

ARDEN

(Helena Modjeska Historic House and Gardens)

East of Olive Hill Road in Modjeska Canyon (within broader Santiago Canyon)

Modjeska

Orange County

California

HALS CA-97

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

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### ARDEN

#### (Helena Modjeska Historic House and Gardens)

HALS NO. CA-97

Location: East of Olive Hill Road in Modjeska Canyon (within broader Santiago Canyon)

Modjeska, Orange County, California

Forest of Arden (Modjeska House) National Historic Landmark Historic District,  
NHLS No. 72000244

Latitude: 33.70894 Longitude: -117.62359 (northwestern point of the Forest of Arden (Modjeska House) District, converted from UTM, NAD27).

Significance: Arden was the estate and gardens of Madame Helena Modjeska (1840- 1909), one of the most famous late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Shakespearean actresses in America. It was her primary residence during the height of her celebrity and her only surviving residence in America. Internationally famed, Modjeska immigrated to America from Poland in 1876, and resided at Arden (when not traveling for performances) from 1888 until 1905, a few years before her death. Madame Modjeska was one of the first celebrities to reside in southern California.

Description: Arden is the 14.4-acre residential core of a once 1,300-acre property. The property is comprised of an assembly of residential buildings surrounded by a meadow, creek, oak forested hillsides, and several discontinuous but associated areas within close proximity. Buildings situated on the property include the Modjeska Residence, Opid Cottage/guest house, Stone Building, and Milk House. Landscape features include gardens with exotic and native plant species, cobble flowerbed garden borders, a well, fountains, pool/plunge, rock monument, meadow of grasses and native wildflowers, Santiago Creek and its associated wetland, and surrounding oak woodlands.<sup>1</sup> Plant species include Coast Live Oaks, coast redwoods, palm trees, sycamore trees, olive trees, glossy privets, Bunya Bunya tree, anchor plant, pepper tree, Italian Cypress, and shrubs including poison oak, chaparral, and coastal sage scrub.<sup>2</sup> Buildings and features of the property constructed after 1905 and/or not associated with its historic period of association with Madame Modjeska include a cinderblock building, Craftsman-style store, stone stairs and pink stone sidewalks, remains of a stone bridge, White Cottage, cistern, and bear den. The property is well-preserved, including both the buildings and landscape elements. While some plantings have been lost over time, the majority of the landscape features are intact.

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<sup>1</sup> County of Orange, 1991, 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

History: World-renowned Shakespearean actress and Polish activist Helena Modjeska and her husband Count Karol Bozenta Chlapowski made Arden their retreat home from 1888 to 1905 during the height of Madame Modjeska's acting career. Madame Modjeska had established herself as a well respected actress in Poland during the 1870s, but left the country with her husband, their son Ralph, and like-minded nationalists for the United States in 1876. Together they escaped the Czarist rule of Poland and built a utopian community in Anaheim, California. However, the harsh realities of back breaking work and limited resources in the West contributed to a short-lived experiment. In 1877, Madame Modjeska debuted in San Francisco and began national tours that continued until her final performance in Los Angeles in February 1906.<sup>3</sup>

During breaks in touring, she visited southern California. From 1883 to 1885, Bozenta and Ralph resided in a small shack in Santiago Canyon. They became acquainted with their neighbors, the Pleasants, who had built a modest homestead nestled under a canopy of oak trees in the canyon. Madame Modjeska and her husband purchased that property, now known as Arden, from Joseph E. Pleasants in 1888.<sup>4</sup> Madame Modjeska named the property Arden after the "Forest of Arden" in Shakespeare's "As You Like It."<sup>5</sup> The property reminded her of Shakespeare's plays with "oak trees, running brooks, palms, snakes, and even lions, - of course, California lions, - really pumas."<sup>6</sup>

While the natural surroundings drew the family to the property, Madame Modjeska's desire for grander accommodations prompted the hiring of friend and famed New York architect, Stanford White, to expand the existing homestead cabin.<sup>7</sup> In 1893, White more than doubled the size of the house with a large western addition containing a kitchen, large living room, music room, office, three bedrooms, bathroom, trunk room, and two porches. Design elements characteristic of White include the large Palladian, mullioned, and round windows, use of natural materials, shingles, and Classically influenced features. It is the only surviving example of White's work located west of Kansas City.<sup>8</sup> Modjeska and Bozenta also constructed a milk house and the Opid Cottage, as quarters for servants or guests. The previously constructed two-story stone building was utilized for storage and servants quarters.

The expansive property was primarily operated as a cattle ranch with some acreage devoted to grains, nearly 30 acres of olives down the canyon from the

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<sup>3</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form, 8-9; Theodore Payne; Los Angeles Herald, "Modjeska Makes Farewell Bow," 2 February 1906, 4:6.

<sup>4</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form, 8-9; Theodore Payne; Los Angeles Herald, "Modjeska Makes Farewell Bow," 2 February 1906, 4:6.

<sup>5</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Helena Modjeska. *Memoirs*.

<sup>7</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form; Theodore Payne.

<sup>8</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form.

house, some acres devoted to oranges and grapes, and an apiary of 120 bee hives.<sup>9</sup> For a short time, goats were bred on the property.<sup>10</sup>

The natural features of the property were what attracted Madame Modjeska to it, and as such, designed landscape elements were primarily limited to the residential core. Modjeska and Bozenta created more formalized circulation both for carriages and foot traffic, lining the main drive with palm trees. By 1893, two large blue grass lawns framed the front/north side of the house as did two fountains, a shingled well enclosure, and a large rose garden bordered by flower and shrubbery borders. Madame Modjeska adored roses, especially Papa Gontier or Tea Rose. Many roses colored the property, including Catherine Mermet, Madame Caroline Testout, Duchess de Brabant, Perle des Jardins, La France, Marie Van Houtte, Maman Cochet, Paul Neyron, Magna Charta, Ulrich Brunner, Prince Camille de Rohan, General Jacqueminot, Captain Christy, American Beauty, Reve d'or, Lamarque, Beauty of Glazenwood, Reine Marie Henrietta, and White Banksia.<sup>11</sup> Ornamental shrubs White Bush Poppy or Matilija Poppy grew five miles down the canyon. Local wildflowers dotted the ranch such as Blue Larkspur, Violet Bearn Tongue, lilac-colored Mariposa Lily, and Meadow Rue that grew six feet high in shady spots.<sup>12</sup>

A large vegetable garden situated up the canyon provided a variety of vegetables when Madame Modjeska was staying at the ranch and staple vegetables for the ranch hands when she was away. The Modjeska dam constructed by S.H. Finley in Harding Canyon diverted water from a nearby creek through a flume and deposited it into a reservoir behind the house. An irrigation system delivered the water across the grounds.<sup>13</sup> There were few other alterations to the ranch during Madame Modjeska's occupancy, with the exception of another small garden and a large pool or plunge. It is likely that the creek overflowed intermittently just as it did in the winter of 1892-1893 and consumed a portion of the existing garden.<sup>14</sup>

Many local and international entertainers and local entrepreneurs visited the ranch, including pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski, the Barrymores, Edwin Booth, the Otis Skinner family, James S. and Coralinn Rice of Tustin, Joseph and Catherine Yoch of Santa Ana, Frances E. Bullard who was the first to hybridize the Watsonia, and others.<sup>15</sup> Friends visited that the ranch encountered a slower pace of life. Madame Modjeska and her friends often sat on the front lawn on chairs or in hammocks under the oak canopies talking or embroidering. The

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<sup>9</sup> Theodore Payne, 36, 98.

<sup>10</sup> Ignace Jan Paderewski, 361-362.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Payne, 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> Payne, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Payne, 36-37, 65, 89; James Miller Guinn, 1902, 682.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, 50,

<sup>15</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form; Theodore Payne, 41.

afternoons were often occupied by horseback riding.<sup>16</sup> Famed southern California landscape architect Florence Yoch visited the ranch as a young girl and later built her career interpreting classic European gardens for her California clients, likely drawing on her experiences at the ranch, among other places.<sup>17</sup> When Madame Modjeska was in town and before the winter, laborers and friends took their dinner in the grape arbor.<sup>18</sup>

Photographs at the Orange Public Library and the California State University, Fullerton, University Archives and Special Collections show the house and grounds during Modjeska's occupancy.

In 1905, Madame Modjeska and Bozenta sold the property and in 1907 purchased a seaside home in Newport Beach. The property served as a rural hotel until 1923, when C.J. Walker purchased it as a summer retreat for his extended family. The Walker family sold the property to Orange County in 1987, after which it became a county-operated historic site.<sup>19</sup>

Sources: County of Orange. Arden-Helena Modjeska Historic House and Gardens General Development Plan and Resource Management Plan. June 1991.

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Paderewski, Ignace Jan and Mary Lawton. The Paderewski Memoirs. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938.

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore Payne, 40-41.

<sup>17</sup> Theodore Payne, 41; Robert Smaus, "Gardens: California Essence: Seventy Years Ago, Florence Yoch Brought Us European Landscape Design," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1989. Available at [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-20/magazine/tm-1000\\_1\\_garden-design](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-20/magazine/tm-1000_1_garden-design), accessed June 9, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Payne, 41.

<sup>19</sup> NHL/NRHP Registration Form.

1989. Available at [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-20/magazine/tm-1000\\_1\\_garden-design](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-20/magazine/tm-1000_1_garden-design), accessed June 9, 2013.

Historians: Shannon Davis, M.A., RPH  
Sarah Stringer-Bowsher, M.A., RPH  
ASM Affiliates  
260 S Los Robles Ave Pasadena, CA 91101  
(626) 793-7395

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2013 HALS Challenge Entry: *Documenting the Cultural Landscapes of Women*



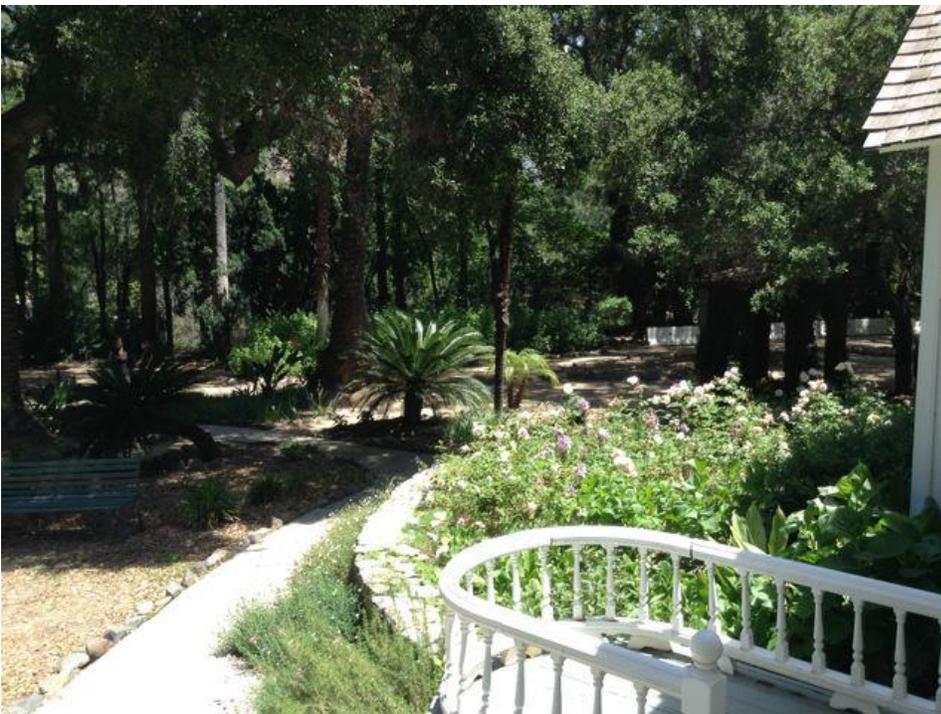
Modjeska House at Arden and north lawn/landscape today, view looking south (Shannon Davis, 2013).



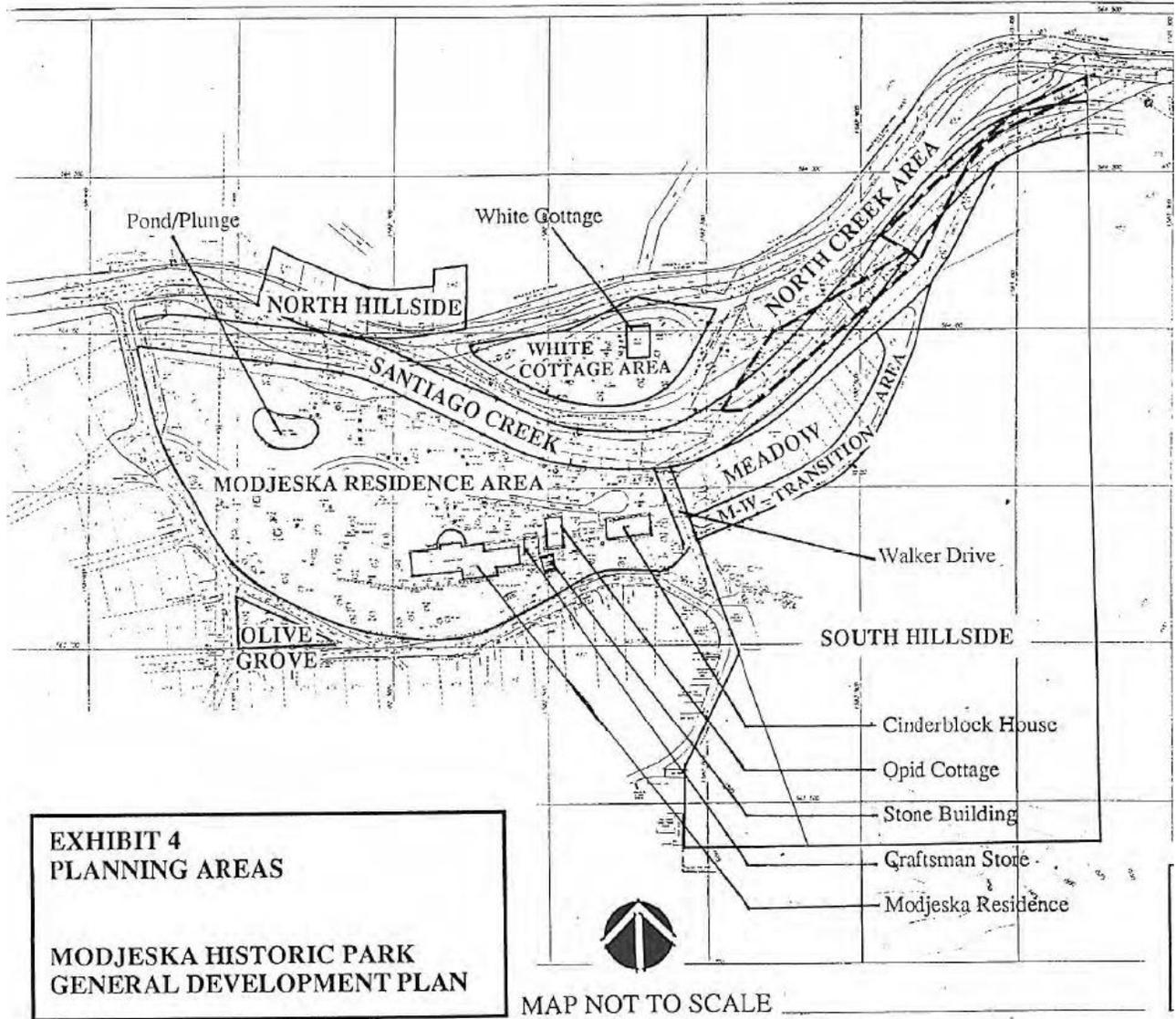
Arden, view looking south at the Modjeska House, north gardens, and palm lined carriage road (Shannon Davis, 2013).



Landscaped grounds of Arden, view looking southwest towards Modjeska House from carriage road north of the well (Shannon Davis, 2013).



Landscaped grounds of Arden, view looking north from entry porch of the Modjeska House (Shannon Davis, 2013).



Sketch map of Arden, indicating the location of some of the key resources of the historic property (1991, Modjeska Historic Park General Development Plan, Orange County Parks, Irvine, California).