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Museum Review: Homestead-Workman Family Homestead Museum

By Jose Castro

Located at 15415 East Don Julian Road in the City of Industry outside Los Angeles, California, the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum is a historical site consisting of two well-maintained homes owned by the Workman-Temple family. Here, visitors can learn a century's worth of Southern California history from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century in a historical site that represents the social evolution of the Western United States. Owned by the City of Industry, visitors can enter this site and be guided through the homes' halls and rooms by volunteers for free. The return to the museum after the COVID-19 pandemic has been sporadic due to budget and staff cuts but, little by little, museum staff are beginning to restart the guided tours and activities that they have done for more than thirty years.

Since 1981, the museum has been open to the public with two historical houses on its premises. One is the Workman House, which is an adobe house built by William Workman (1799–1876), who was the co-founder of Rancho La Puente, in 1842.¹ The other is the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture home named La Casa Nueva built in 1920 by Walter Temple (1869–1938). The Workman-Temple Homestead Museum also includes the family cemetery (built in 1850) where Pío Pico (1801–1894), the last

¹ Rancho La Puente was granted to John Rowland by Governor Juan Alvarado as a 17,740-acre ranch for \$1,000. The rancho was enlarged to 48,790 acres in 1845 when Governor Pío Pico named both John Rowland (1791–1873) and William Workman as co-owners. With the annexation of California by the United States in 1848, the validity of the grant was reviewed by the United States Land Commission. It was not until 1867 that the title was confirmed by then-President Andrew Johnson (1808–1875). Rancho La Puente, *The Homestead Museum Blog*, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org/about-us/rancho-la-puente>.

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governor of California while California was under Mexican rule, is buried. Apart from being a historical site, the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum also holds a vast archive of documents such as letters, books, pictures, and newspapers dating from 1830 to 1930.



Figure 1. Workman Adobe House Built in 1841. Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.²

The City of Industry purchased the property in 1971 and began an extensive restoration process to return the site to its original appearance. Both houses were damaged prior to the city's acquisition of the properties, but La Casa Nueva required a more detailed restoration than the Workman Adobe House. The city hired specialists to restore the buildings. Goetz Art Studios, an East Los Angeles company recognized for its tile murals, so accurately reproduced the missing and broken tiles that it is difficult to distinguish the new ones from the originals. John Wallis and Associates, a company who has made stained glass windows in Pasadena since the 1920s, reproduced all the missing windows and cleaned and repaired the surviving original windows. As a result of the workers' efforts, the stained-glass windows appear as they did

² "Workman Adobe House," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

in the 1920s. It took over five years to restore the house to its original prestige.³ Once the restoration was finished, both homes were opened to the public for free as a museum. From the walls to the ceiling, every detail in the restoration is essential to avoid deterioration that accumulates over time due to natural wear. Due to restoration efforts on behalf of the City of Industry, Walter Temple's La Casa Nueva and William Workman's House have been maintained and preserved over the past few decades so that new generations can learn about the history of Los Angeles and the prominent Workman-Temple family.

The history of the Workman House began in 1841 when Rancho La Puente was granted to Workman and John A. Rowland (1791–1873) north of Puente Hills, in the San Gabriel Valley. The first phase of the house was built by the banks of what was once the San Jose creek in 1842. The architecture was a common and traditional Mexican frontier house. The main column of the house is made up of three adobe rooms. The adobe bricks are made with sand, clay, straw, and water, and the bricks were turned out onto the ground for several weeks to dry them out. Wooden lintels were placed across the top of the doors and windows to open support, and the house was covered with plaster to preserve the abode.⁴ The roof was flat and originally there were wooden doors and windows, but it was later replaced with brick wings and a second story during expansion.

The second phase of construction began after 1849 during the California Gold Rush (1848–1855). Workman began to have unprecedented economic growth due to the profits from raising cattle and the sale of raw hides and tallow, and he began to expand the house.⁵ In the 1870s, the Workman House was transformed

³ "Cultural Heritage," City of Industry, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.cityofindustry.org/about-industry/cultural-heritage>.

⁴ "Cultural Heritage," City of Industry.

⁵ Paul R. Spitzzerii, "Gold, Guns and Growth Preview: The Expansion of the Workman House During the 1850s," *The Homestead Museum Blog*, January 8, 2021, <https://homesteadmuseum.blog/2021/01/08/gold-guns-and-growth-preview-the-expansion-of-the-workman-house-during-the-1850s/>.

from a modest adobe home into an American Victorian house. A second floor was added to the building and rooms added to the wings designed by architect Ezra Kysor (1835–1907).⁶ The picturesque Victorian country home reflects the architectural tastes that were popular in mid-nineteenth century America. Today, the Workman House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a California State Historic Landmark.⁷

Inside the house, most of the rooms are empty; only one bedroom has furniture that belonged to John Temple (n.d.) from 1899. The bed, dresser, and chamber pot are positioned in the way they are believed to have been when the house was inhabited. In this way, the visitor can observe how the family lived in the Victorian Era (1837–1901) with the large curtains on the windows, the wooden furniture and the marble fireplace that adorns the place. Moreover, visitors are able to view the changes made to the house over time to understand how Los Angeles changed from the 1840s to the 1890s with pictures posted by the museum in the empty rooms. These images illustrate the city's changes from a Mexican pueblo to an American metropolis of the late nineteenth century, and the Workman Adobe Home reflects this demographic and cultural shift.

In 1899, the Workman family lost the homestead due to financial problems. It was not until 1917 when Walter Temple (1869–1938), the youngest grandson of William Workman, decided to buy his grandfather's old house. He then built a new house next door and named it La Casa Nueva. Fortune came to Temple in 1914 when he found oil at his home in the Montebello Hills. He began doing business with Standard Oil and investing in real estate. By 1917, he purchased his grandfather's house and the adjoining land that included the family cemetery. Being an architectural and artistic work, the construction of La Casa Nueva

⁶ Ezra Kysor was one of the most famous architects in the 1800s. Among the most recognized works was Pico House, and Cathedral of St. Vibiana.

⁷ Erected 1976 by the State Department of Parks and Recreation in cooperation with the City of Industry. "William Workman Home," The Historical Marker Database, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=50981>.

began in 1922 and took five years to finish due to its intricate craftsmanship.⁸

La Casa Nueva, built as an adobe home with hand crafted steel and wood, is a symbol of appreciation towards Temple's Hispanic and English roots. There is Mexican symbolism from the entrance of the door to the stained-glass windows. Though the artistic and historic value of architectural craft is significant, they are often disregarded since few are found in museums or art galleries and most craftsmen remain anonymous.⁹ From the entrance door, the visitor can appreciate the detailed figures carved in the wood, such as medieval knights helmets and Spanish-European symbols, and see how the icons cast in steel was not only to give aesthetic but to give a message representing the wealth and lineage within the Workman-Temple family.

Temple commissioned well-known Los Angeles architects Walker Eisen (1919–1941) and Roy Seldon Price (1888–1940) to design La Casa Nueva, and Mexican workers who specialized in adobe construction oversaw the actual labor and development. The 12,400-square-foot home was built with a Spanish Colonial Revival style, and it is noted for its fine architectural crafts, including stained glass, ceramic tile, wrought iron, and carved plaster and wood.¹⁰ During the 1920s and 1930s, the Spanish Colonial Revival was one the most popular architectural styles in Southern California.¹¹ It was sought to resemble the Spanish

⁸ Paul R. Spitzzerii, "Family History," *Homestead Museum*, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org/about-us/family-history>.

⁹ Max A. Van Balgooy, "Architectural Craft at the Homestead Museum," *Homestead Quarterly* (Winter 1990).

¹⁰ "Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed December 2021, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

¹¹ According to Ione R. Stiegler, "the Spanish Colonial Revival style includes a wide range of elements influenced by Spanish Colonial architecture in the United States, and incorporates elements from the broad history of Spanish architecture, including Moorish, Gothic, Byzantine, and Renaissance fountains with tiled roofs, windows of multiple panels, exterior spaces and decorative

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European Mediterranean, so wealthy families began to build this type of house in the sunny state of California to evoke a status of wealth and power.



Figure 2. La Casa Nueva Main Entrance. Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.¹²

Surrounding La Casa Nueva, the visitors can walk through a grapevine-covered corridor with a concrete floor that features the names of all the California missions as well as tile diamonds, six-pointed stars, and coats of arms. This house is composed with artistic colorful ceramic tile as well as clay tile roofs, roughly plastered walls, arched doorways, and wrought iron window grilles. The largest and most public spaces of La Casa Nueva are the Main Hall, Living Room, Dining Room, and Library. Outside

details.” Ione R. Stiegler, “Style 101: Spanish Colonial Revival,” IS Architecture, accessed May 2, 2022,

<https://isarchitecture.com/style-101-spanish-colonial-revival/>.

¹² “La Casa Nueva Main Entrance,” Workman and-Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

of the main house, is the Tepee House, a conical adobe structure that Mr. Temple used as an office.

The two most important handcrafted elements of the house are the stained glass and the tiles. La Casa Nueva's stained-glass windows represent one of the largest public collections of its kind in California. The artists drew their inspiration from the stained-glass windows of medieval Europe. The glass coloring is done in different steps and various metallic oxides are added during the manufacturing process. According to researcher, author, speaker, and blogger, Max A. van Balgooy:

In the early nineteenth century, stained glass became popular in the United States with the introduction of the Gothic Revival style of architecture. Drawing on medieval churches for inspiration, the Gothic Revival influenced the design of churches, houses, and furniture, which began to feature trefoils, pointed arches, and crockets. Like their medieval counterparts, windows often used stained glass. Much of this glass was imported from England or Germany, but beginning in the 1840s, skilled craftsmen quickly became adept at producing stained glass windows in the United States.¹³

The stained-glass windows found throughout La Casa Nueva demonstrate the variety of techniques popular in the early twentieth-century. In some parts, such as the main entrance, craftsmen used colored enamels in the stained glass, such as blues, reds, and greens, to render clothing and landscapes in the images. In the bedrooms and smaller rooms, techniques of painting are more easily seen with roses, irises, morning glories, and wisteria bloom painted onto the glass.

¹³ "Stained Glass," Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed December 2021, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org/about-us/la-casa-nueva/stained-glass>.



*Figure 3. Back Side of La Casa Nueva and Tippy House, Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.*¹⁴

Every room contains a stained-glass window, totaling nearly fifty pieces throughout the historical house. The most important is the triptych, the centerpiece in the main lobby room. When visitors enter the lobby of the house, the first thing the visitor can see is the pictographic window that is illuminated by sunlight, depicting various Indigenous American nations observing the arrival of European ships. Additionally, one of the rooms in the home is the Music Room with an arched ceiling to preserve the acoustic and decorated with stained windows representing famous classical music composers. The Study Room also has stained glass that represents the writers and scenes from Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1594).

¹⁴ "Back Side of La Casa Nueva and Tippy House," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.



Figure 4. Stained Glass Window. Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.¹⁵



Figure 5. Stained Glass Window Celebrating The American Immigration to The West. Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.¹⁶

¹⁵ “Stained Glass Window,” Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

¹⁶ “Stained Glass Window Celebrating The American Immigration to The West,” Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

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The handmade tile is another important element in the house and is found in nearly every room, either as baseboards, stair risers, fireplace surrounds, wall niches, or window seats. According to the Homestead Museum website:

These tiles range in size from 2-inches to 3-inches to 5-inches and feature the characteristic convex face covered with thick, bumpy glaze. Over two dozen different tile patterns are used throughout the house, including flowers, birds, and rabbits covered in blue, yellow, green, white, and red. This tile was purchased from B. A. Whalen, a Los Angeles dealer in 'Spanish, Italian and Mexican furniture, wrought iron, tile and pottery' and was most likely imported from Puebla, Mexico.¹⁷

Those panels were made by an artist named Pedro Sanchez (n.d.). In the Dining Room, a 36-inch by 24-inch panel features a potted plant with stylized flowers. Lining the back of a built-in cupboard in the Breakfast Room is a 24-inch by 29-inch panel showing two peacocks eating a basket of fruit. In the bedroom of Thomas Temple (n.d.), a niche contains a 32-inch by 27-inch panel of a Madonna and Child guarded by two angels.¹⁸ While the Mexican ceramic tile was imported from Puebla and is handmade and has brighter colors, the American made tile was built in factories and each of them uses different patterns in brilliant colors, such as blue sunflowers and pink roses.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Tilework," Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed December 02, 2021, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org/about-us/la-casa-nueva/tilework>.

¹⁸ "Tilework," Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum.

¹⁹ Talavera ceramic tile is from Puebla, Mexico. Puebla was the most prominent of the Mexican centers of pottery production to employ the technique of tin-enameled earthenware. Johanna. Hecht, "Talavera from Puebla," in *Heilbrunn*



Figure 6. La Casa Nueva Main Lobby. Courtesy of the Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.²⁰

Just by looking at each room, the visitor understands why La Casa Nueva took five years to build. Creating and installing so many architectural crafts was a time consuming process. Since the City of Industry obtained this property, efforts have been made to maintain every room as it was in the 1920s, and the museum volunteers and workers work diligently to maintain and sustain the museum to its original prosperity. Not only is the building important, but visitors can get in touch with a 1920's atmosphere with a collection of furniture and artifacts that the museum has obtained over the years. Some of the furniture was donated by the Temple family like the family piano made in the 1800s and brought from the East Coast. Because the late Temple family member, Edgar Temple (n.d.), helped the museum to refinish the

Timeline of Art History (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tala/hd_tala.htm.

²⁰ "La Casa Nueva Main Lobby," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

houses where he lived with his father Walter Temple, the furniture is placed according to when the Temple family lived there in the 1920s.

Currently, the museum is continuing to develop an online archive to show their entire collection. There are two online permanent exhibits for the public to access and use for research. The virtual exhibits are *Collective Strength: The Battle for Women's Suffrage*, and *Drying Out: Living With Prohibition in Los Angeles*.²¹ According to Museum Director Paul Spitzzeri:

[We] have a pretty good collection of early (pre-1890) photographs, a good selection of family artifacts, including papers and photos, and the pretty remarkable first ledger for the store of Henry Dalton, at Los Angeles and Azusa from 1846-1856, which, of course is from the end of the Mexican era to the first decade or so of the American period. Only a small percentage of the Homestead's collection of over 30,000 objects are on display at the site.²²

Lately, museum staff have worked diligently to digitize documents and photograph valuable artifacts to be put on their webpage and other websites like Calisphere. Currently, approximately 500 artifacts from the museum are available for public viewing. Spitzzeri noted that the museum "just finished a collaboration with the USC Digital Library, with five hundred of our photos relating to underrepresented groups (mainly ethnic minorities) scanned to that database."²³ Josette Temple (1936–2020) was the granddaughter of Walter Temple. She passed away in 2020, and she donated hundreds of valuable photographs and negatives, approximately 2,500 papers, letters, and other

²¹ "Online Exhibits," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org/about-us/online-exhibits>.

²² Paul Spitzzeri, e-mail interview with author, March 31, 2022.

²³ Paul Spitzzeri, e-mail interview with author, March 31, 2022.

documents that are useful for the museum. She also donated family furniture and other objects that will be placed in La Casa Nueva.²⁴ This new collection will be an enormous and important addition to the museum.

The museum provides school tours, lectures, workshops, performances, and special tours to visitors, and Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum also works to support other institutions. In addition, the museum staff hosts book clubs, special talks, and events related to California history. As Spitzzeri recalls:

We've occasionally helped other historical organizations, such as the Historical Society of the Pomona Valley, on managing artifact collections, and have loaned objects or images to museums, such as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which is using a photo for an exhibit that will be shown there this fall and then in Nashville in 2023. We've had a long-time connection with the Boyle Heights Historical Society and Boyle Heights Community Partners because the Workman family established that community in the 1870s.²⁵

The jobs of the few paid workers at the museum are difficult. There are only seven paid staff members (five full-time and two part-time) and sixty-five volunteers who have the responsibility of being docents and desk assistants.²⁶

²⁴ "Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum," Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, accessed December 2021, <https://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

²⁵ Paul Spitzzeri, e-mail interview with author, March 31, 2022.

²⁶ The paid members are Paul Spitzzeri, who is the museum director; the programs manager, Gennie Truelock, who oversees all public programs like tours and events; a programs coordinator, Steven Dugan, who works with the volunteer program and other administrative tasks; the facilities coordinator, Robert Barron, who oversees our computer network, site maintenance and restoration and other projects; the collections coordinator, Michelle Muro, who oversees general operations of the artifact collection, exhibit, care of the historic

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Industry cut the museum budget by forty percent, laying off several paid employees and keeping only the seven. The museum stopped doing festivities that were very successful such as the Festival of the 1920s, which managed to have up to 5,000 attendees in two days in 2019. This festivity brought the public, families, and children closer to the museum and closer to local history. Therefore, it is important that these beautiful family festivals return to promote the museum and encourage people to come to visit this historic site. The City of Industry, who owns the museum and is in charge of its financial support, needs to increase the budget for next year and thus return funding to hold these events and hire paid staff to coordinate the events and manage the museum. In 2022, three of the best paid workers left after receiving positions at private fund museums, and they left their position to unpaid volunteers who had the impetus to work as Public Historians.

The Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum is a small historical site that is supported primarily by volunteers and a hand-full of paid workers. Volunteers include students from high school, community colleges and universities, and people who like history and want to contribute their time to this museum. As Spitzzeri recommends, “volunteering and finding internships are always very important and my advice is to be open to possibility, meaning keeping any and all options open and being prepared, as much as can be done, to encounter surprising and unexpected opportunities.”²⁷ When Spitzzeri was a young history student at California State University, Fullerton he came to the museum as a volunteer and from there, he received the opportunity to be a paid staff member and later received the position as the museum’s

houses, and other duties; the public programs specialist, Isis Quan, who is mainly concerned with managing social media platforms as well as event development; and the public program’s assistant, Bea Rivas, who helps with tours, events, site supervision, and other assignments needed for the museum to function.

²⁷ Paul Spitzzeri, e-mail interview with author, March 31, 2022.

Director. He recommends Public History students to first be a volunteer, gain experience from the position, and learn what it means to be in the public history profession. Spitzzeri recalled, “I became director by sticking around for almost thirty years, working up from intern to Education Specialist to Volunteer Supervisor to Collections Coordinator and Manager and finally to Assistant Director before our long-time Director retired in 2016.”²⁸

Although the majority are volunteers, the responsibility of running the museum is in the hands of paid staff. It is a rigorous job to coordinate events, create exhibitions, manage files and have all services available to the public. From fourth graders, who are brought on field trips, to historians and the public, who visit to learn about the history of Rancho La Puente, everyone is welcomed by staff who, volunteering or paid, are willing to help and inform everyone who visits this historic museum. Thanks to donations from the Temple family and the City of Industry for funding this location, the people of Los Angeles County have access to a rich piece of local history. Inside the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum is a site full of archives with pictures, primary sources, and documents that historians can use and for the public to enjoy. Some of those sources are also being brought online as museum staff work to develop a virtual archive and virtual events to reach people from all over the world. Meanwhile, the entrance and all public and school events are free in this beautiful historical site museum.

²⁸ Paul Spitzzeri, e-mail interview with author, March 31, 2022.

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Author Bio

Jose was born and raised in Mexico City. He obtained his first bachelor of arts in communication studies in Mexico in 2006, and a second bachelor of arts in history at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona in 2018. He entered the inaugural class of the master of arts in history program at California State University, San Bernardino in 2020 where he found a wonderful cohort and a professional faculty. He will pursue a doctoral degree in history in the future. Jose is currently a docent at the Workman-Homestead Museum in the City of Industry. He is working on research about Mary Julia Workman, Catholic Progressivism, and Liberal Theology. He is interested in the history of California, history of Mexico, religious studies, and the history of Christianity in North America.



