

THE SAN JOSE ROSICRUCIAN PARK

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An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County

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INTRODUCTION

The Rosicrucian Order celebrated their new headquarters in San Jose with the help of H. Spencer Lewis in 1929 when they bought the block of land on Naglee Ave. The Rosicrucians constructed the park and acquired artifacts for their museum at a time when many other museums and businesses closed because of the Great Depression. The Rosicrucian Order prospered under innovative leadership in the Great Depression and cleverly found ways to acquire artifacts and money to construct more buildings.

Over time, the Park ran into only a few obstacles, like trying to obtain certain artifacts from Egypt after the 1930's. Another problem that turned up in the 1970's was a question regarding the credibility of the museum.

Through the years the number of visitors and members have increased profusely going from a small group of people, to hundreds, to thousands. Many come to see the Egyptian museum while others find it relaxing to walk through the Park looking at the fountains and statues.

THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER

The Rosicrucian Order, a non-profit fraternal order, has been around for hundreds of years. It originated in ancient Egypt when a pharaoh began to contemplate whether there was only one God or more. He began to look inwardly to find these answers and realized that he understood more about himself than he ever had before. He and a small group met to discuss this idea. They met in secret because they would be murdered in their sleep if anyone found out about these new ideas which would eventually influence the world.(1) The Rosicrucian Order wasn't mentioned again until 1614 in an anonymous pamphlet circulating in Europe. The pamphlet read of Rosenkreuz who learned the secrets of the universe in the Arablands. Rosenkreuz and his followers kept his secrets for 150 years. It is not known whether the name, "Rosicrucian", comes from the emblem of the rose cross or from Rosenkreuz. Then, in 1693, the Rosicrucian Order came to the United States where a group of Rosicrucian members settled on the East Coast.(2)

The Rosicrucian Order's official name is the AMORC: the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis. Like most fraternal orders they have an emblem. It is a gold cross with a red rose but has no religious significance. It symbolizes the goal in this life. The rose signifies that we live on this Earth to try and find something and that there are many roads to take. It signifies "the path" each individual chooses to walk. Their letterhead consists of a

rose cross, an ankh (the ankh is the Egyptian symbol for life), a triangle, and the wings of a dove. The triangle signifies the idea that when there is a negative point and a positive point there is also a point neither one nor the other. For example, three points could be a man, a woman and a child. The wings comes from the idea that new understanding comes to the individual like a dove.(3)

Since the Rosicrucian Order began at the time of the great pharaohs in Ancient Egypt, it has become known as the oldest world-wide order. The Rosicrucian Order distributes lessons to eager members in 150 countries in thirteen languages. Surprisingly, many famous scientists, artists and politicians belonged to the Rosicrucian Order including Isaac Newton, Ben Franklin, Balzac, and Dante.

There are certain requirements to join the Order. The interested individual must be eighteen years old or older. For a single membership, the dues amount to \$182 per year and there is also a registration fee. To increase membership, AMORC encourages individuals to register with a companion: a spouse or a friend. The companion dues come out to only \$202 a year.(4) These dues are used strictly for maintenance and the high cost of mailing the lessons. Once someone has become a member, four lessons, called monographs, arrive first class each month in sealed envelopes. Members devote one hour a week reading the lessons and contemplating their meaning. It is suggested that members make one night a week, "Lodge Night" where a

part of their house becomes their temple and a place to review the concepts of the lesson. Each lesson comes with a simple experiment to prove to the accuracy of the statements. It is said that "once a man is aware of the divinity in himself as a microcosm of the universe, he can control its forces to lessen evils of suffering and ignorance"(5) It offers means for people to develop a new inward consciousness about the world. The Rosicrucian Order also holds meetings which members attend voluntarily but it is not necessary. Pamphlets are given out to interested people at the Rosicrucian Park. These pamphlets describe the organizations and what they teach:

Truth knows no barrier! The AMORC (not a religion) is one of the oldest authentic organizations and societies perpetuating the ancient truths for the advancement of mankind. By becoming a member of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, you will be brought into contact with other great mystery schools and their renowned teachings throughout the world. This is a rare privilege and a great additional benefit you will enjoy. Become in tune with the times - and the thoughts of the greatest minds everywhere. (6)

The AMORC makes sure to include the message that this organization is not a religion and that the cross has no religious meaning. The idea of the Rosicrucian Order was for members to be able to go to the church of their own choosing and then come home and study the lessons. Many members faithfully practice a religion and also belong to the AMORC.

After many years of lessons, members write a paper showing they fully understand the principles. They show

they have a new awareness of their surroundings. Once they have done this, they become a frater or a sorore which means brother or sister. Like the concept of the Ph.D, these special members can add F.R.C or S.R.C to their names. The initials stand for Frater (or Sorores) Rosae Crucis. Members feel that "humans are not the puppets of fate. The roles we each play in life can be intelligently and personally directed by ourselves".(7)

FOUNDING OF THE SAN JOSE HEADQUARTERS

Dr. H.S. Lewis, a descendant of Meriwether Lewis, was born in Frenchtown, New Jersey, on November 25, 1883. He was an early member of the Methodist Metropolitan Temple and was in charge of art features in the New York Herald at the age of twenty one. Soon, Dr. Lewis realized that the main principle in life was to live better and subsequently joined the Rosicrucian Order along with a few others and slowly, the membership to the AMORC increased. One of their major concerns was to figure out how people all over the United States could join the Rosicrucian Order and receive the four lessons each month. They decided to make a headquarters which eventually moved from place to place: New York to Florida and finally to California. H.S. Lewis founded the area for the new headquarters in San Jose on Naglee Ave in 1928 and construction began in 1929. By December 2, with the help of outside grants and the incoming dues used for mailing the lessons and construction, all debts were paid on the buildings and the Rosicrucian Order fully owned the park.

When he was forty-six, Dr. Lewis became the Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order. The Emperor's duties are that of a President's and so he set up the monographs and managed the Park.

H.S. Lewis was dedicated to the Rosicrucian Order and spent as many as eighteen hours in a day working with the museum administration and its affiliates. He constructed a

one hundred foot transmitter with two steel antennas in San Jose. It enabled him to broadcast lectures from the basement of the administration office.

Everyone loved Dr. Lewis because he liked people for what they were and not their positions in society. In fact, on hot days in the office, Dr. Lewis treated the staff for ice cream. He often accepted invitations to the homes of his staff. He did these things at a time when coffee breaks were unheard of.(8)

H.S. Lewis loved Egyptian artifacts and built up his collection over time. The first objects he obtained were sent from excavations at the Tell-El-Amarna site. In 1929, he went with more than one hundred members from all over the globe to Egypt. He playfully pointed out many sites that the local tour guide knew nothing about. When he returned, he put the artifacts he acquired in a display case near his office and decided to build the Akhnaton Shrine.

In one of the conventions the Rosicrucians held, he spoke his mind to one of the members. "I think it's a good convention, but do wish some of the members would not take themselves too seriously and smile a bit more. Never lose your sense of humour, it will take you through many a stormy period."(9)

H.S. Lewis passed through transition in 1939 at the age of fifty-six. Transition substitutes death in Rosicrucian belief and it means he passed through a doorway to another form of life. It's a comforting idea to many people. Upon

his transition, his son, Mr. Ralph Lewis, took over the job
his father started of building up the Rosicrucian Park in
San Jose.

THE BUILDINGS IN THE PARK

One of the earliest buildings completed was the Francis Bacon Center. Francis Bacon was an English philosopher who emphasized, "...the need of science to employ inductive reasoning and experimentation".(10) They finished construction in 1931. It was used as an auditorium for plays, lectures and concerts. It seated one hundred people and could be rented for special occasions. It now houses the Alexandria Book Store and Cafe.

Another early landmark the Rosicrucian Order constructed was the Akhnaton Shrine which is reserved for members only today. They visit the Shrine to meditate and honor memories of members. Presently, it is dedicated for the achievements of H.S. Lewis, Ralph Lewis and other devoted members.

The Egyptian Museum has been through many changes. In 1932 through 1940 most of the present artifacts were acquired. From 1950 to 1966, the Rosicrucian Order spent its time expanding the facilities to accommodate their growing collections. It first began as a display outside H.S. Lewis's office. In 1932, a small museum for the artifacts was dedicated. At first, the museum was called the Rosicrucian Oriental Egyptian Museum. It had a replica of the Temple of Luxor and also an Egyptian tomb. Everyone worked to expand the collection of Egyptian artifacts.

After the 1930's, it became much harder to obtain genuine Egyptian artifacts. The Egyptian government

realized that many priceless artifacts had been taken out of their country, and they became uneasy of the excavations. The Egyptian government restricted the amount of departing pieces.(11) But even with the setback in Egypt, many museums decided to pass on duplicates because of the small amount of storage and display areas. People willingly accepted whatever cash they could get for their whole collections during the Great Depression.

In 1938, Ralph Lewis, at the age of thirty-three, inquired about purchasing duplicates at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The museum possessed a mummified Apis bullhead that they were willing to put on the market. The Rosicrucian Order bought the artifact in January, 1939. It took a long time to get approval to acquire each duplicate; most of the time, it took an average of two months.

In 1936, Mr. Kendall Brower was hired as the first curator of the museum and kept up the maintenance of the artifacts and the museum. He served until August 26, 1942. James French, his successor, obtained many major artifacts between the 1930's and the 1940's. He served for twenty years. He passed through transition in 1983.

In 1951, the museum purchased a major collection from the widow and the son of Dr. Steindorff who passed away at the age of ninety. The museum bought over eighty Egyptian artifacts from the Steindorff estate.

In 1954, the Rosicrucian Order built a two-story addition to the museum. With the increasing amount of

publicity and members, the annual amount of visitors increased from 15,000 in the 1940's to 100,000 by the 1950's.(12)

John Cooney, a friend of the Rosicrucian Order, helped acquire many artifacts for the museum. The Order was so impressed with Mr. Cooney's skills in obtaining artifacts that they offered him a job as their consultant in all acquisition cases. Mr. Cooney turned down the offer for personal reasons.(13)

To accommodate the amount of artifacts and to attract tourists, construction for an entirely new museum began in 1965. The Grand Opening was on November 27, 1966. It contained the largest collection of Babylonian, Egyptian and Assyrian artifacts in the U.S. The museum cost about \$500,000. By the 1970's, the number of artifacts had grown to approximately 2000. Some artifacts were acquired on accident.

Every year the Neiman - Marcus Department Store of Dallas, Texas, publishes a Christmas catalog for those with more money than sense. In 1970, the big item was "his and her" mummy cases, which were, of course, the real thing. When the department store got ready to ship the cases to California in early 1971, lo and behold, they discovered a mummy inside one of them. The store asked if the museum wanted the mummy, and if not, they would dispose of it somehow. Of course the museum jumped at the chance to obtain this bonus mummy, who today reposes in tranquility alongside the case he was buried in thousands of years ago.(14)

It was written in 1969, that 99% of the Rosicrucian Museum's collection was authentic yet in 1987 about 4000 artifacts raised questions on the credibility of the museum

which prompted the museum to investigate. The museum obtained an artifact identified as an Egyptian sandstone tablet from the New Kingdom. The sandstone had hieroglyphics, a picture of a bull and a crest on top, yet it was thought to be a fake. The curator, Dale Johnson, said the hieroglyphics meant nothing. "In fact, he said, the last part of the tablet reads, and then the priest says, nothing follows." (15) Nowhere did the museum mention that it may be a reproduction but they still put the duplicates out for public viewing. Kent Weeks, an Egyptologist from U.C. Berkeley, estimated that less than half of the collection is authentic. Officials admitted that they probably had some fakes in the collection. Three consultants were hired from the University of Pennsylvania to investigate everything and the controversy died down soon after.

Admission to the Egyptian Museum was free in the 1970's and it was noted for its replica of the Rosetta Stone, the code of Hammurabi, King Tutankhamen's (Tut) sarcophagus. A trip to the museum also included the Rock Tomb tour. At that time the Planetarium and the Science Building were closed for remodeling and reopened in early 1974.

The Rose-Croix University and Science Building was dedicated in 1934. It was designed by H.S. Lewis and contains classrooms, labs and offices. Classes are held each summer ranging from topics on mysticism to metaphysics. But also there are familiar classes such as creative

writing. But even a class like that introduces members to ideas not usually discussed in an adult education class. On the two steps of the University, the right sphinx contains a scroll that has the fifteen mystical principals most important to Rosicrucians. The principles outline the idea of only one God. Once someone becomes a member, it opens up a positive energy and that person can comprehend new things such as the best solution to a difficult situation. H.S. Lewis placed the principles in the sphinx when it was dedicated to preserve the principles for prosperity. In 1939, the Rosicrucian Order decided to enlarge the Science Building by the addition of the Research Library. It serves both members and the public. The library contains books ranging from the metaphysical to the mystical and philosophical.

The Planetarium was built in 1936. With its Moorish design, it was the fifth planetarium to be constructed in the United States and the first to have an American-built star projector designed by H.S. Lewis. Currently, the Spitz Model 512 projects 2,100 stars and is able to shift the sky forward or backward in a time span of 13,000 years.

In 1938, the Art Gallery was added onto the Egyptian building. It was meant to showcase the works of renowned artists and local artists and to make them available to the public.

The Grand Temple was dedicated on July 17, 1949. It is a replica of the Great Temple of Hathor at Dendera. It is

available for members only and is a spiritual and mystical home of Rosicrucians.

The Shipping Department was needed to edit, print, and mail lessons given by the Emperor for home study. It became a small post office and in 1977, the Order's bill for stamps was the largest on the Pacific Coast. Today, their bill amounts to more than \$500,000 annually. 6 million pieces of literature are mailed each year which is about 7,120,000 letter-sized sheets used in one year.

A Studio and Administration annex was built in 1959 and was inaugurated on April 5, 1970.

On the grounds, there are unique plants and statues to look at. Ralph Lewis bought a replica of a statue of Augustus Caesar for his father who was interested in his activities in Egypt. Caesar's tutor, Seneca, helped develop the Rosicrucian philosophy. There is also the Horus Falcon Statue which is symbolic of cosmic consciousness many find in the Park. Another is the statue of Thutmosis III which weighs 12,000 lbs and is thirteen feet tall. Thutmosis III founded the school in which elements of the Rosicrucian Order came from. Also on the grounds is the Meditation Pond where the water and the fountain statue represents soothing feminine nature. Another fountain is the Sunken Patio Fountain also called "The Fountain of the Living Waters". The golden statue on a column represent eternal life and the water symbolizes all material in existence.

The Rosicrucian Park covers an entire city block in San Jose and remains at the members' disposal. Every department has a different way to contribute to the enlightenment of oneself. In 1974, it was estimated that it draws more than 350,000 visitors every year. Many visitors come to see the museum which now charges a small admission fee. A high percentage of those visitors become members of the Rosicrucian Order.

Today, the beliefs of the Rosicrucian Order remain a mystery to outsiders. With help from grants and members, the Rosicrucian Order has built the Park into a calm and relaxing place to stroll along the walkways and think about life in an increasingly noisy world.

Rosicrucian members say they have a better understanding of the world around them. "True happiness consists not in the knowledge of good things, but in good life; not in understanding, but in living understandingly. Neither is it great learning but good will that joins men to God." (16)

NOTES

1. Vernon, Louise, interviewed on the telephone by Cathy Dean, San Jose, California, 2:30 p.m., April 17, 1994.

2. "Rosicrucians", Encyclopedia Americana 23: 796, 1981.

3. Vernon, Louise interviewed on the telephone by Cathy Dean, Op. Cit.

4. Application for membership to the Rosicrucian Order.

5. Encyclopedia Americana, p. 796.

6. "Mystery of Life", (San Jose, Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC Inc.) p. 33.

7. Ibid, p.6.

8. Juan Perez F.R.C., "A History of Rosicrucian Park", p. 5.

9. Ibid, p. 6.

10. "Mystery of Life", Op Cit., p. 1.

11. Dorothy C. Stamper, "The History and Development of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum" (Aug. 1974), p. 9

12. Ibid, p.33

13. Ibid, p. 22.

14. Ibid, p. 41.

15. Tim Larimer, "Looking for the Fact in Artifact" (San Jose Mercury News, June 5, 1987).

16. "Mystery of Life", Op Cit., p. 6.

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