



December 2, 1991

Marion Blake  
Sunnyslope Rock Garden  
10023 North 13th Place  
Phoenix, AZ 85020

Dear Marion,

Thanks for your letter, we really appreciate being kept apprised of your activities. I'm glad you are getting so much positive response and support from the public.

We are close to adding a new member to the staff who will be working on our next newsletter. I'm happy to report we hope to highlight environmental sites in Arizona. Needless to say Sunnyslope Gardens is on top of the list of sites to be included. You will be contacted for the necessary information or to verify some dates.

As to your question about historic designation of environments of similar quality to Mr. Thompsons.

There are currently 8 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, California 1977  
S. P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden, Kansas 1977  
Baldasare Forestiere's Underground Gardens, California 1977  
Pop Shaffer's Hotel & Rancho Bonito, New Mexico 1978  
M. T. Ratcliffe and Bert Vaughn's Desert View Towers, California 1980  
Br. Joseph Zoetl's Ave Maria Grotto, Alabama 1984  
Edward Leedskalnin's Coral Castle, Florida 1984  
John Jacob Makinen's Kaleva Bottle House, Michigan 1987

December, 1990, Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts were given additional status by being named as an National Register Monument. This gives the site equal historic credibility as other national monuments.

In 1981 the California Office of Historic Preservation named 9 environmental sites as State Landmarks.

These included.....

Emanuelle "Litto" Damonte's "Hubcap Ranch"  
Art Beal's "Nitt Witt Ridge"  
Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey's "Bottle Village"  
John Ehn's "Old Trappers Lodge"  
Calvin and Ruby Black's "Possum Trot"  
Miles Mahan's "Hulaville"  
Charles Kasling & William Averett's "World of Lost Art"  
John Giudici's "Capedro"  
Duke Cahill

Three other sites were being considered but all were destroyed or damaged during the nomination process.

All the sites were designated as State Landmark #939. The California State Office of Historic Preservation, with blessings from the National Register, allowed the whole state to be declared an "Historic District." This allowed us to write only one justification for the body of work with descriptions and histories of the individual sites. The list was submitted as a thematic nomination "Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California."

In 1985 John Medica's "Castles and Garden" was added to the California State Landmark #939 listing.

This year Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts was also designated as California State Landmark #969.

We have heard that the State of Wisconsin will soon be nominating 6 or more sites for national recognition.

In all cases the aesthetics or the uniqueness of the sites were the main justification for recognition.

I apologize for not knowing specifics, but of the environments I am most familiar with in Arizona, George Phar Leger's Valley of the Moon and Grover Cleveland Thompson's garden are the oldest sites of importance. From the national interest about sites in Arizona, you shouldn't have problems with questions of significance of the sculptures.

If there is any question of precedence for historic designation I would be happy to write a letter to local authorities or answer any questions local agencies may have. Please let me know.

Lastly, I showed pictures of the garden to people attending a conference in Chicago and all were quite taken with Mr. Thompson's work. Expect some visitors. I told them to write ahead and give you some warning.

Happy Holiday's

Sincerely,

Seymour Rosen  
Director - SPACES

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Dear Marion,

The preceding letter was meant to be shown to that person or persons who are giving you trouble with an historic designation for the garden. I would be happy to write to someone specific if that is what you need.

I just received your letter of November 20, 1991 with that nice article about you and your passionate letter to the New Art Examiner. I hope they print your letter.

As to your questions .....

1. Have you seen the video on the garden & would you like a copy?

No I haven't seen the video and yes SPACES would love to get a copy for its Archives. How can this be done?

2. Wouldn't it be neat to have "baseball" cards of the garden?

Yes. Postcards would be nicer. But both are expensive and incredibly hard to distribute. (you have to print 5,000 or more to get a good price).

3. Stamps

There are people who print stamps with glue but I and the three people I asked have no clue who they are. I'll keep asking around.

I've enclosed something you can duplicate and use for stationary when necessary - if you wish.

Lastly, I really don't think you need any more work, but if you will be asking for an historic designation you should gather material for a **Time Line** like the enclosed one we did with the information we had from the Valley of the Moon site in Tucson (please do not show this around). This type of information will be necessary to fill out the proper forms.

You might ask the Phoenix Office of Historic Preservation to send you and SPACES a copy of the form they use. The more information readily available for them the more likely you will get your wish.

I hope you are well and warm. Keep up the good work.

Arizona - George Phar Legler - Valley of the Moon

**BIOGRAPHY**

*much of the following information was provided by a pamphlet from the Valley of the Moon Restoration Association, unless otherwise noted.*

*from SPACES: for your information*

- 1885 George Phar Legler was born in Evansville, Indiana.
- 1897 He entertained other children in his family with magic shows. He related the following: "Once I buried a can of nickels and told my younger brother we were going to dig for treasure. You should have seen his face when we found the can of nickels. I'll never forget how amazed my father was." He also gave plays for the children in his neighborhood, who paid an admission fare of a hatful of rags because, he said, "I made all of the costumes myself and learned how to make them the hard way. At first I cut them all out flat, not leaving any room where the body isn't flat. They'd always burst in the seat of the pants." (cf. Cummins, Valley of the Moon News 1977)
- ca. 1910 Legler arrived in Tucson, when wooden sidewalks were removed. He worked at various jobs, eventually becoming a mailman. He built small landscape scenes for bedridden patients: "I enjoyed bulding miniature landscape scenes outside the windows of bed-ridden patients. Some of them even had running streams and buildings that would light up at night. (cf. Cummins, Valley of the Moon News 1977)
- 1916 George Phar Legler, with the help of a local real estate salesman, acquires the land where the environment would later be located. (cf. Cummins, Valley of the Moon News 1977)
- ca. 1917 Legler conceives the idea for the environment and begins to build. His personal philosophy is "Kindness to All." (cf. Cummins, Valley of the Moon News 1977)
- 1932 Spending over 15 years on the construction of his environment, the Valley of the Moon opens, a 2-1/2 acre fantasy-fairyland geared towards entertaining children of all ages. He sought to provide a free, quiet area from which to enjoy the Valley of the Moon, as well as an entertaining and exciting place for children to play. The environment blended in with its surroundings, perhaps due partly to the spontaneous nature of its construction.
- 1940s The Valley of the Moon Memorial Association was founded to enhance the existing collection of towers, caves, pools and miniature scenes. Around this time George Phar Legler initiated plans for tours and magic shows that were eventually attended by thousands of Tucson residents. Legler, in his guise as the Mountain Gnome, told stories and gave magic displays enjoyed by the visitors.
- 1948 Legler began keeping and training wild and domestic animals at the Valley of the Moon.
- 1950 Legler developed a trained rabbit show, the "Bunnyland Theater." Tours were given 6 days per week until 1963 (cf. Chilcott, Valley of the Moon News 1977).
- 1953 Life magazine featured a pictorial essay on the Valley of the Moon. 6/29/53
- 1963 The Valley of the Moon closes, after providing over thirty years of free entertainment (donations were accepted for maintenance of the land) and education to young and old visitors. The closure stemmed from inadequate funds and Legler's failing eyesight, which rendered him unable to maintain the environment.
- 1972 The Valley of the Moon was restored.

**Arizona - George Phar Legler - Valley of the Moon**

- 1972/3 According to the Schensul article, the Valley of the Moon Restoration Association was founded by a group of Catalina High School students who remained enamored of the place where they had played when they were children (cf. also Smith 1978). The association grew to include 30 members (ibid.). The students cleared weeds, rebuilding fencing and cleaning the caves, generally maintaining the property for the first three years. They built a winding wooden bridge complete with a troll, which they connected to the natural amphitheater near the bridge (ibid.). Assisted by a few parents, the students stored Legler's papers and books for future reference.
- 1974 By the summer of this year, fences were repaired, as were water lines, and electrical equipment modernized, all funded by the association. Historical tours were instituted, and fairy tours re-instituted, with Legler playing the Wizard (cf. Goodridge, Valley of the Moon News, 1977)
- At the age of 89, George Phar Legler still directed the Valley of the Moon Association. Eventually, he turned over the administration of the site to the students mentioned above (anon. 1982?).
- 1975 Valley of the Moon was granted placement on the Arizona Register of Historical Sites. In the same year the Association installed rest rooms; cave rooms were restored, and landscaping was improved. (cf. Goodridge, Valley of the Moon News, 1977)
- 1976 According to the Valley of the Moon News, (Goodridge article) the tours were much in demand, particularly during this year. Unfortunately, there were no provisions (at the time?) for handicapped visitors.
- 1977 By spring 2,600 people visited the Valley of the Moon. The Pima County Board of Supervisors recognized the Valley of the Moon as a "Public Service Agency." The site was closed temporarily to permit construction of handicapped facilities and to bring the property up to code. (cf. Goodridge, Valley of the Moon News, 1977).
- 1978 Vandals infiltrated the site, tearing wires and removing sprinklers, destroying bushes and shrubs, as well as other objects in the process of falling down (Schensul 1980). Legler obtained a clear deed to his property and turned it over to the Association (cf. anon. 12/14/78).
- 1980 As of this date (cf. Schensul article), Legler moves to the Posada del Sol Nursing Home
- 1981 Valley of the Moon was restored by the Valley of the Moon Restoration Association, a non-profit association.
- 1982 In February, the Association cordoned off the site with a fence, hoping to reduce the incidences of vandalism (anon. 1982?).

*from SPACES - for your information*

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(\* - in SPACES' archives)

CONTACTS/SOURCES

Jim Griffith      University of Arizona      Tucson, AZ

Historian/Registrar  
Historic Preservation Section  
Arizona State Parks  
Phoenix, AZ ???

Arizona Historical Society

Valley of the Moon Restoration Association (Frances Foster was treasurer in 1982)  
2002 E. Fort Lowell #116      Tucson, AZ 85719

Valley of the Moon      2544 E. Allen Road      Tucson, AZ 85716