

Union City History Collection

A collection of articles on Union City history



By Timothy Swenson

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Three Towns - Early Names for Alvarado

There are four town names that run through the history of Union City; New Haven, Union City, Alvarado and Decoto. The Decoto area of Union City has always been named Decoto. How the names of Union City, New Haven and Alvarado apply to the western part of town is a little less clear.

In September of 1850, John Horner made available a number of plots close to a landing that he built in a bend of Alvarado Creek. He named the town Union City, after a steamer he owned called "Union." In December of 1850, about a half mile east of Union City, Henry Smith bought some land and founded the town of New Haven, named after his home town of New Haven, CT.

What is not all too clear is how the name Alvarado came to be associated with both towns. Currently the whole area is known as the Alvarado district of Union City. A number of the "old timers" remember growing up in the area and calling it Alvarado. This gives the impression that Union City and New Haven merged to form Alvarado.

Looking over the published histories gives a slightly different story. The "History of Alameda County" by Wood (1883) mentions New Haven and Alvarado in almost the same paragraph. In the 1928 "History of Alameda County" by Merrit, mentions "New Haven, since named Alvarado." The 1905 "History of Washington Township" published by the Washington Township Ladies Club mentions "Union City had a rival in Alvarado .. [which] was first called New Haven."

The 1878 Thompson & West Atlas shows an etching of "Union City Warehouse and Landing at Alvarado," which was owned by James Barron. An 1875 bill of lading from James Barron says only "Union City Landing" and no mention of Alvarado.

The most recent history of Washington Township, written by John Sandoval, says "in one section of enactments the village is called New Haven, and in a later section it is referred to as Alvarado." Sandoval is talking about the enactments that were used to create Alameda County and to designate the first County Seat.

In researching this subject, I've found that period maps can tell a lot, although they are not 100 percent correct. The 1878 Thompson and West atlas shows only Alvarado for the area. An 1880's map shows both Alvarado and Union City. The same is true for both an 1873 Topographic map, a 1906 Navigational chart and a 1929 map of the East Bay. The maps seem to point to Union City being distinct from Alvarado, even up to the 1930's.

Luckily, I have come across an article that seems to have the definitive answer. The article "New Haven and the Two Alvarados" by J.N. Bowman, was published in 1933 in the California History Magazine, the official magazine of the California Historical Society. The article is well footnoted and heavily researched.

Mr. Bowman details the same about Union City and New Haven, as documented above. He then goes on to talk about two San Francisco lawyers, Strode and Jones, that

purchased a plot of land just to the south of both Horner and Smith, in September 1852. They named the town Alvarado, after Juan B. Alvarado, a Mexican governor of California. The town may not have been more than just a name as there was no serious development of this area.

On March 15, 1853, when creating Alameda County, Henry Smith introduced a bill to the state Senate locating the County Seat as New Haven and the Seat of Justice at Alvarado. It is known that the first meeting of new Alameda County officials was held in Smith's store in New Haven, but the meeting minutes dated April 11, 1853 show the name Alvarado. In a foot note, Bowman states that Mr. Jones was an important political player in the state and the naming Alvarado as the Seat of Justice might have been a compromise to get his support for Smith's bill.

Records show that the first use of "Alvarado, formerly New Haven" was on August 29, 1853 on survey maps and in deeds starting on October 3, 1853, where the double designation was used well into the 1860's.

It would appear that the general use of Alvarado would apply to the area covered by New Haven, Alvarado and Union City, but map makers were making a distinction between the "new" Alvarado and Union City.

First Presbyterian Church of Alvarado

Just down from Union City Blvd on West Horner St. is an old church. The major part of the church is the second church for the Presbyterian Church of Alvarado, built in 1902. The first church building was built in 1860.

In the late 1850's, there were no churches in Alvarado. Church services were held in the second story of Mr. Horner's store. Mrs. Charlotte Cornell and Mrs. Julia Thompson organized a Sunday school in the public school house. Soon, both decided that a church was needed in Alvarado. As Mrs. Cornell was Presbyterian and Mrs. Thompson was a Methodist, they both struck off to build their separate churches.

Mrs. Cornell contacted the Pastor of the Centerville Presbyterian Church, Reverend William Wallace Brier. The Centerville Presbyterian Church was the first Presbyterian Church in Washington Township, and of which, Mrs. Cornell was a member.

Rev. Brier promised to help build the Alvarado church, and committed \$500 from the Church Erection Fund to the project. It was up to them to find the land and the rest of the funds. A Mr. Jones was visiting Mr. Cornell's General Store, when Mr. Cornell asked if he would be willing to donate part of his land for the church. Mr. Jones agreed, but only if the landowner, Mr. Murphy, would release him of his mortgage. Mrs. Cornell traveled to San Jose to see Mr. Murphy to secure the land. Mr. Murphy agreed and the deed was written up so that the land belonged to the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of San Jose.

To generate the rest of the funds needed to build the building, Mrs. Cornell organized a festival. Since the festival was to have as many people attend as possible, Mrs. Cornell had to sell the new church as benefiting all of Alvarado by bringing respectability to the town and increasing property values.

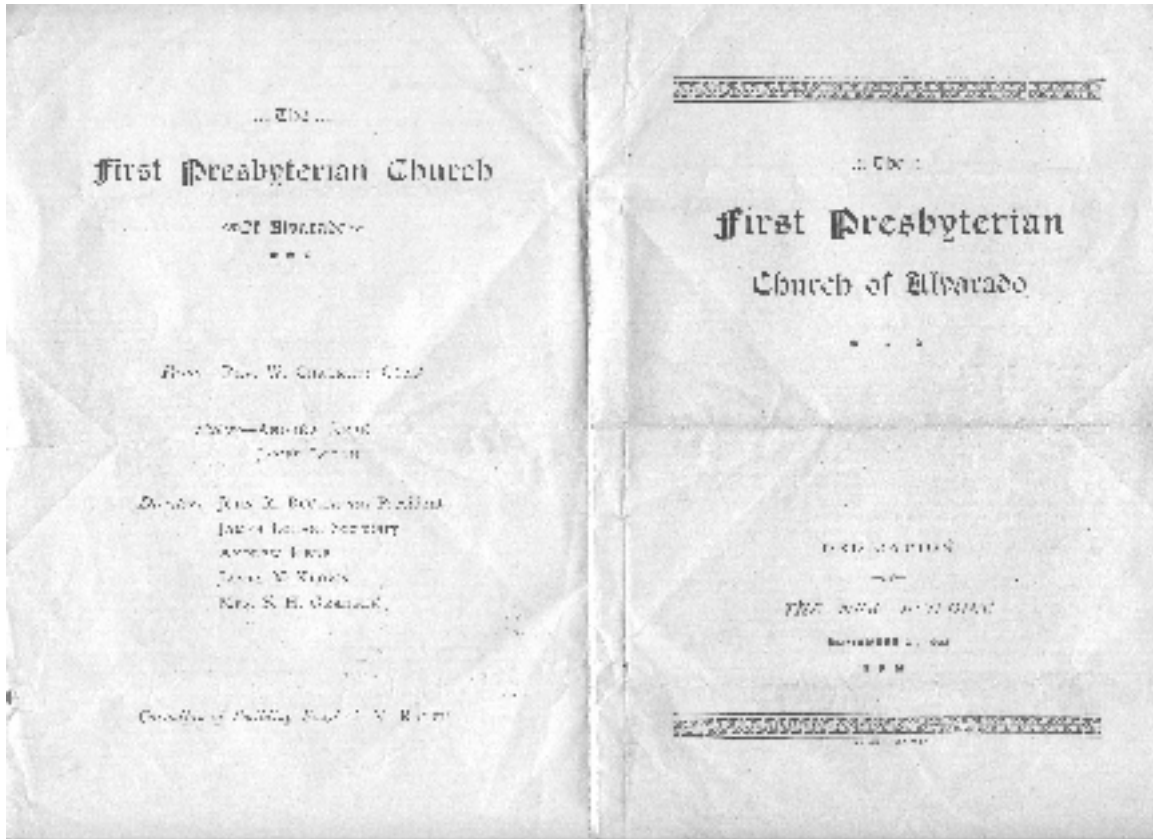
The festival was held in a large brick warehouse, decorated with bunting and evergreens, and lighted by chandeliers. Everyone pitched in by contributing various cooked items, including pies, cakes, biscuits, pickles, preserves, and so on. They also sold books, which they had purchased in San Francisco, for a small commission. Admission was only 50 cents. After the final tally, the festival generated \$600 for building the church.

A day after the festival, a schooner landed in Alvarado with a load of lumber and other building material. Mrs. Cornell and her group thought that a benefactor from San Francisco was making a large donation to their cause. Much to their disappointment, the load was for building the Methodist church.

Soon the Presbyterian Church was built and was ready for furnishing. Mrs. Cornell traveled to San Francisco to purchase carpet, a sofa, 2 chairs, and other furnishings. A friend from San Francisco donated lamps. The bell came from a foundry in Brooklyn (Oakland). Mr. Cornell sent the foundry \$50 for the bell. The foundry operator, with the help of some of his friends, contributed \$100 toward the bell, and sent the church a bell costing \$150. Mr. Buel, the agent of the Bible Society, furnished a pulpit bible. Nathaniel Gray donated a number of hymnbooks. Other friends donated various books for the Sunday school.

The church was dedicated in May, 1861, by the Rev. Dr. Hamilton of Oakland, with him preaching the sermon and Rev. Brier and others assisting in other duties.

In 1902 the present building was built, just to the west of the original church. The original church was soon torn down. A dedication was held for the new building on September 21, 1902. At the time, the Rev. V. Chalmers Gunn was the Pastor. The Elders were Andrew Kerr and James Logan. The Directors were John R. Buchannon - President; James Logan - Secretary; Andrew Kerr, James McKeown, and Mrs. S. H. Granger. The Custodian of the Building Fund was I. V. Ralph, a local banker.



Prominent families from Alvarado have been associated with the Presbyterian Church of Alvarado, such as the names McKeown, Logan, Granger, Farley, and Jung.

Union City City Halls

When Union City incorporated in 1959, there was no City Hall. The City Council was meeting at Barnard Elementary School, but someplace was needed for the City Administrator to work. It was decided that the first City Hall would be the Alvarado Firehouse, located at 3841 Smith St. The City Administrator and two other City employees performed the daily business of the City from the Firehouse. Given the small size of the Firehouse, it did not take long for the City staff to grow too big for the Firehouse. The City Hall was moved to 309 H. St (at the corner of 4th St.) in Decoto.

Until 1966, Police services for Union City were contracted to the Alameda County Sheriff Department. In 1966, the Police Department was formed. With the new Police Department, plus continued growth, the City needed more space than the current City Hall had.

In February of 1966, the City leased a building at the corner of Whipple and Central, with an address of 1154 Whipple Ave. In January of 1967, the building was expanded an additional 4,200 square feet, to create a final size of 10,000 square feet. The new

expansion made room for larger City Council chambers and for expansion of the City Police Department.

Before the expansion, City Hall was a rectangular building running along Whipple Ave. The expansion was added on the west end of the building, running along Central Ave, making the building L shaped. The City Council chambers were located in the corner of the L. The Police Department took up the rest of the expansion, with the entrance to the Police Department on Central Ave. Since the City did not own the building, it was limited in what it could do, esp. in building the Police Department. The holding cell had bars, but it had the same drop-down ceiling as the rest of the building. Occasionally, an eager prisoner would try to escape by climbing up into the drop-down ceiling.

On August 6, 1976, City Hall was dedicated to Police Chief William Cann, who was shot on June 11, 1974 and died a short time later of his wounds.

As the City continued to grow, so did the need for a larger City Hall. Planning for a City Center Complex, that included City Hall, a Police Station, and Library, was started in 1971. The soon-to-be finalized City General Plan proposed a 10 acre site near the future BART station, but another group proposed a 24 acre site along Alvarado-Niles Road between Dowe and Central. Later the plan shifted to land owned by the New Haven School District, across Alvarado-Niles Rd. from Logan High School. In 1974, the New Haven School District approved the sale of the land to the City for \$256,000.

A special election was called for May 27, 1975, for two tax measures, one for the City Center Complex and one for continued local Bus Service. The measure for Bus Service was approved by the voters, but the measure for the City Center Complex was not.

In February 1977 the City received a federal grant of \$5 million for the City Center Complex. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on April 15, 1977. The groundbreaking was for both the City of Union City and the New Haven School District, as the NHUSD was building their new Educational Services building. Congressman Don Edwards was the guest speaker.

On March 8, 1979, the new City Hall was ready and the first city workers moved in. The opening ceremony was held on April 21, 1979. Guest of Honor was U.S. Sen. S. I. Hayakawa. Like the previous City Hall, the City Center Complex was named for Police Chief William Cann.

Alvarado, Decoto and Union City Postmasters

Alvarado

The Alvarado Post Office was established on August 8, 1853 and was discontinued on November 3, 1959 when the Union City Post Office took over.

As the first Postmaster was Henry Smith, it is quite likely that the first Post Office was located in his store, the same building that was also the first County Court house. Eventually the Post Office would move to a building just behind the Central Bank building (on the corner of Smith and UC Blvd). This building has long since been torn down. The Post Office would move to the current location of the Alvarado Branch (of the Union City Post Office). The Post Office probably moved to this location some time in the late 40's or early 50's, based on the age of the building.

<u>Post Master</u>	<u>Appointment Date</u>
Henry C. Smith	8/9/1853
Augustus M. Church	5/31/1856
John R. Wares	12/14/1859
Azman J. Lowell	9/29/1861
Daniel C. Owen	1/11/1867
Mary L. Owen	8/22/1876
Wilfred F. Ingalls	6/26/1877
Edwin A. Richmond	9/26/1877
Irvin V. Ralph	5/10/1899
Edwin A. Richmond	3/16/1903
John. H. Ralph	3/2/1911
Albert Norris	4/13/1915
Thore J. Nordvik	9/29/1934
Frances Luna	11/26/1934
Genevieve P. Dutra	7/22/1936
Angie V. Vargas	5/18/1956
Alvina E. Bruce	7/2/1957

Decoto

The Decoto Post Office was established in January 9, 1871, but was discontinued on September 2, 1872. It was reestablished on May 12, 1875 and ran as the Decoto Post Office until October 31, 1959, when its name was changed to Union City.

John Olson was the owner of one of the two grocery stores in Decoto (in the 1910's and 1920's). The Post Office was located in the general store from about 1903 until 1937. The Post Office would move a building of its own located on 10th St. between J. and I. Streets, in May 1937. An undated news article talks about the Post Office moving from its location on 10th St. to a new building on Second and E. Street. The same article mentions the new Hillview Crest development, dating the event to sometime in the early 50's.

<u>Post Master</u>	<u>Appointment Date</u>
James M. Hine	1/9/1871
Andrew J. Hare	5/12/1875
Edward Salz	6/11/1884

Manuel H. Lewis Jr	3/2/1889
Thomas W. Lee	2/19/1892
Sarah E. King	6/27/1896
George R. Young	4/22/1902
John L. Olson	6/18/1903
Mary B. Janeiro	1/2/1936

(Last name changed to George on 7/13/1959)

Mary B. George would be the first Post Master for Union City.

Union City

When Union City was incorporated, it was decided to change the name of the Decoto Post Office to Union City and dissolve the Alvarado Post Office. The Post Office would eventually move to its present location on Alvarado-Niles Rd.

<u>Post Master</u>	<u>Appointment Date</u>
Mary B. Janeiro(continued from Decoto)	
John H. Monahan	6/30/1972
Vernon L. Conway Jr.	1/2/1973
Chester French	9/4/1981
William J. Wellmerling	2/6/1982
Freddie L. Anderson	10/15/1986
Avelino C. Laigo	10/25/1986
Richard J. Martinez	1/2/1999
Robert W. Reed	2/10/2001

Mary George – Decoto and Union City Postmaster

Mary George held the position of Postmaster longer than anyone else in the history of Union City. Mary, with her maiden name of Janeiro, was appointed Decoto Postmaster in 1936.

Mary grew up in Decoto, attending Decoto Elementary School and Washington Union High School, graduating in 1930.

The Decoto Post Office was in a corner of the Olson's store on 10th St. At the time, Mary had to use her own money to purchase the equipment she needed. In 1938 she was able to borrow \$800 to purchase new postal equipment and to install 176 postal boxes. That same year she was able to expand into a building next door, almost opposite of the Decoto Fire Department.

During WWII, the Post Office moved to another location and added 240 more postal boxes. Mary would marry Albert George, whose family had been farming the Decoto area for many years.

In 1958, funds would come to Decoto to build a new Post Office. The office was built at 200 E. St. and was opened on March 8, 1958. When Decoto and Alvarado would merge to form Union City, the Decoto Post Office would become the main post office for Union City, with the Alvarado post office becoming a sub-station. Mary would become the first postmaster of the new Union City Post Office.

With the new Post Office being open, home delivery would come to Union City. It started with three carriers and then expanded to five the next year. Besides the five carriers, Mary would supervise seven administrative and clerical workers.

In April of 1961, Mary would be honored by the Alameda County Postmasters, celebrating her 25th Anniversary as Postmaster.

In 1972, Mary would send a letter to the City about naming a new street "Alvarado Nuevo". She said it was confusing enough with Alvarado Blvd and Alvarado-Niles Rd. and suggested using a name that is "more compatible with the new commercial growth on the street."

In June of 1972, Mary announced that she would be retiring from the Post Office, after 36 years of service. She felt that it was simply time to step down.

Besides being Postmaster, Mary would also dedicate her time to Our Lady of the Rosary Church and several civic organizations.

Mutual Aid Societies of Union City

As immigrants came to America, most created mutual aid societies based on ethnic background, for the purpose of helping others in their communities. The structure and benefits provided varied from group to group. In Union City, the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities created local mutual aid societies for their respective communities.

La Commission Honorifica Mexicana

The Mexican community founded this group in 1939. They purchased a home at the corner of 7th and G St. The home would eventually be rented out with the proceeds going to fund their projects. The Bracero program in the 40's brought in Mexican workers and the society worked to assist them. The society also sponsored Mexican Independence Day parties. These parties continued over the years until the early 1990's. The society also gave donations to an orphanage and rest home in Mexico and sponsored two scholarship programs. In 1997, they awarded two \$1,000 scholarships. The name "La Comision Honorifica Mexican" was also used for similar societies in other parts of the United States.

Puerto Rican Union of Mutual Aid

Founded in 1937 by Ramon Berrios, this society started with the purpose to help other Puerto Ricans new to the Decoto area. Their motto was “to advance with progress.” They keep the culture alive through Jíbaro music and Puerto Rican food. They had dances once a month and raise funds for educational scholarships and other community benefits. On June 11, 2002, the Union City Council enacted a “Resolution in honor of the Puerto Rican Union of Mutual Aid and its founder, Ramon Berrios.” The resolution was accepted by PRUMA President Carlos Feliciano.

Socieda Hispana de Decoto

Founded on Sept. 24, 1932, this society was formed to help raise money during the Depression to help Spanish families pay for funeral expenses. By 1995 all members were financially able to pay for their own funerals, so it was decided to dissolve the society. The society funds were given to charity after some were set aside for lawyers and taxes. The Boys Club of San Leandro received half of the funds with the other half going to Prevent Blindness of Northern California. Here is the text a note that with three officershop badges that are on display at the Union City Historical Museum.

Founded Sept. 24, 1932

Charter Members

Antonio Ramos

Juan Roderiguez

Roman Cortez

Alcdio Santiago

Laurence Delgado

Basilio Pacheo

Emilio Paniagua

Ignacio Paniagua

Philip Hernandez

Jose Arribas

Henalo Arenas

This club was formed to help raise money during the Depression to help Spanish family to pay funeral expenses. By 1995 all members were fiscally able to pay for their own funeral so the group decided to dissolve the club. The group voted to give the money left in the club to the few members that were left. They saved some of the money to pay lawyers and income tax. After everything was taken care of, the money was voted by the group to donate half of the money to the Boys Club of San Leandro and the other half to Prevent Blindness of Northern California.

Secretary Marrella Roderiguez



Juan Bautista Alvarado

Alvarado is one of the towns that merged to form Union City. The town was named after Juan Alvarado, the Mexican Governor of Alta California from 1836 to 1842.

Juan Alvarado was born in 1809 in Monterey, California. At this time Mexico had not separated from Spain, so he was considered a Spanish citizen. Later, he would be considered a Mexican citizen after Mexico gained its independence. Be he Spanish or Mexican, he was really a Californio, a native Californian of Hispanic heritage.

Alta California was ruled by a Governor with a "Diputacion" or provincial legislature. The seat of government was in Monterey.

As Mexico gained independence from Spain, its interest in Alta California waned. It got to the point where the Californios were dissatisfied. In a 5-year period (1831 - 1836), eleven different governors were appointed for Alta California, not including three appointments that the Californios did not permit to take office.

In 1835, Governor Figueroa died, and Governor Chico was appointed to replace him. He was considered a very obnoxious person to the Californios and was forced to retire. Juan Alvarado, President of the Diputacion, in November 1836, sent Chico's Deputy and a number of Mexican officials packing back to Mexico. The Diputacion then elected Alvarado as governor ad interim. Alvarado soon declared Alta California as "a free and sovereign State."

Southern Alta California remained loyal to the officials back in Mexico. Through diplomacy and a show of force, Alvarado was able to win over Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. In January 1837, he announced that Alta California was free and united.

One of the major players campaigning against Alvarado was Pio Pico, who would become the last Mexican governor of Alta California. Pico and Alvarado would clash so much that Pico, more than once, would be imprisoned by Alvarado. Pico and Alvarado were related by marriage, since Pico married Alvarado's sister, Maria Ignacia. Pico's sister, Tomasa, would also marry into the Alvarado family.

In June 1837, a Mexican Commissioner was sent to talk with Alvarado and get him to step down. Alvarado was able to convince the Commissioner of the cause of Alta California. The Commissioner went back to the Mexican authorities to plead Alvarado's case.

Meanwhile, the Mexican authorities appointed their own Governor for Alta California. The new governor rallied some troops and set off to take Alta California back by force. A small battle or skirmish took place at San Buena-Ventura, with the result being a total victory for Alvarado. There was only one death during the entire "battle."

In 1838, the Mexican authorities then offered Alvarado the official governorship of Alta California, which he readily accepted. Alta California would now become known as the "Department of California."

Alvarado was governor until 1842, when the Mexican authorities decided to remove him. After he was governor, Alvarado was granted a Rancho called "Rancho Las Mariposa" by Governor Micheltorena, Alvarado's replacement. It was located at the southern most end of the Sierra Nevada. He would later sell it to Thomas O. Larkin during the gold rush. Larkin was acting as an agent for John C. Fremont.

In 1844, Pio Pico and Juan Alvarado tried their hand at rebellion again. Pico and Alvarado raised a force from San Diego and Los Angeles. At Cahuenga Pass, Pico and Alvarado met the forces of Micheltorena. The only casualties in the skirmish were the death of two horses and one mule in an artillery duel. Micheltorena eventually capitulated and left California. Pio Pico took over as Governor of California.

In 1846, John C. Fremont entered California on a geographic survey team. Fremont built a temporary fort on "Hawks Ridge" and ran up the American flag. The local Mexican authorities were not at all happy and gathered some troops to make them leave. Jose Castro and Juan Alvarado were in charge of the gathering of troops. Once the troops had gathered close to Hawks Ridge, news arrived saying that Fremont and his men had left. Castro decided not to pursue the Americans.

Alvarado would eventually settle on a rancho in San Pablo in the East Bay. In 1882, Juan Bautista Alvarado passed away.

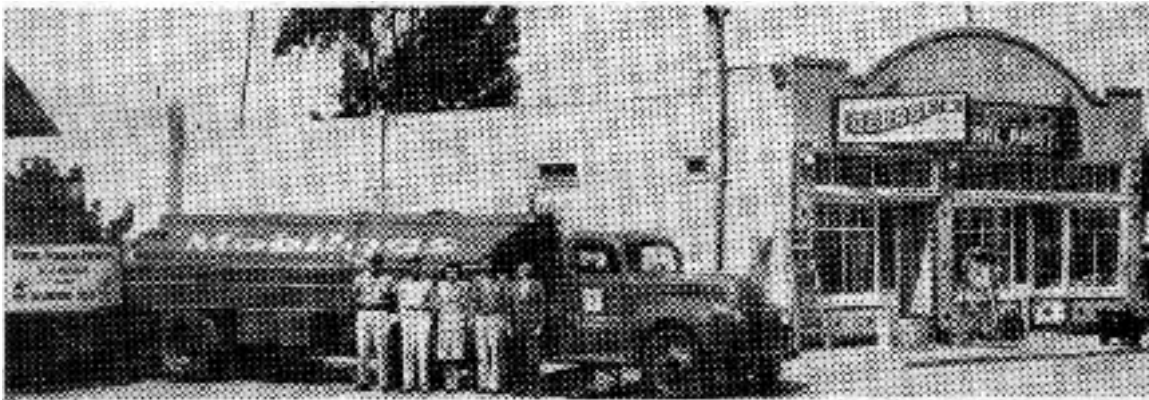
Frank George - Alvarado Businessman for over 40 Years

On Union City Blvd, just north of Smith St. is an older building, now housing a beauty shop. For most of the buildings life, it had been a oil dealership run by Frank George.

Frank George was born in San Leandro in 1898. After finishing grade school, Frank went to work in a shoe store. At 18, he joined the Postal Service, but was soon drafted into the Army for WWI. As he arrived at the Induction Center he was told to go home because the war had just ended.

In 1922, he turned to farming and started working on the Salz ranch with his brother Antone. The Salz ranch was located between Whipple and Alvarado-Niles Road, including areas that are now part of Hayward, specifically the site of the California Highway Patrol station.

Deciding to take up a business of their own, the two brothers started a trucking business. The trucking business hauled a variety of farm produce all over Northern California. After 5 years, the business had grown to include six trucks and trailers.



In 1933, General Petroleum (later to become Mobil) contracted the two brothers to take over the bulk oil dealership in Alvarado. The dealership sold oil products to the local farms. As the make up of Alvarado and Decoto began to change from farming to residential, the type of products sold changed to meet the new needs.



In 1949 Antone passed away, leaving Frank to take over the whole of the business. In 1965, Frank turned the business over to his son Frank, and his daughter-in-law Lena. In 1970, Frank was brought back into the business when his son died.

Frank passed away in 1977 at the age of 79.

Union City Outlook

The Union City Outlook was a short-lived newspaper that was published for six months, running from April 30, 1975 to Nov. 19, 1975. The newspaper was published by Richard G. Ford. The Outlook was started as "a community newspaper, designed to tell the story of what is happening, where and when, while spotlighting community interest items."

In the first issue, Richard Ford mentions community members prompting him to publish a local newspaper covering Union City. Richard Ford had worked at Folger Publishing, the publisher of the previous Union City newspaper, "The Union City Leader." The Leader had just finished its publication in 1973, having covered Union City for 14 years.

The Outlook staff were:

Editorial Manager –	Patricia Dubois
Production Manager –	Deborah Bockman
Office Manager –	Deanna Amstalden
Advertising Manager –	Charles Dodd

Classified Manager – Susan Magio
Correspondent – Anne Wright
Correspondent – Lisa Acosta
Sports – Terry Brinkerhoff



The introductory subscription rate was \$4.25 per year, with the regular price going to \$5.50 per year. The first issue was 12 pages, with most issues being either 8, 10, or 12 pages.

The Outlook would carry at least 2 pages of local sports covering both High School and independent leagues. At times the coverage would cover as much as 4 pages.

Reflecting the Hispanic background of a majority of the Decoto residents, the Outlook would publish articles and editorials in Spanish along side the English text. On May 21, 1975 the first Spanish/English Editorial was published. The June 4 issue had the first Spanish/English headlines and news articles.

After working at the Outlook, Co-Editor, Anne Wright, would go on to help write the book "Hayward...The First 100 Years". The book was written to celebrate the Hayward Centennial in 1976 and was a fairly popular book at the time.

Like a lot of small businesses just starting out, the Outlook was not able to make enough money to keep it going. In the final issue, Richard Ford thanked the community for the support they had shown over the short life of the Outlook. The Outlook would be the last local newspaper for Union City.

The Union City Historical Museum has a number of issues of the Outlook that have been donated by local residents.

South Bay Shipwreck

For years I have noticed that in the Bay just off the shore of Hayward and Union City is a shipwreck. The wreck can be seen from either the Dumbarton or San Mateo bridge, at low tide. I've heard that the wreck was called the South Bay Shipwreck, but I did not know much about it.

While working at the Union City Historical Museum, a Mr. P. Miller came to in. He mentioned that he was a retired Tug Boat captain and he used to boat all over the Bay and Delta. I asked him if he knew about the South Bay Shipwreck. Not only did he know about it, he had climbed on it.

He said that it was a 4 stack Destroyer that had been used for bombing practice during WWII by Navy fighters. He thinks that it may have even been used during the Korean War. During the late 50's the ship was still mostly intact. Mr. Miller told me that he would boat from Redwood City to the shoreline of Union City to do some duck hunting. After hunting, he would boat over to the wreck, hop aboard and have a "cool one" or smoke a cigar. He said he knew of folks that would use the aft part of the wreck for duck hunting and set out decoys around the ship.

Sometime during the late 50's or early 60's, he said that some people went out to the wreck with blow torches and started cutting the ship up for scrap. As they worked on the ship, they would live aboard, as the living spaces were still intact.

Later that evening, with the information that Mr. Miller had provided, I decided to do a little web search and see if I could find out more about the ship. After typing in the right search words, I found a web page on the USS Thompson (DD-305).



The USS Thompson was a Clemson class destroyer. It was built in San Francisco starting in 1918 by the Bethlehem Steel Company. In August, 1920, it was commissioned. The USS Thompson was used primarily in the Pacific, with an occasional trip to the Caribbean. In 1925, the USS Thompson made a trip with the Battle Fleet to Australia and New Zealand.



(Photograph taken 2000. Courtesy of Jon Hunolt)

In 1930, the London Naval Treaty reduced the amount of naval tonnage each nation could have. The USS Thompson was a casualty of that Treaty. The USS Thompson was decommissioned in 1930. The more useful parts of the ship were removed at Mare Island and the ship was put up for sale. In June of 1931, the USS Thompson was sold and became a floating restaurant on the southern part of the Bay.



(Photograph taken 2000.. Courtesy of Jon Hunolt)

In June 1944, the USS Thompson was repurchased by the Navy, run aground on the mudflats on the eastern side of the Bay near Hayward and Union City and used for target practice by Navy fighters. There it sat for many years slowly rusting away.

Union City Festivals

Since becoming a city in 1959, Union City has hosted a number of different festivals, sponsored by different groups. In looking through old newspaper clippings, the number and types of festivals comes out.

The Southern Alameda County Buddhist Church started a church Carnival in 1962, which has continued to run over the years, eventually being renamed as a Bazaar. The festival still runs today, usually held in July. The Buddhist church also holds the Obon festival, held in August.

In 1970, the Union City Chamber of Commerce and the Union City Merchants Association started “Fiesta Days”, highlighted by a parade. In 1975, the festival was renamed “Festival Days”. In 1976, the festival was once again renamed to “Carnival Days”.

In 1974 the City held the First Annual Kite Festival in Casa Verde Park.

Both of the Catholic churches in town hold festivals for fundraising. St. Anne held its “International Festival” in 1975, which in 1991 was called “Autumn Festival”. The festival still runs today in September. Our Lady of the Rosary holds its parish festival as the “International Fair” in early October.

In 1976, the Union City Library sponsored a Cinco de Mayo celebration which was also held in 1978.

In 1985 the Union City Chamber of Commerce sponsored the first Gladiola Festival in August. The festival ran in 1990 as the 6th Annual Gladiola Festival.

In 1993, the Africa-American Alliance Club sponsored the first Black Family Day, usually held at Kennedy Park. This festival is still held today.

Two Indian festivals have been held in Union City, the first in 2000 as the Festival of India. The festival out grew Union City and moved to Santa Clara. In 2002, the Federation of Indian-American Associations sponsored its own Indian Festival.

In 2001, Union City sponsored the first Winter Fest, a collection of related events. The Hall of Trees was a benefit where local non-profits would decorate Christmas tree and sell them at an auction. The Champagne Gala and Auction was a black tie event for New Years Eve that also benefited local non-profits. As Union City does not get cold enough for snow to come to it, the City trucked in a whole bunch of snow and deposited it in the parking lot of City Hall and the Library. Kids were allowed to dig through the snow, make snow men and toss a few snow balls.

Dry Creek Picnic Grounds

Where Whipple Ave. meets Mission Blvd. is a small road called May Rd. At the end of May Road is a place called Dry Creek Cottage. The cottage, built in the 1910’s, has some history to it, but the land the cottage sits on has a history before the cottage.

From about 10 years, starting in 1873, the area where two small creeks came together was a well known picnic ground. The main holidays celebrated were May Day and the 4th of July, but local organizations also use the picnic grounds for their events.

The picnic grounds sit on what was part of Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda, granted to Jesus Vallejo. Over time Jesus Vallejo would borrow money from Jonas Clark. Jonas Clark would eventually take ownership of a section of land of the Rancho in lieu of payment of the loan. This section included the picnic grounds.

The picnic grounds would be used by different organizations, including the Independent Order of Chosen Friends, the League of Friends, the Scandinavians of Alameda County, the Pioneer Society (later called the Argonaut Club), the Ancient Order of United Workmen, the Danish Picnic, the Harvest Picnic, the Odd Fellows, the Good Templars, Washington College (in Irvington), and occasionally the Oakland Guard.



The picnic season would generally start around April 26 and continue to just past the 4th of July. To announce that a picnic was coming up, a flag was flown from on top of a nearby hill, giving it the name “flagpole hill”. Advertisements were also run in the local Hayward and Oakland newspapers.

The 4th of July picnic would be the biggest of the season, with patriotic events, like the reading of the Declaration of Independence by a local judge. Fireworks were also used, including firecrackers, pinwheels, snakes, and a “double headed dutchman”, whatever that is. There would also be the firing of the anvils. This is where gunpowder is placed in a small groove in the top of the anvil and a second anvil is placed on top of the first. Once the fuse is lit, the gunpowder (under pressure between the anvils), explodes, sending the top anvil hurling up into the air.

For the picnics, benches and tables were setup for eating and a bandstand and dance floor were installed. Across the creek a bar would be put up to satisfy the thirst of the picnic goers.

In 1877 the Pioneer Society put on the 4th of July celebration where a total of 1200 revelers were in attendance. The 1879 picnic was remembered for a target shooting contest between members of the Centerville Rifle Club. The first prize went to Gardner Whipple, second prize to R. E. Smith, third prize to Troy McDavid, fourth prize to Frank Bane, and fifth prize to M. J. Overacker.

From 1880 to 1882, Andrew Jackson Hare operated the picnic grounds. He was the first agent for the Central Pacific Railroad in 1874, the first Wells Fargo agent and Decoto Postmaster in 1875.



On May 20, 1882, the Pioneers of the Southern Part of Alameda County held a picnic where 1000 patrons attended. The Third Grand Annual Picnic of the Scandinavians of Alameda County was held on June 10, 1882, and advertised “free conveyance from and to every train at Decoto.”

The last picnic may have been the Grand Harvest Picnic of August 1883.

Once the land was purchased from Jonas Clark by August May, Sr. it is not documented exactly why the picnic grounds were no longer used.