

Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A Lecture by Woody Minor and Robert Farrar

Marcuse & Remmel Revisiting Their Influence in Alameda's Architectural Landscape

Sunday, March 8, 2020 at 7:00 pm

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

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



Marcuse & Remmel's early 1890s trio sit tall on Santa Clara Avenue. Robert Farrar's house on far right. Image: Marco Abellera.

Do You Own a Marcuse & Remmel?

by Conchita Perales

Robert Farrar discovered Marcuse & Remmel when in 1992 he and his wife Elizabeth bought a fixer upper on Santa Clara Avenue. The Queen Anne had been essentially untouched over the years and was in very bad condition, with most of the exterior and interior details obscured and tainted by time and neglect. "They were thrilled to find a vintage dwelling so little changed..." Their house and its twin neighbor were built in 1893 on speculation for Marcuse and his wife Delphina, and "...it's a showcase of the builder's Queen Anne phase at its most ornate" (Minor, *ALHT Guidebook* 2018, pg 30).

Robert practically restored the whole house himself, turning him into an expert in all things M&R. He stripped and refinished woodwork including the mantle and floors; uncovered vine-leaf patterns embossed in doors and window frames; restored the Lincrusta Walton wainscoting; wallpapered rooms and hallway; and hand painted not only the interior plaster rosettes, but the whole exterior of the house in eight different colors, including the gold leaf!

Robert is now embarking on the creation of a Marcuse & Remmel database of the over 277 surviving Alameda homes built in the 1890s by the foremost Victorian homebuilding firm. Through research and interviews he hopes to uncover what remains of the builder's extensive work, and connect current M&R homeowners and other historical enthusiasts with resources and information to assist them in the restoration and preservation of these local treasures.

MARCUSE & REMMEL DATABASE

Contact Robert Farrar

rfarrar665@yahoo.com

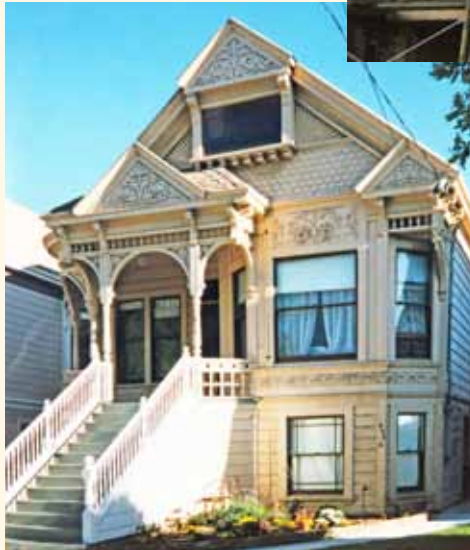
530-440-4479



The stairs with metal railing and part of the porch had to be removed. Robert's son displays his talents with the jack hammer. Images: Farrar family collection. (circa 1998)

Ready to tackle the facade!

Once the stairs and balusters were installed, the next step was addressing the restoration of the original facade woodwork.



Marcuse & Remmel designed arches reminiscent of medieval islamic architecture in some of their exterior porches.

The detailed application of color and gold leaf highlight the intricate wood designs. (Bob Buckter color consultant).



The original plaster rosette in the front parlor (hand painted by Robert Farrar)



Marcuse & Remmel, Homebuilders Par Excellence

by Woody Minor

During the late 1880s and early 1890s the value of land and houses soared in Alameda, inducing many residents to get into real estate. In 1888, Felix Marcuse began selling land in new tracts, and the following year Julius Remmel started building speculative houses – buying lots, hiring architects and builders, and selling the finished product. Marcuse and Remmel joined forces in 1890, creating Alameda's most prolific homegrown firm. 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.

Born in Berlin in 1847, Marcuse arrived in San Francisco in the 1860s. He and his wife and young daughter moved to Alameda in 1876, 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 fruit, wines and liquors. The Remmel family came to Alameda in 1879, residing in the area now known as the Gold Coast. The patriarch, saloonkeeper Jacob Remmel, immigrated to America from Germany in the early 1850s. He settled in Sacramento and became a San Francisco liquor merchant. The oldest of the seven children, Julius, who was born in Sacramento in 1855, taught piano and voice before becoming a builder and partnering with Marcuse.

Marcuse & Remmel 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 their main office which was located at Bay Station, next door to Marcuse's old store. The firm rose and fell with the real estate market, embodying the final decade of the Victorian era in a remarkable array of architecture enriching the modern city.

Similar porches with Tuscan columns and recurring arches are a defining feature of Marcuse & Remmel's 1895 high-basement row on the 1300 block of Pacific Avenue.
Image: Valerie Turpen.

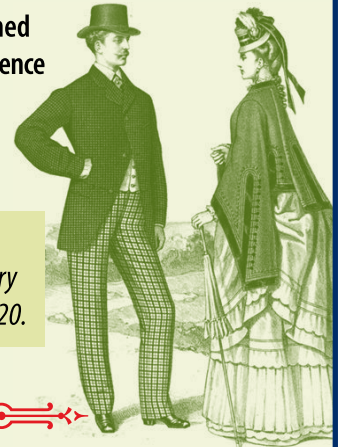


AAPS Talk Caps Off Boffo Slide Series

Mark your calendars for **Local Lore at the Library 2020**, the third summer of explorations into Island history and architecture by lively and entertaining speakers. Free programs in the **Stafford Room, Main Library, Oak St. at Lincoln Ave., Alameda.** Talks run from 6:30-7:30 pm and the library closes at 8:00 pm.

An added treat: Enticingly costumed "courtiers" will be amongst the audience to promote the September 2020 Alameda Legacy Home Tour!
Info: judithlynch7@gmail.com

Elaborate costumes and eye-popping "jewels" bedeck diplomats from history as part of the Local Lore line-up in 2020.



Tuesday, June 9, 6:30 pm
Gold Leaf: Art, Craft, and More

A slide talk by Chris Rummell, Bay Area artist, craftsman, and historian.

Tuesday, July 14, 6:30 pm
Jaw-Dropping Resuscitations of Vintage Homes

A slide talk by architectural entrepreneur and veteran house restorer Jim Smallman.

Tuesday, August 11, 6:30 pm
A Cavalcade of Alameda Historic Home Tours

A slide talk by Conchita Perales, involved with the home tour for 10 years, filmmaker, writer, and board member, Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS).

Alameda homeowners, proud of their historic dwellings, are generous about opening their homes for guests to tour.
Image: Richard Knight.



TRAVELOGUE



An illustrated architectural travel story inspired by places visited and experiences encountered.

Bungalow Sojourn *by Steve Aced*

Bungalow aficionados and Craftsman style architecture enthusiasts may want to consider a trip to Pasadena this April to tour the preeminent Arts and Crafts era interior of the Greene and Greene designed Gamble House, to take a guided walking tour to see several other nearby Greene and Greene designed houses from the street and then to take part in an annual house tour in nearby "Bungalow Heaven".

Designated by the American Planning Association (APA) as one of the "10 Great Places in America", "Bungalow Heaven" is a sixteen block residential neighborhood in Pasadena with more than 800 mostly bungalow homes built between 1900 and 1930. Surrounding a central public park, (MacDonald Park), the neighborhood with its large front yard lawns and its tree-lined streets became a listed City of Pasadena Historic District in 1989. In 2002 *Sunset Magazine* called the area the "Best Neighborhood" in the West. Then in 2008 it was placed on both the National Register of Historic Places and The California Register of Historical Resources. Nearly all of the well landscaped homes substantially maintain their original form and exterior architectural details.

The homes were designed by a number of architects that exhibit a range of design skills, initial construction budgets and a variety of ways of presenting and articulating some typical forms and details.

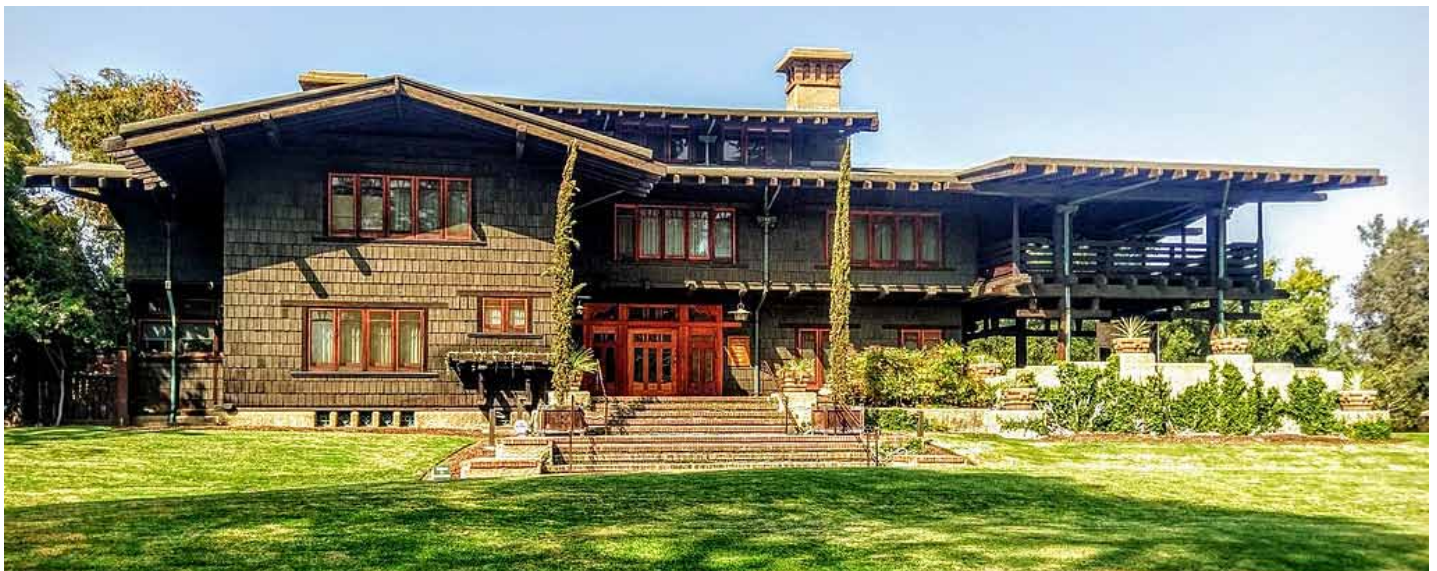
Most of the bungalows are one or one-and-a-half stories high, frequently have wide, street facing open covered porches with distinc-



Street sign identifies a Pasadena neighborhood that is full of bungalows. The Planning Department adopted the area's nickname "Bungalow Heaven" when the City designated the area an historic district. Image: Wikipedia.com.

tive (often "Elephantine") over-sized roof supports, low sloping gabled roofs, large overhangs, and large barge rafters with articulated tails and decorative knee brace supports. The frequently tapered front porch roof post supports, exterior entry step platform/walls and fireplace bases will often include the use of clinker brick and large river rock collected from the nearby arroyo. Exterior wood windows, doors and gable end vents will occasionally have surrounding decorative trim. And the front porch beam that extends over the porch posts can have a decorative curved or tapered form.

A few of the houses include the use of an open wooden trellis front porch roof that extends across the side yard driveway to create a "port-cochere" shelter for those arriving by car and to give additional horizontal emphasis to the design. And pay attention to the gates,



1908 Gamble House spreads out to join with the surrounding landscape. Image: Wikipedia.com.

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TRAVELOGUE...*continued from page 4.*

fences, exterior light fixtures and door hardware. There are often well-crafted woodwork, ceramic or metal hardware included in these objects. The houses are set well back from the sidewalk so bringing binoculars may help you see the details of these objects.

To insure that the neighborhood maintains its unique character the City of Pasadena requires all alterations, remodels and additions to be reviewed to verify that the proposed project conforms to the Secretary of the Interiors Standards and Design Guidelines.

The annual "Bungalow Heaven" Home Tour is scheduled for Sunday, April 26, 2020 between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. The \$25 tickets, (\$30 if purchased on the day of the tour), go on sale the end of February. For information email: bhnaa@bungalowheaven.org, phone: 626-585-2172.

The ticket will give you docent led access to a few, (usually 8), house interiors, but the house exteriors can be appreciated by themselves any time from the sidewalk. There may also be some houses for sale in the neighborhood that you may be able to visit.

In addition to the tour, houses there are often nearby outdoor exhibits showcasing restoration techniques, quilts, stained glass work, lighting or similar materials appropriate to the era. There may be a musician and a food truck that often show up at mid-day. And home-made cookies and cook books are usually for sale as a fund-raiser.

Prior to your Sunday visit to "Bungalow Heaven", you may want to take a Saturday 1-hour (+/-) tour of the nearby Gamble House interior and/or take a Gamble House docent guided 1-1/4 hour (+/-) walking



Front entry door, operable sidelights and fixed transom windows are filled with a stained glass masterpiece. Image: Wikipedia.com.



Ohio natives Charles Greene (left) and Henry Greene (below). Images: Wikipedia.com.

The brothers formed the architectural firm of Greene and Greene, established in Pasadena in January 1894.



tour to see the exteriors of nine other nearby Arroyo Terrace neighborhood Greene and Greene designed houses, plus houses designed by Arts and Crafts period architects Myron Hunt, Edwin Bergstrom, Elmer Grey and D.M. Renton.

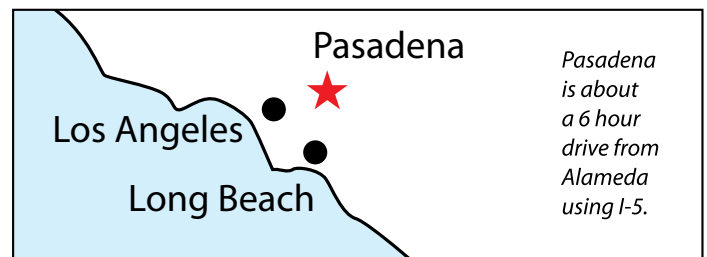
The David and Mary Gamble House exemplifies a high point in the architectural expression of the Craftsman era bungalow. The layout is designed to provide shade and shelter from the sun, cross circulation of air and a strong indoor-outdoor relationship. Natural materials, especially wood, are used extensively and are left exposed and unpainted. The design and installation of these materials and others such as stained glass, tile, built-in and freestanding furniture and custom

light fixtures are handled in a manner that reveals a high degree of individual craftsmanship and attention to detail. In addition, there are many influences from Japanese architecture apparent in the design of these elements.

There is a Saturday April 25th walking tour scheduled that starts at the Gamble House bookstore. Meet there at 9:50 am. Tickets for the Walk and Gamble House Tour can be ordered online (gamblehouse.org/tours) or call Acme Ticketing at 844-325-0812 to reserve a spot. Tickets are \$17 for the walking tour and \$15 for the house tour. The Walking Tour is usually available only once a month on a Saturday so make sure to check the schedule. Advanced reservation of tickets for both the tour of the Gamble House and the Walking Tour of the Arroyo Terrace neighborhood are strongly recommended.

If you visit the Gamble House but don't take the walking tour you may want to walk from the house past the book store to the nearby iron and stone entrance gates designed by the Greene brothers.

Additionally, if you have the time, an 11 minute drive from the Gamble House to the Huntington Library (1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino/ 10:00 am to 5:00 pm - closed on Tuesday) offers an extensive collection of Greene and Greene furniture and decorative arts in the Dorothy Collins Brown Wing of the Virginia Steel Scott Galleries of American Art.



Home Inspector and Insurance Experts Tell All by Karen Lithgow

Allen Kanady of Omega Pest and David Teare of BPG revealed what inspectors look for in a vintage home at our Fall event, describing the important and often hidden issues in a property. A key event in the life of a vintage home is its sale to a new owner. Accurately presenting the condition of a home is necessary to give buyers confidence that they know what they are purchasing, avoiding any unpleasant surprises. The insurability of vintage structures was also addressed by Leah Nishi of Farmers Insurance.

PEST INSPECTIONS: Allen has owned Omega for 40 years and helped write the regulations governing the industry. A comprehensive inspection includes almost the entire home, from the attic to crawlspace. They look for wood-destroying organisms and conditions that lead to them including termites, dry rot, beetles, moisture conditions, porous foundations and damage to wood members.

Inspectors don't often see subterranean termites, but look for signs of their presence like migration tubes used to hide from their predators. There are many termites in the main island of Alameda; they like the sand and have been here a long time. Termites have a caste system, like ant colonies, with kings, queens and soldiers. Colonies can be over 200,000 in number and one colony can be under three or four different houses. When the colony gets to a certain size and conditions are right, reproducing termites turn dark and swarm. Termite treatment chemicals act like ant poison with the workers ingesting the treated wood and transferring it down through the colony where they live underground. Dry wood termites are less common in Alameda; they have smaller colonies than the subterranean termites and live inside the wood.

There are also hundreds of types of wood-destroying beetles in Alameda and identification of types is very difficult. Localized chemical treatments sometimes work but may need

repeated applications. Another option is to tent and fumigate a building for four nights which has a higher success rate.

Dry rot and fungus are wood-destroying organisms common in our vintage homes, often in wood sash windows. They need moisture, temperature and oxygen to grow and must be cut out and replaced or they may keep growing. To completely remove dry rot, you must remove beyond the visibly damaged wood to keep it from growing back. The wood must then be sealed with an epoxy-based compound.

Allen showed us various types of architectural features prone to wood-destruction including failed recessed wood gutters allowing water to pour into the stucco. Test holes are then needed at the side of the house to assess the damage.



Electrical panels should be checked for dangerous conditions such as the improper "tap" above, which can lead to overheating and potentially an electrical fire. Image: David Teare.

Bungalows with flat roofs need to have a water-tight roof gutter system. Victorians, by contrast, have old-growth redwood siding which is almost impervious to decay. Allen has never seen it fungus damaged. Additions to these buildings frequently reveal some rot. Their foundations, however, may still be made of bricks or are porous. He may recommend the foundation be replaced or capped with concrete. Other things he looks at are porches and steps because they are

expensive to replace. Exterior soil should not be up against the wood of the house and should be graded to drain outwards to prevent problems. Foundations also need to be higher than the exterior grade level. Keeping the exterior wood sealed and painted is also helpful.

HOME INSPECTIONS: Dave has been a home inspector since 1995, performing over 12,000 inspections. He's seen some interesting things like decorative asbestos vinyl, bomb shelters, 19th century letters, short wave radios, ancient appliances and dead critters.

Homes have six big components that can end up costing money. In descending order of expense: foundation, roof, chimney, plumbing, electrical and HVAC. He sees many broken and leaning chimneys around Alameda and most of those built before 1930 are unreinforced with rebar and metal linings. A major earthquake could send many of these bricks falling down through the roof and even on people.

When people see brick on their foundations they may be looking at brick veneers on top of concrete, possibly with wood framing behind it. Dave needs a thorough look underneath to see what's going on. Often there is a hybrid situation with parts of a foundation replaced, part capped and some original sections. Dave and Allen often use their expertise together to determine what is going on and describe it accurately. They figure out how long cracks in a foundation extend, if they have infestations, the condition of the concrete, etc. Water heaters and furnace vents also have to have a slope of a certain degree to function properly.

Dave's seen dangerous alterations to electrical systems and always pulls the electric panel off to investigate. Also, whenever something is going on with a house, water is always involved. It's important to pay attention to grading and downspouts and sump pumps. In Alameda, particularly the east end, there are wet crawlspaces and springs and it's important to put in proper drainage.

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Experts...continued from page 6.

Dave also thinks that you should consider replacing your brick foundation. Some reinforcement measures can be partially effective but brick can't be retrofitted with anchor bolts. Sheer paneling, t-strap and intermediate piers can be helpful but investment in perimeter foundations is needed to avoid taking a big chance. Post 1908 concrete is often unreinforced. Some of the concrete in Alameda also contained too much sand as it was a readily available material leading to a crumbling foundation with this bad mix. Anchor bolts in concrete foundations make them much stronger. Also, the balloon framing used from 1890 to 1930, while structurally sound, can have cavities which spread fires. Retrofitting and insulation can mitigate this problem. Dave also recommends rain caps for your chimney to keep water out.

Knob and tube wiring systems may be overloaded and improperly connected to new systems. When Dave sees new lighting in an old home, he looks for clues in the attic to see if that wiring was properly installed. Capacity is an issue as many old homes in Alameda still have less than the minimum 100 AMPS service.

The biggest plumbing problem is old galvanized pipes. Some have corroded to the point that hardly any water is getting through. Terracotta sewer lines can also cause problems as they could be cracked and leaking. Although rare, old gas piping for gas lamps can still be connected to the gas system. Dave also sees a lot of gas floor heaters in Alameda that are inefficient and can sometimes contain leaks.

Although lead paint and asbestos were outlawed in 1978, the majority of historic Alameda homes still have some of these things. General deficiencies include a lack of engineering or conformance to building codes, no insulation, no bolting, no mechanical connections and poor building materials; there was no universal standard for the homes and construction quality depended on the builder. General benefits of vintage homes include beauty, charm, architectural detail, quality of lumber and craftsmanship and no planned obsolescence as homes were built to last. Long ago, specialists in electrical, plumbing, etc. worked on homes and now we see more contractor generalists.

INSURANCE: Leah Nishi works with many realtors in town and with the city to do flood insurance presentations. In recent years much of the state has caught fire a couple of times hurting the insurance industry. Billions of dollars have been lost statewide, some small insurance companies have gone out of business and more insurance companies are pulling out of California.

If you do have a loss, the cost of materials has been going up tremendously in part because of high demand from recent losses along with scarcity of labor crews. Owners of vintage homes with lots of detailed work need to have adequate dwelling coverage and check a box on the forms that says applied costs for original period or restored finishes. This can make a huge difference in both cost and amount of coverage. Although the old growth redwood in the homes cannot be replaced, crown molding, plaster work and detailed finishes can be obtained.

Brick foundations are ok if they are in good condition. Knob and tube electrical work is more problematic. If there is a circuit breaker, electrical updates, an upgrade to 200 amps and the knob and tube are not in the attic, there may be an exception. Otherwise, the homeowner may have to use California's Fair Plan insurance which was set up for high fire risk properties, crumbling foundations, floating homes and other properties outside the traditional box.

You have to think about earthquake insurance in terms of a major catastrophe because of the huge deductibles, typically around 10 – 15% of the home value. CEA is the only provider for Alameda, all other companies charge huge fees. Fires that happen directly after an earthquake are usually not covered outside of the earthquake coverage. The automatic gas shutoff valves in homes now have decreased this type of risk. Loss of use is almost as important as dwelling coverage and coverage has been moved up to \$100,000 which is very helpful while you're getting your house fixed up.

Most homes in Alameda are not in the flood zone but recent changes in the FEMA maps have added areas needing flood insurance. FEMA will require homeowners to get flood insurance if they get a federally backed mortgage. Sometime in the next 5-6 years anticipated additional map changes will include much more of Alameda. The areas that have been flooding the most are in Bay Farm by the golf course, Fernside and Ballena Bay. Central Alameda which is higher will be less affected. The cost of flood insurance is going up quickly but can be given to a new buyer of your home.

AAPS Board Members 2020

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AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2020

SUNDAY, MARCH 8

7:00 PM

*Marcuse & Remmel
Revisiting Their Influence in Alameda's
Architectural Landscape*

with Woody Minor & Robert Farrar

First Congregational Church
of Alameda
1912 Central Avenue

SUNDAY, MAY DATE TBD

A Discussion About Measure A

First Congregational Church
of Alameda
1912 Central Avenue

THE ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

(AAPS) has been protecting the architectural legacy of Alameda's historic buildings for more than 40 years. Through AAPS action committees, educational seminars and home tours, citizens of Alameda have learned to embrace their diverse older neighborhoods. Over 4,000 buildings are on the City's Historic Building Study List. Alameda City Hall, one of the oldest in California, is a historical monument.

Alameda retains the rich charm of a bygone era, in both residential neighborhoods and commercial districts. Alamedans responded to AAPS's preservation mission back in the early 1970s, when Victorians were being demolished in order to construct large apartment buildings. AAPS, then called the Alameda Victorian Preservation Society (AVPS), helped pass a local initiative, Measure A, that preserved vintage homes by forbidding the construction of buildings with more than two housing units. To learn more about Alameda architectural treasures and the organization, visit the AAPS web site: **alameda-preservation.org**

AAPS MEMBERSHIP

Join the AAPS or renew your membership by sending this form back with your payment or visit our web site and pay with PayPal. Call AAPS at 510-479-6489 if you have any questions.

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I would like to make an additional donation of \$_____. AAPS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Tax identification #51-0139572.

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