

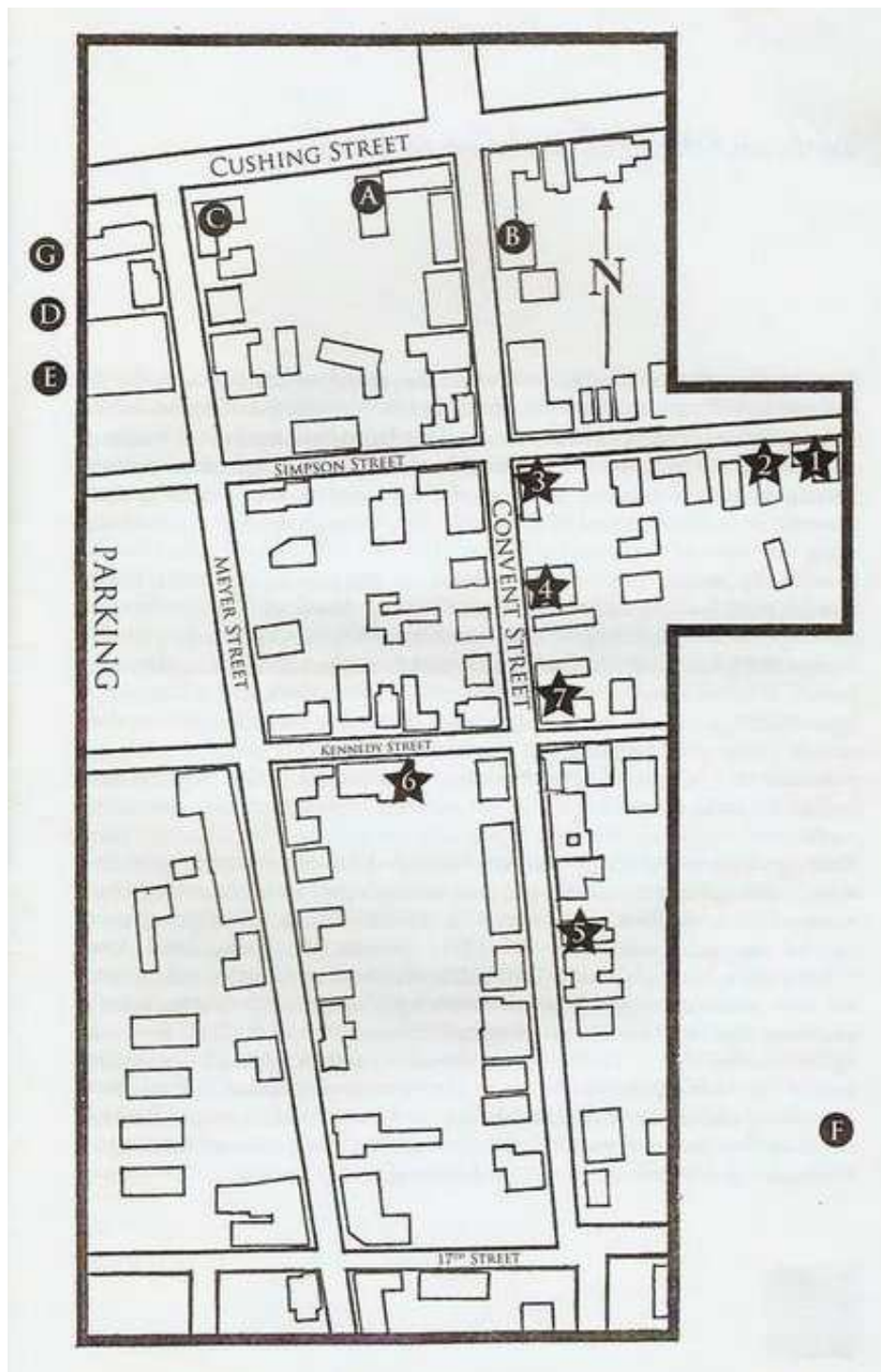
## Ormand Family Activity

April 2013: Barrio Viejo Home Tour

The Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation is an organization that works to preserve historic Tucson buildings and structures. I believe they are responsible for saving many famous old neon signs that now grace Drachman Street along the north side of the Pima Community College site. Now and then they will sponsor an event to raise awareness or funds (or both). It was right after I got on their mailing list that they announced a tour of some of the homes that occupy some of Tucson's oldest buildings - the adobe houses of the Barrio Viejo. This is the area between Cushing Street (just south of the Convention Center) and 22nd Street, and from Stone Avenue to the Freeway. Unfortunately, some of the oldest neighborhoods were destroyed to build the Convention Center.

Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation: [www.preservetucson.org](http://www.preservetucson.org)

When we arrived, we found a table at Simpson and Convent where we verified our names on their list (\$70 for both of us) and got the tour booklet with the map:



There were LOTS of people out for this tour! There were long lines outside the houses on Convent Street as we walked south, so we started with number 6 on the map.

As the line approached the door, we were asked to take off our shoes and walk through the house in or socks, or use "cleanroom" style shoe covers. Over our heads, the ceiling was planked with boards that came from packing boxes, and sometimes, the old crate markings were visible. As was the case with most of these old buildings, the original home



was fairly small, but later owners acquired adjacent properties and expanded into them. In this case, the original building had *canales* or waterspouts to drain the roof; one of these ended up *inside* the expanded kitchen! I'm sure it was no longer functional, and that the roof had been fixed to no longer need such drainage.

After trooping through the house and emerging in their back patio, we put our shoes back on and continue on south, to pick up the tour sites at the end and work back up.



Number 5: I believe we were told that this building was a duplex at some point, but the current owners have taken down the internal wall and have a sizeable living room with two front doors. Two of the rooms were furnished for children, which I take as an indication that not *all* the affluent "creative" people who have chosen to buy these old properties, fix

them up, and live in them are childless "moderns", although I certainly saw no evidence of children playing outside. In earlier days in Tucson, this would most certainly have been the case. The tour exited the house through the (nicely appointed kitchen) into the back patio, and then to the guest house on the north side (which the red pick-up is in front of in this picture). The guest house is a "shotgun" house, long and narrow with no hall; in the idiom, a shotgun blast from one end would clean out the whole house!

Number 7: Next up is 413 Convent Street, which is *not* a historical building, but is "context sensitive infill development" made to look historic. So, a fake. But a very nice fake.



Not only the outside of the house is done up to look like a Sonoran Rowhouse, but the inside is as well, with built-in (adobe) kitchen cabinets and bathroom counters. I note there is a large vacant lot on the north side, like a parking lot; I don't know if it is part of the property, but it allows the occupants to get their cars off the street, unlike most of the

other neighbors.

One of the most unique features of the house was this ornate iron fence or partition in the courtyard.



The next house up, number 4, is 387 Convent Street, once home to a Tucsonan connected to real history: Jesus Maria Elias was one of the leaders in the Camp Grant Massacre, in which an Apache settlement was attacked by settlers in retaliation for a raid, and many Indian women and children were killed.



Sometimes, standing in the lines was a treat. The girl ahead of us had these interesting spider sandals. We also overheard conversations sniffing dismissively at "those ignorant Tea Party people". I can infer the majority political orientation of the sort that is attracted to an artsy home tour - all too common in Tucson ("Viva Baja Arizona").



Also standing in line, we could see Sentinel Peak, or "A" Mountain, between houses. Many of the houses incorporate volcanic stone that was quarried from Sentinel Peak. In fact, the next one up (number 3) is built on a foundation of

such rock.

The buildings are much larger than Tucson houses used to be, partly to expand the dwelling, and partly to enlarge the patio. Sometimes there are gardens in the patios.



In this patio, there is a workshop, which, in addition to ceramics or woodwork (a kiln was outside the door) and guitars or amplifiers (there were many electric guitars hanging in the house, and a stack of old tube-style amplifiers near the workshop), the owner works at restoring neon signs. Like the one visible from the door.

Also seen from Convent street: a cozy courtyard with palm trees and other ornamental plants. Doubtless a cool and quiet place to sit and read or do light work (like web writing or programming).



And another view from Convent - or another view of Convent - an elegant rooftop deck. Earlier I saw the residents up there. Chairs, probably a table, likely a firepit or chiminea. A place to sit in the evenings and enjoy the view of the tall buildings and the lights downtown. Very nice. A lot to be said for life in the Barrio Viejo!

Number 3: This beautiful building was once the local grocery store. Then it was a saloon. Now it is a dwelling with lots of colonial-style religious artwork and heavy, dark, carved wooden doors. But the beautiful and peculiar interior was no match for the patio.





As seen here. Jacuzzi, swimming pool, with a fireplace at the other end. This is just the part visible in the photo - the patio extends to the left, under the porch, and on the porch (a deck). Lots of room - certainly there was not this much room on the property originally, so I'm pretty sure the adjacent lot had some building that was too far gone, the lot was acquired and adjoined, and turned into a wonderful patio.

Turning right on Simpson, the next house on the tour, number 2, is this "cottage" in an American style. According to the booklet, Nellie Pomroy was a "socialite and librarian" (how odd that those roles could coincide) who had this East Coast-style house built in 1889 to replace an earlier adobe structure. So the demolition of original adobe buildings to make way for contemporary (even alien) style structures has been going on a long time in Tucson.



And finally, number 1 on the tour. The owner has lots of bookcases in the *zaguan*, or axial hallway, so it was difficult to get an idea of what the building might have looked like in its day. Except for the original hand-cut mesquite lintel beams over the door, twisted and knobby. We could guess at something about the current owner by the variety of odd drawings hung on the walls

of the study and bedroom - including some of nude males.

The original idea was that this home tour would take an hour, maybe two, but we spent all afternoon here, with the unexpected crowd and the surprises in the patios. We ended up by going up to Cushing Street to see (A) and (B) on the map, which were original adobe buildings that had been extensively rehabilitated as office buildings, with modern-style windows and interior doors and electrical wiring and ethernet jacks in every room.

The other things on the map above were "extras", not part of the tour but local attractions that the Preservation Society wanted to point out:

- (C) - Cushing Street Bar and Restaurant. We've been here for dinner once. Nice, but their real draw is the live music.
- (D) - El Tiradito Shrine. We've visited the shrine before as well. Odd, spooky, very Tucson.
- (E) - La Plaita Museum. Nope, this was new to us. We had to go around past the school on Main Street to locate it for a future visit.
- (F) - Jewish History Museum. On Stone. We've been there before. Old synagogue (first in Arizona), rotating exhibits. Recommended.
- (G) - El Minuto Cafe. Standard Sonoran-style Mexican food. Very good, we've been there several times.

Great tour, very glad to have heard about it in time to take advantage of the opportunity. My only regret is not having taken pictures of the interiors of these homes, to show what the current owners have done to make these old adobe houses very comfortable indeed. I seem to recall that the tour organizers forbade taking photos of the insides of other people's homes, but if not, I was certainly uncomfortable with the idea, so I didn't do it.