



Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A Presentation by Woody Minor

Marcuse & Rimmel: A New Approach

Sunday, April 19, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church (Corner of Santa Clara Avenue & Chestnut Street. Parking available off Santa Clara Avenue.)

FREE for AAPS members; \$5 for non-members



Visiting Old Territory with a New Slant

Woody Minor will be presenting an overview of his new book, *A Home in Alameda*, to be published by the Alameda Museum in May. The book is a reprint of two earlier booklets published under the auspices of the Historical Advisory Board—*Bay Station Heritage Area* (1988) and *Leonardville Heritage Area* (1992)—with an introduction containing new material about the firms of Marcuse & Rimmel and Joseph A. Leonard.

Minor will also talk about the AAPS-funded Marcuse & Rimmel database being compiled by Kevin Frederick. This “digital portal” will include a comprehensive range of data and images on hundreds of individual buildings, allowing homeowners and architecture buffs alike to surf through the firm’s entire output.

The partners Felix Marcuse and Julius Rimmel and the designer-builder Joseph A. Leonard rose

continued on page 2...

Woody Minor in front of a full-sunburst Queen Anne cottage, 1530 Lafayette Street, designed and built in 1892 by the Alameda firm of Marcuse & Rimmel.

Visiting Old Territory... *continued from page 1*

and fell with the real estate market of the late 1880s and 1890s. Their stories are intertwined, in time and place, shedding light on a whole period of our history. Marcuse & Rimmel was the homegrown firm, composed of established residents. Leonard was the new kid on the block, but he hit the ground running when he came to town.

The Marcuse & Rimmel Families in Alameda

Felix Marcuse came to San Francisco from Berlin in the 1860s, when he was around 20. He and his wife and young daughter moved to Alameda around 1879, taking up residence at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Sherman Street, in the Bay Station commercial district. Marcuse operated the biggest general store between Park and Webster Streets, selling everything from crockery and clothes to fruits, wines and liquors.

The Rimmel family came to Alameda around the same time as the Marcuses, residing in the area now known as the Gold Coast. The patriarch, saloon-keeper Jacob Rimmel, immigrated to America from Germany in the early 1850s. He settled in Sacramento, later moving to San Francisco.

The oldest of the Rimmels' six children, Julius, who was born in Sacramento in 1855, taught piano and voice. By the time he married, in 1894, he was a partner with Felix Marcuse in the city's most prolific homebuilding firm, Marcuse & Rimmel.

Marcuse & Rimmel: Homebuilders par Excellence

Alameda's building boom of the late 1880s and early 1890s was not unlike the late lamented housing market. The value of land and houses soared during those years, inducing many residents to "get into real estate." In 1888, Felix Marcuse began selling land in new tracts, and the following



A pair of speculative Queen Anne cottages at 1609 and 1611 Bay Street, designed and built in 1892 by Marcuse & Rimmel. The nearby Bay Station Heritage Area is the largest concentration of houses by the firm in Alameda.

year Julius Rimmel started building speculative houses—buying lots, hiring architects and builders, and selling the finished product.

Marcuse and Rimmel joined forces in 1890. During the ensuing decade, the firm would build over 500 buildings, mostly houses in Alameda. They also designed and built dozens of houses in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and Vallejo. The firm's main office was at Bay Station, next door to Marcuse's old store.

Marcuse & Rimmel specialized in high-basement cottages in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles, catering to working class and professional clients. Most are in the central part of Alameda, within a mile or so of the firm's office. The Bay Station Heritage Area comprises the single largest group, containing more than 30 houses.

Leonard Comes to Town

The Joseph A. Leonard Company ran a close second to Marcuse & Rimmel in terms of output. A native of Texas, Leonard came to San Francisco in the 1880s. He and his wife and four children moved to Alameda in 1887, at the onset of the real estate

boom. Leonard soon became the most successful realtor in town.

A trained architect and builder, Leonard soon began buying up tracts of land near Chestnut Station, bordering the bay shore. The dozens of houses he erected there in the 1890s gave rise to the name "Leonardville." Leonard's houses were mostly two-story residences in the Queen Anne style, and his clientele were more prosperous, including many businessmen who commuted across the bay to San Francisco.

The finest house in Leonardville was the mansion he erected for his family at 891 Union Street, on the bay shore. The mansion looked out over the bay to the shingled clubhouse of the Encinal Yacht Club, off the foot of Grand Street, which Leonard also designed. He was the club's longtime commodore and the owner of its fastest yacht, *El Sueño*. The life he created for his family in Alameda had something of a "Great Gatsby" feeling, and he was one of the progenitors of the Gold Coast mystique.

A severe downturn in the economy in the 1890s led to the demise of both firms. The Joseph A. Leonard Company closed its doors in 1898, followed two years later by the bankruptcy of Marcuse & Rimmel. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Come to the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society's April lecture for the full story. *Story by Woody Minor*

A group of dapper Alamedans at Bay Station. The Marcuse sign advertising insurance, real estate and money to loan is visible on the left.
(Courtesy of the Alameda Museum.)

Historic Preservation “Season” Declared

Devotees of vintage buildings are invited to more than a dozen activities reveling in the preservation of our architectural heritage. So many events are scheduled that the Alameda City Council is declaring April, May, and June “Historic Preservation Season”! With more than 4,000 historic structures, Alameda has a lot to show off. From gingerbread Victorians, delirious Queen Annes, comfy Craftsman homes, and sturdy Bungalows, to the Art Deco of the Alameda Theater and the Art Moderne left by the Navy at Alameda Point, these rich and varied styles of architecture enrich and enliven our island hometown.

Local Organizations

Three organizations that thrive on history—the Historic Advisory Board, the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) and the Alameda Museum—have organized all manner of presentations, walks, lectures, and tours to help people understand, recognize, and enjoy evidence of our past. The business community is also involved, and co-sponsors include the Alameda Association of Realtors, the *Alameda Sun*, the Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Alameda Business Association (GABA), the Park Street Business Association (PSBA), and the West Alameda Business Association (WABA).

Vintage buildings are tangible evidence of history readily available to us all. Local author Woody Minor describes Alameda as an open air museum. “Want to see history? Just walk outside and look around,” he often says. Woody will lead a walk as part of the season at a location to be revealed later. You can join architect Richard Rutter in a “Webster Street Walkabout” that will visit secret spaces and historic sites in the West End with a visit to a restored Craftsman to cap off the tour.

Exciting Events for the Season

A visitor from the ethereal zone will appear in May, when Queen Victoria inspects the artwork of hundreds of elementary students who are studying the history, homes and culture of Alameda built during her reign (1837-1901). Dynamic slide lectures by local experts will include Hank Dunlop on the original Fernside, and Minor’s talk on his new book, *A Home in Alameda*. Historic Preservation Season culminates with the 12th annual AAPS Preservation Awards highlighted by dramatic before and after images of acclaimed restoration projects.

Celebrate the legacy of historic preservation and restoration in Alameda! For additional information, pick up a flyer at the Planning and Building Department, ground floor, City Hall. Visit these informative

websites: www.alamedamuseum.org and www.alameda-preservation.org. Check the *Alameda Sun*, read the *Park Street Business Association Newsletter*, the *Alameda Museum Quarterly*, the AAPS *Alameda Preservation Press*, and the Chamber of Commerce insert in the *Alameda Journal*. Or leave a message at 748-0796 to receive a leaflet with dates and times. *Story by Judith Lynch*



City Council member Frank Matarrese presided over the 11th “Kids & Queen Victoria” show at the Alameda Museum. He stands next to Queen Victoria (Edison teacher Connie Turner) with Kenny Bob Mecham.

ALAMEDA HISTORIC PRESERVATION EVENTS 2009

Tuesday April 21, 7:30 p.m.

City Council proclaims Historic Preservation Season, because we have too many events to fit into one month!

Saturday, April 25, 11:00 a.m.

“Wandering on Webster,” a walk led by architect Richard Rutter. Sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. Location TBA. **Free.**

Saturday, April 25, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

“Where History Lives,” Meyers House Museum, 2021 Alameda Avenue. For information call 523.5907. **Admission \$4.**

Thursday April 30, 7:00 p.m.

“A. A. Cohen and Old Fernside,” a slide lecture by architect and historian Hank Dunlop,

sponsored by the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. **Free for Museum members; \$5 for others.**

Saturday May 2, 11:00 a.m.-noon

“Kids & Queen Victoria,” 12th annual art show with work from Alameda elementary students, opening reception featuring Queen Victoria. Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. Sponsored by Alameda Education Foundation and the Alameda Museum. **Free.**

Saturday, May 16

“Topic TBA” a walking tour led by local author and historian Woody Minor. Sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. **Free.**

Saturday, May 23, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

“Where History Lives,” Meyers House Museum, 2021 Alameda Avenue. For information call 523.5907. **Admission \$4.**

Thursday May 28

“A Home in Alameda,” a slide lecture by Woody Minor based on his new book about Victorian era development on the Island. Sponsored by the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue. **Free for members, \$5 for others.**

Sunday, June 7, 7:00 p.m.

12th Annual Historic Preservation Awards sponsored by the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS), First Presbyterian Church, Santa Clara Ave. and Chestnut St. **Free.**



The Little House Cafe was converted from a 1904 Colonial Revival residence to a quaint eating establishment when The Perforce Foundation purchased the property for an expansion of their offices. The project is an outstanding example of preservation of a small building that many developers would have considered a detriment to the overall project.

Reinvented Houses Preserve and Attract

Preservation can be successful when it allows historic structures to adapt to contemporary needs, even in business districts. Many Union Street stores in San Francisco were once homes. You also can view this in Province Town on Cape Cod and in New Hope, Pennsylvania. All these places have become destinations *because* of the charm of the old houses that are now a part of a sales tax-generating enterprise.

Already we have many examples of these revenue producers in Alameda. Part of one fraternal organization building has become a coffee shop. Two Park Street automobile dealership buildings have become going concerns again as a beauty school and a marketplace. Many large old houses along Santa Clara and Central Avenues between Oak and Grand Streets have been adaptively reused as offices. Preservation Park in Oakland is another example of such adaptive reuse.

The reader can probably think of many other adaptive reuse examples which show how new life can be given to an old building. Let's hope that the future developers of our city can see their intrinsic worth as well.

City Council Approves “Deconstruction” of Victorian House at 2314 Buena Vista

Conditions Attached Requiring Continued Efforts to Move the House and to Postpone Deconstruction Until Issuance of a Building Permit for Replacement Project.

At its March 3, 2009 meeting, the City Council approved removing the Queen Anne Victorian house at 2413 Buena Vista Avenue from the City's Historic Building Study List and demolition of the structure. The Council's decisions were rendered in a 4-1 vote with Councilmember Doug deHaan dissenting, and was taken on appeal by the owner, Bill Phua, after decisions by the Historical Advisory Board (HAB) to retain the building on the Study List and to deny the demolition application. Mr. Phua would like to have the building removed in order to provide additional parking for a new retail project at the northeast corner of Park Street and Buena Vista Avenue on the property formerly occupied by Cavanaugh Motors, one of Park Street's recently departed car dealers.

Although AAPS would prefer that the house be preserved within its existing block, we recognize the importance of Mr. Phua's project to the City due to the departure of the auto dealers and the major reduction in City sales tax revenues that their departure has caused during a time of fiscal crisis. AAPS therefore supports the project, but we urged the City to require Mr. Phua to make a good faith effort to have the house moved.

City Council Imposes Conditions

In approving the demolition, the Council imposed the following three conditions:

1. A demolition permit for the structure at 2413 Buena Vista Avenue shall not be issued until after building permits for the principal project are issued.
2. Property owner shall, to the maximum extent feasible, make the structure at 2413 Buena Vista available for relocation to another site and shall provide adequate notification of this availability.
3. Property owner shall, to the maximum extent feasible, make materials generated from the deconstruction of the structure available for reuse or salvage either on or off site.

The first two conditions were recommended by AAPS. The third condition was requested by Councilmember Doug deHaan. Mr. Phua said he could accept these conditions.

At the Council meeting, thirteen people spoke in favor of preserving the building, either on site or relocating it, including six AAPS members, HAB members Randy Miller and Mark Irons, and five residents of the surrounding Wedgewood Neighborhood. Two representatives from the Park Street Business Association and two neighboring business and property owners supported the demolition, although two of these speakers agreed that losing the house would be unfortunate. Three members of the development team, including Mr. Phua, also spoke in favor of the demolition.

Prior to the Council action, the applicants advertised the availability of the house for moving on craigslist.org and reported receiving 22 inquiries, of which two initially seemed very promising. However, both of these proposals were subsequently withdrawn because the prospective developers, after inspecting the house, concluded that moving and rehabilitating the structure would be more expensive than building new.

Other Possibilities

Following the Council meeting, Mr. Phua's representative, Barbara Price, advised AAPS that they will resume advertising the building and that another promising proposal has been received to move the house. Mr. Phua advised the City Council that he expects building



permits to be issued in about six months, by which time the house will need to be off the lot.

Moving the building to the former Island High School site one block away at the northwest corner of Eagle Avenue and Everett Street may be a fallback possibility, if other relocation proposals are not implemented. It will require cooperation from the Alameda Unified School District and would also need, according to Acting City Manager David Brandt, to be looked at "in the context of a larger project", which may involve moving other structures.

This case sets the stage for zoning changes and design guidelines to implement the recently adopted Park Street North of Lincoln Strategic Plan (see February, 2009 AAPS newsletter). The new zoning and guidelines will apply to the entire Park Street Business District and surrounding blocks. Public meetings on the rezoning and design guidelines are expected to begin in March or April. **AAPS encourages its members to attend these meetings.** We will keep you informed on the exact dates.

Call to Action

If you know anyone who may be interested in moving the house and who has a site where it can be moved to, have them contact **Barbara Price, PK Consultants at 633-9550 or barbara@pkconsultants.com.**

AAPS BOARD MEMBERS 2009

President

Nancy Hird 523-0825

1st Vice President

Valerie Turpen 522-3734

2nd Vice President

Rachel Bennett 748-9470

Treasurer

Bob Risley 864-1103

Corresponding Secretary

Holly Sellers 521-2299

Recording Secretary

Kevis Brownson 522-4966

Member at Large

Jeannie Graham 769-9287

Advisor to the Board

Christopher Buckley 523-0411

For more information, please contact:
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society
P.O. Box 1677, Alameda, CA 94501
510-986-9232 • www.alameda-preservation.org

Newsletter Design: Valerie Turpen 510-522-3734

We Have a WINNER!

Did you notice our new masthead? The one that says, "Preservation Press" was submitted by Lisa Dosa. We actually received about 25 wonderful entries and the board had a difficult time selecting the one that best conveys our image and message.

So, how do you like our "new look"? We have tried to achieve a fresh appearance of an inviting and well written newsletter to give you the latest news about Alameda preservation issues. We hope it will both educate and entertain our membership.

Come to our next General Membership Meeting to congratulate Lisa in person as she receives her award and prizes. It will be at 7:00 on the evening of April 19th at the First Presbyterian Church of Alameda.

NANCY HIRD

AAPS PRESIDENT 2009

Dear AAPS Members

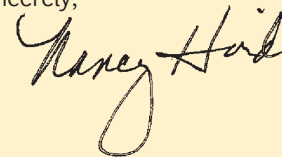
In the last issue, I discussed many ways AAPS members can support the preservation efforts of our organization. I suggested activities such as helping with General Membership Meetings, writing up a narrative to accompany a Preservation Award, organize our entry in the Mayor's Parade on July 4th, helping with the Legacy Home Tour and/or Holiday Party and serving on the Preservation Action Committee. In this issue, I need to make an urgent plea for help with publicity.

For many years, Jeannie Graham has used her journalistic skills to serve as our volunteer publicist. Prior to each General Membership Meeting, Jeannie has written up an article about the presentation using information that is usually furnished by the speaker. She works with the board member who is the contact person with the speaker to develop a visually interesting publicity piece and then sends the articles to various publications for print. Newspapers and magazines devote some space for free public interest articles as a public service. Since there is no guarantee anything will be printed, Jeannie follows up with the publications' staff members with whom she works to maintain personal relationships.

Now, Jeannie is embarking on a new business opportunity and would like to discontinue her volunteer publicist job. This leaves AAPS with a real gap in getting information out to people who may be interested in our programs. If anyone can step up to take on the role of our publicist for AAPS, with Jeannie's help, you can make a very real contribution to our organization. While helping AAPS, a new career (and portfolio) may be started that could potentially lead to a paid opportunity as a publicist for other organizations.

As always, please call me with your interest in helping AAPS. I can be reached at 523-0825.

Sincerely,



IN THIS ISSUE:

- *Marcuse & Remmel:
A New Approach*
- *Historic Preservation
Season Declared*
- *City Council Approves
Deconstruction of
Victorian House*

 printed on recycled paper.

Free Trees & Shrubs

IN 1-15 GALLON CONTAINERS.

Selection includes:

- Deodora Cedar
- Linden
- Maple
- Oak
- Redwood
- Viburnum

and more!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
CALL CHRIS BUCKLEY AT 523-0411**

AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS for 2009

APRIL 19

Marcuse & Remmel: A New Approach
by Woody Minor
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JUNE 7

Twelfth Annual Preservation Awards
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 27

The Alameda Legacy Home Tour

OCTOBER 18

History of Alameda Naval Air Station
by Dick Rutter
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH