

An Architectural Survey of Willow Glen

Brian Veen
California History
January 21, 1980

CALIF.
720.9794

Season 2000 10/11/2000

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Introduction | page 1 |
| 2. Willow Glen | page 1 |
| 3. Pre-Victorian and Victorian Era Buildings | page 3 |
| 4. Residential Architecture, 1910-1930 | page 8 |
| 5. Residential Architecture, 1930-1945 | page 11 |
| 6. Postwar Construction | page 12 |
| 7. Conclusion | page 13 |
| 8. Bibliography | page 16 |

1. Introduction. Just what compromises the Willow Glen area is a question that no one has ever really answered. The incorporated city of Willow Glen claimed the area between the Los Gatos Creek on the west and the Guadalupe Creek on the east, the northern and southern borders being Coe Ave. and Malone Rd. respectively. Today, some people's idea of Willow Glen extends well down into the Cambrian area. For the most part, my researches were confined to the area bordered by Los Gatos Creek, Coe Ave., Bird Ave., and Curtner Ave.

With this paper I have attempted to pick out the basic architectural trends in the Willow Glen area and compare them to trends in California as a whole. It can also be used as a guide for those who wish to explore the area for themselves.

The dates given for the buildings and areas in this paper, when not specifically stated, are estimations made from various observations. The architectural style and conditions of the structures, the sizes of trees and/or stumps, and other information was all taken into account. Even the sidewalks are useful for dating neighborhoods. The styles of sidewalk construction have changed over the years, and some sidewalks have the date they were put in pressed into the concrete. This method, however, is a very risky way of dating homes and was used primarily to confirm inferences already made.

2. Willow Glen. Two hundred years ago, when San Jose was first settled, the Willow Glen area was nothing but a large willow swamp overgrown with wild blackberries. Its rich soil was soon discovered, however, and by the 1840's the basic Willow Glen area was occupied by two ranchos.

The first of these, Rancho Los Coches, was granted in 1836 to Roberto Ballermino, a Christian Indian. It was sold in 1847 to Don Antonio Sunol¹. Rancho San Juan Bautista was granted to Don Joaquin Narvaez in 1844².

After the American conquest of California, Americans began moving into the area. Royal Cottle bought 140 acres in what was then known as "The Willows" in 1852. The Kirk brothers bought 1000 acres in the present Dry Creek area in 1853. Campbell Settle purchased 200 acres in 1860. By 1862, Cottle, Settle, and Zarilla Valencia owned the main Willow Glen area.³ In 1869, Miles Hills bought 94 acres from the three men and subdivided it into smaller parcels.⁴

In 1863 the Willow Glen school was built and in 1869 the Willow Glen Cottage was opened. This was a roadside inn located on Willow Ave.⁵

There was a real estate boom in the area in the 1880's, and many of the larger properties were subdivided. By 1887 there were more than 60 owners of land in the area.⁶ During this time period, most of the residents in the area were orchardists. The most common crop was fruit

-
1. Elizabeth Giarratana, Old Willow Glen, (Palo Alto, 1977), p. 5.
 2. Clyde Arbuckle, interview with author, San Jose, California, January 17, 1980.
 3. Giarratana, p. 24.
 4. Giarratana, p. 19.
 5. Arbuckle, interview with author.
 6. The Willows, (map of area, 1887).

largely peaches, apricots, cherries, and prunes. There was some diversification, however: the Coe, Sansevain, and Bird families grew hops in the Bird Ave. area.⁷

The area began to take on a more residential character as time progressed. San Jose shopkeepers and businessmen bought homes along Lincoln Ave. around the turn of the century. In 1913 the first true housing development was built, and smaller residential houses were constructed throughout the 1920's and '30's, filling in the central Willow Glen area prior to World War II.⁸ Willow Glen was actually an incorporated city for nine years, from 1927 to 1936. It had incorporated to prevent the Southern Pacific railroad from laying track through the town, and it was annexed to San Jose to get sewer connections and a high school. Little construction took place during the war, but a postwar housing boom took place. War industries which had moved to the valley turned to peace-time activities and even more industries came in the 50's and 60's. The entire area south and west of a line roughly following Hicks Ave., Pine Ave., Newport Ave., and Curtner Ave. is postwar construction.

3. Pre-Victorian and Victorian Era Buildings in Willow Glen. The earliest home in Willow Glen is of course the Roberto-Sunol Adobe at 770 Lincoln Ave. This building was the ranch house for the Rancho Los Coches, the early history of which is described above. Ballermino built a one room adobe structure around 1836, and Sunol added three brick rooms

7. Giarratana, p. 25.

8. Arbuckle, interview with author.

after his acquisition of the structure?⁹

In 1853 the residence was purchased by Stefano Splivalo, an Italian Sea Captain. Splivalo encased the walls in wood and added the second story and the balcony, making the house over in a basic Monterey Colonial style, which it has retained to this day.¹⁰ In the mid-1970's, the building's present owners completely refurbished it, still maintaining its colonial style.

There are a few homes of the early orchardists still extant in Willow Glen. These houses were usually styled after eastern victorians but built of redwood harvested in the Santa Cruz mountains and milled locally.

One of the earliest homes in Willow Glen is located at 1195 Willow Ave. According to one author and area residents, it was built by the McClaren family in 1854, but city historian Clyde Arbuckle disagrees, saying it is probably 20 years newer. The house appears on an 1876 map; it was the house of J.A. Campbell, who owned a 10 acre orchard. This home appears to have been built in the style of a typical eastern farm house, but remodeling has made correct identification impossible.

There is a very old farmhouse still extant at 1185 Pine Ave. It too is a simple farmhouse, with no detailing or scrollwork. It was built before 1876 by Oscar Wells.¹¹

The house of J.B. Marcovich still stands on the SW corner of Minnesota Ave. and Newport Ave. It was built in the 1870's.¹² This home is a fine example of the Italianate style of architecture. These buildings

9. Phyllis Butler, The Valley of Santa Clara, (San Jose, 1975), p. 136.
Giaratana, p. 7.

10. Butler, p. 136.

11. Historical Atlas of Santa Clara County, (San Francisco, 1876), p. 22.

12. Historical Atlas of Santa Clara County, p. 22.

are typically flat fronted, with angled bays, and are identified by raised porches, flat or low roofs, cornices at the eaves, and quoins at the corners.¹³

Another excellent example of Italianate architecture is located at 1615 Dry Creek Rd. This is the Kirk house, which was built by Theophilus Kirk in 1878 for his wife Lizzie.¹⁴ Kirk owned more than 400 acres when the house was built, and today it is located on a large and beautifully maintained lot. The house contains 11 rooms and became the property of the Junior League in 1978. It is the only orchardist home which is recognized as an historic landmark by the city.

Several other homes have survived the encroachment of communities built in the '20's and '30's. The farmhouse of William Cozzens is still at 1195 Minnesota Ave.; it was built in the 1870's. This is a typical wooden frame house from this era; it is Victorian, but not excessively detailed, and has a few Carpenter Gothic touches.

Another vogue during the Victorian Era was the Queen Anne style. This was marked by an asymmetrical floor plan, round corner towers, and gables. Closely related was the Eastlake/Stick style, having square bays instead of towers and steep roofs.¹⁵ The two styles were often intermixed, and the names were used to cover a variety of styles.

13. Dr. David Eakins (ed.), Focusing in on San Jose, (unpublished project, San Jose State University, 1979), p. 51.

14. Butler, p. 155.

15. Eakins, p. 52.

Willow Glen's finest example of Queen Anne architecture is the David house at 109 Merideth Ave., near Lincoln. It was probably built in the late 1880's or early '90's.

Also in the Queen Anne/Eastlake style are several other orchard homes. A very distinguished Victorian is located at 1118 Nevada Ave. Built by a man named Brown, it was constructed in the 1880's, and is presently situated on a 0.5 acre lot.¹⁶ Two homes on Cherry Ave., one at 1303 and the other at 1252, are also illustrative of this style. Little is known of these homes except that the owner of 1252 tried to deed it to the Pioneer society in exchange for a guarantee of lifetime membership for her daughter. The offer was rejected.¹⁷ The Crump house is located at 1305 Willow. It was built in the 1880's and is a smaller version of the typical Queen Anne house, being more of a cottage. Crump was a cherry orchardist.¹⁸ Another beautiful Eastlake is located at 796 Coe Ave. It was built about 1890 by Albert Greer.¹⁹

Many people began building residences in "The Willows" around the turn of the century, people who had no intention of keeping orchards. Willow Glen gradually gained its residential flavor.

Several Queen Anne residences were constructed during this time period for this reason. The Buffington house at 1224 Lincoln was built

16. Arbuckle, interview with the author.

17. Arbuckle, interview with the author.

18. Arbuckle, interview with the author.

19. Giarratana, p. 68.

near the turn of the century, as was the house at 1518 Newport.²⁰ This home on Newport was owned by Ernest Billweller, who was the official meteorologist in the area until the weather station was moved to Redwood City; after that, he reported weather for the San Jose area with instruments he kept in the city hall.

Two residential homes are also classified as historical resources by the city. One is the Richards house at 1550 Hicks Ave. It is the only example of Georgian architecture in Willow Glen; the tall columns, wide entrance stairs, and classical pediment make it look like an antebellum Southern mansion.²¹ In fact it was built circa 1910 by Dr. Charles Richards, an early benefactor of the San Jose Symphony.²²

The other historical resource is the well known Maynard house at 1151 Minnesota Ave. Erected in 1898 by Edward Maynard, this extravagant home fits no style perfectly; it is best described as an eclectic Victorian. Three stories high and containing 13 rooms, this home was built from hand-picked virgin redwood and sandstone.²³

One last residence from this era is the J.S. Smith house on Newport Ave. This home was built around the turn of the century by Smith, a pioneer manufacturer of food graters and processors.²⁴ It predates the Span-

20. Arbuckle, interview with author.

21. Giarratana, p. 90.

22. Giarratana, p. 91.

23. Butler, p. 155.

24. Arbuckle, interview with author.

ish Revival architecture of the area by almost 20 years, being built in the style of an enormous Spanish villa.

Other examples of Victorian Era architecture are found scattered throughout the Glen; most of these are small Queen Anne cottages such as the ones at 1352 and 1575 Newport, and little is known of their history.

4. Residential Architecture, 1910-1930. Styles changed dramatically as Willow Glen moved from a community of orchards and exclusive residences to a home for several thousand people. Gone were the elaborate Victorians; they were replaced by modest forms of indigenous architecture such as the Bungalow and the Spanish Revival cottage.

The Bungalow was a style which developed in California and spread throughout the country. The earliest form was the Craftsman Bungalow. In the early 20th century the Craftsman movement had swept California; the Craftsman Bungalow with its informal floor plan, low pitched roof, broad porch, exposed beams, and extensive use of natural materials was the result. Later, the California Bungalow developed; the only differences were use of stucco and wide, massive columns on the porch.²⁵

The Spanish Revival developed out of the earlier Mission Revival. Trademarks of cottages built in this style include red tile roofs, stark stucco exteriors, and wide use of arches. This style was prevalent from 1915-1935; the Craftsman Bungalow was popular from 1905-1925 and the California Bungalow from 1910-1925.²⁶

Two other styles should be mentioned: the Prairie style and Per-

25. "1980's idea . . . Rehab an Ugly Duckling": Sunset, (June 1979), p.90-1

26. "1980's idea . . . Rehab an Ugly Duckling": pp. 90-1.
Eakins, p. 52.

iod Revival. The Prairie style was derived from the midwestern architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. These homes feature an extensive horizontal motif: flat roofs, long window sills, horizontal banding of casement windows.²⁷ They are often found in combination with Bungalow style. The best examples of this Prairie school are located on Newport near Minnesota and on Settle Ave. Period Revival loosely refers to many different styles; English Tudor cottages, French Provincial cottages, and Hansel and Gretel cottages are all included. These rather absurd looking homes were an attempt to reproduce quaint, fairy tale European cottages; they are characterized by imitation thatch roofs, shingles wrapped around the eaves, and stucco exteriors. They were popular from about 1920-1935; the Prairie school from 1910-1925.²⁸

The first development in Willow Glen was Palm Haven, graded in 1912 and built in 1913 and after.²⁹ This development of custom homes, shaded by tall Washingtonia palms, is located off Bird Ave. and Coe Ave. The earliest streets in the development are lined with Bungalows and Prairie type buildings; the others have a predominance of Spanish and Period Revival architecture. The architecture is similar on Broadway Ave. and Ramona Ave., across Coe from Palm Haven.

Some of the oldest homes in the Glen are found on Lincoln and the streets coming off Lincoln in the north: Lester Ave., Garfield Ave., and Brace Ave. to the west and Michigan Ave., California Ave., and Willow

27. Eakins, p. 53.

28. "1980's idea . . . Rehab an Ugly Duckling", p. 91.

29. Arbuckle, interview with author.

Glen Way to Settle in the east. One finds great numbers of Bungalows here. Unfortunately, modern apartments have replaced many older cottages on the first three streets in the past 15 years. Some very old buildings, including Neo-Classical style cottages and original Craftsman Bungalows are found on Newport Ave. and Lupton Ave. These probably date before 1910.

The Spanish Revival style gradually replaced the Bungalow as the predominant form of new architecture in Willow Glen. Some very beautiful examples of this school can be found on Carolyn Ave. They were built in 1924 and '25. Another street consisting entirely of Spanish Revival style homes is Merle Ave., off Willow. This is the Los Amigos housing development, built by Volney Van Dalsen in 1935.³⁰

Sections of Willow Glen Way, the eastern parts of Michigan, California, and Nevada Aves., Jansen Ave., and Curtis Ave. all have a great predominance of Spanish Revival homes, as does El Abra Way to Crescent Dr. in the north and Pine Ave. in the south. To the west, Richards Ave. and Hicks north of Richards are almost exclusively Spanish Revival. Great stretches of Willow and the north part of Kotenberg are similar.

Slightly younger are the streets with mixtures of Spanish Revival and Period Revival cottages. These were generally built in the late '20's and early '30's. The finest examples of Period Revival architecture can be found on Glenn Ave. north of Britton Ave., on Meridith Ave. west of Cooldidge Ave., and on the streets west of Lincoln between Pine and Malone Ave. They are almost always found intermixed with the Spanish style; the north end of Jonathon is unique in that it consists exclusively of Period Revival cottages. Other residences of this type are found

30. Giarratana, p. 208.

on Riverside Dr. in Palm Haven, on Nevada Ave., and on the western ends of the streets north of Curtner and south of Pine.

5. Residential Architecture, 1930-1945. Homes looking more like the ones built today were constructed in the 1930's. In Willow Glen, these usually took the form of Eastern style Colonials or vernacular forms of architecture. The Colonials are boxy homes constructed of clapboard and/or brick, with shuttered windows. Vernacular architecture describes buildings common to a certain geographic area but not built in any particular style. These homes lack sufficient embellishments or detail to mark them in any architectural category. I have used the term to describe the small stucco cottages built prior to World War II which do not fit any recognizable form. Both prewar styles can be differentiated from post-war construction because of their detached garages.

There are not great numbers of colonial residences in Willow Glen. Most are located in the Glen Eyrie area, which comprises the streets between Willow, Glen Eyrie Ave., and Carolyn Ave. This area was built about 1937, and one finds a heavy New England Colonial influence. The neighborhood appears to have been brought directly from the East Coast.

The small, undistinguished cottages of the vernacular sort are found in many areas. Some are located in the Glen Eyrie area, while others are found on Mildred Ave. and Glenwood Ave. between Newport and Lupton, Kottenberg Ave. and Blewett Ave., and the eastern ends of the streets off the east side of Lincoln. The best examples are probably located on Glen Una Ave.

The homes described in the above two sections are not tract houses; however, they all are very similar. The builders seem to have provided their customers some basic floorplans and the detailing was left up to

individual discretion.

There was little residential building during the war years, because of manpower and material shortages. However, some homes in the Willow Glen area show evidence of wartime construction. These houses are quite similar to residences of vernacular construction, but are contrasted because they are set well back from the curb, providing a larger front yard at the expense of the back.³¹ Buildings on Crescent Dr. and the included section of El Abra Way, Patricia Way, and parts of Cooldidge and Merideth all appear to have been erected in this time period.

6. Postwar Construction. To the south and west stretch the vast tracts of homes built since World War II. These are generally characterless houses, stucco ranches all stamped from the same mold with no architectural interest or detailing. The remaining orchards have disappeared one by one to make room for these developments; one of the last to go was the Vierra Orchard, now Vierra Ct. Yet even here one finds some remarkable homes.

The greatest number of unusual homes is found in the Eichler Tract, bordered by Curtner Ave., Briarwood Dr., Booksin Ave., and Andalusia Way. Although this is a tract, these houses are quite different from the usual development home. Designed by Joseph Eichler, these buildings can be classified as California Moderne. They are single story, flat-topped with gravel roofs, and they make extensive use of glass and vertical wood paneling. They are designed around a central atrium and most have exposed structural beams. The northern section of the tract has two house styles, and was constructed around 1959. The southern part is com-

31. "1980's idea . . . Rehab an Ugly Duckling"; p. 90.

posed of two different designs; and was built circa 1963. Other Eichler homes are found on Margot Pl. and Adele Pl. in Willow Glen; these unique buildings add to the architectural diversity of the area.

There are other striking clusters of homes in the area. These are usually custom home developments. The Willow Ranch development is particularly noticable because it has no sidewalks, and its large homes are set far back from the road. It is surrounded on four sides by more pedestrian tracts. The development comprises only two streets, Cottle and Westgate Aves. between Husted Ave. and Koch Ln.; it is denoted by large white gates at the entrances. Very similar is the Laturalwood Dr./Mullberry Dr. area. Here too one finds large custom homes of different styles and an absence of sidewalks.

The most outstanding examples of custom homes, from an architectural interest standpoint, are located in an area roughly surrounded by Cherry Ave., Dry Creek Rd., and Peregrino Way. This development is basically an extension of the Dry Creek area which runs all the way to Campbell; it has large custom homes and large lots. The houses here are much newer than the other Dry Creek homes, and some are much more unusual. While most of the houses on these streets are comparable to homes in the Almaden Country Club (large stucco ranches, shake roofs), one also finds huge stucco monoliths with hardly any windows, impressive Italian villas, and redwood geodesic domes.

7. Conclusion. The architecture in Willow Glen is interesting because it fits almost perfectly the accepted model for architectural progression that has been developed by architectural historians.

After about 1870, with the building of the transcontinental railroad Californians tended to build whatever was in vogue in the East.³² While

32. Harold Kirker, California's Architectural Frontier, (San Marino, 1960), p. 75

there was some architectural innovation in San Francisco, in general, California builders followed after Eastern style setters, first with the Italianate, then Queen Anne and Eastlake styles. About the only local concession that was made was the use of redwood for construction. This is apparent in Willow Glen.

The Colonial Revival of the late 19th century was rapidly transformed into the Mission Revival movement in California. Leading architects had become upset over the shoddy California copies of Eastern styles; many Californians were tired of the "architectural colonialism" they were subject to. This marked the beginning of regionalism in California architecture.³³ The Bungalow style also had its genesis at this time, as the result of a general "back to nature" and "arts and crafts" movement in the state at this time.

The Mission Revival movement was a dismal failure, producing no buildings of merit, chiefly because, as Harold Kirker writes in California's Architectural Frontier: "it was impossible to adopt the primitive architecture of a religious order to a commercial and worldly society". But the Mission Revival did pave the way for the much more successful Spanish Revival. More and more Californians discovered their state's romantic past; they were interested in Spanish rancho life and tried to build their interpretation of a Spanish home. While much Spanish Colonial culture was manufactured, the revival had a large impact and produced many houses.³⁴ Willow Glen illustrates this thrust in home-building also.

33. Kirker, p. 89.

34. Kirker, p. 101.

The architecture of Willow Glen spans more than 140 years and encompasses a wide variety of styles. One can go from a gracious Victorian to the Eichler Tract by walking only a few blocks. There is a great diversity of styles in a relatively small area; this is one of the things which makes Willow Glen unique.

8. Bibliography.

I. Books.

1. Bangs, Edward. Portals West. San Francisco, 1961.
2. Butler, Phyllis. The Valley of Santa Clara. San Jose, 1975.
3. California Historical Landmarks. Sacramento, 1979
4. Eakins, Dr. David (ed.). Focusing in on San Jose. (unpublished project, San Jose State University, 1979).
5. Hamlin, Talbot. Architecture through the Ages. New York, 1953.
6. Hiller, Carl. From Teepees to Towers. Toronto, 1967
7. Giarratana, Elizabeth. Old Willow Glen. Palo Alto, 1977
8. Historical Atlas of Santa Clara County. San Francisco, 1876.
9. Kirker, Harold. California's Architectural Frontier. San Marino, 1960.
10. Maas, John. Gingerbread Age. New York, 1957.
11. Maas, John. The Victorian Home in America. New York, 1972.
12. Profile '70: a Socio-economic Data Book for Santa Clara County. San Jose, 1970.
13. San Jose: an Inventory of its Historical and Architectural Heritage. San Jose, 1975.
14. Summers, John. Victorian Architecture. New York, 1970.
15. Sunshine, Fruit, and Flowers; Santa Clara County, California. San Jose, 1895.
16. 200 years of Santa Clara Valley Architecture. Santa Clara, 1976

II. Articles.

17. "The Evolution of the Ranch House"; Americana, (May 1973), pp. 14-17
18. Kirker, Harold, "California Architecture in the 19th Century: a Social History" (book review), Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. (December 1957). p. 36.
19. Lewis, Oscar. "Here Lived the Californians" (book review), Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. (December, 1957), p. 36.
20. "1980's Idea . . . Rehab an Ugly Duckling"; Sunset, (June 1979), pp. 91-

21. Perusse, Lyle, "The Gothic Revival in California"; Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. (October 1955), pp. 15-22.
22. Thompson, Elizabeth, "Early Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region"; Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. (October 1951), p. 132.

III. Other

23. Interview with Clyde Arbuckle, San Jose City Historian, San Jose, California, January 17, 1980.
24. Santa Clara County maps, 1887-1973.