

# Alameda Museum

# Quarterly

## A ROLLYCKING ROMP FROM RUGS TO RHYTHMIX *by Judith Lynch*

**T**HE PROPERTY AT THE NORTHEAST CORNER of Everett Street and Blanding Avenue has a history of significant transformations. It is located on the peninsula near where Alameda was connected to Oakland; then the tidal canal was completed in 1902 bringing the estuary within a block of the site. For more than nine decades, from 1906 until 2000, the parcel was the location of two businesses, each founded by an energetic entrepreneur, one the purveyor of rugs, the second the inventor of merchandise pricing apparatus. After some fallow yet litigious years, the corner of Everett and Blanding again became a witness to history as Alameda's first work-live building. Now called Rhythmix Cultural Works, it provides studios for seven artists with the lagniappe of a community cultural center that has become a mecca for a cornucopia of artistic pursuits.

The place is known affectionately as "The Clamp-Swing" building, in part because that company's name was emblazoned across the side in



*Original Alameda Rug Works building circa 1908 at 2006 Everett Street at Blanding Avenue, on part of the site for larger establishment built in 1931. That property briefly housed the Clamp-Swing company and is now the site of the Rhythmix art, music, and culture center. Image: Alameda Museum.*

bold white letters on a black background. But before that, the site was home to another Alameda establishment founded in 1906 and located there until the company moved fifty-one years later. The Clamp-Swing Pricing Company tenure was shorter, from 1957 until 2000 when the company relocated to Oakland.

### **The Alameda Rug Works**

After a few years of running a rug business in Pasadena, John A. Osterdock decided to go north to "The Mecca of

the West" according to the *Alameda Daily Argus*. The year he chose to immigrate here was 1906, and the date was that of the devastating earthquake, April 18. The catastrophe delayed him for a bit, but he persevered, and by May had settled in rooms in Oakland. Soon thereafter he bought the Pioneer Steam Carpet Cleaning Works operated by J.H. Hoag at 2409 Santa Clara Avenue in Alameda. Next Osterdock secured the property at Everett and Blanding, which at the

*Continued on page 2 . . .*

**Rugs to Rhythmix . . .Continued from page 1**



*Entrepreneur businessman John A. Osterdock founded the Alameda Rug Works; he and his family lived next door at 2004 Everett Street. Image: Alameda Museum.*

time housed "a two story residence surrounded by fruit trees. The trees were cut down to make room for the rug factory, which was rushed to completion and ready for occupancy on the 1st of July. Then Osterdock moved Hoag's equipment to the new structure." It was a two story wooden building with an enormous sign on the front: "Alameda Rug Works, Rugs Made from Old Carpets" with "Pioneer Carpet Cleaning Co." underneath. The phone number was Alameda 39, and address was 2006 Everett Street. Osterdock, his wife Mary, and their children moved into the Victorian house next door at 2004 Everett Street.

By 1911, Osterdock had already earned a fine reputation, with his "unswerving adherence to the policy of providing the best possible article at a reasonable and fair cost." From a modest beginning with six people, the business expanded until about fifty hands were employed in the various departments. Osterdock also built two factories, one in San Francisco, the other in San Jose, "both thoroughly equipped with the latest modern machinery, most of which is of Mr. Osterdock's own design." Another innovation he introduced was the Aero Vacuum Cleaning Wagon, after experimenting with a trial cleaning. "The test was as follows, a newspaper was laid on the floor and covered with dust. A large Wilton rug was laid over it. The rug had a coat of glue sizing on the back so thick that it had the appearance of glass. The Aero Wagon was set to work, and the newspaper was cleaned through the rug without any injury to the rug."

Osterdock and his crew did everything: made rugs from old carpets, cleaned, laid, and altered carpets, and even reconditioned used mattresses. They drove the Aero Wagon on house calls to clean upholstered furniture, as well as

carpets. They also installed a power loom for weaving lace and summer curtains. According to Alameda Museum Curator George Gunn, the Alameda Rug Works developed a clever marketing ploy. They christened their workaday rag rugs as "Osterdock Persians."

The business thrived even during the Depression. In 1931 the house was pulled down to provide the business with a parking lot, and the wooden factory was replaced with an ell-shaped two story structure at a cost of \$14,000. Planning Department records describe it as "brick construction with twelve inch walls throughout, concrete floors and wooden posts. The interior is lit by industrial sash windows. The building is unornamented but is painted with large black and white signs in simple block letters." The carpet weaving and lace making were done in the Blanding Avenue wing; the Everett Street section had a boiler that powered the vacuums used to clean carpets, and signs that are still visible were painted on this end.



*Alameda Rug Works employees toiling in the 1931 building, 2006 Everett Street. Image: Alameda Museum.*

**The Clamp-Swing Pricing Company**

Meanwhile another local inventor was devising a product whose manufacturing would eventually affect the brick structure at 2006 Everett Street. David Garfinkle moved here from Poland and established Garfinkle Brothers Groceries on Park Street in 1916. Around the corner in an unassuming brick garage on Park Street and San Jose Avenue, he experimented and developed "a price tag holder with a hinge that clamped to the edge of the shelves leaving the price tag hanging down in front of the merchandise," according to Planning Department archives. He secured a patent for the device and established the Clamp-Swing Pricing Company in 1925. The establishment soon outgrew the brick garage that was the inventor's workshop; the brick structure was enlarged three times during the 1920s. The structure caught fire in 1957; that

*Continued on page 3 . . .*

**Rugs to Rhythmix . . . Continued from page 2**



Original 1931 painted sign is faint but still evident. It was designated "historic" by the Historic Advisory Board in 2006. Image: City Planning staff.

same year the address of the Rug Works was changed from Everett Street to 2515 Blanding Avenue. Then the rug company moved to 2333 Clement Street, and Garfinkle's company moved into the brick building, claiming the new location with the eye-popping Clamp-Swing Pricing Company sign. Garfinkle died in 1979, still active and roundly praised as a civic leader and patriarch of a large family including 12 great grandchildren. The company stayed on in business on Blanding until 2000, when they moved to Oakland.

**Rhythmix Cultural Works**

The current and most exciting reincarnation of the red brick building started in 2004 when musician and artist Janet Koike purchased the structure, vacant but still sporting painted signs for both endeavors. She successfully persuaded city officials to let her develop the first "work-live" project in Alameda. She proposed both studio spaces for artists and spaces for performances, exhibits, and classes. Some praised her plan for preserving one of the significant industrial buildings left in the northern waterfront section of the Island. Others worried that letting artists have a bit of living quarters (only 10%) in their work spaces would circumvent Measure A, a 1973 ordinance that prohibits construction of multiple dwelling units. Arguing that the artist quarters would, in fact, become living units, thus flouting the City ordinance, Ed Murphy attempted to halt the project. He filed suit, lost, and then appealed; the last appeal was struck down by the court. Mayor Beverly Johnson, learning of the outcome, said "I'm pleased that the court agreed with the City of Alameda. Our work-live ordinance will help ensure the creative reuse of other industrial buildings."

After years of renovation, Rhythmix opened in 2007. In addition to studios for artists, the place also offers rooms for exhibits, a handsome theater, and multipurpose rooms

for classes and community use. During the last decade-plus, Rhymix has attracted stellar performers from drummers to dancers, mounted significant exhibitions, presented local and national authors and artists, and offered on-site classes to many schools in Alameda and Oakland. The most recent concoction is Island City Waterways, a triumph of movement, music, hiking, and history. The first in the series in 2016 focused on the estuary near Rhythmix, and several performances sold out with delighted audience trotting along surrounded by the performers as the whole crew went along Blanding past the Park Street Bridge. The second show began near Crab Cove in 2018 and also attracted an engaged audience; that show was partially funded by a grant from the City of Alameda Public Art Commission. What is next? Given the cascade of creativity and involvement, Koike and Rhythmix know no bounds!



Janet Koike bought the Alameda Rug Works building in 2004 and converted it into a combination of work-live lofts and spaces for performances and art exhibits. Image: Judith Lynch.

Prepared by Judith Lynch, former member, Historical Advisory Board.

Sources: Alameda Daily Argus, Alameda Magazine, Alameda Sun, Alameda Times-Star, Building Permit Bureau records, City Archives, Alameda Museum, Planning Department records, Polk's City Directories. This story was published by the Alameda Sun in 2007 as one of Judith's columns on "Local Landmarks."



# Alameda in the News

## What was happening in the Island City

### *From the San Francisco Call*

April 26, 1903

### **WIFE NOW SEEKS HUSBAND'S TRADE**

#### **Alameda Barber Leaves Spouse Who Opens Rival Shop**

**M**orris Barron, Park Street barber, now has as his most dangerous competitor for trade, his wife, who until today wielded the razor and scissors in his shop. She has opened a tonsorial parlor just across the way from her husband's stand and is already cutting deeply into his patronage. Trade unionism is the primary cause of the marital and business separation of the couple.

Barron is a union man and had employed his wife to assist him in his shop, although she is not a union woman, for the reason that the barbers permit no woman to join their union. Objections were made by the union to Barron having his better half work with him, and he and his place were threatened with the blacklist and boycott if he did not discharge his spouse. When Barron informed his wife that in order to retain his customers and be a good union man he would have to let her out, she retorted that if he thought more of his Barbers' Union than he did of his barber wife she would pack her things and go. And go she did.

Barron has caused to be published a notice saying that he will no longer be responsible for any bills contracted by his wife. "She has left my bed and board and barber shop and has started an establishment of her own," said Barron tonight. "I have lost a non-union helpmate, and guess I will have to get a union man to take her place."

"Morris and I wrangled about union matters until I got tired," said Mrs. Barron at her new place of business. "When he said he would have to discharge me because I was not a member of the Barbers' Union I concluded that it was about time that we dissolved our marriage union. I mean to show him that I can make a living and not belong to any union."

October 3, 1908

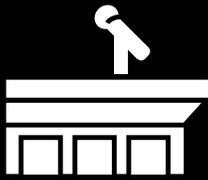
### **PANTALOONS ROBBED**

**F**our pairs of pantaloons, belonging to as many Chinese employed in the laundry of Sam Wo, 2036 Lincoln Avenue were filched of \$163 in the wash house last night while the owners of the trousers and the cash were sleeping in their bunks. The robbery was reported to the police.

September 20, 1910

### **GROCER PLEADS GUILTY TO POOR MILK CHARGE**

**G**eorge Morris a grocer at Willow Street station, pleaded guilty today in the police court to a charge of selling milk which was below the standard fixed by the board of health. Sentence was suspended. Several grocers and milk dealers, have been arrested by Milk Inspector Tom Carpenter on charges of selling milk not up to the standard. E. F. Kearney was found guilty, Morris pleaded, guilty and the trials of the remainder will be held in October, after the return of City Attorney M. W. Simpson from Atascadero.



## From the President's Podium *by Adam Gillitt*

I am pleased with the response we got for new Director nominations; more than half a dozen members of the community expressed interest. After meeting with interested nominees, we proceeded with three candidates to join the board. Kim Dye and Linda Ivey have been elected to two-year terms and Myrna van Lunteren will join the Board for a one-year term. All three have skills and enthusiasm that will ensure a vibrant future for the Museum.

It has been a privilege for me to work with our returning Directors; Valerie Turpen, Evelyn Kennedy, Bob Risley, Sherman Lewis, and Ashok Katdare. I am grateful for Valerie's tireless work producing our *Quarterly* and managing the lecture series; I don't know how she finds the time. Evelyn has been so incredibly helpful to the Museum as our Docent and Volunteer Coordinator—I think she spends more time at the Museum than anyone else! Especial thanks to Bob, who has been providing the Museum's accounting for longer than I have been on the Board. Thanks go as well to Sherman, who is now our director of membership; so far this fall, we have brought in over \$2,500 in renewals. Ashok has been very generous with his time as a Docent at the Museum and supporting our events.

I also want to thank many other members of the community who contribute so much to our success, including Joe Young, Tom Faulds, Chuck Millar, the Docents at the Meyers House and at the Museum, the Volunteers who produce the estate sales, the people who donate to the collection and the gift shop, the visitors to the Museum and Meyers House, and, most of all, you, our members. Without your generous support, the Museum could not keep our doors open.

I will never forget the first time I visited Alameda, in the spring of 2002, to buy a car off Craigslist. As a seven-year resident of San Francisco, I had no idea of anything to do with Alameda; I thought it might be located next to Antioch or something. Once I arrived on the island, over by Burbank St., to meet the owner of the car, I was immediately captivated by everything surrounding me—the smell of the salt ocean, the historic architecture, the carefully manicured parks and trees; the sense of being somewhere else completely different from everything around it. Within six months, I'd moved here.

That's not a unique story; since the early 1850s, Alameda has drawn visitors and residents from around the world, attracted by its unique charms. The Alameda Historical Society was founded 70 years ago, in 1948, by a group of local citizen historians, who wanted to chronicle and preserve Alameda's history. The Alameda Museum first opened to the public in 1951, under the stewardship of Harry Smith, who served as Curator until his passing in 1964. He was succeeded by Myrtle Richards for the next seven years, and then our present Curator took over in 1971.

Directors, boards, volunteers and other contributors have come and gone in the ensuing 47 years, but the constant guiding force has been George Gunn, researching, recording, archiving and sharing Alameda's history. He is the architect behind the Museum's collection, amassing valuable artifacts from throughout more than 160 years of history. Respected as a leading authority on all areas of Alameda's history, his service, time and efforts have led to a greater understanding of our community's different eras. He remains the only paid staff member of the Museum; without George there would be no Museum. I hope all of you are as grateful as I am that he has dedicated so much of his time and efforts to chronicling the history of Alameda. Thank you, George, for all that you do.

Finally, this is my last official act as an Alameda Museum Director. For six years, I have learned so much about what makes Alameda unique, and I have enjoyed the opportunity to preserve and present our history to the public. I am confident that the Museum is going to continue to grow and thrive and be a valuable resource to our community.

Thank you for the privilege.



**Adam Gillitt**  
Acting President, Alameda Museum

# Forty-Niner Called Alameda Home

by Dennis Evanosky

**ALEXYS WALDEMAR "A.W." VON SCHMIDT** surveyed the first border between Nevada and California. Among his other accomplishments, he and his brother Julius designed and built the dredge that helped create the Oakland Estuary as we know it today. A.W. spent the last years of his life in Alameda. In 1899 he moved into the home at 1816 Eagle Avenue so he could be near his five grandchildren, victims of a tragic parental murder-suicide in 1898.

For a short time, the orphans lived with his daughter Lily and her husband, Charles Lee Tilden. A.W. stepped up and cared for the four boys—his namesake Alexis, along with Harold, Roland and Edward. Lily and Charles, who had a son of their own, cared for the orphaned Rose. The Tildens lived at 1031 San Antonio Avenue, a little more than a mile's distance from A.W. Both the Tilden and von Schmidt homes still stand.

In his book *Putting California on the Map: Von Schmidt's Lines* historian David Carle tells us that A.W. sailed for California aboard the *Pleiades*. Storms off the Central American coast battered the ship to such an extent that the captain decided to dock at Mazatlán, Mexico, rather than risk sailing to San Francisco. Rather than waiting for the shipwrights to complete repairs on the *Pleiades* A.W. joined booked passage on the *Fanny*, which arrived in San Francisco on May 24, 1849. A.W.'s brothers, Julius and Peter, joined him in California in June and July respectively.

A.W. was a civil engineer. In 1852, he surveyed John Charles Fremont's Mariposa land grant in the Sierra foothills. Three years later, as deputy U.S. land surveyor, he took on, and succeeded at, the difficult task of extending the Mount Diablo Base Line from the San Joaquin Valley over the Sierra Nevada mountain range into Nevada. He then employed engineering skills, designing and building water channels called flumes, as well as ditch systems and pumping plants that supplied water to mining companies in both California and Nevada.

George Ensign's Spring Valley Water Company hired A.W. at its first engineer. Ensign had incorporated the water company in 1860 and employed A.W. to redirect Pilarcitas Creek in San Mateo County through tunnels and flumes and on to San Francisco. Thanks in large part

to A.W.'s skills, the company became the first to deliver water to San Francisco in 1862.

The history website Found SF ([www.foundsf.org](http://www.foundsf.org)) relates that in 1865 A.W. tried to break Spring Valley Water Company's monopoly. He founded the Lake Tahoe and San Francisco Water Works Company, hoping to build an aqueduct from Lake Tahoe to the mines in the Mother Lode and on to San Francisco. "It backfired," Found SF states.

Undaunted, von Schmidt built a dry dock at Hunter's Point in 1868 to service the ships that regularly visited California from east coast ports by way of Cape Horn. Von Schmidt's sturdy creation saw regular use until a larger facility replaced it during World War I.

On August 23, 1870, von Schmidt dynamited an impediment that had long plagued ship navigators in San Francisco Bay. His fete destroyed Blossom Rock, sending it to a depth of some forty feet below low tide. In order to send Blossom Rock to a safer distance below the surface of the bay, A.W.'s workers excavated an irregular cavern some 50 by 140 feet within Blossom Rock, filled it with 43,000 pounds of black powder in sealed casks and connected those casks to a single, distant power switch. "The explosion went off without a hitch to the great delight of thousands of people gathered to personally experience the spectacle," historian John Southworth relates.

All that remains on the surface today is a green buoy afloat in the bay off Coit Tower, appropriately marked "BR."

A.W. next took on defining the Nevada-California border. Today, not one, but two lines define the border between these states. One is the official boundary that the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey (USGS) laid out in 1893. The second is the less-accurate one—the "other" boundary, that A.W. laid out in 1873. Much like sailors of his day, A.W. used the stars to define his position while surveying his version of the boundary.

*History Illustrated* magazine tells us that A.W. set up tents, plumb bobs, stadia poles, a telescope and a clock. He used a reference book, charts and paper notes. His team, that included an astronomer sighted and timed the sun and the stars. "The technology of the day consisted of pencil calculations, mechanical clocks, mechanical optics and sheer skill, the Geosphere story in the magazine tells us. "These alone determined the accuracy of latitude and

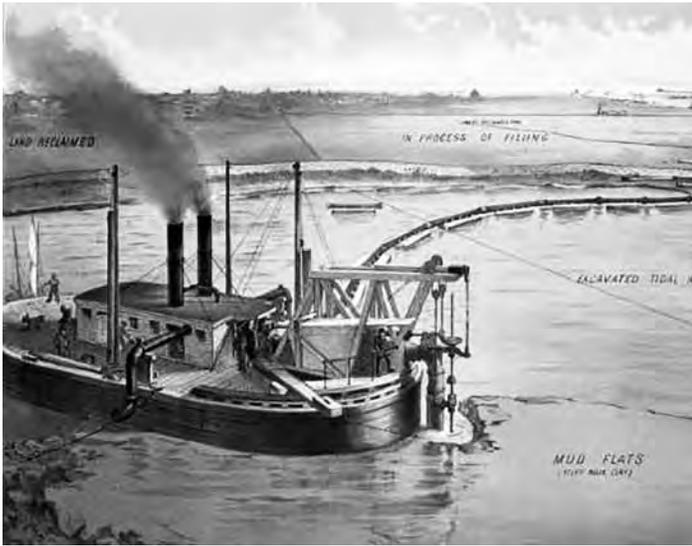
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**A.W. VON SCHMIDT**

*A.W. von Schmidt arrived in California in 1849. After a long, successful career as a civil engineer, he settled in Alameda so he could live near his daughter and his grandchildren. Image: Calisphere.*

**Forty-Niner** . . . Continued from page 6



A.W. von Schmidt and his brother Julius designed and built this dredge, which went to work creating the Oakland Estuary we know today. Image: Calisphere.

Twenty years later USGS used more accurate information about longitude not available to von Schmidt.

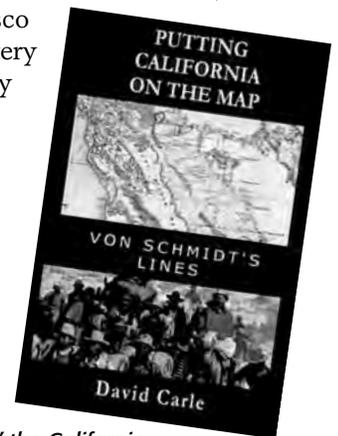
Three years after defining the California-Nevada border, A.W. joined his brother and fellow engineer Julius to design what Southworth calls "a giant floating suction dredge." The brothers first put their creation into operation along the river levees above Antioch. The federal government then hired the von Schmidt brothers to operate a much-improved version of the dredge on the Oakland Estuary. Southworth tells us that this was the "first suction dredge on the Pacific Coast." He also relates that it may have the first successful dredge of its type ever built.

Alexis von Schmidt died at his home in Alameda on May 26, 1906. He was laid to rest in his large family plot at Laurel Hill Cemetery in San Francisco. In 1939, the City and County of San Francisco ordered that long-neglected cemetery to close. The von Schmidt family moved its place of burial to Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland.

longitude. Accurate timekeeping was really the key. To help guarantee that accuracy, A.W. enlisted the help of a professor of astronomy to make his observations.

*History Illustrated* points out that the "difference of even one second in clock timing compared to the observatory in Greenwich England, would make the location error worse than 1,700 feet. Amazingly, A.W. and party's calculations "ended up only about 1,800 feet south and about 130 feet east of the much sought-after border at a perfect 42 degrees north by 120 degrees west."

*In "Putting California on the Map," author David Carle uses letters, newspapers and other primary sources to describe the fascinating life of the man who lived as a successful civil engineer. "If you love maps, engineers, backpacking or successful professionals this is the book for you," the California State Library says.*



## Island / Not an Island

When Alameda was founded in 1851, it was a woody peninsula attached to what would later become the city of Oakland. It was quickly populated by a diverse group of settlers; the need for expanded shipping facilities and improved sewage facilities led to the dredging of a canal through the marshland. The canal took almost 30 years to complete, from 1874 to 1902, making Alameda an island. The area called Bay Farm Island was never fully an island and was built out further by landfill. The size and shape of Alameda has also increased through the years from landfill, both along the south shore and on the west end to create the Alameda Naval Air Station. In 1874, a wooden cantilever bridge first connected Bay Farm's thirty residents. The original bridge across the Estuary at Webster Street, built in 1871, was replaced first in 1900, and again in 1926 by the Posey Tube. Currently, there are three drawbridges and two tubes connecting Alameda to Oakland, and parallel drawbridges between Alameda and Bay Farm, including the only drawbridge in the United States exclusively for pedestrian use.



# BUSINESS AROUND TOWN

Images from the Alameda Museum Archives • Captions provided by Woody Minor. ++++++

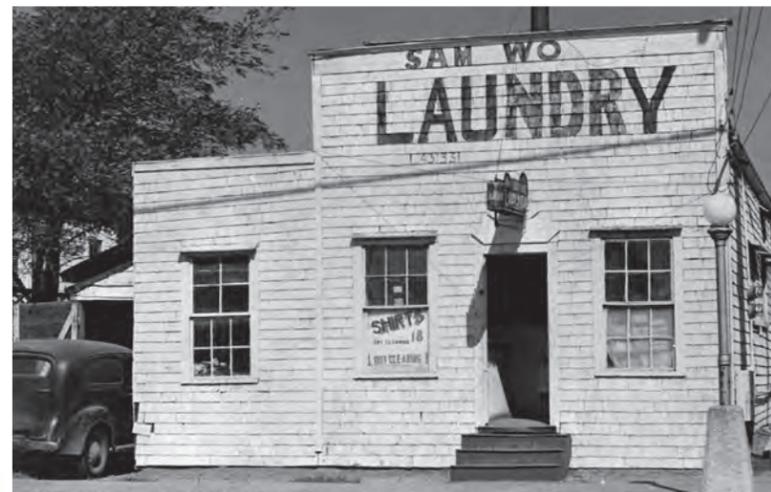


**Alameda Rug Works & Carpet Cleaning Co.**  
**Rugs Made From Old Carpets a Specialty**  
 First class rag carpets and rag rugs woven.  
 We pay freight *one way* on all orders.  
 The largest and best equipped factory in the State  
**J. A. OSTERDOCK, Prop., 2006 Everett St. Alameda, Cal**

▲ Founded in 1906 on the waterfront near Park Street, the Alameda Rug Works cleaned carpets and also recycled old carpets as newly woven rugs. In 1931 the original building was replaced by the brick factory at 2515 Blanding Avenue, repurposed as the Rhythmix Cultural Works. Ad from the *San Francisco Call*.



▲ Erected in 1878, this imposing pair of Webster St. Italianates included Philip Gochnauer's West End Meat Market (1612 Webster, right) and the shop of shoemaker Louis Reichsrath (1616, left). The image dates from the early 20th century when 1616 Webster housed Jacques Bonne's West End French Laundry. Both buildings still stand, though greatly altered.



◀ Demolished in 1978 for a church parking lot, Willow Station's landmark Sam Wo Laundry (2035 Lincoln Ave.) was the last of the city's historic Chinese washhouses, numbering around a dozen in the 19th century.



▲ George T. Morris's grocery store and residence, 2048 Lincoln Ave., was a notable addition to the Willow Station commercial district in 1908. Designed by talented Oakland architect A.W. Smith, the Colonial Revival structure came down in 1957 for the Alameda Boys Club (now a center for gifted children). The 1898 cottage on the left still stands.



▲ Noah Ford's turn-of-the-century print shop at 1714 Everett St., as it appeared around World War I. The bungalow at the left (where Ford and his family lived) and the "Groceries" building beyond both still stand though the print shop is long gone.

# Civil War Veteran Called Bay Farm Home

by Dennis Evanosky

**NATIVE AMERICANS HAD LONG USED** a marshy piece of land with some uplands that could pass for island to harvest birds and the eggs they laid. They dubbed the place "Wind Whistle Island." In 1820, the property fell into the hands of retired Spanish army sergeant Luis Maria Peralta as part his retirement package.

In 1842, Luis divided that package among his sons. His third oldest, Antonio, received this marsh and its upland. In 1851 Antonio sold the nearby Bolsa de Encinal to W.W. Chipman and Gideon Aughinbaugh, but did not include this marsh and its 230-acre upland in the sale. In 1853 the property became part of Alameda County. The county made Bay Farm Island part of Alameda Township on October 2, 1854, calling it "the place referred to as the Bay Farm." This marks the first time the place name Bay Farm Island appeared in an official document.

By then, the place had been settled and farmed by Powell E. McDonell, Benajah Benedict, William S. Lea and Asaph Cleveland. From the start, asparagus was the major cash crop. An 1875 advertisement for the sale of reclaimed marshland mentioned asparagus (and nothing else). By 1891 the *Alameda Semi-Weekly Argus* newspaper was reporting that Bay Farm Island's principal industry was raising asparagus.

George was among the second wave of settlers who began settling on Bay Farm in the 1870s. Other men who came to farm Bay Farm's rich soil at that time included Adrian Hamlin, J.E. Ellis, Daniel Swett, John Titlow and Thomas Jose Miranda.

Strangely George Anderson and Thomas Miranda were brothers, Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. For some reason George decided to abandon his family name Miranda and take the last name of captain of the ship on which he and Thomas had sailed to America.

The brothers arrived in this county in June 1860. George settled in Edgartown, Massachusetts, on Martha's Vineyard. He joined the Navy and served as quartermaster aboard six ships during the War between the States: *USS Vandalia*, *USS J.C. Brandywine*, *USS Bienville*, *USS Governor Buckingham*, *USS Ohio* and *USS Tacony*.

George saw his share of action during the war. For example, while serving aboard *USS Vandalia* in 1861, he participated in blockade duty off Charleston and Bull's Bay, South Carolina. He also witnessed the capture of the Confederate schooner *Henry Middleton* and its eight crew members. George assisted in the capture of the Confederate



George Anderson and his wife, Josephine, sit for the camera about 1890. George is wearing his Grand Army of the Republic badge to show that he served his adopted country during the Civil War.

barkentine *Thomas Watson*. He was also aboard *USS Vandalia* when the ship participated in the successful amphibious assault upon Roanoke Island, North Carolina, as 1861 drew to a close.

George married Louiza Sylvia in Edgartown in 1864. They had a son, Henry. George lost Louiza in 1869. After Louiza's death, George met Maine native Josephine Douglas. They married in Edgartown in 1874. He was 33, she was just 16. The couple had three sons—John, William and Alfred—and five daughters, Elizabeth, Anne, Blanche, Mary and Josephine.

Their daughter Josephine married Joseph R. Marshall and lived out her life on Martha's Vineyard. She and George did not get along, something made evident in a terse sentence in George's 1902 will. After enumerating all his other children and mentioning their shares of the estate, George wrote, "To Josephine L. Marshall, I bequeath nothing."

In 1880, six years after their marriage, the federal census lists George and Josephine living on Bay Farm Island. The census lists George's occupations as "farmer."

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**Civil War** . . . Continued from page 10



George Anderson served aboard *USS Vandalia* during the Civil War, one of six US Navy ships on which he served as quartermaster during the conflict. Image: Wikipedia.

George was among the first of a growing community of Portuguese who lived on Bay Farm. By the time the *Argus* was reporting the abundance of asparagus in 1891, the list of Portuguese settlers on Bay Farm had grown to include the Duarte, Flores, de Souza and Silva families.

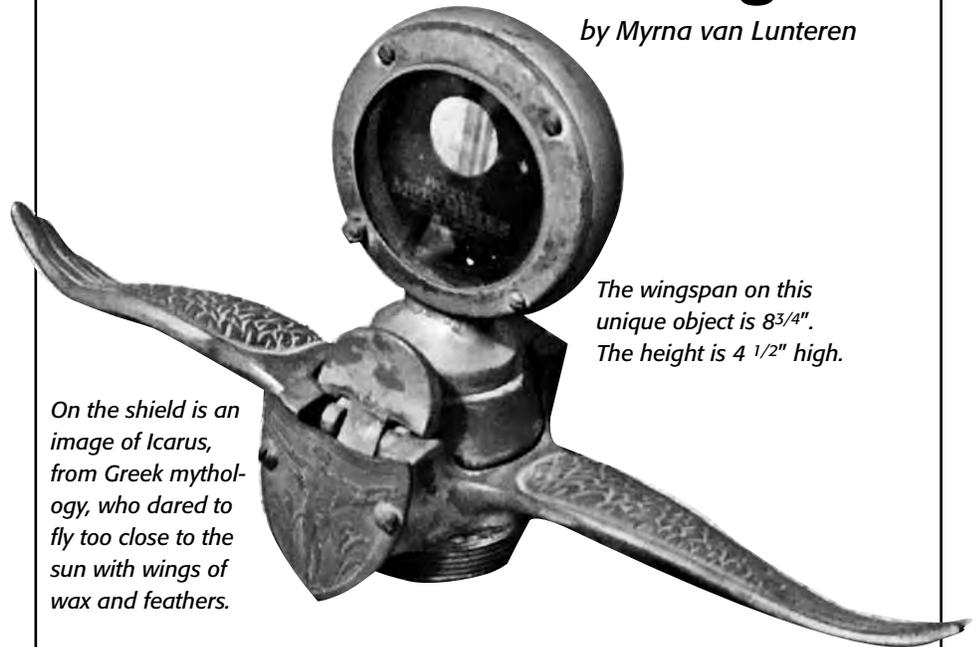
About that time, George sat for a photograph with Josephine. He is proudly wearing his Grand Army of the Republic medal to show that he had served his newly adopted country during the Civil War. He was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic's Joseph Hooker Post #11 in Alameda.

In 1895, the couple's daughter Mary wed Frank Martin. Like her mother, Mary had married young. She was just 15. She gave Frank a daughter, Emma. Tragedy cut the marriage short. Frank drowned in San Leandro Bay on May 17, 1903. George had already passed. He died on August 2, 1902 and rests at Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery.

Josephine moved to 3234 Encinal Avenue, where she passed on November 27, 1928. She was 70 years old. It is unclear whether she rests with George at Mountain View.

## What is That Thing?

by Myrna van Lunteren



The wingspan on this unique object is 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". The height is 4 1/2" high.

On the shield is an image of Icarus, from Greek mythology, who dared to fly too close to the sun with wings of wax and feathers.

This is a Boyce MotoMeter (midget model). It fell down when we replaced the ceiling of the garage in an 1889 Victorian on San Antonio Avenue we were renovating. Apparently, it was tossed up on the rafters of the garage after it became obsolete – or stopped working – where it sat for most of a century.

An internet search tells us that the MotoMeter was patented in 1912, and was used in early automobiles to read the temperature of a car's radiator. Having this stick out on the hood allowed the driver to monitor the radiator temperature without opening up the car's radiator cap. It also provided excellent opportunity to personalize the car's look. For instance, under the rust, this model has both a decorative shield with a picture of Icarus, and detailed wings.

After the 1930s, however, most car manufacturers installed this type of gauge on the dashboard – removing the need for a MotoMeter on the hood. However, people were so used to seeing these objects, that hood ornaments remained a common item on cars until safety and efficiency did away with most of them, except on some luxury brands. But still, most car brands display some kind of emblem on the front center of the car, a remnant of the time when that's where a personalized radiator cap used to be.

You will not find this in the Alameda Museum, as it's not specific to Alameda history. However, it sparks the imagination – what other things, once common, now odd or mysterious, have our Alameda historic homes seen come, and go?

**FROM THE COLLECTION**

# A Historic Cornerstone Finds a New Home at the Meyers House

**RECENTLY CURATOR GEORGE GUNN** received a call in regards to a donation to the Museum collection. The donation under consideration was more than a family heirloom, literally it was a piece of Alameda history—it was the cornerstone of the Lincoln School.

The first school in Alameda was located in a home purchased from the Schermerhorn family in 1855. It was located on the west side of Court Street, between Van Buren and Jackson streets. In 1864 the Alameda School District replaced the home with a new structure. A two-story building with eight-classrooms was built in 1892, named for school board member Cyrus Wilson.

In 1911 the name Wilson School was changed to Lincoln School. By 1916, the district had purchased an entirely new block bounded by Jackson, Van Buren, Mound and Court streets. The new school opened in 1917 with its grand entrance fronting on Central Avenue. The structure was designed by Cunningham & Politeao who designed the Haight School on Santa Clara Avenue in 1910.



*Opened in the fall of 1917, the new Lincoln School on Central Avenue displayed the classical symmetry and stylized Art Nouveau ornament for which the architects were known. Image: Alameda Museum.*

Also in 1917 a boy named Alvin Stefani was born in Alameda. As a youth he attended Lincoln School and after graduation moved on to classes at Alameda High School. He remained in Alameda where he married, raised a family, and built a home on Washington Street.

When the Lincoln School was scheduled for demolition in 1977, Alvin was employed by the school district as a carpenter. His son Alvin junior recalls, "Dad heard the cornerstone was available. He went over with a couple of buddies, retrieved it, and placed it in our backyard." That is where it remained for over 40 years.

The home belonging to Alvin and Yolanda Stefani was recently sold prompting their son to give the museum a call about their backyard treasure. "I felt the cornerstone should be kept in Alameda."

Museum volunteers Virgil Silver and Ross Dileo went to the residence and transported the very heavy stone to the Meyers House on Alameda Avenue. It is now proudly on display next to a 1911 streetlight in the garden.

*The Lincoln School cornerstone has found a new home in the Meyers House garden thanks to the donation of the Stefani family.*

*Story by Valerie Turpen. Historical information from Woody Minor and the Lincoln School facebook page.*

**When you finish reading this newsletter, DON'T THROW IT AWAY. Pass it on to a neighbor who may not be aware of all the interesting activities going on in our museum!**





## VOLUNTEERS: ALAMEDA MUSEUM & MEYERS HOUSE & GARDEN

- |                      |                             |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Margaretha Augustine | Ashok Katdare               |
| Margie Benko         | Evelyn Kennedy              |
| Ginnie Boscacci      | Julie Kennedy               |
| Gene Calhoun         | Carole King                 |
| Dora Calhoun         | Mary Lou Kurtz              |
| Janine Carr          | Jessica Lindsey             |
| Katherine Cavanaugh  | Gayle Macaitis              |
| Barbara Coapman      | Nancy Martin                |
| Cathy Conley         | Jeannie McCaffery           |
| Charles Daly         | Carla McGrogan              |
| Lin Datz             | Jim McGrogan                |
| Robbie Dileo         | Joanne McKay                |
| Ross Dileo           | Chuck Millar                |
| Marilyn Dodge        | Lloyd Novakowski            |
| Linda Domholt        | Patt Petrosky               |
| Joanne Dykema        | Carl Ramos                  |
| Brian Ellis          | Shirley Ramos               |
| Tom Faulds           | Holly Schmalenberger-Haugen |
| Pamela Ferrero       | Margy Silver                |
| Jean Follrath        | Virgil Silver               |
| Adam Gillitt         | Trish Herrera Spencer       |
| Debra Hilding        | Ellen Tilden                |
| Charlie Howell       | Gerry Warner                |
| Gail Howell          | Robert Welch                |
| Virginia Jones       | Helen Wittman               |
| Charles Kahler       | Joe Young                   |

*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 three hours to make new friends? Come and spend that time with us!*

**Docent Coordinator for Alameda Museum**  
Evelyn Kennedy  
volunteer@alamedamuseum.org  
510-504-5612

**Docent Coordinator for Meyers House**  
George Gunn, 510-521-1233

# JOIN ALAMEDA MUSEUM

Preserving the Past for the Future  
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### New Membership

- A one-time pass to the Meyers House

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- Free admission to the lecture series
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Join any time. Dues based on calendar year.  
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Meyers House and Garden  Alameda Museum

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## The Most Beautiful Statue I Have Ever Seen *by Ron Ucovich*

**THE MOST BEAUTIFUL STATUE** I have ever seen was created by a San Francisco real estate mogul named Angelo Sangiacomo. He was born in San Francisco in 1924. During the Great Depression, Angelo earned money delivering newspapers to office buildings in the Richmond District. When World War II broke out, Angelo served four years in the Navy. After the war ended, he had enough money saved up to buy a cottage near Ocean Beach. He divided the home into small units, which he rented out for \$75 a month. As the rent money came in, he used it to buy more homes, subdivide them, and rent out the apartments. He became a real estate broker and started selling houses, businesses and condominiums. He bought old buildings and refurbished them, or he tore them down and replaced them with high-rise luxury apartments.

In 1996, Trinity Properties, Angelo's real estate investment enterprise, purchased Marina Cove, a 241-unit complex on Bay Street. He drove out his tenants by charging confiscatory rent increases for the foreseeable ten years. The rent increase was allowed under the "capital improvements" clause in the rent-control ordinance. As tenants vacated the units, Trinity Properties converted the units into luxury apartments.

By the year 2000, Angelo's enterprise comprised 43 apartment buildings. He was about to commence work on his magnum opus, a 1900-unit complex of luxurious apartment suites. He already owned the former Del Webb's Towne House Motel, built in the 1960s. His dream was to demolish the old building and replace it with a high-rise apartment complex.

The complex is made up of a square of four huge buildings with a large plaza in the center. To break away from the monotony of San Francisco's mega-structures which resemble giant ice trays standing on end, each building has subtle changes in the pattern of windows, the use of balconies, the color of marble siding, or the design of ledges and cornices.

These subtle changes in architecture create a symphony of harmonic architecture.

For his crowning showpiece, Angelo dedicated the entire center of his plaza to his grand masterpiece, a statue of Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty. The most famous statue of Venus is the one discovered on the Greek island of Milo. It was carved over 2000 years ago out of white marble, and it represented Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty (Venus to the Romans). Although both arms are now missing, she is still considered the epitome of beauty and proportion perfection.

Now, Angelo needed to create a statue that would outshine every other statue of Venus in the world. He enlisted the help of Lawrence Argent, a world-renowned artist and sculptor, then the two of them began to bounce ideas off each other, boldly determined to create the most spectacular work of art in the world.

What material should they use? Granite is stately, but it is too mundane. White marble is elegant, but too common. Bronze is expensive, but looks a bit military. Copper is beautiful, but it turns to dull green when it tarnishes. After long weeks of non-productive debate, the two settled upon stainless steel. It is elegant, beautiful, clean, simple, and very unusual for a statue.

Now, what should the statue look like? Venus de Milo was designed to depict the perfect woman. She was carved out of white marble to depict purity, simplicity, and freedom from blemishes. If Angelo's monument were a beautiful woman made out of stainless steel, she would look like some type of futuristic robot. Angelo decided that his statue should not look like a real woman. He decided upon a stylized woman that looked like a wisp of smoke swirling up from Aladdin's magic lamp.

Next, Angelo had to decide how large his Venus should be. The larger the statue is, the more impressive she will be. Venus de



*Continued on page 15. . .*

**Statue . . . Continued from page 14**

Milo measures 6 foot 8 (considerably taller than the women of her time). If you make the statue too tall, she will look more scary than beautiful. This concept was brought to light in 1909, when Federal officials decided to memorialize Abraham Lincoln by erecting a huge likeness of him in Washington D.C. The statue was designed to stand 28 feet tall from head to foot. Then, to convey a feeling of importance, the statue was supposed to stand inside a 190-foot-tall Doric-style Greek temple. The statue would have been pretty intimidating, especially after climbing the 24 steps required to reach Mr. Lincoln's feet. The designers decided to make Mr. Lincoln sit in a chair looking down at his feet in pensive contemplation. This made him only 19 feet tall, and a much less imposing figure.

Angelo wanted to have a statue even taller than the Lincoln Memorial. The largest statue in America is the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Lady Liberty stands 111 feet tall from head to toe, and is quite a grandiose work of art. Angelo decided to make his monument 92 feet tall, hoping to create the same magnificent impression.

The design work was now complete. The plan was to create a 92-foot statue of a beautiful maiden wearing a flowing, silver bridal gown and veil. But, how will people know that she is the goddess of love? Historically, Venus has been illustrated using various phallic symbols to convey sensuality. The heart shape, for example, originated from Roman artists trying to imitate feminine contours. Another

legend from Roman mythology tells us that Venus bore a lovechild whose father was Mars, the God of War. The child's name was Cupiditas, the Latin word for "lust." People today call him Cupid, the devilish little cherub who mischievously uses his bow to shoot phallic symbols at unsuspecting victims. No, thought Angelo, his monument should not be adorned with prurient icons.

Surprisingly, the statue was not named Venus. Angelo gave her a name that would evoke mystery and intrigue. He named her *C'era una Volta*, the same name as our wonderful Italian restaurant on Park Street. It's a name that says you are leaving reality and entering a fairytale land... a land of legends, fantasy, and imagination. It tells you to prepare your mind to take a ride on a flying carpet, or to enter a fanciful white castle in the clouds. The words can not be translated literally, but the idea is the same in all languages: in Italian it's *C'era una volta*; in Spanish it's *Erase que era*; in French it's *Il était une fois*; and in English it's *Once upon a time*.

Angelo's monument was completed in 2016, and is located on 8th Street between Market and Mission. She stands proudly in the center of Trinity Plaza, and is surrounded by a dozen imaginative and fanciful lesser works of art. Next time you are in San Francisco, drop by and check her out. I think you, too, will say that she is the most beautiful statue you have ever seen.

**See the next issue of the AMQ for "The Ugliest Statue I Have Ever Seen."**

**Are you recovering from the loss of a loved one, moving to smaller quarters, or overwhelmed by unnecessary clutter?**

Alameda Museum provides an expert estate and consignment sale team that takes care of everything for you. When you engage us for your sale, not only do you keep more revenue by utilizing a non-profit estate sale company; you also may be eligible for a tax deduction. Please consult your tax advisor for more information about charitable contributions.

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**For more information, please email [info@alamedamuseum.org](mailto:info@alamedamuseum.org) or phone 510-521-1233 and leave us a message describing which estate sale services you would like for us to provide.**





**ALAMEDA  
MUSEUM**

2324 Alameda Avenue  
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**ALAMEDA MUSEUM**

2324 Alameda Avenue

**The Museum will be closed  
for the Holidays from  
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to January 2, 2019.**

**510-521-1233**



**Meyers House & Garden**

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in January 2019.**

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