



Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A Presentation by Judith Lynch
**Architectural Forensics:
What Was That?**
Sunday, April 14, 2019 at 7:00 pm

**First Congregational Church of Alameda
1912 Central Avenue, Alameda CA**

Free for AAPS members • \$5 for non-members

Before: Entrepreneur-developer Joseph Leonard designed this embellished Queen Anne completed in 1891.

Image: Alameda Historical Society



During: In the 1970s its decoration was shorn and replaced with stucco.

Image: Woody Minor



After: Reborn, the Clinton Avenue home won an award for its restoration. Image: Judith Lynch

Continued on page 2 . .

Architectural Forensics — A Detective Story *by Karen Lithgow*

Amongst our grand and glorious vintage buildings here in Alameda are some odd-looking structures that resemble our beauties in shape and size but seem oddly lacking in visual appeal. Judith Lynch uses the tactful phrase “misguided improvements” to describe what happened to these once-beautiful building facades and the well-meaning but ultimately disastrous alterations. People may refer to these buildings as having “good bones” meaning that the overall shapes and some external or internal features may be intact but the original lovely surfaces have been replaced or covered up with inferior materials. Some of these now odd-looking structures are sheathed completely in textured tiles made out of asbestos, big plastic-like strips of vinyl, lumpy and bumpy stucco or other man-made surfaces. What you don’t see now in these buildings are the original ornate and delicate wood and plaster surfaces and decorations that have been discarded or covered up by these offending materials. Trying to figure out what has happened to these buildings we can now refer to as “architectural forensics”.

When I asked Judith why she uses the term “misguided improvements”, she said that she is careful not to accuse building owners of intentionally ruining their homes. As major earthquakes, fires and the eventual wear and tear have taken their toll on the fancywork covering homes, new products emerged promising fire-retardant qualities and easy maintenance. Practicality became an important objective and homeowners became vulnerable to the appeal of these new inventions. Judith is quick to point out that Alameda wasn’t a specific target of these pitches; the trend to recover buildings with new and improved materials was nation-wide. People really intended to “improve” their buildings and it would be both unkind and unfair to question people’s motives after the fact. Who knew that asbestos fibers released into the air could accumulate in lungs and cause cancer? Asbestos fibers are soft and flexible yet resistant to heat, electricity and chemical corrosion. It can be mixed into cloth, paper, cement, plastic and other materials to make them stronger. No wonder it was marketed as a “magic mineral”!

So, it would take a highly knowledgeable detective to decipher what architectural crimes have been committed and what was the original healthy state of the victim. What appendages are missing from the subject and what were they wearing when they met their untimely demise?

Some of the “improved” homes wear elaborate disguises and clues can occasionally be left behind on a building after the disguising materials have been removed. It’s not always practical, however, to start ripping off these coverings and it would take a knowledgeable, clever and dedicated detective to sort things out. Lucky for us, we have Judith Lynch and her accumulated years of experience examining and studying old homes. She’s taught fascinating classes on this subject and her popular architectural forensics classes at the Mastick Senior Center have thoroughly demonstrated these investigative techniques.

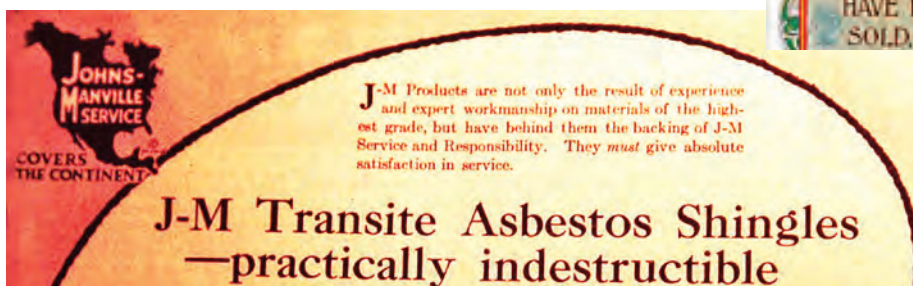
You’re probably all familiar with the before and after photos of vintage buildings that have been restored to former glory but Judith accurately points out that these “before” pics should really be thought of as “during” images. The reason for this distinction is that the pre-restoration images no longer display the original beautiful materials and decorations. These “during” pictures that show the results of accumulated misguided improvements do not represent any particular type of style worthy of emulation. Showing a building’s before, during and after images show the full cycle of original beauty, decay and disguise and their eventual restoration. Determining what today’s “during” buildings used to look like is the first step in creating a successful “after” structure. Of course we often don’t have the before images available making the architectural forensics work that much more difficult.

Judith will tell us more about how to practice architectural forensics in her upcoming talk which will include many fascinating and entertaining images on the subject and will be interactive with the audience. Judith loves to hear what questions, comments and insights her lectures inspire and I’m sure we will all greatly enjoy this evening.

SEE COVER PAGE FOR LECTURE LOGISTICS.



In addition to sheathing buildings with asbestos shingles, the material was incorporated into many sorts of everyday products, including shoes, clothing, tablecloths, cigarettes, and pipes. Images: Google.com.



Alameda Artist Spotlight

by Candace Rowe

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

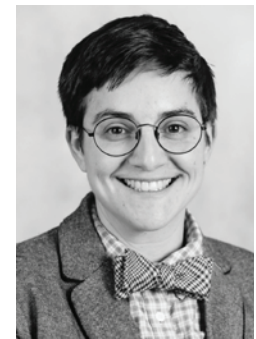
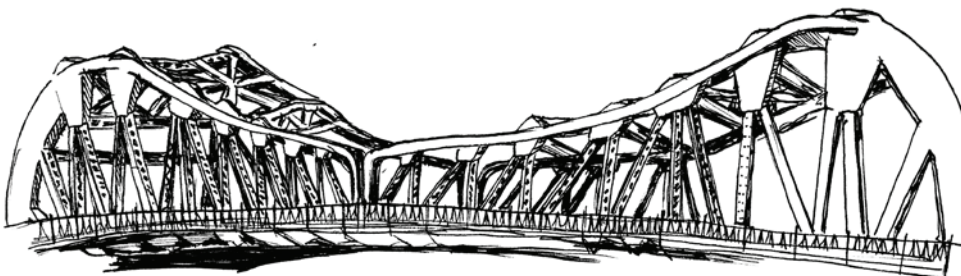
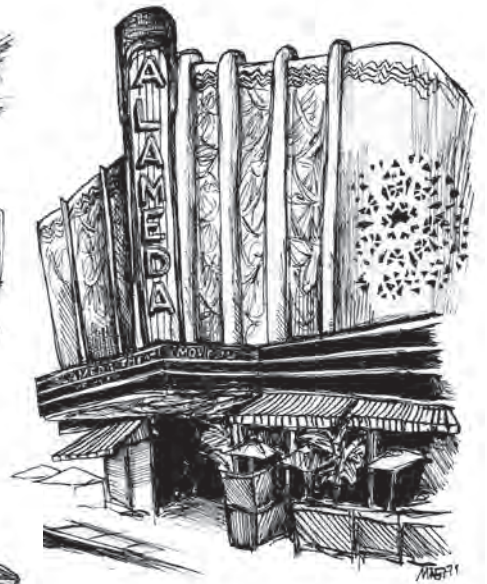
Art has always been a way for Meg Adler to process the world around and inside of her.

An East Bay native, Meg discovered a love of drawing and lettering while in art therapy as a child. A self-described "homebody," Meg loves drawing spaces that hold us together: the stages on and in which we play out our stories.

As an artist, Meg loves more than anything to create pieces that connect a person to their own story: where they are from, and, subsequently, who they are. She sees homes as more than merely structures, but as opportunities in which to create homes. Homes, she feels, are something that ought never to be taken for granted.

Currently, Meg primarily creates custom pieces of art, but always loves to take a break to draw the other beauties of the Bay Area. After spending two years on the East Coast for graduate school, Meg and her wife, Colleen, were eager to find their corner of the Bay Area that had a friendly vibe and slower pace. Alameda felt like a perfect fit, and they are beyond thrilled to call the Island home.

Meg Adler



You can reach Meg on Instagram @lettersaligned or on her website, lettersaligned.com

Meet Our Monuments

by Judith Lynch

Historic Preservation Program Continued

Way back in the 1970s the Alameda City Council adopted "Preservation of Historical and Cultural Resources," article VII of the Municipal Code, sections 13-21. Among other provisions, it established the Historical Advisory Commission (now a Board) and set out procedures for designating Monuments, known as Landmarks virtually everywhere else. By whatever moniker, these places are rightfully revered as hallowed representatives of local history, exemplary architectural design, and icons of commerce, culture, and industry.

The last issue of *Preservation Press* described the "Pyramid of Preservation," and noted that at its pinnacle are thirty official local Monuments. This article describes what and how many there are, analyses the number, type, and frequency of designation, and reminds us that while their honor is great, their protection is meager. While thirty have been investigated and elevated, only twenty-nine remain, a grim reminder that constant citizen vigilance is the only sound way to make sure our most treasured places stay intact.

A Bit of Background

How are Monuments used? Here are both the original purposes and the current uses of our Monuments: Commercial: three then, six now; Governmental: ten then, nine now; Industrial: three then, none now; Institutional: six then, none now; Residential: eight then, five now. Some candidates for Monument status are renowned, such as City Hall, the Carnegie Library, and the Alameda Theatre. Others are equally worthy, but less well known, such as the Whidden House and the Red Cross headquarters. Most are individual properties; two exceptions are historic districts, Park Street and the former Naval Air Station, which together add more than 150 structures to the honor roll: Our most unusual Monument is a collection of almost 1300 historic lampposts in five styles dating from 1912 to the 1950s.

How are Monuments named? Alameda's special places are named in various ways, without resort to consistency—foolish or not. Examples include historic monikers (City Hall), generic titles (Second Empire Dwelling), popular names (Croll's), street addresses, and more. A 2005 memo to then Planning Director Cathy Woodbury suggested developing a uniform way of referring to the places. Most cities use the original name of either the owner or the establishment to identify landmarks. Using this system, the Dr. Edith Meyers Center would be called Greenleaf House, the building at 1630 Ninth Street renamed Whidden House, and Croll's known by its origin use, as the Britt Hotel. So far a standard way of referring to Monuments has not been adopted, so many have both official names and popular ones.



One of the oldest Monuments is the little known Whidden House, originally a farmhouse, also called by the prosaic title of 1630 Ninth Street. This early image shows its original balustraded captain's walk and handsome wooden fence. Source: A member of the second family to own the property.

How frequently are they designated? The rate Monuments are nominated, investigated and then designated by City Council has changed significantly over the past five-plus decades. Between 1976 and 1985, nineteen Monuments were added, from 1986 to 2005 only ten were designated, and during the dozen years from 2006-2018, the number of our Monuments increased by . . . one!

An Even Higher Pedestal

The most prestigious accolade for a building in the United States is a listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under the auspices of the National Park Service and shepherded by the Keeper of the National Register. The Keeper tracks the "districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation." Thirteen Alameda Monuments are on that Register; the Veterans' Building; St. Joseph's Basilica, the Masonic Temple and eight others join the City Hall and Carnegie Library. These places are also recognized by the State Office of Historic Preservation and listed as "California Historical Resources," that are so included because they "provide continuity with our past and enhance our quality of life."

Honor Yes, but Protection?

Reassured by lofty language, many people think that official documentation and designation as either a local Monument, or listing by the State or being added to the National Register means we can relinquish concern because they are protected, right? Sadly no, as the Register preamble cautions, "Protection is not guaranteed." A local example is the wrenching loss of one of our most worthy properties, triple-listed locally, in Sacramento, and nationally.

The Union Iron Works Turbine Machine Works Building, originally the Bethlehem-Alameda Shipyard machine shop, fondly nicknamed "The Red Brick Building" was local Monument twelve, designated in 1980. It had

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Monuments...continued from page 4.

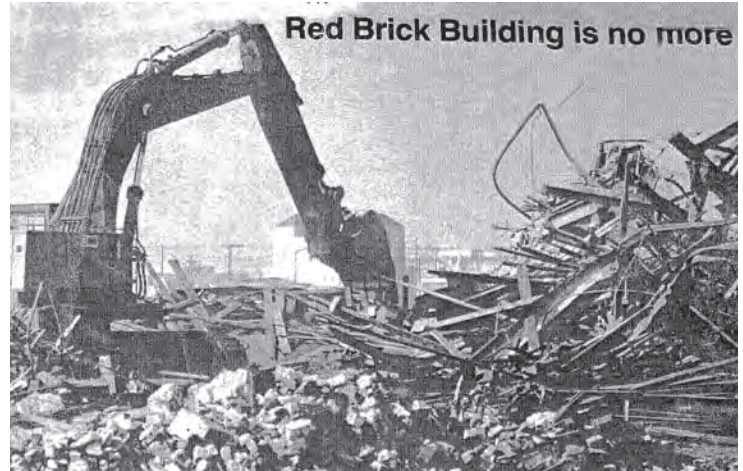
significant links to Alameda industrial history. Major shipbuilding enterprises bestrode the Bay Area during World War I, then called the Great War, as nobody then anticipated a second one. Bethlehem Steel was a huge Bay Area conglomerate, and the part of their company located here was known as the Alameda Plant of the Union Iron Works. The turbine machine works inhabited a gargantuan building on Webster Street near the estuary. This structure was so big that superlatives paled or failed. It cost a million to build in 1918, when it was the largest structure on the Pacific Coast, comprising 90,000 square feet on the ground floor and a volume of million cubic feet. Two football fields would almost fit inside. The place was in use until it was abandoned after World War II.

Enter Marina Village Associates in the early 1980s with a comprehensive development proposal for Union Iron Works properties, including a plan to repurpose the RBB with 200 housing units upstairs and a ground floor shopping center. The hitch? Measure A, passed in 1973 to prohibit construction of dwellings with more than two units, had to be waived for this RBB scheme to succeed.

The waiver was placed on the ballot and split the preservation community. Some saw it as an inroad that was a dangerous precedent weakening Measure A. Others embraced the opportunity to preserve a building that was emblematic of the Webster Street entrance to the Island. The ballot measure lost; the City Council approved demolition, and by early 1985 the RBB was gone. So what good did local, state, or national recognition do?

Regrets Still Linger

Longtime AAPS supporter, author-historian, and Measure A proponent Woody Minor devoted a newspaper column to mourning the loss of the RRB. More than three decades later, asked about the demise of this



The National Register-listed Monument we lost was demolished in 1985, when the Alameda electorate voted 8,500 to 6,500 to tear it down. Destroying it took three weeks and cost \$200,000. Source: Alameda Times-Star, January-February 1985.

symbol of Alameda's industrial heritage, "It still stings!" Woody asserted. "Our premier industrial Monument is gone. It was also testament to excellence by designer John Reid Jr., a prominent San Francisco architect responsible for schools, libraries, and police and fire stations, in addition to the RBB. Saved, it could have been the proud centerpiece of historic preservation. Instead we have an insipid shopping center of ordinary materials and forgettable design."

Promise Eternal Vigilance!

Want to better appreciate these august historic remnants? First, visit the AAPS website to find a complete current list with addresses, completion dates, and other information. Then start your field trip at Monument Ground Zero, the intersection of Central and Willow. Each corner hosts a



This archival image demonstrates the massiveness of the derelict "Red Brick Building," originally the Bethlehem-Alameda Machine Shop. Image: Alameda Architectural and Historical Survey undertaken 1978-1980.

Continued on page 6...

Monuments...*continued from page 5.*

Monument, proud representatives of education, religion, government, and culture, the Historic High School, the Veterans Building, the Adelphian Club, and the Second Church of Christ Scientist. An easy stroll from here will take you to the Alameda Theatre (gracious about letting visitors enjoy the lobby), the Carnegie, City Hall, and the western boundary of the Park Street Historic Commercial District. Consider how the loss of even one of these places would diminish us. Citizen oversight can help protect what ordinances, listings and laws cannot!

End Notes: Monuments on the Move

Monument 16, Carnegie Library:

The Economic Development Department issued a call for RFQs (Request for Qualifications) to “lease and renovate” the 1902 building. The Crucible applied, with an all-encompassing proposal entitled Innovation Hall. Oakland preservation architect Rosemary Muller is a member of their comprehensive team of artists, innovators, and fundraisers. She wrote, “I have been working on restoring this building for over a decade. My dream is to see it returned to its former glory and made available for the community.” Details were presented at an intense public meeting; afterward AAPS members weighed in. President Steve Aced, “They will save the historic form and fabric of the building. They appear to be creative, competent, capable, and open to concerns of the audience.” Kevis Brownson was impressed, “The Crucible team is relying on preservation architect Muller’s report as to what is historically significant.” PAC chair Christopher Buckley asked many pertinent questions and received positive answers. Many more steps are required, and AAPS will continue to scrutinize and report on progress. Review the ideas for yourself: carnegieinnovationhall.org.



Second grader Mark sketched the Carnegie Library when he was on a field trip from Washington School.

Monument 29, the Del Monte Warehouse, is an item on the March agenda of the Historic Advisory Board, which meets after the *Preservation Press* deadline. According to the staff report, the proposal to modify the design of the monitors (rooftop structures) on bays 1 and 4 is part of the restoration and rehabilitation of the historic Del Monte Warehouse. (This change) does not affect previously approved land use, unit count, and parking.

More information about our official Monuments:

- A complete up-to-date list is available on the AAPS website.
- The Reference Department, 2nd floor, Main Library has seven new binders of information about the 30 Monuments.



Architect R.W. Littlefield and engineer Philip Bush collaborated to design this handsome brick structure that follows the graceful curves of the train tracks; completed in 1927 it was originally the California Packing Warehouse. Image: Alameda Museum.

AAPS would like to thank members who donated to the organization in 2018. Your outstanding support is greatly appreciated.

* * * * *

*John Buestad
Buestad Construction*
Tom and Katherine Saxby
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Karin Sidwell

FREE

Local Lore Shines at the Library 2019

Slide-talks on Alameda History and Architecture by Renowned Experts
Stafford Room, Main Library Oak St. at Lincoln Ave.

Tuesday, June 11, 2019, 6:30 - 7:30 pm
How Railroads Shaped Alameda

Grant Ute, co-author
Alameda by Rail and
Associate Archivist,
Western Railway
Museum (WRM).

*Passengers leave the Alameda
ferry mole to board Southern
Pacific electric trains, 1911. Image: Vernon J. Sappers Collection, WRM.*



Tuesday, July 16, 2019, 6:30 - 7:30 pm
**An Undiscovered Alameda
Neighborhood, Post Street:
Six Short Blocks Long on History**



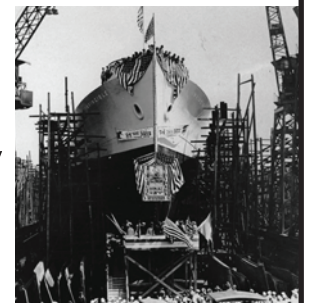
Robin Seeley, Post St.
resident, retired
attorney, and volun-
teer walk leader with
SF City Guides.

*'Gold Rush Era' cottage on
Post St. Image: Robin Seeley.*

Tuesday, August 13, 2019, 6:30 - 7:30 pm
**Industry in Alameda, A Legacy of
Enterprise and Innovation**

Woody Minor, author
A Home in Alameda and
other books, walks, lectures,
and articles about local history,
culture, and architecture.

*The freighter "Invincible" was launched
in 1918 from Bethlehem's Alameda yard.
Image: Alameda Museum.*



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In This Issue:

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- *Alameda Artist Spotlight: Meg Adler*
- *Meet Our Monuments*

printed on recycled paper.

AAPS Plaque Committee Needs New Members

If you are interested in seeing historic building plaques commemorating our shared history all around Alameda, join us in our work!

Here is a link to an explanation of the plaque program:

alameda-preservation.org/programs/historical-plaque-program/

- > One person to take notes at meetings and record decisions. No other responsibilities if that is the one task someone wants to do.
- > One person to learn the ordering process and work with our vendors. It's easy and straightforward and the vendors are wonderful family owned businesses that love history.
- > One person who would like to follow up with past preservation award winners to check if their property is still in award condition and to try to get them to buy and install a plaque.
- > One person to follow up with plaque owners on plaque installation.
- > People to contact and follow up with building owners about applying for plaques.

**If you are interested in any of these positions,
please call 510-463-4966 or contact
Kevis.brownson@alameda-preservation.org**

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For more information, please contact:
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AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS

•
SUNDAY, APRIL 14
7:00 PM

Architectural Forensics
JUDITH LYNCH
First Congregational Church
of Alameda
1912 Central Avenue

•
SUNDAY, JUNE 2
Preservation Awards
Details To Be Announced

•
SUNDAY, AUGUST 25
1:00 PM
Woody Walk: The West End
Location To Be Announced