

# The Alameda Museum

## Quarterly Newsletter

Fall Issue, 2008

Volume XLIX

Number 2



*Paden School 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders visit Alameda Museum to learn about local history with special emphasis on Native American artifacts found near what is now known as Mound St.*

*Photo: Robbie Dileo*

### **Featured Articles Inside:**

**Meet Ellen Chesnut, Sewer Repairs, Budget Cuts,  
Curator & President columns**

## **2008 Directors**

Diane Coler-Dark, President  
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### ***The Alameda Museum Quarterly Newsletter***

is published in the spring, summer, fall, and winter of each year  
by the Communications Staff of the Alameda Museum,  
2324 Alameda Avenue, Alameda, CA 94501  
Telephone 510-521-1233  
Website: [www.alamedamuseum.org](http://www.alamedamuseum.org)

*(The Quarterly is also available in electronic form on the Museum website)*

### **Museum Hours**

Wednesday - Friday	1:30 pm - 4 :00 pm
Saturday	11:00 am - 4:00 pm
Sunday	1:30 pm - 4 :00 pm

### **Communications Staff**

Contributors  
Editor - Ron Ucovich

George Gunn, Diane Coler-Dark, Chuck Millar, Ron Ucovich, Robbie Dileo  
Proofreader - formatting, Robbie Dileo



# From the Curator's Desk

With able assistance, several major goals have been accomplished at the Meyers House. The studio has been cleaned, objects are sorted and staged, and explanatory captions are written. We are now open to the public. The gift shop was transferred from the garage to the main house basement. The basement has been cleaned and organized, and fluorescent lights were installed to make the room bright and cheery. We have cleaned and assessed the greenhouse, pursuant to planned repairs and restoration. Ross Dileo's woodworking club has expressed interest in possibly restoring it. Four slides, discovered in the studio, taken in late 1960s show it with gingerbread trim and walls intact.

Henry Meyers' high school diploma, discovered in the studio, is being framed by Urban Forest on Park Street. When completed, it will be exhibited in the studio. In addition to the diploma, other items of historic interest were discovered. Through Jane Burgelin, the drafting coats, worn by Mildred Meyers when drawing her architectural plans, were restored and will be displayed.



Plans are also being made for the three-car garage, which I hope will draw more interest and attraction to the Meyers House.

I'll talk more about these plans in our next newsletter.

*George Gunn,  
Museum Curator*

## From the President's Desk

by Diane Coler-Dark



Whew! We just finished another Legacy Home Tour. Home Tour day brings a lot of out-of-towners to our great Island City. Working the event is very gratifying, as most people comment on how much they like and admire our small town and its architecture. The hard part about working the event is remembering to be a gracious hostess, welcoming our guests, and never “gloat” because we love the place so much. Wearing out one’s dimples is the easy part.

The Home Tour Committee is shrinking, and it’s getting harder to put the event together. If you would like to see it continue, consider volunteering. We need help making phone calls, delivering materials, mailing notices, arranging refreshments, and a little testosterone for driving a truck, lifting and hauling. Please call me at 523-5907.



The Docents’ Brunch had a good turnout, good information, with lots of food and even doggie bags for leftovers. If you missed it and didn’t get an updated docent list and work schedule, please call Ellen Chesnut, our new Docent Chairperson, at 865-1204.

Thanks to the generous members who sent in *Double the Bang for your Buck* donations, helping us to stay afloat. I have packets made up containing an appeal letter, envelopes, and membership blanks to mail to ten people. Can you take a minute to go through your address book, find ten friends, and send each one an invitation to become a member of our museum? Call me at 523-5907, and I’ll get a packet to you. We need to expand our membership, and we need your help.

\* \* \* \* \*

Have your memories recorded, and be part of Alameda’s history. Think about how much of Alameda’s rich history is lost each generation because it wasn’t recorded. The Museum is helping the Alameda Library with a new project to record oral histories. The library obtained a grant and equipment from the State to make it possible.

Do you remember Neptune Beach, the Red Train, streetcars, ferries, airports, and businesses? Do you know stories of famous or infamous people? Do you know stories behind political foibles and follies? Do you know the origin of a service or cultural organization? Let’s call this *show and tell time* for big people. Call me at 523-5907.



## Gift Shop News

If you haven't visited our museum gift shop lately, don't fail to stop by to check out some of our newly received merchandise,

such as...

~ a nice collection of vintage Hummel figurines priced 40-60% off standard catalogue prices.

~ a great assortment of large format pre-1920 sheet music, with wonderful illustrations, suitable for framing.

~ our old and rare book department, featuring many first editions, at reasonable prices.

~ a wide selection of costume jewelry priced inexpensively to move.

~ Christmas and holiday décor await your decorating expertise.

### ~ **Looking for a gift idea?**

Museum Memberships are \$30 and only \$20 for seniors. All Members receive the "*Museum Quarterly*", notices for special events, and free entry to our lecture series.

Shop early, the Museum closes after December 14<sup>th</sup> and reopens Saturday January 3<sup>rd</sup>.



**Come in and treat yourself!**

## A CLOSER LOOK

Tom and Mary come into the museum. Mary stops to check out what's new in the gift shop, and Tom continues on to the exhibits. He passes Frank's barber shop, but then he backs up to take a second look. He stands there contemplating it as his mind transports him into another time. He thinks about the long black tapered comb from an era that predates Tupperware. He thinks about the leather-covered swivel chair with a razor strop tethered on one side. He thinks about the booster chair that the barber used to bring out for kids whose heads were shorter than the headrest without it.

Tom's eyes pass from item to item in the barber shop, each one triggering a flush of memories: the tonic bottle on the shelf, the wood paneling on the walls, the drawers with glass knobs, the push broom stashed in the corner, the electric clippers that sounded so loud next to your ear, the moustache cup with its foam making brush, the straight razor for the back of the neck, the hand mirror used to see the back of your own head, and the Flash Gordon comic books on the magazine table. Yep, this was just like the barber shop Tom remembers as a kid.



And what could characterize the old barber shop better than the red and white candy cane pole on the sidewalk? Barber poles originated in the days when bloodletting was one of the principle duties of the barber. The two spiral ribbons represent two long bandages, one twisted around the arm before bleeding, and the other used to bind the wound afterward. When not in use, the pole with the bandages was placed at the door as a sign of the services offered.

The use of the barber pole dates back to the 1500s. At that time, barbers were in charge of pulling teeth, bloodletting, cupping, and applying leeches to infected wounds. The pole was used for the patient to grasp, so the veins of his arm would stand out. At the top of the pole hung a basin used to catch blood. Over the years, this basin became a ball, often with a light inside. The colors became symbolic; red represents blood, blue for the veins, and white for the bandages. When the poles became mechanized, they were made to spin downward, making the red stripes appear to be blood flowing down.

In France, medical surgeons were distinguished from barber surgeons by the length of their robes. Medical surgeons wore long robes, and barber surgeons wore short ones. And, to this day, barbers still wear a white smock, similar to that of a doctor.

# MEYERS HOUSE MUSEUM & GARDEN NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

## **FEATURED ON ALHT 2007,**

recent budget cuts mean the East Bay Community Foundation's annual grant will cover about half of the expenses.

Alameda Museum, through its Meyers House Guild Membership program, is an excellent way to help maintain this beautiful property.

Please join for \$25 per year. Send your check payable to: **Meyers House Guild c/o Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Ave., Alameda, CA 94501**



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## **MEYERS STUDIO & BASEMENT GIFT SHOP**

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**NOW OPEN!** Tucked away on the grounds is a newly rejuvenated gem that opened to the public for the first time Saturday August 23. The Mission style studio completed in 1935 was designed by Mildred Meyers for her father, Henry, an influential Alameda architect responsible for the Posey Tube, the Veteran's Building, many other institutional structures, plus a handful of Island residences.

The Meyers House Gift Shop was moved to the house basement in September. Guests will descend the kitchen staircase, pass the original oak ice-box, view a laundry & sewing tableau, consider treasures to purchase, then exit to the grounds and studio to complete their tour.

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**OPEN 1-4 P.M.**

**FOURTH SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH.**

**2021 ALAMEDA AVE. BETWEEN WILLOW & CHESTNUT ST.**

**ADMISSION \$4 • INFORMATION 510.523.5907**

# Volunteers!



Lou Baca  
Barbara  
Balderston  
Harry Bissett  
Marge Blaha  
Jane Burgelin  
Katherine  
Cavanaugh  
Ellen Chesnut  
Dorothy Coats  
Diane Coler-Dark  
Charles Daly  
Robbie Dileo  
Ross Dileo  
Marilyn Dodge

*Thank you for the  
generous donation  
of your time!*

Roni Dodson  
Joan Dykema  
Carolyn Erickson  
June Feder  
Dottie Fehn  
Pamela Ferrero  
Jeanne Gallagher  
Barbara Gibson  
Leslie Hawksbee  
Debra Hilding  
Lois Hoffman  
Julie Kennedy  
Jim Korn  
Flora Larson  
Barbara Lewis  
Gayle Macaitis  
Carla McGrogan  
Jim McGrogan

Joanne McKay  
Frank Nelson  
Trish Nelson  
Susan Potter  
Darlene Pottsgieser  
Marjory Quant  
Virginia Rivera  
Lorraine Salizar  
Betty Saunders  
Betty Sewell  
Margy Silver  
Virgil Silver  
Lois Singley  
Grace Taube  
Wanda Thatcher  
Ellen Tilden  
Ron Ucovich  
Joe Young

# Volunteers!



**Alameda Museum is always looking for volunteers who are interested in helping make our museum the best that it can be.**

Enthusiastic docents and volunteers help run the gift shop, do building or maintenance tasks, help with mailings (*2 people needed now for getting out the election materials*) and do special projects like replication of our photograph orders. Training is available.

We also have Board positions available for truly dedicated individuals. Look for the nomination and renewal notice going out late October and due back November 8th. For information or to discuss specific ideas, please call Diane Coler-Dark at 523-5907.

# Meet Ellen Chesnut

I would like to introduce to you Mrs. Ellen Chesnut. Ellen will be replacing Carla McGrogan as the docent coordinator. I asked Ellen if she would tell us a little about her life, how she came to Alameda, and how she became interested in our museum. These are her words:



*I was born in Mosul, Iraq, of Armenian Christian ancestry. We came to America in 1941( my mother, father, my baby brother, and I, as a toddler) on the Dutch freighter, the Boesch Fontaine, a few months before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.*

*My husband, Glen, and I moved to Alameda three years ago from Noe Valley in San Francisco. I was a teacher in the San Francisco*

*Unified School District for 42 years at the middle school and high school level. I taught history, English, and art, and **I loved it!***

*Away from school, I am a printmaker (calligraphy, etchings and monotypes). I paint with watercolors and oil paints. And I love to write. Right now, I am working on my father's story. Both my parents survived the genocide of the Armenians by the Turkish government in 1915.*

*When I moved to Alameda, the first thing I wanted to do was to volunteer at the museum, and it's not hard to understand why. I have absolutely nothing that belonged to my father's family... not a picture, not a wooden spoon, not a scrap of fabric. We all must treasure our heritage, and it is appalling to me that, in a city the size of Alameda, so few people cherish the wonderful history and artifacts that our museum offers.*

*I am very impressed by the wonderful volunteers I have met at the museum... people who are dedicated to keeping our history alive, and not relegating it to a black hole. My goal is to help spread the word throughout our city, and beyond, about our little treasure here. Tell your friends and neighbors to drop by. They will be surprised by what they discover.*

# From the Secretary's Desk

by Robbie Dileo

One of my favorite duties as a volunteer is to be the docent who gives group tours during non-business hours. In October, two classes from Paden School came to learn a bit more about Alameda History. Local history is usually covered in 3rd grade and most of our elementary schools schedule an annual FREE tour that often combines a visit to City Hall, the Fire Dept., the Police Dept., and a bag lunch in Jackson Park or the Old High School. Many of the teachers depend on the Museum to make history come alive and most have seen the video "Alameda – An Island City" that we produced and gave to their media centers. The *Quarterly* cover picture shows Ms. Marsha Gills' class, who has been coming for years. The adult chaperones are always surprised by what we have on display and how things have changed. It's always fun for me to interact and field the children's questions. All feel a greater sense of community afterwards. Let's hope the Museum can stay open for a few more years.



The Museum would like to thank all the people who made the Alameda Legacy Home Tour a great success. Homeowners graciously shared their home and supplied details that ended up becoming our Guidebook. This year, we were especially fortunate to have local historian Woody Minor as the primary writer and Valerie Turpen supplying her superlative graphic designer skills. Houses were of many styles, including Storybook, Arts and Crafts, Traditional and Victorian. The many docents directed traffic flow and explained unique

features and collections. The home tour committee is comprised of Alameda Architectural Preservation Society and Alameda Museum members. It's a lot of work, but the rewards for promoting "heritage tourism" and our architectural legacy is worth the effort. I would like to extend a special thank you to The Perforce Foundation who has been our sponsor for the past eight years. Their generous underwriting is what makes the event a successful fundraiser. The ALHT committee is seeking new volunteers for a variety of tasks. If you would like to participate, please contact Diane Coler-Dark, 523-5907.

# ***Sewer Problems***

## **What happened to our art gallery?**



The gallery has been closed during the months of September and October due to a drastic renovation project by the Masonic Lodge. It seems that the antiquated sewer was used to drain both the old and the newer buildings toward Park Street.

A new sewer line had to be installed to drain the west wing toward Alameda Avenue. On September first, they began by moving all East Gallery furniture and displays to the sides, erecting visqueen walls and closing off the gallery with a plywood barrier. They removed a six foot wide swath of floor from the bathroom to the street, cut the concrete below and dug a plumbing trench.

In the process of digging the trench, the workers discovered a leak in our water supply line, which runs directly beneath the front doorway of the Museum. This discovery necessitated more trenching, more construction, and the closure of the Museum for one week.

Three weeks later, the plumbing was completed and the concrete was repaired. In another week, the swath down the middle of the gallery was patched with oriented strand board. The visqueen walls and plywood barrier were removed and all activity stopped. According to the Masons letter, the construction workers had finished their job, leaving us with the news that the cleanup, the repainting, and the furniture replacing was our responsibility. The Museum had to spend about \$150 for painting supplies, and with the diligent labors of Chuck Millar and Robbie Dileo, the room is finally getting back to normal.

Our next exhibit in the gallery will start in November. The ***Women Artists of Alameda*** will be presenting a mixed media ensemble of oil colors, water colors, pottery and jewelry. It will be nice to get back to normal.

## Museum in Proposed Budget Cuts

Back in the spring 2007 issue of the *Quarterly*, we were celebrating the establishment of a \$50,000 grant from the City of Alameda. It was comprised of two parts, monthly rent subsidy payments and a smaller piece that we could apply for at year end with a “matching funds” component. Today, many city departments are facing cuts, and certainly, the economy is forcing severe belt tightening, but the recommendation from the City Manager to City Council regarding the Museum is to cut 100% of our rent subsidy for 2009/2010 and probably all subsequent years. **A 100% budget cut for next year could mean a fatal blow to our 60-year-old Museum.**

All City departments were asked to cut 8% from their budget but we are being cut by almost 24%. We currently receive \$3225 per month or \$38,700 per year. Our rent is \$61,236 (\$5103 x 12). The difference is made up by our hard work with fund raising. City Council Agenda item 5A October 21 showed the Museum getting \$42,500, which is the total amount available in fiscal year 2008/09. The difference is \$3800 that we can apply for through our ***Double the Bang for Your Buck*** program. Should we not be eligible to get this \$3800 in additional funds, we will have been cut almost 24%.

Additionally, the Meyers House has also come under our care because the City cut off 100% of their support for it in 2008. Only the \$14,000 to \$22,000 that comes from the East Bay Community Foundation each year (5% of investment returns from the Meyers Endowment) can be used. This means no financial support for painting and roofing repairs, which are due sooner than later.

Our Museum will not survive long in our excellent location if our subsidy is eliminated. **Please write City Council and the City Manager to voice your concerns.** You may attend City Council meetings or view their proceedings which are broadcast live on cable channel 15. Past meetings are viewable online. Check the newspaper or City web site for schedule and agenda details.

[http://www.ci.alameda.ca.us//gov/city\\_council\\_meetings.html](http://www.ci.alameda.ca.us//gov/city_council_meetings.html)

A decorative border of palm trees surrounds the page. The trees are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with a row of 12 trees at the top, a row of 12 at the bottom, and vertical columns of 12 trees on the left and right sides. The trees are stylized with green fronds and brown trunks.

# MISNOMERS

by Ron Ucovich

Many California towns were named by the Spanish for the trees that grew there: Dos Pinos (two pines), Encino (live oak), Fresno (ash), Palo Colorado (redwood), Palo Alto (tall tree), Sausalito (willow grove), Palmera (palm tree), Paso Robles (oak pass), and Alamo (poplar).



Yes, *Alamo* is the Spanish word for a *poplar tree*. An *alameda* is a street or river lined with poplars. It's quite a misnomer to name a city Alameda where there were no native poplar trees. But we need not apologize for our name. If we look around, we will see many misnamed areas: Mt. Eden has no mountain, Fish Ranch Road has no fish, Morgan Hill has no hills, Shepherd Canyon has no shepherds, and Bay Farm Island is not an island.

So, an *alameda* is a grove of poplar trees, and our city had no native poplar trees. An *encinal* is a grove of oak trees, so Encinal would have been a much more appropriate name. Or, better yet, *Hiedra Venenosa* (poison oak) would have been a perfect name, because the island was full of it.

But let's not worry about literal translations. Let's leave that for the cities with more embarrassing names, like Vacaville (cow town), Los Banos (the bathrooms), La Brea (the tar pit), Asco (nausea), or Atascadero (mud hole).

## How come dining room sets have one chair with armrests?

by Ron Ucovich



The answer to this question dates back almost 1000 years. When William of Normandy conquered England in 1066, the English language underwent many changes. The French-speaking Normans treated the native Saxons and their guttural language as very inferior. Anglo Saxon words were regarded as crude, while French words were refined and sophisticated. The Anglos were the low class, and the French were the upper class. The French, for example, were the ones who dined on the animals that were raised, slaughtered, and cooked by the Anglos. The word *cow* comes from the Saxon language, while the word *beef* comes from the French language.

Notice the connotation of the Saxon word compared to the same word in French: chicken / poultry; sheep / mutton; pig / pork. The Saxon words are crude and brusque, while the French words are cultured and refined. Compare the feeling you get from these parallel words, again the first coming from Saxon and the second from French: to sweat / to perspire; to eat / to dine; to want / to desire; house / mansion; stool / chair.

So we see that *stool* and *chair* have the same meaning, but *stool* is used for the common people, while *chair* is used for nobility.

Historically, in committee or council meetings, the leader of the group sat on a chair, while the rest of the people sat on stools. He was referred to by the group as the *chairman*. Similarly, in private homes, the head of the family (the oldest man) sat at the head of the dining room table in a chair, while the rest of the family sat on stools. And that is why to this day, dining room sets will always have one chair that is a little larger than the others, and it will always have armrests.



# City Matching Grant

## *Double Your Donation Donors*

### “Friends of the Museum Rent Donors” for City matching funds:

Alameda Women Artists	Shirley & Ron Goodman	Bill & Irene Palmer
Catherine Baker	Philip & Donna Gravem	Louis Parker
Ann Bracci	Lynn Groh	Frank Perkins
Dr. Alice Challen	James Hammill	Darlene Pottgeiser
Beverly Church	William Houston	Suzanne Renee
Elise Clasby	Victor Jin	Grant & Jo Robinson
Betty Ann Cogliati	Toku Kamei	Betty Sanderson
Diane Coler-Dark	Estelle Knowland	Margaret Seaman
Betty Barry Deal	Adam Koltun	Betty Sewell
Ross & Robbie Dileo	Flora & Larry Larson	Carol Sharon
Catherine Edwards	Linda Larkin	Elizabeth Steffen
Rose Foster	Barbara Lewis	Emily Thurston
Jeanne Gallagher	Lillian Molzan	Bill & Laura Tippet
Alice Garvin	Beverly Moore	
Alice Godfrey	Audrey O'Brian	

*The Museum thanks all of you for your generous support.*

The City will match donations that *exceed* donations in the Museum's 2006 fiscal year, up to \$3,848. **The City reduced its support \$7,452 this year. With the 2007/8 rent increase of \$15,084 and operating expenses of \$36,000, the Museum now must raise \$58,536 a year to survive.** This is an enormous task for a small group of worker bees. Please send in your needed support and the coupon below with your donation to ***Double the Bang for Your Bucks!*** \$25 becomes \$50. \$100 is \$200. \$1000 equals \$2000. We like to think big when it comes to keeping our Alameda Museum functioning as a valuable resource.

**Mail to: Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue, Alameda, CA 94501**

***Yes, I want to double my donation for the Alameda Museum.***

Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ it is okay to list my name in the next Quarterly as a  
Friend of the Museum Rent Donor. Tax ID# 942464751**

