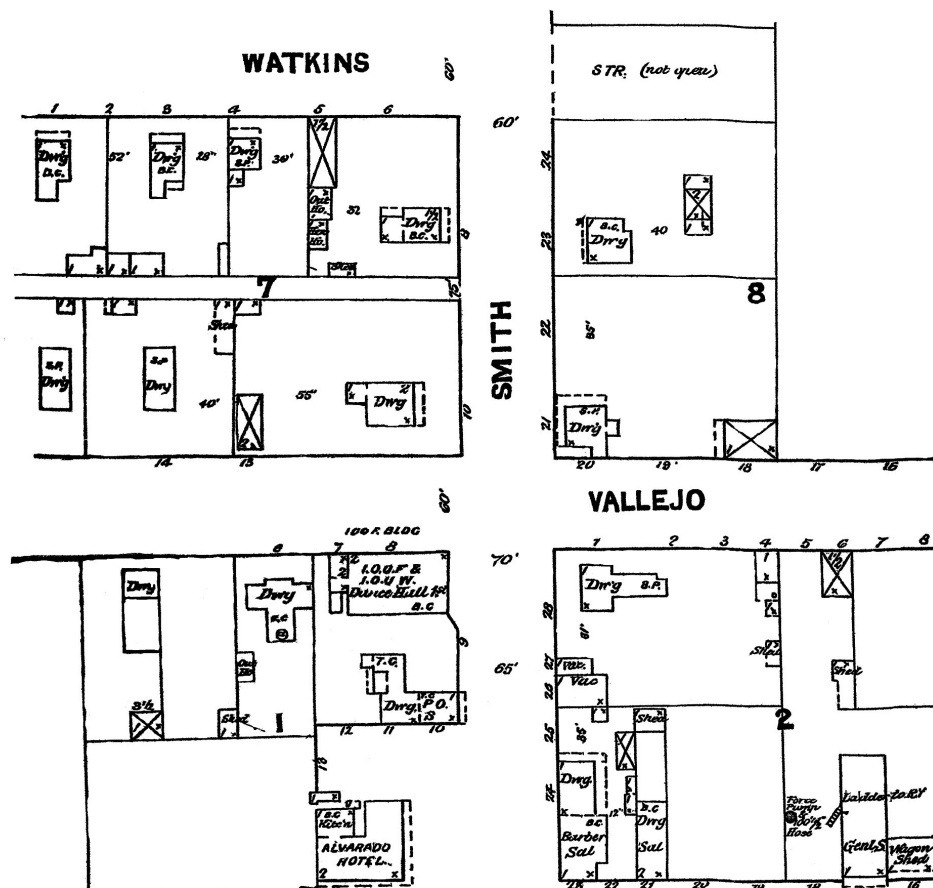


Blogging Union City History

The First Year

Short articles on Union City history



Timothy Swenson

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Timothy Swenson



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List of Articles

1. Ezra Decoto and the Cache of Gold
2. The Lyle/Harvey/Dinsmore Building
3. Dyer Family Letters
4. Oldest Market in Alvarado
5. The Case of the Abandoned Buggy
6. Decoto not on the map
7. Bridges of Alvarado
8. Oldest Market in Decoto
9. Decoto Cannery
10. Special Train to Decoto
11. Fires in Early Decoto
12. Francis Robie
13. Snake on May Ranch
14. Automobile First in Decoto?
15. Prohibition in Decoto
16. John Brizee, Alvarado Inventor
17. Alvarado and Decoto Inventors
18. Freddie Muller – Baseball
19. Water Wars
20. Duck Hunting and Clubs
21. John Horner Flour Mill
22. Witchcraft in Alvarado
23. Alvarado and Decoto Celebrates the Centennial
24. George Tay Foundry
25. Alvarado 1850-1870
26. Two Courthouses of Alvarado
27. East Shore Freeway affects Alvarado
28. Alvarado's Fair Maidens of the Marshes
29. Alvarado Grammar/Elementary School
30. Decoto Football
31. Chicory Growing
32. Alvarado Small Airplane Crashes
33. Bicycles in Alvarado
34. Old Meets New in a Rough Way
35. Pistol Packin' Mama
36. Alvarado Theaters
37. Alvarado Methodist Church
38. John Hall
39. Horner Stage
40. Bootleg Dog
41. Alvarado Cattle Round Up
42. August May Jr. & House
43. Continental Salt Works Destroyed
44. Last Flood of Alameda Creek
45. Chinatown in Alvarado
46. The Hapless Hairless Dog
47. "Union" Steamship
48. First Auto Accidents In Alvarado
49. Safecrackers at the Alvarado Train Station
50. Fire on the Marshes

Introduction

Starting in the middle of 2011, I have been writing a weekly history blog on unioncity.patch.com under the simple blog title of "History Blog". I posted the first History Blog on July 30, 2011. In the first year, I posted a total of 50 articles.

This document is a collection of those articles, made for those that don't read blogs and for those that want to have all the articles in one single source.

When researching Union City history, a lot of times I will come across short bits of history that interesting, but really do not warrant any further research. Most of these items are single events that may not be historically all that important, but are non-the-less interesting and sometimes humorous. Sometimes the day-to-day events of history provide a better understanding of history, and even show how things may not have changed over the years.

Ezra Decoto and the Cache of Gold

Reading through old newspapers articles, it is sometimes astonishing the short articles that one comes across, the type of article that begs for more details. On September 23, 1887, there was a sort article on Ezra Decoto, one of Decoto brothers that lent their name to the town of Decoto. The article says this:

"Ezra Decoto, of Niles, while engaged in hauling stone from the creek near the old Vallejo Mill for use in the Decoto burying ground, came upon a square, flat stone in the sand. He had some trouble in digging it out, and was astonished at seeing a rusty tin box underneath. Prying it open, his astonishment can be imagined at the sight, which met his eyes, the box being filled with twenty-dollar gold pieces. Mr. Decoto refuses to tell the exact size of the box or total value of the coin, and says if any claimant present himself it must be fully described before possession will be given."

For those not familiar with Vallejo Mill, the gold was found in Alameda Creek close to where Mission Blvd crosses the creek.

That article leaves so many questions unanswered, especially, where did the gold come from. Did some local resident feel that keeping gold near the creek was a safe place to keep it? Was the gold the booty from some robbery? Given that Joaquin Murrieta and Tiburcio Vasquez are both rumored to have been operating in the area, was the gold from these legendary bandits?

Without knowing more we will have to speculate on the circumstances that put the gold into a tin box, under a large flat rock, on the banks for Alameda Creek.

The Lyle/Harvey/Dinsmore Building

Sitting in old town Alvarado is one of the last buildings in Union City that has retained its classic Victorian look. The building that houses Bronco Billy's Pizza is over a hundred years old and still looks the same as it did 100 years ago. About the only difference between a picture taken in 1898 and one taken now is the lack of hitching posts in the front of the building.

In January 1896, M. H. Lyle purchased three lots at the corner of Smith and Vallejo Streets in Alvarado, from Daniel J. Murphy. Soon, work was started on a two story building, with eight carpenters working on the project. By April, 1896, the building was completed and Mr. Lyle established a general mercantile store in the bottom story of the building. Dr. Hauber occupied an office in the upper story of the building. One of the main features of Mr. Lyle's store was a soda fountain.

Mr. Lyle was not in business long, and by 1901, he sold his general mercantile business to F. C. Harvey. In March of 1902, Harvey had a 40 foot by 40 foot, two story addition built on the back of the building.



Sometime before 1908, a telephone system was installed in Alvarado and the telephone exchange was located in the F. C. Harvey store, and F. C. Harvey was the local telephone agent. A telephone directory from 1916 shows a total of 27 different phone numbers in Alvarado. Oddly enough, the Harvey store did not have

its own phone number listed. Maybe just ringing the operator was enough. The first phone directory that showed a listing for the store was in 1948.

In the early 1930's, F. C. Harvey sold his business to Sam Dinsmore. Mr. Dinsmore ran his business for more than 40 years. Most of the older Union City residents that grew up in Alvarado remember Sam Dinsmore and the icon that his store was. His was the last general mercantile store in Union City.

In early 1942, as part of the civil defense work once World War II was declared, a fire alarm from the Holly sugar factory was installed on the Dinsmore store, as an air raid warning siren.

When the Nimitz Freeway was built, Highway 17 was routed from Union City Blvd to the new freeway, avoiding Alvarado. Most of the store in town were affected by this move, including the Dinsmore store. By the early 1970's, the business at the store was not enough to keep it going. Sam Dinsmore finally had to close the store and retire.

The building was vacant for a while, but a hot air balloon company used it for a few years. In 1972, the concrete foundation was installed. The building became Uncle Joe's Pizza and then Bronco Billy's Pizza.

Dyer Family Letters

Three different Dyers brothers lived in Alvarado from the 1850's and on. Two of them, Ephraim and Ebenezer married and had their families with them. Letters to family back home in Maine provide a first hand glimpse into early Alvarado:

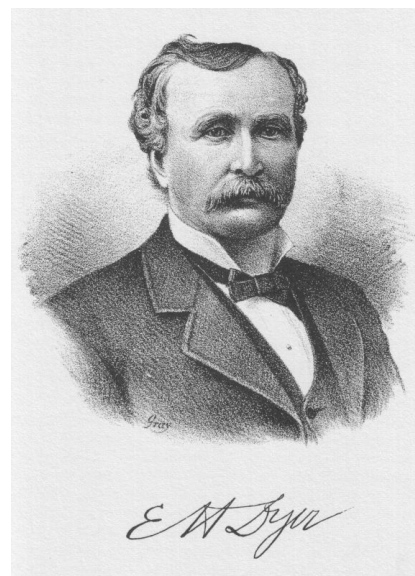
Alvarado - April 17, 1858

The children seem to enjoy the weekly visit of the steamboat. The only water view we have is by going to the creek a few steps from here, at all times you can see vessels coming and going, they have the appearance of sailing on land, it is so level that we can see at a great distance. It is quite busy here now that the steam mill commenced operations. Farmers are bringing in their grain and peddlers of all kind pass the door with fruits and vegetables. There is a butcher shop close by, a lager beer saloon, a school house, a store, etc. The school is kept the year around. They have a man teacher at the present, his wages are a hundred dollars a month. - Marion Dyer

Alvarado - December 11, 1859

I do not know if I ever described Alvarado to you or not. If not, it might interest you to know some of the feature of the place. It contains two churches, three or four stores, a blacksmith shop, butcher shop, an Odd Fellows Hall - lately established (Herrick is a Grand Noble) Ephraim also belongs to it. We have two hotels and one livery stable.

The people settled here are mostly western or Dutch. But there is a small circle here very pleasant to associate with indeed. The creek runs by our backyard. We have quite a pretty front yard with quite a variety of plants growing, some blooming now, all in the carnation pink. You know that this is a house plant at home. But in Alvarado, it is rather low, consequently rather muddy during our rainy season.



One very bad feature of our plains, I think, is the absence of grass. Unless the land is under cultivation, you can see nothing but salt weed as far as the eye can reach. But as if for atonement, the mountains are covered with wild oats which after a few rains, make the mountains appear green and pretty.

Excepting along the banks of the creek, there are no trees to relieve the eyes. Trees can be successfully transplanted here, so when the settlers feel secure in their titles, they can soon make up for the lack of them.

Most of the buildings here in Alvarado were hauled from Union City. The latter place is getting rather shorn of some of its ancient glory while the former is in the ascendant. Mr. John Horner was the founder of Union City and Henry Smith of Alvarado. They are now both poor. - Marion Dyer

Alvarado - October 28, 1860

This is getting to be quite a smart village, we have two hotels, about a dozen grocers and boarding houses (mostly German), a drug store, three doctors (in a starving condition), two blacksmith shops, two wheelwrights shops, three large stores well stocked with all sorts of goods, two churches and an Odd Fellows Hall, besides our share of officials; last but not least, the county Surveyor has an office here. - Ebenezer Herrick Dyer

Oldest Market in Alvarado

Across from the Alvarado Fire Station is a small convenience market that sits between a couple of homes. This market is the oldest market in Alvarado, having been a market for 100 years.

Katsusaburo Matsumoto purchased a plot of land on Smith Street for \$5.93 in June 1909. He built the store and applied for a liquor license in January, 1910, but did not receive the license. In August, 1910, Katsusaburo married Fusa Kubo.

The first news of the market in newspapers was on March 8, 1921, when the Oakland Tribune reported that four "yeggs" or thieves were caught in the act of trying to blow the safe in the Matsumoto store. Night Marshall Andrew Anderson discovered the men working on the safe but his approach of the men was comprised and one of them got the drop on him. They kept the Marshall covered while they continued to work on the safe.

When an opportunity arose, Marshall Anderson was able to escape and hid in a bush. It was from there that he opened fire on the thieves. Soon both parties were firing shots at each other. Tony Mello, who lived next door to the Matsumoto store, was awoke and when he came out to check the goings-on, he was covered by a pistol and told to stay where he was.

The thieves were able to allude the shots of Marshall Anderson and make an escape, believed to be helped by an automobile. They were not caught.



Early in the morning, on a day of July, Katsusaburo was awoken by a burglar coming in through his window. The burglar, armed with a pistol, forced Katsusaburo to remain in bed while he took \$21 in silver.

Once again, Marshal Andrew had a short gun battle with thieves trying to rob the Matsumoto store on December 3, 1922. Marshal Anderson said that he spotted a lookout who then spotted him. The lookout let out a signal and two men came running out of the store, where there was a sort exchange of gunfire. No one was hit and the thieves escaped.

By 1949, Katsusaburo's son, Ben, had taken over the store. In September 1949, a safe was found on a private road on the Patterson Ranch, just north of Jarvis Road. The papers inside showed that the safe belonged to Ben Matsumoto. When reached by the Sheriff, Ben said that the store was broken into the night before. The safe was dragged out and placed into a waiting car. The cash register was also broken into and all cash was removed. About \$700 to \$800 in cash was in the safe, plus \$1,000 in checks and a few old coins. About \$200 was removed from the cash register.

In September, 1958, a scuffle between a husband and wife ended with the large glass window, in the front of the store, needing to be replaced. The husband and wife started arguing in the store, and the husband carried the groceries out of the store. The fight continued outside, with the husband tossing the groceries at his wife, missing her and hitting the large window, smashing it.

Eventually the Matsumoto family sold the business, but market still operates today.

The Case of the Abandoned Buggy

In another newspaper article that leaves many more questions than it answers, The November 30, 1909 issue of "The San Francisco Call" had an article about an abandoned horse and buggy in Decoto:

"A valuable horse and a buggy, in which was a heavy lap robe and a woman's coat, were abandoned mysteriously at midnight last night in front of A.S. Vager's ranch at Decoto. Vager has tried to find the owner of the rig in his neighborhood and has failed. He is at a loss to explain the occurrence, which he made known today for investigation."

"Vager said a shout was heard in front of his place at midnight. Before the hands could respond the person making the cry had disappeared, leaving the rig. Vager has not found anyone who saw the horse and vehicle being driven, and does not know if a thief abandoned them or if the owner met with foul play."

Normally in a small town everyone knows each other and should be able to identify the horse and/or the buggy. Maybe the issue was a private matter and all follow up was done locally and not in the press.

Decoto not on the map

In 1926, there was an article from the Oakland Tribune about map makers leaving Decoto off of the map. Interestingly enough, the person making the complaint was Peter Decoto, President of the Decoto Chamber of Commerce. Here is the article:

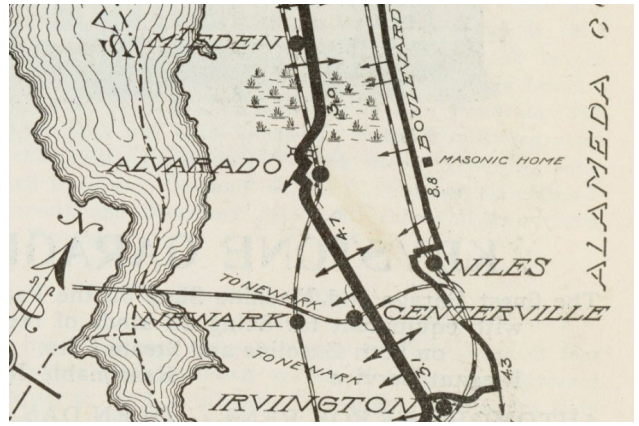
Map designers take notice!

This town wants a place on the map, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding. Complaining that Decoto is eliminated in practically all maps and charts designed within the past few years, the Decoto Chamber of

Commerce plans a drive for recognition at its next meeting, Wednesday evening, October 27th, according to President Peter L. Decoto.

Communications probably will be addressed to the California Automobile Association, Rand-McNally, and others who have failed to give Decoto its proper identification on road maps, Decoto said.

Looking at some historical maps, I would think that the Decoto Chamber of Commerce would have spoke up sooner. The 1911 Automotive Club of Southern California Tour Book clearly shows Niles, Alvarado, Centerville and Hayward, but on the road between Niles and Hayward there is no Decoto. A 1926 map of Northern California also shows the local towns, except for Decoto.

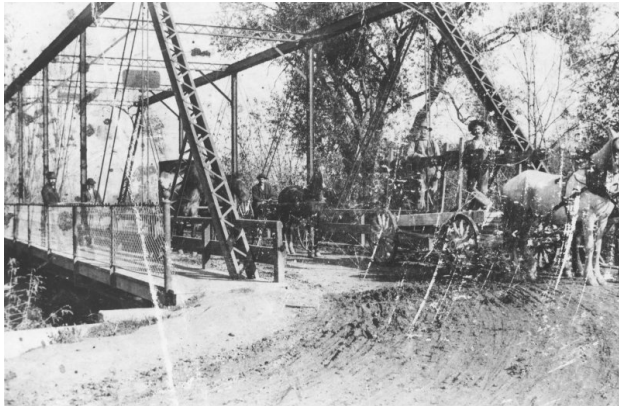


I don't know if the Decoto Chamber of Commerce was successful, as all of the maps of the area that I could find, after 1926, cropped out the area of Decoto and only showed Alvarado.

Bridges of Alvarado

When Alvarado was founded in the 1850's, Alameda Creek had a bend in it that formed the northern border of Alvarado. The creek also was just a mile southeast of town, on the road to Centerville (Fremont). To get to Centerville or Mt. Eden (Hayward), Alameda Creek had to be crossed.

John Horner created a stage that linked his steamer "Union", that landed near Alvarado, and Mission San Jose (the first town in Alameda County). To get his stage over Alameda Creek, John and his brother paid to have a



bride crossing the creek, close to where Dyer Street meets Alvarado-Niles Road. The bridge cost \$1,100 to build. Eventually the wooden bridge was replaced with a steel bridge. Since the old route of Alameda Creek still exists, an at-grade bridge was built on Dyer Street where the old bridge stood. Most do not notice the creek going under Dyer and then Smith streets.

On the road north to Mt. Eden, the Horner brothers also build a bridge. The initial outlay of funds was theirs, but the County reimbursed them for the costs. The bridge was a Jackknife bridge that lifted at one end. According to E. H. Dyer, the bridge was used as a "convenient tool for meting out swift justice to bold criminals under the administration of the vigilantes." A boat was rowed under the bridge with the unfortunate criminal, a noose was attached to the bridge and criminal, then the bridge was raised. The end was slow, but "the conspicuous location gave publicity to the wages of sin."

The wooden bridge was replaced with a steel one. By this time, there were no longer any small ships going up Alameda Creek to the sugar factory, so the second bridge was a standard bridge. When the route of Alameda Creek was changed to prevent flooding in Alvarado, the bridge was no longer needed. The path of the old creek can still be seen in a line of trees on the east side of Union City Blvd., just north of Smith Street. Interestingly, the property lines for that area, still follow the old creek bed.

Oldest Market in Decoto

Sitting at the corner of 10th and I Streets is the Guadalajara Super Mercado (market), about the only true market left in Decoto. The market caters to the Hispanic community, but this building has been a market long before the Hispanic community came to Decoto.

The market building was first owned by T. S. Ferreira, who used it as a saloon starting in 1897. In 1898, T. S. Ferreira sold the saloon to Harry Fortune, who continued to run it as a saloon. In 1901, Harry Fortune sold the building to George Young, who turned it into a market. In 1903, John Ludwig Olson and John Ralph purchased the market from George Young. John Ralph had experience working in the Alvarado store of I. V. Ralph, his uncle.

In 1903, John Olson was appointed Postmaster for Decoto and the post office was moved to his store. The post office was located in a new addition to the building.

In a couple of years, John Ralph had the opportunity to purchase his uncles' Alvarado store and he went in business on his own, leaving John Olson to run the market in Decoto.

About 1908, the first telephone system was installed in Decoto and the phone exchange was installed in Olson's store.

At 2 am on July 24, 1914, some unknown men blew the safe in Olson's store and made off with \$400. The safe crackers used nitroglycerin to blow the safe, muzzling the explosion with a blanket. The door of the safe blew through the store counter. The men, quickly grabbed the money and ran off in a waiting automobile.



In 1917, the store and post office was broken into but only 90 cents in pennies was stolen. In 1922, the store was robbed again. This time the thieves took watches and razors. The thieves broken in by forcing a door with the sounds of their entry muffled by the heavy rain falling. Later that same year, another set of thieves broken into the store and tried to break into the safe, but failed, leaving the safe door damaged and tools scattered on the floor. The thieves left with only a few pairs of shoes and some cutlery.

In 1925, local residents requested that telephone service be expanded to 24 hours. At the time, there was no night or Sunday afternoon service. Since an operator was required to transact all phone calls, this request required hiring someone to be at the phone exchange all night long.

Again in 1926, robbers broke into the market, but quickly fled when they were scared off by a train going by the market.

In 1941, John Olson passed away at the age of 66. His wife, Harriet Olson continued the business as J. L. Olson and Company. In 1949, the market was sold to Bernie Joseph. In 1953 the market was still being referred to as "Olson's Grocery." In the 1960's, the market was known as Union City Market.

For over a hundred years the market has been in this building, providing for the needs of many generations of Decoto residents.

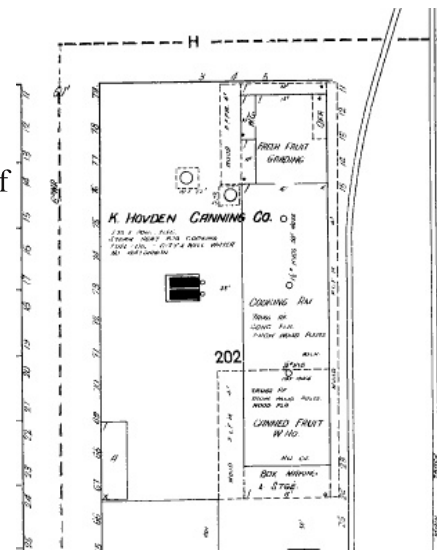
Decoto Cannery

With the proximity of rail shipping and locally grown fruit and vegetables, Decoto was a prime place to place a cannery. Around 1919, the Decoto Canning Company was formed and a cannery was built next to the railroad tracks between H, I, and 10th Streets. An advertisement in the July 21, 1919 edition of the Oakland Tribune advertised jobs at the cannery with "a long season; good wages.." The cannery handled pears, tomatoes and apricots. Pears were bought from orchards in Danville at \$85 a ton.

In 1920 the Better Pack Canning Company purchased the cannery, built additional buildings and added new equipment. In late 1921 the cannery was sold to K. Hovdon, which had canneries in Monterey and San Diego. The cannery ran only when there was fruit or vegetables to can. If the produce was not the quality or quantity needed the cannery stayed closed.

In 1926 John Soto of Decoto was burned on the arms and hands when the furnace that he was working on "backfired." Dr. Charles Law of Decoto treated John for his burns and transported him to Hayward General Hospital. That same year, Superintendent Keuhne reported that almost all of the tomato crop in Washington Township was being canned at the factory. By 1930 about 20,000 cases of tomato sauce was produced.

In 1932 Joseph Pearce, a former official at the Hunts Cannery in Hayward, purchased the Decoto cannery, canning produce under his name. In September of the same year, the cannery donated a ton of tomatoes to the Salvation Army to be distributed to needy families suffering from the Depression. The first season under Pearce the cannery packed 85,000 cases of fruit and vegetables.



For the 1933 season, the cannery started in January canning spinach. In March spinach from the Patterson ranch (now Ardenwood Regional Park) was harvested and lasted through April. Next in season was asparagus then apricots.

In 1934 "communist agitators" were arrested at the cannery where they were attempting to cause a strike. A newspaper report stated that the men were armed with pick handles. Deputy sheriffs arrested five of the men. That same year, the cannery assisted the Department of Agriculture in a plan to can beef from cattle brought from the drought stricken Mid-West. The canned beef was used for Depression relief work.

In early 1937 fire struck the Pearce cannery. The fire destroyed the warehouse and its contents of canned tomatoes, spinach, fruit and vegetables, all ready for shipment. The Decoto fire department was aided the Hayward, Centerville, and Niles fire departments. The fire was reported about 3:30 pm and by 6 pm the fire was under control. The damage was estimated to be between \$75,000 and \$80,000. The firemen were able to save the main warehouse, which contained about \$100,000 is produce.

By 1949, the cannery was being operated the Marlo Packing Company employing over 200 people and canning about 3,400 cases of peaches daily. In 1950 the cannery was purchased by the Alaco Preserving Company.

From newspaper reports it is not clear when the factory closed and later torn down. Homes now occupy the location where the cannery used to be. Most were built from 1976-1979.

Special Train to Decoto

In 1907, Decoto was still a growing town. There were many lots in town that were open and used for purposes other than housing. That same year, Our Lady of the Rosary Church was founded.

The Holcomb Realty company was the exclusive agent for a large number of lots in Decoto. In an effort to make the most of selling real estate in Decoto, the company organized an excursion train to Decoto to bring potential buyers from San Francisco and Oakland to review the lots.

THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL, THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 1907

BUY IN THE ORANGE BELT

DECOTO

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Here is the story of Decoto in a nutshell—it doesn't take a close observer to appreciate the situation.

The chance of a lifetime for the man of modest means to own a fine home and to see the future of a community that is growing rapidly. The lots are sold at \$100 each, with a down payment of \$10.00 and the balance in 10 equal payments of \$10.00 per month.

Call April 1st our office at 200 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland, and we will send you a map of the town of Decoto, with all the lots and prices, and a list of the names of the buyers who have already purchased.

After April 1st, when all the lots will be sold, we will send you a map of the town of Decoto, with all the lots and prices, and a list of the names of the buyers who have already purchased.

Send us Illustrated booklet which tells in detail about DECOTO

Suburban Homes in the Orange Belt at Decoto, Cal.

NO INTEREST
NO TAXES

Forty House Lots
Decoto, Oakland

Lots \$10.00 for \$100.00
\$100.00 down—\$10.00 per month.

Main Office, 200 San Pablo Ave., Oakland, Cal.

BRANCHES: OAKLAND, CAL. SAN FRANCISCO, CAL. ALBANY PARK, CAL. AND IN THE TRACT, OAKLAND, CAL.

HOLCOMB REALTY CO.

306 SAN PABLO AVENUE, OAKLAND

CHAS. CLARK BOWMAN AND SONS' FATHER'S LIFE. BROOK HENRY BOWMAN. SAYS YOUNG SYSTEM. SAYS FATHERLY TO AGE. WILLIAM R. VICE GIVEN. HIS FREEDOM BY COURT.

CLOSED SATURDAY

CREDITORS' SALE
J. GOLLOBER, TRUSTEE
BRILLIANT'S
300-320 Golden Gate Ave. 2016 14th St., Mission

ROOMS
The Taste of a Chickadee Quarter Grand
SUMMER RESORTS
TAHITI
HOTEL RAFAEL
The Kenilworth

On February 22, 1907, an eight car passenger train was chartered to carry 300 potential buyers to Decoto. A band was on the train to entertain the group on the trip south. The train trip was also designed to show how quick and easy it is to get from Oakland to Decoto and back. The trip was planned as "come rain or shine" and the rain did come. A newspaper report at the time called it a "drenching rainstorm."

The town consisted of 1,200 lots, most being designated for residences, and some lots designated for commercial development. The residence lots were 50 feet by 100 feet and were sold as low as \$100, with a down payment of \$10. The rest was to be paid at five per cent per month. One feature of the sales contract was that if the buyer died before the lot is fully paid, the rest of the loan would be forgiven and the heir would receive a clear title.

A ferry from San Francisco left that city at 9:20 am. The passengers arrived at the dock in Oakland where the rest of the buyers were waiting for the 10 am train departure. The return train left Decoto at 5 pm. The cost of a one-way fare

gave the buyers a round-trip ticket. If a plot of land was purchased, then the cost of the train fare was subtracted from the cost of the lot.

When the train arrived in Decoto, the Ladies of Decoto were waiting and entertained the buyers at a luncheon and informal reception at Silva's Hall.

Decoto was described in the newspaper reports as: "There are fine school and church facilities at Decoto and values will undoubtedly increase as the Western Pacific passes through the territory, the Southern Pacific already has a depot there and the Key Route electric road is also to erect a depot on the ground."

By the end of the day, it is reported that over 300 lots were sold. A rather remarkable achievement given the inclement weather and the number of buyers that arrived. A few days later, a commercial venture applied for a 10 day option on 6 blocks of property, between the two railroad tracks.

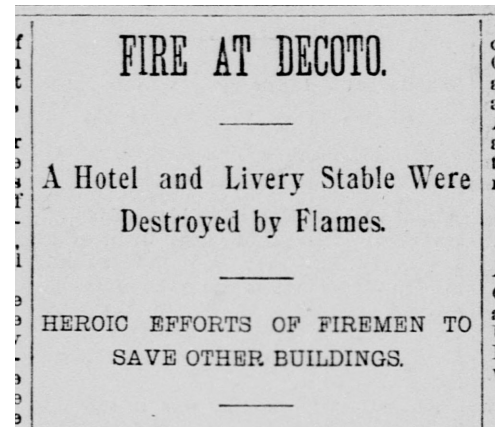
After the excursion, the Holcomb Realty company still advertised the Decoto lots with a newspaper ads like this, "There will positively be an advance of 10 per cent in the price of all lots by April 1st. Put dollars in your pockets by buying now."

Fires in Early Decoto

Fire has always been a hazard, especially a hundred years ago, when heating and cooking was done with fire and homes were made almost entirely of wood. Fire fighting was a hap hazard effort with local resident using buckets. At the time, there was no fire department in Alvarado or Decoto. For a couple of years a number of major buildings in Decoto were destroyed by fire.

On July 5, 1891, the grain warehouse of Edward Salz and the saloon and general merchandise store (including post office) of T. S. Ferreira's was lost to fire. The Southern Pacific Railroad brought in a "water train" to help put out the fire, but the valves were not working to it was of no use. Hours after the main fire was out the sacks of grain were still burning. The reported cause of the fire was "too many firecrackers."

On August 30, 1895, an early morning fire broke out in the kitchen of the Grand Hotel, a two-story building owned by Mrs Astru. By the time the fire was discovered it was already too late to be put out "without a well-organized fire department." There was an attempt to have items from the hotel, but they were not successful. The fire then spread to the Fashion Livery Stable owned by Frank Rose. Luckily, the horses, wagons, harnesses and a couple of tons of hay were removed from the livery before it was really burning. In the end the livery was lost with a total of 40 tons of hay. The residence of Frank Rose, adjoining the livery, as also burned. The residence of Mrs. Murphy, sitting next to the livery was threatened by the fire, but the efforts of local residents saved the building from too much damage. If the fire had not been put out on this building, the fire would have kept going from building to building down the block.



On December 18, 1895, the general merchandise store of Frank Ribera burned down at 4 a.m. The barbershop owned by M. Brown, in the same building, was also lost. The adjacent store owned by W. B. King was saved by the hard fight of local residents.

Francis Robie

In the early 1900's, local politics were dominated by men. It was not until late 1911, that women were granted the vote in California. Despite this, men still dominated local politics. There was one woman that was elected to a local office, less than a year after women were allowed to vote. Francis Robie was a school board trustee for the Alvarado Grammar School for 32 years, starting in 1912.

Francis Robie was born on April 7, 1867. She married Walter Starr Robie and raised a family in Alvarado. In 1912, at the age of 45, Francis started getting active in the community. She was elected to the Alvarado Grammar School Board and became a polling inspector for voting in Alvarado. By 1922, Francis was clerk of the school Board and became the public voice of the school board, announcing events and activities of the school board, to the press and public. In 1924, Francis, along with trustees John Scribner and F. C. Harvey,



oversaw the building of a new grammar school, designed by noted architect Henry Haight Meyer.

By 1942, Francis was the longest serving women school board trustee in Alameda County. By the next year, 1943, Francis was the longest serving school board trustee in Alameda County. In, July 1944, Francis resigned from the school board, at the age of 77.

While serving on the school board, Francis also continued her work volunteering to work polling stations for elections in Alvarado. She was also involved in a number of local organizations, including, the Alvarado Whist Club, Alvarado Senior Bridge Club, Alvarado Ladies Birthday Club, Order of the Eastern Star, Washington Township Parent Teacher Association (President in 1926), First Presbyterian Church of Alvarado, Toyon Branch of the Children's Hospital, Women of Woodcraft, and the Country Club of

Washington Township (President in 1926).

Francis passed away November 11, 1957.

Snake on May Ranch

On June 9, 1926, John Costa reported seeing a large snake on the May Ranch. When he stumbled on the snake, said it was "big enough to be a tree, only it moved." John reported the snake to be 10 feet long. John reported that he was working on Dry Creek near the area used for picnics, he heard a rustling sound and there, right before him, was the large beast, at least eight inches around and with black, green and yellow colors.

Some years before this event, a circus stopped in Hayward and was rumored to have left behind a small 4 foot baby boa snake. Since then, reports of a large snake happened a couple times a year.

In this instance, John informed Mrs. May, who in turned called volunteer Fire Chief Walter Walker to come out and find the snake. Chief Walker organized a hunting party with "lassos, shotguns, and monkey wrenches".

A total of 250 persons, including members of two fire departments, volunteered to comb the hillsides in and around the May Ranch. After an all-night effort, everyone came back to Decoto, exhausted. Despite "every foot of the May Ranch" being search and thrashed, no snakes were found, not even small local snakes.

As a point of reference, the May Ranch is now Dry Creek/Pioneer Regional Park. Dry Creek comes out of the hills near the corner of Whipple and Mission Blvd.

Automobile First in Decoto?

In another newspaper article that begs more questions than it answers, the Oakland Tribune, on May 11, 1901, reports on a news article from a small monthly called "Astraea" that was published in Decoto:

"To Rufus Whipple must be accorded the construction of the first automobile in the State of California. Rude it was, 'tis true, in construction, but it held the motive power that has developed into the horseless carriages seen daily on our thoroughfares."

"This announcement is made in justice to this gentleman, who is an old time resident of this county, as well as to record the fact that the writer, by invitation of Mr. Whipple, took a ride in his vehicle in the month of September last. Like many other, he has failed to do himself justice in this matter, being submerged in his inventive genius while other have carted off the prize."

Is it really possible that Rufus Whipple really did create the first automobile in California? Could Decoto hold such an important mark in the history of California?

The author of the original article reported to take a ride in the previous September, making the automobile built in 1900. Some quick Google searches found a reference to an earlier use of the automobile before 1900. David Star Jordan, in his autobiography "The Days of a Man" mentions helping test an automobile in the fall of 1892, and he described it as the first automobile on the west coast. Other references to automobiles are contemporary with Rufus Whipples' invention, but the earlier reference by Jordan does not give the milestone of "first" to Rufus. It is still nice to know that an early Decoto resident had the wherewithal to develop an automobile when the general concept was still unfamiliar with most residents of California.

Prohibition in Decoto

From 1919 to 1935, the sale and possession of alcohol was made illegal in the United States. Everyone hears the stories of the liquor raids in big cities like New York and Chicago, but raids were also common in smaller towns like Decoto.

In April 1925, agents raided a pool room and cigar stand run by Felix Penza and George L. Smith, where a quantity of brandy was found and both men were arrested.

In May 1925, Tony Costa was found to be running an old fashioned saloon "in the old fashioned way" in Decoto. A raid by agents George Helms and George Hardy found some "jackass brandy and wine." Just three years later, Tony Costa was again found with a "little brown jug" of liquor. He was fined \$100 by Judge Silva.

In 1927, a pool hall owned by Ralph Lopez was raided. The newspaper reported that "the Officers report it was the gathering place of the Mexicans in that section. A crowd of a hundred Mexican and Spanish laborers were found there, and were questioned by the immigration authorities." Only Ralph was arrested.

Also in 1927, a raid on a ranch in Decoto found 525 gallons of Sake and a complete factory for producing the drink. The property was run by T. Minamini, who was not on the property at the time of the raid. His son, H. Minamini, was arrested in the raid and informed the authorities that his father could be found in San Francisco.

In 1929, Angelo Morales was found with "three pints of moonshine and a sack and two boxes of marijuana." When arrested, Morales was asked what he wanted to do. He headed to his room, packed up his razor and said that he wanted to "take a rest at the county jail."

John Brizee, Alvarado Inventor

John Brizee was an Alvarado resident in the 1860's and 1870's. By reviewing U.S. Patents, John emerges from history as a local inventor. He was awarded four different patents between 1866 and 1878.

His first patent was for an “improved device for transmitting motion” dated July 10, 1866. He was awarded patent number 56,171. The description of the invention says; “This invention relates to a new and improved device for transmitting motion or poer from a spring to machinery...” such as “washing machines, churns, sewing machines, etc.” The diagram shows a rather complex mechanism comprised of wheels, gears, and possibly a spring. It looks like he was inventing a better spring wound engine for general use.

His second invention is for an “improvement in mop-holders” dated February, 21, 1871. He awarded patent number 112,014. The description is “my invention relates to an improved mop-holder which is simple and cheap.” The holder is designed to securely hold a soft cloth mop head and quickly release it to be replaced.

His third inventions is for an “improvement in mop-heads”, dated June 13, 1871. He was awarded patent number 115,815. The text of the patent discusses the wire frame that holds the mop cloth to the mop-head, so the invention is an extension of his previous patent.

His final invention is an “improvement in window-screens”, dated July 16, 1878. He was awarded patent number 205,995. The invention is for old style sash windows and a screen frame that goes over the lower window and stays in place when the window is raised. The screen fame even includes a locking mechanism so that the screen cannot be removed from the outside.

They say that necessity is the mother of invention, so I wonder what necessity John had to work on such a diverse number of inventions.

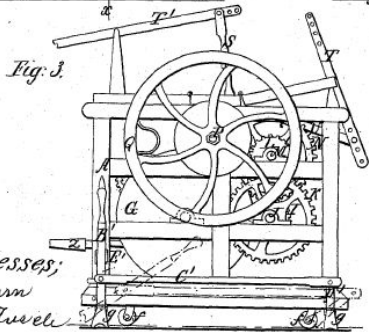
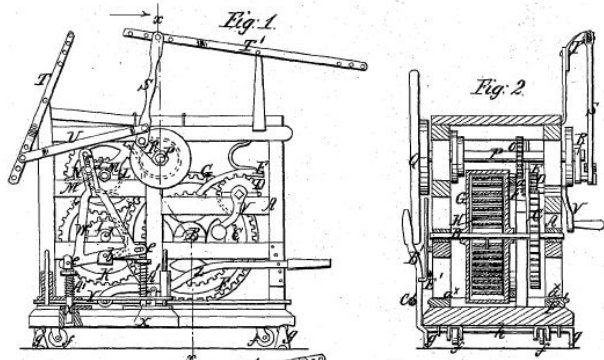
Alvarado and Decoto Inventors

In a previous article I discussed John Brizee of Alvarado who was awarded four patents. He was not the only local inventor.

Ebenezer Dyer, who founded the Alvarado sugar beet factory, was awarded patent 607,229 on July 12, 1898 for an improvement in a “boring implement for frozen earth.” In the patent, Dyer states “my invention relates to implements for boring or penetrating frozen earth and to means for thawing the frozen material in advance of such implements as they pass into the ground. The drawing submitted with his patent shows a boiler that generates steam that is then sent through the boring tool, down the hole, where the steam hits the frozen ground at the bottom of the hole.

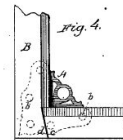
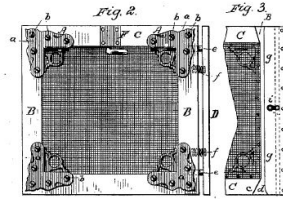
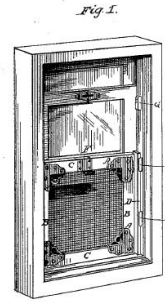
Ebenezer's nephew, Edward Dyer was also an inventor. His patent, number 319,007, was for an improvement in the “manufacture of beet-sugar” and was awarded on June 2, 1885. His improvement “increased yield of sugar and greatly shorten the time of manufacture.” This invention really helped the sugar beet factory maintain profitability for many years.

Other inventors were, H. G. Cox of Alvarado for his work on a horse harness, granted on September 22, 1891. L. C. Page of Decoto for his work on an “attachment for telegraph apparatus, granted on April 21, 1914. A. J.



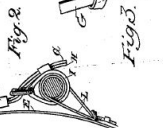
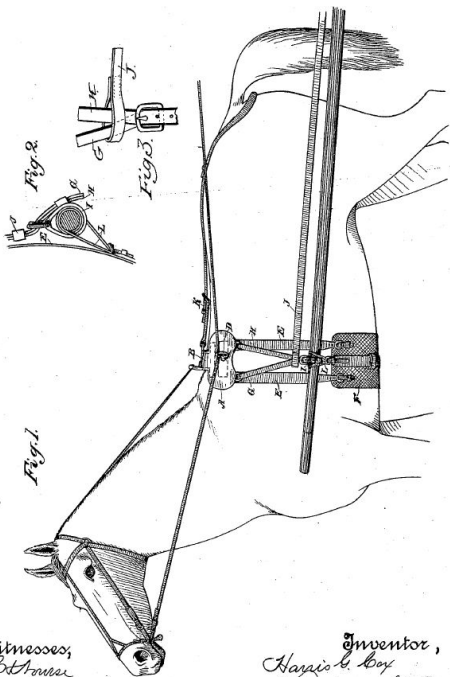
Witnesses;
Wm. C. Curn
Thos. L. L. L.

Inventor,
John Briggs
By *[Signature]*



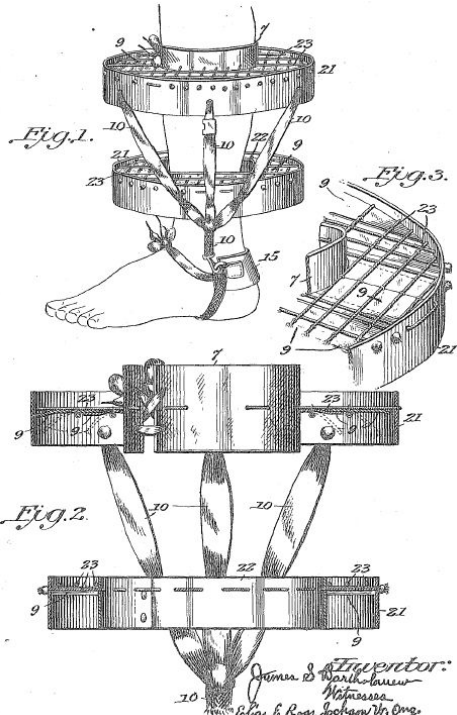
WITNESSES:
Charles F. F.
R. A. Dyer

INVENTOR:
John Briggs
By *[Signature]*



Witnesses;
J. B. C. C.
J. B. C. C.

Inventor,
Harris & Co.
By *[Signature]*



Inventor:
James D. D.
Witnesses:
E. C. C. & R. J. J.

Lattin of Alvarado for his work on a “spring bed bottom”, granted on December 5, 1876. F. L. Eaton of Decoto for his work on a “tension retaining binder” for securing loads to trucks, granted on October 14, 1955.

The oddest invention is by J. S. Bartholomew for this “swimming apparatus.” The device is attached to the lower leg with a strap around the foot. The device is designed for swimming with the frog stroke. The device does not look effective or comfortable and probably did not go much beyond the inventor using it.

Fred Muller, Alvarado Baseball Player

Fred Muller, born in 1907, grew up in Newark and Alvarado. His mother is the daughter of Walter S. Robie of Alvarado.

In 1928, Fred signed with the Seattle Indians of the Pacific Coast League, but he still played for the local Alvarado team when he was back home. In June of 1929, Fred sprained his ankle during a game and he recuperated at the home of his grandparents. In 1932, Fred was assigned the position of second base with Seattle. That same year he led the Pacific Coast League in home runs. He hit 38 home runs and had a batting average of .282. In 1933, his contract with Seattle was bought by the Red Sox. In that year, he had a batting average of .327 and drove in 66 runs in 83 games. The Red Sox sent him to Montreal, then he was sent back to Seattle, then he came back to Boston and played for them.

In 1934, his contract was purchased by the New York Yankees and he was sent to play for the New Jersey Bears where his team won a pennant in the International League. In 1935, the Yankees sent him to the Oakland Oaks. In a game with Sacramento, where the Oaks won 4-2, Fred was given credit for driving in all of the runs. In 1936 and 1937, Fred was back playing for the Seattle Indians. In 1937, Fred Muller was one of 4 Pacific Coast League players featured with a card on the back of boxes of Wheaties cereal.

In 1938, Fred was sent to the Seattle Rainiers. In 1939, he was playing for the Toledo Mud Hens and his final year in baseball, 1940, he was with the Portland Beavers.

Fred owned land in Alvarado and during the off season he grew spinach, asparagus and cauliflower.

Water Wars

In the early days of Alvarado, pioneers discovered an aquifer below Alvarado that when drilled into, created artesian wells. This provided a wealth of water for local farmers and residents. In 1895, William Dinger purchased land around the old landings on Alameda Creek and drilled 35 wells, ranging from 72 to 500 feet. With this source of water, he founded the Oakland Water Company. The company ran a pipeline from Alvarado, north across the marshes and salt flats, to Oakland, where they needed additional water for a growing population.

Oakland was already served by the Contra Costa Water Company, founded by Anthony Chabot in 1866, and used reservoirs to capture and store water for serving Oakland. When the Oakland Water Company started providing water to Oakland, the Contra Costa Water Company did not like the competition and looked for ways to get rid of them.

In August, 1895, the Contra Costa Water Company was determined to put the Oakland Water Company out of business. They leased land next to the existing artesian wells and drilled their own well. They pumped the water from these wells directly into Alameda Creek and the bay. The purpose was to drain the underlying aquifer.

The Oakland Water Company arranged to have a number of well-known Oakland residents come to Alvarado to see for themselves the fresh water dumping. The residents reported back to the Oakland press and the following news headlines were seen in the papers:

ALVARADO WATER ROBBERY DENOUNCED WITH
FERVOR

CALLED A DASTARDLY OUTRAGE

George Baker, a “prominent Oakland attorney”, had this to say about this trip to Alvarado:

“I went to Alvarado yesterday not only free of all bias favorable to the Oakland Co. and devoid of prejudice against the Contra Costa Co., but utterly disbelieving the newspaper reports concerning the actions of the latter company and the allegation that their agents were endeavoring to deplete their rivals water supply by pumping from wells tapping the same source and running the water obtained wastefully and wantonly into the marshes. I say that I did not believe, for I considered such methods too contemptible for honest men and beneath the dignity of businessmen under any stress of business rivalry.”

The negative press forced the Contra Costa Water Company to stop the unnecessary dumping of fresh water from the aquifer.

Duck Hunting and Clubs

When Europeans first came to the south bay, they marveled at how many ducks and water fowl were on the marshes. After statehood, duck hunting became a popular sport, with hunters coming to Alvarado from Oakland and San Francisco. The Alvarado Hotel advertised as an ideal place for hunters to stay over in the area.

The marshes were converted to salt flats, but the ducks still used them on their migration. The salt operators leased the salt flats to different hunting clubs like the Pacific Life Gun Club or Willow Lodge Club. The clubs built a club building for overnight stays and a number of hunting blinds. Other hunters tried to hunt on salt flats, so the different clubs had to hire keepers to keep an eye out for poachers. In 1895, C. W. Crane of San Francisco and L. Gould of Oakland were caught by game warden Donovan shooting ducks on leased land. They were fined \$70 by the court in Oakland.

Duck hunting was popular over the years in Alvarado with newspaper reports detailing what local hunter bagged his limit appearing from the 1880's all the way through the 1950's, with clubs like the Sunset Gun Club and Marsh Gun Club.



In 1955, four men, described only by their business position, were arrested for hunting ducks with “baited” ponds, meaning that they put duck feed in the ponds to attract the ducks. The men were “ President of Granny Goose Potato Chips, the General Manager of S&W Foods, a Burlingame financier and President of the United Can & Glass Company.”

The Laughing Mallard Duck Club and the Ugly Duckling Duck Club were the last two duck clubs in Alvarado in 1998, when the city passed an ordinance banning all hunting within the city limits, thus ending a tradition going back almost 150 years.

Horner Flour Mill

John Horner, who founded the hamlet of Union City, needed a way to convert his acres of wheat into flour, so in 1853, he built a flour mill in Union City, next to his landing. The flour mill cost \$85,000 and had eight



“burrs” or grinding stones. A 75 horse-power steam engine was used to power the mill. After grinding his first flour, Horner competed in a agricultural fair and showed the very first bag of flour from the mill. Horner won a silver pitcher as first prize for the best flour, against seven other mills. The sack was kept around as an important piece of agricultural history and in 1897 the the State Board of Trade had the sack on display.

In June of 1856, a financial panic cause Horner to run into money issue, causing him to sell his flour mill.

The panic causes property values to deflate drastically and Horner was only able to sell the mill for \$5,000. J. J. Hoe purchased the mill and continued keeping it in operation, grinding flour and taking either cash or flour as payment for the grinding. By 1859, the mill was operating at two barrels of flour daily. The mill still hard the most grinding stones of any flour mill in California.

By 1863, the mill was owned by C. J. Stevens and the mill was leased to Mr. Lindell. In September 1863, Mr. Lindell got caught up in the main shaft of the mill, breaking both of his legs. In 1869, C. J. Stevens moved the milling operation to Livermore, leaving the buildings vacant.

In 1870, George H. Tay & Company bought the buildings that housed the mill, moved them off of the landing and used them to house a foundry. Charles Naurt was the foundry manager. The foundry made stoves and was a large employer for Alvarado.

It is unclear exactly when the old mill building was torn down. In 1905, the foundry was put up for sale. There is a reference to a foundry operating in 1917, but it is not clear if it operated from the building as the Tay foundry. By this time the buildings were over 50 years old and probably not in a good state. I don't think they would have been around much longer after this date.

Witchcraft in Alvarado

The September 22, 1932 issue of the Oakland Tribune had an interesting article on the police trying to investigate a matter of possible witchcraft in Alvarado. The events in the article are of little historical significance, but it does make for a good read and shows the color and character of Alvarado:

Constable Tom Silva and Patrolman Don Bates today are seeking to adapt modern police methods to primitive voodooism and witchcraft spells. The aid was sought to quell the demonstrations of witchcraft in modern California when Mrs. Selca Agundez collapsed and became violently ill after discovering a substance known "as the powder of death" on her doorstep.

A second victim of the same "charm," Mrs. Elvira Brown, also asked for police protection, in the firm belief that her escape from similar ill effects was solely due to the fact that she saw the powder in time to avoid stepping over it, for this traditions avers, is the means of escaping its potency.

Both women demanded that Silva undertake a full investigation (witch hunt) for only an authentic witch, which they assert can compound the potent powder. Its formula includes earth gathered from a graveyard, crushed pepper seeds and various herbs, prepared with incantations of necromancy.

Mrs. Ramona Romero, friend of Mrs. Brown, and her husband Casimiro Romero, childhood friends of Mrs. Agundez, also sought the aid of the authorities in putting a permanent injunction, or something, against the proactive of witchcraft in Alvarado. They feel some hidden enemy has engaged the services of a witch to bring them bad luck, sickness or even death.

The questioning of a woman suspected by the victims of witchcraft proved to have its own difficulties, as the woman, Ramona, speaks no English. Accompanied by an interpreter, the officers sought her out. With wildly waving Medusa-like black curls and gesticulating hands she poured forth a torrent of rapid and emphatic Spanish that even left the interpreter gasping.

"She says," he tersely translated about 20 minutes worth of speech from the woman, "that people talk too much and you all can go to the devil."

Alvarado and Decoto Celebrates the Centennial

On July 4, 1876, the country celebrated 100 years of being independent. Residents of Alvarado and Decoto organized a 4th of July celebration at Dry Creek picnic grounds in Decoto (near Whipple and Mission Blvd). Rev. W. F. B. Lynch read the Declaration of Independence and "Drake's Address to the American Flag." A few hundred were present, and the day was spent with dancing, lively discussions, and anvil firing.

Anvil firing is where two anvils are placed on top of each other, gun powder is placed in between, and when lit, there is a large bang and the top anvil is sent skyward. James Cameron, of Alvarado, was careless in his use of the gun powder and while setting up the anvils, the gun powder went off early and burnt his hands and face. His injuries were thought to be serious, but by the next day, he was conscious and making a recovery.

After sundown, the celebration moved to Alvarado for a fireworks display. A large group of folks came to Alvarado in that "so large a number had ever been seen in the place before." The fireworks were set off at 9 pm. And after the party moved into the Odd Fellows Hall where dancing went on until 2:30 in the morning.

The hall was “literally jammed with people” during the first two hours of the dance. Griffin and Lattin provided the music with violins.

George Tay Foundry

The buildings that once housed the Horner flour mill next to the old landing, were no longer in use by 1870. The George Tay Company of San Francisco purchased the buildings to house a foundry. The buildings were moved “up the street” and remodeling was completed by late 1871. Charles Nauert was hired as the Superintendent of the foundry. The primary product of the foundry was stoves.

The foundry was one of the major employers in Alvarado. Being close to Alameda Creek, the foundry had its own wharf and easily shipped its stoves to a growing San Francisco and Oakland.

In 1896, the factory was reworked to handle double the capacity it had previously. A newspaper reported that “Superintendent Charles Nauert said today that the increase of business is due to the election of McKinley, which has restored confidence, increased the demand and compelled the works to enlarge their business. “Newspaper reports from 1896 and 1897 noted that the foundry business was “rushed” and that additional moulder and stove fitters had to be hired.



The Hayward Review of March 1900 had this to say about the foundry:

One of the busiest industries in the interior of Alameda County is the stove foundry at Alvarado, of which Mr. C. R. Nauert is manager. From early morning until night there is the continuous ring of metal and belching smoke, denoting that all is life and activity within. This year has been particularly favorable. Orders are coming in steadily from all parts of the country. The payroll includes about twenty-five workers, each of whom is drawing good wages and is well satisfied. Alvarado may well congratulate itself on such a progressive and valuable industry.

The business ran for about 35 years, with Charles Nauert serving as superintendent for all of those years. It is unclear as to the reasons, but in 1905, the foundry was advertised for sale.

East Shore Freeway affects Alvarado

In November, 1957, a 5.9 mile link in the new East Shore Freeway (now known as I-880) was opened between Jackson Street in Hayward and Alvarado Road in Fremont. The East Shore Freeway, then designated as Highway 17, replaced the older route of Highway 17, that came down Hesperian from Hayward and turned down Horner street toward Fremont. Before the freeway, the two routes from Oakland to San Jose where Highway 17 and Mission Blvd.

With the change in traffic to the freeway and off of the old route, businesses in Alvarado were greatly affected.

Antone Santos, owner of a Shell gas station on Horner Street, reported that he was pumping 800 gallons a day and after the freeway opened, he was down to 300 gallons a day. John Matchitelli, owner of another gas station reported that he was down 50% on his gas sales. Ambrose Loyola's gas station was also down 50%, but his auto repair business was unaffected. Elmer Andrade reported that his gas sales were down 30%, but grocery and soda fountain sales were up.

Fernando Paredes of the Alvarado Hotel reports that his restaurant and bar sales are down. Walter Oakley of the First Western Bank says that they have noticed a change in business. Quan Yut's meat market reported a drop in sales. Manuel Priego's market had actually seen an increase in sales. Mr. Priego attributes this to the lack of traffic making it easier for local residents to cross Union City Blvd to get to his store. Jacinto's, Lee's and Dinsmore stores have all seen a drop in grocery sales. Matsumoto's Japanese specialty grocery store has not seen a drop in sales. His customers have no other local stores that carry the same items.

Alvarado's Fair Maidens of the Marshes

A news article from the "Vallejo Chronicle" from 1884 has an interesting tale from a duck hunter out in the marshes of Alvarado and some fair maidens that he ran across:

A solitary sportsman, roaming over the Alvarado marshes last Sunday in pursuit of the ducks, which were few and far between, he thought himself of an artesian well in the distance where he might slake his thirst. When he reached the desired spot he saw two girls seated on the margin, dressed in a peculiar and striking costume. They wore tunics extended to the knees, long rubber boots, hunting coats and caps, and were provided with an excellent brace of breech loading shotguns. Beside them lay a pile of teal, widgeon and rail, ample testimony to their skill in the use of their weapons. The hunter raised his hat, and, presuming on the fraternity of the sport, inquired if the ladies were having any good luck. They pointed triumphantly to their pile of birds, and then glanced sympathetically at their interrogator's flaccid game bag. Both were unusually pretty girls, their cheeks brown from exposure, showing that it was not their first excursion, and the hands with which they dabbed their heated faces were white and dimpled. They confess that the oddity of their costume made them shun the male hunter, though the sportsman confessed he had never believed that rubber boots could look so cunning.

Just then a bunch of teal came down the wind with lightning speed, and both girls squatted on the marsh in a moment. Along swept the birds, bang went both guns, and three birds fell to the ground. They picked them up and, with great generosity altogether unknown to the sportsman, offered him a brace of the birds, as he had the courtesy to allow them to do the shooting.

They explained how they came to be hunters. One was extremely delicate, and, after graduating from a well-known Seminary in Alameda County, was recommended outdoor exercise by her doctor as the only escape from consumption. Tired of objectless strolling, the girl, under the tutoring of her uncle, learned to shoot, converted a companion to the sport, and both are now passionately attached to hunting.

In the 1880's, women did not normally participate in hunting, so running across two women shooting ducks in the marsh was probably a strange site for the duck hunter.

Decoto Football

In the early days of Decoto, the town gained a bit of a reputation for football. High school age boys formed their own team and played other towns in the area.

The Hayward Review covered a game in January, 1896, where the team from Decoto played the Hayward High football team. Despite a cold and foggy start to the day, by game time the sun was shining. It was reported that the Decoto team outclassed the Hayward team by their greater skill and style of playing. Decoto won the game with a score of 18 to 0.

The Decoto team practiced on Sundays at a local playing ground. The team line up in November, 1896 was:

M. Luna, Center
W. Peterson, Left Guard
E. Woods, Right Guard
C. Whipple, Left Tackle
J. Carr, Right Tackle
L. Decoto, Left End
F. Kelley, Right End
M. Anderson, Quarterback
Harry Searles, Fullback
F. Garcia, Left Half
H. Haines, Right Half

In December, 1896, Decoto went against the team from San Leandro, winning 30 to 0. It was reported that Searles, Carr, Whipple and Garcia won the game. In December, 1897, the Decoto team traveled to Niles for a game and won with a score of 26 to 0.

All though not a football player, Ezra Decoto Jr. became the Graduate Manager for the University of California's football team, organizing the different games with west coast universities. He started the position in 1901. In 1903, James Whipple, from Decoto, joined the Cal football team, becoming the captain, a tackle, and the coach of the team in his senior year.

Chicory Growing

Farley B. Granger was a local farmer owning a farm where the New Haven Unified School District maintenance yard is located. One of the major crops that he grew is chicory, a root vegetable that when ground and roasted can be used as a substitute for coffee or an additive to coffee. During the Civil War, coffee was scarce, so drinkers turned to chicory and developed a taste for it. In 1867, the California Chicory Company was founded in San Francisco and in the same year, Granger started growing chicory for them. With steamers running directly from Alvarado to San Francisco, getting the crop to the mill in San Francisco was not a problem.

An article from the Pacific Rural Press from September 1872 has this to say about F. B. Granger:

F. B. Granger of Alvarado, who has for some five years been engaged in raising chicory for the California Chicory Company, has just completed a new drying house, the one formerly used having been destroyed by

fire last year. The present crop now ready to gather consists of fifteen acres, and will yield probably ten tons to the acre, which in drying will lose about three-fourths of its weight, and will furnish about thirty-seven tons of marketable product.

Mr. Granger planned for a much larger crop this year, having planted fifty-five acres, but time developed the unfortunate fact that forty acres had been planted with lettuce. The mistake was not discovered, however, until all the ground had been carefully weeded over twice, and then it was too late in the season to replant. The seed was furnished by the parties with whom he contracted to cultivate the chicory, and was procured by them part in New York and part in Europe. I believe it is not known where the mistake was made, the two seeds are identical in appearance.

It is too much labor to dig them out whole, so a plough is used that cuts them at a depth of about ten inches, when the top part is pulled out by hand, cleaned and chopped by machinery, and put into a hopper-shaped bin lined with brick, that will hold from three to four tons at a charge, and exposed to the heat of a furnace underneath till dry, when it is sacked and ready for market.

Alvarado Small Airplane Crashes

Commercial airplane crashes make big news and are remembered for years. Small plane crashes rarely are remembered in the long term. After researching commercial air crashes in Union City, I heard a few people refer to other plane crashes. From newspaper reports, here are a few that have been long forgotten.

In January, 1942, an Army P-40 fighter crashed in a field between Newark and Alvarado, killing the pilot. The newspaper reported that this was the second P-40 crash in the area. The P-40 was flying out of Moffet airfield, then controlled by the Army. Later in June, another Army pilot had to make an emergency landing near the sugar mill. The aircraft had minimal damage and the pilot walked away.

In May, 1948, a Luscomb Model 8A aircraft had an engine failure at 3,000 feet over Alvarado. The pilot tried to restart the engine by putting the plane into a dive, but engine failed to start. While making the landing, the plane flipped over in a field of barley just north of Alvarado. Both occupants walked away.

In September, 1948, an instructor pilot teaching his student how to recover from a spin, failed to get the aircraft to fully come out of the spin until just above the ground and the plane made a big splash in a salt pond. The pilot and student were able to get out of the aircraft, and wade or swim to the nearest levee, where they were picked up by salt workers and taken to a local hospital.

In September, 1957, Wes Leneville was flying his crop duster over Alvarado when the engine failed. On landing in a field near Fair Ranch Road, his wheels dug into the soft earth and the plane nosed over. Police and an ambulance was called as some feared the worst. Wes calmly got out of his plane, had some locals helped him flip it back over and he was able to get the plane back into the air.

Bicycles in Alvarado

The "safety" bicycle was invented in the mid-1880's and was popular over the earlier Penny/Farthing bicycle with the large wheel in the front. The invention of the pneumatic tire in 1888 made for smoother ride. By the 1890's, bicycles were popular through out the United States. Bicycles came to Alvarado in 1896, when I.V. Ralph became a dealer for McKeon bicycle and M. R. Lyle became a dealer for Victor.

A newspaper report in 1896, mentioned that there were over fifty bicycle riders in the Alvarado area. Even women were getting involved with Mrs. J. W. Atkinson, Mrs. O. J. Emery and Mrs. H. P. Dyer purchasing a bicycle in a single week. Also, in 1896, Andrew Muller in Alvarado rode his bicycle from Alvarado to Stockton, taking a couple of days to get there.



Bicycles were also popular with the older boys in Alvarado and other neighboring towns. In 1897, the Alvarado boys competed against the Newark boys in a road race and came up the losers. In a grudge match, the Alvarado boys challenged the Newark boys to a road race from nineteen to twenty five miles. Unfortunately, there is no record of the results from this race. We are lucky in that August Nauert of Alvarado had a brownie camera and took a picture of the race as it went down Alvarado Road. August was 20 years old at the time and probably had a friend or two in the race.

In May, 1900, a road race was held in Centerville, with teams from Pleasanton, San Leandro and Alvarado. Pleasanton lost in the first relay, leaving the teams from San Leandro and Alvarado racing a rely, where Alvarado won.

Old Meets New in a Rough Way

As much as automobiles were invented in the late 1800's, and Ford was mass producing cars on the assembly line in 1914, it took a number of years for the automobile to take over as the main mode of transportation. A photograph of Alvarado from 1912, shows a number of buggies on what is now Union City Blvd, and a single automobile. In 1917, buggies and automobiles still shared the road, leading to all sorts of issues and both vehicles traveled on the same roads.

An article from Oakland Tribune, January 5, 1917, details an encounter between the buggy and an automobile, that ended badly for the buggy driver from Alvarado.

The authorities are today searching for a motorist who drove on without rendering assistance after severely injuring Joseph Novis, an Alvarado rancher, in a collision between an automobile and a horse and buggy at Warm Springs last night.

Novis was found by Dr. W.C. Lynch of Niles lying on the state highway, suffering from broken arms and other injuries. He was rushed to the county infirmary. The rancher, who can speak English only with difficulty, says he was driving along the state highway shortly before 11 o'clock last night when an automobile, which he could hear approach at high speed, crashed into his buggy. Novis was thrown out and the buggy was badly smashed. Without stopping to give aid the motorist continued on. Novis lay on the road for nearly an hour before assistance came. One of his arms has a compound fracture and the other multiple fractures.

Pistol Packin' Mama

Reading old newspapers, with their reports of petty crimes or items of note only important to the time, can be rather boring. Occasionally an article, including the title stands out and is quite entertaining. An article from the November 7, 1944 issue of the Daily Review is such an example:

Pistol Packin' Mama was reborn in Alvarado this weekend when Jennie Czupek, brandishing what appeared to be either a .22 caliber or a .32 caliber nickel plated gun, shot up the town in good old fashioned western style. Jennie is the cook for the Railroad section hands in Alvarado.

Picked up by sheriff's deputies on charges of drunkenness and for carrying a gun, Jennie was sentenced to five days in jail or a \$10 fine by Judge Silva on Monday on the drunkenness charge. She pleaded not guilty to carrying the gun and will be tried at a later date.

According to witnesses, Jennie entered the Alvarado Hotel at about 8:15 p.m. Sunday and stayed about half an hour. During that time she drove a Mexican out of the door at the point of her gun. She then went down to the Silver Dollar Saloon and fired a shot out the door. Her brief but eventful evening in town was cut short when deputy sheriff's arrested her.

The Alvarado Hotel is now the Smith Building at the corner of Smith Street and Union City Blvd. The Silver Dollar Saloon is now closed and is on Horner Street between Vallejo and Watkins Streets.

Alvarado Theaters

The first known movie theater in Alvarado was in the Odd Fellows Hall. The lower story of the building had been used for years as a dance hall and local meeting place. In 1925, Charles Browning leased the Hall for a silent movie theater and ran the business for 10 years. Sometime in the 1930's, Edward Naharro had a theater on Salt Works Road (now Westport Way) and in 1935, he took over the lease on the lower story of the Odd Fellows Hall and moved his business there. When Naharro moved in, he had a seating capacity of 327.



By 1944, Naharro had built a new theater on the west side Union City Blvd, just south of Horner Street. Naharro owned the theater building and the building next to it, on the corner of Union City Blvd and Horner Street. The building next to the theater housed the Alvarado donut shop and a bar called "Mike's Place." Starting in 1946, Naharro sponsored a baseball team named for the Alvarado Theater and managed by his brother-in-law, Joe

Sanchez. The Alvarado Theater played first run movies, but also played Spanish language films. In 1957, the playbill had the films "Maria La Voz" and "Cantando Nacce Amor".

The Alvarado Theater ran until 1976 when the entire west side of Union City Blvd was demolished to add to additional lanes.

Alvarado Methodist Church

In 1859 and 1860, two churches were built in Alvarado, a Presbyterian Church, organized primarily by Charlotte Cornell, and a Methodist Church, organized primarily by Julia Thompson. The Presbyterian Church is well documented with pictures of the first church building and detailed in a number of local histories. The Methodist Church is documented when it was built, but little is found in local histories that detail the church after 1860 and nothing of its location.

The church was built in 1859, using lumber brought in by steamship to Union City Landing. The first services were held on December 17, 1859 with Rev. Peck of San Francisco, Rev. M. C. Briggs, and Rev. C. Cushman leading the services.

A newspaper article from the "Sacramento Daily Union" of November 25, 1871, says "A church at Alvarado, Alameda County, has been turned into a bar room, the spirits being dispensed from the pulpit, which serves as a counter." Given that it is documented that the Presbyterian Church still existed after 1871, this article must refer to the Methodist church.

An article from the "San Francisco Call", from June 16, 1900, provides even more detail, "A fire, which for a time threatened to destroy the town of Alvarado, was discovered about 2 o'clock this morning in the rear of A.L. Fitzell's drug store. Before the flames were extinguished by the volunteers who answered the alarm, the buildings belonging to the Ralph estate and occupied by the drug store, I.V. Ralph's furniture store and a restaurant were destroyed. One of the burned buildings was formerly the Alvarado Methodist Church, but had been remodeled a number of years ago."

The Ralph store was located on the east side of Levee Street (now Union City Blvd). The Sanborn map of 1908 shows a building on Levee Street with a drug store. After the fire, the area was rebuilt, and it is safe to assume that the drug store was rebuilt in the same location. A Sanborn map from 1887 does not show the drug store, but it does show a building just to the north, that is listed as a saloon and is long enough to have been a church.

This would place the Methodist Church on the east side of Union City Blvd, just south of the old Central Bank building that sits on the corner of Smith and Union City Blvd.

There is one photograph of Union City with Alvarado in the background that shows two church steeples. One is clearly the Presbyterian Church and the location of the second steeple just about where it should be if the research above is correct.

John Hall

A park on the west side of Union City is called Hall Ranch Park. Dyer Street west of Alvarado Blvd, used to be known as Hall Ranch Road. Hall Ranch was a large ranch that is now covered by the Contempo housing subdivision. John Hall, born in 1822 in Ohio, came to Alvarado in the early 1860's and purchased a large ranch. John was known for raising and showing thoroughbred horses, starting in 1864. In 1871, at the California State Fair, John was the following awards

Class I. Thoroughbreds:

Stallions:

Best three-year-old and over

Best one-year-old

Best colt under one year

Mares:

Best four-year-old and over with colt

Best two-year-old

Best thoroughbred dam with not less than four of her colts, all thoroughbred

His mare, Peggy Ringgold, won awards, and offspring also won awards at the State Fair. In 1873, John sold one mare, Alice May, for \$1,500 to Mr. Samuels from Livermore.

When the South Pacific Coast Railroad came through Alvarado, it crossed over his property. The railroad built a rail stop call "Hall Station" on his property. Hall Station was along the railroad tracks just west where the tracks cross Alvarado Blvd. In 1865, John planted three Eucalyptus trees near Hall Station. A newspaper report from 1936 said that they were still there. Today, they are long gone.

In 1912, his ranch was sold to R. B. Mott, who subdivided the large ranch into smaller ranches and farms and sold them off.

Horner Stage

John Horner came to California in 1846 on the "Brooklyn." He settled in Mission San Jose and purchased large tracks of land in the area and started farming. He did fairly well growing potatoes, but he was having a problem getting his goods to market in San Francisco.

In 1850, John Horner purchased land around a landing on Alameda Creek. In 1851, he purchased the small steamship, "Union", and set it up to run from his landing in Alvarado to San Francisco. His primary goal was to get his produce to market, but he also used the steamship for passenger traffic. He also set up a small town around the landing and called it "Union City."

The problem was that no one wanted to go from San Francisco to Union City. The heart of East Bay was still Mission San Jose. So, Horner needed to setup a stage from Union City to Mission San Jose. Since there was no roads, Horner had to create his own road from Union City to Mission San Jose. In 1852, his roads were finished, so he established his stage from the wharf in Union City to Mission San Jose.

This advertisement from the Daily Alta California newspaper, from January, 25, 1855, is for the Horner's steamship and stage line:

FOR UNION CITY:

Connecting with stages to Alvarado, Centreville and San Jose Mission.

The Steamer Union, Capt. Charles Thorn, will leave Broadway Wharf every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, returning will Union City on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. For freight and passage, which will be at the lowest rates, apply on board at Broadway Wharf.

Another newspaper report talks about a brawl between a driver for the Horner stage and another stage driver in August, 1857:

A difficulty took place on July 28th, between Cameron Duncan, of the Union City line of stages, and Lewis J. Hilt, driver on McLaughlin's mail line, in which the latter struck the former with a slung shot, and was himself stabbed by the former in the shoulder and right breast, though not seriously injured.

Eventually, Horner built a total of 16 miles of roads and ran stages from Union City to Mission San Jose and then to the city of San Jose.

Bootleg Dog

Alvarado was known for it's saloons in its early days. In 1884, a business directory listed 3 different saloons, plus the Alvarado Hotel and the Riverside Hotel each had a bar. When prohibition came along, it hit the town fairly hard. In 1929, a business directory listed one business as "beverages" and another as "beverages and billiards," The beverages were soft drinks, officially, but there might be some other beverages available.

Different merchants had different ways to conceal that they were selling alcohol. From the Oakland Tribune, February 11, 1928, comes this tale:

Alameda County's first bootleg dog is in jail! He was arrested today in Alvarado, along with his master, John Gomez, by the county raiding squad from the sheriff's office.

The squad entered Gomez's soft drink place just as Gomez gave a shrill whistle. In trotted the dog with a basket in its mouth, in which was a pint of brandy for the customer. The dog's collar was fastened to a wire, which connected the bar with a kennel, by a ring. This was to keep the dog on the wire so as to not escape. A search of the kennel revealed numerous baskets all ready for delivery. The dog stayed in the kennel and brought in a load when Gomez whistled. Gomez has been booked for sale and possession and the dog is held on general principles.

Alvarado Cattle Round Up

In 1952, Alvarado still had the feel of a small town. Highway 17, the route from Oakland to San Jose, ran through Alvarado and sometimes backed up at the light where it turned from Union City Blvd to Horner Street. Suburbia was just starting to develop in the Bay Area, but it was many years away from coming to Alvarado. The days of the horse and buggy were long gone, but farming still remained an important industry. Alvarado was surrounded by farmland. As Alvarado was coming into the modern times, there was still a reminder of the old days. An article from the June 24, 1952 issue of The Daily Review provides details:

An impromptu cattle round up was staged here yesterday morning when a herd of some 25 cows wandered from their pasture on Marsh Road, a mile south, and strolled in for a Monday morning look at town. Residents were awakened as the sometimes-galloping herd turned right and left on V Street, wandering wherever they desired. They were rounded up and herded back into their pastures.

Marsh Road is now Union City Blvd south of Horner Street and V Street is Horner Street.

August May Jr. & House

August May Jr., son of August and Sophia May, was born in December, 1866 in Alvarado. His siblings are George (born 1862), Bertha (born about 1868) and Henry (born about 1871). August May Jr. joined his father in the butcher business. In 1902, August May Jr. became the cashier of the Bank of Alvarado when it was founded. By, 1912, the bank was known as the Bank of Alameda County and August May Jr. was the bank president.



August Jr. married Jenny Decoto, and had one son, Henry.

Bertha May married Henry Haight Meyer, a well-known Bay Area architect in 1897. In 1890, Henry was with the San Francisco firm of Percy & Hamilton, coming primary draftsman by 1900 and eventually becoming the principal of the firm. By 1904, Henry was in partnership with Clarence R. Ward. From 1910 to 1920, Henry had his own independent firm. From 1912 to 1935, Henry was the Alameda County Architect.

In 1913, August May Jr. contracted with his brother-in-law to design a new home on Vallejo Street in Alvarado. Work started in December, 1913, and in May, 1914, August and Jenny were able to move in.

The original address for the house was 947 Vallejo Street. Telephone directories from 1940, 1945 and 1948 list the May family with phone number #41. The telephone directory from September 1951 listed them with the phone number of #55-758.

August Jr. passed away August 24, 1940 of a cerebral hemorrhage while staying at an Alameda hospital. Jenny May passed away March 4, 1954 at the home on Vallejo Street.

Continental Salt Works Destroyed

The lands west of Alvarado have been used for salt making since the 1860's. Different companies came and went over the years. In the 1910's, Continental Salt Works had a factory 1.5 miles west of Alvarado, making 200 tons daily of salt and employing 30 workers. In 1924, the Continental Salt Works merged with Leslie Salt, and the salt works near Alvarado continued to operate.

In November, 1935, the salt works burned to the ground. The November 7 issue of the Oakland Tribune provides the details:

Fire of an undetermined origin completely destroyed the plant of the Continental Salt Company on San Francisco Bay a mile west of Alvarado yesterday, with damage approximating \$100,000. The "Haze M," a \$14,000 tugboat and a \$7,000 barge belonging to the Miller Launch Company of San Francisco, beached by low tide, were also destroyed, as were the transformer poles and equipment of the Pacific Gas & Electric Company.



The plant, which handled about 30,000 tons of salt a year is one of two operated by the Leslie California Salt Company. A third plant is located at Mt. Eden. The 25 men employed at the Continental plant will be put to work at other branches.

Rolly Montalbo, captain of the "Hazel M" stated that it was impossible to save the boat and barge as low tide had left them stuck in the mud. Crude salt transported in 150-ton loads from the plant to the San Francisco waterfront is used for salting fish, curing hides, etc.

Some of the employees have been connected with the salts works for more than thirty years, among them William Johnson who in the early days operated freight boat between Alvarado and San Francisco.

Last Flood of Alameda Creek

Since the first settlers built buildings on the alluvial plain of Alameda Creek, floods were something that had to be dealt with. Even in the early days, some form of dikes were built to try and keep Alameda Creek from affecting homes and farm land. Normally Alameda Creek is a mild stream, but after a few days of rain, and it can become a raging torrent. Anybody that has driven through Niles Canyon during the rainy season can attest to how much higher the creek is.

It was not until the 1950's that any major work was done on taming Alameda Creek. The Alameda Flood Control Channel was built in the 1950's to 1960's. This channel prevented Alameda Creek from flooding Niles, Fremont, and Union City.

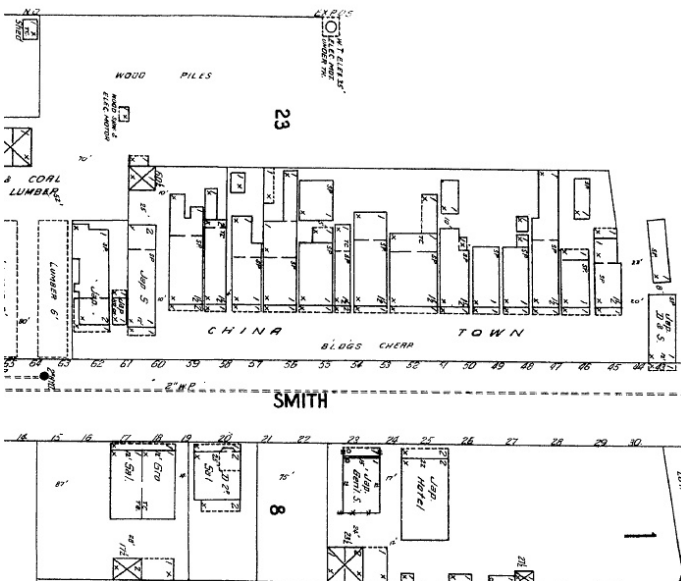
The last flood recorded in Union City was in December, 1955, just before Christmas. After three days of rain, Alameda Creek rose 20 feet as it passed by Niles. A 50-foot breach in a levee allowed waters to enter Alvarado up to four feet deep in places. The levee was suspected to break, so Sheriff's were in place to notify Alvarado residents in time to evacuate. A total of 15 square miles of the area was flooded. National Guard troops were driving through Alvarado in jeeps helping those that needed evacuation. The start of the Alameda Flood Control Channel near Lowry Road kept that area from flooding.

What helped Alvarado was that a levee break near Niles and Centerville let flood waters flow into one of the 80 feet deep gravel pits, filling it in 4 hours. Once the water started flowing in to the gravel pit, the water under the bridge on Decoto Road dropped two feet.

Four days after the flood most Alvarado residents were still not able to get back to their homes. It took over a week for the flood water to recede in some places. Most residents stayed with family and friends until the waters receded.

Chinatown in Alvarado

In old Alvarado, was an area known as Chinatown. It was situated starting at the Alvarado post office and ran east to the Dragon House restaurant. The area was a collection of small, ramshackle buildings that housed Chinese businesses and residents. The buildings were inexpensively constructed and rent was cheap, making it a haven for recently immigrated Chinese. There is no record of exactly when Chinatown was built, but the buildings were probably built around 1870.



Chinatown was known for gambling and prostitution. The 1880 census lists one small building as occupied by four women, one listed as "keeping a house of ill repute" and the other three listed plainly and clearly as prostitute. Other occupations listed by residents of Chinatown in 1880 are: keeper of gambling house, clerk in Chinese store, merchant, keeper of restaurant, dish washer, cook, and laborer.

The Chinese population in Alvarado peaked in the 1880's and by 1900 was much smaller. Other immigrants filled the buildings of Chinatown. On 1919, Chinatown was described in a newspaper article as:

"The foreign quarter was originally known as Chinatown. Later it was occupied principally by the Japanese and now by the Cuban Mexicans. Those involved are of the latter nationality."

During prohibition, Chinatown was a place to get alcohol and possibly other illegal substances. More and more, the police were looking into Chinatown, making occasional raids, including one in 1919 by the State Pharmacy Board, looking for illegal narcotics. In 1921, a raid was made looking for bordellos and a number of working ladies where arrested.

About 1921, the name was changing from Chinatown to Little Tijuana, since the newer residents were Mexicans, and where the area was still known as "the scene of numerous fights, shootings, and stabbing affrays."

In 1923, District Attorney Ezra Decoto filed suits to close the bordellos in Chinatown under an abatement law. A newspaper article described opening of the suits in court:

Trial of two abatement proceedings against Alvarado's "Little Tijuana" opened today in Judge James G. Quinn's court today with spectators benches crowded with women, public welfare workers and neighbors of the district subpoenaed to testify concerning the general reputation of the boardwalk establishments where gambling, drinking and sale of contraband liquor and narcotics are alleged to have been a constant source of revenue.

Twenty owners of the rickety pool rooms and dance halls, and Edward L. Farley, owner of the land on which they are built, are defendants in the two suits. Since the passing of the narcotics abatement law at the last legislative session, this is the first instance of prosecution asking abatement for that cause in Alameda County and in the State.

The two suits designated as "The United States versus Edward Farley and others" and "The People versus Edward Farley and others," result from a raid of "Little Tijuana" last March, when twenty-six wooden houses, connected by alleys, runways and underground tunnels, were entered by federal and county officials and wholesale arrests made.

By 1927, the abatement proceedings had worked and all residents were moved out of Chinatown and the doors were padlocked. In July, 1927, a fire started in one of the buildings and consumed all of Chinatown as described by a newspaper report at the time:

[Chinatown] was destroyed in one of the most spectacular blazes in this part of California, with five Fire Departments fighting the flames. Only by prompt and efficient efforts, did fireman prevent the fire from spreading to an adjoining lumberyard, and for a time the entire Alvarado community was threatened.

The Hapless Hairless Dog

In October, 1913, the Oakland Tribune reported on the hapless dog, Pete, owned by Arthur Whipple of Decoto. While out and about, the dog stumbled across a covey of blackbirds and scared them before he knew what was going on. The blackbirds, not happy being startled, attacked the dog and "with unerring precision they picked him clean of fur; so now he wears a red flannel union suit to keep him warm and also for decency's sake."

It would have been worse for Pete, but toward the end of the fight, Arthur happened upon the scene, and was able to rescue his dog, exhausted and hairless. The dog was reported "under the care of a veterinarian and hopes are held out for his recovery. But he will never be the same. His fine courage and his canine precocity will never recover from a harrowing experience when he inadvertently explored a lair of blackbirds."

"Union" Steamship

When John Horner founded the original Union City in 1851 near what is now the corner of Horner and Veasy streets, he named the town after the steamship that he owned, the "Union". His town was built around the landing that he built and where the "Union" was berthed.

The "Union" was built in New Jersey. Charles Minturn had it dismantled, shipped around South America, and rebuilt in the Bay Area. In 1849, it was running up the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers from San Francisco. John Horner purchased it to carry the produce from his large farm lands to the markets in San Francisco.

The ship has a number of captains during its years in service, including Capt. Trefrey, Capt. James Marston, Capt. T. W. Seely, and Capt. Charles Thorn.

The "Union" traveled to San Francisco, stayed overnight, and returned to Union City the next day. While in San Francisco, the ship was berthed in a basin between Pacific and Broadway wharves. Horner and Company had an office at the corner of Front and Broadway streets. The "Union" left San Francisco for Union City on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It left Union City on the other days (Monday, Weds., and Friday) and did not travel on Sunday. The cost of the trip from San Francisco to Union City was \$5. Horner also had a stage that ran to Mission San Jose, costing an additional dollar.

In May of 1853, the "Union" was just leaving the mouth of Alameda Creek on a run to San Francisco, when it came upon the disabled ship, "Jenny Lind." The "Jenny Lind" was traveling from Alviso to San Francisco when its boiler exploded, killing 18 passengers and scaling another 40 of the 130 on board. Capt. James Marsten of the "Union" transferred the survivors and the remains of the victims to the his ship and continued on to San Francisco, where the wounded were treated for their injuries.

First Auto Accidents In Alvarado

The first recorded automobile in Alvarado was reported in the Oakland Tribune on May 7, 1904, when Mr. & Mrs. Merrit came down from Oakland to visit the Sunkel's. The next summer, Mrs. Merrit was back with following reported: Mrs. A. Merritt of Seminary Park took Mrs. Sunkel, Miss Sparks and the Misses Nauert out for an automobile ride Sunday in her big steamer, which she runs herself. The ladies were dressed in white and hatless and made a pretty picture as they sped along the roads.

The first recorded automobile accident in Alvarado was reported on September 6, 1906: While returning from a trip to San Jose at about 3 o'clock this morning in a heavy touring car, Leo Rowley of Berkeley, the owner of the machine, and a party of friends were thrown into a ditch about a mile and half east of Alvarado. Rowley was pitched forward over the front wheels of the machine and was instantly killed. The other passengers in the car were uninjured. There were six people in the car.

Two years later another accident was reported on September 21, 1908: An automobile accident outside of Alvarado on the San Jose Highway spilled three men and three women over the road and through a picket fence. Excess speed was cited as the cause of the accident.

Another early accident was reported on September 17, 1909: An automobile party with a badly dilapidated machine was towed into Hayward about 10 o'clock last evening, and told of a thrilling auto accident that took place near Alvarado about two hours earlier. The machine, which was nearly a wreck, is said to have run off the grade and smashed into a telegraph pole, throwing out the occupants. The machine then continued on its mad flight, crashing through the pipeline of the People's Water Company that is alongside the road for some distance out there. The machine contained five passengers from San Francisco and all were more or less maimed and bruised, but only one had a bone broken it is stated.

I have no idea why all three reported accidents were in September.

Safecrackers at the Alvarado Train Station

In late December, 1909, three men broke into the Alvarado train station looking to break into the safe and make off with some easy money. Here is the details of the event as reported by the Oakland Tribune:

Three safecrackers broke into the Southern Pacific Depot in Alvarado and attempted to blow up the safe said to contain between \$500 and \$600. They were scared away when the 1:30 a.m. train pulled into Alvarado and saw the three men in the station. They notified the dispatcher in Oakland who notified the police. Sheriff Frank Barnett and a posse took up after the men who eventually got away after a gunfight.

A few days later another newspaper report linked the three men to another series of crimes that took place earlier in Novato:

The bandits that tried to blow up the Southern Pacific train station at Alvarado last Sunday and then fought a pistol duel with sheriff's officers are described as being the same bandits who stole a launch from Sausalito last May and robbed the Hamilton Brothers at Novato. The launch these robbers used to get away is the same in every respect as the launch used in Novato.

From the second article it looks like the three men escaped from Alvarado via the boat (launch) that they stole from Novato. The most likely place for the boat to dock was the old Union City landing on Alameda Creek at the end of Horner Street.



Fire on the Marshes

Duck hunting was a popular sport on the marshes and salt flats around Alvarado for almost 150 years. Many duck clubs leased the marshes and built club houses for overnight stays. Most of the time nothing noteworthy really happened at these clubs other than a little too much sun and too much drink. A newspaper report from September, 1902, details one event that was a little more exciting than most:

A fire is reported on the lonely marshes of Alvarado. Last year the “Spoonbill Club” lost its grounds near Alvarado to another club, and now its new clubhouse in the same locality has gone up in smoke to the accompaniment of popping shells.

Anticipating a glorious duck hunt on the first day of the season, the members shipped a “wide awake” hunter down to the clubhouse with instructions to paint the decoys and give the house a general burnishing for the reception of its owners. The wide-awake hunter worked hard at the decoys and painted them in a way that the worldliest duck would regard with favor. Then, on Sunday afternoon, he started at the house with a tar bucket to give the outside a weatherly coat. In his haste he allowed the fire to connect with the tar, and shortly there was nothing left of the house and the decoys but a heap of hot ashes. The ammunition that was stored within kept up such a lively fusillade that the amateur painter did not dare stay close enough to throw water on the flames, and members of the club now insist that the exploding shells frightened away all the birds in the