

2021 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Guilford Hall – Penn Court



In 1893, a private home was constructed for the Fensom family, one of the early families to settle the community of Whittier, California. In 1938, then owners the Kroener family, sold the house to Whittier College and the house was moved to the campus and renamed Guilford Hall. From 1939 until its closure in 2008, Guilford Hall served variously as the Music Department, a dormitory, printing shop, mail center, and warehouse.

In 2008, the college applied for a demolition permit to make way for fifteen parking spaces. The Whittier Conservancy, whose board consisted of several alumni, and descendants of the Kroener family, stepped in to save the house. Extensive research on the part of the Conservancy established historic significance for the house, which put demolition on hold. The house sat empty for several more years, while a solution was sought. Residents in the neighborhood adjacent to the college, in an attempt to save the house, proposed to include it in efforts to declare the neighborhood a historic district. Whittier College agreed to forego demolition if the house was not included in the historic district and was moved off campus instead. The college contributed funds for the relocation effort.

The Guilford Hall-Penn Court project proved to be a highly successful public-private partnership. Whittier College wanted campus land freed for a new use. The Whittier Conservancy was looking for a developer who would take on the relocation and

restoration of an important historic resource; Heritage Housing Partners was looking for a site for an affordable housing project that would include a historic structure; and the City of Whittier was supportive of a redevelopment plan for a four-lot parcel it had owned for years.

The collaborative effort resulted in full community support and a midnight parade viewed by hundreds of residents as the house made its way out of the college parking lot, down the street, and onto a new foundation at its new and final location. Work on the house was performed in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and included, among other efforts, the preservation of original interior and exterior door and window trim and existing newel posts, stairs, and railings. Brick pilasters and columns for the wrap around porch were preserved, and baseboards and original siding were retained and reused as much as possible.

Guilford Hall became the center piece of Guilford Penn Court, a cluster of eight new affordable-housing, single-family homes, and was returned to its original use as a home within the historic core of the town. The community of Whittier in turn was able to preserve a valued part of its past while providing quality housing for present and future residents.