

Alameda Museum

Quarterly

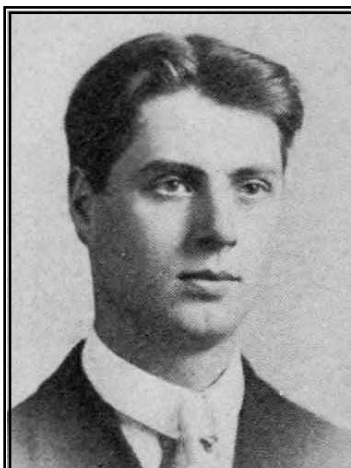
ALAMEDA'S RADIO PIONEERS

by Bob Rydzewski, Fellow and Deputy Archivist, California Historical Radio Society, Alameda, CA.

In the earliest years of the twentieth century a group of young Alamedans played an outsized role in the evolution of what we know as "radio" but which they called "wireless". And appropriately the story, untold for over a century, recently emerged from research begun at the California Historical Radio Society (CHRS) located on Central Avenue right here in Alameda.

Today we mostly think of radio in terms of broadcasting, but it was around for several decades before that became its primary use. Marconi first proved that a "wireless" signal could be sent across oceans in 1901 and for about the next 20 years its biggest use was in military and commercial communications with ships at sea. It was the "high tech" of its day that excited the imagination of teenage whiz kids, who set up their own amateur stations to transmit and receive messages. But the field back then was very different from ham radio today.

First, there were no laws regulating it. You didn't need a license to get on the air and transmit. Anyone could send out messages on any frequency with as much power as they could muster whenever they felt like it. Since useful vacuum tubes had not yet been invented, signals were produced by generating sparks. Communication was in Morse code dots and dashes since much more sophisticated electronics were needed to send and receive "phone" (voice and music rather than just a tone). You didn't buy a radio: you bought or made the parts and put them together yourself. Mom's sewing needle, borax, coils of wire, sheets of glass, tinfoil—these were all standard ingredients for self-constructed sets which were truly "as primitive as can be." The power usually came from a light socket, with fuses and even neighborhood power sometimes becoming casualties. But some early amateur radio



FRED MUDGETT

*University of California
(Berkeley) Yearbook, 1909.*

operators, lusting after a stronger signal, opted for climbing up power poles and trying to tap into high voltage lines; tragically—but not surprisingly—a few were electrocuted.

It's been known that the San Francisco Bay Area was a hotbed of early radio activity, but the outsized contribution that Alameda amateurs made to the development of radio has not been acknowledged. Research shows that Alameda could more than hold its own against larger Bay Area cities when it came to pioneering amateur stations and their operators. Even before 1910, within a few blocks of Park Street there lived at least four young Alamedans whose wireless transmissions would end up having repercussions that reached from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. to the East China Sea.

Fred Mudgett and the Great San Francisco Earthquake

Fred Mudgett lived with his parents at 2305 Santa Clara Avenue, across the street from City Hall. His connection with the latter was a quite literal one: a long antenna wire stretched from his radio shack clear over Oak Street and was tethered to the flagpole atop the now long-gone City Hall clock tower, the highest point in Alameda. "I was always taken up with electrical toys and that wonderful power attracted me," recalled Fred. "I began the study of electricity about 8 years ago [1897] as a pastime." Fred graduated from Alameda High in 1904 and was soon enrolled at UC Berkeley. By 1905 his Alameda station, called FM (his initials), could communicate with nearby amateur stations, U.S. Navy stations at Goat Island (today's Yerba Buena Island), Mare Island, and the Farallons, as well as with some ships at sea, according to the *Alameda Daily Argus*.

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**Radio Pioneers . . . Continued from page 1**

Alameda City Hall with the flagpole atop the tower. Fred Mudgett lived with his family across the street at Oak and Santa Clara, in the house which stands behind the Towata Flower building. Image: Library of Congress.

On the fateful morning of April 18, 1906 when the earth rumbled and buildings in San Francisco collapsed and burned, Fred's station was put to good use proving, probably for the first time, the value of amateur radio in disaster communications. All wireless stations in San Francisco were destroyed, as were telephone and telegraph lines. Within hours of the quake, Captain Leonard Wildman of the U.S. Army Signal Corps and his men strung up temporary telegraph lines connecting sections of San Francisco to General Funston's headquarters at Fort Mason and from there to the Ferry Building. A relay system was set up using the *U.S.S. Chicago*, one of the few radio-equipped ships on the West Coast, and U.S. Navy wireless stations at Goat Island and Mare Island, where messages could be forwarded to telegraph lines. So with this complex military communications network in place, what part could an Alameda youth with his homemade set play?

Plenty, because at some point one of the links failed and Fred Mudgett's Santa Clara Avenue station took its place. Although Alameda's City Hall clock tower was

damaged in the quake, Fred's station remained operational. The *Army & Navy Register* noted "that a young lad in Alameda with an experimental wireless station established for his amusement came to be of inestimable value in the transmission of messages. He is referred to in this communication as Master Fred Mudgett, and his station where messages were passed along furnished the only means of communication from Yerba Buena, the *U.S.S. Chicago* and Fort Mason to the outside world." [Italics added] Incidentally, since Mudgett had worked for the *Alameda Daily Encinal*, that newspaper appears to have gotten the scoop on every other paper in the world.

Henry Heim Jr. and Albert Wolff Jr. Get In Trouble

At Heim's Swiss confectionery at 1426 Park Street one could get "everything from taffy and molasses candy to the finest of Parisian creams and chocolate bon bons." Henry Heim Jr. was the proprietor's son. Along with Albert Wolff Jr., son of the co-proprietor, he became interested in wireless at a young age. These Alameda boys built their own stations, with the antenna from Henry's radio shack attached to the water tower on Park Street and Albert's hooked to a windmill in his backyard on Clinton Avenue. By 1905 they were tuning in the Navy stations mentioned above, other local amateurs, and commercial stations. The Navy was transmitting messages "in the clear" back then since encryption/decryption was considered too burdensome short of war.

Some of what they heard made it into the *Alameda Daily Argus*. Readers thereby learned about medical emergencies at sea, shipwrecks and deaths at sea. Eventually, though, reporters found that they had stumbled onto something even more interesting. On September 29, 1907 the *San Francisco Examiner* screamed "Alameda Boys Construct Wireless: Intercept Government Messages: BARE NAVY SECRETS AND TAKE BILLETS FROM OFFICERS." Naval officers aboard ship, it turned out, were using the new technology to arrange rendezvous with their beaus, married or single, ashore. One message read "Mrs. Blank, Alameda—Will see you to-morrow night. Didn't like to take too many chances yesterday. We must be discreet.—The Lieutenant." Another was from "Bluebeard." Worse still, the article claimed that Henry "frequently uses the names of Fighting Bob Evans [Rear Admiral Robley Evans]" in asking warships for information,

SPECIAL BY WIRELESS TO THE DAILY ENCINAL

From Goat Island Wireless (2:45 pm) to F.G. Mudgett, Alameda

Report to Washington severe earthquake in San Francisco. City in flames. Have sent for assistance. Am in readiness to furnish other assistance when demanded from Goat Island. Loss of life is enormous. Estimated loss of life in San Francisco is from 5,000 to 6,000 souls. Apparatus is slightly damaged. Communications to and from the city is all out.

The Encinal has given the only full accounts of the fire and the conditions which have so appalled the civilized world. This has been possible through the wireless telegraph system of Fred Mudgett of the staff of this paper. Bulletins delivering the latest news will be posted at this office during the day. Alameda Encinal, April 20, 1906.

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Henry Heim Jr. lived with his family above his father's confectionery shop at 1426 Park Street (where the awning is). He attached his wireless to the top of the Waterworks tower which stood to the south near Central Avenue. Image: Alameda Museum.

and had even pretended to be the Admiral once to see if he could get a cruiser to delay its departure. It didn't work and "Heim was deprived of experiencing how it feels to be an admiral." If this is true, before you condemn the boys consider what you would have done as a 14-year-old with a powerful new technology and a powerful temptation.

Henry and Albert were far from the only teenagers causing trouble for the Navy, which had the most critical need for wireless. But the *Examiner* article made it into the U.S. Congressional record, Bluebeard, spoofed admiral and all, as an example of the need for a U.S. radio law. At that time there was nothing illegal about interfering with government messages, revealing confidential transmissions, sending false distress calls from ships, etc. The airwaves were filled with obscenities, threats, fake news, etc. Even respectable commercial companies intentionally interfered with their competitors to get a business advantage. None of it was technically illegal. But of course the amateurs, with few allies and the least political clout, got the brunt of the blame, and for a long time it looked like they might be outlawed altogether.

Congress mulled over the situation for years, weighing competing

ills, interests, and donors. Eventually a compromise bill, the Radio Law of 1912, was passed. Amateurs were allowed to stay on the air, but only with certain frequencies, times, and powers. Licenses were mandatory, and all of the bad stuff became illegal, overseen by a government agency that was the predecessor of today's FCC. Though not completely responsible for its passage, the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, which drew everyone's attention to the importance of wireless, certainly catalyzed it.

Albert Wolff Jr. remained in the Bay Area, worked as an electrician, and died in 1963, survived by children and grandchildren, some of whom may still be in Alameda today. Henry Heim Jr.'s story was more tragic. In 1914, while working at the Marconi high power wireless station at Bolinas, he was electrocuted and died at the age of just 23. To make things worse, if such is possible, the funeral director (a Mr. Fowler) bringing Henry's body back to Alameda accidentally plunged over an embankment near San Quentin. Henry's remains were then recovered by inmates and finally returned to Alameda for cremation.

George S. Hubbard Saves the Day

Wireless lifesaving in a maritime disaster was on the menu for at least one Alameda lad, George S. Hubbard, who lived with his parents on College Avenue. Like many early amateurs, Hubbard began his professional career as a ship radio operator, or "Sparks," as did his brother, Irvin. George's first posting was on a "little bed-bug ridden steam schooner named the *Falcon*" in 1910. Earning a reputation as an excellent operator, George was transferred to the Pacific Mail passenger steamer *Asia*, which ferried

passengers and mail between the West Coast and its namesake. On the homeward bound leg of his second trip, on April 23, 1911 he received a rude awakening at 5:30 AM. In heavy fog, the *Asia* had run aground on a huge pile of rocks just south of Taiwan (then Formosa). "The sensation was almost indescribable," he recalled. "She bumped up and down mightily, then heeled 45 degrees to port where she finally settled." They were soon surrounded by dozens of Chinese junks and sampans which George was told were river pirates bent on plundering the helpless ship. The captain tried to keep them away by firing from the bridge with a large caliber pistol.

George's description of what happened after that reads like something from a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera.



Illustration from the *San Francisco Call*, March 29, 1908.

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Radio Pioneers . . .Continued from page 3

"Remembering the lessons I had received... I realized I was supposed to report to the captain, get the ship's position from him and broadcast the news of our mishap and location. I grabbed my pants from the foot of the bunk. But, should I first don my pants?" He dashed to the bridge, pants in hand. "I rushed up to the Skipper who was busy shooting at the so-called river pirates. As I neared him his pistol appeared to jam. 'What is our position, sir?' I asked him in a voice wavering from fright and excitement. 'None of your bloody business! Get off the bridge!' was his reply." But George stayed, realizing the importance of getting his position for an SOS call. "I turned back to the skipper who was hammering the hammer of his big pistol with the handle of his pocket knife. Suddenly the pistol discharged. The bullet splintered the wooden grating on the floor of the bridge. Splinters stung my bare legs. I danced about the captain," who finally realized the advantage of giving out the ship's position.

As he entered the radio room, George found a few inches of a liquid on the floor and waded through it barefoot, started up the set (no easy task), and sent out the SOS with the ship's position. "Replies came thick and fast," and several ships were headed his way.



GEORGE S. HUBBARD

*Oakland Tribune
April 25, 1911.*

"Meanwhile, I had become conscious of pain and burning under my toenails. Suddenly the smell of acid made me aware that the 'water' I had been wading around in was battery acid." This had spilled out due to the ship's heavy list. A bucket of sea water for each foot solved the problem.

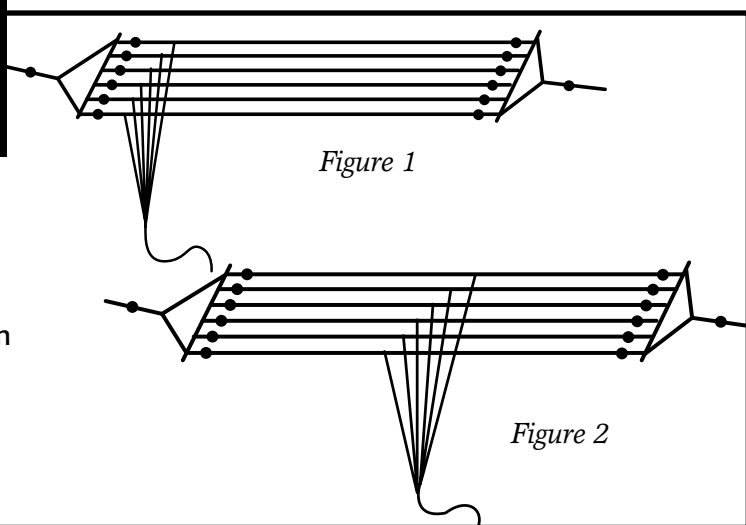
Help soon arrived in the form of a Japanese and a Chinese ship, the latter of which fired salvos into the river pirates, killing and wounding some. Every passenger and crew member of the *Asia* and all but two sacks of mail were safely rescued, and George Hubbard returned to Alameda a hero. He would survive other emergencies, including the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, where he was a radio engineer, on December 7, 1941. He died in Ben Lomond at the age of 96, and some of his letters and photos are preserved in the Society of Wireless Pioneers archives at the California Historical Radio Society.

(www.sowp.org)

Early amateur wireless operators from the city of Alameda contributed to the development of electronic communication as we know it. Although their times and technologies differed from ours, resourceful and inventive figures like Fred Mudgett, Henry Heim Jr., Albert Wolff Jr., and George Hubbard deserve to be remembered for the innovators that they were.

What did the early antennas look like?

Good question! In those days, most "wireless" enthusiasts used a horizontal rather than vertical antenna. So all they needed was two points to stretch one or more wires between. These could be a tree, a tower, a point high on the house near the roof, or even the side of a windmill. From the horizontal "aerial" a wire would run down into the room where the radio station was. In those days antennas would need to be very long and high up to work.



CREDITS: Much of the above comes from the files of the Alameda Daily Encinal, Alameda Daily Argus, Oakland Tribune, San Francisco Call, San Francisco Examiner, and San Francisco Chronicle, and from documents from the Society of Wireless Pioneers archives. Birth and death information from Ancestry.com. More detailed information and credits can be found in "The Wireless Boys of Alameda" series published in the Journal of the California Historical Radio Society Volume 41, numbers 1, 2, and (upcoming) 3 for 2022. We thank the Alameda Museum for historical information and image research.

The California Historical Radio Society museum at 2152 Central Avenue, Alameda is currently closed to the public, but anyone interested in helping to preserve radio and communications history is invited to contact president, Steve Kushman, kushseal@flash.net.



BE A MUSEUM DOCENT

Docents are the folks who keep the museum doors open. An enthusiastic group, they help run the vintage shop, greet visitors, and tell guests about our unique island community.

Do you enjoy historic homes? The Meyers House is a Colonial Revival showcase of life in the 1890s and beyond. The Meyers sisters were successful women ahead of their time. Consider being a docent at the Meyers House and telling their story.

Do you have three hours to make new friends? Come and spend that time with us!

**For more information
please contact
Docent Coordinator:**

Jean Graubart

510-217-8193

volunteer@alamedamuseum.org

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From the President's Podium

by Valerie Turpen



The Alameda Museum has come to a new chapter in its history. We are currently requesting applications for an Executive Director to guide us into the future. It is an exciting time for museums to expand their presentation of history and I'm looking forward to what the Alameda Museum can achieve.

This month we are also asking for Board Member nominations. If you or someone you know is interested in working with non-profits and engaging our community in the history of our city please submit their contact information. Our board is a working board which means members are required to participate on committees, be a docent, and/or manage programs. We appreciate great ideas, but we need participants to make them happen! **See the insert included in this issue.**

I would like to mention the upswing in research taking place at the museum. Inquiries (via email) multiplied during the pandemic and have continued since. Some questions have been real mysteries, "Why is the Alameda High School mascot the Hornet?" (If anyone knows the answer please let us know.) The most common research question from every historic home owner is, "What can you tell me about my house?" That has been popular since George Gunn wrote two books on the subject in the 1980s. These books are available online and at the museum.

Our photo archives have been helpful with various projects in the city at the Alameda Marina, along Central Avenue, and at the US Maritime Service Officer Training School. Our newsletter cover story this month came about when Bob Rydzewski, radio enthusiast contacted me in regards to a story he was writing about early wireless operators in Alameda. He was looking for images showing where they lived and the buildings they connected their antennas to. We were successful and Bob graciously supplied a version of his story for the *Quarterly*.

Sometimes a request leads to the museum receiving additions to our collection. I received an email from a woman in Indiana who remembered a small church she attended on Lincoln Avenue (now gone). Did we have a photo? It was a coincidence the church stood behind the house I live in and I had just discovered a photo of it in the museum archives. When I asked where she lived in Alameda she sent images of her childhood home on Benton Street. The home was replaced by an apartment building in the 1970s and we had no visual record of it.

Other recent acquisitions to the photo archive are two of the early school photos included in the center spread. There were no images of the first Porter School of 1891 and few good photos of the original Everett School in the archives.

Do you have an interesting Alameda photo you would like to share?

If you have a research question or would like to visit the museum archives please email info@alamedamuseum.org to request an appointment.

Valerie Turpen

President, Alameda Museum

School Begins in Alameda

Yes, school is back in session again, but the title is in reference to the very first schools established here. The first Board of Education was formed in 1855 by the county when Alameda became a township, and the first school was located in the pioneer town in the east end. Alameda School began as a cottage rented from a Mr. Schermerhorn, on the east side of Mound between Jackson and Van Buren, which was replaced by a proper schoolhouse in 1864.

The Encinal School District was established in 1860 to serve the west half of the township. It took its name from the Gold Rush hamlet of Encinal at the north end of Grand Street. The first Encinal School opened in 1865 at the corner of Bay and Santa Clara.

In 1872, Alameda became a self-governing incorporated town, at which time the Alameda Unified School District replaced the two pioneer districts.

AUSD's first important decision was to construct a large structure at Santa Clara and Chestnut in 1875. It served as a high school and the main grammar school. Also that year, the West End School was built at Fifth and Pacific.

As the population increased, so did the need for schools. Alameda continued to add new structures and expand the established ones. Also contributing to the design of schools was the awareness of fire and seismic safety. Wood was replaced by brick and concrete and the halls of education became civic centerpieces.

Highlighted here are early images of our first schools from the Alameda Museum photo collection.



1864 ALAMEDA SCHOOL • EVERETT SCHOOL: *Alameda School, built in 1864 on Mound, was moved to the corner of Everett and Eagle in 1891 to become Everett School. After a remodel it served as a primary school until the 1950s, eventually used by the school district as storage for textbooks and equipment. It was demolished in 1971 and small buildings were erected for Island High School. The property was sold and the Everett Commons residential complex was developed on the site, opening in 2019.*



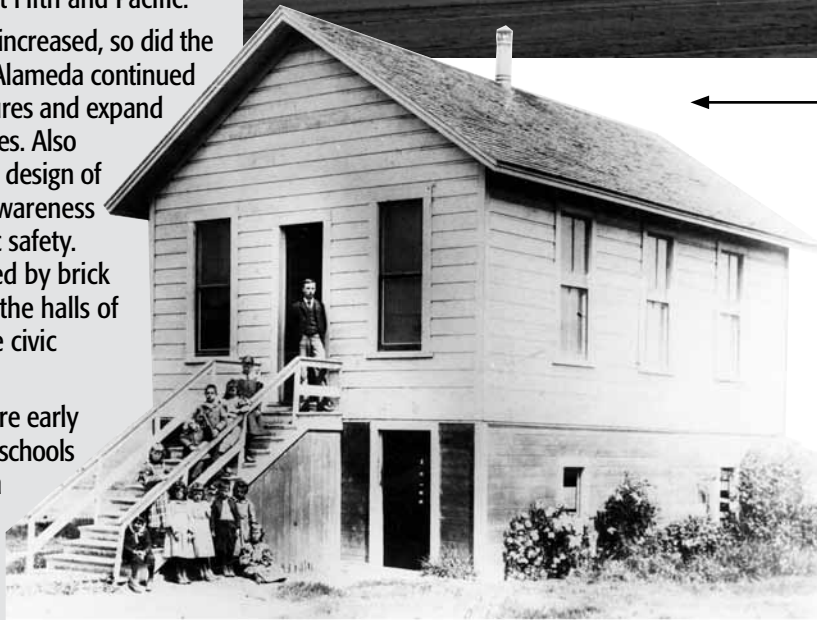
1875 ALAMEDA HIGH SCHOOL & GRAMMAR SCHOOL: *The building at Santa Clara and Chestnut originally served both high school and grammar school students. The grammar school was renamed in 1887 after Alameda resident and California governor Henry Haight. Due to overcrowding the high school classes moved in 1900.*

HAIGHT GRAMMAR SCHOOL LOVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: *The structure was rebuilt in 1911 in a classical form. In 1975 the school was demolished and a new building, which stands today, was constructed. The next change came in 2019 when the name was changed to Love Elementary due to Haight's racist views stated during his 1867 campaign for governor.*

ALAMEDA HIGH SCHOOL: *In 1903 the second high school was located at Central and Walnut. It became the west wing of the grander Neo-Classical construction of 1926. It was demolished and replaced in 1956.*

1883 BAY FARM SCHOOL: *Bay Farm was separated from Alameda by a marsh making it a struggle for children to travel to Alameda for an education. Resident Amos Mecartney donated land, materials, and labor to construct a school. It remained open until 1890, closed for a time, reopened and finally closed for good in 1899. Bay Farm did not have another school until Amelia Earhart Elementary opened in 1979.*

Front to back, Tom Souza, Katie Souza, Mary Souza; Minnie Miranda, John May, Louisa Flores, Mary Hansen, Sophie Hansen, Manuel Souza, Bill Silva, and Minnie Silva. Instructor Mr. Butibowle stands at the door.



1879 PORTER SCHOOL: *(left) This wood structure was located on the south side of Alameda near Oak. Remember at that time Alameda Avenue went through between Walnut and Oak. It was named in honor of school board trustee and state senator Nathan Porter who died in office. In 1895 the building was remodeled into a grander version complete with a bell tower (right). In 1916 the entire building was replaced by a more subdued brick version. In 1973 the school was destroyed by fire and the lot became part of the Alameda High School grounds.*



1891 ENCINAL SCHOOL MASTICK SCHOOL: *The two-room school was built at Santa Clara and Bay. This simple building was replaced in 1891 and renamed in 1901 for the late E.B. Mastick, former president of the Board of City Trustees. The building was demolished in 1939 and a Moderne style school was constructed. Eventually closing in 1980 the school became Mastick Senior Center under the Alameda Recreation and Park Department.*



1892 WILSON SCHOOL LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL: *This school, named for a president of the Board of Education, was built on the site of Alameda School which moved to Everett Street. In 1911 it was enlarged and renamed Lincoln School. In 1917 the building became an annex to the new Lincoln School built on the south side of Central between Mound and Court. The annex burned in 1923. Lincoln School was demolished in 1977 for a new facility on Fernside.*



1875 WEST END SCHOOL • LONGFELLOW SCHOOL: *The West End School opened in 1875 at Fifth and Pacific. It was a simple affair with only two rooms. In 1895 it was replaced by the first major school building in the West End, and renamed Longfellow after the poet. In 1942 the Victorian building was replaced with a modern version. Longfellow closed in 2006 and today Island High School occupies the site. And so we come full circle since Island High School started at Everett School which was the original school building in Alameda.*

Information sourced with permission from articles by Woody Minor.



Memories of Washington School

by Ron Ucovich

I ATTENDED WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL at the corner of Eighth Street and Santa Clara Avenue. The school was a three-story brick building, built in 1909. Until the 1940s, Alameda had no middle schools. Primary school taught grades 1 to 8, and high school taught grades 9 to 12. Then, in the 1940s, primary school taught grades 1 - 4, middle school taught 5 - 8, and high school taught grades 9 - 12. I entered Washington School as a fifth-grader in the early 1950s.

My classroom was in the basement. For me, this was the most interesting part of the school. There was an art room, a crafts room, and a music room. On the west wing there was the boys' gymnasium, and on the east wing was the girls' gym. The boys' and girls' bathrooms were also on opposite ends of the building. There was no plumbing on the upper floors. Bathrooms were only in the basement. There were symbols on the bathroom doors for people who couldn't read. There was a crescent moon for girls and a star for boys,

just like the symbols that were used on outhouses. And, instead of calling these facilities bathrooms, a proper person always referred to them as *lavatories*. Also, the proper euphemism for the outhouse was the *privy*.

Across the hall from my classroom was a very mysterious room where kids were not allowed to enter. On the door were the words "Boiler Room," and occasionally I could peek inside when the janitor opened the door. The boiler was a huge tank that had lots of steam pipes coming out of the top. Mounted on the side of the tank were lots of intriguing gauges, and valves, and sight tubes. Beside the boiler was another tank that held fuel oil. I told my father that I wanted to know how the steam boiler worked, so he took me to Washington Park, where they had an old Southern Pacific steam engine for kids to climb on and explore. He showed me what all the gauges, valves, and tubes were for, and how the fuel oil was burned in the firebox to heat the steam pipes. I was agog with fascination.

All the burnable trash from the school was incinerated in the boiler room. The trash consisted mostly of paper and cardboard. We didn't have any plastic, Styrofoam, or polyethylene, which would emit poisonous gasses if you burned them. Cans and bottles would be picked up once a week by the trash collector. At home, household garbage was also incinerated. You could burn your trash in your wood-burning stove, or your fireplace, or the burn barrel you had in the backyard. The burn barrel was a 55-gallon oil drum with holes cut into it for proper ventilation. Later, in the late 1950s, at Pagano's Hardware Store you could buy a slab concrete burn barrel for your backyard. This new state-of-the-art luxury was called an *incinerator*.

Schools did not have cafeterias in the early 1900s. We had an hour for lunch, so some kids went home to eat, and others brought a bag lunch. We had to remember to take the paper bag home to use again tomorrow. Instead of a paper bag, some kids brought their lunch in an old tobacco tin. If you were really lucky, your mother bought you a tin lunchbox

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In 1909, Washington School was established at Eighth Street at Santa Clara Avenue in a classical style with large pediments held aloft by Ionic columns.

*In 1955, the original building was removed and replaced with a modern structure. Change occurred again in 2012, when the name became Maya Lin School in honor of the American artist who created the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Civil Rights Memorial.
Image: Alameda Museum.*



Washington School . . . Continued from page 8



with a round lid and an easy-carry handle, just like a bucket. Most people called these *lunch buckets*.

In 1909, when Washington School was built, schools did not have playgrounds.

The undeveloped land behind the school was called "the garden." We think of a garden as a beautifully landscaped area with artistically manicured flowers and shrubs, but actually, the word comes from the German word *garten*, which best translates as yard. The word *kindergarten* literally means "a yard for children." The word zoo is shortened from *zoological garden*, which literally means "a yard for animals." So, originally, the school play yard was called "the garden." In the 1920s, the playground was paved with asphalt, which was, at that time, called *tar macadam*. When I attended Washington School in the 1950s, everyone referred to the playground as the *tarmac*.

When Alameda took out the flashing red light on Santa Clara Avenue and replaced it with a 3-colored traffic signal, people continued to call it a stop light. The bus stop in front of the school had a sign that said *coach stop*, even though it had been half a century since a stage coach had stopped there. Boys pants were called *breeches*, and girls dresses were called *frocks*. Cursive handwriting was called *penmanship*, and homework was called *your lessons*. The small room you passed through between the hallway and your classroom was called the *cloakroom*. How many 10-year-old kids have you ever seen go to school wearing a cloak?

Alameda's First Woman Candidate for City Council

by Myrna van Lunteren

ON ELECTION DAY, 1911, proposition 4, to change the 1849 state constitution, giving women the right to vote, was voted on in California. Although the new bill was soundly defeated in the San Francisco Bay Area, the final state-wide vote was 125,037 to 121,450, a difference of 3,587 votes, making California the sixth state to support voting rights for women.

Now women could vote. In fact, they were confirmed to have the same citizen's rights as men, which meant they could also be voted for, since the rule was, anyone who could vote, was eligible, with some further requirements.

In the run-up period before the next election, in 1913, Mrs. Eileen Allen, of 1356 Broadway, walked into City Hall and petitioned to be placed on the ballot as a candidate for the open seat of Councilman-at-large. The City Clerk, startled out of complacency, wrote to the City Attorney for his opinion who, after a very brief period of consideration, replied that placing Mrs. Allen on the ballot was pointless, since she was not eligible; a candidate had to have been an elector in the city for three years; she was at least one year short.

Mrs. Allen sued the City, arguing that the 1911 amendment had meant that women should have had the right to vote all along—and won; California Superior Court decision number No. 37631. The ballot was redrafted; Mrs. Allen became the first woman in the City of Alameda whose name was placed on a ballot.



The result of the election? Frank Otis was elected Mayor, and George T. Morris won the position of Councilman-at-large. It would take until 1953—about 40 more years and two world wars—before a woman (Irene Moresi) was elected onto the Alameda City Council. It would take until 1983—70 years later—before the first woman was elected mayor of Alameda (Anne B. Diamant).

Source: *Alameda Museum archives, 11.39.3 (documents)*

Women elected as Mayor in the City of Alameda

2022 - 2026
Election Pending

2018 - 2022
Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft

2014 - 2018
Trish Herrera Spencer

2010 - 2014
Marie Gilmore

2002 - 2010
Beverly Johnson

1983 - 1987
Anne B. Diamant

★★★★★

**For a list of all
Alameda Mayors visit
[alamedamuseum.org/
city-officials-lists](http://alamedamuseum.org/city-officials-lists)**



FROM THE COLLECTION

The Pupil's Perfect Desk

by Valerie Turpen

SCHOOL FURNITURE EVOLVED

over the years. Your memory of a school desk is very different from your grandparents' or your great-grandparents' before them. On display in the museum is a desk set from the Encinal School on Santa Clara Avenue at Bay Street which opened in 1891.

This style of desk with wood seats and with cast iron legs became popular in the late 19th century. At the time a public education was available to children between the ages of six and fourteen. As more children attended school the better school desk was designed to accommodate them.

These desks were arranged in a row as the seat in front had a desk-top attached to the back for the next student. The seats flipped up for compact storage and the distance between desks could be adjusted.

Wood is not always the most comfortable surface, but these seats and backrests were curved to fit the body sitting in them for hours. The desktop slanted slightly toward the student and often included a built-in

inkwell. The inkwell was refilled daily by a student chosen as the ink monitor. This was a privilege and a curse as the monitor usually filled the well in the morning before the other students arrived.

Our desks also have a groove across the top to place the writing utensil so it would not roll away. A shelf under the desktop made it convenient to store books, a slate, or paper if you had it.

The industry of school merchandise was booming and selling desks was a competitive business. The leading manufacturers were located in the Midwest and the desk model names were as racy as cars, which were developing on the near horizon.

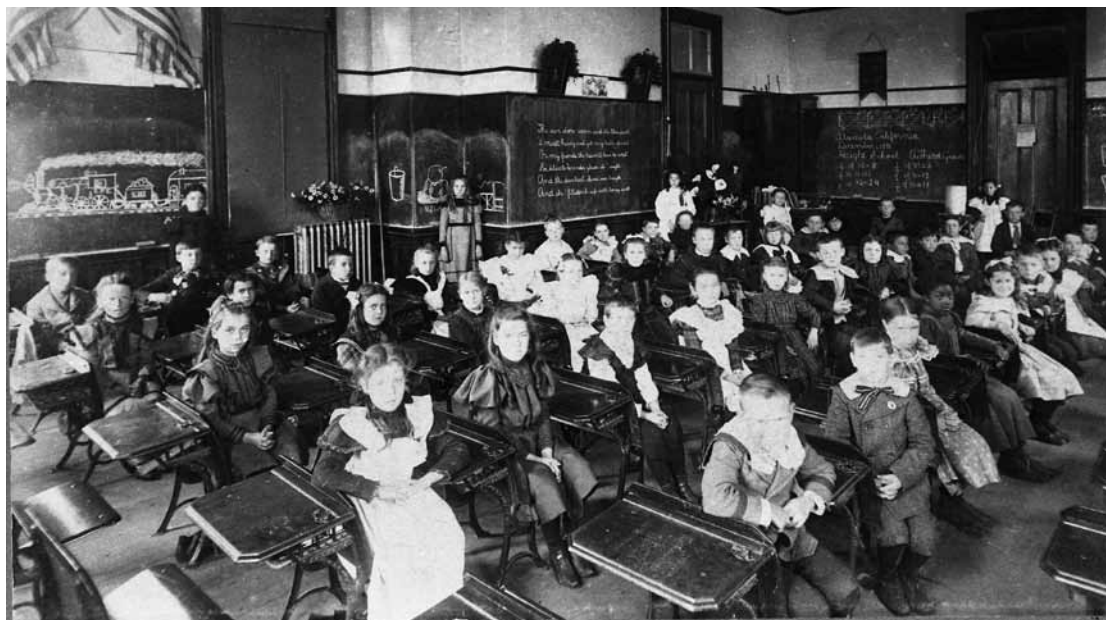


On the leg is a number 2, the size of the desk. Desks came in sizes 1 to 6.

In Chicago A.H. Andrews & Co. advertised the *Triumph*; Sears Roebuck and Co. made the *Majestic*; Haney School Furniture Co. of Grand Rapids, had the *Faultless Automatic*; The Sidney School Furniture Co. of Sidney, Ohio flaunted the *Fashion* which was proclaimed to be "the latest and best".

The museum's desks do not have a visible company name, so it is unclear what fantastic model it is. It does have a visible number two which would be the size. Desks came in sizes one to six corresponding to student sizes.

In the top of our desks a few pupils did leave interesting carvings and some initials. One set of note is BS which could be in reference to a name or perhaps the lesson for that day.



The third grade class at Haight School on December 1, 1898. How do we know the date? It is written on the chalkboard.

Likely planning for the photograph the blackboards feature an intricate drawing of a SPC train running past a building, a precisely written short story, and a series of math problems. Bouquets adorn the room. Image: Alameda Museum.

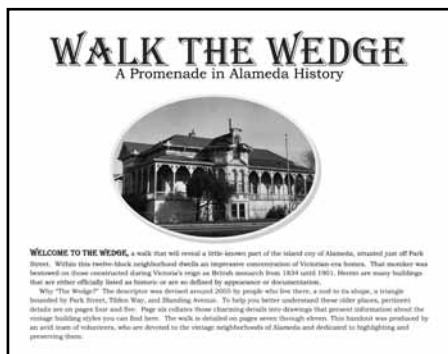


Wedge Team on Tour with Talk, Walk, and Booklet

The Wedge is 12 blocks off Park Street in Alameda. Many of its antique structures were built on large lots during the 1870s and 1880s. The little-known isolated location renders the small area vulnerable.

A recent *Alameda Sun* letter from Wedge homeowner Patricia M. Paul warns about recent "up zoning" and height limit increases, "We do not want to be overpowered by rectangular six story apartment buildings. . ."

Alarmed about the potential fate of the Wedge, almost two dozen volunteers rallied to produce a talk, a walking tour, and a booklet to alert residents, city staff, and preservationists. The group is taking their show on tour to inspire people in other Island districts and other beleaguered Bay Area towns. Free booklets will be handed out at each talk.



Current Lecture Dates:

October 23, 2022
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
First Congregational Church
1912 Central Avenue

Admissions underwritten by the Wedge team.

April 2023
Mastick Center
1155 Santa Clara Avenue

ALAMEDA MUSEUM

• • • • 2022 EVENT LIST • • • •

Join us online on the dates listed. Museum members please check your email for announcements or visit **AlamedaMuseum.org** and click on the homepage header to register.

• **September 19, 2022** **Latino Heritage Month**

A conversation about Latino identity, history, and politics with George Galvis, executive director of Communities United for Youth Restorative Justice (CURYJ).

• **October 17, 2022** **Museum Exhibitions Workshop**

A conversation about the displays and exhibits at the Alameda Museum.

• **November 17, 2022** **Native American Heritage Month** A conversation about Indigenous histories, with Corrina Gould, tribal spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan.

• **December 5, 2022** **From Haight to Love and Beyond** A conversation about place names in Alameda, Dennis Evanosky, editor of the *Alameda Post* and Rasheed Shabazz.



**ALAMEDA
MUSEUM**

2324 Alameda Avenue
Alameda CA 94501

IN THIS ISSUE

- *Alameda's Radio Pioneers*
- *From the President's Podium*
- *School Begins in Alameda*
- *Memories of Washington School*
- *Alameda's First Woman Candidate for City Council*
- *From the Collection:
The Pupil's Perfect Desk*

ALAMEDA MUSEUM

OPEN WEEKENDS

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

Interested in research? Call 510-521-1233 or
email info@AlamedaMuseum.org



MEYERS HOUSE & GARDEN

2021 Alameda Avenue
OPEN

4th Saturday each month
1:00 - 4:00 pm
3:00 pm last tour

\$5

**MASKS
REQUIRED**

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Alameda Museum is seeking nominees for the 2023 Board of Directors

(A VOLUNTEER POSITION)

and an Executive Director.

(A PAID POSITION)

This is an opportunity for members of our community to create a dynamic, working board striving to keep the collection interesting, educational, and enjoyable for our diverse population.

Please see the insert for more information.

THE ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY
& THE LEGACY HOME TOUR present

The Gold Coast And The Shore Before A self-guided Architectural Walking Tour Audio narrated by Denise Brady



Tour opens Sunday, September 25th.
Join us! Franklin Park 10am to 4pm

Tickets and guidebook available in Franklin Park.

Learn about lagoon birds from East Bay
Regional Parks Naturalists

Restoration vendor booths and refreshments

**App available on your smartphone or
tablet through 10/26/22**

Download a pdf or order a full color, keepsake guidebook

Reserve your tour today!

Go to alameda-legacy-home-tour.org