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Greystone: Monument to City's Guilded Past

Way Sought to Preserve Mansion as Art Gallery; May Become Subdivision

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BEVERLY HILLS—Your footfalls echo in the hollow halls and the dust of disuse dulls the sheen of the marble floors.

Ornate chandeliers, unlit for years, hang in the darkness from high ceilings and a chilling hush pervades the deserted mansion on the hill.

This is Greystone, 501 Doheny Rd., once the estate of the late Edward Laurence Doheny II, pioneer oil developer. The mansion has been vacant since 1955 and vandals have repeatedly entered the place to leave scars on carved woods, walls and fixtures.

Monument to Past

Greystone is a relic from Beverly Hills' past, a monument to the gilded age when the barons of industry sought to enshrine their success in palaces worthy of any hereditary lord.

With the possible exception of Harold Lloyd's "Barony" in Benedict Canyon, Greystone is the last of the great Beverly Hills homes. And unless some way is found soon to preserve it, undoubtedly it will be torn down to make room for another residential subdivision.

The palatial home of Errett Lobban Cord, a Georgian mansion which once graced the corner of Doheny and N Hillcrest Rds., was demolished early last year for subdivision.

Possible Art Gallery

The City Council would like to see Greystone preserved and dedicated to some public purpose such as an art gallery, museum, music conservatory, or as another Huntington Library or Dumbarton Oaks.

But no one so far has offered to buy the estate and donate it to the city. And the city can't afford to buy it.

The present owner of Greystone is Park Grey, Inc., of Chicago. It was purchased by the firm in 1955 from the widow of Doheny, Mrs. Leigh Battson.

Three years ago Henry Crown, who has controlling interest in Park Grey, reportedly offered the estate to the city for \$1.5 million to be paid over a 60-year period at 2% interest. But city officials shied away from the deal.

Greystone was built between 1929 and 1931. And although its original cost is not known, it has been estimated that between \$4 million and \$5 million would be

needed to duplicate it now. The estate now covers 18½ acres. Some of the original land has already been sold.

The house is built of steel-reinforced concrete with sandstone exterior facing and a slate roof. It includes such unusual features as a movie theater, bowling alley and a laundry and dry-cleaning plant.

The grounds surrounding Greystone include a waterfall and artificial lake, a formal garden with a fountain and statuary, a guest house, tennis courts, swimming pool, stables, kennels, guest apartments and a gatehouse.

Main House Intact

Although some of the 55 rooms have been stripped of their fine wood paneling and carved marble mantelpieces, most of the main house is still intact, except for the aforementioned vandalism.

The dining hall, built after the fashion of a medieval refectory, has a green-and-white marble inlay fireplace and carved wood ceiling and musicians' loft.

The grand staircase and entrance hall feature carved wood balustrades and marble floors. Massive wooden doors, some intricately carved, can be found throughout the house. Many of the outside doors have wrought-iron gates as does the main entrance to the estate.

Sometime Movie Set

Since 1955, when the Battsons moved out, only full-time caretakers and visiting gardeners have walked its halls and grounds. Also the house has been used on occasion as a movie set, most recently for Bette Davis' "Dead Ringer."

One attempt at subdivision was stymied by the city last year. But new plans reportedly are being prepared. An interested developer says the property could be subdivided to accommodate 25 houses in the \$200,000 class.

In the meantime, a citizens committee is scanning the country for a savior for Greystone.

Annual property taxes on Greystone amount to \$20,000 of which Beverly Hills gets about \$5,000.



GREYSTONE MANSION—The stately old home nestles among the trees and shrubs, one of last monuments to the golden era of Beverly Hills history.

Times photo