

THE ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

www.alameda-preservation.org

April, 2008

ALAMEDA BY RAIL—TAKE THE RED TRAIN

Presented by Grant Ute

Sunday, April 27, 2008 at 7:00 PM

First Presbyterian Church

(Corner of Santa Clara Avenue & Chestnut Street)

Parking available behind the church, enter from Santa Clara • Doors open at 6:30 PM • \$5 for non members
Signed books will be available for \$20.00

ALAMEDA BY RAIL

By Judith Lynch

Alameda's rail and trolley lines of yore are celebrated in a recent book, *Alameda By Rail*. The book's authors, volunteer trolley operator Bruce Singer and photo archivist Grant Ute, were introduced in 2004 at a West End Chinese eatery. They became instant colleagues and dove headlong into research on the history of Alameda transportation. Their glut of material became two lectures for the Alameda Museum, "Trains, Ferries, and Trolley;" and "A Trip on the Red Cars." Those presentations were turned into *Alameda By Rail*, published by Arcadia and selling for only one Jackson, quite a bargain for well over one hundred images, many new to local transportation hounds.

Transportation was a powerful force that influenced the development of Alameda, a peninsula turned into an island in 1902 when the tidal canal



Willow Street Station January 12, 1941, the Sunday before abandonment of service. (Bay Area Electric Railroad Association Archive)

severed the city from Oakland. Before the Posey Tube and the Bay Bridge aided automobile travel, a robust train-ferry system made trips across the Bay quick and comfortable.

The train-ferryboat connection was the brainchild of Alameda entrepreneur A.A. Cohen, who founded the San Francisco and Alameda Railroad on Railroad Avenue in 1864. The route ran west to a long pier at Alameda Point where the ferries were berthed. Later a second rail line, the South Pacific Coast Railroad, was built along Encinal-Central. The trains all ran to the West End, where they connected to boats that steamed to the San Francisco Ferry Building in under 30 minutes.

The railroad tracks helped spur the residential and commercial development of Alameda. Along their routes, major builders and architects constructed whole tracts of Victorian homes and bungalows serviced by clusters of stores that grew up around the train stations. Population on the Island grew steadily,

as many San Francisco families moved here, enticed by the felicitous climate and the ease of commuting. Later, the trains were replaced by electric street cars, including the Red Star cars and the charming diminutive "Dinkies" that ran along Park Street.

Little is left to recall these forms of transportation. Lincoln (formerly Railroad) and Encinal-Central Avenues are extra wide because rail track ran down the middle, and both thoroughfares are marked every few blocks by signs heralding various "stations." Only the Fifth Street station remains, the deteriorating hulk at 500 Central Avenue.

Grant Ute is a first generation Alamedan who grew up near West Portal in San Francisco, where he developed a penchant for public transit. He helped found the Friends of the San Francisco Railway Archive and co-wrote *The San Francisco Market Street Railway*. Ute works as a volunteer archivist at the Bay Area Electric Railroad Association F.M. Smith Library and has just completed cataloguing their Alameda material. During thirteen years of commuting to San

Francisco by ferry, Ute grew fascinated by the history of the Southern Pacific Red Train and ferry service.

Author Singer grew up in Southern California in the days of Pacific Electric interurban railway system. Sadly and suddenly, he died last summer. "You don't often meet an honest lawyer, a funny businessman, or a man who, despite success in both fields, really wanted, deep down, to work on the railroad. When Bruce retired from the practice of law, he became an avid volunteer at the Western Railway Museum. His Saturdays were spent in full regalia operating antique trains and streetcars out at Rio Vista. When he and Grant finished *Alameda By Rail*, Bruce was delighted to finally have his own Library of Congress number," according to Judith Singer, his wife of forty years. She will be at the AAPS presentation, where she will reminisce briefly about Bruce and introduce speaker Ute.

Judith Lynch serves on the Historical Advisory Board and teaches at Washington School.

City Begins a Strategic Plan for Auto Row. Opportunity Presented to Reduce 100' Height Limit and Preserve Historic Buildings.

On March 15, 2008, the City of Alameda and its consultants, City Design Collective, conducted a community visioning charrette for the Park Street Commercial District north of Lincoln, also known as Auto Row. The study area is bounded by Lincoln Avenue, Oak and Everett Streets and the Estuary. AAPS sent out a Preservation Alert for this event.

The charrette was intended to help form the foundation of a strategic plan for the study area. A primary purpose of the strategic plan is to address the expected departure of the major auto dealers and related uses from Auto Row.



Nonresidentially zoned Victorian houses on Buena Vista Avenue east of Park Street

AAPS believes that the strategic plan should accomplish the following objectives:

1. Ensure that all buildings within the study area are properly evaluated for historic significance, including the feasibility of restoration of altered buildings. The study area includes some of Alameda's oldest and most historically important buildings. Some of these are well known, such as the 1886 Fossing Building (aka the "Silver Building") at 1629 Park Street, but others are less obvious. One of these, 1623 Park Street, dates from 1871, making it one of Alameda's oldest surviving commercial structures, but it has been severely altered. Although none of its original façade surfaces are currently visible, much of it may still be intact under the existing surfaces.

2. Rezone historic residential areas to zones that permit residential uses and other uses compatible with the existing historic residences. The study area has many historic residential structures that are currently not zoned residential. This has encouraged intrusive nonresidential uses, some of which are Auto Row related and which might leave when the auto dealers leave. Their departure could create opportunities for new infill residential or other uses that

are more compatible with the historic residences. These areas should be rezoned to permit both residential use and other uses compatible with the existing historic residences. The nonresidential zoning can also make obtaining mortgages on residential properties more difficult, encourage disinvestment in historic residential structures and prevent restoring residential uses in buildings that have been converted to nonresidential. Restoration of such buildings should be considered in the strategic plan.

3. Reduce the 100' height limit to 40' and three stories in nonresidential areas as called for in the City's General Plan, and 35'-40' in residential areas, as provided in the study area's existing residential zones. Much of the study area now has a 100' height limit which is totally out of scale with the existing development and creates the risk that new development will be similarly out of scale.

AAPS also believes that the study area boundaries should be expanded to Broadway on the east and to include the west side of Oak Street. Several large Auto Row related uses are on the west side of Oak Street. The eastern expansion area continues the study area's patchwork pattern of historic houses and incompatible nonresidential uses, including Auto Row related uses.

About 40 people attended the charrette, including at least 14 AAPS members and several residents and business owners from within the study area. **AAPS is very pleased with the good attendance from our members and would like to thank those who came.**

The charrette began with a consultant presentation suggesting that a combination of retail, residential and office development might be most appropriate for the area. Possible prototypes were planning proposals for Rio Vista and for San Pablo Avenue through El Cerrito.

AAPS believes that the charrette went very well. Attendees were divided into six groups to provide input. The feedback from most of the groups included recommendations similar to those from AAPS and none that were inconsistent with AAPS's recommendations.

Besides the AAPS recommendations, other comments included:

- New buildings should be compatible with the existing historic buildings, but "should not look like Disneyland."
- The structure at the northwest corner of Oak Street and Clement Avenue dates from 1909 and is Alameda's oldest large industrial building and should be preserved. The building has had its windows covered over or removed and

Totally remodeled street facades of 1623 Park Street, built in 1871, but altered probably in the 1950s-1970s.



Rear of 1623 Park Street to the left showing original form and some detailing. Rear of 1605-1613 Park Street, also very old and with a totally remodeled street façade, is on the right.



other alterations, but these changes can be corrected. Possible uses include a marketplace.

- The recently installed historic style streetlights on Park Street south of Lincoln should be continued north of Lincoln all the way to the Estuary. One group said that the brightness should be reduced.

- Off street parking should be shared and at multiple locations, rather than a single parking garage, and should be behind businesses fronting Park Street or possibly second story parking above the businesses hidden behind pleasing architecture, as has been done in Walnut Creek. Parking access and other curb

cuts should be from side streets, not Park Street.

- Provide outdoor cafes and restaurant seating areas along the Park Street sidewalk and the Estuary.

- Provide upscale shopping, as well as marine uses. New retail should primarily provide stores that Alamedans now leave town to shop, rather than focusing on attracting outside customers to Alameda.

- Provide pedestrian access to the Estuary through the middle of blocks along Blanding, like Redwood Alley on Park Street. Provide a wide pedestrian promenade along the Estuary, possibly with some vehicular access.

- Make the Work Live Ordinance less restrictive.

- Provide a more welcoming entrance to Alameda.

Please note that the above non AAPS comments are not necessarily endorsed by AAPS.

An "open house" will be held on April 17, 6-8 p.m., Room 360 in City Hall where the public can review the consultant's urban design concepts and provide additional feedback to shape the strategic plan. This will be followed by Planning Board, Economic Development Commission and City Council review of the draft strategic plan. Final action by the Council on the strategic plan is expected in early summer.

Historic Preservation Season in Alameda

With many apologies, Judith Lynch would like the AAPS members who called to sign up for the Sacred Spaces walk with Richard Rutter, to please call her again at 748.0796.

Repeated from previous issue . . .

Last year, at the urging of Planning and Building director Cathy Woodbury, a subcommittee sprang to life staffed by members of the Historical Advisory Board (HAB), the Alameda Museum and AAPS. The group organized the best ever celebration of Historic Preservation month. Usually the fantod is in May; last year we had so many events that it grew into a season. Here are the activities underway for this year.

2008 Theme:

"Preservation is Good Business"

Thursday, April 24, 7:00 p.m. "A Home in Alameda" a slide lecture by author and historian Woody Minor, sponsored by the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. Free for Museum members, \$5 for others.

Saturday, May 3, 1-3 p.m., "Kids & Queen Victoria," eleventh annual art show with work from sixteen elementary classes, opening reception featuring Alameda Unified School District Superintendent Ardella Dailey and Queen Victoria. Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. Sponsored by Alameda Education Foundation and the Alameda Museum. Free.

Tuesday, April 22, 7:30 p.m City Council proclaims Historic Preservation Season! (because we have too many events to fit into one month) Note: See part of the "Restoration Retrospective" exhibit in the hallway on the ground floor of City Hall. Sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. Free.

Saturday, May 10, "Sacred Spaces," an exploration of churches in the Park Street Historic District led by architect Richard Rutter. Meeting place and time TBA. Limited to 40 participants. Reservations and comfortable shoes are required. Many stairs, limited handicap access. Reserve a slot by leaving a message at 748.0796 by May 6. Sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. Free.

Saturday, May 17, 11:00 a.m. starting place TBA, "Walkabout on Webster,"

led by author and historian Woody Minor. Sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. Free. (Note: This walk originated last year when Woody prepared it for AAPS members.)

Sunday, May 18, 11:00 a.m.–5 p.m. New Meyers House exhibit: "An Age of Elegance: Wedding Finery from Yesteryear." 2021 Alameda Avenue, admission \$5. Exhibit held in conjunction with the St. Joseph's Annual Garden Tour. For Meyers House information call 523.5907. For Garden Tour information, call 864.8503.

Thursday, May 29, 7:00 p.m. "Strolling Historic Park Street," a slide lecture by authors Dennis Evanovsky and Eric Kos. Sponsored by the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. Free for Museum members, \$5 for others.

Sunday, June 1, 7:00 p.m. Eleventh Annual Historic Preservation Awards presented by the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS), First Presbyterian church, Santa Clara Avenue and Chestnut Street. Free.

For information leave a message at 748.0796.

Electronic Newsletters

By Nancy Hird, Membership Chair

For some time, the AAPS Board of Directors has thought about supplying members with an electronic version of newsletters rather than paper copies. We have been hampered by a lack of correct e-mail addresses despite some members frequent requests to receive the newsletters through their e-mail addresses. Joyce Mercado's recent work to produce a flier about how to become more environmentally responsible was the final nudge we needed to pursue electronic transmission for members who want to reduce paper in their lives.

The 2008 dues renewal mailings included a mechanism for members to state their preferences for how they receive their newsletter. Newsletters are produced prior to a general membership meeting, typically early February, late April, early June and October so they appear 'sporadic'. We fill in with special mailings and Preservation Alerts as news occurs plus all members are invited to our annual holiday party.

Members who have designated they would like to receive newsletters electronically will begin with this service beginning with the April edition of the newsletter. (We hope.)

If you have not renewed your membership, please do. We count on your support to continue our programs to maintain our unique architectural heritage in Alameda.

AAPS Contributors

Partner:

Cornelia Grunseth, Northwest Painters
Bill Essert, Wooden Windows
William Houston
Mike and Karol Luque
Jeannie Graham
Adrienne Lakadat
Bob and Claire Risley

Other:

Andrea Medulan
Dennis Reno
Gordon Stevenson and Kathy Lavtz
Mark White and Henry Villareal
Catherine Baker
Claudia Lewey

GET INVOLVED AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

The Preservation Action Committee meets at 7:00 pm on the first Monday of each month to address issues important to the architectural preservation of the City of Alameda. Committee meetings are open to all AAPS members. If you would like to attend a meeting or would like more information, please call Chris Buckley at 510.523.0411. We are making an impact within the community. It's fun and informative. We encourage all members to get involved!



FREE trees and shrubs in one to fifteen gallon containers are available, including deodora cedars, lindens, maples, oaks, redwoods, viburnums and more. Call Chris Buckley at 523-0411

Alameda Museum Lectures 2008

- **Thursday April 24: "A Home in Alameda,"** by local hero Woody Minor (or other topic TBA). Underwritten by Ginger Schuler; member, Alameda Museum Board; Realtor, Harbor Bay.
- **Thursday May 29: "A Stroll Down Historic Park Street"** presented by Dennis Evanovsky and Eric Kos in honor of Historic Preservation month. See stunning then and now images of the Park Street Historical Commercial District. Underwritten by the law office of Gina Mariani.
- **Thursday June 26: "Eccentrics, Heroes, and Cutthroats of Old Berkeley,"** another magical tome about the legacy of "Berserkeley" by Richard Schwartz, a perennial Museum lecture circuit favorite. Underwritten by Robbie Dileo, member, Alameda Museum Board.

All lectures take place at the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue off Park Street. The Museum opens at 6:30 p.m. on lecture nights. Come by early to save a seat and enjoy the exhibits in the History Gallery and the contemporary work in the Art Gallery. Lectures are free for Museum members and \$5 for others. For lecture information leave a message at 510.748.0796.

AAPS Board Members 2008

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In this issue Alameda by Rail—Take the Red Train, Plans for Auto Row, Electronic Newsletters

AAPS Membership Coupon

If you would like to join the AAPS or renew your membership, please send this portion back with your payment. Membership Chairperson Nancy Hird at 523.0825

Name: _____

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☐ renewal ☐ new member

Check your Membership category:

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P.O. Box 1677, Alameda, CA 94501

AAPS SCHEDULE OF EVENTS for 2008

Sunday, April 27

Grant Ute - Alameda by Rail

Sunday, June 1

Preservation Awards

Sunday, September 28,

11am–5pm

Alameda Legacy Home Tour

October, Date TBA

Bill Essert (Wooden Window)
and his Wonderful Window Machine