

Los Angeles, California

July 15, 1972

Egr. Sig. Sindaco:

In the name of the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts and of Prof. Paul Laporte who wrote the Italian version of the letter which you received. We would like to express our most heartfelt thanks for your prompt answer with copies of the documents pertaining to Sabatino (Sam) Rodia. We are very happy that you are interested in Sabatino Rodia - known to us as "Sam" -, and that also the family and other citizens of your community have expressed their interest and approval.

This letter will bring you as much information as we have about Sam. At the same time, we will point out what we would like to know. We never could obtain data of young Sabatino. We do not know at what age he emigrated and with whom he travelled to America. According to your communication he was a boy of 11 years of age. We have no records of his early days in America, whether he went to school or <sup>when</sup> whether or where he started to work. We only know that some relatives of his emigrated too, that his sister married Mr. Calicuro whom we met in Martinez, Calif. Sam's sister had died years before we had the chance to get in touch with the family. Sam liked to tell very eloquently about various cities in the United States, that he met Buffalo Bill the famous cowboy whom he admired, and also the writer Jack London.

We know that Sam worked as a craftsman in many trades and in many parts of the United States. He had trade union cards in various professions. He finally settled in California in the early years of the century and came to Los Angeles in 1920 at the age of about 42 years. He acquired a triangular lot in Watts approx ft A So Eastern

suburb of Los Angeles, a settlement inhabited mainly by Mexicans and colored people. This part of Los Angeles is flat and plain, very different from Los Angeles and Hollywood, the elegant districts in the hills, the elegant city of amusement, filled with Stars and motion picture studios. For Sam this empty lot next to the railroad tracks was the right place. He had the idea to build something great in honor of his new country. His Towers would <sup>gloriously</sup> soar up from the flat lands. He worked 33 years with utmost concentration and consistency on his project. He had no blue prints and definite plans, but "he had the project in his head" The result is known as the group of towers, the tallest of which rises to a height of 99½ feet, and open structure of iron rods, re-inforced cement which is again strengthened by multi-colored mosaic of thousands of shells, broken glass bottles, and china. Sometimes he pulverized the glass to sparkle and glisten in the Californian sun. He used rocks and colorful stones, parts of furniture, profiles, parts of statuary and mirrors, he impressed patterns in the ground floor pavement and into the walls next to the impression of his tools and a few inscriptions which give the date 1921. He also mosaiced the name. We also find the name of the Towers in Spanish language: Nnestro Pueblo, in honor of the City of the Angeles and its Spanish <sup>Mexican Indian</sup> heritage.

It was hard for Sam to get a building permit. He told himself the story how he finally <sup>travelled to Sacramento.</sup> went to. His report sometimes had a dream-like character, reality and phantasy melted together.

We do not know much about his private life, he had a nice house, built by his own hands at the entrance of his grounds. This house was destroyed by fire after Sam had left in 1954. He was several times married, two sons are living in near San Francisco, but they grew up with their mother who had left Sam/ The sons do not have much attachment to the father nor to his work. But the people of the neighborhood tell pleasant stories about his

part 3

Many of them collected odd materials for his mosaic and brought it to him. Sam liked to talk and tell fascinating stories about his observations, his opinions, about historical people, his concept of the political development of the U. S. A. It is said that he loved to read in the encyclopedia Britannica, but he said that he never owned one. In 1951 a film <sup>William Hale,</sup> maker a maker of historical documentary films made an excellent color film at the same time he talked to Sam and made a tape recording of the interview. I, myself and Mrs. Kate Steinitz archivist of the Towers, transcribed word by word what Sam said., while he was building the Towers, one can see him mounting the highest one, a pail of cement in his hand. He had a safety belt climbing up to the dangerous heights.

at the age of 75 in 1954 Sam abandoned his life's work. He said often that he wanted to die peacefully surrounded by his family. He donated the Towers to a neighborhood boy and left secretly without leaving his address. He was thought to be dead, but when in 1959 the Towers came into the spotlight of the press, his nephew, Mr. Sullivan, called the newspaper editor by phone and reported Sam to be sound alive in Martinez California. He lived alone but not far away from his nephew Frank Sullivan who was manager of a great food market in Martinez. His sister, Mrs Calicura? We do not know whether his sister Mrs. Calicuro was alive when Sam arrived in Martinez, but members of the committee visited Mr. Calicura in his house. He was not in very good terms with Sam. They used to quarrel about trivia.

The Towers stood abandoned. We have to go back in our narration to the year 1959 when two young journalists, artists-photographers, Bill Carrwright & Nicholas Kin film maker and an artist came to rediscover the the Watts Towers, Sam's Towers in Watts, abandoned and neglected.

came to Watts on a reportage tour- they saw the abandoned Towers neglected. Children ruined the mosaics rather destructively, there was no supervision. They saw the ruins of Sam's own house which was burnt to the ground by accident of sabotage.

part 4

To tell a long story short, they were so much impressed by the impact of Sam's work, the beauty and originality of the construction, that they scrounged the money together to acquire the Towers, by all this means this work of art should not suffer destruction and had to be saved. While the acquisition was carried through, they learned that the City authorities had condemned the Towers as "unsafe". They were to be destroyed by bulldozers. Cartwright and King contested. Prominent architect, artists, and art lovers engineers, lawyers, neighborhood peoples and doctors and University professors contacted them. The city art director, who at this occasion had seen the Towers for the first time provided the location for an meeting. Thus the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts was founded on \_\_\_\_\_

In the meantime the City safety and building department had demanded a rigorous test. If the Towers would stand, a pressure of 10,000 lbs. they were to be declared safe. The Towers withstood the tests marvelously. They withstood earthquakes and political events which made the name of Watts world famous.

\_\_\_\_\_ should be established  
The Committee thought that <sup>good</sup> neighborhood relations to the community of Watts could be \_\_\_\_\_ The children of Watts should learn to appreciate the beauty of the Towers. An art school was conducted by excellent art educators free of charge. \_\_\_\_\_ who we employed  
They employed excellent art-educators and the children of Watts and since that time for eleven years the children of Watts enjoy free of charge the experience of art and creativeness according to the modern way of combining crafts work and artistic expression in play and entertainment. \_\_\_\_\_ as enjoyable as  
The small donations of visitors to the Towers and larger donations from interested citizens and our City council, made the art-school possible, although at time it was a great financial struggle to meet the expenses. Cartwright and King finally sold the Towers to the Committee without accepting any profit.

part 5

The art classes first were held in the open air on a platform built over the ruins of Sam's house by the architects of the Committee, with their own hands. Later the Committee acquired a small house next to the Towers which served for several years, but almost broken down, but the life of and temperament of the students.

In 1970 a lady <sup>an artist who loved Watts and the Towers</sup> as a memorial for her son who was killed in a car accident

<sup>community arts center</sup>  
A wishful dream for us was the building of a real art center to develop the manifold talents of the population, drama, arts, crafts, This dream became reality in 1970 the funds were provided by a group of which asked us to by contributions from foundations, and a great fund-raising drive which we called the "Square Inch" which meant that one could for \$1.00 one could hold an honorary title to one square inch of the art center lots. Our effort

We will end with a story which is real and not invented in this case I will end telling that sometimes reality can be even better than a good invention reality was just as good as if it was invented in Hollywood

The rain of gold came from the film land of Hollywood in a peculiar way tragedged the death in an accident of the offspring of a movie family of the early days of Hollywood brought us the funds necessary to complete our dream of a community art center.

It was not functional and well built art center carries the name of One part of our glamour Morgan Adams and it is to the good reputation of Hollywood it is not a matter of vanity, but of love and good will that we are obliged to be silent.