

# Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA  
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## WOODY WALK

# The West End

Sunday, August 25, 2019 at 1:00 pm

Meet at Longfellow Park, 520 Lincoln Avenue  
at the picnic area next to the slides

Sponsored by Peter Fletcher, Windermere Bay Area Properties

FREE for  
AAPS members  
\$10 for  
non-members

### Kohlmoos Hotel, 1879

The hotel stood a few blocks from the beach on Railroad (Lincoln) Avenue near Fifth. In later years it served as a private academy, briefly attended by Jack London, and lastly as a reformatory for wayward girls. The landmark came down in the 1930s for Longfellow Park.

Image: Alameda Museum.



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# The West End: A Place Apart

by Woody Minor

Having trod the exotic East End these past three years, the 2019 walk heads west. It's been a while since we visited this end of the island, most recently in 2012 to explore Mastick Park. There are different takes on "West End." I consider it to begin in the vicinity of Ninth Street, where the shoreline resorts began, and to end at the setting sun (aka Alameda Point). The area resembles other parts of the city in its rich stock of historic houses—indeed, they will be the focus of the walk—but in other ways it truly is a place apart.

The West End's peculiar dynamism is a legacy of railroads and resorts, airplanes and ships, mobilization and war, public housing and protest, reuse and redevelopment. It's a fact worth noting that every historic event of national or global significance associated with Alameda has taken place there, from the completion of the first transcontinental train trip to the start of the first transoceanic airline flight, from the first quadruple ship launching during World War I to America's opening salvo of World War II; and then there's Skippy Peanut Butter.

## Origin Story

The West End began as a conundrum, a windswept point that was also a wooded hinterland. Judging from their shell-mounds, the Alameda Ohlone chose to live at the overland end of the peninsula near trails and streams. Chipman and Aughinbaugh followed precedent after they bought the peninsula from ranchero Antonio Maria Peralta, establishing the gold rush town in the East End. At first the partners held the West End in reserve. They sold the western tip, or point, to an investor who marked his boundary with a long-gone ditch near Fourth Street. Their last venture envisioned a new town called Peralta in the vicinity of Fifth Street; despite the completion of a ferry pier in 1856, the scheme ended in bankruptcy.

Reliable transit brought development. The San Francisco & Alameda Railroad inaugurated service in 1864 along Lincoln (Railroad) Avenue from a ferry pier on the west shore to the main station on Park Street. At newly christened Alameda Point a brick stack sent smoke into the sky as shops fabricated equipment. And just as

later residents would spend hours at the city's airports watching planes take off and land, denizens of the wharf observed the clockwork procession of trains and ferries. The Central Pacific soon took over the line, and on a September evening in 1869 onlookers witnessed the epochal end of the first overland trip from New York.

The mansion of SF&A director Edwin B. Mastick faced the next stop a mile to the east. Mastick Station served as the gateway to Schuetzen Park, a German resort perched on a shoreline bluff between Eighth and Ninth Streets due south of the station. The fenced compound had a shooting range, parade ground, and dance pavilion favored by groups like the San Francisco Fusiliers and Garibaldi Guard, and gunfire and brawls made it a byword for disturbing the peace until its closure in the 1880s. Resort, station, and mansion marked the east edge of the West End.

Transit improved with the first bridge across the estuary, which opened in 1871 between downtown Oakland and the Alameda marsh. Taking the name of the Oakland artery, Webster Street soon became the West End equivalent of Park Street, a commercial/civic center with its own post office, fire station, and jail. The area's first school opened in 1875 at Fifth and Pacific, the same year the Alameda, Oakland & Piedmont Railroad began operating horse-cars over the bridge. Later served by trolleys, the streetcar route survives today as the 51A bus line.

The early population was dominated by three immigrant groups led by Germans in commerce, real estate, and construction. Italians controlled tracts of farmland taken over from the Chinese. Making up nearly ten percent of the population in 1870, the city's pioneer Asian community arrived with the first railroad—merchants and growers, scavengers and laborers, kite-flyers and pyrotechnicians—only to be met with discrimination and exclusion. Before they were pushed aside, their agricultural prowess gave Alameda Point a second name, China Point.

## Victorian Heyday

When the South Pacific Coast Railroad began local service in 1878, bathing resorts sprang up near train stops on Central Avenue—the Long Branch at Webster; Terrace Baths and Cottage Baths at Sixth; Newport, Green Arbor,

*Continued on page 3...*



*Neptune Beach's entrance tower beckoned at the foot of Webster Street from 1917 to 1940, when Alameda's greatest resort finally gave up the ghost. During the war the property became the U.S. Maritime Officers Training School and today the grounds survive in part as Crab Cove. Image: Woody Minor.*



*West End...continued from page 2.*



*Developed by the city's leading bungalow builder, George H. Noble, Marion Court went up in 1920 around the corner from Sunny Cove Baths. The jaunty ensemble epitomizes a West End tradition of bungalow courts near beach resorts, and will be one of the stops on the walk. Image: Woody Minor.*

and Sunny Cove at Fifth; and other venues such as the Palace Brewery, Croll's, and Kohlmoos Hotel. Neptune Gardens was Queen. Developed by the railroad on the site of the Long Branch, its attractions included roller-skating, balloon ascensions, circus acts, costume pageants, and caged animals; one fine day the bears escaped and lumbered down Central Avenue past the SPCRR ballpark where John L. Sullivan once umpired.

As the shoreline boomed and the business district grew apace, industry also arrived at the point. Francis "20 Mule Team" Smith turned the 1879 Royal Soap factory into the world's premier borax refinery, pioneering the use of reinforced concrete in the process. In 1880 Pacific Coast Oil began producing kerosene at a shoreline refinery acquired by Standard Oil and replaced by the big Richmond refinery. The 1887 plant of N. Clark & Sons, fabricators of sewer pipe and architectural terra cotta, stood a few blocks inland. The four-story factory was the most massive structure on the peninsula, its stack the tallest object on the skyline. The complex would be rebuilt two times following fires, remaining in business eight decades.

Woodstock, the old SF&A town at the point, never amounted to much. Buildings faced the tracks near the wharf, including boarding houses for workers and a hotel for hunters. The grid extended through farmland and forest to two large estates at Third Street, one owned by state governor H.H. Haight and subdivided after his death. Builders like A.R. Denke and Marcuse & Remmel would make their mark in the West End, but construction lagged far behind the central districts. Only two of the town's twenty churches had sanctuaries west of Ninth Street, and the 1895 Longfellow School at Fifth and Pacific was the sole civic monument.

## **New Century**

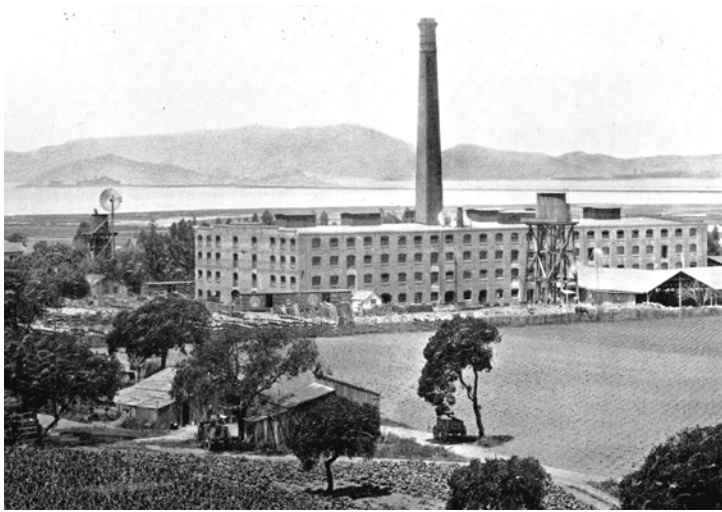
Growth quickened after the 1906 earthquake as bungalows proliferated in tracts like Mastick Park and Bay Park (Burbank-Portola) on the sites of the Mastick estate and Schuetzen Park. The resorts spawned festive courts. Vaudeville comedian Max Dill built the first across from Sunny Cove, followed by Marina Court, Marion Court, Palace Court and others. A civic center of sorts took hold along Eighth Street with the beach-fringed Washington Park, Washington School, and West End Branch Library. St. Barnabas Church served the new Catholic parish and Longfellow Park replaced the venerable Kohlmoos Hotel.

New resorts included bustling Surf Beach Park, the 1908 makeover of Terrace Baths, and the fashionable 1913 Venice Baths alongside Washington Park. Nell Schmidt, an exhibition diver and long-distance swimmer who grew up at Cottage Baths, was an icon of the era; but nothing captured its spirit like Neptune Beach, the 1917 reincarnation of Neptune Gardens. The bayside playground offered an eye-watering mix of exotic buildings, fancy rides, big saltwater pools, and aquatic stars. Its neighbors didn't stand a chance. Venice Baths folded in 1918, the site turned into the Washington Park ballfield. Surf Beach was bought out in 1925, the pool replaced by a roller coaster, the Central Avenue frontage embellished by the Neptune Court garden apartments.

When the borax refinery came down in 1931, the rubble from the point's last waterfront factory was hauled to Neptune Beach for riprap. Industry had long since shifted to the estuary, where the East Bay's first steel hulls

*Continued on page 4 . .*

**West End...***continued from page 3.*



*A leading producer of terra cotta, N. Clark & Sons remained in operation on Pacific Avenue from the 1880s to the 1940s. The plant closed in the 1950s under new owners. A portion of the site became Chipman School, now known as the Academy of Alameda. Image: Alameda Museum.*

were fabricated in a yard east of the bridge. Acquired and expanded by Bethlehem during World War I, the yard boasted the largest machine shop on the coast and staged the world's first quadruple launching. In 1928 the bridge was replaced by the Posey Tube. Lacking streetcar tracks, the two-way tunnel gave birth to stop-and-go commutes as cars crawled under monumental exhaust chambers looming over the entrances like triumphal arches. Webster Street soon led the city in gas stations, supermarkets, and large apartment blocks.

The West End was also home to the city's two airports. Bordering Webster across from the shipyard was the San Francisco Bay Airdrome, opened in 1930 with tri-motor service to Los Angeles. The older Alameda Airport adjoined the mole alongside the road to the automobile ferries. The sequestered waterfront setting suited Pan American Airways, which leased the facility to launch the world's first transoceanic airline route in 1936. The luxurious seaplanes hopped from island to island across the Pacific to Manila and Hong Kong. Alas, it didn't last; by 1941 the airports were gone along with the trains and ferries and Neptune Beach.

### **War and After**

World War II hit the West End like a tsunami, sweeping away tideland and farmland for military bases and housing projects. The Naval Air Station supported the Pacific carrier fleet; in one heroic mission four months after Pearl Harbor, the *Hornet* sailed from Alameda with Doolittle's bombers on deck. The huge base swallowed point and mole and appended about 1,500 acres of tideland fill—more than South Shore and Harbor Bay Isle combined—increasing the island's overall length and acreage by half. Toward the end of the war the Army developed a second base—a supply depot on the airdrome site—repurposed in later years as the Fleet Industrial Supply Center. Along with the bases were two West End shipyards,

Bethlehem and the new United Engineering yard at Main Street, providing employment for thousands.

To handle the crisis, the Alameda Housing Authority was formed in 1941 as an oversight agency for federally funded projects starting with 200-unit Woodstock (which still stands). Much larger wartime projects spread across farmland and marsh—5,000 functional units auguring postwar design—with the largest, Estuary and Encinal, adjoining the yards. The tenants included many African Americans. The black population increased during the war from less than one percent to more than eight percent, recalling the sudden rise of the Asian community at the outset of rail. In like manner, exclusionary practices would keep most black families at the margins of civic life. When the projects started coming down in the 1950s, forcing many to leave, black activists took on the city government and initiated the modern era of advocacy and protest.

The West End's coming of age was enshrined at Encinal High School, a modernist landmark dedicated in 1952. The school's substantial black enrollment included stellar athletes like Willie Stargell, who grew up in the Estuary project to become the city's most famous public figure. Meanwhile the wars in Korea and Vietnam kept the Naval Air Station humming as jets screamed overhead. Webster Street teemed with sailors, bars, all-night restaurants, and drive-in theaters; a second tube was opened to relieve the congestion. Apartments obliterated most vestiges of the resorts, leaving only Neptune Court and Crab Cove to recall the Coney Island of the West.

After the 1973 passage of Measure A banning apartments, developers tried other approaches. Marina Village replaced Bethlehem at the cost of the majestic machine shop, while the main building at United Engineering saw new life as Rosenblum Cellars. The game-changer was the 1997 closure of the Naval Air Station and Fleet Industrial Supply Center. Rechristened Alameda Point, the NAS site has been slow to develop but the FISC property is on its way to build-out. Projects include Bayport, the island's largest subdivision since South Shore, and the apartment buildings and megamall of Alameda Landing. Apartments have made a comeback under the city's 2010 density bonus ordinance relating to affordable housing; the law, effectively voiding Measure A, is the shape of the future, and in Alameda the future begins in the West End.

**Woody Minor will give an illustrated lecture on  
THE WEST END**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 22 AT 7:00 PM**

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**Alameda Museum Lecture Series**

**ELK'S LODGE**

**2255 Santa Clara Avenue**

**Admission is free for Museum members**

**\$10 for others**

**For more information visit [alamedamuseum.org](http://alamedamuseum.org)**



# Alameda Artist Spotlight

by Candace Rowe

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

Rosanna Diggs is a fiber artist who focuses on recreating flora and architecture through embroidery on linen. She has been involved in various fiber arts since an early age, thanks to the influence of her mother and grandmothers. Her main focus is now embroidery which provides an open-ended creative outlet.

"My process is to take my camera on a run or drive around Alameda and photograph what catches my eye. I then sketch it on linen and stitch it. If possible, I love to go back and photograph the finished piece with the original subject."

A resident of Alameda since 2015, Diggs has loved the Victorians, Craftsmen, and Tudors since her first drive down Santa Clara. Originally from Kentucky, Victorians were common in old parts of Lexington, so there's a comfortable connection for her to these venerable structures. "Alameda has this beautiful, small town charm that makes it an oasis in the bustling Bay Area. Every day I see something new to me that I feel the need to recreate in embroidery. I love how home owners landscape here; to see a pink magnolia in bloom in front of an aqua Mediterranean, I find that so inspiring. I only wish I could stitch as fast as I come up with ideas."

Embroidery is a very portable art, which works with Diggs' busy schedule of home-schooling two of her kids and being active in her church and community. Diggs is a member of the Society for Embroidered Work as well as the Alameda Art Association and exhibits at their gallery in South Shore Center.

## Rosanna Diggs



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# Tangible Symbols of the Past

by Judith Lynch

Glorious neon, dubbed “A Living Flame,” zestful artist’s images painted on walls, brass sidewalk letters, and painstakingly applied gold leaf transom numbers . . . these signs are reminders of how Alameda developed, from early train stations to an Art Deco theatre to a vibrant soda ad.

Part of the ordinance that spells out how Alameda’s historic buildings are designated also singles out signs imbued with heritage. The Municipal Code begins with a preamble “. . . signs are important to the economic life and welfare of the City.” Then the ordinance goes into exhaustive detail with 75 definitions for different kinds of signage, from Balloon and Dilapidated to Single-Faced and Streamer. Historic signs are discussed, “A sign is designated as historic if it has merit according to the Historical Advisory Board (HAB) based on (1.) The nature and condition of the building. (2.) The nature and condition of the sign: including age, materials, and whether it represents a historic building, time period, or person.”

In 1989, an evaluation questionnaire was adopted by the HAB to help determine whether a nominated sign met guidelines. In 1993 the Municipal Code incorporated rules for preserving designated historic signs: (1.) Ensure business name changes duplicate size, material, shape, color, design and lettering of the designated sign. (2.) Retain lighting design features (3.) Maintain animated sign components in good working order. (Note: Above excerpts edited from City Municipal Code 13-21.6 and 30-6.1.)

As of 1993, seventeen signs had been nominated and fourteen qualified for designation according to an abbreviated list on the city website. Questions lurk about those signs: when was each sign mounted, when was the building completed, what architects-builders were responsible, who designed the sign, and what score did each garner on the HAB

questionnaire? At least two signs on the list have vanished, one designation was denied, and another has (withdrawn application) after its listing. Yet without seeing the evaluations, these puzzles still lurk.

Supposedly one of the evaluation questionnaires was completed by the HAB for each of these seventeen; yet these significant HAB archives have been misplaced, according to longtime HAB staff Allen Tai, “the folder (of sign nomination questionnaires) you’re describing is in one of several hundred banker boxes currently offsite – they’re in the custody of a third party vendor who is scanning the documents. It’s a multi-year effort to scan all the old hardcopy files this City has ever had in its possession. I think we’re entering the 10th year.”

Some important historic signs have been added since 1993, and HAB members at the time completed each evaluation. One was the hand-painted Rug Works sign on the repurposed work-live structure that now hosts Rhythmix. Brass train station signs were also designated; embedded in the sidewalk are remnants of Grand Street and Mastick stations. Those three do not appear on the City website list, although their designation was documented in the *Alameda Sun* November, 2007. Those questionnaires are also misplaced.

Other significant signs, such as Towata Flowers, Ole’s, the Hide Out, and Odd Fellows also need recognition and protection.

Neither safeguard comes cheap: A City Council member or a person on a City board or commission can activate the nomination of a sign without cost. However, a member of the public or the current owner “can file an application to nominate a sign. The fee of \$2,164 covers City costs for doing the work, public noticing, newspaper ads and holding an HAB public hearing, including all the logistics that come along with it,” according to Tai. Over the next year, *Preservation Press* will publish a detailed investigation into which designated signs have vanished, what survivors deserve designation, and the whereabouts of the evaluations prepared by the HAB. Have a sign you want honored? Please let us know, [judithlynch7@gmail.com](mailto:judithlynch7@gmail.com).



◀◀◀ **Neon Sign:** The Van de Kamp bakery sign at High Street and Encinal combines neon with movement; when it was first installed, the windmill turned. Image: Judith Lynch.

⋈ **Sidewalk Marker:** This plaque is a reminder of the Grand Street station of the San Francisco & Alameda Railroad. Its official questionnaire is misplaced, it was added to the roster of historic signs by the HAB. Image: Richard Knight.

## Painted Sign: >>>

The Golden Gate beverage sign at 1431 Webster Street was painted in 1935 by D. E. Handley. After restoration by Alameda artist Michael McDonald, it was unveiled in a ceremony attended by local luminaries including the Kim family who own the store where the sign is located. Image: Judith Lynch.





# ALAMEDA LEGACY HOME TOUR

INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE

## Alameda's Hidden Gems Sunday, September 22, 2019 10am-4pm

*Advanced tickets on sale now!*

Enjoy Alameda's annual home tour featuring a unique selection of East End architectural gems ranging from the 1880's to the 1930's!



To purchase tickets please visit:

[alameda-legacy-home-tour.org](http://alameda-legacy-home-tour.org)

Advanced Tickets \$35 | Day of tour \$40

### Our 2019 Home Tour Features:

- Homes in a variety of styles including Queen Anne, Arts & Crafts, and Streamline Moderne
- The General Electric "New American" Demonstration home, including GE memorabilia
- Costumed docents appear at each home
- Keepsake guidebook included with each ticket purchase



Presented by the Alameda  
Architectural Preservation  
Society. Find us here:  
[Alameda-Preservation.org](http://Alameda-Preservation.org)



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Thank you AMP for sponsoring this year's Home Tour!



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## AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2019

•  
**SUNDAY, AUGUST 25**

**1:00 PM**

*Woody Walk: The West End*  
Longfellow Park, 520 Lincoln Avenue

•  
**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22**

**10:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

*Alameda Legacy Home Tour*

•  
**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20**

**6:30 PM**

*Insights from Home Inspection  
and Insurance Experts*  
First Congregational Church of Alameda  
1912 Central Avenue