

# MADONNA AND CHILD STATUE WEATHERS HALF CENTURY IN HOLLYWOOD FOOTHILLS

by Theresa M. Danna, M.P.W.

What would you do if your gardener said that the spirit of the Virgin Mary appeared to him in your yard?

When this happened to Stuart Holmes (1887-1971), silent film actor and artist, he built a grotto to house a Madonna and Child statue at the sacred spot on his property at the corner of Primrose and Vista Del Mar.

Now, 50 years later, people still visit the statue regularly to pray, light candles, and offer gifts to the Blessed Mother and Baby Jesus.

According to the property's current owner, Josh Warner, the site is even part of a walking tour for the Sierra Club. "Once a month, a group of about 30-40 people stops by," Warner said.

From the time the property was first developed, it had a spiritual atmosphere. The church-like building was originally erected in 1912 and owned by the Krotona Theosophical Society until 1924, when the organization relocated to Ojai.

Holmes lived there many years with his wife, Blanca, who was a noted astrologer to celebrities such as Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, Louella Parsons, and Hedda Hopper. She apparently provided accurate horoscopes. As legend has it, in July 1951, Blanca told actress Maria Montez that, according to her charts, her life would be short and that the end would happen suddenly. Two months later, Montez died of a heart attack at age 31.

In recent years, the Holmes property had fallen into disrepair and became a magnet for vandals. When Warner heard that someone else was planning to raze the structure to build an apartment complex, he decided to step in and purchase it himself.

He has been renovating the building and



Candles are lit and offerings are left at the foot of the statue of the Virgin Mary.

will work on the grotto and stone wall fence in the future. The arch around the statue had been placed in a wire frame, so Warner can easily remove it in one piece for repairs. His plans include improvements that will provide a receptacle for the stream of wax drippings and make the area less vulnerable to trash and vandalism.

Thanks to Warner's efforts to save the statue and preserve the spirit of the site, people will be able to make

pilgrimages for many more years. Who knows? Maybe the Virgin Mary herself will return to smile upon this unique little corner of our neighborhood!

Theresa M. Danna has a master's degree in professional writing from University of Southern California. This is the fourth in a series of articles she has written about spiritual places in Beachwood Canyon. Ideas for future articles can be sent to her at: [theresadanna@prodigy.net](mailto:theresadanna@prodigy.net).



Primrose & Vista Del Mar - where Stuart Holmes had a vision of the Virgin Mary.

A.J. gives an offering on a Sunday morning.

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