

"SUNSHINE HALL"  
THE EVANS MANSION  
419 South Lorraine Boulevard

"Sunshine Hall" was the first house built in old Windsor Square, the R. A. Rowan tract about a mile west of Western Avenue, between Wilshire Boulevard and Third Street. Others may claim this distinction, but court records and the facts authenticate it. It is one of only four houses in the block on the west side of the street between Fourth Street and Fifth Street. At the other end of the block is the Norman Chandler home, built by Peter Janss, father of the Janss developers. Across Fourth Street is the old Van Nuys house, which was moved from a hill where it was built on Sixth Street and Loma Drive.

"Sunshine Hall" is on Lorraine Boulevard, so named for Miss Lorraine Rowan, daughter of the developer. Miss Rowan married Prince Orsini and for years lived in a magnificent Georgian mansion in Georgetown, D. C. She is at present married to Senator Cooper of Kentucky.

The most distinctive feature of the grounds is the gigantic elm tree known far and wide by humans and birds, for whom it seems to be a landmark during their migrations. One trunk or large branch was bent to grow at right angles to the main trunk and points due south. Legend says this was an Indian trail marker. Other large trees are a pair of cedar deodars, very high, and a spreading sycamore. A very tall and perfectly-shaped Italian cypress is one of an original pair. Sunshine lights the lawn in the winter and the shade of the large trees keeps it and the house cool in the summer. A semi-circle drive of flat stones leads to the house.

The architecture of the house is ~~pure Neo-Classic or~~ Greek Revival, a style favored by the western world during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Andrea Palladio, the 16th century Venetian architect, began the style, and it spread through Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Russia and the British Isles to America. In the United States it was particularly favored by Thomas Jefferson in the 18th century, and Nicholas Biddle in the 19th century, and was interpreted by their architect, Benjamin Latrobe, in the many public buildings in Washington, D. C., in the mansions of Pennsylvania, New York, and the South, and in the branches throughout the nation of the United States Bank, of which Nicholas Biddle was president.

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From the curving drive, wide red tile brick steps lead to a terrace of the same brick running the full width of the house and bordered by a white classic balustrade. The house itself has always been painted white. Four enormous Ionic columns support the front portico with bull's-eye window. Like the house throughout, from vast basement to vast attic, these columns are built of California redwood. The wide, heavy, paneled front door is framed by fluted Ionic semi-columns and pilasters and arched lintel with a leaded rose fan-light and leaded side lights. On either side of the door are antique copper coach lamps.

Inside, the doorframe is similar to that on the outside and opens to a large entrance hall 17-1/2' x 35-1/2' from which ascends a wide flight of stairs with slender classic spindles and firm mahogany rails. At a sunny landing, the stairs divide and lead on either side to the second floor. In the center of the south wall is an original Adams 18th century mantel with pairs of delicate reeded columns and classic figures of cherubs and an urn.

The day we moved into the house was late in October. The furnaces were not yet connected and the air was chilly. We enjoyed the open fireplaces, and particularly this large one in the hall. An abundance of eucalyptus wood is still stacked against the back fence.

Black and gold Italian marble faces the mantel and makes the hearth. The mate to this mantel is in the salon. These mantels were brought from the Virginia home of Gen. J. E. B. Stuart's mother and installed in the house by the builder, Mrs. Jeannette Donovan, who came to Los Angeles from New York and was a friend of Mr. Rowan.

The ceiling cornice in the hall has a Greek key motif. Here, and throughout the house, the woodwork is elegantly done with wide door-frames and high baseboards. Downstairs the doors are folding French doors with glass panes. Upstairs the doors are beautifully paneled. The woodwork throughout the house is white, the floors are natural finished quarter-sawed oak. In the hall and the salon the floors are bordered by parquetry lined with double strips of mahogany.

Brass light brackets in the hall have frosted and etched "astral" globes with heavy square-cut prisms. From the center of the ceiling hangs a huge brass lantern with a cylinder etched-glass shade. In the wide stair-well hangs a long, tiered crystal chandelier of the same period, brought from China where it hung during the British period there.

The large salon to the south of the hall has an impressive frame of double Ionic pilasters to the ceiling for the other Adams mantel, here faced with pink French Rose de Brignoles marble. Opposite the chimney piece, similar pilasters frame the large, wide bow of five double French doors. The ceiling cornice here presents a beautiful grouping of Greek mouldings: Acanthus, tulip, egg and dart, dentil and beading. Ormolu wall candle sconces are of the French classic period, while three French crystal chandeliers, designed and assembled from antique parts for the room, hang in light and graceful order. Lengthening the salon even more is a small anteroom beyond, with Swedish crystal chandelier and two pairs of French doors.

Across the hall on the other side of the house is a cozy, small study with bookshelves to the ceiling, framed by slender Ionic pilasters. A double French door opens on the brick terrace. Here the Greek chimney piece is in a heavier style in a buttress effect, with anthemion (honeysuckle) detail, and is faced with red French marble. The simple ceiling cornice here is a convex and a concave moulding. An iron and brass chandelier with shaded candle lights is in appropriate style.

Opening from the hall beyond the study is the dining room, similar to the salon with its large bay, opening on the patio. In this room the mantelpiece, though the same height as the others, is in a simpler design of panels and mouldings. It is faced with white Vermont marble, streaked with smoky lines. On each side of the chimney are classic china cupboards with arched paned glass doors, broken pediments and urn finials. The ceiling cornice is similar to, though simpler than that in the salon. The crystal chandelier is of English style of the period. Silver double candle wall brackets have blue Wedgewood plaques of Greek dancing girls. The walls of this room and the Anatolian rug take their colors from the blue Wedgewood plaques. A very wide swinging door leads to the pantry.

Another anteroom with French doors across the full width is at the end of the hall. This room has a small powder room with a floor of large black and white marble squares. Beyond are three pantries and a kitchen provided with two double sinks, a tiled and hooded range area, a large service porch, storeroom and two sunny rooms with French doors and a good bath and large closets.

Upstairs, the four chambers are large, roomy, sunny, all provided with mirrored-door double and triple wardrobes, closets, shelves, drawers, and tiled baths. The south suite is in the French style with an authentic Louis XVI white marble mantel, classic ormolu wall sconces, a wide French door, and windows with shutters. The massive shutters of the house are original and very workable and convenient here when the sun becomes too strong. A crystal and gold chandelier was brought from Venice for the room by Miss Mary Evans, now Mrs. Hughes Gregory Morton. A large dressing room-bath has mirrored wardrobe doors and dressing table framed in woodwork with delicate classic details.

Across the full width of the upstairs hall runs a series of shelves and closets for linen and other storage, enclosed by paned French doors. At the other end of the hall is a large chamber with a mantel identical to that in the dining room. Silver candle wall sconces light this room and the adjoining bath with mirrored wall. Beyond is a room with Chinese Chippendale feeling, one whole wall is covered by an original Van Luit Chinese scenic paper. The light fixtures blend with the design. This room, also, has a wide French door to the deck.

The fourth suite is the largest in the house with all four exposures. The suite is a wing added by the Harwood Huntingtons, who purchased the house in 1918 for \$125,000 and then added another lot for the classic tennis court with surrounding Ionic columns. This suite has picture windows on the east with antique natural wood folding shutters. There is a large dressing room and wardrobe, and a large tiled bath with red tiled shower. There are French doors to two small balconies and to the deck where Mr. Evans raises camellias in boxes.

The outbuildings of the house were added by the Huntingtons and are in the same style, though simple. There is a large two-story guest house with kitchen and a bath-and-a-half. A large two-story servant's house has a laundry, storerooms, and bath. The four-car garage has a room and a bath. Also, there are three small enclosed sheds for gardeners', painters', and carpenters' supplies.

The patio off the dining room has arbors of double square columns, it is bordered by an ornamental iron railing over the court, and stone

steps lead down on either side. Here, and across the front of the house, Mr. Evans planted a variety of camellias that begin to bloom as early as October and last until summer. From this patio also lead stairs to the basement (besides the inside stairs).

The house is equipped with good modern furnaces and water heaters. Wide and open as are its rooms, its eternal sunshine makes it easy to heat, and yet, in the summer when the sun is overhead, the high attic and the trees keep it cool.

Around much of the house on a level between the first and second stories runs a narrow ledge. When they were young boys, Hugh Evans, Jr. and his neighborhood friends, including daring John Barrymore, Jr., the now architect Barrett Jardine, and the now businessman Hugh Maguire, used to terrify the family by climbing all around the house on this narrow ledge and on other supports such as arbors, balconies and trees. None of the boys ever fell.

All the doorknobs have solid brass frames and key escutcheons and cut crystal knobs. Charmingly characteristic of the house are the dancing rainbows that come through the doorknobs and the various tinkling prisms as the sun makes its daily round. In fact, the house might well be called "Dancing Rainbows."

The Evans Mansion, a gracious home, has always been noted for its hospitality. Though spacious and formal in style, it lends itself easily to an informal, intimate, though still dignified, living. Generations of children have climbed and swung on the great elm tree, have played on the steps and stairs, outside and inside, and have slid down the stair rails. Tennis, especially on Sundays, has never stopped during the entire period of the Evans' residence. There have been tennis breakfasts, brunches, luncheons, and suppers for tennis-playing friends from Pasadena to Santa Monica. The Marlborough School tennis team uses the court every year during a tournament, and a number of groups of friends come at regular days in the week.

Each owner of the place has entertained on a large scale. Young Jack Donovan was interested in the films, and many parties were given that included his Hollywood friends and the society friends of his sister, Miss Catherine. Mrs. Donovan's staff wore maroon livery, the men with knee-breeches, white stockings and silver shoe buckles. She maintained a small eucalyptus grove which provided wood for her fireplaces every evening of the year.

The Huntingtons (said to be distantly connected to the Henry Huntingtons) filled the walls of the house with handsome 18th century portraits of their New England ancestors. Rev. Huntington was interested in making religious films. Miss Harriet Huntington was a writer, artist and classic dancer. Miss Grace Huntington was a pioneer flyer. Mr. Charles Huntington, now a businessman, when a baby, was threatened by a kidnapping plot that involved the German cook and the Japanese chauffeur. At this time a very strong system of burglar alarms was installed throughout the house and grounds.

The Evans family acquired "Sunshine Hall" at the time of the great depression. Gone were the days of liveried servants and large staffs, Rolls Royce town cars and two chauffeurs. However, with a reduced staff and efficient caterers, the entertaining went on. There were Hawaiian luaus around the patio pool (now filled in) and the usual tennis entertaining, perhaps accelerated. During the way, the Evanses were asked to open the house for the entertainment of servicemen, and many were entertained. For years the officers of the armed forces who were guests of the Pacific Southwest Tennis

Tournament were entertained at cocktail parties and suppers. There were children's parties, debutante parties, receptions and teas for visiting social or political figures, Sunday night suppers with candlelight, and Christmas and New Year's parties.

One of the outstanding parties was that given for Hugh Evans, Jr. on the occasion of his 21st birthday, which came on New Year's Eve. Before this birthday Hugh's friends had always come to celebrate in an informal way in the guest house. The twenty-first birthday party was given in and out of the house and under a tent erected in the patio. There were cocktails, supper and dancing lasting on through breakfast of January 1.

For the wedding reception of Miss Mary Evans a three-pole tent was erected on the tennis court, and another on the patio. They were decorated with masses of magnolia leaves and blossoms and classic figures of cherubs holding gardenias, with tree ferns and soft lighting from the ceiling. More than a thousand guests were there and dancing lasted until the small hours.

As chairman of the annual Navy Ball in 1964, Mr. Evans gave a large reception for invited officers and their wives, and for members of the Ball Committee and their wives. For that night the house was ablaze with pink camellias and candles. Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, a distant relative of Mrs. Evans, was guest-of-honor for the evening. He and Mrs. Sharp came from Hawaii where they were stationed, bringing orchid leis and iridescent antherium for Mrs. Evans. Soon after this affair Admiral Sharp, who was then Commander of the Pacific Fleet, was made Commander of all military forces in the Pacific -- Navy, Army, Marines and Air Force. His area of command covers 86 million square miles, a command he still holds today. Admiral Sharp is charming, elegant, slight of build, a good conversationalist, and a brilliant commander.

Many other celebrities of national and international note have been entertained at "Sunshine Hall" -- leaders of politics -- cabinet members, senators, congressmen, judges and governors, as well as admirals and generals. Also, there have been artists, musicians, writers and film celebrities. Among them have been Mayor Sam Yorty, Governor

Goodwin Knight (Governor Ronald Reagan was entertained at the Evans' Montecito home), Justice McComb, Elliott Roosevelt, Igor Patiagorsky, Johnny Green, Rudolf Firkunsky, Leonard Pennario, a former neighbor, Postmaster General Edward Day, also a former neighbor, and our celebrated neighbors the Norman Chandlers, who have often been here.

From overseas Lady Lillian Fox, mother of the Hon. Mrs. Gerald Lascelles, first cousin to Queen Elizabeth II, visited (The Gerald Lascelles visited the Evanses in their Natchez home), also Lady Winifred Hargreaves, wife of a chief high justice of England. The Right Hon. the Earl of Antrim, of County and Castle Antrim, North Ireland, was a gay and delightful house guest. Lady Davina Cope, granddaughter of the Duke of Beaufort, was an enchanting house guest. The international family of De Cloedt, famed French-Belgian engineers, have visited the Evans family, here as well as in Montecito.

The Evans mansion has been written up in all the metropolitan Los Angeles newspapers, in magazines and books. It has always been sought as a setting for Hollywood films, and lately, for television series. Part of "Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall," starring Mary Pickford, was filmed here. One of the bedrooms contains the mahogany hand-carved high four-poster bed of 18th century style, used by Bing Crosby in the film "Mississippi." One of the earliest films ever made where this house was used was appropriately titled "The Price of a Good Time" !

Mrs. Evans' father was Judge Charles S. Crail, presiding justice of the California Second District Court of Appeals from to 1945. Judge Crail's twin brother, Joe S. Crail, was a representative in Congress from Los Angeles when the city only had two Congressional districts, from 1926 through 1932. Mrs. Charles Crail was prominent in patriotic work, Regent of the D.A.R., chairman of the City Beautification Committee and President of the Los Angeles Ebell Club.