

*Arizona Historical Society's Yuma Campus:*

# A NEW VISION



*A Master Plan for the Molina Block and Sanguinetti House*

# HISTORY OF THE AHS YUMA CAMPUS

Madison Avenue in downtown Yuma has played a central role in the development of Yuma. In 1877, the Southern Pacific Railroad brought the first railroad to Arizona as it crossed the Colorado River into Yuma down the middle of Madison Avenue. Its arrival spurred a building boom all along Madison Avenue. The Molina Block, an adobe commercial structure, was built in the 1870s by Alejandro Figueroa for J.M. Molina. It was considered the premier location for professional offices until the downtown's decline in the mid-20th century. Steamboat captains Isaac Polhemus and Jack Mellon built imposing homes for the day. E.F. Sanguinetti, who would become

the most prominent businessman in the region, purchased the home of Mary Alexander at 240 Madison Avenue in 1890, and it quickly became the center of life in Yuma.

Madison Avenue also had the benefit of sitting on relatively high ground in flood-prone Yuma. The disastrous flood of 1916 practically wiped out Main Street, but spared Madison Avenue. In fact, the Polhemus House served as the headquarters for the relief committee after that flood. Thereafter adobe construction was banned in downtown Yuma, so the houses along Madison and 1st Avenues remain



**E.F. SANGUINETTI**

*His phenomenal business career from 1890 to 1946 reflected and helped fuel the growth of Yuma during this crucial period.*

**OPPOSITE PAGE**

*E.F. Sanguinetti's rose gardens were his pride and joy: a welcome respite from his busy commercial life. The new master plan aims to enhance the gardens and bring back the spirit of those glorious days.*

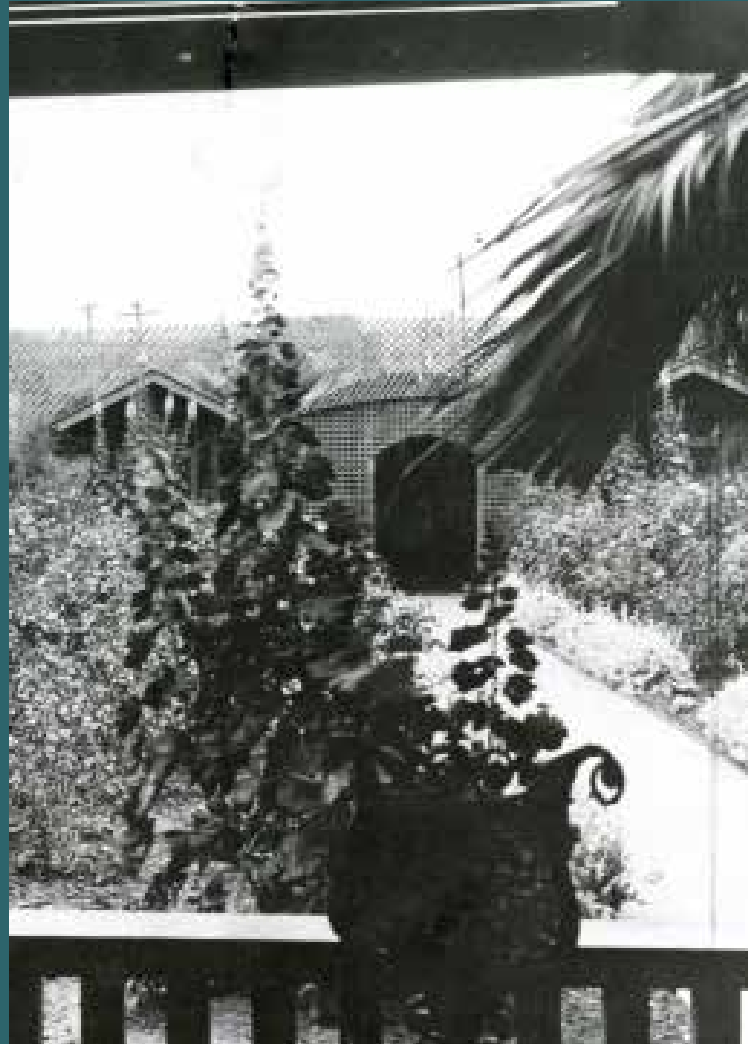
to the day the most prominent examples of the era of adobe construction. The Southern Pacific Railroad relocated its main line to the east in the 1920s, relieving Madison Avenue of the noise and smoke of the steam locomotives.

Through the first half of the 20th Century, E.F. Sanguinetti built a business empire as a farmer, merchant, and banker. After his passing, his home, garden and aviary were operated by the Yuma County Historical Society (YCHS), which was formed in 1963. In 1971, the family decided to donate the property to the Arizona Historical Society (AHS) to better provide for its development and maintenance as a history museum and as a fitting legacy to E.F. Sanguinetti. AHS has managed the home and gardens ever since. Sanguinetti's descendants retained adjacent retail and restaurant properties, that are operated by the family to this day.

The AHS Yuma campus expanded considerably in the late 1980s as part of an ambitious and collaborative effort to relocate the Lower Lights Mission out of the downtown and reclaim the Molina Block as part of a larger historical setting. Considerable local, private, foundation and City of Yuma funds were invested to accomplish this purpose. These efforts were followed up with key conservation initiatives for the Molina building, including the installation of a new roof.

In 2001, the City of Yuma and AHS did collaborate to create shared visitor parking area on land adjacent to the Molina building. As part of the City's downtown redevelopment initiative, the City's new Municipal Complex opened in 2002 just to the south of the AHS Yuma campus.

Lack of additional funds (public or private) and the prohibitive cost of fully restoring the Molina building inhibited progress in expanding the campus. The deep recession beginning in 2008 created further challenges as state funding for the museum continued to erode, with staffing and operating funds reduced. The situation reached the point where the long-range viability of the facility was in question. It was at that point that Yumans became determined to revitalize the effort through the Yuma County Historical Society—the original local support organization in existence for more than 50 years.







## HISTORY OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

In 2011, Bruce Gwynn, Yuma native and grandson of E.F. Sanguinetti, began encouraging community members to join the YCHS and its board. What became apparent was that a new vision for the entire AHS Yuma campus was needed — a vision which would motivate membership, donations, and volunteer efforts. In 2012, the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area agreed to fund a community planning effort led by YCHS, and contracted with landscape architect Howard Deardorff of Deardorff Design Resources—the firm which developed the conceptual designs for West Wetlands, Gateway Park, and Pivot Point Plaza. Concurrently, YCHS began an annual fundraising event, Redondo Days, to generate private funds as the

local match for any potential grants. Membership and board involvement rapidly grew.

In March 2012, Yuma City Administrator Greg Wilkinson endorsed a joint master planning process involving the Arizona Historical Society (AHS), the Yuma County Historical Society, the City of Yuma (COY), the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (YCNHA), the Yuma Visitors Bureau (YVB) and several other stakeholders. In the latter half of 2012, YCHS led the master planning process, resulting in the production of a draft plan in early 2013. In May 2013, the Board of Directors of the Arizona Historical Society voted to approve the master plan. Since implementation of this plan would rely heavily on fundraising

by and the leadership of the YCHS, an intergovernmental agreement between AHS and COY, along with an operating agreement between COY and YCHS, were drafted and approved. This had the effect of empowering the local community to implement the master plan, and that is scheduled to begin in 2014. In addition, the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) reviewed and approved the master plan, stating that it was in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's standards, including proposed phase one. Additional phasing work will be reviewed by Arizona SHPO.

*Above: A re-energized Yuma County Historical Society has attracted hundreds of new donors and volunteers with its annual Redondo Days event and gala dinner.*

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**OBJECTIVES** The AHS Yuma Campus master plan has three main objectives:

**1** To tell specific, compelling and distinctive stories of the history of Yuma — stories which relate to the location and unique attributes of the Madison Avenue site.

**2** To restore and preserve the historic resources found on the AHS Yuma Campus site.

**3** To create a campus that supports a public/private partnership that sustains the museum and the economic vitality of the private-sector elements.

# PLANNING & DESIGN CRITERIA

- Provides for flexible phasing based on funding availability
- Creates a clearly defined point and sense of arrival
- Promotes efficient visitor flow
- Features attractive gardens with flexible event spaces for special event rentals
- Respects the importance of the historic adobe structures
- Reflects Sanguinetti’s eclectic preferences in terms of garden plantings and elements
- Keeps maintenance and operational costs affordable

# SITE OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

The campus presents some interesting challenges, as the opportunities and constraints are intricately related. The main issue is that private property intersects the campus, which could tend to inhibit free flow. On the other hand, collaborative planning which meets the needs of both public and private sectors could open up great new joint uses. Secondly, the site requires a rethinking of both east-west and north-south access ways. Finally, the random combination of fences (including assorted birdcages) within and surrounding the campus is confusing, unattractive, and restricts the potential for wanted traffic flow.



*Turning barriers into gateways— Currently, private businesses bisect the AHS Yuma Campus. The master plan seeks to create synergy between public and private sectors on the site by respecting their needs and integrating their uses.*



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## INTERPRETIVE THEMES

To be successful, the campus must engage the public with stories that are meaningful and powerful. Therefore, a fundamental task was to identify the themes and to then determine where in the campus to interpret those themes. Those tasks then drive the plans for physical improvements.

The planning process revealed three primary interpretive themes in priority order:

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### **THE AGRICULTURAL HISTORY OF THE YUMA AREA**

Agriculture has and continues to be the lifeblood of Yuma's economy. The rich farmland, intricate irrigation system, and warm and sunny weather has made Yuma the winter vegetable capital of the United States, providing more than 90% of the nation's supply of leafy greens November through March. Before air conditioning and modern technology, hardy pioneers farmed the land beginning in the late 1800s. Local irrigation districts were formed to work with (and repay) the Bureau of Reclamation so that there was local operational control of the irrigation water supply. From those humble roots has grown a gigantic, multi-billion dollar industry. Telling this story is central to telling Yuma's story.

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**LIVING IN  
DOWNTOWN YUMA  
(THE SANGUINETTI HOUSE)**

Over the years, the museum has housed many different exhibits. While space is needed for traveling exhibits, it makes sense to feature the life of E.F. Sanguinetti and his family, who lived and worked in downtown Yuma from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. What was a day in the life of this man like? How did it evolve during this crucial period in the United States and Yuma? What better way to honor his contributions than by telling his story within his own homestead.



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**MERCANTILE LIFE  
IN DOWNTOWN YUMA  
(THE MOLINA BLOCK  
BUILDING)**

Madison Avenue rivaled Main Street in its importance to downtown business and civic life. Professionals populated the building until the mid-20th century. Once renovated, the building can tell this story.



# BUSINESS PLANNING

The past decades have made it evident that relying solely on funding from the State of Arizona is not a viable option. State funding currently provides for basic subsistence: minimal staff and operational funds to keep the doors open, with no provision for capital improvements, building repairs, or major upgrades to exhibits.

“ *Museums today face a crisis and must begin to think of themselves as “attractions”.* ”

Our planning process has identified the following potential sources of revenue:

## LOCAL FUNDRAISING

The Yuma County Historical Society has demonstrated strength in local fundraising with its Redondo Day events and growing membership. The goal is to commit these funds to the implementation of the master plan through visible capital improvements projects. Funds will also be used to match grants.

## GRANT FUNDING

A strong local fundraising base improves the ability to secure grants. The Yuma Crossing National Heritage has offered grant-writing assistance and submitted an NEA grant application in spring 2014 on behalf of YCHS.

## OPERATING REVENUES

Admission revenues have traditionally contributed little to the overall budget. A new and ever-improving visitor experience at the museum — along with joint marketing with the two state historic parks — can begin to change this dynamic. In 2013, YCHS renovated and upgraded the museum gift shop, which has resulted in a surge in retail sales and profitability. Another potential source of increased revenues is rentals of the current and future expanded gardens for special events.

Perhaps of equal importance to physical changes is a change in the mind-set of the museum's operators. Museums today face a crisis and must begin to think of themselves as “attractions”. While the scholarly research and historic interpretation must be solid, it does not mean that the museum experience has to lack fun and imagination.

What is meant by an “attraction”? An attraction is defined by five key characteristics: quality, activity options, uniqueness, authenticity, and drawing power.

- **Quality** relates not only to physical improvements but also to providing a greater sense to the visitor of presenting a “perceived order”. How is the visitor to proceed through the attraction to fully enjoy the experience? Order provides a sense of security.
- **Activity options** present the other side of the equation, allowing the visitor to have the potential for exploration with variety and mystery, but within an orderly setting.
- **A unique attraction** tells a story that can be found nowhere else.
- **Authenticity** is one of the most crucial elements. Do the place, museum and experience resonate as real and not fabricated?
- **Drawing power** is ultimately the deciding factor. Do people want to visit the attraction?

The master plan must address all of these characteristics, which sometimes may be in conflict. The success of the plan will depend on whether these elements mesh.

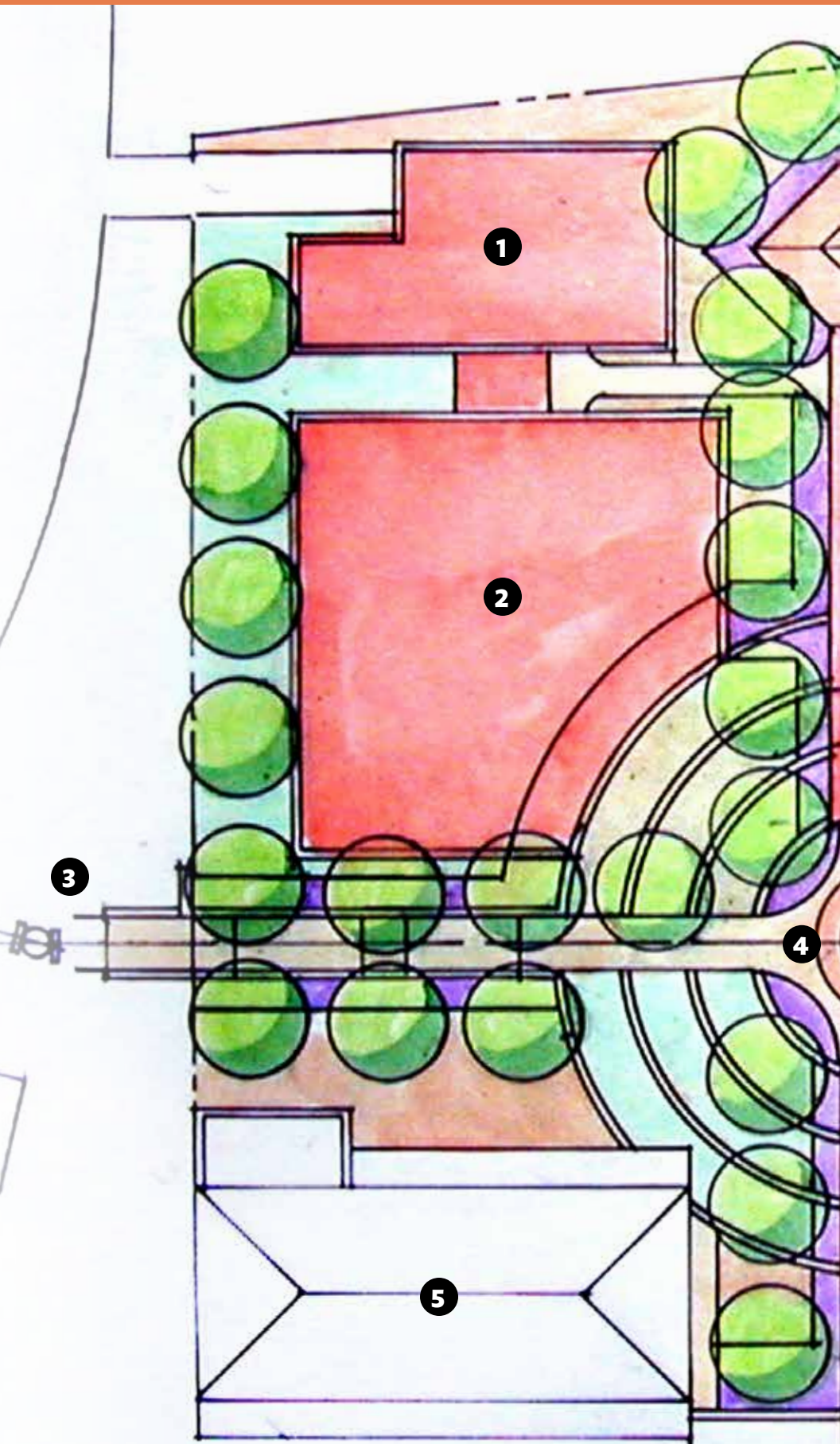




The Plan is divided into southern and northern sections, bisected by private land, shops and the Garden Café.

### THE SOUTHERN SECTION

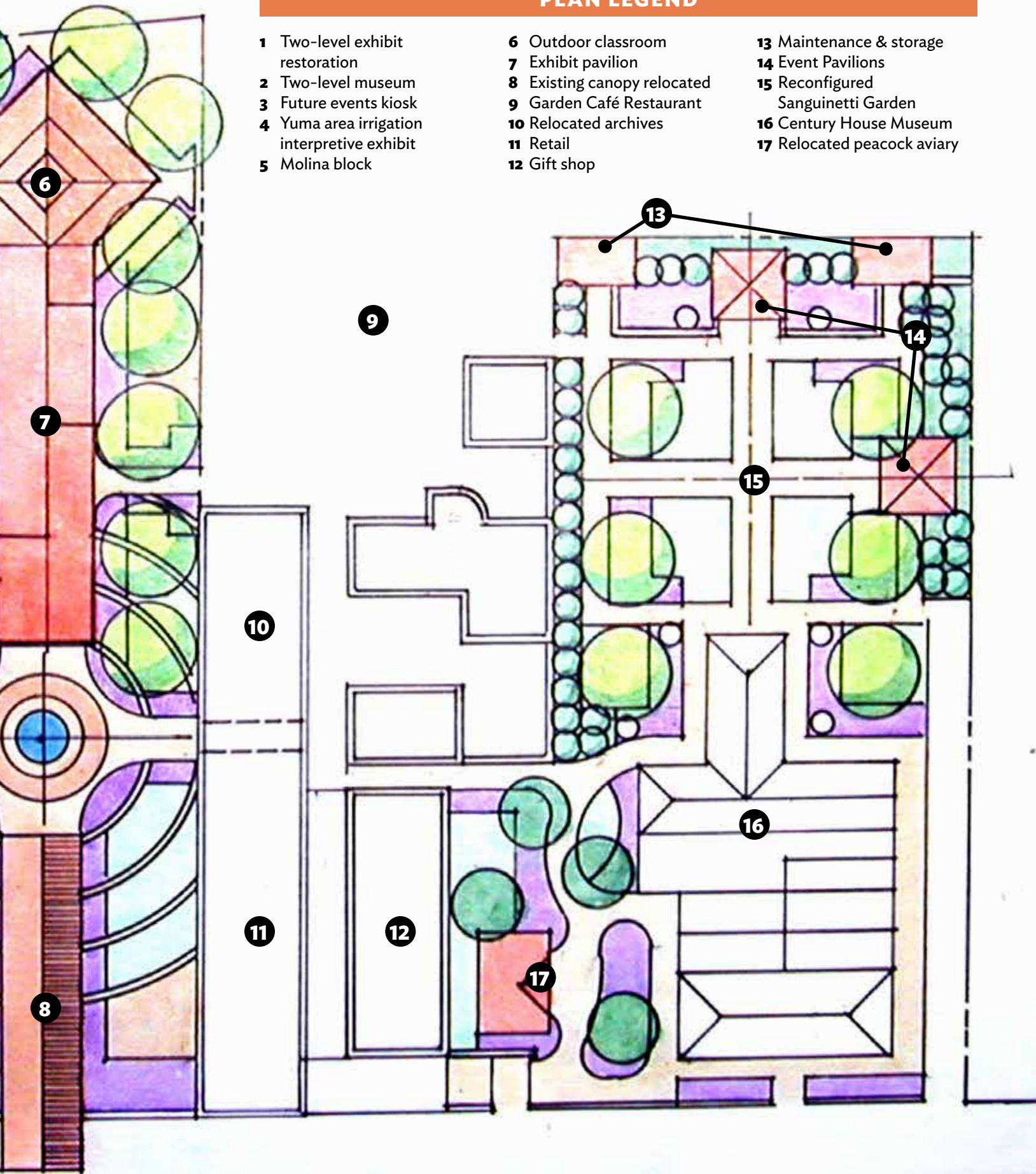
The southern section is dominated by the telling of the history of Yuma agriculture on vacant land to the west and north of the Molina Block building. The plan calls for an initial phase of creating outdoor exhibits to convey this history, with an option for a museum building in the longer term. The area includes two entrances—the main one from the east off Madison Avenue and a second one from the south from the City of Yuma's Municipal Complex. The Madison entrance features a long promenade with a portico along which there would be interpretive panels about farming in Yuma. That promenade would terminate at the west end of the site at a covered outdoor classroom which could accommodate up to 40 people.





## PLAN LEGEND

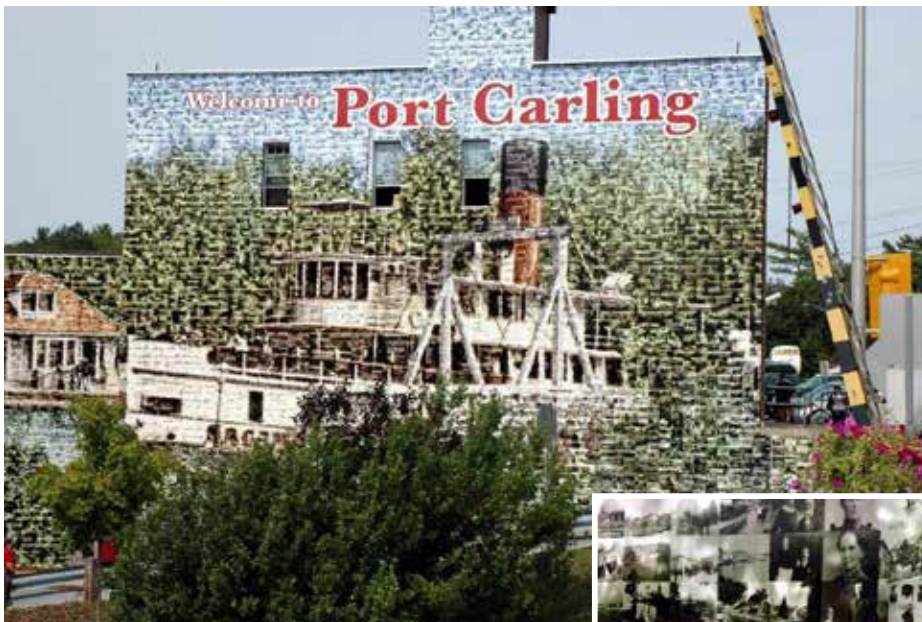
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|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Two-level exhibit restoration</li> <li>2 Two-level museum</li> <li>3 Future events kiosk</li> <li>4 Yuma area irrigation interpretive exhibit</li> <li>5 Molina block</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 Outdoor classroom</li> <li>7 Exhibit pavilion</li> <li>8 Existing canopy relocated</li> <li>9 Garden Café Restaurant</li> <li>10 Relocated archives</li> <li>11 Retail</li> <li>12 Gift shop</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13 Maintenance &amp; storage</li> <li>14 Event Pavilions</li> <li>15 Reconfigured Sanguinetti Garden</li> <li>16 Century House Museum</li> <li>17 Relocated peacock aviary</li> </ul> |
|---|--|--|





*There are two prominent features in the southern section:*

■ **A PHOTOMOSAIC MURAL** (60' long by 8' high) that has a few large images depicting the progress of Yuma agriculture over time. Closer to the mural, one realizes that the mural consists of 480 foot-square panels of photographs of pioneer families, current farmers, and those who support the industry. The mural runs along the back wall of the privately owned retail shops.



*Port Carling, Ontario used a photomosaic mural to promote its heritage as a nautical community. To the left is the image of a Great Lakes steamship.*

*A photomosaic mural involves hundreds of individual images of family photographs, which allows many community members to become a part of the "bigger picture"*





■ **THE TWO PROMENADES INTERSECT AT A LARGE FOUNTAIN,**

which symbolizes the primary importance of the irrigation systems throughout Yuma. Surrounding the fountain are concentric circles which represent the various irrigation districts that manage the delivery of water for farms.

The final element of the southern section is the restored Molina Block building in which there would be exhibits relating the mercantile story of Yuma at the turn of the century.



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**THE NORTHERN SECTION**

The northern section involves the original Sanguinetti home and gardens. The museum itself will bring to life E.F. Sanguinetti by depicting a “day in the life” of the man who shaped the Yuma community. Considerable thought and planning has been put into reconfiguring the gardens to make them more efficient. The aviary has been relocated toward Madison Avenue as a feature to attract passersby. Its relocation is also part of an overall effort to create a fence treatment which unifies the entire campus and

provides controlled cross-traffic (when required) through the private property. The black, wrought-iron fence also extends along the entire frontage of Madison Avenue and continues west along the joint parking area with City Hall. Another key change is to route all museum traffic through the gift shop, now called the Jack Mellon Mercantile. This will provide for better access control, efficient use of staff, and more visibility for the gift shop — along with enhanced revenues.



# IMPLEMENTATION AND PHASING PLAN

The challenge with any master plan is that while it should be visionary and inspiring, it must have definitive phases so that it is not so overwhelming that it immobilizes those attempting to carry it out. Creating visible progress on the way to a worthwhile goal is crucial if YCHS is to maintain momentum and inspire the confidence of its funders. The phases are driven by the following considerations:



### PHASE ONE

- The highest priority is to complete the exterior wrought-iron fencing plan creating a unifying element all along Madison Avenue, and to add a handicapped access ramp to the gift shop entrance.
- Grade vacant land in back of Molina building to reduce damage to adobe structure from water runoff, add decomposed granite pathways, grass and some trees.
- Remove and relocate (if possible) existing portico to the north of the Molina building to reduce run-off damage to adobe structure.

*In 2014, with YCHS funds, a block wall which hid the potential for Molina Block redevelopment along with random fencing along Madison Avenue was replaced with an attractive and unifying wrought iron fence.*



## PHASE TWO

- The photomosaic mural remains a priority despite not receiving NEA grant funding, as it will be very visible and attract interest and support from the agricultural community. The mural will transform the look of this section of Madison Avenue.

- Undertake complete redevelopment of the Sanguinetti House museum and all of its exhibits.

- Reconfigure museum's entrance through the Jack Mellon Mercantile gift shop, open up side door from gift shop toward museum.

## PHASE THREE

- Completion of the plaza, including fountain and concentric circles.

- Installation of Yuma agricultural history interpretive signage and artifacts, portico, and outdoor learning classroom and ramada.

## PHASE FOUR

- Improve Sanguinetti Gardens in conformance with master plan.

## PHASE FIVE

- Undertake construction of agricultural museum

*Top: The land west of the Molina Building will be turned into an interpretive plaza, telling the story of Yuma agriculture. Right: The Sanguinetti House is the central feature of the AHS Yuma Campus. There are ambitious plans to revitalize the museum with funding from the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area.*



# SANGUINETTI HOUSE MUSEUM

## CONCEPTUAL PLAN FOR UPGRADING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

### THE STORY

The period (1890-1946) during which E.F. Sanguinetti lived in this home and ran his businesses was a formative time for the Yuma community. Just imagine: at the beginning, the Southern Pacific Railroad rumbled down Madison Avenue and served as practically the only link to the rest of the world. By the end, we were at the dawn of the jet age and Yuma was being transformed into the community we know today.

To appreciate Sanguinetti's role in the transformation of Yuma, one must understand not only the breadth and depth of the businesses he ran, but also the key civic role he played in building the foundation for today's Yuma. Although his primary focus was on his expanding retail empire,

the scope of his enterprises was endless, as was his energy. When he saw either opportunity or need, he made a business out of it: electricity, an ice house, cattle, farming, a dairy and creamery, banking, real estate, and finance. Living through the Great Depression, he had his share of setbacks and hardships but refused to declare bankruptcy or foreclose on others if at all possible. He spent the rest of his life making good on his debts.

More impressive is that he had the vision and foresight as well as time and energy to "see Yuma as it could be". As Yuma became part of the new state of Arizona, he understood how large a role the federal government could play in Yuma's transformation. He played a behind-the-scenes

but leading role in securing the Yuma Project (Laguna Dam, Yuma Siphon and extensive irrigation canal system), the Ocean-to-Ocean Bridge, Yuma's airport, and a number of other projects critical to Yuma's future. He was not only "the merchant prince of Yuma" but its "master builder."

The interpretive exhibits will therefore tell the story of the emergence of Yuma as a major metropolitan community in Arizona through the life and work of E.F. Sanguinetti

### THE CHALLENGE

Ever since his family donated E.F. Sanguinetti's home and gardens to the Arizona Historical Society, the house has functioned as part period house, part museum, part archival storage and part





offices. It has not served any of these functions adequately. In addition, with progressive “lean-to” additions to the house over the first decades of the 20th century, it is a series of smaller rooms with narrow hallways—not conducive to grand open spaces for interpretive exhibits and it lacks the grandeur of a period house from the South or New England. It has also attracted a very diverse and rather random assortment of artifacts and exhibits that lack a central theme or compelling story. Its past interpretive efforts tended to broaden out to all of Yuma’s history. Recent interpretive additions like Pivot Point Plaza, the lobby at the City’s municipal complex and exhibits in both state parks have told a number of Yuma’s stories in greater detail and impact. Currently, there is an Arizona Centennial exhibit that made sense in 2012 but has lost relevance and interest from the public.

The challenge, therefore, is to develop a plan which focuses on one very compelling story, while coming to grips with the physical limitations of the house.

**THE HOUSE:  
ITS LIMITATIONS/  
OPPORTUNITIES** (See  
*Sanguinetti House layout on  
next page for reference*)

As an exhibit space, the house is limited with cramped quarters, narrow hallways, limited open space, and different levels. Previous exhibit case construction, particularly in the space noted as Territorial Office Conference Room, has shrunk the amount of open area. The only really open space is in the area noted as E. F. Sanguinetti Museum.

As a period house, the multiple additions make it difficult to focus on a particular era. The best representation of the house as a true “turn of the century” period house is in the front of the house by Madison Avenue.

The other spaces include a mid-century kitchen and several offices and some storage area — all of which are small spaces off of a narrow hallway.

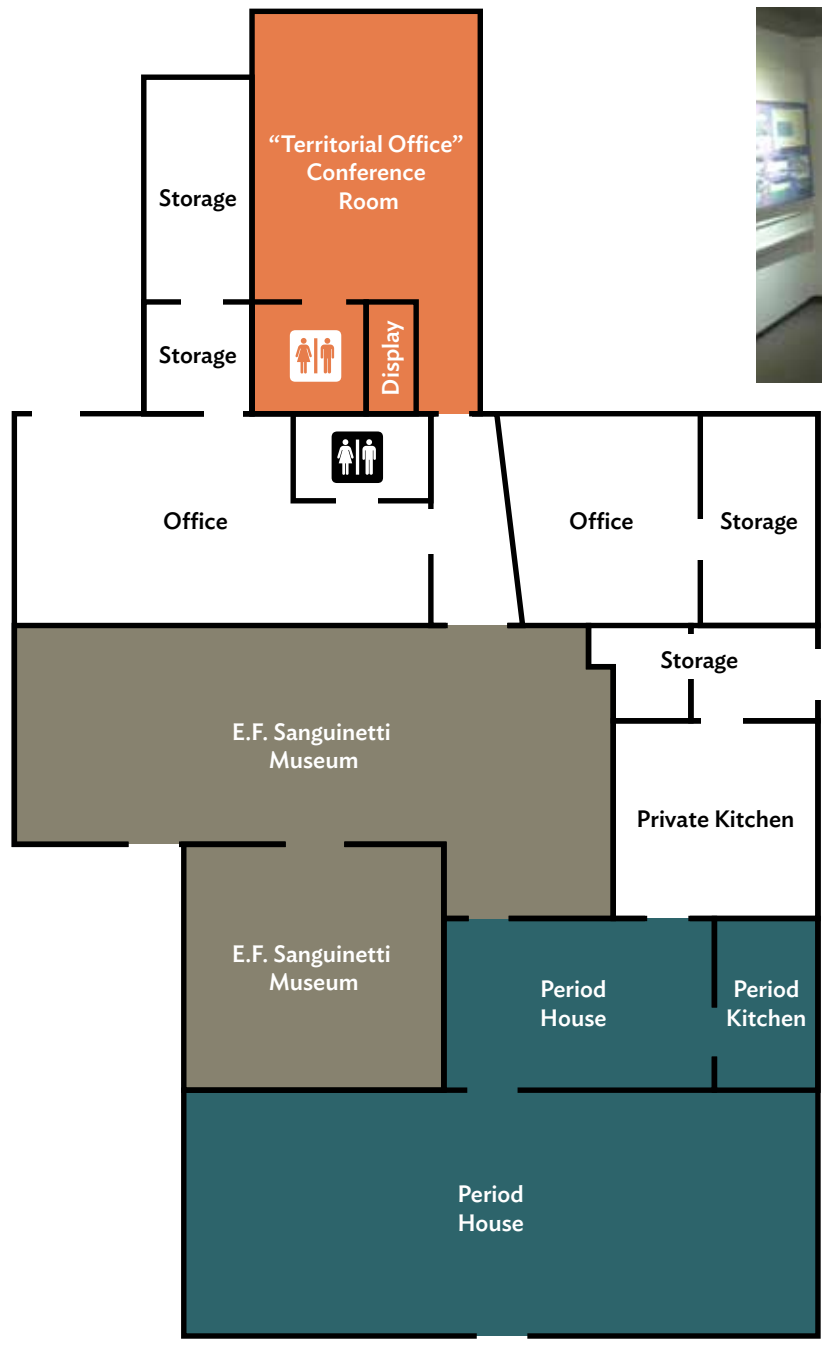


*Above: Cramped quarters severely limit the visitor experience. Narrow hallways, different levels, and decades of added exhibit cabinetry have made most of the museum space practically unusable.*

*Left: The story of E. F. Sanguinetti will reflect the commercial vibrancy of Yuma as a key western crossroads.*







*Above: "Less is More"—Accepting the limitations of the Sanguinetti House means that the house should do a just a few things, but do them well. The "Territorial Office" conference room will connect out to the gardens once again. The key feature will be the story of the life of E.F. Sanguinetti in the only space large enough to tell one story vividly. The original front of the house will give a feel of life along the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1890s.*

## A PROPOSED APPROACH

The major divergence from previous planning is to limit the actual museum area, concentrating most of the interpretive exhibits in the E.F. Sanguinetti Museum. This 180 square feet of museum space will be alive with the life and times of E.F. Sanguinetti. From this area, the visitor would then proceed east into the period house portion of the museum, which will be outfitted as the turn-of-the-century house it was. A ramp will need to be built to address the slight change in elevation. These areas will be not be roped off but designed to be fully experienced with furniture reflective of the era (but not original to the house), with safeguards to prevent theft of artifacts. The major enhancement to the visitor experience will be a sound system along the east wall which replicates the sounds along turn-of-the-century Madison Avenue, particularly the rumbling of the Southern Pacific Railroad which, according to journals, rattled the china cabinets, if not the entire house.

It is the recommendation of this report that there be no attempt to convert the private kitchen, current offices and storage into museum space, as they are just too small. Instead, the offices should be used as office and storage space. The mid-century kitchen

should be closed off from the museum with a solid door, and perhaps used to support catering that takes place in the gardens.

The major question was what to do with Area A at the far west of the home. It currently is a very congested space that shrunk from its original 6' x 12' with the building of exhibit cabinets. It is, frankly, claustrophobic but has tremendous potential as a board room/class room, with direct access to the gardens. In fact, it appears from records that this space was originally referred to as the "Territorial Office", which served as a "place of exchange" where frontier merchants were able to transact business successfully. Creative reuse of the room can once again reflect that entrepreneurial spirit.

Currently, windows and doors facing the gardens are blocked up or blacked out. The plan is to remove all the exhibit cabinetry and return the room to its original size. In addition, the windows will be restored, letting natural light from the gardens return, as E.F. Sanguinetti might have enjoyed. Doors also will be restored, providing direct access to the gardens for those using the conference room. This will not be a public space, per se, but used on a reserved basis only. This could greatly enhance the

marketability of the gardens, adding an indoor conference room which could be made available separately from the museum. Reconnecting this space with the gardens is a critical component to the restoring the sense of what it was like for E.F. Sanguinetti to spend a few moments out of his busy day to enjoy the peace, serenity and beauty of his gardens.

## SUMMARY

We propose to follow an approach of "less is more":

- For maximum impact, concentrate the museum exhibits in the area closest to the entrance with the most open space and wall space.
- Focus the "period house" in the east end of the building, the original turn-of-the-century Sanguinetti adobe home.
- Open up the western space and connect it to the gardens, using it as a conference room or classroom.

These improvements can be completed within the funds committed by the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area.



*The true "surprise" in the museum plan is reconnecting the house with the gardens. Long shuttered windows and doors will be opened back up to the sunlight. Landscaping will be cut back to create a better visual connection between the home and the garden.*



