alameda-preservation.org | June 2017

# Alameda PRESERVATION

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY Press

## Winners of the Twentieth Annual Preservation Awards

Sunday, June 4, 2017

Alameda Point Theater 2700 Saratoga Street • Alameda, California

### The Alameda Portal Shines Again

Story by Kay Weinstein

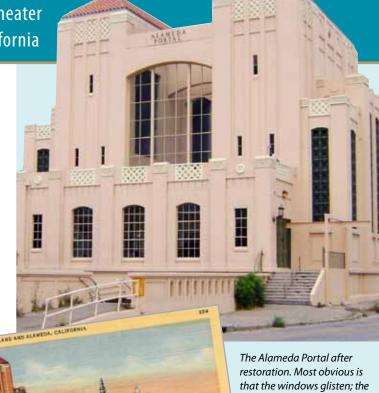
Award Recipients: For Restoration/Rehabilitation California Department of Transportation, 2015 - present

ne of our most iconic structures is the Alameda Portal which is the entrance to the Posey Tube that carries vehicular and pedestrian traffic from Alameda to Oakland. This beautiful Art Deco structure was designed by prominent Alameda architect Henry Meyers in 1928. His work includes ten veterans buildings throughout Alameda County, numerous public buildings and churches, as well as his home, The Meyers House and Garden. His home and the Alameda Portal are both City of Alameda Historical Monuments.

Incidentally, the Posey Tube is the second-oldest underwater vehicular tunnel in the United States, preceded only by the Holland Tunnel on the East Coast. The Posey Tube

was named after George Posey, Alameda County Surveyor during the tunnel's planning and construction, and also chief engineer on the construction project. The Webster Street Tube opened in 1963 to carry the increased traffic between Oakland and Alameda. Both are immersed tubes, constructed by sinking precast concrete segments to a trench in the Estuary floor, then sealing them together to create a tunnel. The Posey Tube replaced a swing bridge that interfered with maritime traffic. The Alameda Portal also houses the exhaust and fresh air fans for the Posey and Webster tubes. The design for the ventilation of toxic

continued on page 2...



asbestos board windows were replaced with impact and glare-resistant glass.

Vintage postcard of the Alameda Portal showing two-way traffic through the Posey Tube.



The portal before restoration showing boards in the windows. Many details on the exterior (inset of eagle relief) were removed in the 1960s.

vehicular exhaust fumes was modeled on that of the Holland Tunnel, and Ole Singstad (who designed the pioneering ventilation of the Holland Tunnel) was consulted.

Funding for the restoration and rehabilitation of the Alameda Portal, as well as the Posey and Webster Tubes, came from the State Highway Operations and Protection Program, and was managed by the California Department of Transportation. The project was approved for both safety and historical reasons. It was noted in the project description that all work would conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings.

Construction began in December 2015 and the major work was completed in January of 2017. The results are stunning! One first notices the salmon color of the Alameda Portal; the original paint colors were identified and replicated. Perhaps next one notices the historic light fixtures on top of the pylons that were refurbished by JAM Services in Livermore. Based upon original designs, 12-54 Industries in San Marcos manufactured the new light fixtures on the approach structures above the sidewalk. The windows glisten; the asbestos board windows were replaced with impact and glare-resistant glass. Cluttered signage at the approach was removed to provide better visibility of the structure's pylons. The new railings are reminiscent of the original design and provide pedestrian and bicycle safety.

There was much rehabilitation inside the building as well: drop ceilings and asbestos flooring were removed; walls, ceilings, and floors were repaired and repainted. New spotlighting was added to the exterior of the portals. Closed circuit television cameras were installed. Roof drains were repaired. Of further historical interest, decorative relief panels removed in the 1960s were recreated based on original drawings. These eagle, chevron and wheel reliefs are visible on all four exterior sides of the Alameda Portal.

Alameda Architectural Preservation Society looks forward to seeing the final details of this amazing project. We thank Noah Stewart, the Branch Chief of Built Resources and Architectural History at Caltrans for answering our many questions.



### A Classic Shows a Rediscovered Face to the Street

Story by James Smallman **Award Recipients: Lois and Bill Francis** 



Bill Francis redesigned the wrap-around porch to be more consistent with what could be discovered of the design of the original porch. The house had acquired a Craftsman-style porch in the early 20th century.

rand Street in Alameda proudly displays some of the finest homes in this historic city. The broad avenue provides the many strollers ample opportunity to enjoy the great architecture. One especially outstanding example is the Eastlake-style residence at 1012 Grand Street. Constructed in 1881 by the firm of Gilbert & Brown for a cost of \$5,500, this was an early indicator of the prominence that Grand Street would enjoy.

The house has been beautifully restored over the years by its current owners, Bill and Lois Francis. As restorers sometimes discover, there often is an element of archeology blended with their construction. Shortly after acquiring the home, they found brackets and porch posts in the basement which did not match the porch then on the house. It was soon obvious that the existing porch, a Craftsman-style, was a later addition. Alameda Museum curator George Gunn dates that construction to 1918-1922.

Bill Francis redesigned the wrap-around porch to be more consistent with what could be discovered of the design of the original porch. The porch posts on the newly constructed porch were milled to match those found in the basement. The originals were redwood, now difficult to obtain, so the new posts were milled from mahogany. The steps were redesigned to match the original footprint, discovered in the area surrounding the 1918 steps. The brackets were duplicated by Bill, using the example found in the basement.

#### A Classic... continued from page 2

The floor of the Craftsman-style porch was reused. It is unknown if the wrap-around porch now on the house duplicates exactly the footprint of the original porch, but there is no existing photo of the house showing the original, so best approximations were required. An appropriate corbel design was duplicated from another Eastlake-style house in Alameda. The frieze, simulating fret-work, was similarly adopted.

Bill gradually produced all the decorative elements of the porch himself, though he carefully notes that he had to have the newel posts and porch posts milled by others. But his craftsmanship and attention to detail are evident for all to see. The porch is a wonderful addition to the Grand Street collection of spectacular houses.

Newel post, rail, and bracket details of the porch at 1012 Grand.







### Classic Alameda Streetlights are Ready to Light the Way

Story by Brian McDonald

**Award Recipients: Alameda Municipal Power** 

n 1886, Alameda became one of the first cities in the country with a municipally owned electric company. At the same time, Thomas Edison and others were developing incandescent light technology in the hope that it could be made a practical alternative to gas lamps. In fact, the first commercial installation of electric lights occurred six years earlier on the steamship *Columbia*.

Within a couple of decades, the technology for electric bulbs had advanced enough that streetlights were a practical application. In 1911 the Alameda Department of Electricity embarked on an ambitious program to light all the major streets in town with electric fixtures. The original fixtures were short posts with round globes on top. This style remained the standard until 1925, by which time the city had installed over 4,000 such fixtures all over town. Many remain, mostly on side streets in residential neighborhoods.

Beginning in 1935, the city began to replace the pole lamps with taller pendant style fixtures (ones where the bulb hangs down from an arched or horizontal cross beam). From 1935 to 1958, the city adopted several different styles and technologies. After 1958, they went with modern "cobra headed" street lighting.

Over time, citizens came to appreciate the grace and beauty of the various older styles, and in 1987, the City Council declared 1,297 of the classic lamps to be historic structures. However, by the early 2000s some of these increasingly ancient structures were deteriorating, and it was time to consider necessary restoration. On October 4, 2012, the Historical Advisory Board approved refurbishing 684 of the pole lamps and fluted fixtures. The original plan was to replace the structures with fiberglass replicas, but preservationists convinced the city that they would be too different from the originals to meet federal preservation guidelines. The final plan was to replace the steel poles and repair and repaint the shrouds, arms, and fixtures. The refurbished elements would be attached to the new poles and reinstalled. Foundation work, new anchor bolts and extensions, trench work, and new wiring and conduits would be done as needed.

Under the direction of project manager Ludwig Simpao, Alameda Municipal Power completed the work between June, 2014 and June, 2015. The restored lights are as beautiful as they were when installed decades ago, and ready to light the way for decades to come.



## Maintaining the Home of Truth: 1300 Grand Street

Story by Jerri Holan

**Award Recipients: The Home of Truth Board and Community** 



The entrance to the Home of Truth designed by architect Bert E. Remmel and built by Olaf M. Magneson in 1905. The cost of construction was \$6,500.

ooks can be deceiving. When you drive by the building at 1300 Grand, at first glance, you think it's another large, beautiful Alameda home.

However, upon closer examination, you notice the sign in the front yard and a bookstore sign next to the front door. And then you spot the small, shiny brass letters over the front door, HOME OF TRUTH, Spiritual Center.

The Home of Truth was established in San Francisco in 1887 by the sisters Annie Rix Militz and Harriet Hale Rix, luminaries in the New Thought Movement. A branch church was established in Alameda several years later, followed by others up and down the coast and across the country.

Today, only the Alameda facility remains. After hearing a New Thought Movement lecture, Annie Rix learned to cure herself of migraines and deafness. She was inspired, along with her sister Harriet, to found the Christian Science Home in San Francisco, soon renamed the Home of Truth. Through their travels and efforts, more than 20 other Homes were opened across the U.S., beginning in Alameda.

The 1905 shingled and half-timbered Arts & Crafts design has a relaxed, residential feeling—a non-traditional approach contrasting with the formality of most church architecture of the period. The architect, Bert E. Remmel, was an Alameda resident who had designed a number of homes in the Gold Coast. The shingled house next door at 1709 Alameda Avenue, also by Remmel, was built at the same time. Now a private residence under separate ownership, it first served as the home of the sisters' mother, the widowed Alice Rix, who provided the funding for both buildings; she lived there until her death in 1915. Harriet Hale Rix herself lived on the upper floor of the sanctuary.

Tudor-inspired, the Home of Truth at 1300 Grand Street features wood shingles and divided-lite, double hung windows on the ground floor. Upstairs, the modest Church is finished with stucco and half-timbering and utilizes divided-lite casement windows. On the west facade, two large gables anchor the building amid mature trees.

As one enters, one notices the brick column supports on either side of the stairs. They are an early example of clinker bricks, often misshapen bricks made denser by their proximity to the hot kiln fire. Clinker bricks were named for the sound they make when struck together. They were first used in English walls during the 19th century and were

made popular in California during the Arts and Crafts movement. No two bricks are alike. The chimney at the rear of the building also features similar clinker bricks.

Inside and out, the simplicity of all the Home's details speak to a concern for spiritual well being over a desire to impress in the physical world. The backyard gardens, too, provide a quiet place for reflection and conversation. The Garden House was added in 1928 and is used for Sunday School, community events and group meetings.

The Home in Alameda has been in good hands throughout the years. The handsome facade has not been altered and many of the improvements are unseen. The foundation was replaced and in 2011, the Church upgraded the entire electrical system. In 2013, the large roof was reshingled. With the blessing of the congregation, Ellen Dougherty, a Church member, improved the gardens. More recently, The Home hired renowned color specialist Bob Buckter to select custom colors for the Arts & Crafts home and Olsen Painting executed the work wonderfully. Charming new garden fences are also a new and welcome addition to the complex and when they were installed, the steps leading from the Home to the garden were also finally brought up to code.

Today, the Home of Truth is in the process of removing a 750-gallon underground diesel tank and will replace their antique sewer lateral at the same time. AWR Remediation of Alameda has expertly handled what could have been a very hazardous situation.

Thanks to the current Board and past members who have contributed to the building's health and well-being, the Home of Truth is as beautiful today as it was when it was built in 1905. And with all its improvements, it's ready for the 21st Century.





The Home of Truth features Arts & Crafts details such as half-timbering, shingles, wood brackets, and clinker bricks.





Isabelle Clark had this bench and the retaining wall with the inscription "In memory of my dumb friends" placed in Jackson Park in 1920. After being destroyed by a falling palm in 2013 it was restored by the determination of Alameda residents joining the "Save The Bench" campaign.

## Restoring the Bench for Our Dumb Friends and Others to Enjoy

Story by Brian McDonald • Award Recipients: Save The Bench Committee – Denise Shelton, Betsy Mathieson, Jack Mingo, and Jim Manning

n November, 2013, as the top of a palm tree came crashing to the ground, it took an important piece of Alameda history with it. Jackson Park is our town's oldest city park, and the "dumb friends" bench at its south end is generally considered the oldest "hardscape" installation in any local park. (Hardscape is any landscape feature using materials such as concrete or the like, in contrast to plants). Built in 1920, the bench and the retaining wall with the inscription "In memory of my dumb friends" were the brainchild of Isabelle Clark, a wealthy animal lover who lived near the park. In those days, the phrase dumb friends was a common term for dogs and cats and other pets. Dumb was strictly a synonym for mute then, long before it got the alternate meaning of mentally slow.

The falling tree destroyed most of the wall with the inscription and damaged much of the surrounding walkway. The initial reaction of the city authorities was that reconstruction would be too difficult and expensive, and the best option was to tear down the bench and replace it with a simpler park bench and landscaping.

Numerous residents from throughout Alameda gathered to save the bench, testifying at Recreation and Park Commission and City Council meetings, and committing to raising funds to finance the restoration. The city agreed to the plan, and the Recreation and Park Department contributed the first \$5,000. Under the leadership of Denise Shelton, Betsy Mathieson, Jack Mingo, and Jim Manning, the group formed Save The Bench and raised the rest of the needed funds. Tucker's Ice Cream donated all the proceeds from their new flavor "dumb friends bench blueberry buckle".

A city contractor demolished the damaged areas (and all of the retaining wall to accommodate wheelchair access standards) and constructed new platforms and ramps. Victor Amador of Soft Concrete designed and constructed a new retaining wall, duplicating the curves in the alignment of the original wall and the arched top. By May 2016, the entire installation had been rebuilt and looked much as it had in 1920.



The bench after the top of a palm tree came crashing down onto it destroying the decorative wall in front with the "dumb friends" inscription..



A new plaque was installed acknowledging those who helped save the bench and improve the surrounding site.

## A Phoenix in Disguise 643 Central Avenue

Story by Jerri Holan

Award Recipients: Owners – Ruben & Araceli Quezada

**Architect: Thornton Weiler** 

Contractor: Tony & Gonzolo Gonzalez, Calsystem Restoration Services

hen the 2015 fire from next door spread to the roof of 643 Central, no one could have imagined how the Victorian cottage, ca. 1894, would eventually arise from the ashes. Two years later, after much loving restoration, the humble dwelling has been brought back to life.

The fire remediation work was quite extensive. The roof and all the windows were replaced and the interior was completely gutted. During the course of putting it all back together, the owners, Ruben and Araceli Quezada, and their architect, Thornton Weiler, poured through period books and millwork catalogs to faithfully bring back period details to their small home. Both Ruben and Araceli are humanities professors, so historical research was almost second nature to them.

The Quezadas purchased their home in 2012 and discovered its twin right around the corner on Taylor Avenue. Using it for inspiration, the owners brought back the covered front porch that had been concealed. They also discovered the original chamfered porch post and are reusing it to support the roof. New stairs were widened and centered on the front door with generous turned balusters all of which bring back period proportions to the front facade. 22 windows were replaced with wood double-hung windows (including ogee lugs and Victorian trim!). They removed the melted vinyl siding to discover original shingles and replaced them faithfully on front and rear gables, including the scalloped courses. They even discovered some original windows on the property-line wall but had to cover them back up for fire safety. And once they saw the City's 1979 photo, they decided their new garage doors would match the original carriage style doors.

According to Thornton, the project was an architect's dream job: complete period detailing inside and out, including the fireplace and interior staircase. Period light fixtures and traditional wainscoting grace the small but airy interiors. The basement was made legally habitable and the new back porch matches the front with turned wood balusters. Period colors, wainscoting and finishes on the inside complement the newly restored exterior.

In all, the restoration work cost \$450,000 but was worth every penny. In fact, while the fire was certainly a disastrous event, for this phoenix, it was a blessing in disguise. The home has been refurbished, strengthened, and restored — it's ready for the next 100 years. Alas, 641 Central has yet to be reborn. But we hope 643 will be its inspiration.





Left: 643 Central Avenue as it appeared in a photo from the 1979 Survey.

Below: The burned remains of the house next door can be seen in this image as the Quezadas' cottage nears completion.



Right: Melted siding revealed original wood shingles underneath.





Left: The home restored with a new fence in front.

## Wescafe Brings Style to 1518 Webster Street

Story by James Smallman
Award Recipients: Monica & Miguel Trejo

escafe is a wonderful example of adaptive re-use. Owners Miguel and Monica Trejo acquired the badly damaged building about four years ago. A series of unsuccessful restaurants preceded their ownership, and concerned friends tried to convince Miguel and Monica to open their restaurant on Park Street, which was perceived to be a more inviting atmosphere. Monica felt that Webster Street "needed" them, however, and the very successful restaurant that now anchors their block is the result of their determination. Thenmayor Beverly Johnson told them, as the restoration began, that their restaurant was Alameda's most critical: If it succeeded, it would encourage other entrepreneurs to come to Webster Street, but if it failed it might set Webster Street back years. As it happened, a renaissance of Webster Street has evolved over the years since that first tentative step. Street trees, new restaurants and outdoor seating areas now grace the area.

The restaurant that preceded Wescafe abandoned the building, leaving the building badly vandalized in their apparent frustration. The new owners repaired holes in the roof, installed new electric and plumbing systems and developed the interior in a sensitive and artistic fashion. Painted brick walls were cleaned and left exposed, adding texture and warmth to the interior. The area behind the building was developed into a pleasant outdoor eating area, enhanced with a softly gurgling fountain.

The façade was opened up to the street and seating area in front. A façade grant from the city helped to make the front an attractive addition to the street. Much was accomplished by simply removing uninspired remodeling from earlier owners. The original brickwork in front was uncovered and cleaned, returning the building to its 1920 era origins. An ungainly awning was replaced with a lighter adjustable version. Installed higher up on the façade, the interior is now bathed in light and presents a friendly open atmosphere. Surviving glass blocks, inexplicably painted over by earlier owners, were cleaned.

As a friendly historical nod to the street, Monica and Miguel commissioned a wonderful mural which graces the back wall of the food preparation area. It shows a view down Webster Street a century earlier, when electric trains ran along the street. (In a little bit of artistic license, the train in the mural is a steam train, of the kind that ran on Lincoln Avenue.)

In passing, it should be noted that the rebirth of Webster Street as a vibrant pedestrian-friendly commercial area continues. Visitors to Wescafe will observe serious construction going on next door. Scheduled to open in the summer of 2017, a Cambodian restaurant is being developed. Monica says that the owner has visited her place and instructed her designers to be inspired by what has been done at Wescafe.



The Wescafe Mural behind the counter depicting a steam train arriving in early Alameda.



Left: The building had been renovated with several modern embellishments over the years completely covering the original façade.

Bottom Left: An inviting courtyard is located behind the building.

Below: Original brickwork in front was uncovered and cleaned, returning the building to its 1920 era origins. An ungainly awning was replaced with a lighter adjustable version.





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### AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2017

#### SUNDAY, JUNE 4 7:00 PM

20th Annual Preservation Award Gala
ALAMEDA POINT THEATER
ALAMEDA POINT

#### SUNDAY, AUGUST 27 1:00 PM

Woody Walk: '20s and Beyond WOODY MINOR KRUSI PARK

#### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22 7:00 PM

Residential Seismic Retrofit
IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

# PRESERVATION AWARD PLAQUE



## PRESERVATION AWARD WINNERS

### HISTORIC BUILDING

## CITY HISTORICAL MONUMENT

AAPS has plaques for buildings that are past Preservation Award winners, plaques for buildings that are historically significant and/or architecturally intact or are part of a historic district, and plaques for City Historical Monuments.

To learn if your building might qualify, see our information page alameda-preservation.org/programs/historical-plaque-program/

For some categories, you can even apply online!

**Questions?** Please email plaques@alameda-preservation.org.