

UNION CITY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Founded by Myrla Raymundo, MBA

3841 Smith Street, Union City, California 94587, Tel. (510) 324-3298

Three Components

(1) Museum & Artifacts, (2) Oral History (3) Preservation of Historical Homes

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Myrla Raymundo, Founding Editor/Writer

MISSION STATEMENT

The Union City Historical Museum is a non-profit organization committed to the preservation, maintenance and protection of, and the education of the public about the architectural, cultural, natural and historical heritage resources of the City of Union City.

FOUNDER'S NOTES

that the Museum is barely two years old. It is now visited by people from everywhere and boasts about hundreds of artifacts.

The museum focuses on the lives of longtime residents and the things that they used in those days. It is said that humanity's progress could be traced by studying the way they lived, the tools they used in their agriculture, their homes, the businesses they operated, the city leaders in those days.

Museum Houses Vision Of Founder

Not far from the bustling Union Landing, amid a group of old but historical homes, sits an old brick building, unchanged since the early years, yet surprisingly majestic in appearance. It is made entirely of reinforced concrete with huge windows.

When you first walk in, you will be amazed at the collections, considering

That is the reason why we collect whatever we could find and whatever is donated to us for posterity and for study by future generations.

We collect oral history. This history is taken from the minds and thoughts of hundreds of long-time residents of Union City.

We know that when people get old, they have stories to tell, because they had lived for many years. I believe in the old saying: "Only little children and old folks tell the truth." They will tell us about their inspiring memoirs, their vivid description of the old Alvarado and old Decoto, a chronicle of their remarkable achievements and their poignant and humorous anecdotes.

The people I interviewed recalled growing up in the old towns of Alvarado and Decoto. This collection of oral histories will provide us with a priceless documentation of our city's past years. And whatever stories I got and will get from them will tell us where we have been, how far we have come and how far we have to go.

The recording of the Union City history goes on. The museum is a showcase of the residents' stories, the news clips collected through the years, and old and new pictures. The museum's holdings also include donated artifacts and maybe later on, archeological digs as we continue to carry on the history. We will be doing research continuously.

With the cooperation of the Union City residents, the city staff and the city council, I am sure that we will be on our way to achieve a continuous recording of our history, which could be a very important segment of a city. After all, what is a city without a history?

MYRLA RAYMUNDO

**ALAMEDA COUNTY IS 150 YEARS
OLD
by Myrla Raymundo**

Alameda County is 150 years old this year, 2003. It was formed in 1853. Alameda County was made up of parts of Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties and was named after a creek that runs through the southern half of the county. At first, there were only 3,000 people. Now the population mushroomed to an estimated 1.4 million.

We are proud to say that Union City, California, incorporated in 1959 by a group of enthusiastic residents, is part of Alameda County. We boast of being the first county seat of Alameda County and the first sugar beet manufacturing in the whole country.

We are also proud to say that we had distinguished mayors who helped shaped the city. I would like to mention two of them.

**Tom Kitayama – First Japanese-
American Mayor of Union City**

Tom Kitayama occupied the positions of planning commissioner, councilman and mayor of Union City. He was mayor for 32 years and has the greatest contribution in the history of Union City. He is the biggest force behind the formation of a new East Bay City – now Union City, California.

Bernie Morales – First Mexican-American Mayor of Union City

Bernie Morales, the first Mexican-American to be elected to public office in Alameda County, was elected to the City Council on April 1964, two years as a councilman and two terms as mayor until the end of his term in 1968. He said that he always has the desire to a commitment for excellence and an obsessive desire to win. With his long list of accomplishments for the City of Union City and for the Alameda County, he is really committed to excellence.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY
Compiled and written by Myrla Raymundo

**ABOUT THE OLD TOWN
ALVARADO DURING THE OLDEN
TIMES**

Alvarado is an old settlement having been settled in 1850 and known variously as New Haven, Union City and Alvarado, it's present name. The population is small and there are a number of substantial buildings. The principal feature, however, is the beet-sugar factory, which has been in operation for many years.

Alvarado is situated on the Southern Pacific Railroad 19 miles from Oakland.

It was the first capital of Alameda County. The capital was taken away by San Leandro and San Leandro finally lost it to Oakland. The first courthouse located at Alvarado at the corner of Smith and Levee streets was burned to the ground. Alvarado, however, has gotten along without the prestige of a county seat. She is rich in her salt lands and marshes, in her artesian well flow, in her beet and farmlands and in her great sugar works. Alvarado is very fertile, being well adapted to the growth of all kinds of garden produce, fruit and sugar beets. Business of all lines is well represented.

Here also is the Oakland Water Company's pumping plant. The artesian wells have been flowing for 40 years and the flow is just as strong as when it was first discovered. On this artesian belt, the works of the Oakland Water Company, which company has now been absorbed the Contra Costa Water company, have been erected. The works have been pumping millions of gallons of water per day.

Mr. R.I.V. RALPH OF ALVARADO

The leading merchant in Alvarado is Mr. I.V. Ralph, who has been established here for many years. He has a well-stocked store of general merchandise on Levee Street, in which is the post office, he is postmaster. This is also the office of the Sunset Telephone and he is the agent. He also has a carpet and furniture store across the street, where he also carries a good stock of window shades, matting and upholstered goods, etc.

(Lupe St. Denis, Union City Historical Museum Director, donated Mr. Ralph's old refrigerator and stove to the Union City Historical Museum. They are now on display at the Museum.)

HOUSING IN THE EARLY 1970'S **by Myrla Raymundo**

Union City's diverse community can be found in the variety of housing in this city. Union City has the modest, smaller and older houses, the elaborate, large and more modern units, the traditional single family detached residence, the townhouse and garden homes, apartments of all kinds, and beautiful mobile home communities in California.

Old Alvarado- Old Alvarado became the county seat. At the time, marsh and fertile agricultural land surrounded the area, including what would become Henry C. Smith's town of Alvarado. People came and worked and built their homes. The streets were lined up with beautiful historic homes. Some are big homes and some are little houses lined up by the railroad train.

Decoto Neighborhoods –Decoto began in 1870 when the Railroad Company purchased 284 acres from the three Decoto Brothers. During the winters of 1870 and 1871, 27,000 trees were planted. The area was mostly orchards and farmland. Homes were built and are lined up in narrow streets. Some homes are beautiful with artistic designs.

Dry Creek Apartments - As you pass by Whipple Road through Mission Boulevard, you will see the Dry Creek Apartments. It is surrounded by 1,000-acre ranch and State Horse Park trails and located among giant trees on a natural creek. It offers quiet seclusion in a luxurious setting. Facilities include heated pool, health spa, planned recreation and security guards.

You'll pass by a rainbow of gladioli on the right, and a stream flowed on the left until the narrowing lane came to a fence going to the "secret garden". It is the Dry Creek Cottage and Garden. At the end of the apartment complex, there is also a beautiful house that used to be the old Decoto School House.

The Tropics- As you pass by Alvarado Niles east, you'll find casual California living at its very finest. The Tropics is a custom designed mobile home community in a park setting. At the gate it says for people over 55 and above only. Each home unit is planned to provide maximum privacy, spaciousness and easy living, quiet, relaxing surroundings and no through-traffic. The residential park setting includes a big, beautiful, air-conditioned clubhouse with 16,000 square feet of indoor recreational facilities, including saunas, library, ceramics room, billiard and card rooms – plus a large outdoor, heated swimming pool by a waterfall.

Casa Verde Housing – During those times, the West Side of Union City was used as pastureland. Here, one of the first housing complexes was built. and is known as the Casa Verde housing. It is a big sprawling land with hundreds of upper scale housing and built in the early 70's. There are two, three and four and even five bedrooms with a huge living room, a family room, fireplace, and dining room. Some homes have swimming pools, nice gardens and barbecue pits. The construction of this area brought many arrivals to Union City.

The housing can be reached through Santa Maria Drive or Santa Susana Drive.

MORE ON UNION CITY HISTORY (Compiled by Myrla Raymundo)

Union City is the youngest incorporated city in Alameda County. In the early 1850's a number of Americans left the booming city of San Francisco to become farmers and traders on the east shore of the Bay. Most settled at the mouth of San Antonio Slough (the Oakland Estuary) but others came up San Leandro Creek to found San Leandro and up Alameda Creek to the area of the present Union City. Among these latter were Ezra Decoto, Henry C. Smith, Ephraim Dyer, C.S. Eigenbrodt and George Emerson.

One of them, Henry C. Smith soon had a prosperous village thriving next to the older Mexican settlement. This village was centered on the general store operated by Smith and named Church known as A.M. Church and Company. It faced the dock then used to be the steamers which carried the farm produce raised in the area to the markets in San Francisco. After one of these steamers, owned by J. M. Horner and built at Union City, New Jersey, the new settlement was called "Union City". At the same time it was customary to call the neighboring settlement (east of present-day Levee Street) New Haven after the birthplace of one of the pioneers.

The Community declined somewhat during the Civil War years, but was revived by the establishment of the first successful beet sugar mill in the United States. This was made possible by a cheap transportation by water of sugar beets from Yolo County and other beet-raising areas down the Bay directly to the Alvarado Dock on Alameda Creek.

The sugar mill, expanded over the years by the Holly Sugar Corporation was one of the city's chief landmarks and leading industries.

The Decoto area grew more slowly although from a very early date, it was a principal stopping place for the state coaches running from Hayward's Hotel and Washington corners (Irvington). George Emerson built a house, on Whipple Road in 1852 and other settlers such as John Cleveland Whipple, Andrew Jackson Hare and numerous emigrants from the island portions of Portugal arrived at an early date. Ezra Decoto divided a portion of his land into town lots in 1867 and a pleasant attractive community soon grew up fronting on the old Mission Road. As the years passed, the whole area became noted as a "breadbasket" for the large cities to the north. The name of Decoto became proverbial for good chickens, strawberries, apricots, cherries and dairy products.

Industry began to move into Decoto following World War I and soon resulted in that community completely outstripping in population the older western town of Alvarado. The Pacific States Steel Corporation, a lumber mill, a tile works and several smaller enterprises grew up, supplemented by such farm-based industries, a cannery, a number of vegetable and fruit packing houses and the largest dairy in the county. By 1950, Decoto had 3,000 people and an enlightened core of civic-minded citizens began to talk about incorporation. The people petitioned for incorporation and after an election, the city was incorporated as Union City on January 13, 1959.

OLD ALVARADO HISTORY
(Photos and stories contributed by
Mr. Brune of Old Alvarado)

First Schoolhouse in Old Alvarado

service station sold gasoline for three companies, Shell Oil Co. General and Richfield. In 1928, it became the first station in Washington Township to sell only Shell gasoline. The original station was demolished in 1961 and a new one was built at the same location at 31112 Horner St. (Corner of Horner & Vallejo Streets.) After 50 years with Shell Oil Co., the station was closed in 1978. The present station will be demolished some time in 2003.

This home was located at 4167 Horner Street. It was the first designated schoolhouse for Alvarado. Prior to that, school was held at different homes in the area. The first school classes in Alvarado were held in an old home of Capt. Marsten about 1853. This historic home was demolished in November 1998.

U-Auto Stop Service Station

This "U-Auto Stop" service station, owned by Mr. & Mrs. Antone Santos, was built in 1927. At that time, the

NEW IN UNION CITY

By Myrla Raymundo

A TASTE OF CULTURE

On Saturdays during summer from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., the old Alvarado/Cesar Chavez Park is bustling with activities. People from all over come and check out Union City's diversity by shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables from different countries at the Farmers' Market. Then they stay to listen to some fantastic music of diverse styles at the park.

Some of the great bands that are lined up are Onami Taiko Drummers, So. Alameda Co. Buddhist Church; La Familia (Afro-Cuban Sounds), Mariachi Sol Azteca de San Jose (Youth Mariachi); Sonata Pi (Acapela Soul), Dave Crimmen (Rockabilly Music), Maruichi Tapatio (Classic Mariachi); Klassix Plus One (Union City's Own Dance Band); Dhun Band (popular Hindi Music) and Pep Sounds (Cool Jazz).

Come and enjoy the produce and come for your listening pleasure.

PACIFIC STATES STEEL SITE

On August 13, 2003, the city leaders and residents celebrated the remediation of the PCCS plant site. The builders are on their way from the ugly site to beautiful homes nestled in the green hills. It was a long tedious process, but we are on our way to a beautiful PSSC Site.

UNION LANDING TRANSIT CENTER

There is something new in the neighborhood.

There will be a transit center at the Union Landing, where buses will be able to stop at the same time and allow riders to quickly transfer from one line to another. It will provide safe and convenient connections to several local and regional bus routes.

The 30,000 square foot transit hub is being built near the Alvarado-Niles Road entrance to Union Landing, between the Union 76 service station and In-N-Out Burger. The center is designed to simultaneously handle up to nine buses. UC Transit, AC Transit and paratransit drivers will have easy access to the facility and its numerous loading areas.

Trees will be planted intensively throughout the site, including a canopy of trees to separate the center from neighboring businesses. Vines will be planted to cover the decorative steel trellis that will run the length of the center.

Hopefully, people can leave their cars at home and come to the Union Landing to shop, go to the movies or go to the restaurants.

**THE UNION CITY SENIOR
CITIZENS ASSOCIATION**

By Miles J. Price

The Union City Senior Citizens Association came into existence in March of 1988 and operated with temporary officers until October 1, 1988. At that time Miles J. Price, Chair of the By-laws Committee presented the Association Bylaws. They were passed by a majority of 75 seniors present at that meeting. Permanent officers and board were elected. The Association was incorporated in November 1988. In January, the following officers were sworn in: Ralph Ruggieri, President, Buster Bellomo, Vice President, Ann Gimenez, Treasurer and Irene Wohlgermot, Secretary.

The purpose was and is to engage in various programs to benefit the aged and the aging of this community and to provide facilities and materials for the comfort and enjoyment of the aged and the aging of this community, regardless of race or creed.

From its start, the Association was a leader in providing services to our mature adults. The city had only one service in 1988; the then newly formed Union City Senior Citizen Commission. There was no place to meet and no programs at all. We provided meetings, noon dances and Line Dancing. The Commission got the city to let the association use Holy Center for meeting purposes and services and a part time Community Outreach Person was hired.

The Association ran senior programs off and on for the next four or five years. Two part time Staff persons worked with the Association in the first few years of

Senior Programming in Union City. Some people were involved in running programs; Tony Vierra, Miles J. Price, Buster Bellomo, Carrie Bellomo, Peter Pinto and his band. The programs were Trips and Travel, Heidi Kitayama Crafts, Potlucks and Bingo Games.

This organization helped built Union City's Senior Services. The Association was in on the ground floor. They leave the Center and the community a long history of service. The Association was active from March 1988 to December 2003.

**A BEAUTIFUL THING CAME TO
AN END**

By Myrla Raymundo

After fifteen (15) years of active participation in the community, the Union City Senior Association is closing. As the only senior group in Union City, it had numerous activities for seniors in the area. In its heyday, the Association was vigorous and active. They hold the annual Gladiola Festival, a barbecue and other activities including horseshoe contest, trips, lunches and clubs.

For the past months, the Association did not have president, vice president and treasurer positions. Tony Vierra acted as the presiding officer and Josephine Pando, as the Acting Treasurer. That was because many seniors that used to be active can't be active anymore, or have just passed away.

So they say, everything will come to end. This association came into a beautiful ending. Thanks to the pillars of the community who made a lot of good things happen in Union City.

**UNION CITY'S ROSE GARDEN
RESTAURANT REACHES 25TH
ANNIVERSARY**

By Myrla Raymundo

Lawrence Wong

Lawrence Wong and his sister Susana Wong are the proud owners of the Rose Garden Restaurant in Alvarado Niles and the Roses Café in the bustling Union Landing in Union City. Referred to as a Union City Landmark, The Rose Garden Restaurant have been serving delicious Chinese cuisine to Union City residents and to the Tri-City area. It is now celebrating its 25th year of existence.

Mr. Thomas Wong, the late father, started the restaurant at the former Union Square Mall. At that time, it had 30 seats and Thomas waited on diners while his wife Camilla worked in the kitchen preparing the meals. Their three children, Susanna, Lawrence, and Peter helped with the restaurant work after school and on weekends. Years of dedicated work and long hours at the restaurant enabled Thomas to support his family and allowed his children to go to college

In 1989, the Union Square Mall was sold and demolished to make way for the New Marketplace Center. At this time,

the restaurant was relocated to Central Plaza facing the busy Alvarado-Niles Road.

After the relocation, Susana, who graduated from UC Berkeley in Business Administration and is presently a Board Member of the Washington Township Hospital, took over the management of the restaurant. The restaurant now seats 130 and often caters to many large functions. The restaurant, which is an active member of the city's Chamber of Commerce, supported local charities.

When development talks of the Dyer Street Triangle began, the thoughts of opening a second location took interests on the Wong family. The ROSES Café was then created.

Susana Wong now takes charge of the ROSES Café. The restaurant serves good lunches and dinners and caters to big parties. It is located in the mega cinema complex of the Union Landing Center and the rest of the upper scale restaurants.

Meanwhile, Lawrence takes charge of the Rose Garden Restaurant at Alvarado-Niles and is so busy catering to guests and outside orders.

When interviewed, Lawrence said, "I am proud to say that from the modest origins of the Rose Garden Restaurant to the modern ROSES Café, the Wong Family created a local independent family business that now spans 25 years."

He invited us to come and enjoy delicious Chinese cuisine and eat, drink and meet friends.

DOUG AND GRACE MAR
Early Casa Verde Residents

By Myrla Raymundo

In 1946, Doug Mar at an early age, came from Seattle to the Bay Area with his parents. They settled in San Francisco where he met his wife Grace. "I was gonna visit Grace's cousin, whom I was dating, but Grace opened the front door. That was the start of my eyes turning to Grace instead of her cousin." Doug said jokingly. They got married.

In 1967, he and Grace and their two children settled in Casa Verde, one of the very first development in Union City and one to be recorded as the big change from rural town to a big city. "We were the very first families who moved to Casa Verde when it was newly developed. The Casa Verde Park was not as beautiful as it is today. The other streets were not yet developed. The developer was just starting to build homes at the huge open space," Grace said.

The early families, just like the very first Pilgrims, became so close to each other. They had barbecues in the two adjoining streets that they closed temporarily. They had potlucks and the children knew each other very well.

Doug is now retired and is very busy with his backyard and the front garden. He worked for the colleges in his working years. Grace, a petite and pretty 75-year old lady, fills her time with her garden at her home and also at her garden located in the Casa Verde Park close to her home. She was recently featured in the Argus Newspaper showing her beautiful

garden, which Doug calls "Grace's Oasis."

Grace, a retired office assistant for the College of Alameda, was born in Oakland Chinatown at a huge apartment at Seventh and Alice Street. When asked if the house is still there, she said it still stands there with great splendor.

Doug and Grace now have grown children who have lives of their own. They visit them and take great pride of their professional achievements and their grandchildren.

They take care of the beautiful garden in the park and take care of their two beautiful Chinese pugs, Sumo and Buddha. Grace walks the dogs at the park every day. That keeps her looking so young.

**BE A PART OF THE UNION CITY
HISTORICAL MUSEUM**

Please join the Union City Historical Museum, a non-profit organization in Union City. It is located in the old Alvarado area at 3841 Smith Street.

As a member, you have free admission to the Museum, free use of the Historical Library, a one year subscription to the Museum Newsletter, featuring Union City history, Oral History from long time residents and news, and invitations to events and programs.

Please choose your membership:

Individual-----\$ 10.00

Supporting-----\$ 25.00

Corporation/Business----- \$ 50.00

Lifetime----- \$200.00

Please send your check payable to the Union City Historical Museum to the above address.

MUSEUM DOCENTS

We're calling on the Museum members to help us. If you're available in any of the days that we are open, please come by and help.

The training for Museum Docents is on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. You will feel fulfilled knowing that you are helping in the preserving and recording of the history of our city. You will also have a full knowledge of the history of our city. Museum docents man the Museum, do library work, conduct tours of the Museum and make educational presentations.

Call Myrla Raymundo at 324-3841 or 489-0133 or e-mail at RAYMYR@aol.com.

HISTORY PRESENTATION

The history of Union City is being presented at the Union City Historical Museum on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Please come to the Museum and learn more about our city.

**VIDEO SHOWING OF ORAL
HISTORY**

There will soon be a continuous showing on video of people who had lived in Union City for a long time. We are going around and interviewing people in the area.

There will also be a continuous showing of historic homes and buildings in Union City.

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