

# Spoils of War

Heritage Square sprang from a Phoenix mayor's desire to salvage historic Phoenix properties – and his support for President Nixon's Vietnam War policies.

Phoenix Mayor John Driggs in front of the Rosson House, circa 1971.



**E**VERY HALLOWEEN season, thousands of faux flesh-eating ghouls overrun Heritage Square in Downtown Phoenix for the Zombie Walk. But most Phoenixians know there's better eating beyond "*braaaains*" here, including the Japanese delicacies at Nobuo at Teeter House and the wood-roasted charms of Pizzeria Bianco. What many Phoenixians may not know is how one Phoenix mayor's support for President Nixon's exit strategy from Vietnam helped fund this vibrant city square.

The park was conceived in the early 1970s to preserve the Rosson House, one of the city's most iconic old mansions, and convert it into a museum. Though the grand painted lady remains the centerpiece of Heritage Square, the project also saved seven adjacent homes and moved two buildings on-site. The preservation of these stately structures – located on the last intact block of the original Phoenix townsite platted in 1870 – was surely noble. The methods used to ensure their survival were perhaps less noble, but the grinding of political pork is rarely pretty.

To be sure, politics and the Rosson House were intertwined from the start. In 1895, Dr. Roland Lee Rosson built an Eastlake/Queen Anne-style Victorian mansion, then one of the city's most luxurious homes. Designed by noted architect A.P. Petit, the home included an Asian moon gate, hooded windows, and an octagonal tower. "The impressive Victorian mansion undoubtedly aided the political career of Dr. Rosson, who became the ninth mayor of Phoenix in 1895," says Donna Reiner, President of the Rosson House-Heritage Square Board of Directors.

Three families successively owned and remodeled the Rosson House after the namesakes moved out in 1897. But by the late 1940s, Downtown Phoenix was becoming less desirable for upscale residences, so the house was divided into multiple rooms to rent. The home declined from a respectable boarding house to a flophouse frequented by nearby skid row itinerants.

An urban renewal initiative proposed in the early 1970s sought to raze the neighborhood to create a parking lot for the new Phoenix Convention Center. But Mayor John Driggs pushed for its placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. The Rosson House was spared.



"As a youth, every Sunday I walked by the Rosson House on my way to... the adjacent Phoenix First Ward Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," Driggs, now 86, says. "During my time as mayor, I would drive by the beautiful, but dilapidated, Victorian residence and think that we needed to save it. I moved forward with my vision without realizing the far-reaching factors that would come into play."

The City of Phoenix didn't have the funds to purchase the Rosson House, so Driggs explored the possibility of the federal government footing the bill via a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant. Concurrently, President Richard Nixon's staff approached Driggs for his help with their own agenda.

The White House peace talks with the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris bogged down in the early 1970s. American negotiators thought one impediment was the U.S. Conference of Mayors' anti-war position, which led the North Vietnamese to assume the American public was also overwhelmingly anti-war.

"President Nixon's chief deputy, John Erlichman, contacted me asking if I would try to change the mayors' position on the Vietnam War because I was one of the few Republican big city mayors," Driggs says. "At our 1972 conference in New Orleans, I put forth the Driggs Resolution [which supported Nixon's proposal to withdraw U.S. troops after a cease-fire throughout Indochina], unsure of its outcome. When I asked if there were any comments on the resolution, Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago rose to his feet. He was a very influential person but rarely spoke publicly."

"In the name of God, stand behind the President," Daley said, according to an Associated Press wire account. "No one would work harder against a Republican president than me. But maybe I'm old-fashioned or behind the times. The question is whether we are go-

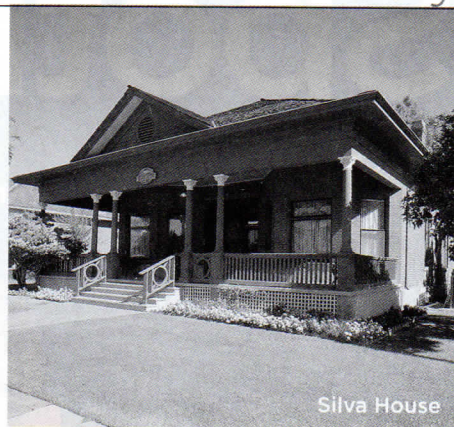
ing to stand behind the President in foreign affairs." The Driggs Resolution was approved.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Phoenix subsequently received a \$200,000 HUD grant to purchase the Rosson House in 1974. "For the dedication of the nearby Phoenix Civic Plaza in 1974, Samuel Mardian, Jr. [Phoenix mayor from 1960-1964] suggested we... invite President Nixon," Driggs recalls. "The President, however, sent his daughter, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, to represent him. Mardian, who claims that the Driggs Resolution was the real reason the city got the HUD grant, told me Nixon had said to him, 'I'll do something else for Mayor Driggs by making sure he gets the HUD grant.'"

\$20,000 of the grant was used to condemn the Rosson House lot, while the remaining \$180,000 went toward relocating 19 people who were living in the home. The other park parcels were acquired with Community Development Block Grant funds. Architect Robert Frankeberger became the chief advisor.

Rehabilitating the park's ten buildings - which included the Rosson House, five bungalows, two carriage houses, a duplex, and a machine shop - began in 1976 with funding and services mostly donated by local companies. The Rosson House, in particular, had been considerably altered by renovations. After four years of work, Heritage Square opened on May 4, 1980. The park expanded in 1996 with the addition of the Arizona Science Center, and was renamed Heritage and Science Park.

"Heritage Square is fine-spun and funky, traditional and trendy," says Michelle Reid, Executive Director of the Rosson House Museum. "The combination of heritage and science and rustic restaurants, neatly wrapped in a turn-of-the-century framework, creates a masterpiece for visitors in Downtown Phoenix. Everyone comes away with a different reason to appreciate the park."



Silva House

## Spirit House

**O**F ALL THE HISTORIC buildings at Heritage Square, the Silva House - with its decidedly free-spirited atmosphere - would probably most please its original owners. Built in 1900 by Phoenix liquor dealer A.F.C. Kirchoff, the neoclassical bungalow currently houses the Rose and Crown, a nightspot featuring traditional pub grub, libations, and, allegedly, spirits of a different type. "It's a pretty unique place," pub employee Chris Ceimo says. "People have even reported seeing apparitions and stuff moving around."

The ghostly entities may be attracted by the bungalow's cool vibe and eclectic history. In 1906, the house was bought by Alejandro Silva, a Glendale rancher of Portuguese descent noted for raising superior draft horses. His family resided in the Adams Street home until 1977. With the creation of Heritage Square, former Phoenix Mayor John Driggs convinced Salt River Project (SRP) to donate \$50,000 to rehabilitate the bungalow as a company museum. After its 20-year run as an SRP education center, the Silva House was home to several restaurants until the Rose and Crown opened in 2008. The English pub proved so popular that its crowds taxed the building's very foundation, necessitating renovation of the floor. Despite such inconveniences, the Rose and Crown appears to have found its niche in the Silva House. "A big part of our pub's success is its historic ambiance," Ceimo says.

Aerial view of Heritage Square prior to renovations

