



# IEL Boletín!

Spring 2010

The Old Santa Fe Association Preservation News

## Irene von Horvath House To Shine On May 9th Tour

### Preserving Santa Fe since 1926



*Irene von Horvath left her Canyon Road home to the Old Santa Fe Association as a gift. (Photo by Teresa Neptune).*

Architect and ardent preservationist Irene von Horvath settled in Santa Fe in 1953. For the next half-century she dedicated herself to the preservation of the city's traditional character.

From 1 until 4 on Sunday, May 9, the house and studio that Irene occupied for 30 years will be one of four properties to be featured on the Historic Santa Fe Foundation's highly popular Historic House Tour.

Located at 728 Canyon Road, behind the old Borrego House (Geronimo Restaurant) near the corner of Camino del Monte Sol and Canyon Road, the house began its life in the mid- 1800s with three modest rooms. After purchasing the property in 1954, Irene made extensive additions to the house in various phases from the 1950s to the 1970s - - doing much of the carpentry and all of the brickwork herself. According to Corinne P. Sze, who researched the house for the Foundation, "these additions represent mid-to-late-20th-century sensibilities of an architect who was a leader in historic preservation in Santa Fe for nearly 50 years."

Irene lived and worked in the house until the mid-1980s, when she moved to El Castillo retirement community. She died in September of 2007, one month shy of the 50th anniversary of the city's first Historic Styles Ordinance, which she co-authored.

Throughout her life in Santa Fe, Irene was tireless in her effort to preserve the unique qualities that attracted her to her adopted city. Her final contribution was to create a historic



*A peaceful backyard. (Photo by Teresa Neptune).*

preservation easement on her house and property with the Historic Santa Fe Foundation, and to bequeath the house and property to the Old Santa Fe Association to further the organization's mission.

OSFA is deeply grateful for Irene's generous gift, and takes both the honor and responsibility of our stewardship seriously. We have invested many months and many thousands of dollars in needed repairs and restoration work, and late last year we found a partner who shares our regard for the house as

*(Continued on page 3)*



*The comfortable interior. (Photo by Teresa Neptune).*

### INSIDE

*Irene von Horvath Bio..... 2*

*Teresa Neptune ..... 3*

*President's Message..... 3*

*Upcoming Events..... 4*

## Irene von Horvath

### SHE CAME, SHE SAW, SHE LOVED IT, SHE PRESERVED IT



*Irene von Horvath, 1918–2007.*

As a founder of preservation protections in our city, Irene was interviewed many times about those historic moments when Santa Fe's first safeguards were passed, as well as the changes occurring in subsequent decades. Here are a few quotes from those interviews.

*"Our aim was to preserve what hadn't already been ruined."*

*"We knew this was a magnificent area - a beautiful little city. We didn't want it to look like the East Coast or California. The area just had to be preserved."*

*"Our mission was to maintain what was here or at least the spirit of it."*

*"The city is changing enough as it is, in ways that we can't control, so why change something that we can control?"*

*"I actually heard one person say we could put a boulevard north/south right through the Plaza, because that land is*

In a long and very full life, Irene von Horvath was born in Russia in 1918, fled the country as an infant with her family to escape the Bolshevik Revolution, spent her early childhood first in China, then Europe, then came to America at the age of 12 to rejoin her father, a biochemistry professor based in Princeton, N.J. The family moved to Pittsburgh, where she completed high school and studied architecture at Carnegie Institute for Technology, in that school's first coeducational class.

Her first glimpse of New Mexico and Santa Fe came in December 1942 when she was 24, after she won an architectural contest with the prize of a cross-country bus trip. At the time she was virtually unaware of Santa Fe, but a travel agent urged her to put it on her itinerary, because "everybody goes to Santa Fe." On a cold winter evening she got off her bus on Route 66 at the Moriarty junction east of Albuquerque, then waited by the highway to be picked up and taken to Santa Fe. She saw no houses and almost no trees, and she thought she had made a big mistake.

Eventually a little van came for her, and began the drive northward. As it passed through the village of Galisteo, the sun was setting; and as she looked westward, Irene watched the most spectacular sunset she had ever seen. In Santa Fe the smell of piñon smoke wafted through the air, and the narrow streets were lined with low adobe structures. She could hardly believe she was still in the United States.

"Love at first sight" was what she called her initial impression--but 11 more years would pass before she had saved enough money to return. In the meantime, she worked in New York City, always dreaming of New Mexico. When she came back in 1953, she came back to stay.

She got a job designing rural health clinics for the state Department of Health. Fascinated by the local

architecture, she started attending every session of the city Planning Commission. When an opening came, Mayor Leo Murphy appointed her to fill it--because, she always said, he felt the need to choose a woman Republican, for balance. She later changed her political allegiance.

An architectural clamor arose in the mid-1950s after the erection of the modernistic Desert Inn at the intersection of Old Santa Fe Trail and Alameda Street, in the heart of Santa Fe's most historic district. Mayor Murphy responded by asking Irene and some other prominent Santa Feans--among them writer Oliver La Farge and attorney Sam Montoya, who later became chief justice of the state Supreme Court--to draft a historic-styles ordinance. They did, and in 1957 it was enacted into law as one of the nation's first.

Irene bought a house on Canyon Road, and from that base never stopped quietly working for things she felt were vital for Santa Fe. She fought for Hispanic names on local streets; against state plans for a major highway through the downtown; against development on Atalaya Mountain. She also donated rolling woodland in the Sangre de Cristo foothills to become a hiking trail, and insisted that the trail be named for a friend, artist Dorothy Stewart.

In September 2007, one month before the 50th anniversary of the Historic Styles Ordinance, Irene von Horvath died at the age of 88. Her will revealed a final--and major--gift she made to the cause of historic preservation, for she left her valuable Canyon Road house to the Old Santa Fe Association, which works to maintain the traditional essence of the city. She is buried in a small cemetery overlooking the northern Estancia Valley, near the place where she first gazed out upon New Mexico, and fell in love.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# In Residence: Teresa Neptune

Santa Fe photographer Teresa Neptune lives and works in the Irene von Horvath House on Canyon Road. Teresa first picked up the camera as a teenager living in Paris. She took to the street with her father's Pentax loaded with Tri-X film and began her lifelong love of black-and-white, street photography. The New York Times wrote up her "Flooded Desert" exhibition as the best in Santa Fe in 2007 travel section. She exhibits her photographs in Santa Fe

and Chicago. Her work is in the permanent collections of The National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington DC, The State of NM - Art in Public Places, The Palace of The Governors Museum, The Historic Santa Fe Foundation among others. She is the recipient of the Willard Van Dyke Grant in Photography awarded to her in 2005. Her website is [www.teresaneptune.com](http://www.teresaneptune.com).

*Quotes (Continued from page 2)*

*free. I said, 'for whom is the boulevard?' They said, 'It's for the people.' I said, 'What people? You're not going to have any people if you look like every other place in the United States.'*

*It's almost a question of whether we'll remain a little old town, or become a modern city with a little bit of old town left in the middle. It's a constant battle. It really is."*

## Message from the President

Marilyn Bane concluded her three-year run as OSFA president this past January. It was a brilliant three years. Marilyn forged new ties with City Hall and other community organizations, creating more exposure for OSFA. We are all grateful for her leadership and dedication.

I was elected OSFA president in January and for those of you who don't know me, here's a brief background. I worked for the Museum of New Mexico for almost 28 years and retired as emeritus director of the museum's Office of Archaeological Studies. I served on the Historic Design Review Board in the mid- to late-1980s and co-authored the city's archaeological protection ordinance, perhaps the first of its kind in the nation. I continue to be involved in archaeology as well as preservation and serve on the state's Cultural Properties Review Committee.

Elected as the executive committee vice-president was Rad Acton. Rad has worked as a Santa Fe architect for

many years and won an award for his historic preservation involvement in 2009.

Our new secretary is Pen La Farge, whom many of you know as a writer and commentator on Santa Fe's treasured character.

Tom Spray, long involved with local nonprofit groups, and a Santa Fe businessman, will continue serving as treasurer.

Though current economic conditions have slowed the pace of building and change in the city, OSFA is still vigilantly watchful for proposals and projects that it feels compromise our city's appeal. The board has found no time to rest since deteriorating economic situations often lead governments to discuss ways to relax laws that they feel inhibit growth. That hasn't happened yet in Santa Fe, but we're staying alert.

*(Continued on page 4)*



*House to Shine (Continued from page 1)*

well as our responsibilities.

Photographer Teresa Neptune now resides and works in the Irene von Horvath house, where she carries on Irene's tradition of creativity and where

her outstanding photographs are on exhibit.

OSFA is proud that Irene's house has been chosen to be part of the Historic House Tour and we look forward to greeting you at the front door on May 9!

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We value and need your support. If the year next to your name is 2008 or earlier, please consider renewing your membership now for 2010.

### Our Mission

“To promote the prosperity and welfare of the city and county of Santa Fe and their inhabitants, to preserve and maintain the ancient landmarks, historical structures and traditions of Old Santa Fe and to guide their growth and development in such a way as to promote that unique charm and distinction, born of age, culture, tradition and environment, which are the priceless assets and heritage of Santa Fe.”

#### *President’s Message (Continued from page 3)*

Since there hasn’t been much in the news lately about threats to our city’s appeal, OSFA hasn’t been in the news either. That’s a good sign! But economic situations always change. We continue to need your support, so that OSFA can be ready to respond when the occasion arises.

Lastly, I hope that all OSFA members will visit the Irene von Horvath house on May 9. It is through your help that we can continue to be a good steward to Irene’s wonderful gift.

Yours,

Tim Maxwell

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Historic Santa Fe Foundation Historic House Tour**, May 9, 1-4 pm. The tour will include OSFA’s von Horvath house (more details this issue). Watch the newspaper for more information.

**2010 Historic Preservation Awards**, May 13, 6-8 pm, National Park Service headquarters, 1100 Old Santa Fe Trail. The Old Santa Fe Association, Historic Santa Fe Foundation, and the City of Santa Fe present their annual awards. You are invited!