



PANORAMIC HILL

LIVING WITH NATURE & PATHS, STEPS, GARDENS, REDWOOD
HILLSIDE HOUSES, AND BAY VIEWS & WOVEN TOGETHER INTO
AN IDYLIC SYLVAN RETREAT & RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN



ORCHARD LANE

Daniella Thompson, 2004

BERKELEY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE ASSOCIATION



THE MOUSER-PARSONS HOUSE

21 Mosswood Road & architect unknown, 1888
(John Hudson Thomas, architect, 1910 alterations)



The Mouser-Parsons House, as remodeled by John Hudson Thomas. Anthony Bruce, 2004.

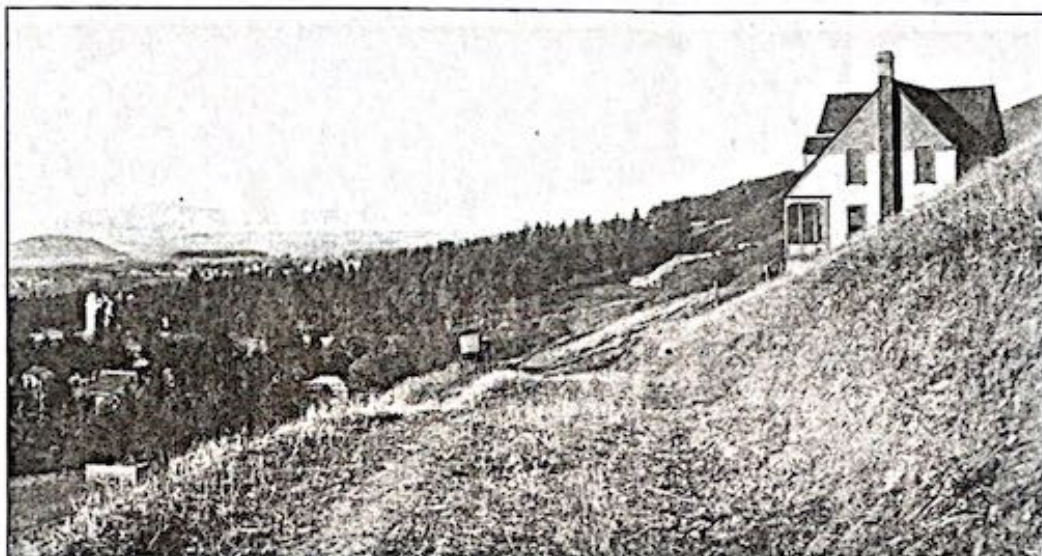
Bay. On November 5 of that year, the *Berkeley Herald* reported:

Dr. Mouser's house now being constructed on the hillside east of the town is visited by many who regard the situation as being extraordinary for the location of the dwelling. It will certainly open the eyes of many to the desirability of the hills as a handsome location for those who can afford to keep a horse and carriage and do not care for the frequent visits of their friends.

Around his house Mouser planted an almond orchard. He called his country retreat *Atalaya* ("watchtower" in Spanish). Mouser was never listed in the Berkeley directory, but his son Benjamin, also a physician, appeared in the 1901 edition as a resident of Panoramic Way. As soon as the elder Mouser died, Benjamin sold *Atalaya* to editor-turned-realtor Warren Cheney. Cheney in turn sold the house to Edward Taylor Parsons (1861–1914) and his wife Marion (1878–1953). Parsons was one of the first salesmen for the Sherwin-Williams paint company.

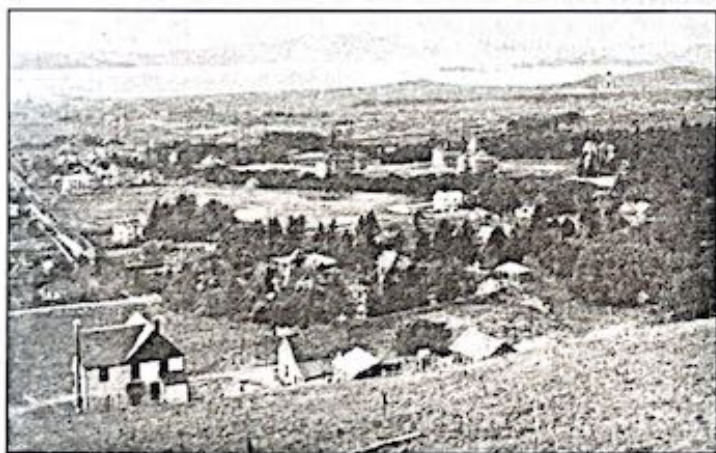
THE Mouser House is believed to be the first residence built on Panoramic Hill. In 1888 and again in 1895, Silas Mercer Mouser, M.D. (1823–1909) of San Francisco purchased large parcels on the hill from major landowner Charles A. Bailey. Also in 1888, Mouser began building a gable-roofed, white clapboard house on the present location of 11 Mosswood Road, where it faced the

The Mouser House in its original location, facing west. Freshly cut Panoramic Way is in the foreground. Illustration from Charles Bailey, Berkeley the Beautiful, 1889. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (xF869 BS B6).



He traveled throughout the West and settled in San Francisco about 1900. An active mountaineer and photographer, he joined the Sierra Club the same year and assisted Club secretary William E. Colby in establishing the Club's outings program. Parsons served as a director of the Sierra Club from 1904 until his death. In his eulogy of Parsons, John Muir recalled:

In 1907 he married Marion Randall, as able and enthusiastic a mountaineer as himself, whom he first met on the Sierra Club Outing of 1903, and three years later, in 1910, established his first home high up on the Berkeley hills overlooking the Golden Gate ...



Looking down on the Mouser House and its outbuildings clustered along what is now Mosswood Lane. Illustration from Charles Bailey, Berkeley the Beautiful, 1889. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (xF869 BS B6 "University").

Parsons moved the Mouser House to its present location, overlooking Strawberry Canyon, on land he had previously purchased from Mouser. He retained John Hudson Thomas to remodel it in the Arts and Crafts style. On the new site, the house was turned so the previous façade now faced away from the street to the view. The new entrance was close to the road and below the street grade. Tho-

mas added interest to the new façade by placing a substantial bay window surmounted by a false pediment above the entrance door, which shelters beneath a copper-sheathed awning supported by heavy wooden brackets. The exterior is clad in redwood barn shakes. Note that the shingles are even with the sash, and the windows have no visible frames except for the library window west of the entrance.

The ground floor comprises a kitchen to the right of the entrance, a library to the left, and at the rear, spacious living and dining rooms extending the entire length of the house. Heavy French doors with leaded-glass panels connect the rooms. Thomas clad the old plastered walls in board-and-batten redwood, with ceilings likewise paneled and beamed. The old double-hung windows gave way to horizontal picture windows affording stunning bay and canyon views. An angled bay window in the living room is a possible survivor from the farmhouse. Thomas designed built-in furniture for the three public rooms:

window seats, cupboards, sideboards, bookcases, and in the library, a fireside bench.

In the old house, all rooms on the ground floor were at the same level. When the house was turned around, the vestibule and library were built three steps above the living and



Marion Parsons at the entrance. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (POR 3 Marion Parsons).



Marion Parsons in the living room: view into the dining room. Sidney V. Webb photograph, courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (POR 17 Marion Parsons).

dining rooms to accommodate the slope of the hill. The ceilings, however, are the same height in all the rooms. Thomas cleverly exploited this feature by inserting a soffit next to the living-room fireplace to house the library storage cupboard. These two rooms also share back-to-back brick fireplaces with wooden mantels (Thomas removed the original chimneys, which were located at two ends of the house).

In the dining room, the mica-shaded ceiling lamp and wall sconce are the work of Dirk van Erp, the legendary San Francisco coppersmith who was the

first to make these lamps in 1910. Many years ago, architect and neighbor Walter Steilberg told the current owner, "You'll grow to like them."

The kitchen is the only downstairs room to have been remodeled. A redwood-lined stairwell leads to the second floor. The balustrade and newel post are Victorian remnants from the original house. In the hall, the large bay window with its built-in seat creates a charming sitting room. Possibly for economic reasons, the upstairs walls were not plastered but finished with Beaver Board, a wood-fiber product. The Beaver Board company of Keeseville, N.Y. advertised its product thus:

Better Walls and Ceilings

Use Beaver Board instead of lath and plaster. It never cracks; needs no repairs, does away with unsanitary wall-paper; is easily and quickly put up at any time of year; suits any kind of building. Let us show you how it looks.

Redwood batten covered the seams between the Beaver Board panels and as trim at door height and around the ceilings. The walls in the four bedroom are now sheetrocked, but the batten has been retained, although at somewhat wider intervals.

It was at the Parsons home that John Muir began transcribing his Alaska journals in November 1912. Marion assisted him with the manuscript of *Travels in Alaska* in his final months and edited it for publication after his death in 1914. Edward Par-



E.T. Parsons in his study. Sidney V. Webb photograph, courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (POR 5 Edward Parsons).

sons died the same year. Parsons Memorial Lodge in Tuolumne Meadows at Yosemite National Park was built in his memory, and Parsons Peak in the Cathedral Range was named for him. Marion Parsons became the first woman elected to the board of directors of the Sierra Club and served for twenty-two years, having a hand in the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. She was also an

amateur painter. In 1921, when Marion Parsons built a new house next door, this became the home of Dr. Earl Morse Wilbur (1886-1956), first dean of the Pacific Unitarian School for the Ministry (now Starr King School) and its president from 1911 until 1931. Dr. Wilbur was a leading historian of Unitarianism and wrote several authoritative books on the subject.

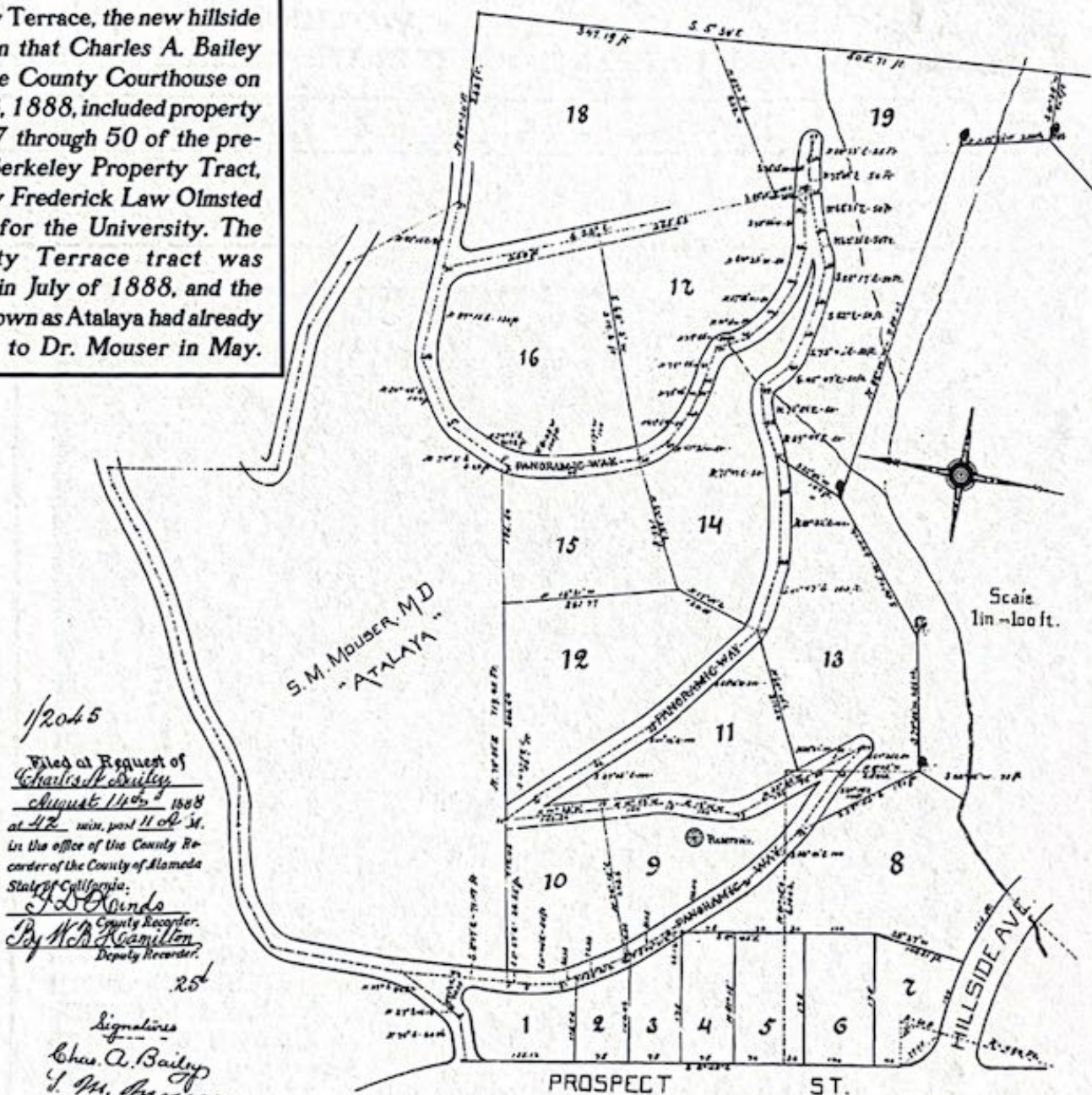


UNIVERSITY TERRACE

subdivision map, 1888



University Terrace, the new hillside subdivision that Charles A. Bailey filed at the County Courthouse on August 18, 1888, included property in Lots 47 through 50 of the pre-existing Berkeley Property Tract, laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1864 for the University. The University Terrace tract was surveyed in July of 1888, and the portion shown as Atalaya had already been sold to Dr. Mouser in May.



1/2045
Filed at Request of
Charles A. Bailey
August 14th 1888
at 4:22 min. past 11 o'clock A.M.
in the office of the County Recorder
of the County of Alameda
State of California.
J. D. O'Leary
County Recorder.
By H. C. Hamilton
Deputy Recorder.

Signatures
Chas. A. Bailey
J. M. Mouser

UNIVERSITY TERRACE,
Berkeley, Cal.

Surveyed by -- { R. H. Carson
R. E. Bush.
Correct
R. E. Bush
Aug 1888

July 1888

CHANNING WAY.