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## The House That Brock Built

Bill Youngs



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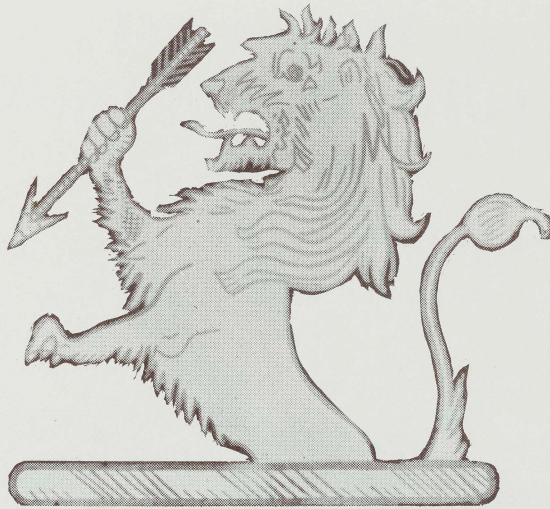
**Pepperdine University  
President's Home  
Malibu, California**





Mrs. George C. Brock





*“Institutions are not founded on material things; not on machinery, or goods or money . . . nor on lands, or buildings, or might, or men, but upon ideals.”*

—GEORGE A. BROCK







# THE HOUSE THAT BROCK BUILT

BY BILL YOUNGS

Hundreds turned their eyes to the hilltop as the anthem played and the wind-whipped Stars and Stripes ascended the tall pole.

Thrilled, Margaret Brock, standing with others of the audience beneath the tent below the flagpole promontory, thought it was one of the most beautiful sights she had ever seen. She turned her eyes toward the sea then, and this inspiring view confirmed the feeling.

“It was so touching. I knew then I would do something for Pepperdine University,” she said later in describing the scene of the dedication ceremony for beginning construction of Pepperdine’s new campus in Malibu.

Margaret Brock had not known Pepperdine University long before that memorable day in May, 1970. But what she had seen had impressed her and every contact after the ceremony further assured her that here was the place to share the heritage in her keeping.

It is fitting that one of the magnificent ways she chose to help was to build The Brock House—home for the president and his family, nerve center for the multi-campus institution, a warmly alive place for social events and other activities for the entire university family and friends.





Exterior of Brock and Co.



And it is especially appropriate that this imposing structure—a landmark building on a landmark campus overlooking the Pacific Ocean—should rise on the same outstanding site where the American Flag, on its maiden flight, inspired Margaret Martin Brock to her great commitment.

### BUILDERS OF THE HERITAGE

This beautiful President's Home of Pepperdine University in Malibu stands as a tribute to three stalwart men who never saw it and to the wonderful lady who chose this way of stewardship in their memory.

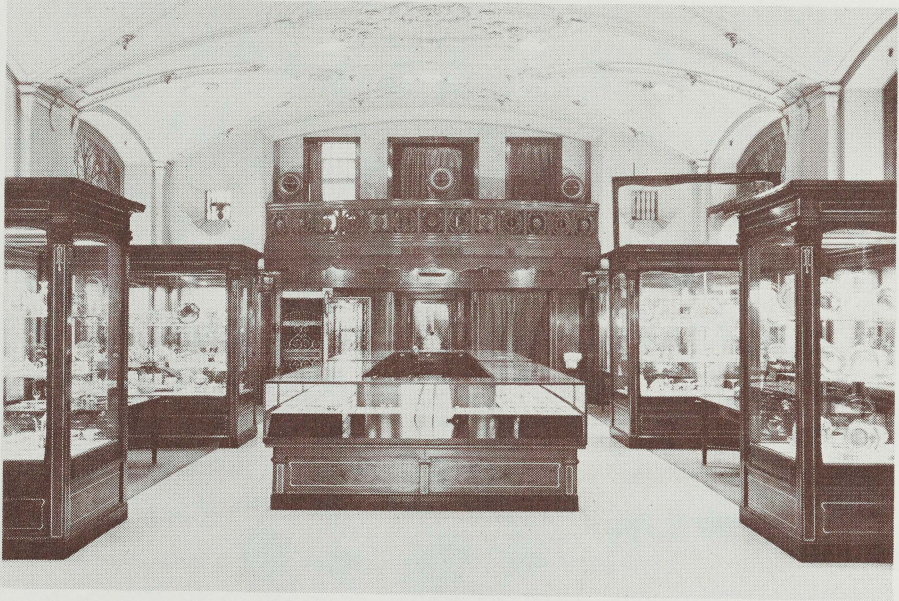
The men were Margaret Brock's father, her father-in-law and her late husband—successful men all, who became that by dint of their own labors, ingenuity and thrift.

"It is a little sad that none of the three responsible could see this fruit of their efforts," said Mrs. Brock, "but it is at the same time comforting to know that their joy in life was in the role of the builder."

A portion of Margaret Brock's heritage came down from her own parents. Her father was James Rufus Martin, who came to California as a boy from Buffalo, New York. His first job was as an apprentice in the Western Union Telegraph office in the then small desert community of San Bernardino.

Later he moved to Los Angeles, became a salesman of stocks and bonds and was so successful that eventually he owned his own company.





Interior views of Brock and Co.



Mrs. Brock's mother was Pauline Cornwell Martin. Her mother's grandmother was Sally Crocker McKee, only sister of the famed Crocker brothers of pioneer banking and railroad fame.

It was Margaret Brock's father-in-law who established the name of Brock in Los Angeles as a prominent symbol of the finer things of life. And it was her husband who polished it to even greater refinement as proprietor of a house of jewelry which treated its wares as art.

Poetically, though, it was California's greatest basic resource—land—which finally coupled with the fine jewelry establishment to create the Brock legacy.

Founder of Brock and Company, which was to gain the enviable reputation as "The Tiffany's of the West," was George A. Brock, a Canadian by birth. Mr. Brock, an optician, came here from Joliet, Illinois in 1903. That same year he and a partner founded the jewelry firm of Brock and Feagens on South Broadway in downtown Los Angeles. Mr. Brock's total capital was \$2900; his partner, George Feagans, put up a like amount. Later Mr. Brock bought out his partner and the business became Brock and Company.

Meanwhile, Mr. Brock continued to operate an optical business at the same place and it is interesting that in the early days it was that part of the business which kept the firm alive. In some reminiscences (which also reflect his thrift), set down years later, Mr. Brock took note of that fact: "Brock had a well established optical business and the revenue from optical





A hand-carved replica of the Brock family crest adorns the main entrance to The Brock House.



business, watch repairs, etc. practically carried the overhead, and the profits from occasional sales were carefully hoarded.”

But Mr. Brock also had a deep faith in the future of Brock and Company as a quality retailer and manufacturer. From the outset he made a personal study of jewels and jewelry and precious stones. He employed the best artisans he could find. He raised up a gifted son, George C. Brock, to learn all phases of the business operation from the ground up. And, from the start, Mr. Brock built on what he called “a single standard of excellence—the very highest.”

Later, in a publication commemorating the Silver Anniversary of Brock and Company in 1928, an article reflected on the ideals which had brought the firm to a place of international prominence in the field in the relatively short span of twenty-five years. How it happened is perhaps best described in this part of the article:

“Institutions are not founded on material things; not on machinery, or goods, or money . . . nor on lands, or buildings, or might, or men, but upon ideals. The institution that is Brock and Company was so founded twenty-five years ago. Of material things it had little . . . a limited amount of capital, a small place of business at the corner of Broadway and Fourth Streets, an organization of only ten people. But it had an ideal of service, of standards, of obligations to its clients which was big and basic and in step with the times. On that ideal the institution was founded.





Main entrance into the top level of The Brock House.



“It may be noteworthy, and a source of gratification to Brock and Company and its friends, that the institution has grown in a material sense. It is far more significant that spiritually the institution never has deviated from its original precepts . . . always it has kept faith with itself and with its patrons . . . always it has been true to its original ideal of service, integrity and unswerving fidelity to unquestioned standards of quality.”

George A. Brock served as president of the firm he founded until his passing in 1938. During those thirty-five years the company took on stockholders in order to have capital enough to expand. It moved from the original small store into larger quarters on South Broadway. It consolidated with the H. J. Whitley Jewelry Company, an old and honored establishment with a splendid record of achievement. In further expanding, it acquired a ninety-nine year lease and occupied its own home on West Seventh Street, with all floors of the four-story building devoted exclusively to retail and creative jewelry service. It amalgamated with the pioneer jewelry firm of S. Nordlinger and Sons. All of that transpired during the first twenty-five years of the company's existence so that, by the time of the stock market crash of 1929, the company was solid enough that it was able to weather that great economic storm.

Typical of the men at the helm (by this time young George C. Brock was his father's good right arm as vice president), they not only managed to survive the de-





The south side of the house faces the Pacific Ocean.



pression, but to get through it without laying off a single employee despite the fact that the jewelry business was especially hard hit economically.

“Brock and Company was very much of a family,” Margaret Brock remembers, “and my husband and his father were determined to keep the family together.”

George C. Brock succeeded his father as president and when the day came that affluent Americans could once again buy jewel items, an increasing number of them found their way to Brock's. And clients dealing with the second generation administration could tell no difference in the treatment they had come to expect here. Whether the customer was a wealthy matron shopping for an exquisite diamond tiara or a clerk on her lunch break looking for a modest brooch for her mother's birthday, the rule at Brock's was always courtesy, knowledge and scientific aid for everybody.

Under the younger Brock's leadership the business continued to prosper and grow in stature, stressing the exclusive in precious stones and featuring fine imported china and novelty items that he added from throughout the world and providing talented artisans to create special orders and designs for a particular clientele. The business grew to where it required more than 150 employees to provide its services.

Several years before his father's passing, George C. Brock foresaw an alarming business trend—the effect of the growth of the suburbs on the downtown Los Angeles business area. As suburbs began to blossom, slowly at first in those days, young Brock convinced his





The president's office in the top level.



father that it would be good insurance to establish a branch of the company in one of the outlying areas. The place he chose was exclusive Beverly Hills and in December of 1934 he opened a fine Brock and Company store in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.

In succeeding years young Brock's foresight was proven correct as the downtown area, until very recently, went from bad to worse as people flocked to the more convenient suburban shopping centers. And, while Brock and Company downtown suffered less than most, certainly the presence of the store in Beverly Hills more than took up what slack there was.

Probably one of the most interesting business deals George C. Brock ever was involved in was one he entered with reluctance but was able to eventually deal with profitably.

It came about during the depression years when an officer of Brock and Company was about to lose a very large orange grove in the San Fernando Valley. He had earlier borrowed \$100,000 from Brock and Company to buy the land. The depression, of course, caused the bottom to fall out of the fruit market, too, and the man was stuck with more payments and taxes than he could handle.

"He came to George and his father and asked them if the company would take it off his hands for the debt he owned them," recalls Margaret Brock. "They really had no other alternative, so George became an orange rancher."

George Brock did indeed for some time try to run





The president's office has an ocean view.



the orange grove and the jewelry business but it not only was too much of a chore but raising oranges, he decided, was not exactly his line of work. Whereupon, he hired a professional, Lindley F. Bothwell. Soon this man had a contract with Sunkist and it wasn't long, much to the pleasant surprise of everyone concerned, before the orange ranch began to show a profit.

Not many years later the value of the land itself began to take on new meaning. The San Fernando Valley started to boom and as the sound of hammer and saw came closer—bringing an avalanche of subdivisions nearer to the orange grove in Canoga Park—the land became more and more valuable.

Shareholders at Brock and Company began to hint that a nice profit could be turned with the sale of the land. But George C. Brock resisted the temptation. In the years to come this pressure was eliminated as George Brock gradually bought up all the stock he didn't already own. And he kept the orange grove.

It was only when he decided to sell Brock and Company that the land in San Fernando Valley suddenly became a vital financial factor. Sale of the jewelry business alone would have left its seller, who had already determined that he would sell only for cash, in an untenable excess profits situation. Only a package deal for business and ranch made a substantial tax savings possible.

Builders wanted to buy the orange orchard for home construction, but these buyers didn't want a very large, exclusive and expensive jewelry business along





The large living room area upstairs used for many college functions and for entertaining guests of the university.



with it. Likewise, offers were made for the business, but these prospects had no use for an orange grove.

George and Margaret Brock, before sailing for a business trip to Europe, even met with the Tiffany people in New York to discuss an offer the great house of jewelry had made. They very much wanted to purchase Brock and Company. They wanted to buy it with good-as-gold Tiffany stock. They spoke of their decision to make the name of the Los Angeles firm "Tiffany-Brock." But they balked at going into orange growing in California and George Brock reluctantly refused to deal otherwise.

Finally, in 1964, a buyer for the entire package came forward and the sale was consummated. Strangely, the man who purchased Brock and Company and the ranch was Ben Weingart, prominent Los Angeles realtor, who was the same person that handled the ninety-nine year lease transaction for George A. Brock when he moved to 515 West Seventh.

"George came home with the biggest check I ever saw," remembers Margaret Brock. "He had done what he wanted to do—clean up and clear out."

And even with the more desirable tax situation which the agricultural use end of the sale had provided the transaction cost George Brock just \$17,000 under one million dollars in taxes.

"What will we do with the \$17,000," George jokingly asked his wife at the time.

"Put it in a little bank in Meeker," she said impulsively.





Upstairs dining room.



The Meeker she referred to is the Colorado mountain town near their ranch, where she and George spent so many happy summers over the years. And, indeed, they did make such a deposit in the Meeker bank and—sentimentally—it's still there.

Three years after the business sold, on October 31, 1967, George C. Brock left this life.

### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STEWARDSHIP

For a person who has never known want, Margaret Martin Brock has an extraordinary feeling for persons less fortunate than herself. She has expressed this feeling in many ways.

It is significant that her most far reaching contributions have been in areas of leadership where her influence benefits many and, in the case of her donations to Pepperdine University, where her gifts become a perpetual, multiplying extension of the original investment.

A native daughter of California, Mrs. Brock attended Pasadena High School and Mount Vernon Seminary in Washington, D.C. She made her debut at a big private party in the Biltmore Hotel and as a young lady was involved in a busy schedule of social life and in working for the Junior League of Los Angeles. She and George Brock were married in New York in 1931.

Among her many philanthropic causes, Mrs. Brock supports and is on committees for the Salvation Army and Goodwill Industries. She is on the board of Young





Another view of the upstairs living room area. The stairs lead down into the living quarters of the University president.



Life and is a founding member of the Los Angeles Music Center. She has supported Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge and the YMCA building program and has regularly contributed for years to a long list of charities involved in youth work, youth camps, veterans affairs and health, welfare and cultural programs.

An ardent and active member of the Republican Party, Mrs. Brock is often referred to as "Mrs. California Republican." She is one of the few women members of the Republican National Finance Committee and is the founder of the Women's Division of United Republican Finance Committee of Los Angeles County. She has served as a delegate and alternate to several GOP conventions and as chairman for numerous fund-raising dinners, including the \$500 a plate "Salute to the President" in 1971. That highly successful event got her a personal citation from President Nixon. Among her numerous fund raising efforts, she chaired the \$200 a plate campaign for Senator George Murphy in 1969, the \$250 a plate dinner for Governor Ronald Reagan in 1970 and the \$1000 a plate "Reelect the President" dinner for Mr. Nixon.

One of Mrs. Brock's greatest interests is young people. She genuinely loves the young, which is quickly evident to them, and they in turn feel comfortable with her and experience little in her presence in the way of the so-called "generation gap" so publicized nowadays. She has sought out and helped many students to further their education and encouraged them to take an active interest in the future of their nation.





The view of The Brock House from the academic complex below.



Her decision to finance the magnificent President's Home on Pepperdine's Malibu campus came only after she learned that the big house would also be a place for student use. And even after assuming the generous role as donor of the home, she has established a fund on campus for promising students who find themselves in financial straits before they can complete their college careers.

Mrs. Brock knew of Pepperdine University only casually until the day she received an invitation to attend the announcement dinner of February 9, 1970, at which Governor Reagan, Architect William Pereira, Richard Scaife of the University Board and others were to tell of the exciting plans for the Malibu campus during simultaneous dinners at the Century Plaza and Beverly Hilton Hotels.

"I almost didn't go," she laughs about it now. "But the Century Plaza is only two blocks from where I live so I finally decided I would attend. Now I'm glad I did, because something good happened to me there. That—and later the flag ceremony at the ground-breaking—really got to me."

Mrs. Brock had met Chancellor M. Norvel Young and his wife, Helen, at a function prior to the February dinner. But she had never met Pepperdine's young president, Dr. William S. Banowsky. That night she did.

"Two minutes after we met, he asked me if I would help get Senator Murphy to be the speaker for the ground-breaking in May," Mrs. Brock recalled.



*“I think the gift of the ‘Brock House’ has been an exceptional opportunity for you. Not only is the building functional and beautifully placed but the people involved provide the real spirit and inspiration for its perfect completion. The standards, goals and sound orientation of the institution and those guiding its destiny will provide you with growing satisfaction over the years ahead.”*

—CHARLES RUSSELL  
Montesito, California



She paused then, her eyes twinkling, and added: "I said I would and I did and I was already working for Pepperdine before I even realized it!"

Then, seriously: "I think this university—the way it started and the course it is following and the kind of graduates it is turning out—is worthy of all that I am able to do to help."

This home, then—The House That Brock Built—and the many students who personally know the generosity of this grand lady are dedicated to the same high ideals of the people who, through her, brought us this important legacy.







