

Purchase of the Cobb Estate – 40 years later

By Bob Barnes

EDITOR'S NOTE: "I am with the people. I shall bid no more," said the real estate developer who only moments before had been bidding against the people, intent on purchasing and developing the 107-acre Cobb Estate that today is our treasured hiking and nature sanctuary at the top of Lake Avenue. Bob Barnes and his students at Muir high school, led by student Maggie Stratton, not only raised the consciousness of the community regarding the importance of preserving the area, but also were instrumental in raising the \$175,000 needed to purchase the land – all this in a six- day period that began September 25, 1971. Bob spoke about the improbable victory, and explained the formidable obstacles the group overcame to turn the potential real estate development into a people's park. Bob was born and raised in Altadena, attending Altadena and Webster's elementary schools, Eliot Junior High, John Muir High School and Pasadena City College. In 1960 he graduated from Pomona College and immediately embarked on a teaching career. In 1970 he began teaching social studies at Muir High School. In 1985 he was PUSD teacher of the year as well as a 1986 nominee for California teacher of the year. Here is a transcript of his speech.

In the spring of 1988, I made my first attempt to extricate myself from the clutches of the PUSD. I took a leave of absence. My Muir colleagues of almost 20 years and my buddies in the Pasadena Federation of Teachers, our AFT local, put on a nice bon voyage luncheon for me at the Peppermill in Pasadena. I was not going abroad. I was going to New York City, which I would soon view with almost childish wonder and awe as the center of the universe.

My wife Jill (we were together from 1972 to 1998) was a senior vice President at Home Savings of America. You remember those guys-- Harry Vonsell incessantly intoning, "Home Savings, peace of mind since '89". Ah, banking the way it used to be! But these big Home Savings guys would soon be swallowed whole by then little Washington Mutual. And not too many years later now big WaMu would be CHASEd from the field.

But at any rate, in the spring of 1988, all appeared rosy, as Home Savings had purchased New York City's Bowery Bank, and Jill had been picked to shepherd the merger. She graciously agreed to take me along. Oh, I knew the drill. I'd been to so many big black tie Home Savings events that I had memorized the exchanges. "Oh, you are our Jill's husband. And what do YOU do?" "Oh, I teach public high school!" "Oh how special!"

After about two months in New York City the cost of living, even on an executive salary, became prohibitive, allowing me to gleefully accept a teaching job in Manhattan's west village. We stayed for 16 months. I used the term "extricate" earlier to define not the teaching part of education, but more the extra, administrative baggage that has inundated education and today threatens to sink teaching. I loved every minute of teaching and working with young people as coach, advisor, cheerleader and friend. My students realized and appreciated this, and most responded in kind. Working with kids, parents, and colleagues--wonderful. The rest of it--not so much!

Am I going somewhere with this? Well, YES. At the Peppermill luncheon I was presented with a handsome Lladro porcelain statuette of **Don Quixote**. Some of you may have guessed where I'm *finally* going. Oh my, Don Quixote-- for a moment I'm totally honored--CHIVALROUS, IDEALISTIC, VISIONARY, ROMANTIC. (Barnes sings, "I AM QUIOXTE, THE MAN FROM LA...") Yes, this must be the way they viewed me. Until I consider the flip side of the Quixotic characteristics --UNREALISTIC, IMPRACTICAL, FOOLISH, UNPREDICTABLE, EXTRAVAGANT, RASH. Was it the leader in me that they were recognizing or my MIKIE quality as in "Get Mikie, he'll eat it!" My colleagues counted on me to get things done- especially things that might get them in trouble.

I'll give you one example. When our new principal, Jimmy Charles arrived at Muir in 1985, fresh out of Eliot Middle, he promptly asserted his authority over a competent, independent, seasoned staff by closing, chaining and padlocking the gate to the faculty parking lot at 9 am on the morning of the first day of October.

Teachers in those days were paid once a month for ten months. Our last check had been July first- two months prior. He had artfully thwarted any attempt for a dash to the bank during conference or lunch period. I responded to this administrative heavy handedness with a blistering screed directed to Principal Charles but with copies for all 140 staff members. My intemperate missive began "JACCUSE!" Strangely Charles and I never became pals.

While I was not the Emile Zola of the Cobb Estate (don't get ahead of me here) neither was I its' Don Quixote. For as you'll clearly see in a moment, I played Sancho Panza to Maggie Stratton's Quixote. i.e.: Panza, as in PRACTICAL, POSSESSING COMMON SENSE, or if you must, AMUSING, PEASANT, SIMPLE, CREDULOUS. You see, **Maggie Stratton** is the real hero in this piece, a rare improbably successful Don Quixote. So if you decide to do this Cobb Estate thing again in ten years at the 50th, don't try to dig me up. Get Maggie!

In the meantime I'll try to tell you all about Maggie and the remarkable 58 hours that we shared. To the best of my recollection I met Maggie for the first time on Thursday, September 23, 1971. We met during lunch at Muir or perhaps just after school, just eight days before the

Cobb Estate Auction. Why did I not know before-this bright, assertive, slightly rambunctious, attractive (let me here add, the in-print description of Maggie by the *Star-News* feature writer Russ Ledabrand.) He found her to be “somewhat shy, well scrubbed,” and yes, “strong willed.” Russ, you noticed!

Why had I not met this Muir Senior and president of my conservation Club? Well, “iz not my club”. I’m the Ski Club advisor and it last snowed at the Cobb Estate during Christmas vacation in 1958. OK! Let me explain. The then advisor to Muir’s Conservation Club was my good friend and fellow teacher Ralph Pinney. An authentic conservationist and mountain man, during World War II, Ralph and his wife Dottie spent the war years at Chilao in the Angeles National Forest performing forest service work. Devout Quakers and pacifists (conscientious objectors) they were interned, much like our Japanese American citizens. Think Manzanar; Little Lake, Chilao.

Ralph called me Wednesday evening. He was at home beginning an extended sick leave. Would I become acting Conservation Club Advisor? There is not much on our agenda at the moment he adds/ And oh yes, would I take President Maggie Stratton to a meeting at McCurdy Nature Center tomorrow evening? And Bob, it’s not ski season, so you’ll have time to enjoy this.

My legitimate protests fall on deaf ears. “But Ralph, I’m the newly elected **Social Science Department Chair** with 26 department teachers to placate--er, lead. Yes lead! And Ralph, my students and I are involved each day in an after school project. We’re painting the classroom.”

“That’s nice Bob. **What color?**”

“But Ralph!”

“Bob, trust me. Maggie will take care of everything.”

Thursday evening I picked Maggie up at her home in Linda Vista. A large, informal, welcoming home, where before I know it I will become a frequent dinner and evening guest and regarded as sort of an older brother (way older) to Maggie’s three younger sisters.

We are sitting next to each other at McCurdy in auditorium style seats bolted to a concrete floor and possessing shared arm rests. Shared is only a concept. Fortunately we are not in the front row, for while **Arden Brame, Audubon Club President** (and soon to be excellent friend), and Barbara Horton, Audubon leader emeritus, talk on and on about the importance of saving the Cobb Estate (in one week), I, Sancho, practical peasant that I am, slink lower and lower into my seat. I just want to go home.

As this sad narrative continues- no money, no corporate prospects, no time, big real estate bids anticipated, so comes the eventual and frightening punch line-we need help from the

community and from the young people here tonight. I have slunk so low that my bottom is almost touching the concrete floor. Maggie? Maggie appears to be sitting taller and taller, almost levitating out of her chair. Suddenly, she has made a decision. Less than a few hours into our relationship, she announces forcefully, "Barnes, we will do this!"

Simultaneously, looking for affirmation or simple acquiescence, (does the distinction really matter) she swings a powerful elbow into what she may have thought were my ribs. The elbow glances off the top of my head. I can see that kicking and screaming will not be tolerated. We have become partners!

It is now 9:30 p.m. on that Thursday evening and the Brame/Horton meeting has mercifully come to an end. But, tiny, chirpy, adolescent voices can be heard talking with excited animation. It must be a sugar rush. Quickly Maggie brings a new meeting to order. Young people from Blair, PHS, and PCC are in attendance. Tonight they help generate ideas. In the next seven days they will perform as loyal, willing, effective squad leaders, distributing the materials that Maggie and I will soon be churning out, to their own enthusiastic foot soldiers, and generally championing the cause.

Don't these kids realize we are all little more than cannon fodder? Were they sleeping during 8th grade history? Our meeting adjourns before 11 p.m. with exchanges of phone numbers and a promise to meet at Maggie's home on Saturday morning. The clock is down to 56 hours and 36 minutes and counting. I still just want to go home. My head, at least the top part, aches.

In case you were wondering, I've come up with the hours by determining the time from 9:30 p.m. Thursday to 11:30 a.m. the following Friday-the start of the auction. From the total (182) hours, I then subtract time for a list of miscellaneous non-essentials which I've identified as:

--attempting to sleep, or why am I counting Cobb Estates?

--hurry up and get dressed, or didn't I wear this yesterday?

--eating on the fly, or sandwiches for dinner again?

--remembering to go to school, planning studying--Did I remember to dress?

--teaching, or "Mr. Barnes, didn't we play with clay yesterday?" *Working* with clay class, *Working!*

--studenting, or "Miss Stratton, please keep your head up off the desk."

At Maggie's Thursday meeting, after the Audubon meeting, it is decided that there should be a walk/bike/ride to the Cobb Estate to raise community awareness. Good plan! Oh my yes, when kids swarm on city streets and sidewalks, citizens pay attention!

On Friday, the following day, September 24, Maggie and I meet during lunch in my classroom with the Conservation Club members. They are interested, responsive and ready to go. However, we put them on standby, for the moment. We're too busy to hold extended dialogue or debate. After school we call **Russ at the *Star-News***. He is our champion, our life line and our window to the world. Russ, a long time, published supporter of our local mountain and wilderness area, has chosen to fully support and encourage our fledgling efforts. We discuss strategy with him, and then drive to KPPC and KRLA to spread the word and ask for air time. Both radio stations are responsive, and KRLA, without any prodding, generously commits to running 48 public service announcements during the coming week. My recollection is that they remained true to their commitment.

Before leaving school, I meet with my painters and tell them that we won't be working in the classroom today and that we'll suspend operations for one week. **Danny Segura is one of those painters: an excellent artist, with a whimsical spirit.** I outline for him our theme of nature versus man's machines. He's a quick study, the wheels already moving in his head. He promises to bring sketches to our a.m. Saturday meeting at Maggie's.

Instead, he arrives with finished drawings. For the first time I'm getting inspired. On Tuesday, September 28, Russ publishes a feature article in the *Star-News*, headlined "**Area Students Hurry to Save Cobb Estate**". Prominently featured in the accompanying picture are Danny and his wonderfully frightening **bulldozer face**, His drawings of Groucho and the hippie biker, his "**Keep on trucking**" style characters, his little **Dr. Seuss type houses**, give character to my somewhat pedestrian text.

It is time to briefly discuss modern technology. Unfortunately, to relate directly to my examples you are going to have to be on the upper side of 50, and preferably have teaching or a related field somewhere in your distant background. Let's start with this winning term "Ditto Machine". By itself, it is worthless, except perhaps to build wrist strength. Combined with its little buddies Spirit Fluid (time out, I'm remembering the smell) and Ditto Master Sheets with their exciting color purple, willing to soak into any exposed surface of clothing or skin, and your lesson plan is almost ready to come to life.

Patience may produce up to 150 almost legible copies. Oops, are you low on fluid? Don't forget to remove the master from the drum while refilling, or a spill will put an end to what may have been hours of work. Huh oh, you forgot to check the pressure knob. It is turned all the way up, and you are already cranking away. Sorry, enjoy your twenty copies-"Kids, we're going to share today!"

We produced hundreds of copies of our petitions and instructions for people carrying petitions, using this exciting and challenging technology. **For the fliers containing Danny's art work we**

used a cut and paste procedure and Arden Brame took them to the printer. On Monday a.m. he arrived at Muir with 7,000 fliers ready for distribution. (Originals of the flyer were placed on everyone's seat tonight.)

During a strategy session on Sunday afternoon, Maggie and I briefly flirt with the idea of trying to obtain a court injunction to block or at least postpone the sale. Some adult leaders in the movement have floated this as the best way to buy time to properly inform the public. We both disagree, feeling that we are now on the verge of a successful media campaign, supported by hundreds, perhaps thousands of now informed and energized students and adults.

Fortunately the injunction theory is discouraged by attorneys we consult. To seek delay won't solve the problem. It will be, in (the) vernacular popular with our current American president, simply "kicking the can down the road". It will buy little good will. It will reap an angry harvest. Clearly our goal, our only function, has been to inform, enlighten and perhaps inspire. This student movement, in three short days has generated a positive, disciplined sense of urgency. We are poised now for a four day concerted, focused effort.

On Monday, at lunch, Muir Conservation Club members assemble folders, instruction sheets, and petition forms for students who will circulate petitions. Danny's steam shovel is displayed at the top of each petition sheet opposite the following statement. "We, the undersigned, in support of Mother Nature over the bulldozer (talk about mixing apples and oranges, i.e. steam shovels and bull dozers) believe that the Cobb Estate should be sold to the people not to a housing developer." Ah youth! And where, a cynical parent may ask, will the people get this money? To which I would respond, "How about those Dodgers?"

After school my classroom becomes a busy collection point as Muir students and other loyal members of the student groups from Blair, PHS, McKinley and PCC arrive to pick up their materials. From the outset, I have begun to appreciate (thrilled would be a better word) the maturity, poise and commitment of these young people. So far there have been no glitches and a flood of material and information is now going out into the schools and community including the "Nature vs. the Housing Development" information sheet, which among other things, clearly directs all donations to the Audubon Society.

My recollection is that by Friday, October 1, the total funds collected by the Audubon Society, including those we steered their way, were less than ten thousand dollars. But we did not know this, and better that we didn't. **One flier that we sent, out "Hikers and Bikers for Nature!"**, is my favorite. I don't know who wrote the text; it is not my style, but is (Oh how I hate this term-"Spot on!"). "Be there or be square," it announces, "Show your support for Nature. People concerned are gathering about the PCC reflecting pools and heading toward the top of Lake Avenue in Altadena, at 3 p.m. Thursday, September 30, 1971. It's a great big, fight against

the all-mighty bull (snort) dozer. Ask about it. Be concerned for some loyal land, that could be yours and mine, forever and ever. Amen”.

Danny’s righteous art--Groucho, in a smoking VW, Biker Dude holding his ground and joyous marchers, including a lady who just ditched her A and P grocery bag to join the throng, complete this compelling broadside. Bless you Danny, and each and every one of us.

Monday has gone well, and we have as a final act, delivered a press release to the *Star-News* and the *LA Times*. **Tuesday begins with Russ Leadabrand’s wonderfully supportive headline, picture and article in the *Star-News*.** After school Maggie and I are off to see the captain at the Altadena Sheriff’s station and to pay a visit to Pasadena City Hall. We have loudly announced a walk/ride parade of sorts and now, we decide, somewhat belatedly, that perhaps we should seek permission.

Happily we are well received in both jurisdictions. We apply for and are granted (two different forms-but completed in one sitting) a parade permit by a remarkably friendly Sheriff’s captain. We have been on our best behavior and clearly we have his blessing. Is this *our* local sheriff? Yes indeed! He gives us a seven page missive titled “An Ordinance Regulating the Conduct of Parades”. This compelling document of fifteen sections concludes, “Violations: Every person violating any provision of this ordinance is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500, or by imprisonment”. Zounds!

But he is smiling. In my bulletin to the marchers, which each of them will receive on Thursday before we embark, I call him “a friendly, enlightened man”. At City Hall we are also greeted with bureaucratic kindness. We fill out an application, but the next day, in a supportive letter that is CC’d to the Police department, Fire department and Emergency Center, I am informed that “no permit will be required...” “Wow, we’re batting a thousand. All systems are go, Houston!

Wednesday is create a poster day. And my classroom, no stranger to paint, is a bee hive of activity both at lunch and after school. Not satisfied with their output of dozens of posters and signs, students re-assemble at my apartment on Sacramento Street, south of the Mountain View Cemetery, for an evening session. I have purchased bundles of either wood lath or grape stake (I can’t remember which) at Lincoln Avenue Lumber that afternoon. Students cover the splinter prone wood handles with masking tape, and then staple the completed posters and signs to the wooden sticks.

I’d like to think that sometime during the long evening I slipped out to Domenico’s for several large pizzas, but I don’t think it happened. I was living on a bare bones budget and the kids were way too engaged and devoted to task to stop working, even for pizza. Folks, those kids, all of them, at each of the events were magnificent. Besides, I had one final chore of my own to

do. My challenge was to type a detailed message (to hikers and bikers who would tomorrow assemble at PCC), typing on an unforgiving spirit master without error and composing as I went along. That I had a room full of kids only added to the pressure. I had to get it right. There would be no time left in the morning.

Before removing my creation from the typewriter (typewriter- a machine for writing in characters similar to those produced by printer's type by means of keyboard operated types striking through an inked ribbon) I did a quick proof read. Still riding high on the adrenalin of a mission almost completed, I have concluded my hand out, "Hundreds of citizens will see you this afternoon. Millions will view you on television tonight. Your actions will be seen as a reflection on all young people. The adults in the world have blown it. *You are the leaders*. Your cause is just. Your numbers are many. Your responsibility is great. Be beautiful. Peace and Love." Peace and Love? Well folks, it was the 70's. But my, wasn't I on a high horse.

At school early the next morning, I have come back down to earth. Actually I am saying prayers to the god of the department ditto machine. As all elderly educators know, I am not out of the woods yet. Carefully I add fluid. Turn the pressure knob to sub-zero, and insert my precious master. But first, I add in bold print at the bottom of my rather grandiose statement, the somewhat pedestrian, but I believe essential, final note. *Don't Litter!*

The following evening, Thursday, September 30, 1971, exhausted, yet still exhilarated after the long, grand and joyous walk/bike event, Maggie and I sit at a table in my apartment and begin counting signatures. Thanks goodness we don't have to check that they are registered voters. We've had good media coverage today, and tomorrow morning articles and pictures from the march will appear in the *Star-News* and *L.A. Times*.

The surprise is that today Harry W. Smith of the *Altadenan* has recognized that something is up and has published a lengthy Cobb Estate article. But below a front page headline "School student parade set for Cobb Estate", he gives away his whole plot in a sub line "Residential protection assured by Sheriff". His article begins, "Tomorrow's scene at the Cobb Estate Auction... appears to be one that is developing into opposition and confusion for auctioneers and bidders." Mentioning our bike/walk as if it will be tomorrow, Friday, auction day, he continues, "...if such a scramble does develop it will fit into the most recent history of the property, one of great controversy". Later in the article, after a lengthy and detailed historical discussion, focused on vandalism and decay of the estate, he gets back to our bike/walk, returning it now, correctly, to Thursday.

Maggie and I have been trying to talk with Harry this past week, but have had no luck. Now he generously admits that a "representative of the group" has said that "the demonstration will be friendly and peaceful". Does he believe this? In his next paragraph he adds, "apprehension has

grown meanwhile among residents of the immediate area over the destruction to homes, gardens, and plantings, along Lake Ave. and Loma Alta Drive”.

Reassuring the residents he continues. “Captain Albert Natividad of Altadena Sheriff’s station said Wednesday that he planned interviews with leaders of the movement and that if they agreed to good procedures...a permit would be granted.” (Never mind Harry that we met and received our permit on Tuesday.) Harry’s article concludes, “but also the Captain announced assurances to property owners in the area that protection would be provided”. Oh thank God, Harry!!

So, where was I? Oh yes, here we sit, Maggie and I, sorting the more than 50 petition packets that our troops had assembled days ago, and now retrieved at the Cobb Estate, at the conclusion of the walk/ride. Happily, but perhaps not surprisingly, almost all of the packets have been returned **and most are filled with signatures**. Sorting done, our count begins!

Before getting into the count let me digress yet again. I have been remiss up to this point in failing to mention a stalwart in both the conservation movement and the struggle for equal opportunity, especially for disadvantaged young people in Altadena and Pasadena. She was Helen Mary Williams, and for years she ran (on a shoe string) Outward Bound Adventurers (OBA). OBA not only served as one of the organizations supporting the drive to save the Cobb Estate, but on Thursday, she and her colleagues provided refreshments as now weary participants trudging north on Lake passed Mendocino, still many blocks from their destination.

While giving credit where it is due, let’s get back to Harry. Harry Smith? Yes Harry Smith. On Thursday following the auction, having had a week to get up to speed in his Cobb Estate coverage (the *Altadenan* was published each Thursday). Evidently satisfied that the community had not suffered any permanent damage, Harry, describing our Walk/Bike, literally gushed, “it was the love for a heritage that caused nearly 300 boys and girls starting at the Pasadena City College reflection pool to walk or bike 4.8 miles up steep grades to the head of Lake Avenue last Thursday, where they quietly but authoritatively, expressed their desire to save the historic estate from land development.”

Oh Harry, thank you! And the picture, Harry, where auctioneer Milton Wershow and Maggie Stratton look on (clearly in awe) as Bob Brown makes a plea for additional funds. But Harry, to your credit, you got Maggie exactly right: “**Maggie Stratton of Muir High School**, who served as monitor and director of the walk, and whose word appeared to be law at the gatherings, the students (and he could have added Bob Brown as well) carefully respecting her desires and admonitions.”

Now, about the count. It is now 9 p.m. Thursday evening and our count stands at 4,249 signatures. While NBC has not yet announced a winner, Maggie announces that we must take a

break. A break? It has been just one week to the hour since Maggie and I attended a meeting at McCurdy. Now, our work almost done, our task almost complete, we will in a little more than 12 hours attempt to present our signed petitions to auctioneer Wershow and make a brief plea for him to consider them. Our fate now in his hands, we will quietly fade into the woodwork or should I say the Cobb Estate shrubbery? "Maggie, let's finish. It's late. We need sleep." But Maggie is insistent. "I must call home! My folks are at a party and I feel guilty for not checking on my sisters. I'll be quick."

And this is where I should be saying, "That's All Folks". Yes, our count eventually passed 4,500, but that was that. End of story. But if that were true, then we would not be here tonight. And you would not have to tolerate my incessant digressions. But stay with me just a bit longer.

Let's at least let Maggie make her call. Sara, a sophomore at Muir and Maggie's closest sibling, answers with, "Maggie, call Mom right now, your Cobb Estate thingy is the big topic of conversation at their party, and there is a lady there who is really interested. Here is the phone number that Mom left so call her right away."

It is party time, and the dress, at least for us, is come as you are. We are not dressed for a party. Indeed we're not dressed up enough for rubbish hauling. Maggie is a far cry from Russ Leadabrand's "well scrubbed" young lady and I not only need a shower, but I'm too tired to take one. If memory serves, the party is in Caltech's athenaeum. Mom is called and off we go. "Hurry", she admonishes. The "interested" lady has already left the party, but she has invited a few party members to join her at her home to continue the Cobb discussion. We are included in the invitation. But before leaving the party that is quickly breaking up, Maggie and I scarf down a bunch of glazed donuts, the only "food" remaining at the party, and our only food since lunch. Lucky for us they were donuts and not watercress sandwiches, for though it is heading toward 11 p.m., the night is still, for us, very young. Following behind Maggie's folks in my car, we drive to 920 Hillcrest Place, the palatial home of Mrs. Virginia Steel Scott.

In the spring of 1972, Maggie and I were invited to La Canada Senior High School to give a Cobb Estate presentation to their kids in student government. To prepare, we sat together attempting to outline the events leading up to and including October 1, 1971. Maggie did the outline in long-hand as we both strained to remember every detail.

While sketchy, her notes ran to four full pages. We presented our recollections of events in a sort of Click and Clack (or Frick and Frack or Abbot and Costello, if you prefer) routine, having specific alternating lines, but enthusiastically interrupting or stepping on each other's lines as we thought to add, or amend something the other had said. We were kind of goofy, but had a lot of fun. The information I'm going to share here on Virginia Steele Scott, and our meeting with her during the late evening of Thursday, September 30, and the early hours of Friday,

October 1, comes from these notes, and from **Bert Mann's L.A. Times article of Thursday October 7, 1971.**

Bert Mann managed to capture the essence of Virginia Steele Scott. She told him of leaving her hometown of Pittsburg in 1920, when she was 14 and about coming to Pasadena. My math tells me that in 1971, she is 65. The Virginia Steele Scott I met, appeared way older than her arithmetic age. "I remember those marvelous, clean San Gabriel Mountains. I couldn't bear to see them piled up with houses, but I also did it for the animals and birds," she told Mann. "I have three principal interests," she continued, "and they all begin with 'A'. The first is animals; the second is art and the third is astronomy." Mrs. Scott didn't get into astronomy with Maggie and me as she was too busy discussing animals and showing us her art. Mrs. Scott confided to Mann that the Cobb Estate sale brought more publicity than she cared for and, into contact with the new generation of youths who are interested in ecology. Mann adds that many of these youths were probably among the 600 who attended the auction.

Mrs. Scott continued, "They are very nice young people, but I'm afraid that they are all like sheep. **They all have to have long hair**, and it does not win votes from a lot of people who are elderly." She continues with Mann, "My fear as far as the young people go, is that they could possibly convert the land into one of those love-in places."

Are you beginning to wonder how Maggie and I even got in the door at Scott's home, let alone entice her into giving us 150 thousand dollars?" Her last comment in her interview with Mann may clarify her generosity. "I don't want anything done to that land. I want it left as it is and to be incorporated into the forest so that it can belong to everyone." Bingo!

After spending more than three long hours with Virginia Steele Scott, after discussing incessantly the importance of birds, trees, rocks and assorted critters, after watching while Mrs. Scott called both her realtor and her attorney at midnight, after realizing that she suddenly appeared to have completely lost interest in the Cobb Estate, after all her other guests had excused themselves and gone home to bed, after being lead on a ground tour of her extensive collection of paintings, paintings that now hang in the Virginia Steele Scott Galleries (yes, galleries, plural) of American Art at the Huntington, after touring an extensive "apartment" area of her home reserved exclusively for her cats...yes, strange perhaps, but true. After all of this, Mrs. Virginia Steele Scott plopped down on an elegant couch and beckoned for us to join her.

I think it would be fair to say that we not so much sat as collapsed on either side of her. It was now 1:45 a.m. and our conversation again returned to birds and animals. Finally she asked, "And what will you do with this land if you get it?" Answering this question was simple for both me and for Maggie, for we had known the answer since the moment, a week earlier, when we began this adventure.

“Mrs. Scott,” I told her, “We will do absolutely nothing with this land other than see that the forest service incorporates it into the Angeles National Forest.” There were lots of other people with lots of other ideas as to how to use what would soon be newly purchased land, but they never gained the slightest traction. After listening to my answer, Mrs. Scott immediately turned to me and very matter of factly inquired, “How much do you need?”

Perhaps it was because I was totally exhausted. Perhaps it was because I felt some new sense of righteous entitlement. I’m not sure, but immediately I replied “one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!” Her instant reply was brief. “All right!”

Within a few moments Maggie and I were in my car headed to her home in Linda Vista. Beyond exhaustion, we were higher than kites. We talked, we hugged, we questioned if this was real. We would have liked to talk about this with somebody, but the rest of the world was fast asleep. Finally, Maggie went off to bed and I curled up in a chair. Early the next morning we shared our news with Maggie’s sisters and parents, and swore them all to total secrecy. They all kept completely quiet. Just imagine each of those three young girls at their separate schools having to sit on this secret. Somehow they managed. Meanwhile, Maggie and I were beginning to have our doubts about Mrs. Scott and her enormous pledge. To say that we found Mrs. Scott to be eccentric may be a bit of an understatement. And while I realize that eccentric folks are perfectly capable of keeping pledges, and are indeed sometimes very philanthropic, Maggie and I simply could not accept that this was really happening. So after cleaning up, changing into fresh clothing and feeding ourselves, we drove to Virginia Steele Scott’s home to make sure this was real. Sure enough, the house was right there, and better yet, sitting in the driveway looking ready to go, was a limousine, complete with attorney, Stanley Bauer, and **realtor Ann Davis**. As we observed Mrs. Scott leaving her home and moving toward the limo, we scooted away, I believe undetected. Now, full believers, and clearly relieved, we drove assertively to the Cobb Estate.

Have you ever tried to hold an innocent dead pan look when every fiber of your being was directing you to grin from ear to ear? That was the predicament that we found ourselves in, as we arrived at the Cobb Estate one LONG hour early. Oh, the entire cast of characters was there —Arden Brame and Barbara Horton from the Audubon Society, Vantor Williams of the Sierra Club, Milton Wershow, the auctioneer, and hundreds of young and not so young people from the community.

But that made it even more difficult for us to make small talk, and nod in solemn agreement, as those who approached us agreed that it was a beautiful day, but wasn’t it a shame that “the people” were not able to raise some real money so that this wonderful turnout would amount to more than simply a glorious symbolic gesture?”

Fortunately, Scott and her entourage remained, for now, far away from the now developing activity. We'd have had a hard time explaining their presence. Earlier in the week we had called each of the local TV stations, 2,4,5,7,9,11 and 13. Most showed some interest. Some got back to us with questions. On my TV response sheet, by Channel 7, KABC Maggie had written "forget it". While several stations covered the event, my memory tells me that the film crew from KNXT, channel 2, was the most thorough.

When we finally found Russ Leadabrand we pulled him (I mean this literally) into a little space of semi-privacy, and after grinning at him for what to him must have been a confusingly long moment (had we perhaps been drinking?) we whispered our little secret. He instantly exhibited a happiness that rivaled ours. Next we handed our 4,500 petition signatures to auctioneer Wershow, and he accepted them graciously.

Russ in a column "People Win One", which ran in the *Star-News* on Tuesday, October 5th, observed "**Milton Wershow, the owner of the large L.A. based auction firm, handled the auction himself.** He was impressed, maybe a tiny bit nervous, by the crowd of 5,000 kids and residents. (Stay with me on these numbers for now folks.) But he kept his cool. Auctioneers have the sharpest tongues in the world. They can put down a man quicker, with more acid, than any nightclub performer can squelch a heckler. But for the main, Wershow was compassionate, kind, even sympathetic. He made some points giving \$1,000 toward the kids' purchase of the land. He segued from the role of the villain in the piece, to the role of a friend, by the time the auction had ended. He was a wise and politic man. He was a little more verbose than he needed to have been, but he handled the kids just right. He was fair!"

Before we return to the auction, let me share with you a letter from long time Pasadenan Heinz Ellersieck that was printed in the *Star-News* on Wednesday, October 6, 1971. "I have always assumed that Russ Leadabrand was more or less infallible. I now know, however, that he doesn't know how to count or perhaps he can't tell young people from wildflowers. I was present at the Cobb Estate auction last Friday and probably as happy about it as Leadabrand. I am willing to swear, however, that there were never more than a few hundred people present including the auctioneers, the sheriff, and real estate agents. The notion that there were five or six thousand is pure myth making and should not be allowed to become (unchallenged) a part of the 'record'. There are practical ways to estimate crowds, their composition and their mood. The crowd Friday was small, mostly, but by no means exclusively young, appealing rather than menacing, and to write of five or more thousand is to falsify the fact that the victory of 'the people' was brought off really only by a hopeful and generous few."

The auction? Yes, we're almost set. But first, please try not to fall out of your seats as I share the reply to Ellersieck from the *Star-News* editor: "Inexperienced crowd counter **Leadabrand hangs his head.** He confesses, as he stated in his October 2nd story, that he had taken his crowd

count from Milton J. Wershow, the auctioneer, who told him that his firm had a crowd counter in the audience, 'clicking' the people. Wershow insisted on 5,000 plus, while Leadabrand, who once thought there were fewer than a million people at a Tournament of Roses, was holding out for 800.

Leadabrand excuses his shortcomings, by the fact that he was pressed against the auctioneer's platform by the crowd and could not get a good vantage point from which to view the people. Other agencies have estimated the Cobb auction crowd at 600, 800 and less than a thousand. Leadabrand admits that he doesn't know for sure.

Leadabrand did not say that the crowd was exclusively young, but insists that even those who were not young, chronologically, were certainly young at heart. He did not say at any time that they were menacing. Rather he said, 'they were quiet and mannerly.' Nothing about menace. Leadabrand, who has been with the *Star-News* for several years, recalls that the last infallible reporter who worked here, vanished one day while trying to walk on the water. Leadabrand has not attempted that, nor will he. He'll take his lumps. The crowd was considerably less than 5,000. Thank you—The Editor”.

At 11:45 the auction begins. It has been delayed for fifteen minutes because somewhere **between 600 and 15,000 young people and young-at-heart people**, have been menacing the flora and fauna native to the Cobb Estate. Actually I can't give an accurate count, or account because I have, along with Russ Leadabrand and Maggie Stratton, been pressed up against the auctioneer's podium. Extricating myself, I note that the bidding, moving at increments of 5,000 dollars, has reached 150,000 dollars.

In fact, that last bid, that's the good news, just came from Mrs. Scott's realtor, Ann Davis. The bad news is that the auctioneer and audience have no clue as who Ann Davis is.

I've been kidding a bit in the last few minutes, but now, trust me; I'm very, very serious. The bidding is now at 155,000, and I now have the presence of mind to croak, "Stop!" Wershow, either startled, because I have popped up right in front of him, or because he is simply intrigued by the bizarre nature of this auction, pauses, giving me a change to say in a manly voice, "the bid of 150,000 dollars was the bid of the people." His response could well have been, "so, we're now at 170,000!" As indeed they were. Instead, amazingly Wershow announces, "I'll give you five minutes to try to raise enough money to reach 175,000."

I think I must have realized that something very special had just happened to this auctioneer and this auction. One by one, with the help of Wershow, I recognized audience members now making on the spot pledges. The Audubon Society, of course, got the ball rolling: seven thousand dollars. Ann Davis gave her four thousand dollar commission; Wershow added a

thousand from his own pocket. We reached 175,000 in mere moments. However, I believe the most significant moment of the entire venture was still to come.

Suddenly a loud and clear voice announced. "I will bid no more. I too am one of the people!" I believe the speaker was Dirk Feenstra, a local realtor. He told me later that he was prepared to bid over 300,000. Wershow quickly intoned "**going once, twice, sold.**" Within a few moments he had reached a Marx family representative and was able to announce to the excited crowd that the bid had been accepted. The Marx family, had, years earlier paid 500,000 dollars for the estate. Evidently, now with something of a white elephant on their hands, they were happy for the sale.

Within days I was appointed to a committee, chaired by Arden Brame. Though many people had ideas on what to do with the Cobb Estate, the committee never swerved from its commitment to guide the full 107 acres into the hands of the Forest Service. This was accomplished quietly on November 26, 1971.