

A Love Affair With a Historic House

By **LESLIE BERKMAN**
Times Staff Writer

Each time Alice Jumper drove down Beach Boulevard toward the sea, she would admire the charming old farmhouse standing alone high on the edge of a mesa in Huntington Beach.

While on a luncheon outing one day in 1977, Jumper became so intrigued by trucks and other signs of activity that she stopped for a closer look at the house.

"It was love at first sight," the 60-year-old woman recalled.

Ever since, she said, "I've been up to my ears" in the Huntington Beach Historical Society's efforts to restore and display the Newland House, located at Beach Boulevard and Adams Street.

Jumper now volunteers numerous hours each week to make and sell handicrafts to raise money for the project. Her shop is in the Newland House, and she said she has discovered that many persons who come to tour the house share her fondness for it.

Actually, there is nothing extraordinary about the 13-room, wood-frame structure built for William and Mary Newland in 1898 to shelter their growing family. It resembles other turn-of-the-century houses that still dot the countryside.

Nor was the Newland House the first residence in what is now Huntington Beach. "There were probably a hundred houses before it was built," said city historian and retired fire chief Delbert G. Higgins.

Nonetheless, the Newland House, standing gloriously apart and aloof from the surrounding sprawl of modern subdivisions, is undisputedly a city landmark.

What is the house's attraction? "How do you describe love?" Jumper replied.



Alice Jumper in Newland House's main dining room.

Jumper rushed enthusiastically from room to room to show off the home's many attributes as if they were her own proud possessions. The objects of her pleasure ranged from a wood-fired kitchen stove, which did double-duty as an incubator for chickens, to a sunny, second-story cupola:

a round room with a half circle of windows that command a distant view of the shoreline and sea.

Jumper was equally well-versed in the lore of the Newland family. She said she feels a strange attachment to the Newlands: "If a person believed in reincarnation, that might explain it."

Surviving Newland family members say William Newland, having migrated with his family from Illinois, worked as a foreman on the Irvine Ranch until he could save enough to buy 500 acres of tule-covered land for \$80 an acre. He planned to clear and farm the land himself.

Historians say that when the Newlands' house was built, the redwood lumber was shipped from northern forests by schooners that unloaded at Newport Beach's McFadden Wharf. The wood then was hauled from the beach by mules. Carpenters were employed to do the construction for \$2.50 a day.

So large did the Newland family grow — to a total of 10 children — that the two-story house proved too small and a bunkhouse had to be built out back for the three boys.

Newland, very active in civic affairs, was one of the founders of Pacific City, later to become Huntington Beach. He also is credited with establishing the city's first bank, first newspaper and first Methodist church. As an appointee to the state Highway Commission, he campaigned to extend Pacific Coast Highway south of Long Beach and to build a state highway through Santa Ana Canyon.

Mrs. Newland, besides caring for her large family and cooking for the field hands, served on the local grammar school board for 16 years.

Her home became known for its hospitality. Among those who slept in the guest room were such celebrities as P.T. Barnum and Mark Twain, whose picture now hangs there in memory of his stay.

Another memorable visitor to the Newland House was an Indian chief. The chief helped Mrs. Newland catalog her extensive collection of Indian baskets, now kept at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana.

The Newlands occupied the family house until 1952, when Mrs. Newland died at age 94. Later, the Newland estate leased the house and surrounding farm land to the Signal Oil Co. (subsequently to become the Signal Compa-

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OTHER DISHES

ON THE INSIDE— Above, the Newland girls' bedroom, added after a particularly profitable harvest. At right, the only remaining Indian basket in Mrs. Newland's collection. The others are being exhibited at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana.

Times photos

NEWLAND HOUSE

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nies). Signal officials explain they have a long-term lease arrangement that will ultimately give the company title to the land in 1999.

Signal Oil originally intended to establish a refinery on their lease holdings, according to Bernice Frost, 75, one of three surviving Newland daughters. But she said public disapproval forced the company to change its plans and use the land for development.

Fans of the Newland House recount that twice in recent history the building has come harrowingly close to disaster. First came vandals, then the encroachment of urbanization.

After Mrs. Newland died, Signal Oil turned landlord and rented the house temporarily. The house was abandoned after the company offered it and 30 acres of adjacent land for a city park as a condition for obtaining development rights on other property.

Left unattended, the house fell prey to vandals, who removed all the fixtures, including door knobs, ornate hinges and fireplace mantle. As a final insult, a fire was ignited on the second floor which burned a hole in the roof. Water from firemen's hoses and subsequent rains drenched the exposed rooms, causing further damage.

Jumper said that after the fire, city officials told the historical society to restore the house "or we are going to tear it down."

When the restoration began, the plaster walls inside the house were so deteriorated that they had to be rebuilt with drywall, according to Teresa Reynolds, president of the city's historical society.

Most of the refurbishing — from replacing shattered windows to stripping and revarnishing woodwork — was done by companies and individuals who donated the materials, labor or both, she said.

Only a few pieces of the original Newland furniture and some of the Newland dishes have been obtained for the house. Other furniture, all of pre-1920 vintage, has been selected with the assistance of Newland family descendants, who have tried to decorate the restored house to match their childhood recollections.

Frost said she and an older sister intend to donate additional family heirlooms to the Newland House in their lives.



Since June, 1978, the Newland House has been open for public tours every third Sunday of the month and by reservation.

Historical society members discovered to their dismay recently that their preservation battles are not over.

The members sprang to the defense of the Newland House when Signal Landmark Inc. (a Signal Companies subsidiary) announced its plan several months ago to nearly encircle the house with a 190,000-square-foot shopping center.

After numerous meetings and public hearings, history buffs and Signal Landmark reached a compromise.

Company officials promised that the color and architecture of the proposed shopping center would complement the farmhouse, which in fact would be played up as the focal point of the development.

Bob McNatt, Signal Landmark's vice president of planning, said the company removed the "main bone of contention" when it agreed to lower a proposed two-story office building by about 10 feet so as not to obstruct the Newland House's view of the sea.

With the shopping center issue apparently resolved, historical society members said their next goals are to restore the rusty, dilapidated water tower in the backyard of the Newland house and to plant lush lawns and rose and herb gardens.

Planting and installation of an irrigation system have been delayed because the house happens to sit on an Indian

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archeological site, they explained. They are waiting for archeologists, who have excavated the area, to give the go-ahead.

Reynolds said the historical society wants to build kitchen facilities into the base of the old water tower and to lease the Newland house's gardens for weddings and other functions. She said the revenues will be needed to cover the