking distance of the site so we could actually visit the project site as part of the visioning. Possible suggestions were the St. Innocent Orthodox Church across F Street from the Annie B. Ryan house, the Labor temple across E Street, and the INK People facilities. Possible invitees were the City of Eureka, the Tourist and Convention Bureau, Eureka Heritage Society, Humboldt Arts Council representing the Morris Graves Museum, University of California Master Gardener Program, Clarke Museum, HSU CCAT, Eureka City Council, College of the Redwoods, the Wiyot Tribe, and local neighbors.

The following week Blackshear and I met with the Parish Council of St. Innocent Orthodox Church to make a proposal to hold our visioning workshop at the church. After hearing the presentation the council voted to approve our use of their hall from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on May 6, 2006 for this purpose.

March 16, 2006 was a major day in the history of the new Whimsy Garden project. I received notice from RREDC informing me that an Escrow had been opened at Humboldt Title for the refinance. A few hours later I received the preliminary title report from a representative of the Humboldt Land Title Company. That evening there was another Whimsy Garden Board Meeting with all board members present. Since two board members were absent at the prior meeting, I again explained I would be documenting every step and activity of what was being done in detail, as this project was also my practicing sociology master's project. I again assured confidentiality as appropriate. The board approved this relationship, and all board members agreed to the use of their names in my paper. As acting chairman, I called the meeting to order. After approval of the minutes officers were elected. I wanted someone else to be president, but was prevailed upon by the other board members to accept the position. Paula Blackshear was elected secretary/treasurer.

The minutes of the meeting show I then made the following report:

“The revised Memorandum of Understanding with the INK People was approved. Incorporation status was still pending with nothing returned back yet from the Secretary of State, The Deed of Trust and Note escrow was opened with Humboldt Title. Preliminary title report was complete and was received just before the board meeting. A copy was passed around. Ron explained the terms of the new loan agreement to pay off the RREDC loan. The note would be financed by a private lender. Terms of the loan were as follows: five year note, due and payable in five years, deferred interest for two years, and an 8% interest rate. After some discussion the Board approved this agreement.” (Whimsy Garden Board Minutes 2006).

The proposal for the Visioning Workshop on Saturday May 6 from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon at St. Innocent Orthodox Church was discussed; The Board approved proceeding



with this. Each board member was assigned a responsibility for a portion of the workshop.

At this point three of the four major objectives for the project had been achieved. A new group had been formed as the Whimsy Garden Association, Inc, replacing the old group. Incorporation had been achieved. Refinancing of the existing note with REDDC had been accomplished in late April. The fourth, and remaining objective, was finding a way to bring other organizations in as partners to help rehabilitate the house and develop the gardens.

For this last item a decision was made to attempt to find single managers to oversee each of the two primary activities: gardens and house. The two tentatively selected were the University of California Master Garden program for the gardens, and the College of the Redwood Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology Program for the house. After discussions with both parties it was decided to wait until after the visioning meeting to proceed with any formal agreements.

The majority of March and April was spent planning for the visioning meeting. I met with a representative of Humboldt First Five. She felt the visioning should be run like a focus group. I agreed, explaining I had facilitated some focus groups with St. Joseph's Health Centers in a number of small Humboldt County communities as part of my graduate training and found them quite effective. She suggested refreshments, and getting the questions to the participants in advance. She agreed that it would be appropriate for me to facilitate. I decided if I could not find someone else, I would myself.

The Whimsy Garden Visioning meeting was held at the St. Innocent Orthodox Church as scheduled on May 6th with 24 people in attendance. As no one else was found, I acted as the facilitator. Following a presentation on the history of the project the participants were asked to list what they felt to be issues and the directions they believed the project should be headed. These comments were posted on newsprint and are shown below. The participants then discussed the items and voted on which ones they felt to be the most important or practical. Following the voting there was further discussion concentrating on those items receiving the most votes.

The workshop comments from the newsprint follow. These were from multiple sheets of newsprint and are not necessarily in the order in which they were presented. Items marked with “\*” were considered by participants to be top priority and were to become the basis for a revised strategic plan. The ones with “\*\*” received the most votes.

- 150th anniversary and Ryan History \*
- Convergence
- Series of Articles \*
- History should be the focus \*\*
- We need to be visible
- Publicity is very necessary \*
- People are going to have to get involved
- The big trees are a major issue \*

- Suggest a series of stories \*
- Grant writing, get writers and get grants \*
- Teach construction techniques \*
- Involve construction companies
- Adopt a Room
- Painting Companies
- Interpretative Center
- Painting Companies
- Interpretive Center
- Period Furniture
- Teas
- Rent for Parties
- Interpretive
- Keep with Historic Architecture \*
- Have College of Redwoods rehabilitate house \*
- Rent house for income \*
- Different use for house and garden \*
- Use house as a community center
- Learning center for history and gardens \*
- Restore the house historically \*
- Do not think community spaces is incompatible

- Students to study architecture, history, archaeology, windmill
- House should be focal point. \*\*
- Paint the house
- Have Master Garden Program become garden coordinator \*
- Multiple use house
- Live in Docent
- Gardens should be historic \*\*
- Make a windmill project stand-alone and self-contained
- Could sell part of parcel to raise money
- Have tours of house
- WG would be a good neighbor for residents
- Emphasize public access
- Contemplative and meditative place
- Addition to F Street corridor

In addition to voting there was ample discussion among the participants, with emphasis on the ideas with the most votes. I tape recorded the comments and took written notes and these were used for the analysis that followed.

Following the workshop, and culminating on May 28, 2006, the information from the Visioning Workshop was analyzed from a perspective of the frame for the project, and practical considerations. A discussion was held with my faculty advisor who agreed with my supposition that reframing the project might be desirable for two reasons. First

it would more accurately represent what the project was actually about (history and preservation), and second would make fundraising and grant solicitation more practical. Because of the emphasis on framing this more as an historic site, during July and August substantial additional research was conducted on the Ryan Family in the context of their contributions to Eureka history, and roles in the particular parcel where the house and garden project exist.

Research showed that much of the prior emphasis on James Talbot Ryan in the work that had been done to-date was misguided. J.T. Ryan was indeed an important person in Eureka's history, having been on the third ship into Humboldt Bay in 1850, and given credit for having named the community. However he appeared to have no involvement in the Pierce Howard Ryan property, which is the subject of the project. Considering the plans to make this an historic site, it seemed inappropriate to include J.T. Ryan in the history to any great degree. That is not to say that it would be inappropriate to include information on him in the historical displays, as he was Pierce Howard Ryan's older brother, but his role should be accurately displayed, and the historic site should be more about Pierce Howard than James Talbot.

The next day, May 30, 2006, the Whimsy Garden Board met and went over the results of the Visioning Workshop, the feedback from my faculty advisor, and the information from my research on the Ryan family. They agreed with the premise that the new frame should be the Pierce Ryan Family and descendants, and the house and garden projects should reflect this frame.

It was therefore unanimously agreed that the project would be renamed the Ryan Family Historic House and Garden project. The immediate goal would be to restore the historic Annie B. Ryan house for initial use as a single-family rental, and the Pierce H. Ryan grounds as an historic garden. The College of the Redwoods would be approached to take immediate responsibility for the restoration of the house, and the Master Gardening program asked to take charge of the gardens. The Whimsy Garden would remain as a portion of the garden project, but would be contained within the Ryan “frame”.

During July I worked with Bill Hole to secure a commitment from College of the Redwoods (CR) to the now newly named Ryan House and Gardens. Hole said he had talked with the Vice President at CR, and he was OK with the plan to begin work at the Annie B. Ryan house at 1000 F Street as soon as Fall 2006. As a result, CR wrote to the City of Eureka and postponed a planned project on a house at 6th and Myrtle. After a series of revisions the final Memorandum of Understanding between CR and the new Ryan Family Historic House and Garden was completed and was ratified by the Ryan Board in early August. Besides clearly setting forth the roles and responsibilities of the use of the house as a field school, it renamed this portion of the project the Annie B. Ryan Historic House Restoration Project.

We also discussed publicity, which was one of the strategic initiatives from the Visioning Workshop. Hole talked to Kathy Dillon of the Times Standard, and she agreed to help by writing an article about the house and project to be published in the award winning Times Standard Restore and Preserve monthly publication. I met with Dillon

and agreed to help her with background information and other materials. This feature article was published two months later.

CR also agreed to prepare a marketing video about the program. I supplied many photographs toward this effort, and the DVD was completed and released in 2007. Other accomplishments during the fall of 2006, included soliciting an agreement with Bill Pierson, owner of Pierson's Building Center, to become a major sponsor and supply any materials that could be used on the project at cost.

The cost of building permits was going to prove to be an obstacle. As chair of the Eureka City Planning Commission, I had become well acquainted with the City Manager. I felt comfortable meeting with him to discuss how this issue might be mitigated. He suggested asking the City Council to waive \$1,000 in permit fees. I then appeared before the City Council and persuaded them to waive that amount in permit fees. There were a lot of questions asked about the project, and the end result was the council voted unanimously its continuing support of the newly renamed Ryan Project. Once again social capital, and the strength of weak ties played a role in this success, just as predicated in social theory by Putnam (1995).

The official part of the project as a master's project concluded at this point, when the required 240 activity hours were reached. The Activity Log was submitted for approval, and an oral presentation was made to the Practicing Sociology Advisory Board. Both were accepted and the only task remaining was to write and submit the project paper for approval.

## CONCLUSION

This was an “action” project in practicing sociology. Nevertheless, except for the existence of a problem to be solved that would result in community improvement, there was no direct connection to sociological concepts when the project first was begun. The situation with the Whimsy Garden was basically a valuable community asset was in danger of being “lost”. Someone needed to step in and take charge, not only to provide project management, but also act quickly and decisively. The immediate issues of forming a new board, incorporating as non-profit, refinancing the existing note with REDDC and finding a way to bring in other organizations as partners to help rehabilitate the house and develop gardens gave immediate direction to the project.

When I assumed primary responsibility for the Whimsy Garden project I initially worked from Carol Green’s Business Plan, and was fully committed to simply bringing her project to a successful conclusion. After reading the business plan, however, it became abundantly clear the project was ripe with sociological implications. Social capital was wrapped deeply into the project. It was necessary to build social capital to even get the project off the ground. The various individuals in my environment, representing both strong and weak ties were absolutely imperative in gaining the support and expertise necessary to solve the problems of heading off foreclosure and the possible sale of the property. Social capital was paramount in gaining the trust and support of the College of the Redwoods, and the Master Garden program. These two organizations were key to moving the project forward. Social capital also played a major part as the



project itself contributed to the community. In this way the relationship between the project and social capital was synergistic. In effect the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

Individuals with whom I consulted were often quite candid in their opinions and reservations, and it was the meeting with the representative of the Humboldt Botanical Gardens that convinced me we needed to have a visioning and planning session to reaffirm or restructure the project direction. By then I had discussed the Whimsy Garden with many people and found it difficult to explain the purpose of the garden portion of the project. I felt it was particularly important to revisit that portion of the project vision.

Achieving the four initial objectives consumed a lot of energy, but was not extraordinarily difficult. As time went on, however, it became abundantly clear that we needed a better long-term vision that would attract the necessary financing and human resources for long-term sustainability. The focus group visioning session was very valuable as it led to both an understanding of which portions of Carol's original business plan were still useful and what need to be revised. The conclusion reached was simply that reframing the project would provide substantial benefits. This required switching the emphasis more to Pierce Howard Ryan and his widow Annie B. Ryan, as their family history was now the basis for the new frame. This also required additional research into the Pierce Howard Ryan history. A summary of this new information is included in the Pierce Howard Ryan History chapter of this paper.

The training I received as a sociology masters student proved to be very valuable. Being able to lead a focus group was critical to my being able to successfully carry out

the visioning session. The concepts of framing and re-framing, which came up repeatedly during many of my sociology classes came into play in understanding that re-framing the project allowed for greater community support and access to grant funding, while retaining much of the concepts and work done to-date to develop the Whimsy Garden. As the project progressed, and the importance of historic preservation, history, and community and public gardens became clearer, the project increasingly became one of action sociology.

Some aspects of this project were relatively straightforward and only required rapid action. There was a need to act quickly and decisively when I first became re-involved to prevent foreclosure and the possible sale of the property. It was a great challenge to motivate others to adopt a shared vision of what the project needed to become successful. In the approximately 18 months of “action sociology” all the objectives set forth for a successful project were achieved. A structure was put in place to allow the original objectives of a plan for an indoor-outdoor learning center for children, tourists, and the public; designed for the study and appreciation of local history, preservation, and horticulture to be realized.

There were four significant outcomes of this project: the value of gardens to the community; the contribution of the Annie B. Ryan house to both the architectural legacy and history of the community; the education of students who worked on the project; and overall value to the community and neighborhood.

We earlier learned that community and public gardens provide a wide variety of benefits to urban living, ranging from resident empowerment to a safe haven, and in

particular building social capital. The successful implementation of a native plant sanctuary along with a specialized vegetable garden for developmentally disabled adults provided immediate benefits in this regard. The planned rose garden, cottage garden, and heather garden, while still under development, will provide a safe environment where visitors and residents can appreciate beauty, and interact sociably. Overall these gardens are proving to be of major social benefit.

The Annie B. Ryan house restoration has made exceptional progress since its inception, with three major attributes. The house itself is close to being completely restored. While modest in size it is a classic example of the Queen Anne architectural style that was so popular in Eureka during the late 1800's when it was constructed. With its front and back parlor, large open kitchen, service kitchen, pocket doors, original lathe and plaster, and claw foot bathtub it represents a museum quality structure that can be opened to the public for interpretive tours.

The house is also historically significant as it represents a way to represent the style of living during the Victorian period. While not yet furnished, the plan is to populate it with period furnishings including furniture and objects typically found during that era including historical objects such as late 1800 kitchen implements. Visitors to the house will be able to learn about how life was lived during that time.

The agreement with the College of the Redwoods Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology program to restore the house has provided a unique opportunity for students to learn about history and integrate it with the skills of restoration technology. Operating as a field school for the past four years, students have taken a wide

variety of classes, learning to apply techniques for foundation repair, seismic retrofit, interior plaster restoration, wood refinishing and faux graining, restoration of period wooden gutters, rehabilitation of wooden windows, interior wiring, plumbing, the repair of classic wooden V-Rustic siding, and construction of new walls and cabinets.

The community at large as well as the neighborhood has derived major benefits from the project. A large number of people have contributed both time and money to helping the project be successful. These people are vested in the outcome and feel a great deal of satisfaction as the project progresses. Neighbors have commented on how much this has stimulated homeowners in the immediate area to fix up their own houses and gardens, and how this has reduced crime and improved property values.

## EPILOGUE

The official part of this project was concluded when the required 240 activity hours were reached, the Activity Log was submitted, and an oral presentation was made to the Practicing Sociology Advisory Board. The project however, has continued on unabated even though I am no longer actively documenting every action. During 2007 - 2009, work continued actively on the Annie B. Ryan house. I personally participated in five of the College of the Redwoods classes, taking all for credit. Three of the classes were "The Field School", and two were specialized classes in masonry and interior finishes. During these classes the foundation of the house was rebuilt, windows repaired, rain gutters refurbished and installed, four rooms re-plastered, and the outside siding repaired and repainted. A new drop-down staircase to the attic was installed. The bathroom was enlarged to allow for the installation of an historic style sink and medicine cabinet.

An agreement was reached with the Rose Society to plant gardens. For one of the gardens the footprint of the original Pierce H. Ryan home was outlined with a boxwood hedge. This location of the two-story portion of the home was destined to become a formal rose garden, and the one-story portion a community vegetable garden with raised beds. The other garden planned was a cottage garden, to be located approximately where the original Pierce Ryan gardens were located to the south of the house. The Master Gardener program installed an irrigation system. The cypress trees were pruned and three larger cedar and pine trees that were poorly shaped were removed. A broken

concrete patio was installed between the cottage garden and the footprint of the former home.

In 2008 the Rose Society planted the cottage garden. Work on the Annie B. Ryan house continued. The fund-raising subcommittee decided to show a vintage movie to raise revenue to purchase materials to continue the work on the house. The movie chosen was the 1927 silent film version of “The Valley of the Giants” in its original 35 mm format. An agreement was reached between the owners of this archived film, the UCLA Film and Television Archives and Warner Brothers, the copyright holder. The venue chosen was the Eureka Theater, which possessed the vintage projection equipment to show the film, as it would have looked in 1927. Negotiations were long and complicated as UCLA had to have assurance the film could be shown without being damaged, as this was the only known print of this film.

The film was shown on both May 13 and 14, 2008 accompanied by a live accordionist, Madame de Squeeze (Lorna Brown). Her husband played sound effects (train whistles and wooden blocks) to represent such things as logging trains and fist fights. Over 600 people attended the two performances, which were highly acclaimed. After all expenses, which included rental of the theater, rental of the film, and royalties to Warner Brothers, almost \$6,000 was raised to support further work on the house.

In 2009, I developed cancer, and my work on both the project and this paper was suspended while I was undergoing treatment. Work began again in the spring of 2010 and I attended an additional field school class that removed the chimney damaged in the major earthquake of January 9, 2010. Also in 2010, due to high fees required by the

California Franchise Tax Board, it was agreed by the Ryan Board that the effort to achieve federal non-profit status would be suspended. Incorporation would be dropped as well. For the time being, this meant the Ryan Project would remain a program of the Ink People Center for the Arts.

In the fall of 2010, using volunteer labor and donated materials, a new roof was placed on the Annie B. Ryan house. Declining enrollment at the College of the Redwoods resulted in the cancellation of the Spring 2011 Field School. However, in March 2011 a major seismic retrofit was done to the house though a class taught by College of the Redwoods to members of the California Conservation Corps.

In the Spring of 2011, agreement was reached for two new gardens: a vegetable garden for a group supporting developmentally disabled adults, and a native plant garden. Negotiations have begun anew with the Heather Society for completion of the heather garden. Plans have also been prepared for a new patio to replace the one made from the broken concrete. This will allow the commemorative bricks that were purchased to be installed and allow the brick sales program to be re-instituted. Finally a new wooden picket fence has been designed to divide the front part of the property from the back part, and to reduce pedestrian through traffic.

Since the project was begun almost 13 years ago, many of the objectives set forth in the original Whimsy Garden have been met, though with some modifications. The gardens remain a “public garden” and are being maintained by other non-profit organizations in accordance with their charters. The Annie B. Ryan house is getting closer to being turned into the “history museum” originally envisioned by Carol Green.

Negotiations are under way to rent office space in the house to a local non-profit at a reasonable rate in exchange for their opening the house occasionally for tourism. As mentioned, there are plans to re-institute the brick sales, which will be used to pay down the note on the property. Finally, in what may be the most exciting news of all, the new Westside Community Improvement Association has shown interest in helping with the project now that the purchase of the former Jefferson Elementary School has been completed. This will provide a new non-profit sponsor for the project and make grant solicitation much more feasible. All things considered, the future for the project is bright, and it should eventually prove to be a major asset to Eureka.



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