

Homes of Vallejo Street

Union City, CA



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Introduction

Vallejo Street is the first residential street to the east of Union City Blvd. It was first known as Vallejo Avenue and Union City Blvd was originally Levee Street. The main business district of early Alvarado, starting in about 1851, was the one block on Levee Street, from Smith Street to Horner Street. There were businesses on Smith Street, but the majority of traffic flowed north and south through Alvarado. After the advent of automobiles, Highway 17 ran from Mt. Eden (Hayward), through Alvarado, turning left at Horner Street and running to Centerville (Fremont). All of this put Vallejo Street close to the core part of Alvarado. If you were someone in town, the west side of Vallejo Street was the place to own a home.

Overview of Vallejo Street

The next page shows an overview of Vallejo Street with property lines overlayed on the aerial photograph. This provides a reference for the homes and properties that will be discussed in this paper.

One thing to note is the curve of the property lines on the back (west) of the properties. This was because Alameda Creek used to flow along that property line. The properties started on Vallejo Street and went back to the creek. Being so close to Alameda Creek may have sounded fine and provided access to fresh water, but during the fall and spring rains, the creek commonly flooded covering Alvarado with a couple feet of water. The 1908 Sanborn map shows the creek running through Alvarado, but the 1925 Sanborn map does not show the creek. At some point before 1925, the creek was rerouted and moved further north.

Vallejo and Smith Streets

The empty lot at the corner of Vallejo and Smith Streets was originally three properties as shown in the overview map. On the lot was the Nauert home, the Odd Fellows Hall, and the Liston home. The Odd Fellows Hall stood at the corner of Smith and Vallejo Streets. Just to the west on Smith Street was the Nauert home. At the back of the Odd Fellows Hall was the Liston house.



Overview of Vallejo Street

Liston House

The Liston house used to sit on a small piece of property just to the south of 30947 Vallejo Street.

William Liston came to Alvarado in 1852 and spent a few years managing the warehouses of Henry Smith. He moved to San Francisco to manage a hotel. A few years later, sometime before 1861, William returned to Alvarado. He established the Brooklyn House hotel and ran it for a number of years. He joined the Alvarado Home Guard when it was established in 1864 and was also a member of the Odd Fellows. It is unknown exactly when his house was built, but it was probably built before 1861.

The property existed into the early 1970's when a number of pictures were taken. It is unclear exactly when the house was torn down.



30947 Vallejo Street - August May House

This home was built in 1914 for August May Jr., who was employed by the Bank of Alvarado (later the Bank of Alameda County). He started working as a clerk/teller in 1903 and eventually was promoted to bank president by 1912. He married Jeanette Decoto and had one son, Henry. The date of the building can be placed exactly as the home was mentioned in the newspaper when it was being built:

The new May residence on Vallejo Avenue is nearing completion rapidly.
The Oakland Tribune, January 18, 1914

Mr. & Mrs. A. May are moving into their new home this week.
The Oakland Tribune, May 24, 1914

August May's sister was married to Henry Haight Meyers, a well known architect. This home was designed by Henry Haight Meyers. The Meyers collection at the University of California at Berkeley, lists this home amongst the projects worked on by Henry Meyers. The records also show that Jennie May had Henry Meyers work on the repainting of the home in 1932.

The original address for the home was 947 Vallejo Street. Telephone directories from March 1945 and April 1948 list August May with phone number #41. The telephone directory from September 1951 listed him with the phone number of #55-758.

Looking at the Sanborn map from 1908, there was an existing house on the property. It is unclear what happened to that home. It was not uncommon for a home to be moved, rather than torn down.

Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:

"This is a two-story house with elements of both Bungalow and Prairie School styles. The house has a low-pitched, hipped roof with the eaves extending beyond the wall plane. The exterior is clad in stucco and there is an exterior chimney. The fenestration is symmetrical with double-hung wood sash windows of various sizes. An enclosed porch extends from the front facade. The porch has a flat roof, a cornice with supporting brackets, and casement windows. The entrance has double doors surrounded by side lights and transom windows. Three tiles in a diamond pattern are located on the first floor of the front facade, above the windows and a decorative band separates the first floor of the house from the second floor."



30935 Vallejo Street

This house has a number of family names attached to it. The first name associated with the home is Ivens V. Ralph, a local merchant. I. V. Ralph was born in Alvarado in 1854, owned a merchantile store, where he was once in business with Mr. Harvey as Ralph and Harvey. He was an Alvarado Grammar School Board member in 1898, helped found the Bank of Alvarado in 1902, then sold his business and moved to Oakland. The next owner was Mr. Ellis, one of two brothers, who moved to Alvarado in 1902. He owned the store previously owned by I.V. Ralph, and then moved back to Niles in 1905. John Scribner is probably the next owner of the house. John Ralph took over the business from the Ellis Brothers, and Scribner joined him as Ralph & Scribner. In 1924, John Scribner was on the Alvarado Grammar School Board and later that year, he moved to Livermore. The reference to the home has Mrs. F. W. Joyce living there in 1948. Fred. W. Joyce was the half brother of John Scribner. Fred W. Joyce also had a son, Fred W. Joyce (born 1913), so the reference could be to either father or son. Years later the home was owned by the Brune family, relations to the Santos family that owned a number of homes in Alvarado. The best estimate for date of the house was that it is most likely to have been built before 1890.

The original address for the home was 935 Vallejo Avenue. The April 1948 telephone directory places Mrs. F. W. Joyce at this address with phone number #44. The telephone directory from 1951 shows Mrs. Joyce still living at the address and gives the phone number as #55-759.



Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:

"This is a one, one-and-half, and two-story house with a combination of gable, shed and flat roofs covered with composition shingles. The rafter ends which face the street have a decorative frieze. A brick chimney rises from the ridge. The house is clad with horizontal wood siding. The fenestration is asymmetrical with a variation of multi-paned, metal casement, multi-paned wood casement, and double-hung. The windows at the second floor have decorative shutters and window hoods. A front porch has been enclosed with windows and screen doors. The roof of the porch is flat and supported by four square posts. The house appears to have had several alterations but is in good condition. There is a wood and metal fence surrounding the yard."



30891 Vallejo Street - William Jung House

What is now a vacant lot, was the home of William Jung and his family. William was born in Germany in 1839, and came to Alvarado in the early 1860's. He was in the meat business in 1864 with Phillip Hellwig and in the investment business with August May. He was married in 1889, to Christina Penke from Mt. Eden (Hayward). They lived in this house as soon as they were married. It is not known if William lived in the house prior to marriage.

William passed away in 1912, but his wife, lived to over a hundred years old, living in the house until she passed away in 1961. Their daughter Mildred, who worked as a nurse, came down with Tuberculosis and moved back to this house in the early 1920's. Her sister, Charlotte, moved back to Alvarado, took up teaching at Alvarado Elementary School and stayed in the house to take care of her sister. Mildred passed away in 1938. Charlotte, who did not marry, lived with her mother and lived in the house until she passed away in 1963. It is believed that the home was demolished after Charlotte passed away.



The telephone directory from March 1945 and April 1948 lists Christina Jung with the phone number of #49. The telephone directory from September 1951 lists Christina Jung with the phone number of #55-750.

30869 Vallejo Street - Earl Hellwig House

This home was owned by Earl Hellwig, son of Fred Hellwig and nephew of George Hellwig, both of Hellwig Meats. Earls wife was Ruth, and his daughter was Linda Jane. Earl died in 1942, just two years after his daughter graduated from Washington Union High School, and while she was a student at the University of California at Berkeley.

The home was built prior to 1925. The 1908 Sanborn map does show a building on the property, but it is slightly different than the building that is shown on the 1925 Sanborn map.

The March 1945 telephone directory does not list any Hellwig other than George Hellwig, so Ruth and Linda Jane might have moved after Earl passed away.



Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:

"This house has been enlarged extensively over the years. Presently, it stretches to the rear of the lot in a series of additions. The house was originally a small Bungalow with projecting front porch. The front elevation has retained most of its original details including the windows and several porch features. The original part of the house has a clipped gable roof running parallel to the street with an eye lid dormer present at the flat portion of the roof. The original portion of the house has primarily double-hung wood sash windows. The front elevation is symmetrical in appearance."

30829 Vallejo Street - John Ralph House

This house was owned by John H. Ralph, a local merchant. John was born and raised in Alvarado. He worked for his uncle, I.V. Ralph, at his general store. John then bought a market in Decoto with John Olsen. Soon after that, John bought I.V. Ralphs' store, located on Levee Street (now Union City Blvd).

The house was built in 1923, probably for John Ralph.

The telephone directory from March 1945 and April 1948 lists John H. Ralph at this address with the phone number of #24. The September 1951 phone book lists John H. Ralph with the phone number of #55-755.

Looking at the Sanborn map from 1908, there was an existing house on the property. It is unclear what happened to that home. It was not uncommon for a home to be moved, rather than torn down.

Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:



"This two-story house has many elements typical of the Prairie School of Architecture popularized by Frank Lloyd Wright and other mid-western architects. The house has an overall symmetrical front facade highlighted by a porch of cream-colored brick. The front porch consists a brick surround with a concrete cap that forms two pedestals for planters. The remainder of the house is sheathed in stucco. There are two large picture windows on either side of the front door with a flat roof overhangs. At the second floor, in alignment with the first floor windows, there are tripartite windows consisting of two double-hung, four-over-one windows flanking a single-paned window with a transom. Many of the window mullions form decorative geometric motifs. There are a number of casement windows in the house as well. Almost all of the windows have their original wood surrounds. The front entrance has a door with a large light, two flanking side lites and a projecting roof overhang. Both the porch, windows and root have similarly detailed overhangs. The yard is formally landscaped."

30811 Vallejo Street - James Wasley House

This home belonged to James C. Wasley, who was the principal of the Alvarado Grammar School from about 1930 to about 1943. James also was Fire Chief for the Alvarado Fire Department from 1941-1942. He was a member of the Chamber of Commerce for many years. His wife, was a substitute teacher at Alvarado Grammar School and other local schools. James was also known for raising prize Brown Leghorn chickens. He won a number of prized from shows all over the state.

A telephone directory from March 1945 lists James Wasley at this address with the phone number of #46. An April 1948 telephone directory does not list him at all, so it is probable that he had moved away by this time.

The home is estimated to have been built in 1910. The 1908 Sanborn map does not know any building on the property.

Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:



"This one-story Bungalow has a number of Colonial Revival characteristics such as the front porch columns and its symmetrical appearance. The house has a hipped roof with exposed rafter tails and sits on a raised foundation. The house is sheathed in horizontal wood siding and has double-hung wood windows. Square in plan, the house has a partially enclosed front porch. The driveway has small square papers and there is some formal landscaping in the front yard. There is a detached garage that is not original to the property."

30803 Vallejo Street - Walter Robie House

This home was owned by the Walter Starr Robie and his wife, Francis. Francis was an Alvarado School Board Trustee for over 25 years, starting in the early 1920's. Their son, William Russell Robie, married Alma Rose Norris, daughter of Albert Norris, Alvarado Grammar School principal, post master, and librarian.

The March 1945 and April 1948 telephone directory lists W. S. Robie on Vallejo Street with the phone number #22. The family is not listed in 1951.

The home is estimated to have been built in 1911. The 1908 Sanborn map does not know any building on the property. An article from the Oakland Tribune, dated July 16, 1911, states "Mrs. Robie is to have a cottage built on Vallejo Street in the near future."

Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:

"This one-story Craftsman-style Bungalow sits on a raised foundation. The roof gable runs parallel to the street and is covered composition shingles. A shed dormer projects from the ridge with two sets of three paned windows. A recessed porch wraps around the back of the house and is supported by several square posts with simple capitals. The house is sheathed in horizontal clapboard. The porch is accessed by several wood steps. The front door is wood with the upper half having a three-over-three lite. The fenestration is asymmetrical. Two small windows flank the front entrance. The remainder of the windows are double-hung, one-over-one wood sash. A large double-hung window faces the street with the upper half consisting of six small tiles."



30793 Vallejo Street

It is unclear who owned this home after it was built. It was built before 1925, and the Sanborn map of 1908 does not show a home on this spot on the property.

Description of the home from the Union City Cultural Resources Inventory:

"This two-story Craftsman-style house has a prominent attic window within the front gable. The house is asymmetrical in appearance with a cut-out porch at the left side of the front facade. The porch has a parapet style railing and a single square post. The house has a high gable roof with overhanging eaves. There are decorative brackets at the roof line. The house is sheathed in horizontal wood siding and the windows consist of large-paned, double-hung wood sash."



The home sits to one side of the property. These used to be a home, sitting on the property, but more in the middle, directly at the end of Vallejo Street. This was the home built by Henry C. Smith, one of the founders of Alvarado. The home was later owned by George Althouse and then Apple Schmidt.

It was part of the Historical American Building Survey (HABS) and a photograph was taken in February 1940. The house looks to be in poor shape and it is hard to tell if it is occupied. The home was demolished by 1961. The card from the HABS says the following:



*Henry C. Smith House. Alt Title : Apple Schmidt house
Feb 1940*

History: Built in 1852. Henry C. Smith came to California in 1846 with John C. Fremont and after retiring from the service opened a trading post at Mission San Jose. He founded the town of New Haven adjoining Union City and Alvarado. Smith introduced a bill in St[ate] Legislature creating Alameda County from parts of Contra Costa and Santa Clara Counties in 1853, and was instrumental in having the County Offices established in Alvarado. He became County

Description: One and one-half story wood frame with rustic siding on front and bevel siding elsewhere. Of significant design and detail though not large. Center element with second story partly in roof with gable and having ornamented band-sawn large board and sun burst in apex. Porch supported by ornamented wood posts with a gable with sun burst over center bay. Two symmetrical wings crested with cast iron ornament and finials. Now Destroyed.

References: Historic Spots in California - M. B. Hoover

*Auth of Card: A. Lewis Koue, AIA, Oakland, California
September 1961*

References

Henry H. Meyers Collection, UCB, from the Online Archive of California
Historical American Building Survey, Library of Congress

Union City Cultural Resources Inventory, City of Union City, CA

"Early Families of Union City", Timothy Swenson, Museum of Local History, 2009

Newspaper articles from Oakland Tribune and Hayward Daily Review

Acknowledgment

I'd like to thank Alice Robie for providing me with a map that her father drew up of Vallejo Street, marking where different families lived and for her taking the time to sit and talk with me about Vallejo Street. Thanks to Anthony Gualco for his transcribed newspaper collection. Thanks to the City of Union City for the overview map of Vallejo Street.