

Cabot's Old Indian Pueblo

The Oldest Green Museum in America

Cabot Yerxa, early homesteading pioneer, was the single builder of Cabot's Museum. Cabot bestowed the city of Desert Hot Springs a rare and proud legacy. The environmental intelligence and sustainability that Cabot nurtured and exhibited in his building expertise included the sustainability of a community. Cabot viewed both nature and man as divine and throughout his life paid tribute to them both. It is for these reasons that Cabot Yerxa has always been called Desert Hot Springs' "Guiding Light".

The business of homesteading 160 acres of land in the desert was a grueling proposition, only five percent were successful. The year was 1913 when Cabot first came to the desert. He tells us about this time in his life: "But in spite of these difficulties and privations, all these early people loved the desert for what it was-clean, quiet, and beautiful... but the greatest overall joy with a thankful feeling of independence and satisfaction, the fact that the land under our feet was "ours!" ...We were free men in a new clean fascinating world."

Writing to Portia, his beloved soon-to-be bride, Cabot asked: "Can we build a place like no other"? Portia and Cabot were lifelong Theosophists. Portia's good friend Rabia Martin who was an intimate of Inyat Kahn's brought the Sufi movement to the United States in 1910. Portia in the 1930's traveled the country giving lectures on the Universalist philosophy of Theosophy. Cabot having already discovered, in 1914, the magnificent hot mineral water that made Desert Hot Springs famous, held dear these utopian ideals. Cabot and Portia Yerxa worked tirelessly and did create a community, Desert Hot Springs... "a place like no other".

Cabot, with his much loved burros, "raked" over 7 miles of roads in the city. He proudly set the cornerstone for the first firehouse, opened the first library, and started a VFW and a Masonic Lodge. He was the founder and first president of the Desert Hot Springs Improvement Association. His entrepreneurship and perseverance brought the famous land developer, L.W. Coffee to the town. Coffee, after rigorous verification that the quality of the hot mineral water in Desert Hot Springs "was some of the finest in the world," built one of the most sophisticated bath houses in the West; right in the center of town...2,000 people, July 12, 1941, attended the opening day celebration when the population of the city was 20!

Cabot built his Pueblo at the same time L.W. Coffee was building his contribution to "suffering humanity" as his bath house plaque was inscribed. In keeping with his Universalist philosophy, Cabot opened his museum as a tribute to Native Americans; he was at the time a well known and devout Indian rights activist.

Cabot expressly wrote about his desires for a meditation garden at the Pueblo: "We who are here today are but pioneers in a new clean land, and must now think of the generations who will follow us. The open desert as we know it now will disappear, but as Desert Hot Springs expands and becomes a city, this spot will always be the Altar in the Wilderness, accessible to all who wish to enjoy moments of peace, meditation and silence... a very simple primitive affair to be in keeping with its natural desert surroundings, it will be a reflection of universal thought of all earnest devout people in their approach to worship a Supreme Being...the last great wilderness is the wilderness of the self." It is with little wonder that the Pueblo became an important artist colony and center of "new thought".

Aubrey Wardman joined all in the creation of the city as well; he was gifting land and helped birth Angel View Crippled Children's Foundation. Dr. Robert Bingham who traveled the world lecturing with Dr. Linus Pauling also joined the pioneers of the city of Desert Hot Springs and aided crippled children with the hot curative waters of the famed city. All were remarkable men in their own right ...these good men each

lived their lives out in the city they helped create...they shared friendship, love and a vision for the common good of all men.

Cabot, like any good builder, chose the land for his Pueblo with foresight and intent. His first task, which took him one year, was to dig out the hillside so he could nestle the Pueblo into it. There are rooms on the second floor that are underground. Cabot set the entire structure at a South–West-facing orientation, optimizing both the wind and the sun to cool and heat the Pueblo. The entire structure is 5,000 square feet, 35 rooms, 150 windows and 65 doors. All built from recycled or handmade materials. Doors and windows are used to create strong air flow. The living room has a cement water tub that is connected to one of two wells on the property. Cabot could use the water to wet the dirt floor or to wet the rock walls for cooling the summer heat.

The front door was once the bottom of a buckboard. Each window in the Pueblo is different, no two alike...tiny ones and large ones with panes of many shapes and sizes. Everywhere you look there is evidence of Cabot's great gifts of creativity and intelligence. Cabot studied art in Paris at Academie Julianne in 1925...ceilings are washed with a soft sky blue paint...rock shelves and cubby holes are everywhere. There's a small room just large enough for a small bed that you must climb into with a multi-paned window that opens to the fireplace. The Pueblo has a classroom with built in benches and a meditation tower that has a pull down bench to cover the stairwell for privacy. A china dog's head is embedded in a kitchen wall...horseshoes are a favorite motif. Tree branches abruptly stick out of a wall or are used as handrails. One can sense the joy he took in creating this space. The Venturi and Silo effects were used extensively for efficient temperature control. Today the Pueblo produces more solar power than it uses from 24 solar panels situated on the hillside just above.

Today you can tour the Pueblo and view 11 of the 35 rooms. You will sense each room's specialness.

Few communities in America can claim, at their core, such a richness of nature and good men. Today the leaders of Desert Hot Springs have taken up the mantel and insured the sustainability of the "place like no other" and have nurtured the heritage of the "Spa City", Cabot Yerxa and his Old Indian Pueblo. The city of Desert Hot Springs is unique in that it owns and operates Cabot's Museum protecting Cabot's wishes to: "think of the generations who will follow us."

Barbara Maron, © Cabot's Museum Foundation Board
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