

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE REFLECTED IN THE 100 YEAR OLD HOMES OF GUSTAV LAUMEISTER



Six of the houses we have identified as circa 1902 were built by Gustav Laumeister, one of the first contractors in this area. He helped plant small American flags for the first auction sale of

lots in the new town of University

Park. Gustav was the son of John Anton Laumeister, who came to the U.S. from the Bavarian town of Aschaffenburg, a city situated close to the heavily forested Spessart mountains. John Laumeister joined the 1849 Argonauts and came to San Francisco where he and his brother Frank started the Pacific Flour Mills. He later moved to San Jose where his son Gustav and two daughters were born. He encouraged his son to go to the University of California, but Gustav instead began working at an early age as a builder in Alameda. He also worked in the Monterey/Carmel area and then moved to Menlo Park in the early 1880's. He helped construct the old winery on the Stanford property, and was on hand after the 1906 earthquake to help with much of the rebuilding of the campus. By this time he had developed quite a lucrative building trade in the new city of Palo Alto.



308 Lincoln

known as the Sunbonnet house on the opposite corner at 1061 Bryant in 1899. A second house built by Laumeister in 1902 for Mrs. Kimball was at **308 Lincoln**, across the street from her cottage. This two-story residence is larger and has many Colonial Revival features, but continues the same Shingle style theme, with its use of redwood shingles and redwood interior paneling and beams. Something about the nature of many of Laumeister's homes makes one think of a Bavarian chalet, perhaps a legacy from his family's background. The first occupant of the house was Edwin Duryea, a young civil engineer from Cornell, who had moved here with his family. He was one of the co-founders of Palo Alto's water district and also served as councilman and vice-mayor. John Charles Lounsbury Fish bought the house in 1920. Fish, who joined the Stanford faculty in 1893, became internationally known in the field of engineering economics.

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THE FOWLER MANSION: 221 KINGSLEY

Also in 1902, Laumeister was finishing the large Fowler mansion at **221 Kingsley**. Of his houses still standing from the period, this was certainly the grandest. The large two-story dark brown shingled house has a dormered gambrel roof, a widow's walk, and a lovely wooden gate guarding the front walk. According to McAlester's *A Field Guide to America's Historic Neighborhoods and Museum Houses: the Western States*:

Throughout Professorville, you will find many front yards enclosed with low hedges or short wooden fences and entered through front garden gates. It is not certain when this practice began. Some gates are constructed of natural wood with a small roof above, a favored



221 Kingsley

First Bay Tradition landscape element (and one that had been actively promoted by Gustav Stickley's magazine, the Craftsman). The garden gate at 221 Kingsley Avenue...is an excellent example.

Mrs. Fowler, the widow of a Spanish American War

officer, had the house built for her son Frederick, who was attending Stanford. He later lived in the home with his wife Elsie, the daughter of Stanford's second president, John Casper Branner.

OTHER 1902 HOUSES

Laumeister built two houses on Waverley in 1902, a Craftsman-style house for Mrs. Emma Pleasants at **1022 Waverley** (adjacent to 1020 Waverley, which he had built in 1900) and **650 Waverley** built for Mrs. Harriet Woods. His sixth house is the Colonial Revival home at **430 Kingsley**. The horizontal emphasis of the siding, and wide extension of the roof lines remind one of the Prairie style. This house was built by Laumeister for Professors Albert W. Smith and Mary Roberts Smith. They wrote the Stanford hymn (he wrote the music, she wrote the lyrics), "From the foothills to the bay...Hail, Stanford, Hail!"



1022 Waverley

Gustav Laumeister would continue to construct houses in the neighborhood, including several more on Lincoln and Ramona. He also built some of the early office buildings on

University Avenue, Castilleja School (attended by one of his daughters), and was responsible for nearly 100 houses in Palo Alto. His second wife, Mabel, was the daughter of Thomas Seale, who once owned all of the land occupied by the original town. Laumeister helped lay out the Seale tract. He also owned a considerable amount of property in what is now East Palo Alto, which he at one time thought of developing as Palo Alto's waterfront. He was an avid mountaineer (a true Bavarian!) and loved motor cars. He was one of the founders of

the Palo Alto Historical Association and was active in many other civic organizations. He worked in the building trade and as a real estate developer for 63 years and died at the age of 90 in 1955.

Sharon Olson



221 Kingsley

The Smiths previously lived at 1146 Waverley, which was built for them in 1893.



430 Kingsley



650 Waverley

Sources:

- Professorville pamphlet (AAUW)*
- Gone Tomorrow (AAUW, 1971)*
- City of Palo Alto Historic Buildings Inventory (1982)*
- Palo Alto Community Book, Guy Miller (1952).*
- History of Palo Alto, Dallas England Wood (1939)*
- Palo Alto Times (1/2/03, 1/28/48, 1/24/55)*
- San Francisco Call Bulletin (12/16/1890)*
- Historic Preservation Ordinance Protected Properties List (12/10/00)*
- Nomination form for National Register of Historic Places—Professorville Historic District (1971)*
- A Field Guide to America's Historic Neighborhoods and Museum Houses: the Western States, Virginia and Lee McAlester (1998).*