

Valley of the Moon  
Name of Property

Pima, Arizona  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Architecture
- Art
- Entertainment
- Landscape Architecture
- Performing Arts

**Period of Significance**

1923 – 1963

**Significant Dates**

1923 date of construction

1963 date garden closes

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

Spiritualism

**Architect/Builder**

George Phar Legler

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The Valley of the Moon Historic District, primarily constructed between 1923 and 1932 and continuously active until 1963, is a fairy-tale garden landscape comprised of 26 distinct and thematically connected historic resources designed and built by George Phar Legler in a unique architectural expression of Modern Spiritualism and the mystic philosophies and beliefs surrounding this late nineteenth – early twentieth movement. The period of significance stretches from the start of construction 1923 to the closing of the property in 1963.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Valley of the Moon Historic District is a whimsical fairy-tale-inspired landscape designed and constructed by George Phar Legler between 1923 and 1932. The district is a rare expression of post-World War I Spiritualism, its character, form and function illustrating this mystic movement's values and is the sole known example in Arizona. The garden's architectural details are reminiscent and closely related to "Storybook Style" popularized by Hollywood in California during the 1910s – 1920s.

The property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level. Eligible under Criterion A, associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history: the district derives its significance as a unique expression of the early of Twentieth Century Modern Spiritualist movement and is a physical manifestation of fairy-tale motifs and tropes and the philosophical tenets of George Phar Legler, builder and founder of the First Spiritualist Church of Tucson. Also eligible under Criterion C, embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and possessing high artistic values: the district is both a 1920s – 1930s Tucson romantic folly and a unique example of "Storybook Style" garden architecture.

The period of significance stretches forty years from the purchase of the property by Legler in 1923 extending though its closure in 1963. During the period of significance, Legler developed and constructed all contributing historic resources on the property.

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

#### Criterion A

##### *Spiritualism, Fairies, Film, George Phar Legler and Valley of the Moon (1848 – 1963)*

The Valley of the Moon, conceived, designed and built by George Phar Legler, is an expression of the surge in popularity of Spiritualism following World War I, the sensation surrounding the sighting and photography of fairies in the United Kingdom, popular fairy-tale and fable literature, and the prominence and accessibility of exotic European fantasy architecture in silent cinema in the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

George Phar Legler was exposed to Spiritualism at a young age under the tutelage of a socialist shoemaker. Legler's introduction to this movement came during its height at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century. Modern Spiritualism was born in the middle of the 1800s with two major surges in America, the first following the end of the Civil War and the second following World War I and the influenza epidemic. Séances, mediums, and the ability to communicate with the dead were the principle tenets. Spirits, ghosts, elves and fairies were fodder for the believers.

Modern Spiritualism's central tenet [is] that death does not exist. Instead, the state commonly called death is only a transition, a shedding of the body, and the spirits of individuals not only survive beyond the grave but also communicate from the other side. A related belief holds that mediums, men and women who are able to receive and transmit spirit messages, can help other, less finely attuned, mortals establish contact at séances. (Weisberg: 4)

Formed by many different influences, Modern Spiritualism as a popular movement began with the Hydesville raps. In defiance of Judaeo-Christian theologians who argued that alleged spirit visitations were either demonic manifestations or delusions, Americans in the third quarter of the nineteenth century crowded into séance rooms, seeking wisdom and comfort in what they perceived as tangible evidence of immortality. Many believers were men and women struggling to reconcile religion with science at a time when geologists were questioning the very age or origins of the earth and its creatures. Whether by design of the spirits or inadvertently, Kate and Maggie Fox served as the catalyst for what believers in spirit communications called the dawning of a new era. (Weisberg: 4)

In March 1848 two young sisters, Kate and Maggie Fox, began hearing strange sounds and knocks in their home in upstate New York, which they attributed to "spirits." In the cultural climate of the eastern United States, they were widely believed. Upstate New York was also the center for many fringe variants of Christianity.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

Spiritualism [began] as both a reflection and exploration of the tension inherent in nineteenth-century America. (Weisberg: 6)

The love affair with technology that helped give rise to Spiritualism may have played a role as well in its decline. Although Thomas Alva Edison was so intrigued by the movement that he hoped to build a machine to facilitate communication between the worlds, the invention of electrical lights slowly but steadily begin to banish shadows from the corners of many séance rooms. (Weisberg: 262)

In the early part of the twentieth century the educated middle class in Europe and England remained deeply engaged with the question of paranormal abilities (Weisberg: 263)

Just as the carnage of the Civil War produced a surge of interest in Spiritualism in the United States, so too did World War I in England. More than seven hundred thousand British soldiers – almost one in eight-died under brutal circumstances, some of the men blown to bits on the battlefield. They were the “unburial bodies,” wrote the poet Wilfred Owen, that “sit outside the dugouts all day and night.” At such a time elaborate funerals seemed not only inadequate but also callous, whereas attempts to contact the spirits made a certain amount of intuitive sense to many of those who mourned. (Weisberg: 264)

As the number of Spiritualists in England increased, the focus of research into the paranormal shifted once again back to the nature of mediumship. A very public battle of wits and tests took place between two famous adversaries in the Spiritualist debate: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the master sleuth Sherlock Holmes, and the magician Ehrich Weiss, otherwise known as Houdini. Doyle’s own son, Kingsley had been wounded in World War I and died of influenza in 1919, not long after peace was declared. In September of that year Doyle heard Kingsley’s ghostly voice say, “Forgive me,” an event that transformed the author’s faith in spirit communication into absolute certainty. (Weisberg: 246)

The movement had two American epicenters during the mid 1800s: “Lily Dale,” New York established in 1876 (still functioning today), and “Cassadaga Camp,” established in Cassadaga, Florida in 1895 (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places). Other large Spiritualist camps and churches developed around the country during the late 1800s and first decades of the 1900s including “Camp Chesterfield” in Indiana (still functioning today), established in 1886 near the childhood home of George Phar Legler, a year after his birth.

The account of Legler’s life is compiled from interviews, articles, and his own writing, all of which is sparse and contains conflicting accounts of various part of his life.

The tale of George Phar Legler seems derived from fairy-tales. His early childhood, as if penned by the Brothers’ Grimm, involves a wicked stepmother, stowaways and an influential shoemaker. Consumed by legends, spirits and fairies, he became an inseparable part of his own mythic landscape which he began to create at the age of 38. A guide, narrator, self-described ‘mountain gnome’ and resident of the enchanted garden, Legler transformed himself, over time, into one of the roles of his own fable; a cloaked figure, who for years lived in underground caves on the property, surviving on nothing but milk; yet celebrated, as a folk hero in newspapers and magazines including LIFE Magazine. As the twentieth century advanced, myths and fairy-tales faded in the wake of World War II, the cultural revolution of the late 1960s and the Viet Nam War; Legler retreated into his crumbling garden. An anachronism of a bygone era, he became a hermit, disappearing into the overgrown grounds, unheard from for a decade. In the 1970s a band of high school students, with faded memories of childhood moonlit excursions into the park, climbed the fence and found the elderly, frail Legler barely alive. Like Rip Van Winkle awaking from sleep, the students extracted him from the deteriorating terrain and nursed him back to health. Then the students and the 90 year old “gnome” worked together to restore the property. Upon Legler’s death at almost a 100, the students inherited a foundation and the responsibility as stewards to guard the garden in perpetuity.

George Phar Legler was born 19 November 1885 in Evansville, Indiana. Legler’s paternal grandfather, Hugo Legler, immigrated to America from Germany between 1850 and 1855 to avoid the military draft of Otto von Bismarck – by stowing away aboard a ship, which first brought him to Canada (*VOTM DH*). George was one of two sons born to Swiss/German Louis Legler and Scots/English Eva Phar McCarthy. George had red hair, blue eyes and a small build. He

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

once said: "I never weighed more than 140 pounds in my life." He grew up in a German-speaking home, and did not learn English until the first grade. His mother leaves the historical record at this time; his father remarried and had 5 more children, 4 boys and a girl (*VOTM DH*). Legler would "escape from his cruel stepmother's domination by entertaining neighborhood children with plays and magic shows" (McGuinn)

[In] Evansville, Indiana, Mr. Legler, as a boy, liked to bring happiness to others. He did Magic shows and plays for the neighborhood children, making the costumes and writing the lines himself. He often told of cutting out costumes without allowing for "where the body isn't flat and they'd burst in the seat!" (Legler: Mt. Gnome)

Louis Legler, George's father, was a banker and wanted George to follow in his footsteps like his other son, but George had other plans and other dreams. When Louis Legler died, George received an inheritance and spent it on hair-brained schemes (*VOTM DH*).

As "a young man, he was influenced by a shoemaker who possessed socialist ideals and who taught him about spiritualism" (McGuinn). Legler reminisced: "He had a philosophy of making people happy [...] that appealed to me. So one day I stood there and said to him, I'm going to devote my life to making people happy." (McGuinn)

Legler was an avid reader, but especially liked literature that expressed the "goodness of mankind." He called the most influential and his favorites a "touch of three": Edgar Allen Poe, Louis Carroll, and Robert Louis Stevenson (*Valley of the Moon Director's Handbook*). He would evoke these three writers and "Chaucer again and again over his lifetime," and ultimately used them as a touchstone guiding the construction of the Valley of the Moon (*Valley of the Moon Director's Handbook*).

Legler's fairy-tale inspiration came from a variety of sources including nursery rhymes, Aesop's Fables, Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" – blended together and fused with "the touch of three."

It is difficult to understand Legler's fascination with Edgar Allan Poe, whose literary canon is almost entirely grim, oriented toward horror and death and madness. Perhaps it was the vividness of Poe's art, and the pervasive, hypnotic mystery with which the tales were told that inspired Legler.

Poe's verses illustrate an intense faculty for technical and abstract beauty, with the rhyming art to excess, an incorrigible propensity toward nocturnal themes, a demoniac undertone behind every page. ... There is an indescribable magnetism about the poet's life and reminiscences, as well as the poems. ("Edgar Poe's Significance" 1880. Walt Whitman )

Take this kiss upon the brow!  
And, in parting from you now,  
Thus much let me avow --  
You are not wrong, who deem  
That my days have been a dream:  
Yet if hope has flown away  
In a night, or in a day,  
In a vision or in none,  
Is it therefore the less gone?  
All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream within a dream.

(A Dream Within A Dream. (1849) verse 1. Edgar Allan Poe)

The children's verse of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894) was a part of Legler's early childhood, including "The Child's Garden of Verses" (1885). The book was published in the year of Legler's birth.

Stevenson eventually moved to Samoa with the love of his life, American artist Fanny Osbourne (1840-1914). Stevenson described settling there:

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

I was now escaped out of the shadow of the Roman empire, under whose toppling monuments we were all cradled, whose laws and letters are on every hand of us, constraining and preventing. I was now to see what men might be whose fathers had never studied Virgil, had never been conquered by Caesar, and never been ruled by the wisdom of Gaius or Papinian. (*In the South Seas*. (1908) ch. 1 (Robert Louis Stevenson)

Such a sentiment reflects Legler's choice of moving to the desert to create his own Samoa, the fantasy universe of the Valley of the Moon.

The best loved tales of Lewis Carroll (1832 – 1898) feature an unpredictable, fantastical universe intended to appeal to children, and which, despite strange events and effects, is never severely frightening.

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well. Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her and to wonder what was going to happen next. (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (1865). Ch 1. Lewis Carroll)

This quality imbues such parts of the Valley of the Moon as "The Tower of Zogog," "The Troglodyte's Cavern," "The Bottomless Pit," and the "Writhing Serpent Monster." With his life-work's complexity, Legler was aware that many of his visitors returned again and again, and those who experienced the Valley of the Moon as children brought their own children decades later. Here too Legler sought to create a real-life experience which Carroll had done with words alone.

I have reason to believe that *Alice*...has been read by some hundreds of English Children, aged from Five to Fifteen: also by Children, aged from Fifteen to Twenty-five: yet again by Children, aged from Twenty-five to Thirty-five: and even by Children—for there are such—Children in whom no waning of health and strength, no weariness of the solemn mockery, and the gaudy glitter, and the hopeless misery, of Life has availed to parch the pure fountain of joy that wells up in all child-like hearts. (Preface to *The Nursery Alice* (1890): Lewis Carroll)

Legler met his wife, Felix, while living in Indiana. She was from Kentucky and was a widow at age 20. She had one daughter, Elsie, whom George grew to love like his own. They were married and had 2 children, Iona and Randall.

There are two differing accounts of Legler's connections with Colorado and Indiana.

The Leglers moved to Pueblo, Colorado, and "influenced by his friend the shoemaker, George ran for public office and was the first socialist to be elected in the town." Tired of the cold climate in Colorado, Legler got a job with the railroad as a track checker and electrician. (McGuinn)

Or ...

Legler left Indiana with a job as an electrician for the railroad, which led him to Colorado. He became one of Pueblo Colorado's founding members, and was the first Socialist to be elected to the City Council in Pueblo (*VOTM DH*). He tried to enlist for service in World War I, but the draft board told him railroad men were vital, and refused him. (McGuinn)

Tucson emerged from World War I as a prosperous and growing community with vast improvements to infrastructure, a monumental building campaign, and the development of a local Southwestern-style tourist industry.

Legler embraced Modern Spiritualism as a philosophical doctrine and became a practitioner sometime in the early part of the 1900s. Legler is known to have held séances intending to communicate with the spirits of the dead. George moved to Tucson in 1917 and purchased the land for the Moon sometime between 1917 and 1923. He took the civil service exam and worked part time as a clerk in the post office and then as a letter carrier. At the end of the 1910s, Legler befriended a young girl in the end stage of tuberculosis. He constructed a miniature fairyland diorama in her window, complete with mountains, plantings and a running river. The end of the girl's life was filled with entertainment, fairytales and happiness. The girl's death left her mother inconsolable. so Legler held a séance with the mother and her daughter's spirit providing the girl's mother peace and closure.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

Legler was asked by a local clergyman to visit his fourteen-year-old terminally ill child who was dying of tuberculosis. This visit ignited the creative genius within George as he decided that what the child needed was to spark her imagination and give her a means to enjoy pleasure once again if only within her mind. Outside the young girl's bedroom window he created a miniature cement mountain scene complete with plants and there was a path leading to a ladder up the side of the mountain. (Tucson's Valley of the Moon)

This diorama included live plants, a lighted cave, and running water. Legler recalls that it brought a great deal of pleasure to the girl and those around her.

In 1923, Legler began the full scale version of the diorama, to create a fairyland where children could see in real perspective what they had heard only in stories.

The Valley of the Moon served not only as a childhood fairy-tale experience but was intended as a literal home for fairies and the location for the first Spiritualist Church of Tucson, with Legler serving as the first pastor. No documents of the activities surrounding the later use survive, but within the Valley of the Moon archive is a 1920s – 1930s calling card:

George Phar Legler  
Pastor : First Spiritualist Church in Tucson Arizona

Legler's belief in the spirit world and the existence of fairies was verified in 1920 with the announcement and photographic proof of fairies in England. The following quotes are taken from James Randi's "Flim-Flam," which includes a chapter exploring in depth the Cottingly Fairies phenomenon:

The Christmas 1920 issue of London's *Strand* magazine featured a piece by that eminent author and celebrity Sir Arthur Conan Doyle the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The advantages of the great detective had brought The Strand large profits and enormous circulation in England and abroad, and any submission by Doyle was most welcome. The article entitled "Fairies Photographed – An Epoch-making Event" was an account, presented as fact, of two girls of Bradford, Leeds, who had photographed a number of fairies and gnomes they regularly encountered in Cottingly Glen.

World War I is over, and England is recovering its wits after sacrificing the flower of its young manhood to the struggle. It is 1920, and spiritualism is in its heyday. Everywhere, hands are pressed to tables in darkened rooms in the hope that some rap or creak will signal the return of a loved one from beyond the grave. In America, the great conjurer Harry Houdini is touring the theater and lecture circuits debunking the claims of the spirit mediums, while his friend in England, Arthur Conan Doyle, similarly engaged –in opposition to him. Doyle, convinced of many irrationalities, has taken up the cause of spiritualism and become one of its leading lights.

Doyle has been knighted for his contribution to literature. Probably there is no person better known in England or more widely respected. His alliance with the spiritists has been a great boost to their cause, and they regularly summon shades for him to witness. He has declared the evidence for survival after death to be "overwhelming." And he will believe it to be so until his last breath. He is in good company. Sir Oliver Lodge and William Crookes, prominent scientists of the age whose contributions to science are undeniable, also have declared themselves believers and are quoted [...] as authorities on the subject.

In May 1920 Sir Arthur has heard from a friend that actual photographs have been taken of fairies and gnomes. He has investigated and has been put in touch with Edward L. Gardner. An advocate of theosophy, a mystical philosophy that accepts such beings as real, Gardner firmly believes in such matters. Upon being informed of the evidence in a letter from Gardner's sister –for whom Doyle has "considerable respect" – Sir Arthur writes that her letter "filled me with hopes." He employs Gardner to investigate the matter for him, and Gardner's first reports to Doyle assure him that girls are undoubtedly honest, coming from a family of tradesmen and down-to-earth people incapable of guile.

In *The Coming of the Fairies...* Sir Arthur concludes his lengthy book on fairies with the comment that "while more evidence will be welcome, there is enough already available to convince any reasonable man that the matter is not one which can readily be dismissed, but that a case actually exists which up to now has not been shaken in

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

the least degree by any of the criticism directed against it. Far from being resented, such criticism, so long as it is earnest and honest, must be welcome to those whose only aim is the fearless search for truth.”

Within three years of the revelations of the Cottingly Fairies, Legler began work on the Valley Of The Moon. One of Legler’s explicit reasons for his building program was to provide a salubrious place for fairies to visit or reside.

“The Fairy Investigation Society” based in Nottingham England was formed in 1927 with the motto: “We welcome all who have the Fairy Faith.” Legler was a charter member of the club, founded by Sir Quentin Crawford, dedicated to collecting and corroborating information about fairies. During its prime, the society organized meetings, lectures, and discussions for collecting evidence of fairy life. Of the 127 members, 9 were located in the United States. Legler is listed next to Walt Disney. (Fairy Investigation Society news letter c. 1927)

At this same historical juncture the American public was suddenly exposed to exotic places and “fabled olden-days” through film. The Hollywood “dream factories” churned out weekly blockbusters exploiting stereotypes of Medieval Europe, ancient Babylon, and the foggy streets of England. Tinsel Town captured in nitrate film stock the stories, lore and history that obsessed Legler. The studios built cities, castles, towns and towers for cinematic chiaroscuro: lopsided, mysterious, ramshackle; constructed to cultivate emotion and create tangible fantasy. The following excerpt from Gellner’s essay articulates Hollywood’s influential role in shaping the American landscape.

Depictions of the distant, the rare, and the exotic had been central to film almost since its inception. The magic of cinema made it possible to transport audiences not only across geographic distance – whether to the London, Paris, or Baghdad – but across time itself. The “period” film became a staple of early directors such as D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille and it remains a popular genre precisely because it offered the public an escape for the here-and now.

Aside from the wealthy and those who had fought in The Great War, few people in the early twentieth century had traveled internationally; fewer still would do so during the Great Depression. Hence, exotic film settings held great fascination for the average moviegoer, who might never set foot outside his own state, much less outside the United States and whose exposure to vernacular European architecture was likely limited to the odd photographs in National Geographic.

[...] Many classic films of the silent era (not to mention a host of mediocre ones) were set in Europe or the Middle East. Rex Ingram’s 1921 film *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* [...] partly set in the French countryside. [...] Nineteen twenty-three brought a slew of period films set abroad, from *Robin Hood*, starring Douglas Fairbanks Jr. to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Lon Chaney to Cecil B. DeMille’s biblical epic *The Ten Commandments*.

Thanks to such formidable entertainment, weekly movie attendance soared to around 1000,000,000 during the ‘20s – one ticket for nearly every man, woman and child in the United States. The public thronged theaters, not just to see their favorite stars, but also to experience exotic foreign locales they were unlikely ever to visit in person. Studio executives were quick to capitalize on this fact, and period films with romantic settings remained a Hollywood staple for most of the decade. Classics abound: in 1924, Raoul Walsh gave us *The Thief of Baghdad*; 1925 saw Lon Chaney in the *Phantom of the Opera*; 1926 brought Fred Niblo’s colossal production of *Ben-Hur*; in 1927, William Wellman and *Wings*, the story of two young men sent to France to fight in The Great War.

Thus the major entertainment milieu provided mainstream cultural support for Legler’s style and aspirations. The widespread transmission of fantasy-historical European sensibility provided exactly the otherworldly, yet accessible, ambience for his architectural vision. The Tower of Zogog and the false perspective of his miniature rustic stone buildings are examples of this.

Legler said: “I’m convinced that all this world needs is kindness [...] I believe that if all children were taught kindness, they would grow up practicing it, and, in time, the whole world would be kindly peaceful place.” (Negri 1993)

The Valley of the Moon the Valley was under construction between 1923 and 1932. Horse teams were brought in to dig caves, and steam shovels later took over the digging. Some 200 tons of stone and 800 sacks of cement were used in the construction as well as an uncounted number of bales of chicken wire, yards of steel cable, concrete and ornamental

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

minerals. Legler made a complex of tunnels, castles, grottos, winding passageways, dark caves, stone towers, pools, and an enchanted garden, mountains, and an amphitheater. Miniature elves, dragons, fairies and gnomes were also a part of the magical landscape.

Legler, a vegetarian, had a significant stomach ailment by the time he arrived in Arizona which prevented him from working full time, so he received a partial disability benefit from Social Security. George and Felix's marriage deteriorated, and around 1928, when the youngest of their children Iona graduated high school, George left (they never officially divorced) and moved permanently to Valley of the Moon, where he resided for the next 46 years. He later retired from the post office with a disability. His stomach ailment became progressively worse until he could eat nothing but condensed milk and vitamins; his son Randall, would bring him milk by the case (Valley of the Moon Director's Handbook).

While he built the Valley of the Moon, various people came to spend time with him and exchange their labor for his hospitality (Negri 1993). One of George's best friends, Frank Thibault, lived on the property for many years with his wife, Rose. Frank and Rose were 'starving artists;' Rose was afflicted with severe rheumatoid arthritis. Frank helped George build the landscape, and in return, George gave him the space to build a small adobe house for himself and his wife. Frank painted the Chinese characters found under the Wizard's Tower and was George's "back-up man" for the tours.

In the throes of the Great Depression, in 1932, the Valley of the Moon was opened to the public. Each weekend Legler opened the garden and offered free guided twilight fairy tours. The Tucson Citizen poignantly noted: "Here is a man who asks nothing for himself except that there will always be young ones coming to him to enjoy his fanciful creation." (Tucson Daily Citizen, 1969)

The article then describes part of the Valley tour:

With his sweeping black cape, big black hat and mysterious black veil, the Mountain Gnome was gustily working his abracadabra in magic tricks that brought bursts of laughter, breathless silence, shrieks and shivers from his delighted audience for 40 Brownies.

The wizard changed black water into white pebbles into goldfish, crystals into mice, and a green feather into a tongue-darting snake.

With incantations of the children singing "Jingle Bells" a paper lizard dropping into a barrel, popped out a live "dragon," The writhing, plush, red mouthed iguana made the children scurry squealing to the topmost benches, frightened just enough for fun but not enough for tears.

Then with black cape flowing from his shoulder, the Mountain Gnome led us through eerie caves of his kingdom of fairyland to the Wishing Amphitheater where the few grown-ups watching as the children scuffed their feet in the sand to uncover pennies, nickels and dimes in a dusty treasure hunt.

Now we twisted along a path past the sorcerer's castle pointed and tipsy and all out of walk but right and authentic as a child's dream. We crowded into a grotto, dim and shadowy, though friendly with many tiny fairy houses of white pebbles tucked under the eaves and mossy fish ponds set in the stone floor.

To suggest more mysteries a cone-nosed pixie guarded a green padlock door at the end of a dark narrow passage. (Tucson Daily Citizen, 1969)

One of Legler's main beliefs was that happiness should be given and not sold, so he never charged admission, although he gratefully accepted donations. He ruminated on his intention in the Valley of the Moon Bulletin:

I have been working with children in the Valley of the Moon for more than a quarter of a century. Now let me give you a little of my philosophy and tell you why I do it.

The magic incidents and free gifts are all woven around the motto of the Valley of the Moon which is "The golden key to the fairy treasure house of happiness is "Kindness To All" printed on them. This is a real fairyland with fifteen foot cliffs into which you disappear for an hour and a half.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

This is my objective. If we can influence children to develop a friendly attitude toward everyone while they are children they will be happier adults. That friendly attitude will unconsciously react on their subconscious mind and in turn will strengthen their character and give them a deeper spiritual outlook on life regardless of what church they may ultimately belong to. (Valley of the Moon...Bulletin)

Legler continued to develop and change The Valley of the Moon after its opening in 1932, adding and subtracting stone features, pathways and buildings. Committed to children, Legler served as assistant Supervisor of the Pima County summer camp program in 1934 and 1935.

Legler introduced the *Bunnyland Theater* in the 1940s. The Theater featured trained rabbits which Legler dressed to play various roles. Legler toured with his *Bunnyland Theatre* as far as California, appearing in the Los Angeles County Fair September 10, 1948. The most famous of these rabbits was "Jack, The Wise Rabbit" whose death at age 8 was publicized in several newspapers and magazines and occasioned an obituary in the Arizona Daily Star newspaper.

In 1945, Legler deeded the district to a non-profit organization, which he created: the "Valley of the Moon Memorial Association Inc." George, Frank, Rose, and George's son Randall became the first directors of the Association. Rose lived on the property until her health forced her to move, while Frank continued to live on the property. (Valley of the Moon Director's Handbook)

As the dust of World War II settled, the possible reality of mysticism born in the tragedies of the of early twentieth century faded in the wake of American optimism. Perhaps the inevitable evolution of culture, or perhaps because TV suddenly became a staple in most houses, or perhaps because the shadowy mysteries of the night were fading, Legler ceased providing regularly scheduled tours at "The Valley of the Moon" in 1947. Immune to America's changing milieu and immersed in his beliefs, Legler continued to work on the property and offered free tours by appointment and on special evenings.

Slowly, without fanfare or paid promotion, George Phar Legler and The Valley Of The Moon became known throughout the U.S.A. In 1952, McCall's magazine gave Legler and his creation a feature article. McCall's also compiled a 1952 Child's Guide to the United States. For Arizona, the guide listed three places: the Grand Canyon, Montezuma National Monument and the Valley of the Moon. In 1953 LIFE Magazine also published a feature article.

By the end of the 1950s Legler worked part-time at the Cerebral Palsy Clinic. In 1963, Legler, then age 78, realized that falling eyesight would no longer allow him to continue his tours and shows. He became a recluse, living on the property. With the death in 1966 of Frank Thibault, who lived to the end in the house he built, Legler became alone and mostly forgotten. He disappeared into the overgrown and deteriorating fairyland until a band of Catalina High School students with childhood memories of visiting the property climbed the fence – and found the old man. The students rescued him from the destitute garden to become his advocates and guardians. In 1973 they formed "The Valley of the Moon Restoration Society" with Legler. The group began the repair and stabilization of the property.

Two years later in 1975, the Valley of the Moon was listed on the Arizona State Register of Historic Places. Five years later the property was deeded to the Valley of the Moon Restoration Society, which was eventually renamed (and is known today as) "The George Phar Legler Society."

At the end of his life Legler said: "And I did – I've made people happy all my life. I never got any money out of it! I didn't do it for money. I've made 300,000 children happy – isn't that pretty good." (Legler quoted in McGuinn)

Some day in your life, when the late afternoon sunlit crown,  
Perhaps in springtime, in the late afternoon,  
Travel the rainbow's bend to this Faerie Town,  
And know the incredible beauty of the Valley of the Moon.  
Legler.

George Phar Legler died 22 February 1982 at the age of 97. His ashes were scattered in his Valley of the Moon.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

## Criteria Consideration C

### *Storybook Style and the development of Valley of the Moon (1920 – 1932)*

The 1880 arrival of the railroad in Tucson marked a dramatic shift in architectural styles and community development. The arrival of new cultural idioms and the availability of new materials changed the direction of building from traditional adobe Sonoran row houses to a eastern American aesthetic.

In contrast to Sonoran buildings that defined open space, American buildings were defined as detached objects on a property. The single Sonoran building form that accommodated a variety of functions was replaced by architectural forms as diverse as their functions. Ornamentation, relatively nonexistent in the Sonoran architectural tradition, was celebrated in the American buildings and followed prescribed architectural styles codified in widely distributed pattern books. (Nequette: 20)

The railroad facilitated the rapid expansion of the city and its population. The city became a melting pot of cultural identities and architectural expressions. Tucson became the largest city in the Arizona territory, and with increased investment came a plethora of new architectural styles.

George Phar Legler, who had worked for the railroad in Colorado, relocated to Tucson in 1916.

The years following World War I brought a shift in Tucson development as mining claims began to dry up. The city began courting new economic opportunities from health seekers and tourists. The warm dry Sonoran Desert was the ideal climate for those infected with tuberculosis, for whom many sanitariums were built. Tucson also became a destination for Americans fascinated with the “West,” who were served by a booming tourist market. Guest ranches, hotels and boarding houses all accommodated travelers looking for the “Great American West” with architectural Revival styles deemed “regionally appropriate.”

The 1915 Panama-California Exhibition at Balboa Park in San Diego celebrated the Spanish Colonial Revival style, creating a “Regional Style” that was embraced by communities in the southwest shifting away from eastern trends. Tucson emerged in the 1920s with a monumental public building program featuring such extant examples as the Rialto Theatre, The Pioneer Hotel, The Temple of Music and Art, and the Pima County Court House – all designed in increasingly popular Revival styles.

The 1920s, from some points of view, were the best years Tucson had ever had – perhaps the best she would ever have. Not every hour was crowned with roses; not every year was a triumph. But if the decade was not pure gold, it was at least gold-plated [...] The town was big enough to be called a city but not too big to keep its community spirit. It was prosperous enough, but not prosperous. (Sonnichsen: 202 )

The explosion of interest in and development of Revival Architecture would give birth to the distinctive Storybook Style in California. Developed in the milieu of 1920s Hollywood, Story Book Style was a combination of fairy-tale, medieval and renaissance revival. Through the new media proximity of film, this fantasy-to-reality expression inspired Legler and influenced the concept, development, and construction of Valley of the Moon. The development of Storybook Style has been articulately described in Arrol Gellner’s, book *Storybook Style: America’s Whimsical Homes of the Twenties*. The following are quotations from this comprehensive essay:

Fairy Tale , Disneyesque, Hansel and Gretel – these are all common synonyms for the “Storybook Style,” a rambunctious evocation of medieval Europe, and surely the most delightful home style of the twentieth century. Its tenure was brief: it appeared on the American scene in the early 1920s, reached its flowering shortly before the Great Depression, and was all but forgotten by the late 1930s. Storybook Style Houses were the product of architects and builders with a distinct flair for theater, a love of craftsmanship, and not least a good sense of humor – attributes that make them especially endearing to the jaded modern eye.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

Storybook Style homes are also relatively rare. They are vastly outnumbered by the ubiquitous California Bungalow, the most popular home style of the 1920s. They are uncommon even among their more straitlaced Period Revival contemporaries – Mediterranean, Normandy, and the so-called Stockbroker’s Tudor – of which they are strictly speaking a subset. But while Storybook Style homes often share traits with these more upright cousins, attempting to classify them as such based upon this detail or that misses their real essence, which owes more to inventiveness than authenticity.

Three attributes set classic Storybook Style homes apart from other Period Revival styles of the ‘20s: their exaggeratedly plastic and often cartoonish interpretation of medieval forms; their use of artificial means to suggest great age; and last, that all but indefinable quality known as “whimsy.” These are houses that embody the utmost joy in creation, yet which never demand to be taken too seriously.

To understand how the Storybook Style materialized as the court jester among 1920s home styles, we must look back several hundred years, to the eighteenth-century English movement known as the Picturesque. The term Picturesque was originally applied to an English school of landscape design that arose in reaction to the rigidly formalistic landscape schemes typified by gardens such as those at Versailles. While the latter sought to assert man’s dominance over nature, the Picturesque school espoused naturalistic compositions meant to mimic nature herself.

Gellner discusses The San Diego Panama-California Exposition and its influence on various Revival styles:

The Exposition’s effect on California architecture was also more lasting than expected: its idyllic buildings and courts ignited a Californian love affair with the Spanish Revival [...] By the early ‘20s this popularity had broadened into a general fascination with European revival styles in general. The stage was now set for the Storybook Style.

The whole range of Spanish Revival subtypes – Mission and Mediterranean, and Pueblo – was soon joined by reinterpretations of rural French architecture, whose popularity had soared after The Great War, and by an array of medieval and post-medieval English styles known variously as Tudor, Elizabethan, Jacobean or Half Timbered.

In 1904, brewing magnate Adolphus Busch had exaggerated the expatriate Scottish landscape architect R.G. Fraser to transform a barren arroyo on his Pasadena winter estate into a singular garden doted with a group of Old World features of the most theatrical kind, including an old mill complete with a water-wheel and stone statuary depicting nursery-rhyme themes. Curious Angelinos flocked to the erstwhile private gardens in such numbers the Busch opened them to the public free of charge in 1905. Busch gardens not only became a beloved destination for Sunday outings, but predictably enough was also tapped as a location for a number of films including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Robin Hood*.

During the Roaring Twenties, there arose two peculiar conditions that would bring the Storybook Style to fruition. The first had to do with the film industry itself. By the early 1920s, the star system had already begun to form. [...] As studios prospered and these “movie people” grew wealthy, a demand arose for homes that would suitably reflect both the status of the stars and the fantasy embodied in the film industry itself. Unlike businessman, these houses would be fanciful monuments to the pathologically flamboyant.

The second condition was one of logistics. The Los Angeles basin was home to burgeoning film industry whose craftsmen were already second to none in evoking the appearance of by-gone eras and faraway lands. Hence Hollywood was uniquely qualified to produce homes of the Storybook Style’s felicity and originality. No starch-collared East Coast architect could have endowed these houses with such a sense of theater.

Perhaps the most literal example of Storybook Style’s Hollywood lineage is the Spadena House. Designed by art director Harry Oliver in 1912 and built for the Willat studio in Culver City to house offices and dressing rooms, the building doubled as a movie set and appeared in a number of silent films of the ‘20s. It was moved to Beverly Hills in 1924.

Valley of the Moon

Name of Property

Pima, Arizona

County and State

The Valley of the Moon is a rustic variant of the Storybook Style. Legler's garden has the rhythm, character and period of development which correspond with the movement, yet is built is a rough raw variation which are expresses his amateur technique. Yet, like Storybook Style in Southern California, Legler's work is done with craftsmanship and care. For instance, his miniature buildings use much smaller stones than his full-size creations, but the meticulousness and flavor of arches, windows, and overall rhythm are the same. The miniature fairy dwellings evoke the Middle Ages, while other buildings such as the Tower Of Zogog evoke a Renaissance form in massiveness and roofline, while the Enchanted Garden evokes an antiquity of no particular origin. The overall sweet ambience suggests the distinctive work of Arthur Rackham (1867 – 1939), one of the most popular illustrators of children's fiction, including the works of Carroll, Poe, and the Brothers Grimm. Legler's conception is in complete harmony with the gentle fantasy universe of Rackham's delicate Art Nouveau illustrations.

Legler specifically designed his works for the perspective of children, as seen in low archways, low benches, and the child's-eye view of his many stonework details. Children were led to look deeply into ground-level structures, and high in the sky for the details mounted on his artificial hills. This anticipated by over 30 years the similar ideas of scale which Walt Disney employed in the design of the original "Disneyland" (1954).

The locations of buildings and structures are all connected with curved paths and viewsheds specifically designed to gradually reveal new wonders to the "pilgrim" visitors, including the various long curved stone benches and curved vegetated backdrops with their miniature stone features. As in the design of movie back-lot locations, this curving design motif, and the subtle false perspective in structure design and location, in addition to increasing visual interest, creates the illusion that the property is much larger than it actually is.

"The Mountain Gnome" intended The Valley of the Moon, his unique architectural creation in Arizona, to be enjoyed at twilight and by candlelight. Seen in these ways, the vast detailing is given a subtle boost in "reality" and one can easily imagine the dances of the fairies in their special places.

George Phar Legler was primarily inspired by storybooks. One can hardly conceive of a more specific example of Storybook Style than The Valley Of The Moon.

Valley of the Moon  
Name of Property

Pima, Arizona  
County and State

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Valley of the Moon

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Pima, Arizona

County and State

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Pima, Arizona

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Valley of the Moon  
Name of Property

Pima, Arizona  
County and State

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: Arizona Historical Society

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 2.3  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>12</u> Zone	<u>506193</u> Easting	<u>3571005</u> Northing	3	<u>12</u> Zone	<u>506242</u> Easting	<u>3570814</u> Northing
2	<u>12</u> Zone	<u>506243</u> Easting	<u>3571006</u> Northing	4	<u>12</u> Zone	<u>506197</u> Easting	<u>3570813</u> Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the District correspond with the boundaries of Pima County tax parcel numbers: Parcel 112-01-0340 and 112-01-0550 in Section 29, Town: 13.0, Range: 14.0E. The district is located mid-block with the entrance located at 2544 East Allen Street.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Valley of the Moon Historic District boundaries reflect the original property boundaries as purchased by George Phar Legler in 1923. The 2.3-acre property has remained intact and contains all historic resources associated with the District.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Demion Clinco  
organization Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation date March 2010  
street & number PO Box 40008 telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Tucson state AZ zip code 85717  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_