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Sourisseau Academy
Smith-Layton Archive presents:
**Local Residential
Architecture**

A Simplistic Semblance of Sequence in Sumptuous Style!

by Thomas Layton

Les Amis (The Friends)
March 2016

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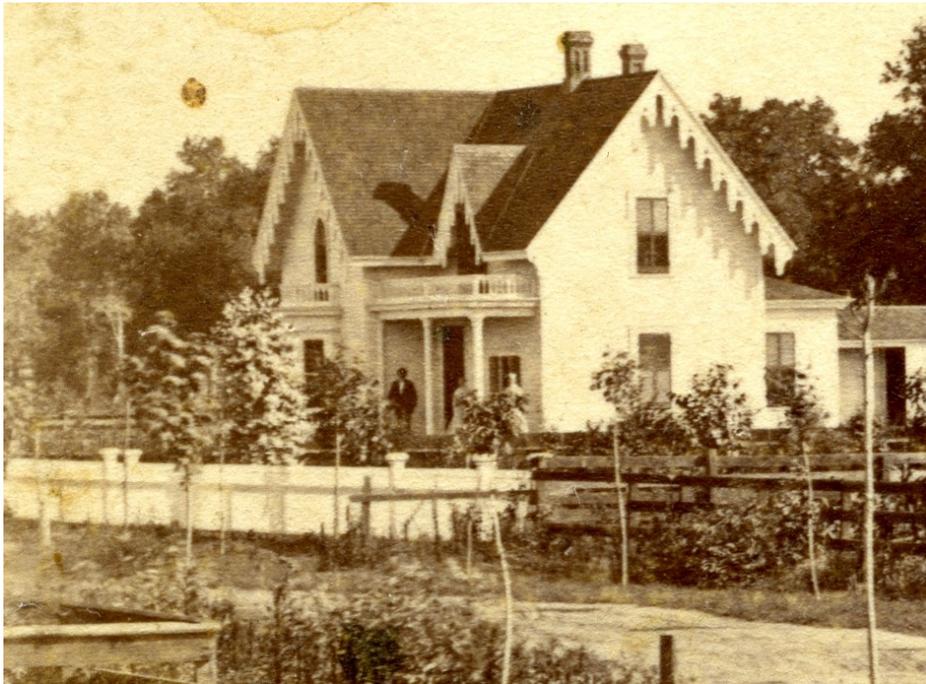
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[32] **From earth did we spring!** The most characteristic domestic structures of El Pueblo de San José, founded in 1777 as the first civilian settlement in California, were thick walled rectangles, built of sun-dried earthen bricks, containing one or two rooms, and covered with simple gabled roofs. The adobe walls were whitewashed with slaked lime, produced by burning oyster shells collected from the San Francisco Bay, which was then mixed with water. This 1909 Alice Hare photo shows the surviving portion of Antonio Sunol's complex of adobe buildings off the northwest corner of Market Plaza. The photo was taken just prior to its demolition.



[33] **Greek Democracy.** In the American mind, independence and its emphasis on democratic principles traced back to ancient Athens. The Greek Revival style, which arrived in California with the Gold Rush, featured a rectangular plan, a symmetrical facade, gabled roofs with eave returns, which formed a distinct triangular pediment as commonly found on Greek temples. Vertical elements on the lower level echoed the columns that fronted those temples. That style was frequently found in large public buildings, such as the 1868 Santa Clara County Courthouse shown here. Residential structures of this style had more simplified Greek elements. The prefabricated Baker-Blanchard house is an excellent example of these early frame houses in San Jose. It was one of ten houses shipped from New England around the Horn in 1850 and assembled on Commodore Stockton's Alameda Gardens subdivision.



[34] **Gothic Echoes.** Those same Americans, who streamed into San Jose following the Gold Rush, had grown up with architectural preferences formed in the eastern states, where many houses echoed the Gothic style of churches and cathedrals. An example is Benjamin Cottle's 1860s Gothic Revival-style house, featuring a steeply gabled roof, a front window with a pointed arch, and spidery “gingerbread” which hung from the eaves. Another example is Samuel Bishop's 1860s home on The Alameda, near the corner of Race Street. Bishop established the first horse-powered transit line in San Jose.



[35] **An Italian Alternative.** Victorian architecture (1860-1900), with styles popular during Queen Victoria's reign, saw the beginnings of the repudiation of the simple, unadorned, classical symmetry of the Greek Revival style. One of the sub-styles of this era was Italianate (1860s-1890s), which mixed classical and non-classical architectural elements. An excellent example was Dr. William Stone's house, built in 1874 at the north-west corner of Fifth and William Streets and designed by Victor Hoffman. Note the low-pitched hipped roof, arched windows, eaves supported by corbels, pediments over the slanted bay windows, and the evenly spaced, classical columns.



[36] **Towers and Turrets.** This newer Victorian look featured asymmetry, with highly ornamented towers, turrets, dormers and outwardly projecting porches. The James Pierce house, designed by J. O. McKee in 1884 and located at the corner of The Alameda and Villa Street, is an example of the Stick or Eastlake style. These houses were typically L-shaped with front-facing gables, square bay windows, and friezes with vertical stick work. The photo on the right is an 1895 Queen Anne style house constructed at 269 S. Second Street. It was owned by O. A. Hale, founder of Hale's department store, and was designed by Reid & Meeker. This firm was responsible for some of the most elaborate examples of this style in San Jose and Los Gatos, which featured round turrets, angled bay windows, patterned shingling and wrap around porches.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
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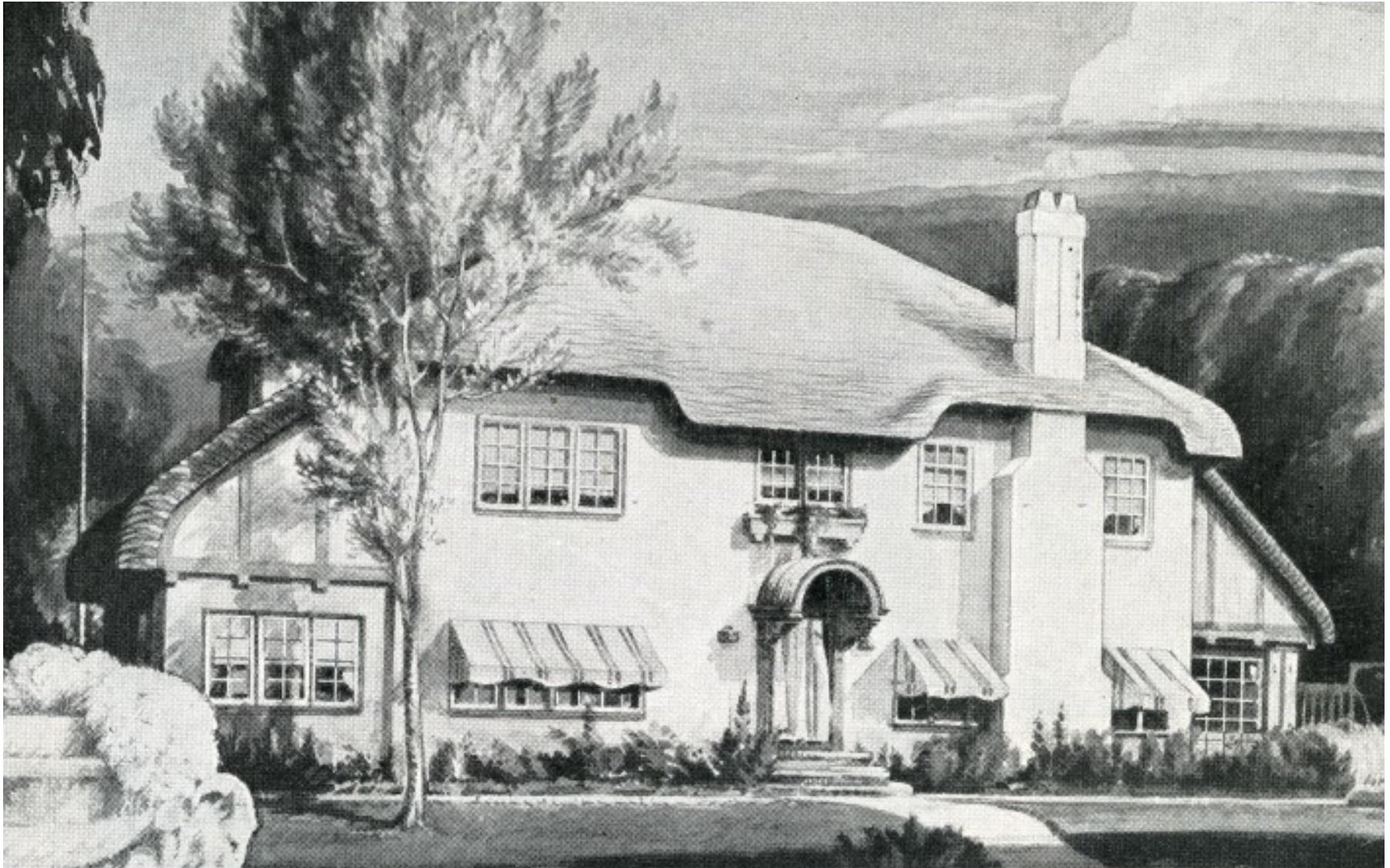
[37] **Classical-lite!** The first decade of the 1900s saw a construction boom of Neoclassical bungalows, inexpensive enough so that they could be afforded by ordinary working families. These modest hipped-roof houses usually had a central dormer and a recessed front porch with classical elements such as porch columns. This photo shows the P. A. Aguirre House, located at 159 Viola Street.



[38] **Simplicity!** By 1905, the over-blown ornamental, decorative complexity and in-your-face pretense of the Victorian aesthetic had inspired an equal and opposite reaction. The Arts and Crafts Movement stressed simplicity of design and an attempt to link form to function, such as the "breakfast nook" in a family-accessible kitchen, all incorporated into an affordable middle-class home. Designs included low-pitched roofs, broad eaves, wide front porches and emphasized local products like cobble masonry, and structural elements such as exposed rafters, handcrafted iron-work, art tile, and built-in cabinetry. This 1907 house on S. Twelfth Street exemplifies a typical example of a Craftsman home. The owner/builder of this house was Jesse A. Prewitt, a brick and stonemason, and the creator of the excellent stone masonry on this home.



[39] **And, with an American flavor!** The Prairie School was a uniquely American reaction against Greek, Roman and Italianate-derived styles. It was an early refinement of the Craftsman Style by Frank Lloyd Wright and others, which stressed a horizontal orientation befitting the vast open space of Middle America, working from a belief that a structure should be allowed to grow from the natural features of the site. Architect Frank Wolfe popularized this style in San Jose and one of his masterpieces was the Col House at 1163 Martin Avenue in Hanchett Park. This photograph was taken just as it reached completion in 1912.



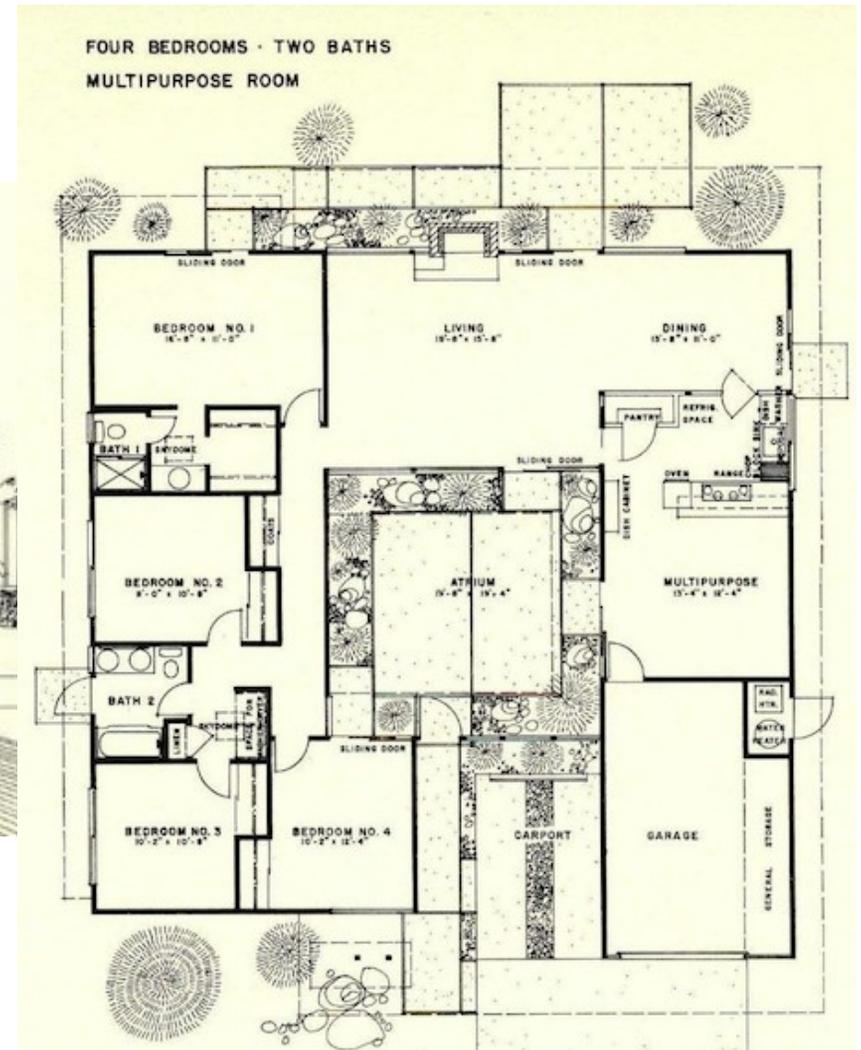
[40] **Turning Retro!** The early 20th century saw an epidemic of exciting innovation. Electric lights and gas stoves became commonplace for middle-class Americans, and the automobile replaced the horse! Although these innovations were welcome, during the 1920s and early 1930s many people, dizzied by change, reached backward to embrace the security of traditional styles — while, of course, retaining all the modern conveniences! This was the era of Revivals: Spanish Colonial; Mission; Mediterranean; English Tudor; and Dutch Colonial, often with a mixture of architectural influences displayed on one home. Here we see S. H. Chase's 1923 English Tudor Revival house on The Alameda. Designed by Charles McKenzie, it featured a faux thatched roof!



[41] **More Retro!** A San Jose subdivision, developed in the 1920s-30s, might find a Dutch Colonial home with a gambrel roof standing next door to an Italian Renaissance-inspired mini-villa with full-length arched windows and doorway. The 1925 development on O'Brien Court pictured above featured a full street of Spanish Colonial/Mediterranean Revival cottages with arched entries and decorative cartouches plastered onto their false-front facades. The builders and their work crews posed proudly in front of the new homes.



[42] **And a two-car garage!** From World War II through the 1970s, a new look — the California Ranch House — came to define residential architecture, and that style soon dominated the housing tracts of the Santa Clara Valley. Cheap land, which had formerly been planted with the Valley's orchards, were scraped clear to provide the large lots that could accommodate long, low, "rambling," single story structures like this one, built in the late 1950s. The "Ranchers" featured flowing floor plans, large windows, and sliding glass doors, which opened to backyard patios. These were the first homes to incorporate the most iconic feature of California suburbia — the two-car attached garage!



[43] **"Bringing the outside in!"** Early in the florescence of the California Rancher, Joseph Eichler (1900-1974) developed some of California's most distinctive Mid-Century Modern residential housing. From 1949 to 1966, he built over 11,000 houses, mostly in Northern California and many in the Santa Clara Valley. His "indoor/outdoor" look featured open floor plans, post-and-beam construction, floor-to-ceiling windows, skylights, and enclosed sky-lit atriums. We present a popular architectural plan and rendering by Eichler designer, Quincy Jones (not the musician).



[44] Mish-mash! By the 1980s, skyrocketing land prices resulted in smaller building lots, favoring two-story houses with smaller footprints. You can look at your Sunday real estate supplement to see the mish-mash of traditional stylistic elements, often grafted onto the same house. But, we remind you that the juxtaposition of historically distinct architectural features has a long history in San Jose. A favorite is this South Tenth Street house, featuring a Mission Revival addition (circa 1905), slapped onto the front of a once elegant Gothic Revival structure. The awkward contrast is somewhat mitigated by a bright pink paint job!

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