

Alameda Museum

Quarterly

DR. ALICE CHALLEN, AN ASSET TO ALAMEDA AND INSPIRATION TO THE COMMUNITY

by Robbie Dileo

IN 1944, ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA BECKONED THE DOCTOR FROM BUFFALO, NEW YORK.

Little could we know what a remarkable impact this woman would have on our island city.

Certainly the promises of a future free from frigid winters would allow for more patients and benefit one who had endured a seven year bout with TB after graduating from the University at Buffalo, a town known in those days for its filthy air and ongoing pollution of Lake Erie. It was that disease that had helped unite Dr. Alice Challen with her husband, Dr. Horace LoGrasso, also a lung specialist. But it was her friend Dr. Alice Becke from school, the only other woman doctor at the time in Alameda, that convinced her to set up practice in a shop in front of Becke's home on Santa Clara near Chestnut, staying there 15 years until Becke retired. Challen later moved her practice to Clinton Avenue, across from the hospital, where she remained until retiring in 1975. 1,000 babies would be delivered during her 30-year career, an amazing legacy, but there's so much more to this woman's wonderful life, for which every Alamedan should rejoice, for she has touched us all, in one fashion or another.

Born in July 1911, Alice had known since she was about 12 that she wanted to help people. She didn't flinch at being one of only seven females in a class of about 400 male applicants to medical school in the 1930's. The war effort required many doctors, so

there was a need for qualified physicians. Achievements: Dr. Challen was a founding member of the Alameda Girls' Club (today's Girls Inc.). Being one of the first women doctors, she was recognized by Girls Inc. in May 2004 when they proclaimed Dr. Challen "A Woman Who Dares", an inspiration for today's young women.

Continued on page 2 . . .



Dr. Alice Challen was named Alameda's Citizen of the Year in 1984, and is the first woman to receive the Kate Creedon Award for extraordinary contributions to Alameda Hospital and the community. Photo: Ani Dimusheva.



Dr. Challen . . . Continued from page 1

As a member of Alameda Museum, she is certainly our eldest lifetime member and one of the original members, back in the days when we were in the cramped and damp Carnegie Library basement. A founding member of the Hospital Foundation, she was also a charter member of the Soroptomist Club, and found time to help as secretary for the Historic Alameda High School Foundation and the Humane Society. Other volunteer activities included Meals on Wheels, The Alameda Welfare Council, and being an activist for the passage of Measure A, the density ordinance of 1973 that helped stop the destruction of many Victorians and the building of high density multiple unit apartments. She was named Alameda's

Citizen of the Year in 1984, but the greatest honor is probably as the fourth recipient and first woman to receive the Kate Creedon Award for extraordinary contributions to Alameda Hospital and the community. The award is named after the nurse who co-founded Alameda Hospital with her sister in 1897.

Alameda Library just completed an Oral History Video with Dr. Challen talking about Alameda Hospital and its history. See it and all the other wonderful stories online at <http://www.alamedastories.org>. Alameda Museum wishes Dr. Challen an early happy 100th birthday with our thanks for your dedicated efforts to make Alameda an outstanding community.

Alameda's First Outdoor Christmas Tree

by Ron Ucovich

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE CHRISTMAS TREE was not put up until Christmas Eve because Santa Claus was said to have brought it. It was a child's delight because it was decorated with all sorts of treats. Special foods were made just for the occasion: little circus wagons with animal cookies inside, peppermint sticks in the shape of a walking cane, gingerbread men, sugar ornaments, and candied fruit. And the whole tree was festooned with strings of popcorn.



The tree was used for just one day because tiny candles burned on the tips of the branches which posed a serious fire hazard and dripped hot wax onto the carpet and packages below. But, for about an hour, the candles were spectacular. They twinkled like the stars at night. After the children were

bedazzled, the candles were extinguished so the children could pick the goodies off the tree.

When electric light bulbs were invented in 1882, it was suggested that they might be used on Christmas trees. As a patriotic gesture, in 1895 the president of the United States, Grover Cleveland, ordered an electrician to wire together electric bulbs colored red, white and blue, and place them on the White House tree like a string of popcorn. It was a novel idea, but it took a skilled electrician to rig the system. In 1908, a telephone worker had the idea of stringing together small bulbs from an

old telephone switchboard. He tinted the bulbs red and green, and in 1917, the first electric lights were sold commercially.

Continued on page 3 . .



Alameda's famous Bishop Taylor Tree at the corner of Central and Park Avenues was planted from a seed brought to the city from Australia. Photo: Alameda Museum.



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510-748-0796 for details.

Alameda Museum Quarterly is published in the spring, summer, fall, and winter of each year and is available in electronic form on the museum web site.

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First Christmas Tree . . . Continued from page 2

In the 1920s, the bulbs were weatherized so they could be used outdoors. A very large evergreen tree at Rockefeller Center in New York City was decorated with these lights. People would come from miles away to see this colorful display. It became legendary, and rumors of this spectacular tree spread across the nation.



Alameda's only natural tree is the live oak, but in the 1920s we did have one very unusual monster tree. It stood at the corner of Park and Central Avenues on land owned by Dr. William Gibbons, Alameda's most respected physician, geologist and botanist. In 1862 Bishop William Taylor, founder of the first Methodist Church in Alameda, spent three years in Australia doing missionary work. There he discovered a large exotic tree which was virtually unknown in America. He sent some seeds home to his wife, telling her that it was a wonderful shade tree with silver leaves and a refreshing antiseptic fragrance. Mrs. Taylor distributed the seeds among neighbors who she thought might appreciate them, one of these being Dr. Gibbons. Over the years, his blue gum eucalyptus grew to enormous proportions, and by the 1920s, it was the largest tree in the Bay Area, measuring 125 feet high. It had a spread of 100 feet and a trunk of four feet in diameter.

Bishop Taylor died in 1902, and as a memorial, a plaque was placed at its base dedicating it officially as the Bishop Taylor Tree. In 1930, the City Council decided that Alameda

should have a Christmas tree that rivaled the one in New York City. A string of over 800 colored bulbs were festooned on the tree, and this attraction drew spectators from all over the Bay Area. As a public announcement, on December 23, 1930, the *Alameda Times-Star* wrote: "Alameda's huge Christmas tree at Park and Central Avenues is scheduled to burst into its electric glory of 800 lights tonight."

This attraction drew hundreds of admirers from near and far. The City Council decided that this should be an annual event, but of course, each year it should be even more spectacular so it would attract even larger crowds. News of Alameda's beautiful tree spread across the Nation, and in 1931 a newspaper in New York wrote: "Alameda, California possesses the largest living Christmas tree in the world, a eucalyptus with more than 800 lights."

Alameda decided that this attraction should become an annual event, but in 1932, the City Council did not have the \$100 price tag for putting on this spectacle during the Depression years, so they voted to put this event on hold until finances got better. Alameda's beloved landmark stood dark and silent for the next seven Christmas seasons. Finally, in 1940, at 70 years of age, after suffering the ravages of time, disease and root damage, with reverence and dignity, she was felled and removed leaving only happy memories and the honorable title of being the Nation's largest and most spectacular Christmas tree of 1930 and 1931.





The Annual Membership Luncheon is Coming

APRIL 2ND, NOON TO 3:00 PM. Looking toward springtime, the Annual Luncheon with Silent Auction and Raffle will be held in the Masonic Hall on the 4th floor above the museum.

This will be an extra special event due to this year being George Gunn's 40th Anniversary as Curator for Alameda Museum. The Mayor's Preservation Season Proclamation will be read and the Board will take their ceremonial oath of office. News of exciting future events, fabulous items for bid, and a lunch prepared by Dennis Wallace of PBS Catering make for a grand afternoon. There were 100 people last year—a packed room. Don't miss out!

Member invitations will be mailed early March but to reserve an entire table or donate an auction item, it would be best to call early (Diane 510-523-5907). Lunch price is \$25 per person but docents are guests of the directors as our thanks for their dedicated service. The public is invited—bring your friends. Checks are payable to Alameda Museum and must be received at the museum by March 26.



From the Curator's Desk

by George C. Gunn

In December of 2010 the work on the basement of the Meyers House began in earnest. Now completed, the walls, ceiling, and woodwork, including the stairs and railing leading to the basement, were given a fresh coat of paint. The goal is to use every available space in the house and outbuildings for exhibit purposes.

The first exhibit planned for the area is a display of Meyers family clothing and fashion accessories. Some date from the 19th century. Included in the exhibit will be some display cabinets recently acquired from a video store that closed. They will aid in the preservation as well as displaying of the artifacts. In the future, this area will also serve as a rotating gallery which will prevent disruption of rooms on the 1st and 2nd floors of the house.

Jane Burgelin and her group of volunteers are doing some serious cleaning of various rooms, including washing curtains and windows. On Saturday, January 22, during the monthly opening, the house just glowed and looked beautiful.

Curator, Alameda Museum

ALAMEDA MUSEUM LEGACY SOCIETY

Notify us of your future bequest and the museum will honor you with a Life Membership and place your name on the ALAMEDA MUSEUM LEGACY SOCIETY PLAQUE in the Alameda Museum.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL 510-523-5907.

■ **LEAVE A GIFT IN YOUR WILL** for the nonprofit and charitable organizations that make a difference in your life. Less than 6% of American households have included nonprofits in their estate plan even though many of these households support and care about these organizations during their lifetime. Imagine the positive impact on our community if everyone made a donation to support their favorite nonprofit organization.



A Closer Look at Ironing

by Ron Ucovich

WHAT WE CALL IRONS TODAY were originally called smoothing irons. They were just a chunk of iron with a flat bottom, and were heated on the stove or hearth. The kitchen table would serve as an ironing board, or more conveniently, a flat board could be placed between two chairs. A wool blanket was used as a pad and also served to keep pitch from coming out of the wood and soiling the laundry. Ironing tables could serve a dual purpose: they could be used for pressing laundry or for making quilts. By the late 1800s, collapsible ironing boards were in vogue, and in the early 1900s you could buy an ultra-modern home with a drop-down ironing board built right into the kitchen wall.



Until the middle 1800s, ironing was a luxury reserved for wealthy people who had servants to do the labor. Flat irons were heated on the stove until they were very hot. Handles were made of coiled metal or of wood so you wouldn't burn your hands. This problem was solved in 1870 with the invention of the detachable handle. The problem with the flat iron was that it cooled down too quickly, and also, it picked up soot from the stove which soiled the clothing.

The iron we see in our museum is a more recent model which came from the Alameda Cleaners. It is an industrial model called a "sad iron." Sad is an Old English word meaning solid. It is much heavier than the flat iron, so it retained heat better, and it was heated by a gas jet, which kept the iron clean of soot. Its drawback was that it could overheat and scorch the fabric, so the worker had to constantly monitor the temperature by spitting on the hot metal.

As an alternative to the sad iron, box irons became popular. They had a chamber inside where you would place hot coals. This kept the surface clean of soot, but the

drawback was that it emitted smoke that was absorbed by the fabric. Later models had a chimney which would direct the smoke away from the cloth.

Gas irons were a clean alternative to stove-heated irons, but they were very cumbersome and often hazardous, since you had to run a rubber hose down from your chandelier to use the iron. In the 1880s the first electric iron was invented. It used a regular iron that rested on a flat stand that was heated by electricity. You still needed two irons to do the job, but the greatest problem was that the tip of the iron didn't get hot enough, and the tip is important for ironing pockets, cuffs, sleeves, collars and pleats.

Finally, in 1905 a Californian named Earl Richardson invented an iron with heating coils built into it, and the coils were designed to focus the heat on the tip. As a marketing device he named it the "Hotpoint." Now, housewives across the nation could purchase an electric iron, but there was still a big problem. By the 1900s, most homes were wired for electricity, but the electric company only ran their generators at night, since the only electric appliances you had were lights. They would fire up the generators when it got dark, and turn them off at about midnight. Many old homes in Alameda even today have chandeliers with two sets of globes: the ones pointing downward are for electric lights, and the ones pointing upward are for gas, so you could still have lights after the generators turned off.

Hotpoint

Women did not want to do their ironing at nighttime, so Mr. Richardson devised another scheme to market his invention. He asked the local women when most of them did their washing, and they preferred Monday, so he declared that Tuesday should be ironing day. He took this idea to the Electric Companies, who were more than delighted to sell their electricity on Tuesday mornings. The women were happy, the Electric Companies were happy, and even the children were happy, because now they had a new rhyme to recite while they skipped rope:

**Monday is wash day,
Tuesday for ironing,
Wednesday is sewing,
Thursday to market,
Friday for cleaning,
Saturday is baking, and
Sunday for church and
afterward, feasting.**



The museum's Sad Iron, the name is derived from an Old English word meaning solid.



From the President's Desk

by Robbie Dileo

Thank you members and directors for the past teamwork and support. Welcome to new board members Debra Hilding, docent of 25 years and history buff, and Freesia Blizard, a former intern at the museum. I'm proud of 2010's accomplishments and look forward to a great 2011. Where we've been, where we're headed, a review.

A **Alameda Museum Quarterly** – new format garnered many positive comments. Directors approved added expense, but it was Valerie Turpen who worked her graphic design magic upon our prose. She'll also take on updates to our web site in 2011. We have her skills for the ALHT Guidebook too! Ron Ucovich serves as Editor, but it's his fascinating articles that make each *Quarterly* special. That he's a docent most Fridays gives him a wonderful perspective on our collection and guest questions.

B **Best wishes to Robb Detlefs in his new endeavors,** but what a wonderful 10+ years. Our web site guru, he redesigned the site in 2010 allowing memberships, donations, books and videos to be purchased from it as well as being more attractive and easier to navigate. A former director, he created a database program allowing retrieval of scanned images for the Neptune Beach exhibit. Thanks Robb for your dedication.

C **Chairs of committees did a great job.** Chuck Millar, our VP this year too, chaired the very successful home tour that we'll reprise with AAPS in 2011. He also got the Neptune Beach Exhibit finished and found us Lise Needham who prepared our latest business plan. Dennis Reno chaired fundraising, bringing us the wonderful Altarena Playhouse event with help from Sharron Tymn (and the board). Both leave us due to challenges of a new business opportunity and more time to spend with grandkids – our thanks for your service.

D **Delightful programs improve our value to Alamedans** while fulfilling our educational mission. From the seemingly tireless Judith Lynch, we have Lecture Season, Kid's & Queen Victoria with the schools, & Preservation Season Events with HAB and AAPS. Read more about these 2011 events in this issue. No wonder she takes the summer off!

E **Exhibits in the Art Gallery** showcase individuals and groups. Many return yearly with new material but we save room for fresh faces too. Most groups have opening ceremonies with refreshments – free to the public. You are missing a special treat if you do not drop in monthly.

F **Friendly staff keeps the museum doors open.** Docent Coordinator Ellen Chesnut keeps the team organized while Tom Faulds for security, gets the place opened up each day. Diane Coler-Dark handles the office manager functions and is the voice of the museum for questions, especially at home tour time. I take some calls but Diane fields most of them. The museum – a fun place to visit but we truly are a business and it couldn't happen without these dedicated people who believe in our mission.

G **George Gunn,** when not cataloging the collection or restoring it, sees that something new is in the gallery each month, helps restock the Gift Shop, and answers questions on Saturdays with help from Joe Young and Virginia Rivera who have been coming in for years. George supervises kids doing community service hours, and his artistry and keen eye are what make the Meyers House Museum so exquisitely beautiful inside. Estate Sales and his team of pricing specialists bring in funds while the leftovers provide some of the Gift Shop's ever-changing inventory. 40 years in March – A lifetime effort saving City of Alameda's history! Look for a special mailing soon to celebrate his legacy.

H Here's to ending this column with gratitude to other indispensable people. Bob Risley, returns as Treasurer, created our budgets, keeps the books straight, and serves on the Meyers House committee. Jane Burgelin and her team tend the Meyers House and get a page for updates in every issue. Dewey St. Germaine and his very popular Alameda Sports Project will be back this year. Freesia Blizard joins us as Recording Secretary and completes her master's degree in Museum Studies this spring. She'll tackle our FACEBOOK page to see if we can attract new members.

All of us, and every docent, make up the team that contributes to the success of Alameda Museum. There's room for new ideas and new faces. I'm here to help. Reach me at damsel_d@pacbell.net or 510-865-1767.

President, Alameda Museum



Hey, Don't Give the Town my Name!

by Ron Ucovich

MANY OF OUR LOCAL CITIES were named after the owners of the early Mexican land grants (Castro Valley, Martinez, Cupertino, Pacheco). And when California became a state, towns often took the name of the pioneer settlers (Atherton, Hayward, Watsonville, Crockett).

The transcontinental railroad of 1869 presented several problems which hadn't surfaced before, for example, the trains had to run on a schedule, which meant that all the clocks had to be standardized. Until then, noon was when the sun was highest in the sky. If a train was traveling from east to west, the clocks were different in each town they passed through, so time zones had to be created. Also, travelers had to know where one town was in relation to the others, so the railroad decreed that towns be named alphabetically. If you were going from California to Arizona, for example, the whistle stops were Amboy, Bristol, Cadiz, Danby, Edson, Fenner, Goffs, etc.

The transcontinental railroad presented another problem: every farmer along the track wanted to have the train stop at his house. To do that, all he had to do was declare that his farm was a town named after himself. To avoid this, the railroad ruled that townships could not be owned by one person, and the town could not be named after the postmaster. To circumvent this regulation, the farmers just changed the spelling of their last name (Hayward changed the spelling to Haywood, Braly became Brawley, Reed became Reedley).

Sometimes towns were named after a man's first name. Daniel Inman could not name his town Inman, so he named it Danville. Since Porter Putnam couldn't name his town Putnam, he called it Porterville. Occasionally, a man would name his town after his wife (Cordelia, Susanville, Marysville). By the way, Roseville was not named after a woman. It was named after a beautiful climbing rose bush that grew outside the train station.

General Mariano Vallejo wanted to name the eastern part of his estate after his wife, Francisca, but when the town of Yerba Buena was renamed San Francisco, to avoid confusion General Vallejo's township was named after her

middle name Benicia. Sometimes a town was named after a man and his wife (Vise and his wife Salia became Visalia, Glen and Ellen became Glen Ellen, Glen and Dora became Glendora).

And there were men who didn't want a town named after themselves at all. F. E. Brown was one of these, so the town council named the town Moreno, the Spanish word for Brown. William Ralston was too modest to have a town use his name, so it was named Modesto, the Spanish word for modest. Nobody liked Quentin, the name of a notorious outlaw, so the city fathers renamed the town after a saint, San Quentin.



In 1814 a young Scottish sailor, John Cameron, got into a fight and struck a senior officer. He deserted the navy to avoid a court marshal. He took refuge in the Salinas Valley, and he eventually married the daughter of a wealthy landowner. He inherited 4,500 acres, which he developed into a town named after himself. There is no town called Cameron, because since he was a fugitive of the law, he always went by his mother's maiden name: Gilroy.

General Mariano Vallejo with his daughters and granddaughters. He did have a town named for him, but opted for his wife's middle name in Benicia.

Legacy Society

THE COMPLETE FLYER IS AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM. Gifts from your estate must be \$1,000 or more to be a part of the program.

Lesser amounts may be donations to a specific project or archival fund. Perhaps a \$500 Lifetime Membership would be appropriate?

For questions about donations, please call Robbie at 510-865-1767.



Your Outstanding Support

Our goal to get the City matching grant of \$3,800 toward our rent subsidy each year depends on the donations of many to our "Bang for the Buck" campaign. By the end of December we received over \$6,800 in denominations ranging from \$5 to \$1,000. Such outstanding support keeps the doors of the Museum open.

The Board of Directors and all Alamedans thank you for preserving the past for the future. Your generous support, especially during these trying economic times, is an indication of how important local history, research materials, lectures and art gallery presentations are to the community.

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Join any time. Dues based on calendar year.
Renewals after September will continue through
the next year.



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BANG FOR THE BUCK!

The mailing was a huge success
and we reached our goal. The
letter to the City of Alameda to
receive our matching funds to
supplement our rent expense has
been sent.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Docent News

WELCOME TO DOCENTS Lucy Rocha, Norma Serles,
and Bonnie Germaine who joined us last fall and have
settled into permanent shifts. Betty Stouffer is new and
will look forward to meeting the rest of the group soon—
maybe at the annual luncheon or an upcoming event.
Charles Daly is on the mend after the first of what will
be two knee operations.

Due to health issues, Jim Korn has retired after 20+
years. He designed the wall of architectural elements
adjacent to the Victorian parlor display and did the
sketch of early Park Street on the end wall. Also retiring
is Barbara Lewis who moved out of town after almost
three decades of loyal assistance.

We couldn't keep the doors open without docents.
Want to help? Docents are members, but they join at
a special rate of only \$15 per year, get treated to lunch
annually and attend our lectures for free. Call Ellen at
510-865-1204, to volunteer.



City of Alameda Historic Preservation Season 2011

- **Tuesday, March 1, 7:00 pm**
City Council declares Historic Preservation Season 2011 open!
Proclamation read by Mayor Marie Gilmore. City Council Chambers, City Hall 2263 Santa Clara Avenue.
Information: 510-747-4800.
- **Thursday, March 31, 7:00 pm**
Facade Easements that Promote Preservation of Historic Resources
Anthony Veerkamp, National Trust for Historic Preservation, sponsored by the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS), Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1420 Lafayette Street.
Free for members; \$5 for others.
Information: 510-479-6489.
- **Thursday, April 28, 7:00 pm**
Fernside the Estate and Fernside the Neighborhood
Author and *Alameda Sun* editor Dennis Evanosky and architect-preservationist Richard Rutter talk about the journey from the bucolic paradise that was the original estate to the best planned and maintained neighborhood on the Island. Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue.
Free for members; \$10 for others.
Information: 510-748-0796.
- **Saturday, April 30, time TBD**
Rededication of Paul's Newsstand
Commemorating the history of the newsboys who worked that corner and the renovation of the structure. Santa Clara Avenue at Park Street.
Information: 510-865-1767.
- **Saturday, May 7, 11:00 am – 12:00 pm**
Kids & Queen Victoria
14th annual exhibit, featuring the children of Alameda serenading her Majesty. Superintendent of Schools Kirsten Vitale will officiate. Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue.
Free, sponsored by the Alameda Museum and the Historical Advisory Board. Information: 510-748-0796.
- **Saturday, May 14, 11:00 am**
Stroll North of Lincoln: The Neighborhood Known as Wedgewood
Author and *Alameda Sun* editor Dennis Evanosky and architect-preservationist Richard Rutter. A study in contrasts, from Victorian homes of the 1870s Italianate style to a dip into maritime history of the 1930s. Meeting place details to follow.
Free, sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board. Information: 510-748-0796.
- **Thursday, May 19, 7:00 pm**
Preservation Awards Gala, the 14th annual celebration of spectacular historic preservation projects on the Island, sponsored by AAPS with details to follow.
Information: 510-479-6489.
- **Thursday, May 26, 7:00 pm**
Storybook Style
Author and architect Arrol Gellner with slides from his book. Featuring Stonehenge and Stoneleigh on Santa Clara Avenue. Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue.
Free for members; \$10 for others.
Information: 510-748-0796.
- **June Event, Date & Time TBD**
George C. Gunn Celebration
40 years of George C. Gunn as Curator of the Alameda Museum. A special fund raising event is being planned for June. Details not determined at the time of publication.
- **March 26, April 23, May 28, & June 25**
All 4th Saturdays, 1:00 – 4:00 pm
Meyers House Museum & Gardens
City Monument #26, a Colonial Revival style home on three parcels, was built in 1897 for Henry H. Meyers, a renowned East Bay architect. Tour includes Mediterranean style Studio with Meyers' office and the former garage now an Architectural Exhibit featuring building elements found in older Alameda homes like doors, hardware, plaster medallions, and stained glass windows. 2021 Alameda Avenue, near Chestnut Street.
Free for Guild members; \$5 for others.
Information: 510-865-3402.
www.alamedamuseum.org/museum/meyers/meyers.html

Proclamation: Historic Preservation Season

- WHEREAS*, the City of Alameda is home to more than 10,000 vintage buildings in all manner of architectural styles, from Victorian to Art Moderne; and
- WHEREAS*, historic preservation promotes commerce through Heritage Tourism and revitalizes neighborhoods; and
- WHEREAS*, many residents and visitors learn about heritage by enjoying local history displays at the Alameda Museum and touring the Meyers House to see firsthand an authentic 19th Century Alameda home; and
- WHEREAS*, most municipalities dedicate only the month of May to Historic Preservation, here in Alameda we celebrate a four month Historic Preservation Season; and
- WHEREAS*, during the Season our legacy of history and architecture will be properly celebrated with awards, ceremonies, slide shows, and walking tours; and
- WHEREAS*, two Preservation Season events that occur only in Alameda now commemorate their 14th year: the Kids & Queen Victoria exhibit and the Preservation Awards extravaganza of the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society; and
- WHEREAS*, Historic Preservation Season is proudly sponsored by the Historical Advisory Board of the City of Alameda, the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society, the Alameda Association of Realtors, the Alameda Museum, the Alameda Sun, the Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Alameda Business Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Park Street Business Association, and the West Alameda Business Association.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that I,
Marie Gilmore, Mayor of the City of Alameda, do hereby proclaim March through June 2011, as

HISTORIC PRESERVATION SEASON

and call upon the people of Alameda to join communities across the United States in recognizing and participating in the many events during this special observance.



How Come the Park Street Bridge is Green?

by Ron Ucovich

THE PARK STREET BRIDGE IS UNIQUE in many ways, the most obvious being its color. There are numerous reasons that the Department of Public Works does not paint their steel bridges with green paint. First of all, dark green (as with all dark colors) fades very fast in sunlight. Light colors, especially white or silver, will last about twice as long as the dark colors. Also, dark colors absorb heat more which expands the metal and puts a lot of stress on the moving parts. Light colors are also much more visible at nighttime or during bad weather. Dark bridges are almost invisible at night, especially from the water. Also, red and green are never used on bridges because they don't contrast with regulatory signs and signals. So, why did they paint the Park Street Bridge that color?



You may recall that it used to be painted silver, but in 1998, the bridge had to be closed to vehicular traffic during nine months for major renovation. With almost 40,000 vehicular crossings per day, this is the busiest bridge in Alameda, and closing it posed quite an inconvenience for drivers, so to compensate the disgruntled locals, the Department of Public Works offered to let the citizens select the new color. The City Council, at that time, was promoting the image of environmental sensitivity with "Green and Clean" as their motto. So

the people of Alameda voted to have the bridge painted green. The Department of Public Works was not thrilled by this decision, but they reluctantly capitulated.

When you look at the bridge carefully, you will see that it has another unique feature. It has two control towers. The Alameda tower is the main one, and the Oakland tower is the emergency backup. If a ship should damage the Alameda span, the Oakland span could still function independently. Also, if there were a power failure, the Alameda tower is powered by Alameda Municipal Power, while the Oakland tower is powered by PG&E.

Another unique feature of the bridge is that it has a steel deck. In 1935 when the bridge was built, cross-laced steel decking was the lightest roadway material that existed. The problem with steel decking is that it is very slippery, especially when it is wet. To give tires better traction, cleats are riveted onto the road surface. They work the same as steel studs on snow tires. These cleats frequently break off and need to be replaced. This past summer, the High Street Bridge was closed for a couple of months during non-peak hours so the broken cleats could be repaired. Fortunately, light-weight paving materials have been developed since then, and steel-grate decking is no longer used.

The bridge we see today is the second Park Street Bridge. The first one was a swing bridge built in 1893. At that time, Alameda was not an island. There was a dirt road that connected Park Street with 23rd Avenue in Oakland. The plan was to carve a channel to connect Peralta Creek with San Leandro Bay, thereby creating an island, but how can you carve a channel and not cut off the connection between two cities? The solution is to build the bridge before you cut the channel. So, there is

Continued on page 13. . .



The Park Street Bridge from the estuary looking east. The bridge was opened in 1935. Photo: Alameda Museum.



Park Street Bridge... *Continued from page 12*

another reason the Park Street Bridge is unique...it was built before there was any water to cross!



And talking about uniqueness, the opening ceremony in 1935 was truly unique. It was not done with a ribbon cutting, as they do with new freeways. It was not done with champagne, as with boat launchings. It was not done with a

21-gun salute or a fireworks display. Believe it or not, it was done by a real wedding ceremony. A man from Oakland married a woman from Alameda right on the deck of the bridge in front of hundreds of spectators. This symbolized the union between the two friendly cities, and the whole town was invited to the reception.

We love our green bridge... it is truly one-of-a-kind.

A NOTE OF APPRECIATION

to the men from
A.T. Weber Plumbing
who quickly figured out
the leak in the museum's
back warehouse and fixed
it pronto!

Did you Know?

ALAMEDA IS HOME TO THE OLDEST FUNCTIONING ESCALATOR ON THE WEST COAST? It is 57 years old, and it is located aboard the USS Hornet docked at Alameda Point. When the ship was built in 1943, the pilot ready room, the room where pilots assembled for briefing before going on a mission, was located directly below the flight deck. Since the flightdeck was made out of wood planks, it was vulnerable to damage by explosion or fire.



One plane crash could wipe out an entire squadron. To prevent this, the ready room was moved down about 40 feet where the pilots were better protected.

In 1953 the Navy installed a Westinghouse escalator to get the pilots up to their planes quickly and efficiently when they were called to duty. This escalator, although quite antique, is still in operating order...and Borders Book Store thought they had the only escalator in Alameda.

*USS Hornet docked at NAS Alameda.
Photo: Valerie Turpen.*

Upcoming Exhibits at the Museum Art Gallery

THE NATICA ANGILLY ART GROUP HAD AN EXTRAORDINARY EXHIBIT IN JANUARY with dance, poetry, art, performances and even a workshop on making better presentations. The artists were of the highest caliber, many displaying for the first time in Alameda and delighted with the venue. They've booked next January and we look forward to their return engagement.

Check our web site calendar for Gallery and Preservation Season events.

■ **FEBRUARY:**
San Lorenzo Art Group
Mixed media. Public reception
2/5/11 from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

■ **APRIL:**
Alameda Photo Society
Public reception 4/9/11
from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

■ **MARCH:**
The Tao of Metal
Feng Jin Sculpture Exhibition
Public reception 3/12/11
from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

■ **MAY:**
Kids & Queen Victoria
Reception 5/7/11 from
11:00 am to 12:00 pm.



What's New at the Meyers House & Gardens

THE MEYERS HOUSE COMMITTEE IS COMPRISED OF AAPS AND MUSEUM MEMBERS. While we don't meet that often, using e-mail to our advantage, we did prepare an assessment of deferred maintenance, complete with budget, thanks mostly to Virgil Silver.

As you know, the City of Alameda is strapped for cash, so the only funds currently available come from the East Bay Community Foundation that manages the Meyers cash assets. The annual 5% varies with the market – so these proceeds barely cover the grounds maintenance and utilities. This explains why the house is looking a bit shabby as the paint is beginning to fail. We hope to come up with a plan – perhaps a paint company or contractor will want to use the house for their promotions, doing the work at a substantially reduced cost. There is a need for improvements to outbuilding doors too, something that could be done by a professional wanting a write-off or publicity.

Meanwhile, we look to the inside as our palate for improvements. Just finished – the entire basement was scraped clean and painted in anticipation of a Meyers Family clothing display. Jane Burgelin and her trusty helpers had the daunting task of cleaning up all the dust from the painter's sanding in time for the 18 visitors January 22.

Thanks to the great response with several new Guild Members joining, we think we have enough funds to complete the project. There will be window film treatments and upgrades to some newly acquired display cabinets, obtained when the Video Station closed – thank you

Dorrance family for a great deal. We'll bring over some display boards from the museum's gallery. The dehumidifier has worked magic on the dampness. Additional lighting is proposed. Rugs from the collection will adorn the floors.

Many hands make light work. **If you can help in any way – please give Jane a call 510-865-3402.**



Guild members get to visit the Meyers House FREE and attend opening celebration, like the clothing display, for FREE.

We'll keep you up-to-date with progress on the museum's web site or via FACEBOOK. If you'd like to join the Guild, annual memberships are \$25 – see form page 15.

The house is open on the 4th Saturday of each month from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Cost is \$5.00 per person

Thanks to Hilda's Recycling for hauling away a freezer and water softener.

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VOLUNTEERS: ALAMEDA MUSEUM & MEYERS HOUSE & GARDENS

- Lou Baca
- Barbara Balderston
- Doris Bay
- Jane Burgelin
- Katherine Cavanaugh
- Ellen Chesnut
- Dorothy Coats
- Diane Coler-Dark
- Charles Daly
- Robbie Dileo
- Ross Dileo
- Marilyn Dodge
- Roni Dodson
- Joanne Dykema
- Caroline Erickson
- Pamela Ferrero
- Jeanne Gallagher
- Bonnie Germaine
- Barbara Gibson
- George Gunn
- Leslie Hawksbee
- Debra Hilding
- Lois J. Hoffman
- Mary Lee Keifer
- Julie Kennedy
- Flora Larson
- Gayle Macaitis
- Carla McGrogan
- James McGrogan
- Joanne McKay
- Stephanie Paula
- Susan Potter
- Darlene Pottsgeiser
- Virginia Rivera
- Lucy Rocha
- Betty Saunders
- Norma Serles
- Margy Silver
- Virgil Silver
- Lois Singley
- Marcy Skala
- Lavonne Stittle
- Betty Stouffer
- Wanda Thatcher
- Ellen Tilden
- Ron Ucovich
- Henry Villareal
- Mark White
- Joe Young
- Every Director

Volunteer docents are the folks who keep our doors open. An enthusiastic group, they help run the gift shop, and on occasion, do tasks like help with mailings. Training is available. Do you have 3 hours to make new friends? Come and spend it with us!

**Docent coordinator for main museum
Ellen Chesnut, 510-865-1204**

**Docent coordinator for Meyers House
Jane Burgelin, 510-865-3402**



MEYERS HOUSE GUILD

is a separate membership and donation category from Alameda Museum. Funds are used for the sole purpose of maintaining this gorgeous property. Guild members get invitations to MHG special events.

For more information call Jane 510-865-3402.

Renewals after September continue your membership through the entire following year.



Thank you for your support!

Make check payable to Meyers House Guild.

Mail to: **Alameda Museum**

2324 Alameda Avenue, Alameda CA 94501

Annual Guild Membership \$25

Dues Amount \$ _____

Additional Contribution \$ _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

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I would like to:

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IN THIS ISSUE

- *Dr. Alice Challen*
- *Alameda's First Outdoor Christmas Tree*
- *From the Curator's Desk*
- *A Closer Look*
- *From the President's Desk*
- *Hey, Don't Give the Town my Name!*
- *Your Outstanding Support*
- *City of Alameda Historic Preservation Season*
- *How Come the Park Street Bridge is Green?*
- *What's New at the Meyers House*

ALAMEDA MUSEUM

2324 Alameda Avenue

HOURS

Wed. – Fri., Sunday
1:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Saturday
11:00 am – 4:00 pm

MEYERS HOUSE & GARDENS HOURS

2021 Alameda Avenue

HOURS

4th Saturdays
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

510-521-1233

www.alamedamuseum.org



ALAMEDA MUSEUM LECTURES 2011

Skipping down Memory Lane!

To celebrate the Museum's eleventh annual foray onto the lecture circuit, we asked some favorites to repeat their talks. Mark your calendars.

- ❖ **THURSDAY, APRIL 29**
Fernside the Estate and Fernside the Neighborhood
Author and *Alameda Sun* executive
Dennis Evanosky and architect-preservationist
Richard Rutter.
- ❖ **THURSDAY, MAY 26**
Storybook Style
Author and architect Arrol Gellner.
- ❖ **THURSDAY, JUNE 30**
A. W. Meets Queen Victoria
Historian and former AAPS president Paul
Roberts on renowned Alameda architect
A. W. Pattiani. Underwritten by Judith Lynch,
member, Historical Advisory Board.
- ❖ **THURSDAY JULY 28**
**Imperial San Francisco:
Urban Power, Earthly Ruin**
Author-historian-gadfly Gray Brechin.
- ❖ **THURSDAY, AUGUST 25**
Victorian Glory
Designer and author Paul Duscherer.
- ❖ **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**
Vintage transportation on the Island
Grant Ute, coauthor of *Alameda by Rail*.
Underwritten by Peter Fletcher, Real Estate
Broker, Prudential California Realty.

NOTE: All lectures start at 7:00 p.m. at the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue near Park Street. No reserved seats; come early to save a place and enjoy the exhibits in the History Hall and the Art Gallery. Admission is free for Museum members and \$10 for others. Topics may change without notice. For lecture information leave a message at 510-748-0796 or check www.alamedamuseum.org.