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Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

— Woody Walk —

FERNSIDE

Sunday, August 26, 2018 at 1:00 pm

Meet at Edison School: Corner of Lincoln and Versailles
Free for AAPS members; \$10 for non-members



FERNSIDE: Fabulous Place, Fabled History by Woody Minor

The 2018 walk is our third annual look at East End architecture of the early 20th century. To date we've explored Craftsman bungalows through World War I and Spanish and Ranch bungalows through World War II. This year we complete the picture with a stroll in Fernside, the city's iconic development of the era. Laid out in 1925 on the site of Alameda's premier 19th century estate, the neighborhood is a showcase of fine homes in revivalist and modern styles.

The Cohen Estate

Fernside was the home of the attorney Alfred A. Cohen, a key figure in local history. He acquired the land in the 1850s, built the town's first railroad in the 1860s, and commissioned one of the state's great mansions in the 1870s. Born in London in 1829 to a Jewish merchant and coffee planter whose fortune waned with the abolition of slavery, Cohen migrated to Canada at age sixteen and left for California during the gold rush. The young clerk adroitly navigated San Francisco's turbulent financial waters before being implicated in an 1855 bank failure. After a year in jail, where he studied law, he was a married man with an office in the city and a home in Alameda.

Fernside's grounds stretched north from the pioneer town between High Street and Versailles Avenue, covering over a hundred acres surveyed by Chipman and Aughinbaugh for Alameda's planned expansion, land the partners lost to foreclosure. The estate extended from Central Avenue to the neck of the peninsula, now bordered by the excavated canal that made Alameda an island. It was a magnificent property, a park-like expanse of oaks and meadows, at its center a Gothic Revival villa encompassed by lawns. Cohen and his wife, Emilie, the daughter of a renowned Quaker physician and amateur scientist, would raise their seven children here.



EMILIE GIBBONS COHEN

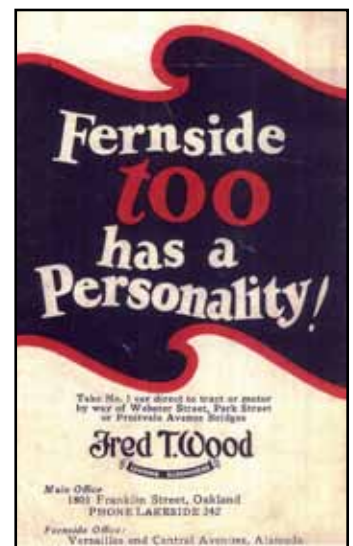
The establishment of a rail line in 1864, and its acquisition by the Central Pacific several years later, made Cohen a very rich man. The palatial residence he erected at Fernside in the early 1870s hinted at his stature, bringing to mind the Nob Hill mansions of the moguls he represented in court; designed by Wright and Sanders, architects of the Mark Hopkins residence, it was among the largest houses in California. Cohen didn't have long to enjoy it. He died in 1887, and the house burned ten years later.

Emilie Gibbons Cohen outlived her husband by four decades. After the fire she continued to live on the grounds in a bowling alley fitted up as a residence; furniture and artworks rescued from the fire were stored in the stable and hung on walls. She died in October 1924. Settling the estate proved to be a messy affair, and the *Alameda Times-Star* gave it front-page coverage. After six months of wrangling the children finally agreed to subdivide the property.

Creating a Subdivision

Named for the venerable estate, Fernside would remain the city's largest residential development until the mammoth bay-fill projects of the second half of the century. At the behest of the heirs, the project was overseen by the Bank of Oakland, the family executor, with actual development delegated to Oakland realtor Fred T. Wood in partnership with local realtor John J. Mulvany. About 75 acres were subdivided, comprising the portion south of the SP right of way on Fernside Blvd., which had been extended through the property in 1910. The orphaned

Right: An early advertisement for the subdivision.



The palatial 1870s Cohen mansion burned in 1897. It was the centerpiece of the Fernside estate, developed in 1925 for the Fernside subdivision. Historical images: Cohen-Bray House.

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waterfront tract north of the tracks stood vacant until the late 1930s, finally subdivided by another developer as Fernside Marina.

The 1925 survey by Oakland civil engineer Charles E. Prather created nearly 500 lots in a dense configuration leavened by a few curving streets. The L-shaped property, with its south ell at Central and Versailles, posed a challenge. Prather responded with a diagonal road (Gibbons Drive) winding from the southwest corner at Central Avenue to the northeast corner at High Street. At the tract's center the complementary curves of Southwood and Northwood Drives form an oval bisected by Gibbons (resembling a heart, the area takes in the site of the mansion). New street names were chosen to reflect the site's sylvan beauty (Northwood, Southwood, Yosemite) and history (Gibbons, Fremont) while appealing to the aspirations of the purchasers (Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Cornell). The tract's appeal was enhanced by the placement of utility poles along rear property lines, leaving the streets wire-free.

The timing was excellent. Real estate sizzled after five tepid years of postwar recession; the demand for land and houses would not abate until the dazed aftermath of the 1929 crash. In four frenzied days in May 1925, when the tract was opened to the public, nearly 150 lots were sold. The first building permit was issued on July 1st. Over the next five years, before the depression reduced construction to a trickle, houses went up in Fernside on the average of one per week, totaling 300 residences by 1930. Housing starts regained momentum after 1935. By the time America entered World War II, late in 1941, only fifty vacant lots remained. Trees are as much of a legacy of the era as houses. At the behest of the homeowners' association, the city planted liquidambar along Gibbons Drive in 1928, followed by ginkgos on other streets, greatly beautifying the neighborhood. Sadly, few of the heritage oaks remain.

A large proportion of the homeowners were businessmen and professionals, with local merchants, doctors, and lawyers well represented. In addition to architectural requirements the covenants included racial restrictions, a disturbingly common practice at the time. Aside from their sheer injustice, these provisions contributed to the subdivision's aura of escapism.



Erwin residence, 2930 Gibbons Drive, 1950.

Paul R. Anderson, architect.

Architectural images: Woody and Mark Minor.



Burnley residence, 1622 Moreland Drive, 1928.

Walter H. Anderson, builder.

Through the Looking Glass

The vicissitudes of Fernside's development, from first flush in the 1920s to final infill in the 1960s, is reflected by its architecture. Placed on the market when exotic revivalism was in full bloom, the tract proved fertile ground for Spanish and Medieval designs from storybook cottages to pattern-book haciendas. The streetscapes bring to mind a movie lot, stucco arches and tile roofs vying with peaked turrets and half-timber gables: Zorro v. Robin Hood. Colonial Revival felt out of place in this hothouse environment and few examples were ever built. The modern Ranch mode made its appearance in the 1930s, diluting the heady mix of fantasy.

The subdivision was the domain of a new generation of architects and builders who came to the fore after World War I, though a few oldtimers like George H. Noble and A.W. Smith also made their mark. Noble built his last house here in 1925. As head of the board of realtors, he devised a creative program for vocational students at Alameda High School. The board provided land and materials; the students did the work. Two Fernside houses were built in this manner. Famed Victorian architect Joseph Cather Newsom also produced his last work here, at age 75; the cottage row capped a 50 year career.

But it was the newcomers who set the tone. Local builders Walter H. Anderson, Hans Christian Hansen, P. Royal Haulman, Noble F. Justice, and John H. Pickrell each built at least twenty houses in the tract, accounting for over a fourth of the total. And while it appears that builders produced most of the plans for the tract's houses, Oakland and San Francisco architects designed a sizable minority. There are fine specimens by Paul R. Anderson, W.W. Dixon, Kent & Hass, Miller & Warnecke, F. H. Slocombe, Paul V. Tuttle, Williams & Wastell, and others. In their work we witness the shift from revivalism to modernism.

Of the architects associated with Fernside, none played a more significant role in the early years than Edwin J. Symmes (1883-1935). A skilled revivalist who oversaw the concessions at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and went on to design Neptune Beach, he and his wife took up residence in Alameda in 1915. Three years later they moved into their new home one block west of the

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old estate—the city's first example of Spanish Colonial Revival. Symmes became the subdivision's first supervising architect with responsibility for reviewing plans and designing model homes, a position he held until he left the area in 1927. His custom work included a 1926 Spanish revivalist house for Edgar A. Cohen, the only member of the family to reside in the tract. It will be one of the stops on this year's walk, encapsulating the history and architecture of a remarkable neighborhood.



*Edgar A. Cohen residence, 3004 Bayo Vista Avenue, 1926.
Edwin J. Symmes, architect.*

**Woody Minor will give an illustrated lecture on
FERNSIDE: THE STORY OF A NEIGHBORHOOD
THURSDAY, AUGUST 23 AT 7:00 PM**

Alameda Museum Lecture Series

ELK'S LODGE

2255 Santa Clara Avenue

**Admission is free for Museum members • \$10 for others
For more information visit alamedamuseum.org**

ALAMEDA LEGACY HOME TOUR

Sunday, September 23, 2018

11:00 am to 5:00 pm

Calling All Docents!

FREE ADMISSION to the tour in exchange
for being a docent on either the
early or late shift.

**Two shifts: 11:00 am – 2:00 pm
2:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

Enjoy a day of Alameda's finest architecture and finish with
a wonderful party after for docents and homeowners.

To sign-up contact HTDocents@earthlink.net

Tour info at alameda-legacy-home-tour.org

510-205-6762

Costumes admired but not required.



Strolling Alameda's Streets, an Architectural Time-travel Experience

by Conchita Perales



Admiring the work of local architect Henry H. Meyers. Images: Conchita Perales.

Strolling Alameda's quaint streets is such a delight and an inspiration due in great part to the beautiful and interesting houses that you see along the way. Questions inevitably arise as to what style, what time period and why are there distinctive details here but not there? Once you start to learn to distinguish the different architectural styles and eras of the homes and buildings you see, your walk will take on a whole new dimension.

Some of us experienced it first-hand this spring, when Judith Lynch, local author, teacher and amateur historian, took us on a time-travel experience highlighting some of the 19th and early 20th century buildings spread throughout the island, from the era of Queen Victoria to the magic of Storybook homes. With leisurely walks through different neighborhoods and complementing slide shows, her breadth of knowledge and depth of content opened a fascinating

window into the past and into the current state of some of Alameda's architectural gems. Now on its sixth year, her Mastick class "Alameda Development and Architecture" is a thorough grounding in architectural styles and an enlightening guide on how to decode vintage buildings and appreciate their evolving features.

Karen Lithgow, one of the students in the group, describes it best: "Judith's class taught us how to identify and appreciate the many beautiful features of vintage homes and see them clearly amongst the outdoor history museum of Alameda's streets. I know the difference now between pendants and finials and regularly count the sides of bay windows to figure out when they were built. Loved every minute of it!"

With a clear message on the importance of preservation and restoration, you quickly understand why we all have a part to play in the fight to preserve Alameda's architectural heritage.

If you love to walk and are interested in learning more about Alameda's architecture, don't miss Judith's next course "Reading the Street". In five 60 minute sessions, beginning and ending at Mastick Center (on Wednesdays starting September 12th), you'll learn to recognize fancywork building details, compare house styles, learn about vintage street lamps and sidewalk stamps while being regaled with local lore along the way.

So "whether you are a longtime Alamedan or a newcomer, you will be enlightened and delighted by every one of Judith Lynch's Mastick class sessions" says Johanna Hall, Judith's student, colleague and friend. "Judith engages participants with her unparalleled architectural and city planning expertise as well as her unique perspective and love for our little island city. Many students repeat her classes because they learn something new each time!"



Mastick students had a magical time visiting Stonehenge during their final class.

Reading the Street

11:00 am – Noon
Wednesdays, September 12 – October 10

is a five session class with one slide show and four walks.

Free for a limited number of Mastick members. **Call 510-747-7506.**

Alameda Artist Spotlight

by Candace Rowe

AAPS is pleased to feature a series of accomplished artists who have focused on Alameda architecture.

Bonnie Boller started exploring her creative side at a young age, influenced both by her parents and by her extended family. Her rich artistic heritage includes her grandfather Frank Randall and uncle Earl Randall, two of the neon artists that created the historical marquee for the Alameda Theater.

Although she continued to explore different artistic interests throughout her education, she eventually became an elementary school teacher here in Alameda. In her spare time she continued to nurture art both in herself and in others, a passion that led her to later found the Clay Art Center, a place for teaching and creating art.

Today Clay Art Center has evolved to become more of a private studio for Boller, while her teaching has taken her into the community



Dappled in Harbor Bay

working with adults and seniors. She currently has over 35 students who study through morning and afternoon classes and independent lab time.

In the 1970s, Boller was concerned with the destruction of the beautiful Victorian architecture on the island and became active in efforts to preserve them. She is inspired by the design and detail in the beautiful old homes, and especially appreciates how paint colors and techniques can be used to accentuate these details.

Boller has her own way of accentuating these beautiful details. Her stark linocuts are achieved through a printmaking method using a sheet of linoleum, in which a subtractive cutting method is used to take away the parts of linoleum that the artist wants to remain the color of the paper. The parts of the linoleum left behind are inked using a brayer or brush. Usually black ink is used on white paper, but color inks may also be used. The linocut is then put on the press and fine paper is laid over it for printing. The resulting image can be reproduced over and over again, with fine differences in the lines.

In addition to putting in regular time at her studio, Boller is president of Island Alliance of the Arts, a non-profit dedicated to promoting art in Alameda. She shows her work with several local organizations, and can be reached through her website.

At Home on Central Avenue

bonnieclayart.com
email at bonnieclay@aol.com
510-865-0541

Presented by Alameda Architectural Preservation Society & Alameda Museum

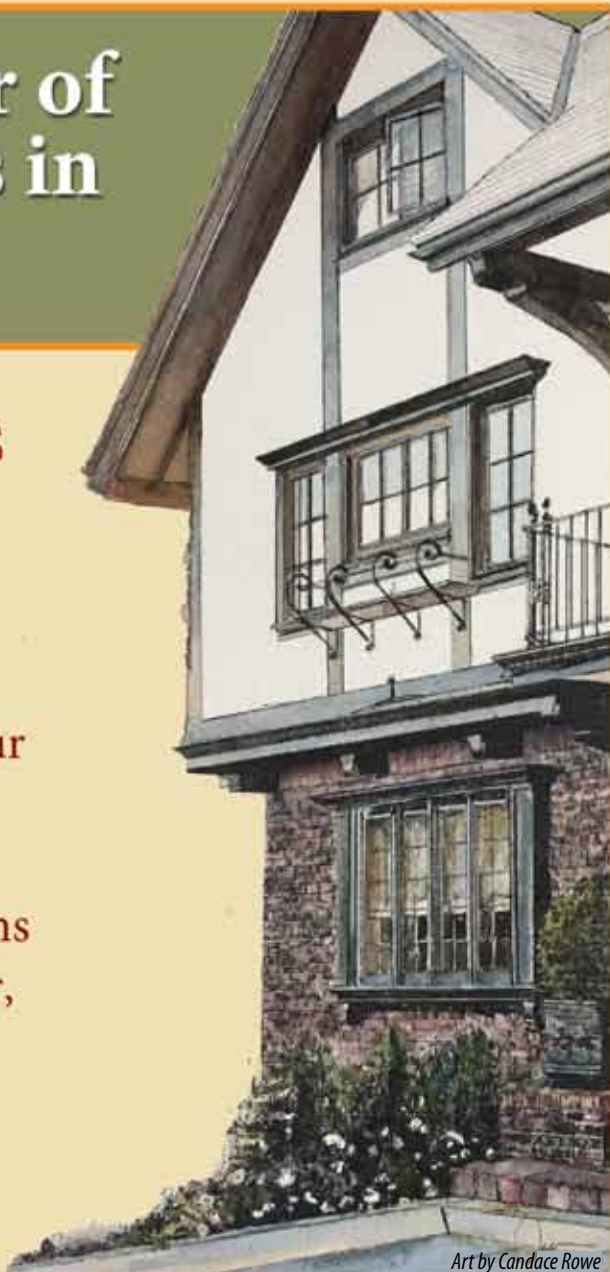
ALAMEDA LEGACY HOME TOUR

September 23rd, 2018
11:00 am to 5:00 pm

A Self-Guided Tour of
Six Historic Homes in
Central Alameda

\$35 Advance Tickets
\$40 Day of Tour

Our tour will take you two to three hours to complete depending on your pace. You'll be provided a Legacy Guidebook with a map and detailed architectural and historic descriptions of each one of the homes on the tour, and there are docents at every home that will guide and answer any additional questions you may have.



Art by Candace Rowe

Tickets & Information Online:
Alameda-Legacy-Home-Tour.org



P.O. Box 1677
Alameda, CA 94501

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PRESERVATION ACTION COMMITTEE

GET INVOLVED & MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

We maintain a Google Group list to advise AAPS members on ongoing issues that could affect historic properties and provide an opportunity to review and comment on draft AAPS position statements. If you would like to attend a meeting, be added to the Google Group list or would like obtain more information, please contact

Christopher Buckley at
510-523-0411 or cbuckleyAACP@att.net



We are making an impact within the community.
It's informative and fun. We encourage all
members to get involved in making decisions.

AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2018

•
SUNDAY, AUGUST 26

1:00 PM

Woody Walk

FERNSIDE: Fabulous Place Fabled History

WOODY MINOR

MEET AT EDISON SCHOOL

•
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

7:00 PM

All Things Glass: Restoration and Conservation

JOAN DI STEFANO

Buddhist Temple of Alameda