

Alameda Museum

Quarterly

FAILED RAILROAD LED TO THRIVING FERRY SERVICE

by Dennis Evanosky

IN DECEMBER 1862, Timothy Dame, Peter Donahue and Charles McLaughlin formed the Western Pacific Railroad (WP). These men were already busy building the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (SF&SJ), which began running between San Francisco and Menlo Park in October 1863. The SF&SJ initiated service to San Jose in January 1864. Ten months later, the Central Pacific Railroad (CP) gave the WP the rights to build a railroad that connected Sacramento with San Jose.

If all went according to plan, the transcontinental railroad would run on WP tracks south from Sacramento to Stockton over the Altamont Pass, through the canyon along Alameda Creek to Vallejo Mills (today's Niles). Trains would then travel south to San



Niles Canyon Railroad. On October 2, 1866 an inspection party visited the Western Pacific Railroad's tracks in today's Niles Canyon. The Western Pacific's inability to finish this railroad through the canyon and on to Sacramento led to a decision to run the transcontinental railroad into Oakland, giving the East Bay ferries a near monopoly on getting passengers into San Francisco.

Jose and finally north up the peninsula to San Francisco on SF&SJ tracks.

In 1866, the WP ran out of money after completing the first 20 miles of track. This forced the railroad to halt construction east of Vallejo Mills in the middle of the desolate canyon along Alameda Creek. The following year the CP decided that the route from Sacramento through San Jose to San Francisco was too long. The railroad found it more expeditious to instead run trains to Oakland and use ferryboats to carry passengers to San Francisco.

This 1867 decision enhanced the role of the San Francisco Bay ferry-

boat industry, which had already been carrying passengers from "Contra Costa," as most called today's East Bay, to and from San Francisco for 17 years. "Ferry service from San Francisco to the East Bay began in 1850, when Captain Thomas Gray began sailing the small steamer *Kangaroo* from San Francisco to San Antonio Creek, which is now the Oakland Estuary," Joe Thompson, the "Cable Guy," tells us. Two years later, Charles Minturn organized the Contra Costa Steam Navigation Company, carrying passengers from San Francisco to West Oakland.

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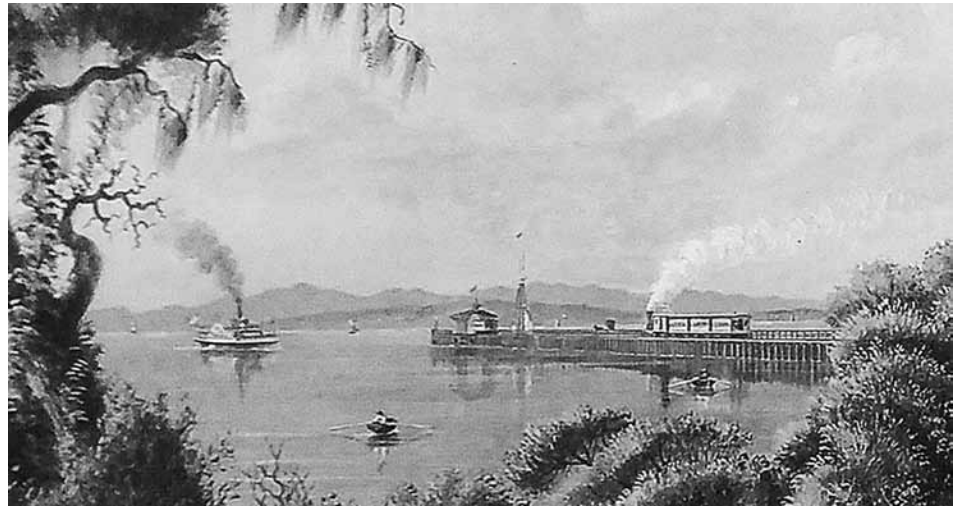
Failed Railroad . . . Continued from page 1

After dredging removed much of the silt from the estuary in 1853, Minturn moved his terminal to the foot of Broadway in Oakland. His ferries also stopped at James Hibbard's wharf at the foot of Leviathan Street (today's Grand Street) in the village of Encinal. Today's Hibbard and Minturn streets in Alameda recall these two men.

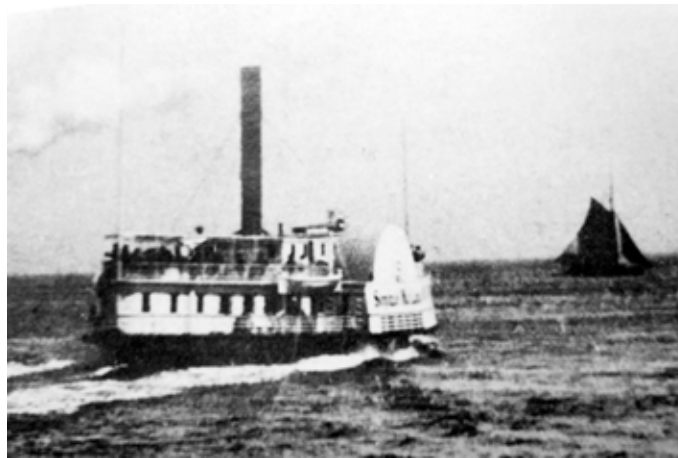
In 1856, William Worthington Chipman and Gideon Aughinbaugh, the founders of the town of Alameda constructed the 350-foot-long Peralta Wharf into San Francisco Bay from the shoreline at today's Central Avenue and Third Street. They hired Captain Lubbock to run his *General Kearney* to San Francisco's Jackson Street Wharf. Plans fell apart when Chipman and Aughinbaugh learned that Minturn had hired Lubbock to run his ferry exclusively for the Contra Costa Steam Navigation Company.

Chipman later purchased and outfitted the *Ellen Craig* to sail from the Peralta Wharf. He fittingly renamed the vessel *Peralta*. Problems plagued the boat. Imelda Merlin tells us that Chipman blamed the *Peralta's* mishaps—which included a hole in her boiler—on "soft English iron."

Alfred A. Cohen arrived in Alameda in 1857. He acquired most of the land on today's West End and laid out the town of Woodstock. By 1864 he had enough capital to build a railroad that would eventually connect Alameda with Hayward and, for about two months, serve as the terminus for the transcontinental railroad. San Francisco & Alameda Railroad (SF&A) workers began laying track from today's Pacific Avenue and Main Street to modern-day Marshall Way, and through the peninsula on Lincoln Avenue to what we know as Tilden Way. The line used Alameda Avenue in Oakland to reach High Street. The railroad later connected Alameda to San Leandro and finally to Hayward.



Joseph Lee Detail: This detail from Joseph Lee's painting "Alameda Shore" portrays the ferryboat *Sophie MacLane* approaching Cohen's Wharf on August 25, 1864. Alfred A. Cohen commissioned Lee to paint this picture in 1868 to commemorate the first trip on the San Francisco & Alameda Railroad. Image: M. H. de Young Endowment Fund.



Sophie MacLane. A schooner crosses the path of the *Sophie MacLane* in this only known photograph of the ferryboat. A boiler explosion destroyed the vessel at Suisun City in October 1864, just one month after Alfred Cohen removed her from service on his railroad. Image: Roy D. Graves Collection.

On August 25, 1864, the SF&A's first train, with the locomotive *E. B. Mastick* in the lead, rolled through Alameda from its end station near today's High Street and Coliseum Way in Oakland. Cohen wanted to carry passengers not just to Alameda, but to San Francisco as well. To accomplish this he built a 3,750-foot-long wharf from a spot near Pacific Avenue and Main Street into San Francisco Bay. The wharf ended about where the *USS Hornet* lies anchored at today's Alameda Point. Cohen leased the river packet *Sophie MacLane* from Minturn's Contra Costa Steam Navigation Company

to take his passengers to the Davis Street Wharf in San Francisco.

"The elegant passenger boat *Sophie MacLane* will leave the corner of Vallejo and Davis streets at 9 a.m., the *Daily Alta California* told its readers that Thursday morning. "The fare from Davis Street to High Street is 25 cents."

The *Sophie MacLane* had been ferrying passengers and goods from San Francisco to Sacramento since 1858. The 148-foot-long side-wheeler proved too small for the task of carrying SF&A passengers to San Francisco and back to Alameda. In September

Continued on page 3 . . .



Failed Railroad . . . Continued from page 2

1864, Cohen hired the slightly larger *Contra Costa* from Minturn. The decision to replace the *Sophie MacLane* on the SF&A line proved a timely one. On October 26, 1864, her port boiler exploded while she was tied up at Suisun City. The explosion killed the packet's captain and three crewmembers.

"The shell of the boiler gave way, and the boat was torn to pieces and rendered useless," the *San Francisco Call* told its readers. The newspaper reported that an investigation showed that the explosion occurred from excessive pressure from the criminal negligence and mismanagement of *Sophie MacLane's* engineer. "He was of the oldest engineers on the coast and up to this time had borne an excellent reputation for attention to his duties. His license was revoked and he immediately left the country to save himself from prosecution," the *Call* reported.

Business on the line continued to increase and even the *Contra Costa* proved too small to handle the traffic. In 1865 Cohen took the bold step of building his own ferryboat, a double-ended affair he christened *Alameda*. Cohen launched his ferry in February

1866. The *Alameda* waited at the foot of Cohen's Wharf on Sept. 6, 1869, to carry the transcontinental railroad's first passengers to San Francisco.

Today Cohen's creation lies at the bottom of San Leandro Bay just east of Encinal Avenue. In 1899, the Southern Pacific Railroad towed the 33-year-old vessel from West Oakland to a spot near the bridge that once carried South Pacific Coast Railroad trains to and from Alameda. Workers filled the *Alameda's* aging carcass with mud and stone to better hold her on the bottom. "The Ferryboat *Alameda* Fills a Sinkhole," the *San Francisco Call* told its readers on August 19, 1899.

**Did you know?
Captain Thomas Gray,
who offered the first
ferry service from the
East Bay to San Francisco
in 1850, was dancer
Isadora Duncan's
grandfather.**

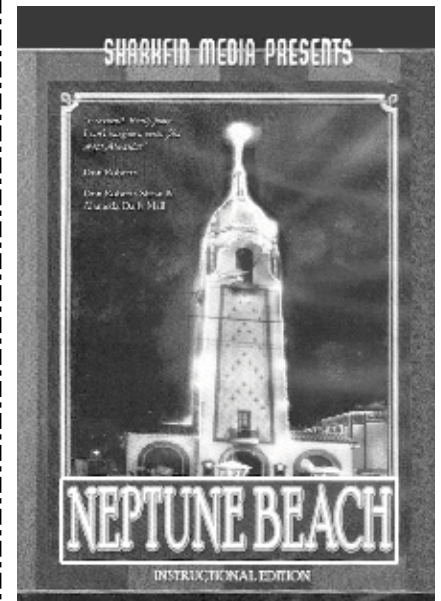


Ferryboat Alameda. Alfred A. Cohen debuted his double-ended ferryboat *Alameda* in February 1866. On September 6, 1869, the *Alameda* carried the very first transcontinental passengers from the town of Woodstock on *Alameda's* West End to San Francisco. Image: Roy D. Graves Collection.

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Exciting New Projects are Underway at the Museum!

AS DIGITIZATION HAS BEEN COMPLETED for our photograph collection, we are beginning to database the information. We are also working on a digital database for our entire museum catalog. This digital work brings us closer to the capability of providing an easy way to navigate through our collections and information conveniently.

New projects, new opportunities, and a new year will bring about new faces! Three of our recent additions to the museum family are professional archivist Sean Heyliger, History teacher Olivia Bauman, and local entrepreneur Bobby Curry (not pictured), with the two latter stepping forward to serve as interim Board of Director members for the duration of 2015. All bring special skills and knowledge to our family of dedicated volunteers.

Our volunteers are the heart of what we do! To get involved please email volunteer@alamedamuseum.org



Professional archivist Sean Heyliger (right) working with museum volunteers Chad Barr (left) and Nancy Martin (center) on a digital accession database. Image: Marcy Skala.



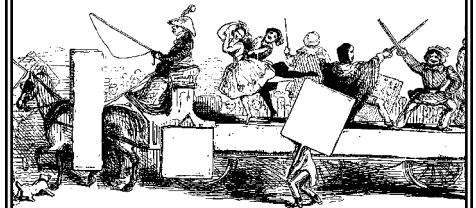
New interim board member Olivia Bauman.

GET COMMITTEED!

Please consider joining one of our committees.

Have fun, learn lots, meet different people, and get the satisfaction of helping out the Museum and the Meyers House! We have listed the chair of each committee, followed by his or her email and phone number.

Please use email if you can, as most of us prefer it.



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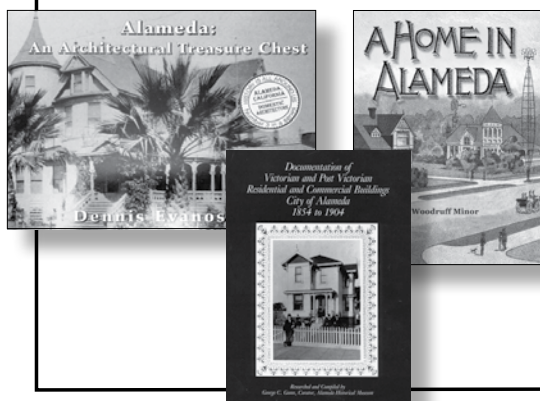
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ALAMEDA BOOKS BY LOCAL AUTHORS



PICK UP A COPY TODAY

Books and other merchandise available at the Alameda Museum Gift Shop or online at alamedamuseum.org

- *Alameda: An Architectural Treasure Chest*, Dennis Evanosky
- *Documentation of Victorian and Post Victorian Residential and Commercial Buildings, City of Alameda 1854 to 1904*, George Gunn
- *A Home in Alameda*, Woody Minor



BE A MUSEUM DOCENT

MAKE SOME NEW FRIENDS

Please contact the
Docent Coordinator

volunteer@alamedamuseum.org
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Alameda Museum Quarterly is published in the spring, summer, fall, and winter of each year and is available in electronic form on the museum website.

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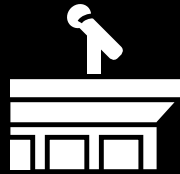
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Alameda Sun

DAMES AUX GATEAUX



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From the President's Podium

by Dennis Evanosky

Carriage House Restored, Show at Museum Gallery & Grants

I was happy to get a preview of the restored carriage house at the Meyers House and Gardens from Curator George Gunn. I remember not too long ago when George and I stood in the carriage house and wonder if the next breeze would blow the building away. By the time you read this, the carriage house will have its finishing touches applied and a special show featuring artist (and Meyers family neighbor) Edwin Siegfried will be on display. I want to congratulate George for seeing this project through to completion.

Phyllis Diller fans have a treat in store at the museum's art gallery in November. The retro dining club, "Dames aux Gateaux, is hosting "For the Love of Phyllis Diller, a special low-brow art show and vintage clothing sale to honor the comedienne who once called Alameda home. The show kicks off on Saturday, November 7, at noon, with live music and a raffle.

Before hitting it big, Diller performed her comedy routines for her fellow PTA moms at Edison Elementary School. To honor this comedic treasure, the Dames have worked with the City of Alameda to create an official "Phyllis Diller Day." The museum is part of it all. Phyllis has a special year-round corner in the gallery and from November 7 - 27 the gallery will belong completely to this beloved woman who once called Alameda home.

The museum will be applying for a \$100,000 matching grant from the state of California. In the meantime I'm preparing the required material for the application, which is due next September. The museum would use the money to preserve and present its collection. We could spend the money on cases and boxes that would help keep the collection in a proper state. We could also spend the money on updating and refreshing the displays.

A matching grant means that we need help from the community. I'm hoping to find eight businesses willing to invest \$6,250 each in the project. Donations could also come from individuals—a little or a lot. I will set up a way for donors to help by February 1, 2016.

On September 30, the museum applied for a \$2,500 grant from the Bank of Marin. If we receive this grant, we would use the money to help digitize the 1979 survey photographs currently with the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society. Last year the City Council asked the museum to find a way to make these photos accessible to the public. Digitizing these photos would begin with preparing information about them for use in Adobe Photoshop's Lightroom.

Dennis Evanosky
President, Alameda Museum



What's New at the Meyers House



Meyers Carriage House Rededication Ceremony

Story and images by Adam Gillitt

Nearly forty contributors and supporters gathered to celebrate the newly renovated Carriage House in the Gardens of the Meyers House Sunday, October 25. Led by Board President (and *Alameda Sun* co-Publisher) Dennis Evanosky, the event featured a Proclamation from Mayor Trish Herrera Spencer, remarks and thanks from Curator George Gunn, and delicious homemade refreshments. Among those also in attendance on the lovely autumn afternoon were docents and volunteers at the Meyers House and Garden, current and former Museum Board members, other MHG supporters and contributors, and Vice-Mayor Frank Matarrese.

The Meyers House is a City of Alameda Landmark, designated Historical Monument Number 26. It was constructed in 1897 for noted Alameda architect, Henry Haight Meyers. He is best known locally for designing the First Presbyterian Church and the portal to the Posey Tube. His descendants bequeathed the house and gardens to the City in 1993, and the City transferred the grant deed to the Alameda Museum in 2013.

Records show the first mention of the Carriage House on the grounds of 2021 Alameda Avenue dating to 1899. Through the years, and at least a couple of renovations, the building has served not only as the carriage house, but housed the pump for the well and the tank for the fuel to heat the family home.

Last year, Curator Gunn brought the Museum's Board of Directors to see the dilapidated condition of the building and began a campaign to raise money from the community to reconstruct, renovate and modernize the structure. Gunn was able to mobilize more than sixty-five contributors, who raised more than \$25,000 towards the project.

Now, the building offers a warm and inviting exhibition and gallery space for the public to enjoy. The space is being inaugurated with a show of works by Alameda pioneer family member and artist Edwin Siegfried. Noted for his early oil paintings and later pastels, Siegfried lived from 1889 through 1955. His family's estate was only a few doors down Alameda Avenue from the Meyers house. The exhibition includes many of his works and additional biographical material about the artist.

Mayor Spencer's remarks and Proclamation were enthusiastically received by both the Curator and the assembled supporters. The Mayor reminded those gathered of the importance of the Museum's mission to preserve City documents and artifacts and to inform and educate the public about Alameda's storied past, urging "I encourage the public to join me in supporting and patronizing the Alameda Museum and the Meyers House and Garden to learn more about our City's long and rich history."

Curator George Gunn, Mayor Trish Spencer, and Vice-Mayor Frank Matarrese view the interior of the Carriage House.



Mayor Spencer with George Gunn, reads the City Proclamation.

The attendees toured the Carriage House, viewed artist Edwin Siegfried works, and enjoyed refreshments in the garden.





Artifact Recalls Early Water Company *by Dennis Evanosky*

AMONG THE ARTIFACTS AT THE MEYERS HOUSE AND GARDEN is a manhole cover from the People's Water Company. The company, which supplied Alameda with its water from 1906 to 1917, traces its roots to Captain Robert R. Thompson's 1879 Artesian Water Company. Thompson's company supplied water to Alameda from artesian wells at first from a source beneath the ground at today's Thompson Avenue.



In 1887, Thompson purchased two and one-half acres from the Damon family adjacent to the slough that bore the family's name. The land was the site of the November 14, 1869, train wreck that killed fifteen people and injured twenty-seven.

In April of the following year Thompson's company drilled eleven wells on this property—called the Damon Well Field—to depths between 60 and 250 feet. One of the wells produced 8,000 gallons per hour, but three produced little water. The company shut those off and drilled twelve more wells.

In a paper he wrote for Norfleet Consultants, civil engineer Sands Hardin Figuers wrote that the Artesian Water Company purchased more land in 1893 just south of the Damon Well Field where the Oakland Coliseum now stands. This new site became known as the Fitchburg Well Field for the town of Fitchburg that stood nearby. The company built a pumping station and drilled fifty-one, 10-inch diameter wells to depths between 42 and 140 feet.

These wells, which stood adjacent to today's flood-control channel near the coliseum, produced about 500,000 gallons per day. Over the years the company enlarged the well

Sometime in the late 1990s museum volunteer Ross Dileo discovered this manhole cover while clearing out the shrubbery on the Meyers House and Garden property. Former board member and handyman extraordinaire Chuck Millar attached the cover to the Carriage House. The cover likely provided access to People's Water Company workers somewhere along or on Central Avenue. The company supplied Alameda with its water from 1906 to 1917.

field. Thompson sold his operation to the Contra Costa Water Company in 1900.

The property the Contra Costa Water Company purchased and the money it paid, an estimated \$750,000, about \$21.8 million in 2015 dollars, give us an idea of the size of Thompson's operation, which consisted of 350 acres of artesian well land at Fitchburg with ninety-seven wells. The company also received the deeds to properties in Alameda that included the pumping plant and wells along today's Thompson Avenue, the lot, building and reservoir on Park Street and a large lot on Santa Clara Avenue near Park Street.

The Artesian Water Company also turned over 330,400 feet of pipe, 3,037 water meters and 247 hydrants to the new owners. By 1903 the

new owners had 72 operating wells that produced 1 million gallons per day. On August 30, 1906, about five months after its purchase of Thompson's water company, the People's Water reorganized, as the successor of several smaller companies that included, among others, the Contra Costa Water Company, which formed in 1866 to supply the city of Oakland with its water; the California Water Company, which supplied San Leandro with its water; and the Piedmont Spring Water and Power Company.

The reorganization gave People's a virtual monopoly supplying water to East Bay communities.

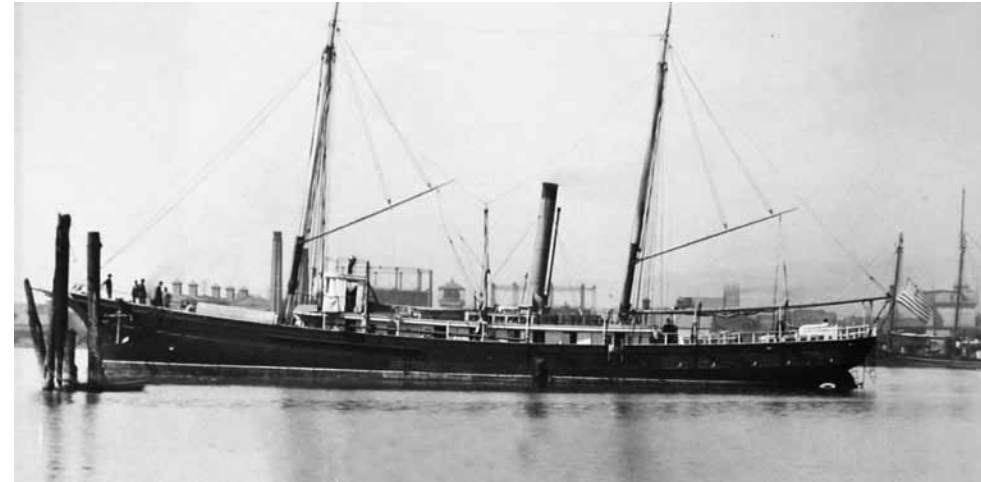
In 1917 The People's Water Company reorganized under the name East Bay Water Company. In 1921 the state legislature passed the Municipal Utilities Districts Act, allowing the establishment of utilities districts in California. Two years later voters approved the formation of the East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD). The new district decided to look beyond the spotty, and sometimes troublesome, delivery of water from artesian wells and acquired water rights on the Mokelumne River in the Sierra Nevada.

In 1927 the district began work on the Pardee Dam there. In 1928 EBMUD purchased the East Bay Water Company. On June 23, 1929, the water district began supplying its customers with water from the Pardee Reservoir. The following year the district stopped relying on water from artesian wells. It shut down all its artesian operations, including the Fitchburg and Damon well fields.

More from the Edgar Cohen Collection

by Dennis Evanosky

IN THE SPRING EDITION of the *Quarterly* we had a look at some of the photos from Edgar Cohen's collection. Edgar was Alfred A. Cohen's son. Alfred built the railroad through town in 1864. The photos on these pages are all on loan from the Oakland Heritage Alliance.



6. *The Coast and Geodetic Survey Ship Thomas Gedney was anchored in the Oakland Estuary when Edgar was there with his camera.*



3. *He carried his camera and gear to the Park Street Wharf that stood at the intersection of today's Otis Drive and Park Street to snap this picture of San Francisco Bay.*



7. *He traveled to Oakland to capture this photo of Lake Merritt.*

1. *Anderson's Wharf on San Leandro Bay. Capt. Neils Anderson came to Alameda in the early 1870s and built his wharf and warehouse at the mouth of a slough at the east end of Fillmore Street.*



4. *Edgar stood on the Alice Street Bridge to capture this shot of Adams Wharf that once stood at the foot of Madison Street in Oakland.*

5. *Look closely at photo No. 4 and you'll see the ship Flintshire in the distance. Edgar got closer to the ship and snapped this photograph.*



2. *Edgar took this shot of San Leandro Bay at sunrise.*



8. *And here's Edgar himself.*



FROM THE COLLECTION

Museum Painting Has Story to Tell

by Dennis Evanosky

THE FERRY OAKLAND WAITS FOR HER PASSENGERS in a 1969 painting by Alameda painter L. E. Nelson. The painting hangs in the Alameda Museum near the reception desk. In the painting the Alameda Mole served Nelson as a backdrop. Looking at the history of both objects of Nelson's interest brings something interesting to mind. Both the Alameda Mole and the side-wheeler *Oakland* fell victim to fire.

Nelson's painting shows the 1902 Mole that replaced the one that burned that very same year. James Fair and Alfred Davis built the first Alameda Mole in 1884.

The ferry *Oakland* also burned. She began life as the side-wheeler *Chrysopolis* in 1860. She was built in San Francisco by respected shipwright John Gunder North in his new shipyard in today's Potrero District.



This painting greets visitors to the Alameda Museum. In it, artist L. E. Nelson portrayed the ferry boat Oakland at the Alameda Mole, the pier where Southern Pacific Railroad passengers caught the ferry to San Francisco. Image: Dennis Evanosky.

Fifteen years after *Chrysopolis* first began carrying passengers Patrick Henry Tiernan rebuilt her as the ferry *Oakland*. When he was finished the Central Pacific Railroad had a double ended ferry boat at its service. To accomplish this Tiernan literally cut *Chrysopolis* in two and extended her length to 282 feet 7 inches overall.

Both objects pictured in Nelson's painting vanished in 1940. The United States Navy destroyed the Alameda Mole to build runways for its new air station; fire destroyed *Oakland* that same year.

The Alameda Museum is a treasure chest full of stories just like this one. Stop by for a visit.

In the Museum Art Gallery November 2015

Veronika Layne's Launch Party
with author Julia Park Tracey
Thursday, November 6
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Guest speaker Woody Minor, architectural historian, will talk about Alameda's Victorian houses and the legend of gold in the walls that inspired Veronika's latest caper. Champagne and snacks. FREE.

For the love of Phyllis Diller hosted by
Dames aux Gateaux
Reception, Saturday, November 7
Noon

Phyllis Diller-inspired Art Show featuring top artists, Vintage Clothing Sale, Music & Giveaways.
Suggested Donation \$5

Watch the Alameda Museum Quarterly for more details on these and other shows and events in the gallery.
Or visit alamedamuseum.org/alameda-museum/art-gallery/

Petit Parthenon on Post *by Robin Seeley*

IN 490 B.C., A VASTLY OUTNUMBERED TROOP OF CITIZEN-SOLDIERS FROM A FLEDGLING DEMOCRACY PULLED OFF A MIRACLE.

At the battle of Marathon, they engaged the most powerful military force in the world, the Persian Empire, and won! To commemorate their victory, they built a temple in honor of their city's patroness, the goddess Athena. Although the Persians sacked the city ten years later and razed the original structure, the Athenians began constructing its replacement in 447 B.C., at the height of their power.

The Parthenon still stands overlooking modern Athens, but the Turks, Lord Elgin, air pollution, and other traumas have taken a terrible toll. The original entrance, an international icon known for its symmetrical portico, Doric columns, and pediment, is now crumbled almost beyond recognition.

Portico is just a fancy word for porch. Doric columns are simple, cylindrical posts, with no ornamentation on top. Pediment is a bastardization of the obsolete English word "periment," which describes the triangle on top of the columns. "Periment" probably comes from an even older word, "pyramid."

Athenian democracy fascinated our founding fathers. They set their moral compass on the principle that all men are created equal in order to break free from the tyrannical rule of King George III. In the 18th century, people still believed that an almighty God anointed kings. When the colonists embraced the Athenians' ancient, yet radical, ideal of equality, they crossed a line.

In 1776, line-crosser Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, our nation's founding document. He was quick to point out the reason we needed to cut ties with England: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created



A graphic interpretation of the Parthenon.

equal" This was the first time on earth that a nation was NOT founded based on either shared ethnicity or religion, but based on a shared ideal.

Jefferson did not express his veneration of Greek principles in words alone, however. When designing his home, Monticello, in 1772, he placed a mini-Parthenon front and center. In 1788, he helped design the first public building in Greek revival style in the United States, the Virginia State House. That structure features a symmetrical portico with triangle topping as well. Scholars of architecture have even called the state house Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Architectural Independence!" It earned that title for being such a deliberate departure from the then-predominant Georgian style named after that autocrat across the Atlantic. Of course, it didn't hurt that it also evoked the first democracy, where divine rights of rulers had no place!

Tributes to the Parthenon have graced the entrances of American buildings for centuries. Examples are so common that we may fail to notice the iconic markings in our banks, government buildings, libraries (like the Alameda Carnegie), churches (like the First Presbyterian Church on Santa Clara), plantation mansions, courthouses, farm houses, universities, San Francisco's City Hall, and even

the U.S. Supreme Court and the northern façade of the White House. As architecture historian William Pierson observed:

[T]he Greek Revival was the product of a popular sentiment. The fact that it became expressive for the whole of American society, from the erudite to the untutored, from the capital to the village, from the city house to the farm, gave it a national independence and set it apart from the architecture of Europe in a way and to a degree that American builders had never before achieved. Indeed, at no time in the history of Western man had a single stylistic form, however sentimentally conceived, been so spontaneously accepted by a total society. It is in this sense that the Greek Revival must be understood as America's first national style of architecture.

William H. Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles* (Doubleday, 1976), p. 452.

How fitting that the first nation on earth spawned by an ideal should also be first in the history of Western man to express that ideal nationwide in a single stylistic form! It is particularly appropriate that our ideal of equality expressed itself in buildings designed for the mighty as well as the meek, the statesman as well as the gold miner.

America experienced a new birth of Greek revival in the mid-1800's, as citizens and politicians struggled to square our founding principle with southern slavery. Indeed, when President Lincoln dedicated a Civil War cemetery in Gettysburg in 1863, he intentionally invoked our debt to Greek democracy. Echoing Thomas Jefferson's words, he affirmed that our nation was "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Continued on page 12 . . .



Petit Parthenon . . . Continued from page 11

A decade before the Gettysburg Address, California's first state capitol had already tapped into our Greek roots. The state house, a proud example of "America's first national style of architecture," was completed in February 1853 and still stands in nearby Benicia. The sturdy symmetrical portico features white Doric columns in the center, paying a direct tribute to its Greek ancestor. Those cylindrical white columns are flanked on either side by two square columns in brick. The four brick columns are technically pilasters, since they are decorative only, and do not bear weight as the white ones do. The pediment is adorned with a series of tiny blocks, known as "dentils," from the Latin word for teeth. This building hosted the first meeting of California legislators just six years after James Marshall discovered gold about 100 miles away, in Coloma. It's no surprise the statesmen strove to lend an air of dignity and grandeur to their Gold Rush capitol, in the region then known as the "Wild West!" They wanted to call to mind the distinguished pedigree that their proud little Parthenon could provide!

The year 1853 also saw Alameda's founders, William Chipman and Gideon Aughinbaugh, create the first plat map of the East End. Its center was at the intersection of today's High Street and Encinal Avenue.

Right around the corner, two of Alameda's first non-Native American residents, gold miner Christopher Christensen and his wife, Annie, moved into a simple cottage at 1223 Post Street. They had immigrated to the Bay Area from Norway in 1848, after the discovery of gold. We can thank the 1917 obituary of their son, Gustavus Adolphus, for disclosing two facts that make their historic home unique: First, that G.A. Christensen, D.D.S., was born in that same home in 1855 (proving the house already



First California state house in Benicia, California built in Greek Revival style. Image: Nancy Baldwin.

existed in that year), and second, that G.A. was the first native-born Alamedan of European descent.

Despite extensive research, we still don't know exactly when the cottage was built, or even whether the Christensens were its first owners. Nevertheless, it must have been built between publication of the plat map in 1853 and G.A.'s birth in 1855! It could easily date back to 1854, since the home surely existed before Annie Christensen went into labor! That would make it a contemporary of the Webster house on Versailles, which was simply ASSEMBLED in Alameda in late 1854. As its bronze plaque proudly proclaims, the Webster house was purchased prefabricated on the east coast, hauled in a ship around Cape Horn, and slapped together here.

But our discussion need not devolve into a chicken/egg controversy. Regardless of which came first, the Post Street Gold Rush cottage is the oldest structure BUILT in Alameda that is still standing. Why is the distinction between being assembled vs. built-on-site significant? As a quick comparison of the photos shows, only the homegrown edifice shows the vibrant Greek revival as interpreted

by a local builder. The imported interloper, with its Gothic Revival style and flaccid icicle trim, is clearly putting on eastern airs.

While there can be no question that our 1853 state capitol has Greek revival in its DNA, the Christensen cottage's genealogy is a little less obvious. Its builder implemented the national style more modestly, in keeping with the cottage's size and purpose. Chances are he was expressing the architectural zeitgeist without realizing he was channeling a nearly 2,400-year old template. Our local craftsman had probably never heard of Pericles, much less Miltiades, the mastermind at Marathon. As William Pierson explained, this style was so popular across America that both "the erudite and the untutored" followed its call.

Like the first capitol, this humble home has four square columns in a symmetrical portico. It's no surprise this simple wooden structure lacks the sturdy stone cylinders in the middle of the state house columns, however. It didn't need them, and it's unlikely a stone mason would have been part of the construction crew, in any case. The cottage didn't need the capitol's fancy pediment, either, but it does have a tidy row of dentils above the columns, now painted brown for contrast. The dentil trim is another trait from the Greek gene pool shared with its not-too-distant cousin in Benicia. These relatives show two different ways in which local contemporary craftsmen interpreted the popular Parthenon; one for governmental and the other for residential use.

Today, the 160-year old cottage is no longer symmetrical. The Christensen family and subsequent owners have added a dining room, bathrooms, bedrooms, and a separate garage, which may have once been a stable.

Continued on page 13 . . .



Petit Parthenon . . . Continued from page 12

The original sleeping area upstairs is now a separate apartment. The former chimney still stands two stories tall against the exterior, even though the fireplace that once warmed the front room has disappeared. Upon entering, the first thing you notice is the low ceiling and the tight spaces, including a staircase running through the tiny kitchen! The *Alameda Argus* once reported that a nasty fall on that same staircase took Annie Christensen's life in 1904.

Occasionally people comment about the sterile, soulless subdivisions found elsewhere in the East Bay. Post Street may not be perfect, but tedious tract housing is not an issue for my neighbors and me. As you go from one end of our street to the other, you can literally watch a full century of Bay Area residential architecture evolve before your eyes, from the Gold Rush to post-World War II early ranch houses.

And it all started with the Christensen cottage. Not only does it exemplify the first national style of architecture in the United States, it bears witness to architectural and political history spanning continents and millennia.

Our Gold Rush cottage recalls Greece's gift of democracy to the world, Thomas Jefferson's love affair with Athenian ideals, and Abraham Lincoln's reaffirmation of our egalitarian Greek roots. It evokes the image of scrappy Athenians shaking their fists at the mighty Persian Empire 2,500 years ago. No wonder their victory temple so resonated with our founding fathers as they shook their own fists at the mighty British Empire in 1776! Although that iconic temple now stands in shambles, its legacy lives on in the petit Parthenon on Post Street!



Post Street's Gold Rush Cottage, circa 1855 or earlier! It is the oldest known structure BUILT in Alameda that is still standing. Image: Robin Seeley.



The Webster House on Versailles Avenue, circa November 1854. This Gothic Revival home was purchased prefabricated on the east coast and transported in a ship around Cape Horn. Image: Robin Seeley.

The author owes a debt of gratitude to local historian and writer Woody Minor for calling her attention to the Gold Rush cottage on Post Street and generously sharing his research. Local researcher Kevin Frederick made further valuable contributions. Special thanks are also due to the Miano family for graciously granting access to their home.
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Docent Dossiers

Who's aboard, what are they doing, and why?



Virginia Jones

Docent Virginia Jones started out with a claim to fame – she grew up in a national park – one of the oldest in fact, Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas. Following the use of the springs by indigenous peoples, European Americans developed the springs promoting therapeutic baths for the health conscious. “Our town was always filled with tourists visiting the baths,” Virginia recalls.

After living many places in the U.S., Virginia came to Alameda from Washington state when her husband transferred here for his job.



Virginia amongst artifacts from the Alameda Fire Department, reminiscent of her prior docent experience in San Francisco.

She first volunteered at the Fire Department Museum in San Francisco before focusing on the local museum in Alameda. “After attending many of the interesting Alameda Museum lectures I volunteered for a docent shift.”

Virginia favors the museum displays showing household rooms as they were. She recalls her uncle’s Victorian home that she often visited in Alabama. She also loves conversing with those who stop to peruse the gift shop. “There are repeat customers who are looking for a specific item such as jewelry or silver. They can usually find a treasure here!”

Her co-docent is Katherine Cavanaugh and the two can always be found having a lively conversation and enjoying their time together.

Jovin Mercado

A newcomer to the Island City, Jovin became involved at the museum at the beginning of the year. He is impressed by Alameda’s hometown feel. “Everyone knows each other!”

After his arrival, he was interested in being involved in his new community. “I started looking for organizations that make a difference. I checked the City of Alameda website to see what volunteer opportunities existed and came across the Alameda Museum, among others.” Jovin noted, “I feel the museum is a very important for Alameda. It’s good for residents to know about the history here.”

Usually Jovin is a docent in the main museum on Saturday where his favorite exhibit is the Neptune Beach display. “Before the Bay Bridge

people rode the ferry here to the Coney Island of the West. There was foot traffic in town, at the park, and at the beaches—amazing. I wish it was still here.”

This second Saturday of the month George Gunn invited Jovin to spend his docent shift at the Meyers House to learn more about Alameda history in a different location. On his first day he was already well-versed in the history of the house and the Meyers family.

“I enjoy the good stories about Alameda from people who come in,” he shared. “There are many hidden gems in this city that I’m still discovering.”



Jovin Mercado greeting visitors in the Meyers Architectural Studio.





VOLUNTEERS: ALAMEDA MUSEUM & MEYERS HOUSE & GARDEN

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
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| Gail Howell | |
| Virginia Jones | |

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
Adam Koltun
volunteer@alamedamuseum.org
510-205-6509

Docent coordinator for Meyers House
George Gunn, 510-521-1233

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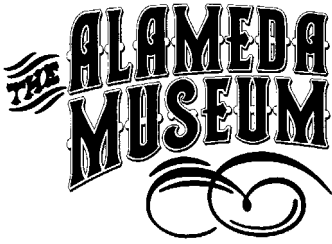
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alamedamuseum.org



On Display
in the Newly
Renovated
Carriage House
SEE PAGE 6.



**SIEGFRIED EXHIBIT
AT THE MEYERS HOUSE**

Edwin Siegfried has been dubbed “Artist of the Marshlands,” for over half his works depict dawn or dusk on the salt water marshes that once lined Alameda and the bay.

Siegfried began painting in oils, but in the early 1920s set aside the brush for pastels, a medium well-suited to his style and subject. He excelled in depicting the subtle, delicate variations in light and color of the marshlands. The range of mood in his marshes is impressive, particularly when they are seen side by side, as in this exhibit.

In addition to marshes, Siegfried painted scenes from his travels, including the Monterey coastline, Monument Valley in Arizona, Lake Tahoe and Point Reyes. One of his WPA projects was a series on the California missions. Mary Baker Eddy’s birthplace was the subject of a large pastel, a gift to the Alameda Christian Science Church to which Edwin belonged. Perhaps the most fascinating is a pastel entitled “Dream House” showing a Southern-style mansion with lights blazing in every window.

It is said he did little painting on location. Most were either done from memory or from sketches made at the scene. He did most of his smaller works on his lap, used his thumb for shading, and sometimes swept a broom across the surface to achieve a rain effect.

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The Meyers House, located at 2021 Alameda Ave. in Alameda, is open twice each month, on the second and fourth Saturdays, from 1:00 – 4:00 pm. Your \$5 admission includes a docent tour of the Meyers House Museum, a visit to a large display of Alameda house styles and details, a glimpse into Henry Meyer’s architectural studio (built later, in 1935), a viewing of the exhibitions in the newly renovated Carriage House, and full access to walk the gracious gardens.

Learn more at www.alamedamuseum.org/meyers-house-and-garden/