

The Muller-Noggle House and Garage, 211 Chorro Street
Designed in 1936 by Pioneer Woman Architect Edla Muir for
A. V. and Elizabeth Biehl Muller
Owned by Johnny and Neva Noggle 1953-2020



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1. Summary Conclusion of Eligibility

The 1936 Muller-Noggle House was designed by Edla Muir (1906–1971), then of John Byers and Edla Muir, Santa Monica and 1941–1968 in her own practice in Los Angeles and briefly in Ellensburg, Washington. With high-profile commissions, prestigious awards, documentation by the country’s leading architectural photographers, and more than a quarter century of lavish coverage in the Los Angeles press and national architecture journals, Muir reached the top of her profession and in articles and exhibitions since her early death in 1971 has been considered one of the half dozen most important pioneer women architects in California. The Muller-Noggle House would be only the second of almost 200 Master List resource by a woman architect, after Julia Morgan’s Monday Club.

The house is an extremely rare—in San Luis Obispo unique—Minimal Traditional design characterized by a single-story main block topped by a pyramid roof with a central chimney—a costly and aesthetically daring approach apparently originating with the British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens or American perceptions of his work. The Lee family's Stratford Hall, built in the 1730s in Westmoreland County, Virginia is another possible model: in 1929, the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association formed to preserve the house and open it to the public. Sources in the 1920s and '30s attribute it as a Neo-Georgian style.

Whatever the source, the Muller-Noggle House embodies the drama and streamlining of the Minimal Traditional. Even more unusually, it has a detached but matching pyramid-roof garage, one of the most architecturally significant garages surviving in San Luis Obispo.

Finally, the Muller-Noggle House and Garage are one of only two residential projects in San Luis documented to have been built by the F. C. Stolte Company, contractor for Hearst Castle, the other being 391 Chorro Street. Both date from the same year and were supervised by Carl Daniels, who oversaw work in the rest of the county while his colleague and sometime collaborator George Loorz managed construction for W. R. Hearst and Julia Morgan (Taylor Coffman, *Building for Hearst and Morgan: Voices from the George Loorz Papers* [Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2003], pp. 201–202 and passim).

As such, the Muller-Noggle House qualifies for the Master List as one of “the most unique and important historic properties and resources in terms of architectural or historical significance [or] rarity” as defined by the city's Historic Preservation Ordinance.

It also qualifies for the less demanding National Register of Historic Places criterion C as possessing architectural significance for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction and high artistic values and representing the work of a master. It retains the integrity of the six applicable aspects (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling) to communicate its significance.

Presented on behalf of Jim and Mai Haselman by James Papp, PhD, Historian & Architectural Historian, Historicities LLC, 6 September 2021

2. Timeline

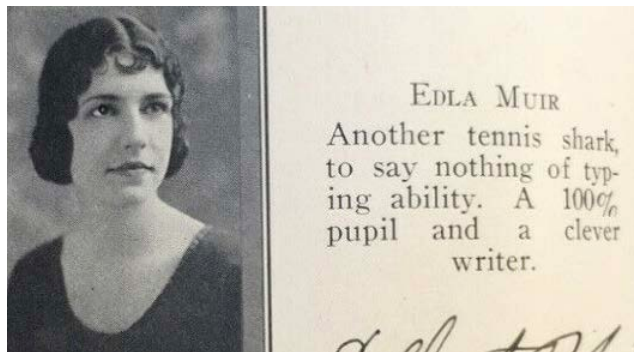
- 1899 Apr 29 Albert Venlow Mueller is born in Texas to Leo Mueller and Josephine Zimmer Mueller from Alsace (1910 United States Census, 1918 draft registration, and 1993 death records). By 1910 the family is living in Lincoln, Placer County, California, where Leo is working as a laborer in a pottery.
- 1906 Edla Muir is born in San Francisco to doctor and former diplomat Joseph Muir and mezzo-soprano Ethel Fitch Muir, granddaughter (and step-daughter) of lawyer and former Republican Congressman Thomas Fitch, “the silver-tongued orator of the Golden West.” Dr. Muir is the widower of Edla McPherson, daughter of three-term US Senator John R. McPherson of New Jersey and Edla Gregory McPherson.
- 1915 After seven years in New York, Ethel Fitch Muir returns to Los Angeles to continue her operatic career.
- 1917 Mueller graduates from Lincoln Union High School, Placer County (“Lincoln Union High School Exercises, Lincoln *News-Messenger*, 21 June 1917, p. 1).
- 1918 Sep 12 Mueller is a cannery worker in Lincoln when he registers for the draft. He serves as a private in St. Louis, Missouri.
- 1919 Edla Muir first works for architect John Byers summer and weekends at age thirteen.
- 1920 John “Johnny” Noggle is born in Ohio (United States Public Records, 1970–2009).
- Ethel Fitch Muir divorces Dr. Joseph Muir, by now living in New York (“Divorce Is Granted Ethel Fitch, Wife of Dr. Joseph Muir,” *New York Tribune*, 7 Aug. 1920, p. 5).
- 1921 Neva Negranti is born in Cayucos, where her parents own the Fairview Ranch (“Neva Noggle,” *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, 10 Jan 2021, 4A).
- 1923 A. V. Mueller receives his juris doctor degree from Stanford and moves to Paso Robles, where he forms the partnership of Muller and Mandl with Judge J. P. Mandl (“To Receive Degrees,” *Sacramento Bee*, 2 May 1923, p. 8; “Around the Town,” *San Luis Obispo Tribune* [weekly], 5 Oct. 1923, p. 4; “A. V. Muller Is



Los Angeles Express, 25 June 1915

Named Assistant District Attorney," Arroyo Grande *Herald-Recorder*, 10 Jan. 1930, p. 6).

Edla Muir graduates from Inglewood High School and goes to work for Byers full-time in a clerical capacity, although she also appears to be doing design work during this period ("Edla Muir: Stoessel House, (Santa Monica, Calif.)," Art, Design, and Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, adc-exhibits.museum.ucsb.edu, accessed 15 Nov. 2021).



Edla Muir from her senior yearbook, Inglewood High School, Los Angeles

1924 Albert Mueller marries Elizabeth Anna Biehl, daughter of a retail salesman and "prominent in Paso Robles as a leader of the younger set" ("One Ceremony, Two Weddings, Four Happy," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 June 1924, p. 83). He joins the Masons and becomes associated with the Bank of Italy.

1926 Muir is promoted to draftsman at Byers' practice.

1927 Muir wins second prize of \$500 in an architectural competition for hillside homes by the Rondith Corporation, from seventy drawings submitted anonymously to an American Institute of Architects, Southern California jury ("Four Win Money in Designing," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 1927, Homes and Builders, part v, p. 3).

1929 Muller is elected a city judge in Paso Robles ("A. V. Muller Is Named Assistant District Attorney"). (From the mid 1920s through the early 1930s, both spellings of his name are being used in the press.)

Edla Muir in photo accompanying the Los Angeles Times article about her 1927 hillside architecture award



- 1930 Jan 6 Muller, living in Paso Robles, replaces H. J. Dubin, promoted to county district attorney ("A. V. Muller Is Named Assistant District Attorney").
- Apr 3 US Census shows A. V. and Elizabeth Muller renting at 650 Upham Street.
- 1934 Muir gains her architecture license, becomes partner in John Byers and Edla Muir.

Edla Muir in 1935. Courtesy UCSB Architecture and Design Collection.



- 1935 Jan 11 A. V. Muller announces the opening of his law office in the Wickenden Building, San Luis Obispo (advertisement, Arroyo Grande *Herald-Recorder*). Muller leads San Luis efforts to attract State Emergency Relief Administration aid under the New Deal National Housing Act ("House Survey Is Proposed," *Herald-Recorder*, 25 Jan. 1935, p. 1).
- Edla Muir is the only woman of fourteen exhibitors in Modeltown, an FHA exhibition at the California International Exposition in San Diego that later travels the country. She enters individually, not with Byers ("Home Plans Win Favor," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Nov. 1936, Homes and Builders, p. 2).
- 1936 Apr 3 The *California House and Garden Exhibition* opens at 5900 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, with six demonstration houses: Richard Neutra's plywood "Moderne" house; a steel frame French house by African American architect Paul R. Williams; a house with steel frame, steel siding, and metal roof; a California house of hollow tile by Winchton Risley; an English cottage of reinforced groutlock brick by Arthur Kelley and Joe Estep, and a New Orleans frame house with brick veneer and wood siding by John Byers and Edla Muir ("Unique 'Village' Rises to Demonstrate Homes," *Los Angeles Times*, Homes and Builders, part v, pp. 1 and 4, 2 Feb. 1936). It runs through 1938.



John Byers and Edla Muir's New Orleans House from the California House and Garden Exhibition, Los Angeles, 1936–1938. Photo: Architectural Digest, vol. 9, no. 3, 1935.

Nov 7 George and Kirstine Anholm transfer title of lots 4, 3, and part of 2 on block 13 of the Anholm Addition to the Mullers. On the same day, Carl Daniels petitions for a building permit on behalf of A. V. Muller for a one-story frame and stucco 6-room house and garage, at \$5,500 the second most expensive residence permitted that year, after a \$6,000 house on Cerro San Luis that is twice the size.

Edla Muir of Byers and Muir designs the Mullers' house.

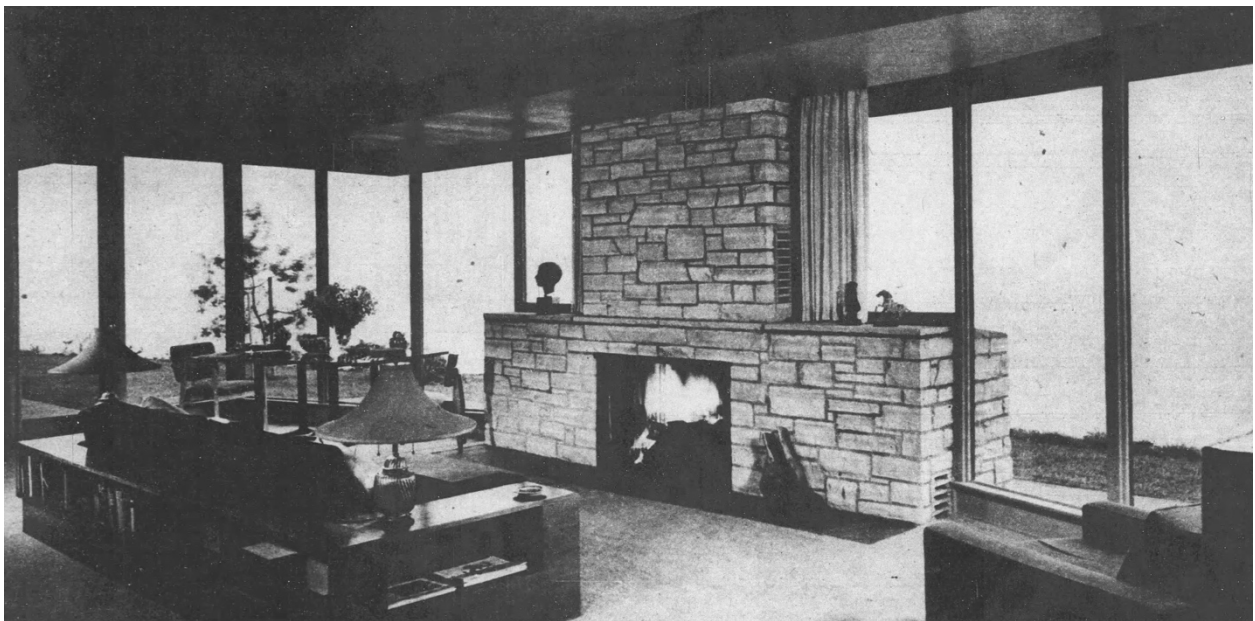
1937 Feb 26 Stolte has completed work on 211 Chorro, and the Mullers have moved in ("Notice of Completion of Work," 27 Feb 1937).



Muller-Noggle House. Photos: Mai Haselman

1937 Apr 12 The Mullers convey their property to the Veterans' Welfare Board of the State of California (County Land Records).

- 1938 Edla Muir marries Englishman Clyde Lambie in Clark County, Nevada.
- 1940 Apr 2 US Census lists A. V. and Elizabeth Muller living at 211 Chorro with their daughters Helen (14) and Jacqueline (7), owners, the house valued at \$6,500.
- July 24 John Noggle, working in automobile manufacturing, enlists in the US Army at Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio (United States World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946).
- 1941 Edla Muir starts to publish work under her name alone ("Two Versions of Colonial Styles," *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, 4 May 1941, p. 7; "A Ranch Home in Traditional Style," *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, 21 Dec. 1941, p. 7), though simultaneously Byers-Muir works continue to appear.
- Apr 8 A. V. Muller is re-elected trustee of the San Luis Obispo School Board ("Parks Plan Voted in San Luis Obispo," *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 April 1941, p. 12).
- 1942 Muir publishes her first two Mid Century Modern houses, the first nominally in collaboration with John Byers ("Design for Sloping Lot," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 Jan. 1942), the second on her own ("Modern," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Apr. 1942). The January 4 article is the last pairing of her name with Byers. With wartime constrictions—and the birth of her son—a Muir project will not be published in the *Times* again till 11 February 1945 ("Postwar Project").
- Dec 19 Muir's only child Alec Lambie is born.



Howard House, Malibu, 1949. Photo by Julius Shulman.

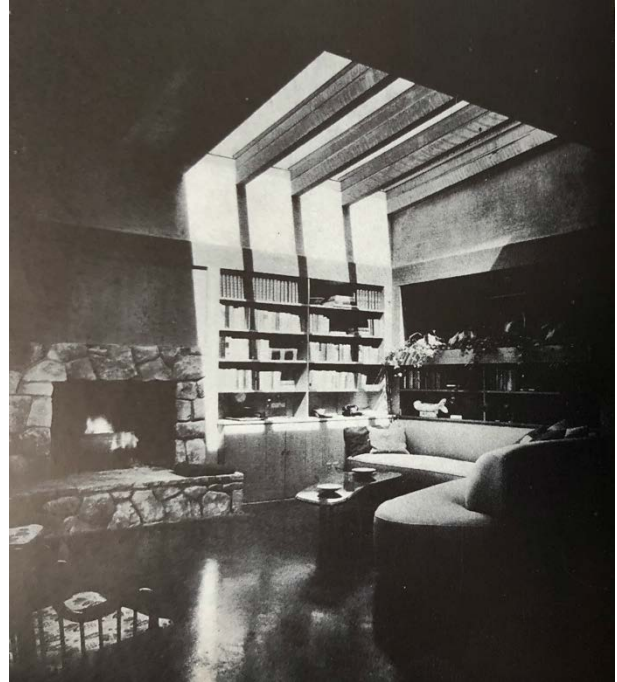
- 1945–1949 The *Los Angeles Times* and its new *Home Magazine* publish almost a dozen Muir projects, including twelve-room house for film couple Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor. Local real estate ads begin to feature "designed by Edla Muir." Most projects are traditional, but in 1949 she debuts two

- stunning Mid Century Moderns: the George and Eleanor Howard House in Malibu, with a stone fireplace set in coastal view glass wall, and the Ilsley House, 12835 Mulholland Drive, on Beverly Hills hilltop with ivy leaf-shaped pool extending into house and underwater viewing room.
- 1946 Neva Negranti marries John Noggle (“Neva Noggle”).
- 1946–1947 Edla Muir designs offices and warehouse for Paddock Engineering, a swimming pool builder, apparently her first commercial commissions. She has designed houses for Paddock chair Philip Ilsley, and “father of the modern swimming pool,” having introduced sprayed Gunitite and the kidney shape (“Lost Hollywood—A Swimmably Grand Estate in Brentwood Heights,” *Paradise Leased*, 3 Jan. 2011, accessed 18 Nov. 2021). Muir will design more facilities for Paddock in the 1950s, including in Mexico City.
- 1948 Mar *Architectural Record*, in “A Thousand Women in Architecture,” a survey of trained woman architects in the United States, includes Muir as one of just ten featured with bios and photos; her Stanwyck-Taylor House is pictured.
- June 8 Chris and Johanna Anholm convey 211 Chorro to the Title Insurance and Trust Company (County Land Records).
- 1948 June 28 Title Insurance and Trust Company conveys 211 Chorro to David and Marjorie Fair (*ibid.*).
- 1949 Dec Edla Muir is elected secretary of the American Institute of Architects Southern California chapter.
- 1949–1950 Muir designs Brentwood Heights house for George and Selma Sturges so they can leave nearby Usonian they commissioned from Frank Lloyd Wright ten years earlier for a “more practical home” (Eve M. Kahn, “Frank Lloyd Wright House in Los Angeles Will Be Auctioned,” *New York Times*, 21 Jan. 2016).
- 1950 Mar 9 The Fairs convey 211 Chorro to L. H. and Bertha Ellsworth (*ibid.*).
- June Edla Muir’s O’Flaherty House in Brentwood Heights makes the cover story of *The American Home* with Julius Shulman photographs.
- 1951 Dec 9 The *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* runs a two-page spread—“Four Houses and Our Future”—featuring Richard Neutra’s Warren Tremain House, Spaulding-Rex’s Arch Ekdale House, Henry L. Eggers’ Arthur O. Hanisches House, and Edla Muir’s Zola Hall House.

1952 Muir wins Honor Award from American Institute of Architects, Southern California chapter, for Zola Hall House, 1888 Mandeville Canyon Road. John Rex—with Sumner Spaulding architect of Case Study House #2—marries Hall the same year and moves into her house.

The only non-partnered woman architect in 82 *Distinctive Houses from "Architectural Record"*, Muir appears for Zola Hall House.

Zola Hall House skylight. Photo by Maynard L. Parker.



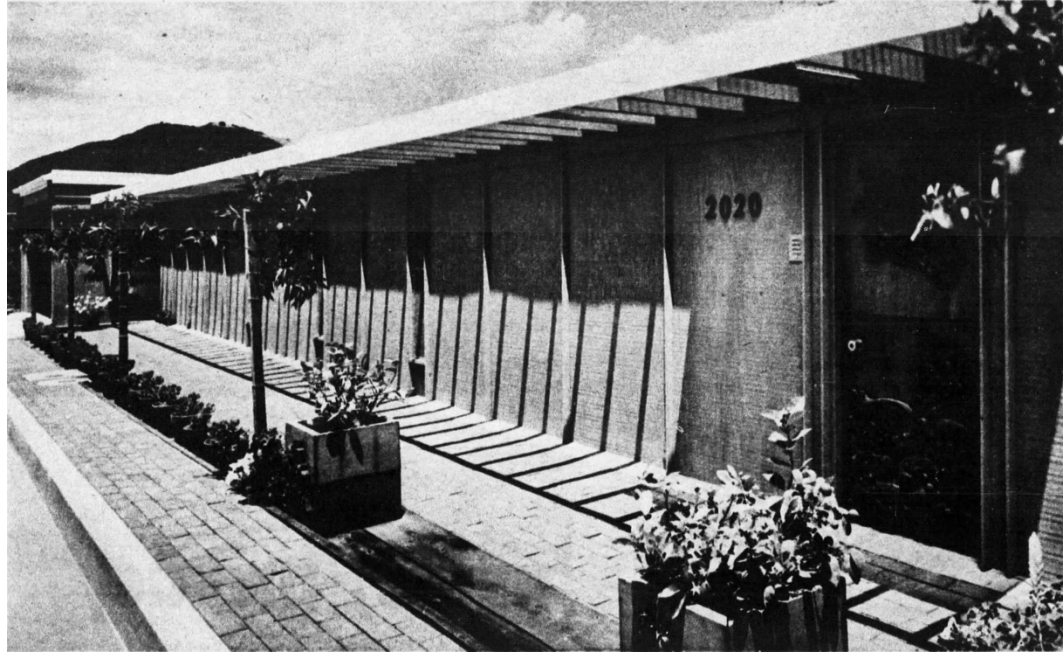
Muir appears on local radio and television ("famed woman architect will be guest on Norvell Gillespie's HOME AND GARDEN show on KHJ-TV at 5:30," *Long Beach Press Telegram*, 22 Mar. 1952).

1953 Aug 12 The Ellsworths convey 211 Chorro to John and Neva Noggle (*ibid.*). From 1957 John spends several decades as a top salesman at Standard Motors on Monterey Street ("Salesman Hits Top of Cadillac Crest," *Five Cities Times-Press-Recorder*, 10 Aug. 1990, p. 4D). The family will own and manage San Luis Obispo's Little Chef restaurant ("Neva Noggle"). They are active in Catholic organizations and John as a bell ringer and historian at the Mission.

Muir and family leave LA for cattle ranch outside Ellensburg, Central Washington, where she moves further into non-domestic architecture, including commercial buildings and Happy's Food supermarket (extant).

1957 Muir returns to LA and joins Charles O. Matcham, Stewart S. Granger and Associates as one of two unnamed associates ("Charles O. Matcham, FAIA, Expands Organization," *Architect and Engineer*, June 1957, p. 33). No one in firm, which designs anodyne institutional and commercial architecture, has the local experience of Muir, and the association does not last. By 11 August 1957, Muir's is the cover house of *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine* feature "4 Houses Designed by Women"; no mention is made of Matcham, Granger.

1962 Mar Muir is part of an exhibition of architects with offices in Brentwood Village ("Brentwood Architects' Work Now on Display," *Citizen News*, 26 Mar. 1962).



Street façade of 2020 West Ridge, Muir's 1962 house for herself and husband Clyde Lambie, with saw-surfaced plywood and fin-shaped battens. Photo by Julius Shulman.

- Apr 22

The *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* gives Edla Muir the cover and a three-page spread of Julius Shulman photos for her own Mandeville Canyon house at 2020 West Ridge Road, finished the previous year in steel posts and beam and plywood siding—ideas perhaps retained from Williams' steel frame house and Neutra's plywood house in the 1936 California House and Garden Exhibition. This will be the last *Times* articles featuring Muir's designs after a twenty-six-year run beginning with that exhibition.
- Nov

A national syndicated article on skylights features Muir's work on the Zola Hall House ten years before and its dramatic Maynard Parker photo (Pauline Graves, Nov. & Dec.).
- 1968

The law firm of A. H. Brazil and James Duenow merges with A. V. Muller, Wickson Woolpert and William P. McWhinney ("Two Law Firms Plan Merger," *Pismo Times*, 11 Jan. 1968, p. 3). Muller had served as assistant district attorney while Brazil served as district attorney in the early 1930s.
- 1970–1980s

Edla Muir continues to be mentioned as architect in real estate advertisements in Los Angeles, though in the 1980s increasingly rendered as "Edna Muir."
- 1971

Edla Muir dies age 65, unnoticed by the press that once lionized her.



Photo: Mai Haselman

- 1972 Muir's widower Clyde Lambie donates her papers to the UC Santa Barbara Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design, and Architecture Museum.
- 1977 Aug The *AIA Journal* publishes Harriet Rochlin's "A Distinguished Generation of Women Architects in California," featuring Muir.
UCSB Art, Design, and Architecture Museum shows *Edla Muir and John Byers/Architectural Drawings*, August–September.
- 1987 A. V. Muller continues to practice as an attorney ("Public Notices," *Five Cities Times-Press-Recorder*, 8 April 1987, p. 8D).
- 1989–1992 Edla Muir is included in the traveling exhibition *That Exceptional One: Women in Architecture 1888–1989*.
- 1990–1991 *A Life in Architecture: Four Women in Los Angeles, 1900–1950*, featuring Muir, Constance Austin, Edith Northman, and Julia Morgan shows at UCLA's Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning and UC Riverside's University Art Gallery, occasioning the *Los Angeles Times* to write briefly about Muir for the first time in nearly thirty years ("Works of Women Architects Shown," 29 Apr. 1990).
Sara Holmes Boutelle lectures on Muir, Austin, Northman, Morgan, Hazel Waterman, and Lillian Rice.
- 1993 Mar 19 Muller dies in San Luis Obispo at age 92.

- 2000 John Noggle dies in San Luis Obispo (Social Security Death Index).
- 2005 & 2019 The *Los Angeles Times* mentions Edla Muir briefly in architectural overviews (Steven Barrie-Anthony, "Landscape of Constant Change, 7 July 2005; Steve Carney, "Architectural Spotlight: Colonial," 23 Feb. 2019, J44 and J13/J15)
- 2020 Dec 31 Neva Noggle dies at 211 Chorro at age 99 ("Neva Noggle").

3. Historic Context

A. V. Muller was a remarkable self-made man in an era of self-made men, though when that possibility was largely reserved for Whites. Son of an immigrant pottery laborer in a small town nestled at the edge of the Sierra foothills, a cannery worker when he registered for the draft at nineteen, and subsequently serving in the US Army as a private, by twenty-four he had his JD from Stanford and had formed a legal partnership with a local judge.

By age thirty Muller was elected a city judge himself and appointed assistant district attorney for San Luis Obispo County. By thirty-four he entered private practice in the City of San Luis Obispo and by thirty-six built the second most expensive house permitted in the city that year, designed by prominent LA architect Edla Miller, who was featured that year in the *California House and Garden Exhibition* and its press. Constructed by the Stolte Company, contractors for Hearst Castle, Muller's house centered the Whites only Anholm Tract, on land that had been previously occupied by Chinese truck farmers.

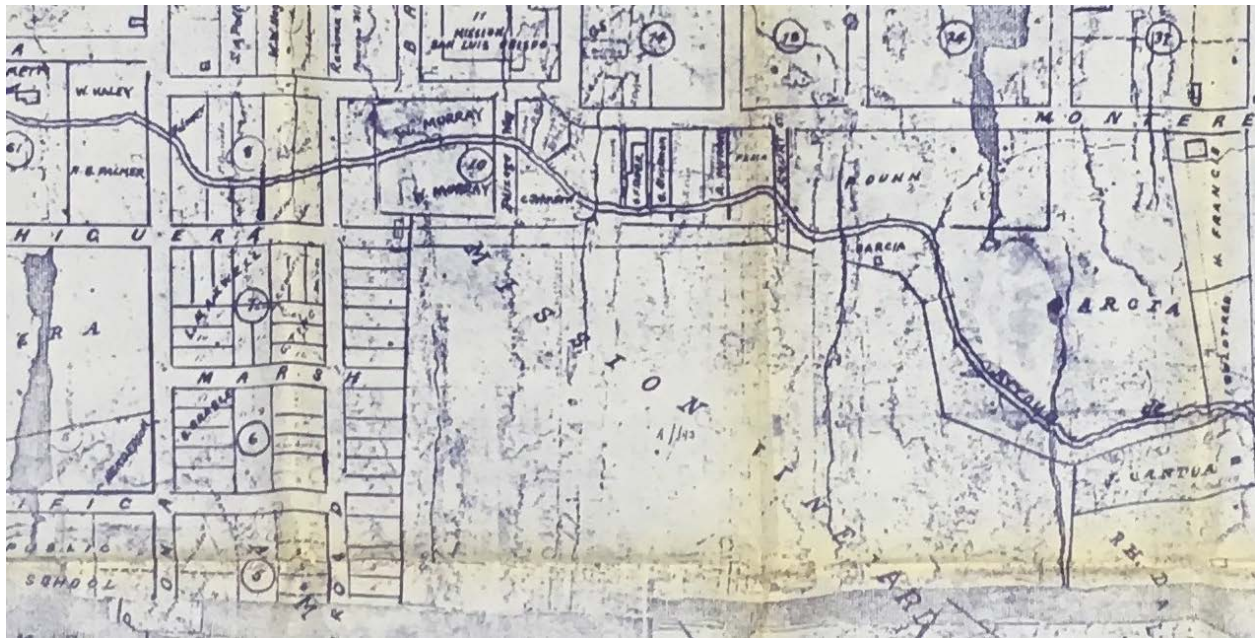
Tract housing in San Luis Obispo The earliest tract in San Luis was built between 1801 and 1810 by enslaved yak tityu tityu yak tilhini/Northern Chumash: 80 adobe and tile houses with windows, 17' wide by 20' deep in two rows on either side of Chorro Street, (Paul H. Kocher, *Mission San Luis Obispo: A Historical Sketch* [San Luis Obispo: Blake, 1972], p. 34; Edith Webb, "Pages from the History of Mission San Luis Obispo," *California History Nugget*, Jan. 1938, p. 117). Some or all would appear to have been detached, with front windows and side entries. Of this linear and permanent housing development, meant to displace indigenous wickiups, only three structures survive: the two ground floor interior rooms of the Sauer-Adams Adobe and the Sauer Adobe next door.



Sauer-Adams Adobe and Sauer Adobe, 964 and 970 Chorro, after 1907

The mission was also behind the next tract housing in San Luis Obispo: the Mission Vineyard Tract. The mission's building, vineyard, and orchard were returned by the

American government to the Catholic Church, which sold off the 160 or so acres of the vineyard for business and housing, comprising most of today's downtown from San Luis Creek south to approximately Buchon Street and between Broad and Santa Rosa.



In the 1870 R. R. Harris and H. D. Ward map of San Luis commissioned by the Board of Trustees (detail above), the vineyard was yet to be mapped for city blocks, along with most other areas south of San Luis Creek, including Walter Murray and Pierre Dallidet's lands.



In 1894 map by city engineer C. W. Henderson (detail above), these areas had become the Vineyard, Murray and Church, and Dallidet Tracts. They were joined by Reed's, South Side, Buena Vista, La Belle, the Phillips Addition, Phillips and Beebe, Phillips Syndicate, Central Addition, Schwartz, Loomis and Osgood, Imperial, Isabel, Maymont, Fairview, Harford, South Side, Brizzolara, Hathway, Arlington, Deleissiguez, Buckley, and Fixlini. The town was ready for expansion from local farmers and speculators.

The slump of the 1890s put off much of this anticipated development. In 1888, for instance, Captain Charles Goodall and former California governor George Perkins, owners of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company and Pacific Coast Railway, built a horse-drawn street railway from the PCR depot on the west end of town to their grand new Hotel Ramona—"as beautiful as the heroine after whom it is named"—on the east end of town and subdivided, sewerred, and macadamized the area around it, which they called the Central Addition. Their Buena Vista Addition was anticipated to rise to the top of Terrace (then Terraced) Hill. Buena Vista also had a trolley extension, was near the PCR's route south, and was next to the surveyed Southern Pacific Line, which would finally be completed in 1894. Goodall and Perkins simultaneously marketed the Phillips Addition around Mill Street between Johnson and Grand, for which they had the street railway franchise but as yet no track.

The street railway was never built on Grand. The Hotel Ramona closed in December 1894, seven months after the Southern Pacific arrived, for lack of business. The next year it reopened under the management of one of Goodall and Perkins' minority partners, R. E. Jack. He bought the street railway system, still only two and a half miles long, five years later and shut it down the following year. The Ramona burned down in 1905, seventeen years after it was built, causing Jack and the Goldtrees' County Bank of San Luis Obispo to fail. There is no photographic, cartographic, or built evidence, that any of these areas had been successfully developed during those years, apart from a few scattered cottages at the base of Terrace Hill, despite San Luis Obispo's population rising by 71 percent between 1900—when the SP's line to Los Angeles was completed—and 1910.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tracts in the western United States tended to offer individuals lots to build on rather than ready-built housing in rows. It's not clear whether this was because of a lack of necessity to house large numbers, a lack of capital to build for them, an Old West tendency toward individualism, or all three. The absence of building developments, however, has given late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century San Luis Obispo its characteristic architectural variety.

In the San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles areas there was more tendency to build housing developments than in California's smaller towns, but even there, substantial developer built tracts only arrived after World War I, with, for instance, Henry Doelger and Carl and Fred Gellert (the latter Joan Gellert-Sargen's father) in San Francisco's Sunset District, where a cheerful Eclecticism relieved mass production. After World War II, Doelger and the Gellerts moved their efforts to Daly City. Mid-Century Modernism did less to allay the sense of sameness the hillside tracts gave, and Malvina Reynolds got the inspiration for her hit song "Little Boxes" driving by Daly City in 1962.

In late 1923, San Luis Obispanians were able to buy lots in Mount Pleasanton Square (Broad, Benton, and Mount Pleasanton (now Chorro) between Murray and Meinecke, and by 1927 in the Anholm Addition (directly south, Lincoln to Broad and Murray). George and Chris Anholm were ethnic Danes from the village Fole (German Fohl) near Haderslev (German Hadersleben) in Schleswig-Holstein, whose disputed ownership between Denmark and Germany inspired the observation apocryphally attributed to Lord Palmerston: "Only three people have ever really understood the Schleswig-Holstein business—the Prince Consort, who is dead—a German professor, who has gone mad—and I, who have forgotten all about it" (Lyttton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* [New York: Harcourt, 1921], p. 364).

The Anholms were born within the decade after the Second Schleswig War, which assigned Holstein to Austria and Schleswig to Prussia, which two years later seized Holstein from Austria in the Austro-Prussian War. Hence George had good reason to go to America at fifteen and Chris to join him three years later, AWOL from the German Army. Fole and Haderslev returned to Denmark in the Schleswig plebiscite of 1920, but by then George and Chris were in their late forties, American citizens, successful farmers, and had already embarked on a property development that would occupy them for three decades. In 1918—Chris having just returned from Denmark with his new wife and child—the two brothers bought from Judge McDowell Reid Venable's widow Alice equal shares of ranchland between Cerro San Luis and Stenner Creek, for \$10,500 each. The Telegram much later referred to the Anholm Tract being built in the area known as Chinese Gardens. According to a map at the History Center, it had held Ah Louis's first brickyard circa 1872–87 and his vegetable and seed gardens, so presumably Ah Louis rented from Venable. George Anholm lived and farmed nearby.

ANHOLM TRACT

Big Lot Sale Sunday, June 10th

Don't fail to come out and see this beautiful subdivision. Adjoining Mt. Pleasanton Square on the south as it does it forms the largest first class residence section to San Luis Obispo. Many beautiful homes are now building and will be built in Anholm. It will be a district of all new homes. Chorro Street is now connected up with Morro Highway and Chorro Street runs right through Anholm addition.

Anholm lots are sure to increase in value—their location assures purchase of future desirability and you will enjoy your home here.

Building restrictions protect your investment. The prices are low. The terms easy. Sewer, water, gas and lights. No assessments against Anholm lots.

Read our big announcement in Saturday's Telegram.

Make your plans to visit the tract Sunday and come early.

If you are interested in buying a new home I have two under construction for sale. It's a pleasure to show them.

J. A. STEBBINS, AGENT,
Room 17, Wade Bldg.
Also office on tract.

Telephones 633-732-J.

First advertisement for the Anholm Addition, noting in the phrase "Building restrictions protect your investment" that it was racially covenanted (San Luis Obispo Daily Telegram, 8 June 1928)

In 1921 James A. Stebbins, a prominent Fresno real estate man who had relocated to Sacramento and opened his own tire and automobile accessories store, subdivided a thirty-acre tract across the southeast limits of the state capital at what is now 58th Street below 14th Avenue. For \$75 down and \$10 a month, people tired of renting—"Mr. Rent Payer ... use judgment like your landlord did—build a home"—could become owners of an acre lot with all city services and no city taxes (Stebbins Tract advertisement, *Sacramento Union*, Apr. 1921; Stebbins Tract advertisement, *Sacramento Bee*, 23 Apr. 1921).

This promise was somewhat illusory, as Sacramento insisted on annexation if the tract wanted water from its mains (*Bee*, 20 Jan. 1922). By June Stebbins and his family

moved into a bungalow on the tract, and he turned his attention to selling built homes for \$300 down and \$45 a month. In 1927 he began to advertise houses on half acres. (There are few acre lots; they may have been a teaser.)

The same year Stebbins visited San Luis Obispo and in January 1928 sold his tire store in Sacramento, in March went on an extended holiday with his wife in Hawaii, and in June was promoting lots and houses in the forty-acre Anholm Addition with full-page ads (L. F. Gould advertisement, *Bee*, 1 Feb. 1928; "Mrs. Stebbins Is Honored on Eve of Departure," *Bee*, 10 Mar. 1928; Anholm Tract advertisements, *San Luis Obispo Daily Telegram*, 8 and 9 June 1928). The *Telegram* touted Stebbins as having been "for the past twenty years connected with California subdivisions in various parts of the state" (9 June 1928), though there is evidence only of his having rather slowly sold somewhat undistinguished houses on a small tract in Sacramento.

Stebbins did not stick with the Anholm Tract as long as he stuck with the Stebbins Tract. His last advertisement was nine months later in March 1929, promising a four-room furnished house at \$350 down and \$30 a month. From San Luis Obispo he and Mrs. Stebbins went to Caspar, Wyoming, and thence to Alhambra in Southern California. In 1932 he was back trying to sell houses in the Stebbins tract, moving into it again in 1933. His last advertisement there was in 1935.

George and Chris Anholm, who listed themselves as dairy farmers in the 1930 census, continued to sell lots and houses in their tract, Chris recording sales as late as 1948 and George taking out building permits as late as 1952. They also lived in their tract, selling off houses and moving to new ones. Their children lived there, too. George and Chris and their wives hosted Danish gatherings at their houses, served as precinct officer in elections, and otherwise participated in the new, White, suburban community they had created from the old Chinese Gardens.

4. Architectural Significance

Minimal Tradition Sir Edwin Lutyens' Munstead Wood is the ur-house for Minimal Traditional, begun 1889 and completed 1897 for garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, Lutyens' lifelong collaborator. Munstead has not only the close-clipped rakes of Minimal Traditional but minimized windows, decluttered walls, broad expanses of steeply pitched roofs, prominent chimneys, curvilinear features, and smooth transitions.



Actual Tudor architecture in Surrey (Losely Hall above left and farmhouse near Charlwood at right): busier, more angular, less sweeping than Lutyens' work. At Munstead (below) he regularized bays, integrated them into walls and roof, reduced windows, flared eaves, and used the chimney as a vertical plane to interact with horizontal ones. It was a smoother modernization than Wright's. Minimal rakes (in grand houses like Losely, parapets) were a Tudor feature fitting well in Lutyens' streamlined vision, while Wright used wide rakes and jettied upper floors of other Tudor houses in both Tudor Revival and some Prairie structures like the Meyer May (1908–09) and Emil Bach (1915) Houses. (Photograph of Munstead Wood from Sir Lawrence Weaver's Lutyens Houses and Gardens [London: Country Life, 1921].)



Unlike many Minimal Traditional houses, the Muller-Noggle House was built on a commodious lot (or series of lots), so it retained the horizontality of Lutyens' county house work. But it also adopted or adapted another aspect, the pyramid roof with central chimney. This form appears to have been borrowed by American Minimal Traditional architects soon after Lawrence Weaver's elephant folio *Houses and Gardens by E. L. Lutyens* was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in the United States in 1914. Lutyens' hipped roofs with central chimneys were not true pyramids, but the photography created a close enough effect to inspire what was to become the Muller-Noggle House's form.



The Dormy House, Walton Heath, entrance front; figure 279, Houses and Gardens by E. L. Lutyens



Littlecroft, Guildford, entrance front; figure 279, Houses and Gardens by E. L. Lutyens

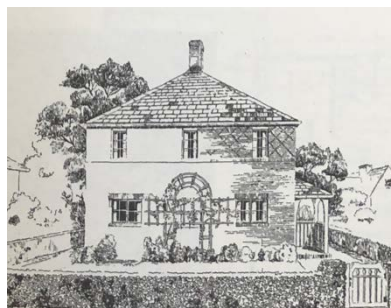
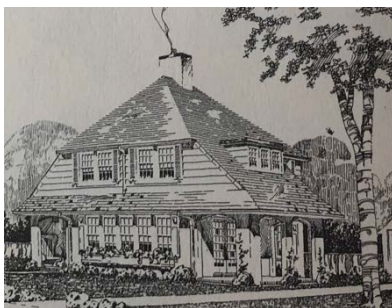
There is no one obvious model for Lutyens' innovation: a hipped roof with a central chimney (seen here in an 1820 Gotho-Palladian farmhouse in Wiltshire) is extremely rare but not unknown in English architecture. It's possible Lutyens had seen an image of the Lees' Stratford Hall in Virginia. It is more likely that American architects were ready to adopt the form because of their familiarity with Stratford.



At any event, it was a form that captured architects' imaginations for the multiplying and expanding suburbs after World War I, when the shady and airy California Bungalow, never really suited for much of the United States, had become passé. Muir would not have adopted it lightly: her papers at UC Santa Barbara show a great deal of research on various architectural forms from different eras and cultures. The new suburb would reverse the Asian influence of the bungalow, adapted from the traditional Bengali village house of simple design surrounded by wide eaves of a thatched hip roof. The inspirations of the Minimal Traditional were European and colonial styles, emphasizing White history, gentility, and overlordship. The great Black Los Angeles architect Paul Williams designing a Plantation-style Minimal Traditional house for a White client in a restricted neighborhood in the 1920s is a distillation of the moment.



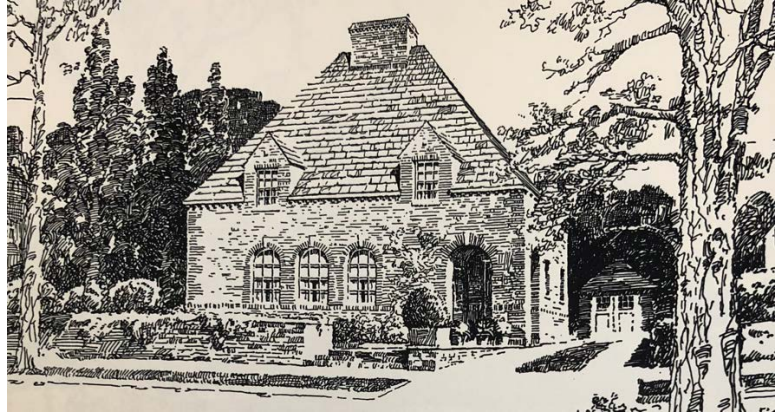
Stratford Hall, circa 1730s, Westmoreland County, Virginia, architect unknown. Nineteenth-century photograph.



Pyramidal English Cottage styles, from Henry Atterbury Smith, ed., Books of a Thousand Homes (New York: Home Owners Service Institute, 1923)



Late Georgian Revival from Books of a Thousand Homes



From Home Builder's Plan Book (New York: Building Plan Holding Corporation, 1921). Note garage with matching pyramidal roof, as in the Muller property.



Morgan Bulkeley House, Hartford, Connecticut, from Ethel B. Power, The Smaller American House: Fifty-Five Houses of the Less Expensive Type Selected from the Recent Work of Architects in All Parts of the Country (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927). Note the bell-cast eaves of the window and door extensions, as seen at left on a Muller-Noggle bay window: a characteristic of Georgian Revival though not particularly of Georgian architecture.

Edla Muir (1906–1971)

Edla Muir was not just an architect, not just a rare woman architect in an overwhelmingly man's field in the mid twentieth century, she was a regionally respected designer of revival homes who then became a nationally esteemed exponent of LA Modernism. Just as Julia Morgan made the transition from First Bay Tradition to Minimal Traditional, Muir made the transition from Minimal Traditional to Modernism. After each mastered their first style, they made their second style their own.

Muir focused—from the age of thirteen and her first work with architect John Byers—on the creation of homes; produced designs as notable for their comfortable and inviting interiors as their elegant and logical exteriors; practiced all but four years in one location, Los Angeles; and settled into a quiet, monogamous family life in three houses designed by herself. None of which could have been predicted by the scandalous and itinerant careers of her immediate family, which included at least eight divorces, three duels, four other shootings, bribery, extortion, embezzlement, malpractice, and countless lies.

The one thing Edla Muir had in common with her family was the ability to generate publicity, but in her case for skilled and carefully researched home designs, in theirs, for the disordered nature of their public and private affairs. Edla went to work for Byers about the time her mother appears to have abandoned the family and was divorcing Edla's father, who had separated from the family long before. It was also about the time her grandmother, with whom Edla lived, was divorcing her great-grandfather, the father-in-law she had married after her divorce and his widowing. It takes no stretch of the imagination to conclude that the practice of architecture was Edla Muir's path to sense and stability.

On her mother Ethel Fitch's side were a trail of corruption and newsworthy domestic ruptures going back to the early 1860s, with great-grandfather Tom Fitch, the Silver-Tongued Orator of Nevada/the Pacific/the Golden West/ the Sagebrush State. Edla's father, Dr. Joseph Muir, gambled in high-stakes poker, Broadway shows, experimental medicine that verged on quackery, and marriages with heiresses—the heiress preceding her mother being Edla's namesake. These two men, the greatest male presences in Edla's formative years, showed strong psychopathic, narcissistic, and Machiavellian tendencies: the dark triad traits that often lead to success though almost as often of an ephemeral kind.

In contrast, a capstone interview with Edla Muir in the *Los Angeles Times Home* magazine concluded by emphasizing her self-effacement: "On this page is a picture of one of the architect's houses which won an honor award from the American Institute of Architects. Edla Muir modestly said little about it."¹

Dr. Joseph Muir Edla Muir's father—physician, diplomat, gambler, financial speculator, and fortune-hunter who repeatedly made national news for the wrong reasons—was born in 1864 in Riga, Latvia (then part of Russia), son of Joseph and Sarah Meuer, immigrants to America from Latvia's large German or possibly German Jewish colony. A turn-of-the-century newspaper article describing Dr. Muir as "dark-haired, heavy-faced, magnetic-voiced" seemed to imply the latter in the language of the day.²

¹. Jean Krenzer, "New Directions: A Quiet Type of Rebellion," 1960, p 23.

². "Gold Tips on Her Cigarettes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 Apr. 1901, p. 3.

Several newspapers during an 1898 scandal attributed Dr. Muir's medical degree to New York University, but others of his published medical qualifications were doubtful. Well before, in 1891, he attracted the attention of the press when, as Dr. A. Joseph Meuer, by his own accounts elsewhere age twenty-six, he set up the Koch tuberculosis hospital in Denver, supposedly funded by the city and a wealthy German woman, based on a sample of tuberculin he had traveled to Berlin to obtain from Dr. Robert Koch. Koch, the discoverer of the tubercle bacillus, had presented tuberculin in 1890 as a miracle tuberculosis cure without rigorous testing. After a flurry of publicity across the Midwest, both Koch's treatment and Meuer's hospital failed, though Koch went on to win the Nobel Prize for his other accomplishments.³

Meuer returned to New York and set up a practice as a lung and tuberculosis specialist. The 30-year-old doctor married Maud Kennedy Roseburgh, a 29-year-old widow, in March 1894, by which time he was giving his name as Muir. She had divorced him, retaining custody of their daughter, by July 1898, when he eloped with 23-year-old Edla Coleman McPherson, daughter of a late three-term US Senator, possessor of a \$150,000 trust fund (\$5 million today) and potential heiress of \$750,000 (\$24 million today) ["Gold Tips"]. The elopement—they were married against the bride's mother's wishes by a part-time justice and full-time barber in Hoboken—made national news.

Edla McPherson Muir's mother, Edla Gregory McPherson, accused Joseph Muir of mental manipulation, vainly encouraged an annulment, and threatened to disinherit her daughter.

Following their marriage, the Muirs spent extravagantly and as "angels" invested with some success and numerous failures in theatrical ventures. Eventually bill collectors—including for 2,400 gold-tipped cigarettes individually stamped with Edla's signature "Eddy"—caused them retire from their townhouse on West 36th Street to a suite at the Waldorf. The late Senator McPherson's contacts were enlisted to get Dr. Muir appointed secretary of legation in Stockholm by William McKinley, though unpaid actors petitioned the US Senate to withhold the appointment until they received their arrears.⁴

Muir had arrived in America in 1875, according to the statement on his naturalization papers. He was not, however, naturalized until 18 March 1901, on the eve of his departure for Europe to take up his US diplomatic post.

The Muirs had just arrived in Ireland on their way to Stockholm when they were told Edla's mother had died suddenly. She returned to New York; her husband continued to his post.⁵ On the voyage over, he had lost nearly \$10,000 (a third of a million today) at poker with three confidence tricksters, one of them claiming to be the nephew of the governor of New York. On the voyage back, they informed his wife of the debt, and in New York she paid his \$8,000 of IOUs to avoid public scandal. Nevertheless, the incident made the newspapers in

³. "A Consumptives' Hospital," *Pittsburg Press*, 4 Feb. 1891, p. 1; "Consumption Cured," *Larence, KS Weekly Record*, 18 Sep. 1891, p. 1; "Dr. Munn [sic] Is Back on Broadway; Returns Rich with Wife No. 3," *Montgomery Times*, 25 Nov. 1908, p. 8.

⁴. "Sweden Aghast at Escapades of American Consul," *San Francisco Examiner, Sunday Examiner Magazine*, 9 June 1901.

⁵. "Mrs. John R. M'Pherson," *Brooklyn Standard Union*, 30 Mar. 1901, p. 2; "Muir Goes to Stockholm," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 12 Apr. 1901, p. 1.

every region of the country, and despite the Pinkertons being called in, the sharpers escaped with the money.⁶



Architect Edla Muir's father and her unrelated namesake, his second wife Edla McPherson Muir. *San Francisco Examiner*, *Sunday Examiner Magazine*, 9 June 1901.

Next, Edla McPherson Muir discovered that despite a supposed reconciliation, her mother had left her only a life interest in the late Senator's fortune. The daughter spent the summer filing lawsuits to break the will and reportedly reached a settlement with the executor. Before she could sign it, however, she died: on 29 December 1901 of measles and pneumonia in the Manhattan Hotel, while her husband was still in Stockholm.⁷

⁶ "Dr. Muir's Costly Voyage," *New York Times*, 22 Apr. 1901, p. 5.

⁷ "Ends a Legal Contest," *Indianapolis News*, 31 Dec. 1901, p. 8; "Edla Coleman Muir Dead," *Boston Globe*, 31 Dec. 1901.

Dr. Muir, after accounting for \$20,000 of debts, declared the value of his wife's estate at \$11.⁸ He continued litigation against the will, losing one suit in 1907, but it does not seem to have been finally settled till 1913, with much of the legacy consumed by legal costs.⁹

Dr. Muir ended his career as legation secretary on 1 June 1902, having started it a year earlier, but he stayed in Stockholm: in July acting as second in duel and in December being fleeced of an unspecified amount of cash and \$1,200 in IOUs in a night of dice and poker by a man falsely claiming to be the son of the governor of Kentucky. This time the sharper was arrested and the money recovered.¹⁰

Ethel Fitch Muir In January 1905, after Dr. Muir had dropped out of the national news for two years, there was an announcement in the San Bernardino *Weekly Sun* of the capitalization of the Rancho La Vista company at \$50,000, the purpose being construction of a sanitarium and cottages on the Harrison Ranch near the Arrowhead hot springs. The stockholders were R. A. Mack, Rene Fitch, Ethel C. Fitch, Joseph Muir, and Thomas Fitch¹¹.

Eleven days later, the now-40-year-old Dr. Joseph Muir quietly married the 21-year-old Ethel Caroline Fitch at the First Methodist Episcopal Church parsonage in San Bernardino. Their witnesses, and the only people in attendance, were Ethel's mother, Rene or Rena Fitch, and Ethel's grandfather, the legendary "Colonel" Tom Fitch: former US Congressman from Nevada, California Assemblyman, Arizona legislator, and delegate to the Utah constitutional convention; editor of various frontier newspapers; legal defender of Brigham Young against polygamy prosecution and of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holiday for the gunfight at the OK Corral; the man whom Mark Twain credited as giving him his "first really profitable lesson" in composition; duelist; bribe-taker and extortionist—and the owner of the Harrison Ranch.¹²

Right: Edla Muir's father and mother, Montgomery Times, 24 November 1908



⁸ "Estate Barely Equals Debts," Washington, DC *Evening Star*, 23 Jan. 1902, p. 7; "Yale Is Remembered in M'Pherson Will," Washington, DC *Evening Times*, 8 Sep. 1902.

⁹ "Suit Recalls Old Romance," *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1907, p. 4; "\$318,000 for Poor Students at Yale," Ottawa, KS *Evening Herald*, 16 Sep. 1913, p. 8.

¹⁰ "The Cream of Late Scandinavian News," *Moline Daily Dispatch*, 31 July 1902, p. 8; 5 Jan. 1903, p. 8.

¹¹ 20 Jan. 1905, p. 3.

¹² Archibald Henderson, *Mark Twain* (New York: Stokes, 1901), pp. 99–100.

There is some confusion in public accounts as to whether Tom Fitch was Ethel Fitch Muir's father or grandfather. In fact he was both. Eight weeks after they witnessed Ethel's marriage to Joseph Muir, the 67-year-old and recently widowed Tom Fitch married his 41-year-old daughter-in-law, with Joseph and Ethel Fitch Muir as witnesses.

The peculiarity of the latter marriage, the celebrity of the groom, and the attempt to keep the license secret ended up making news reports across the West, which also drew press attention to the Muirs' marriage, though the papers did not make the connection to the notorious Dr. Muir of New York or Dr. Meuer of Denver.¹³ The newspapers all reported—presumably on the bride and groom's information—that Rena Fitch was also widowed, but in fact her first husband, Tom's son Francis, was alive and well and living with his second wife Laura Cardwell and second daughter Frances, though where is unclear. He had been practicing law in Medford, Oregon in the mid 1890s, then relocated to San Francisco, then Los Angeles by 1897, Medford in 1900, San Francisco in 1901, but in 1903 the Ways and Means Committee of the Oregon State Legislature included an expense of \$112 to Alex Orme “incurred in the pursuit of Francis Fitch, a fugitive from justice.”¹⁴ He turned up again in San Francisco in 1908, associated with the Cameraphone Company, incorporated to take advantage of a talking picture invention by his brother Tom Fitch, Jr. In 1909 the collapsed company was suing its five directors for fraud and conspiracy, attempting to lodge responsibility for its debts to them and Francis Fitch, “to whom they transferred the greater part of their stock.” Francis, meanwhile, had moved to New York City.¹⁵

Ethel Caroline Fitch, Francis's first daughter, Joseph Muir's third bride and the architect Edla Muir's mother, was born in San Francisco on 19 May 1883 to Francis and Rena Dodds Fitch, who had married a year earlier in Arizona.¹⁶ Francis was Tom Fitch's elder son, born in Missouri in 1859, before his father came out West to campaign for Lincoln in California. Francis's mother Mary divorced Tom in 1862, eight months pregnant with their younger son, Tom Fitch, Jr., and Tom largely abandoned all three, though the sons ended up on good terms with their father, and like their father Francis became an attorney, appearing to have partnered with him briefly in Denver after first practicing in Arizona and before practicing in San Diego.¹⁷

He also, like his father, ended up playing fast and loose with the law and moving (or having to move) often, in December 1888 being arrested in San Francisco for embezzling \$500 in San Diego; in January 1889 losing a lawsuit against the proprietress of a disreputable house on Ellis Street; and in April 1889 being indicted by a San Francisco grand jury for felony embezzlement of \$50 from a client, though this was later dismissed on the technicality that grand larceny must exceed \$50. In the meantime, the district attorney in San Diego, where

¹³. “Thomas Fitch Takes a Bride,” *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, 31 Mar. 1905, p. 1, 6.

¹⁴. “Francis Fitch, Attorney at Law,” advertisement, *Medford Mail*, 21 Jan. 1892–24 Apr. 1896; “News of the City,” 21 Feb. 1896, p. 5; “Redondo Arrivals,” *Los Angeles Post*, 21 June 1897, p. 1; 1900 US Census, Medford; “Purely Personal,” *Medford Mail*, 1 Mar. 1901, p. 6; “The Report Is Complete,” *Daily Orego Statesman*, 15 Feb. 1903, p. 5.

¹⁵. “Directors Accused of Fraud and Conspiracy,” *San Francisco Call*, 5 May 1909, p. 16; “Died: [Frances] Fitch,” *New York Times*, 30 Jan. 1909, p. 9.

¹⁶. “Miss Rena Dodds,” *Weekly Arizona Miner*, 6 Jan. 1882, p. 4.

¹⁷ “Frank Fitch,” *Globe Arizona Silver Belt*, 8 Sep. 1883, p. 3.

Fitch had apparently skipped bail, sought his return.¹⁸ When he and Rena divorced is unclear, but by 1891 he had relocated to Medford, Oregon and was married to Laura Cardwell, daughter of a wealthy rancher there.

Ethel Fitch was brought up by Rena Fitch, who in 1893 was traveling in the Pacific Northwest with her father-in-law Tom and his second wife Anna Fitch, all listed as being from New York.¹⁹ By 1894 Rena had married someone named Goodwin and seems to have been living in Arizona, while Ethel, 11, was at the Ramona Catholic convent school in Shorb (now Alhambra), where she helped found a journal and engaged in musical performances. Her great aunt in Missouri, Tom's sister, left a legacy—including property, cash, and diamonds—to pay for her education, and Rena made Tom her trustee. Ethel graduated from Ramona in July 1897, when she was 14. There is no record of further schooling except a stint at the Dobinson School of Expression and Dramatic Art in Los Angeles six years later.²⁰

The summer of her graduation, when Ethel's father Francis was living in Los Angeles, social news listed Ethel and her mother as living in Beaumont, in Riverside County near the San Bernardino County border, though summering at the Hon. Thomas Fitch's house in Coronado and at the Hotel Del Coronado while the Francis Fitches visited Redondo Beach and Catalina. By the 1900 US Census, Rena, 37 and using her Fitch surname again, and Ethel, 17—neither with an occupation listed—were staying among middle-class lodgers at 326 S. Hill Street in the then-respectable Bunker Hill neighborhood. By 1902 Rena was sharing a grand stone and wood Queen Anne house at 2666 Menlo in the Rowley Tract of the Adams-Normandie with another woman. In December 1904, just before the plans for the Harrison Ranch were announced and she married Joseph Muir, Ethel was living at the ranch with her grandfather.²¹

The Muir-Fitch sanitarium and cottages never came to fruition, but Muir was once again successful in marrying a young heiress, though for a smaller sum than Edla McPherson. Thomas Fitch, as trustee for Ethel, had sold land in the Rowley Tract of the Adams-Normandie neighborhood of Los Angeles for \$6,500 in 1899. Tom Fitch deeded Ethel land in San Bernardino County, and Ethel and Joseph Muir sold some San Bernardino land for \$15,000 and mortgaged more for \$1,500 in 1908 before leaving in the same year for New York City, where Dr. Muir was quoted as having “made a fortune” in ranching, though he did not specify that it was by marrying someone half his age to whom the fortune belonged.²² In the meantime, Joseph and Ethel Muir had had their first child in San

¹⁸. “Francis Fitch,” *San Diego Union*, 19 Dec. 1888, p. 8; “Lawyer Fitch Gets No Fee,” *Daily Alta California*, 29 Jan 1889, p. 1; “Fitch Freed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 May 1889, p. 6; “Fallen Francis Fitch,” *San Diego Union*, 27 Apr. 1889, p. 5.

¹⁹. “Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Fitch and Mrs. Rene Fitch of New York,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 6 Aug. 1893, p. 12.

²⁰. “Local Briefs,” *Arizona Republican*, 9 Dec. 1894, p. 4; “Probate Court,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, 25 Oct. 1894, p. 12; “Shorb has an interesting new journalistic venture,” *San Francisco Call*, 17 Feb. 1896, p. 6; “Shorb,” *The Tidings*, 3 July 1897, p. 2; “Dramatic Art,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 8 May 1903, p. 4.

²¹. “Events of the Week in Society: Coronado,” *San Francisco Call*, 1 Aug. 1897, p. 26; Los Angeles city directory, 1902–1903, p. 1556; “Personal,” *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, 24 Dec. 1904, p. 5.

²². *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 27 Nov. 1899; *Daily Times Index*, 19 Apr. 1905; “Official Record, January 3, 14 and 15,” *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, 4 Jan. 1908, p. 8.

Francisco on 23 January 1906 and named her Edla after Joseph Muir's earlier great catch. This Edla Muir was to become the master architect.

In the 1910 census, the Muirs were living in a substantial Neoclassical apartment building at 3 West 87th Street, beyond the range of fashion but not of wealth, with Edla; her baby brother Thomas Fitch Muir, generally known as Fitch; and two live-in servants. Francis and Laura Cardwell Fitch, Edla's grandfather and step-grandmother, were living a fifteen-minute walk away on West 18th Street, though Francis would die later that year. His first wife Rena was back in California suing her mother over control of a hotel in Banning that Rena had given her.²³

Joseph had recently been running an "inhalatorium" for chorus girls in *The Chocolate Soldier* backstage at the Casino Theater, which made national news.²⁴ Ethel listed her profession as "none," but the following year the New York and New Jersey papers began to give Ethel Fitch Muir concert listings and even notices—"sang well" ("Musical Moments," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 Dec. 1911, p. 13)—as a mezzo-soprano and contralto. These stopped in 1913, and in 1915 the *Los Angeles Times* announced her return to that city and cited her coaching by Hans Morgenstern. As Morgenstern was director of the Metropolitan Opera's Chorus School, it suggests Fitch Muir sang in the Met's chorus as well as appearing as a soloist at recitals in the region.

In the meantime, Dr. Muir, author of the article "Radium for Gout," gained national press for his new "emanatorium," "a sort of sealed room where the radium charges the atmosphere, the patients sit idly."²⁵ He went on to promote radium in various treatments and connect himself with the Radium Company of Colorado as a supplier of the then rare and hugely valuable material, bizarrely claiming both membership in the Royal College of Surgeons and Royal College of Physicians and to have been the model for the profile of the Indian on the Buffalo Nickel.²⁶

Los Angeles press and promotion treated Ethel Fitch Muir as an opera star from the East Coast, but after the initial hype, her career failed to take off, and her last documented appearance under that name was at a Wednesday noontime recital at the Barker Brothers furniture store in downtown Los Angeles in July 1919.²⁷ Her next press notices were in Los Angeles and New York papers from April to August 1920 for her divorce action against Joseph Muir for desertion and failure to provide, asking monthly alimony of \$250 and child support of \$150 (about \$5,500 today).

Ethel Muir alleged that her husband sent her from New York to Los Angeles and refused to send her enough money to return or to acknowledge her letters. The *Los Angeles Evening Express* also reported that they had separated in 1910, presumably based on information

²³. "Mrs. Fisher to Retain Hotel," *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, 1 May 1910, p. 9.

²⁴. "Throat Hospital for Chorus in New York," *Los Angeles Herald*, 13 Feb. 1910, p. 41.

²⁵ "Radium Treatment Now in Operation," *Plainfield Courier-News*, 17 Apr. 1914, p. 23; O. O. McIntyre, "New York Letter: Right from Broadway," *Lima Republican Gazette*, 28 Nov. 1914, p. 4.

²⁶. Features on Every American Nickel, *Montreal Gazette*, 18 Oct. 1921, p. 5.

²⁷. Barker Brothers advertisement, *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, 31 July 1919, p. 6.

given by Ethel, as Joseph neither contested the divorce nor sent legal representation.²⁸ This date of separation seems unlikely, as in March 1912 Ethel and Joseph were dining with Ethel's step-mother, Laura Cardwell Fitch, in apartment on West 97th Street in New York, when her step-aunt, Rose Cardwell Fitch Hughes, shot herself twice in the chest an attempted but unsuccessful suicide.²⁹

Gunplay was not unusual among the Fitches. When Rose Cardwell had divorced Ethel's uncle, Thomas Fitch, Jr., in 1898, he shot her attorney in the hand, which later had to be amputated. Francis Fitch—Ethel's father, who had shot himself in the foot shortly after marrying his first wife Rena Dodds—represented Thomas in the criminal complaint, where he got him off, then in the divorce took the side of Rose, who was his second wife's sister. Two years after the divorce, Thomas Fitch's first wife Susie Shaw, his "girl bride" and "a comely brunette of high connections," shot in the chest Edward Conway, a tailor's cutter who she claimed—and he claimed was not—her husband, although he claimed to have been supporting her and Thomas Fitch, Jr.'s son. She was let off when Conway admitted to having attacked her with a knife and declined to press charges. The press initially confused Susie Shaw Fitch and Rose Cardwell Fitch in its salacious reporting.³⁰

Ethel Fitch's divorce from Joseph Muir, though less violent than her uncle Thomas's, is interesting to the architect Edla Muir's development, because according to the 1920 US Census, on January 17, Ethel Muir was cohabiting with Gustav Gottlieb, a dental mechanic, in a rented apartment at 126 Third Street in downtown Los Angeles. Muir seems to have filled in the information, listing the birthplace of Gustav and his parents as New York (it was Austria), his age as 30 (it was 26), herself as his wife (they did not marry till 8 November 1921), and his name as Gustav Muir.

Meanwhile, on January 12, the census recorded Ethel Muir's 14-year-old daughter Edla and 10-year-old son Fitch as living with their grandmother Rena as head of household at the rented address of 146½ Surf Street in Santa Monica. A few doors down, at 154, Thomas Fitch was living as a boarder. The previous month, Tom Fitch had sued Rena for desertion, claiming she had an income of more than \$150 a month (about \$2,400 today), and enjoined her from disposing of \$5,000 of jewelry and \$20,000 in real estate. Rena filed a cross-complaint for desertion and nonsupport, claiming Tom Fitch had the "brilliant mental attainments" to earn a livelihood (he was still advertising his legal practice and writing newspaper columns). He withdrew the suit after an agreement to settle their property rights.³¹ Ten days before the Santa Monica census, Tom was recorded as living in a large rooming house in Lincoln Heights. The family seems to have fallen on hard times with the attendant acrimony.

²⁸. "Wife Seeking Divorce Asks \$400 a Month," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, 19 Apr. 1920, p. B1; "Divorce Granted to Dr. Joseph Muir's Wife," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 26 Aug. 1920, p. 11.

²⁹. "Naval Officer's Widow Attempts to Kill Self," *Washington, DC Evening Star*, 30 Mar. 1912, p. 9.

³⁰. "Was Found Not Guilty," *Oakland Tribune*, 6 Dec. 1900, p. 8; "Await Result of Shot She Fired," *San Francisco Call*, 4 Dec. 1900, p. 11; "Rose Cardwell Fitch Shoots," *Stockton Daily Record*, 3 Dec. 1900, p. 1.

³¹. "Thomas Fitch, 82, Is Seeking Divorce," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 9 Dec. 1919, p. 13; "Fitch Drops His Divorce Suit," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, 11 Dec. 1919, p. B1.

Ethel Gottlieb continued her singing career under her new name though to little press notice.³² In the 1930 and 1940 censuses and at her death in 1942, she and Gustav were living in largely Japanese truck farming areas of Hawthorne.

Joseph Muir's last two encounters with the national press were when (a) he promoted, to American Academy of Physical Therapy, radiation for the treatment of cancer, finally getting a medical advance right, and (b), simultaneously, a manicurist and former Follies girl, Irma Schubert, sued him for \$150,000 for malpractice for leaving a radium seed in her throat during a treatment for tonsillitis, injuring her health and ruining her beauty and stage career. "Then when I became ill, he offered to marry me." The suit was settled for an undisclosed sum, but Schubert was later pictured boarding a liner for three-week Caribbean cruise.³³ The showgirl suit got far more play than the cancer treatment. Muir died in Manhattan on 11 February 1934 to no notice in the press.

Later in the year his daughter Edla was to gain her architecture license and become a partner with John Byers, and the next year design a modest, homey Minimal Traditional Colonial for herself at 455 North Bundy in Brentwood.

Tom Fitch Edla Muir's cultural DNA stretches back to her great-grandfather, step-grandfather, and effective *in loco patris* Tom Fitch—not only because from age nine to seventeen, after she and her mother and brother came to Los Angeles, he was the substitute father figure in her life; not only because his writing, speechmaking, and personal mythmaking continued to resonate through the Los Angeles basin during that time; but because his combination of genius and malfeasance descended, somewhat diluted, through the next two generations and their high rolling, risk taking, rule breaking, and tendency to flee from the consequences. Edla Muir's career definitively rejected this inheritance, yet she also designed for the people of this world: Hollywood stars and business tycoons.

Despite having reported on the second Lincoln-Douglas debate and advised the young Mark Twain at the beginning of his speaking career, Thomas Fitch lived till 1923, after his great-granddaughter Edla had graduated from high school and gone to work full-time for architect John Byers. Tom Fitch—boarding next to the beach in Santa Monica, two doors down from Edla, her brother and his namesake Fitch, and Edla's grandmother and his third wife Rena—lived much reduced but with an afterglow of glory in a city whose first lot sales he had graced with his oratory and speculation forty-five years earlier.

In the late 1900s, 1910s, and early 1920s, when Edla was growing up in the Southland, Tom Fitch was still practicing law, giving speeches, and writing regular columns for the *Los Angeles Times* and other publications. In 1909, he argued a seven-year-old case for the Japanese Merchants' Union from his time practicing law in Hawaii—whether sake should be taxed as wine, beer, or miscellaneous—before the US Supreme Court. The court ruled against his clients in 1910, depriving him of a \$100,000 contingency fee and the restoration

³². "Weekend Concert Sponsored by Silverwood's," *Los Angeles Daily Times*, 7 Feb. 1925, p. 18.

³³. "Cancer Control Is Subject of New York Physician," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 3 Sep. 1931, p. 2; Jack Miley, "Doctor Says 'Sue Me,' So She Sues—for \$150,000," *New York Daily News*, 22 Nov. 1929, p. 3; "Ex-Follies Girls Settles \$150,000 Damage Suit," *Garrett Clipper*, 15 Feb. 1932, p. 2; "Radium Suit Winner Starts Trip to West Indies," *Bergen Evening Record*, 16 Mar. 1932, p. 3.

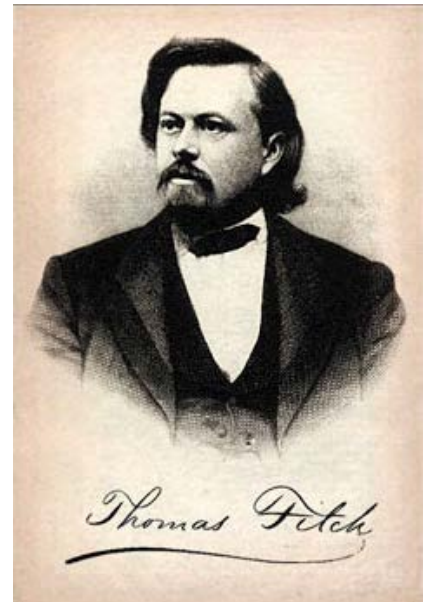
of the family's dwindling fortunes.³⁴ Though his columns (and doubtless family narratives) were sanitized versions of his past, he was certainly a looming presence in young Edla's life.

Tom Fitch in the 1860s Thomas Fitch first came to the notice of Californians in August 1860 as a 23-year-old star, making dozens of stump speeches for Abraham Lincoln around the state as the "eloquent Milwaukian" (Republican papers) or "carpet bag politician" and "imported 'Milwaukie orator'" talking "soft nonsense" (Democratic).

Throughout a career that spanned the late 1850s to the early 1920s, Fitch attracted a following by being willing to speak truth to power in earthy and eloquent language. In 1864 in Nevada Territory, he brought a criminal complaint against one W. F. Myers for "language derogatory of our fellow citizens of African descent," with the result that the government of the United States was brought into disrepute and the southern Confederacy encouraged, so Fitch charged Myers should be hanged for treason. (The complaint was dismissed.) Four decades later, Fitch created great offense among white Hawaiians, soon after his arrival in Honolulu to set up a law practice, by defending Chinese labor and averring that "we swiped the Kanakas' country."³⁵

But he he found it hard to resist grafting money from power. While he was campaigning for Lincoln in California, his pregnant wife and infant son were back in Wisconsin, where in February of that year he had become part owner of the *Free Democrat*, an abolitionist newspaper, bringing "to the establishment a liberal amount of capital." By June his editorial and proprietary interested in the paper had ended, and he had been arrested in Milwaukee and taken to Missouri on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses a year before.³⁶ This combination of trouble and flight to new opportunities was to become a pattern in his life and that of his eldest son Francis, Edla's grandfather, and of Edla's mother Ethel.

Lincoln won California in November, and immediately after the election, Tom Fitch took over as editor of the *San Francisco Gazette*, which failed within a month.³⁷



On 11 January 1861 Fitch sailed east, "intending to return at once with his family." Instead, on February 8, he was meeting with Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, four days before the president-elect departed for Washington, noted by contemporaries as an inconvenient moment for an importunate office-seeker. Supposedly the California delegation had come

³⁴. "Sake Cases Again Heard," *Honolulu Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 20 Dec. 1909, p. 19; "Half Million Is Lost by Sake Decision," *Honolulu Evening Bulletin*, 4 Jan. 1910, p. 1.

³⁵. "Hang Him," *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 4 Apr. 1864, p. 1; "Mr. Fitch's Views," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 28 Dec. 1901, p. 4.

³⁶. "The 'Free Democrat,'" *Racine Daily Journal*, 18 Feb. 1860, p. 1; "Arrest of One of the Late Editors of the Milwaukee 'Free Democrat,'" *Chicago Press and Tribune*, 18 June 1860, p. 2.

³⁷. "San Francisco Gazette," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 17 Dec. 1860, p. 8.

to press the cause for a Californian in the cabinet, but it was assumed they were actually there to promote their individual interests. After the inauguration in March, Fitch was in Washington, DC and on April 11 boarded a return ship from New York to California, due to arrive May 4—unaccompanied by his family and without a federal appointment.³⁸ Neither Honest Abe nor anyone in his administration seemed to find Fitch suitable for even minor employment, in an era when a vastly greater proportion of federal jobs were in the president's gift.

But Tom Fitch's pull in California was greater, and on June 7, a month after his return, he was appointed the cashier at the San Francisco Mint by the mint's superintendent. Unfortunately, the Mint's treasurer appointed a rival candidate at the same time. They trained in tandem under their departing predecessor, but within five days it was announced Fitch would be joining the San Francisco *Daily Times*, and by mid July it was announced he had resigned from the Mint. In July, announcements of his speaking engagements by the Republican State Central Committee described him as editor of the *Daily Times* and gave him the honorific *Esquire*, whether because he had obtained legal credentials or in recognition of his brief government office is unclear.³⁹

By mid August 1861 he is being referred to as the ex-editor of the *Daily Times*. According to the Republican State Central Committee, the *Daily Times*, in August, had tried to extort \$5,000 not to substitute the name of Union Democratic gubernatorial candidate John Conness for Republican Leland Stanford's at the head of its columns. Fitch, editor and part owner, disclaimed any knowledge of the extortion. In September Stanford won.⁴⁰

In October, Fitch purchased the Placerville *Republican* and became its editor. Almost immediately he was called to the California Regiment with the rank of major and was preparing to leave the *Republican* for the Civil War, but the news that the regiment's commander, Major General (and US Senator) Edward Dickinson Baker, had already been killed in action at the Battle of Ball's Bluff in Virginia, caused Fitch to cancel his departure, his loyalty apparently being political or personal rather than national.⁴¹

In November the *San Francisco Call* broke the story that Fitch had attempted to extort money from a US Post Office clerk for the latter to retain his position.⁴² So divided and intemperate were the California papers in Republican and Democratic partisanship that the story did not develop legs, but an investigation commenced from Washington on corruption in federal offices in California.

³⁸. "Departures By Today's Steamer," *Daily Alta California*, 11 Jan. 1861, p. 1; "Presidential Gossip," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 11 Mar. 1861, p. 4; "Sycamore in Washington," *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 25 Apr. 1861, p. 1; "Passengers Coming," *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 30 Apr. 1861, p. 4; "Returning Californians," *Daily Alta California*, 1 May 1861, p. 1; "Poor Fellow," *Red Bluff Beacon*, 23 May 1861, p. 2.

³⁹. "The Troubles in the Mint," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 10 June 1861, p. 6; "Exclusive to the Daily Bee," *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 12 June 1861, p. 3; "State Stump Speaker," *Daily Alta California*, 18 July 1861, p. 2; "Political Speaking—Thomas Fitch," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 20 July 1861, p. 4.

⁴⁰. "Political Meetings," *Daily National Democrat*, 14 Aug. 1861; "Card from the Republican State Central Committee," *Daily Alta California*, 28 Aug. 1861, p. 2.

⁴¹. "Placerville Republican," *Stockton Daily Independent*, 21 Oct. 1861, p. 2; "Placerville Republican," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2 Nov. 1861, p. 2.

⁴². "San Francisco Dispatch," *Stockton Daily Independent*, 23 Nov. 1861, p. 2.

At the end of April 1862, Fitch's wife Mary was severely burned on her arm, shoulders, neck, and ear when her ballgown caught a candle flame. In June their one-year-old daughter Camille Louisa died. Despite these two family disasters, the El Dorado County Republican convention elected Tom Fitch delegate to the state Union convention, and he attended it. On his return, Fitch ceased publication of the *Republican* and offered the presses, type, and office furniture for sale, apparently cleaned out.⁴³

Yet in July, Fitch gave the Independence Day address in Lone City and was nominated for State Assembly on the Union Democratic fusion ticket in El Dorado County. After a vituperative election in which Fitch was accused of many things and, according to the Democratic press, admitted to being a gambler and having been expelled from the Freemasons, he was elected in September, a 25-year-old Assemblyman who had been in California barely two years.⁴⁴

The next month, Mary Fitch, eight months pregnant, sued Thomas Fitch for divorce for desertion and failure to support, which divorce was granted November 11. On November 30 she gave birth to their younger son, whom she named Thomas Junior. A month later, on New Year's Day 1863, Tom Fitch married the poet Mrs. Anna Mariska Schultz, a fellow passenger on the *Cortes* in January 1861, which he had sailed on "to return at once with his family." Tom and Anna Fitch would stay married till her death in 1904.⁴⁵

The next few months were uneventful except for votes in the Assembly, where from January 1863 Fitch was sitting as a Republican despite having run on the Union Democratic ticket. In April he was nominated to run for Congress.⁴⁶

The same month, testimony in the federal investigation of corruption in San Francisco offices hit the newspapers. Fitch was accused of having obtained a Custom House printing contract at so inflated a rate that he was able to farm it out at half the cost; of having accepted a bribe to obtain someone a position at the San Francisco Mint, but the position was worth only two-thirds of what the briber had expected; of having promised to furnish information to bring down Superintendent Stevens, then met with Stevens and come away "flush of money, which was a remarkable circumstance, as he was dead broke when he arrived here from Placerville," and having subsequently not furnished the promised

⁴³. "A Sad Accident," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2 May 1862, p. 3; "Died," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 13 June 1862, p. 2; "The Republican County Convention," *Mountain Democrat*, 14 June 1862, p. 2; "Union State Convention," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 18 June 1862, p. 1; "Placerville Republican," 27 June 1862.

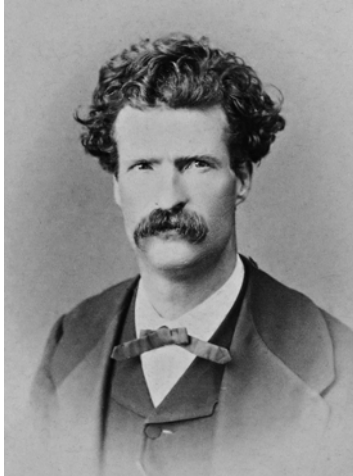
⁴⁴. "News of the Morning," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 16 June 1862, p. 2; "El Dorado Nominations," *Nevada Democrat*, 2 Aug. 1862, p. 2; "Sanderson and Fitch at Centreville," *Mountain Democrat*, 30 Aug. 1862, p. 3.

⁴⁵. "Items," *Sonoma County Democrat*, 23 Oct. 1862, p. 2; "By Telegraph to the Union," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 11 Nov. 1862, p. 2; "Births," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 11 Dec. 1862, p. 2; "Death of Mrs. Thomas Fitch," *San Diego Union*, 16 Apr. 1904, p. 2.

⁴⁶ "Candidates for the State Offices," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 15 Apr. 1863, p. 3.

information. Fitch immediately issued a passionate denial in the Assembly and in May filed suit for \$15,000 against one of the papers that had printed the charges.⁴⁷

In June the *Sacramento Daily Union* printed verbatim testimony to Special Agent Brown from Joseph M. Lord, who had lost the use of his right arm, of how Fitch had sold him for \$500 a position at the Mint that Superintendent Stevens had promised to Fitch, to be held during the administration of Lincoln, and how he subsequently discovered that Fitch had already sold it to Harvey Somers, but on demanding his \$500 back got another position instead.⁴⁸



Mark Twain by Abdullah Frères, 1867

In July 1863 the *Stockton Daily Independent* announced that Thomas Fitch was now a resident of Virginia City, Nevada. Not for the first or last time, he had done an expedient bunk.

Fitch became editor of the *Virginia City Union* and by the end of July had challenged the editor of that city's *Territorial Enterprise*, Joseph T. Goodman, to a duel, which was broken up twice by marshal and sheriff and reported on by the *Territorial Enterprise's* Mark Twain, a report reprinted in California. ("It was agreed between the two seconds that the battle should transpire at nine o'clock yesterday morning (which would have been late in the day for most duelists, but it was fearfully early for newspapermen to have to get up).") Fitch and Goodman gave bonds to keep the peace, but Fitch challenged Goodman again in September, and on the 28th Goodman, who knew how to shoot, while Fitch didn't, gave Fitch a flesh wound in the leg lieu of having to do him more serious injury.⁴⁹

The two duels played in the press for three months, through October 1863. In January 1864, Fitch began to advertise himself as an attorney and disclaimed editorship of the *Union*.⁵⁰ But the press was not of his blood, for in March, to great fanfare, he started a literary monthly called the *Occidental*, which Mark Twain was to appear in the third issue of, but which lasted for only one issue. In June Fitch was a delegate to the Nevada constitutional convention. At the beginning of July, he co-founded the *Washoe Herald* but by the end of the month had sold out to his partner.⁵¹

In August he was also admitted to practice as an attorney before the Supreme Court of Nevada Territory and was nominated as the Union Party candidate for Congress in the new

⁴⁷. "By Telegraph to the Union," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 7 Apr. 1863, p. 2. "Disclosures at Washington," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 18 Apr. 1863, p. 2. In June, the *Sacramento Daily Union*.

⁴⁸. "More About Special Agent Brown's Investigation," 9 June 1863, p. 1.

⁴⁹. "The Fourth in Washoe," p. 3; [Mark Twain,] "A Duel Prevented," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 4 Aug. 1863, p. 2; "Duel in Washoe," *Daily Alta California*, 29 Sep. 1863, p. 1; "Thomas Fitch," *Stockton Daily Independent*, 6 Oct. 1863, p. 3.

⁵⁰. "Thomas Fitch Attorney-At-Law," advertisement, *Gold Hill Daily News*, 20 Jan. 1864, p. 2; "Correction," *Gold Hill Daily News*, 8 Jan. 1864, p. 2.

⁵¹. Dan DeQuille, "Reporting with Mark Twain," *California Illustrated Magazine*, July 1893; "Delegates from Storey County," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 10 June 1864, p. 2; "New Paper in Washoe," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 4 July 1864, p. 4; "Washoe Herald," *Marysville Daily Appeal*, 22 July 1864, p. 3.

Union-supporting state by an overwhelming majority. The *Territorial Enterprise*, in opposing the nomination, called Fitch a “putrid and revolting person,” and an independent Union candidate was put forward, in the person of Delos Ashley, a former California assemblyman, state senator, and state treasurer. Delos beat Fitch, but Fitch seems to have taken the defeat cheerfully.⁵²

The following February, 1865, newspapers in California and Nevada reported that Mary Fitch, Tom’s ex-wife, had been discovered in San Francisco, in a miserable room with her two children (6-year-old Francis and 2-year-old Thomas, Jr.), having sold all her possessions and in a dying condition from want, not having eaten in three days. The California Assembly took up a collection, and in the Virginia City *Union* Tom Fitch published a response questioning the existence of such reports, claiming that if they existed they were malicious, pointing out Mary Fitch divorced him, professing ignorance of her want, and claiming to have sent her \$70 a month until he was overtaken with misfortunes.⁵³

Mary Fitch did not die and married a salesman and later wealthy wholesale grocer named Lorenzo Henry Sweeney. In 1897, the *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed they were married in 1864, which would have been the year before she was supposedly found starving. She changed Thomas Fitch, Jr.’s name to George Arnold Sweeney, which he petitioned to change back after—in his twenties—he met his father. Thomas, Jr. contested his mother’s will in 1897 on the basis of his stepfather’s turning her against him for becoming friendly with his father.

At any rate, the tempest over Mary Fitch passed, and in August 1865, the commissioners of Washoe County appointed Thomas Fitch—who had been arrested in Wisconsin and extradited to Missouri in 1860 and whose investigation by the federal government for extortion, bribes, and graft was published in 1863—district attorney.⁵⁴

From fall of 1867 to spring of 1868, Fitch was living and practicing law in San Francisco, though announcing he was still a resident of Nevada, but with Rep. Delos Ashley retiring after two terms, Fitch returned in time to run for the Republican Congressional nomination (having in 1867 failed to secure one of its Senatorial seats). At the age of thirty, Fitch triumphed in the general election and served 1869–1871 before being beaten in his reelection bid by a Democrat. The month following the end of his Congressional term representing Nevada, he moved to Salt Lake City and set up as attorney there and a year later was nearly elected US Senator for a state, Deseret, that almost came into existence.⁵⁵

Edla Muir’s Early Career All sources agree that Edla Muir started working for the architect John Byers part-time in 1919, when she was 13 and Byers was just starting his practice as a self-trained architect. No source explains how they encountered one another,

⁵². “Thomas Fitch,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 22 Aug. 1863, p. 2; “By Magnetic Telegraph,” *Stockton Daily Independent*, 16 Aug. 1864, p. 2; “Tom Fitch for Congress,” *Placer Herald*, 27 Aug. 1864, p. 2.

⁵³. “San Francisco Dispatch: Starving to Death,” *Nevada Gold Hill Evening News*, 24 Feb. 1865, p. 2; “The members at the Legislature,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 27 Feb. 1865, p. 2.; “Card of Thomas Fitch,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 3 Mar. 1865, p. 2.

⁵⁴. “Bay Gleanings,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 20 July 1889, p. 8; “Has an Office,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, 31 Aug. 1865, p. 3; “Tom Fitch, Junior, Contesting a Will,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 Sep. 1897, p. 9.

⁵⁵. “Thomas Fitch Attorney At Law,” advertisement, *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 28 Apr. 1871, p. 2.



Above and right: John Byers' circa 1930 design for the Unitarian Church of Santa Monica and a photograph of the finished product. Courtesy AD&A Museum, UC Santa Barbara.

but since Muir was living in Santa Monica, and Byers was teaching languages at Santa Monica High School, it seems likely that she was one of his students and recruited into one of his projects.

Byers was born in Grand Rapids in 1875, educated at as an electrical engineer at the University of Michigan and Harvard, worked as such at the 1900 Paris Exposition, and then went to teach language in Montevideo, Uruguay. By 1910 he was working at Santa Monica High School as head of the Department of Modern Languages.⁵⁶



⁵⁶. Chris Marino, "Biographical/Historical Note," Finding Aid for the John Byers Papers, Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design, and Architecture Museum,

University of California, Santa Barbara. Accessed 5 Dec. 2021.

In 1919 Byers' wife's cousin, who had commissioned a house in Brentwood from a Mexican crew of adobe builders but did not know Spanish, asked Byers to supervise construction. During the process Byers became fascinated with adobe, took a leave of absence from his teaching job, and started a third career designing and building high-end Adobe Revival houses for wealthy clients in the Los Angeles area. He established a kiln and workshop on Johnson's property for building accessories like roof and floor tile and wrought iron and in the postwar paucity of building materials often scavenged structural materials and architectural features.⁵⁷

In 1925, two years after Muir came to work for Byers full-time, he became, at age 50, a licensed architect. Up till then, 13 of the 15 documented houses of his professional career had been adobes; now other materials and styles began to dominate, from Tudor to Cape Cod. To what extent this was a result of his new status, Muir's influence, or a change tastes is a matter of speculation, but it is clear Muir had an unusually pivotal role even before she gained her architecture license and Byers added her name to the partnership.

Muir earned her license in 1934, in her late twenties, but by 1927, when other architects were still in school, she had already won a prestigious award for hillside architecture.

Byers handled the business end of things, solicited new clients, entertained them, and supervised buildings in progress. Edla Muir was in charge of all design and ran the office. Byers kept strict control of all design, although he executed few of the details or final drawings himself. He would make preliminary sketches of what he thought the client would like to see or he would ask Edla Muir to do a rendering of the style of house the client wanted. After the client's approval, Miss Muir and the staff did the drawings from the sketch stage followed by Byers' supervision and final approval (Sell, p. 33).

Edla Muir donated the Byers papers to UC Santa Barbara, and Muir's widower, Clyde Lambie, donated her papers. Muir's papers start in the 1940s, after her partnership with Byers had dissolved; hence the Muller House drawings are filed in the Byers Papers. Yet this seems to be a result of Muir's modesty: she would have done the drawings and much if not most of the design of the partnership's houses, and Elizabeth Biehl Muller was clear in the interview that informed the 1997 DPR523 that her and her husband's house was designed by a woman architect, Edla Muir.

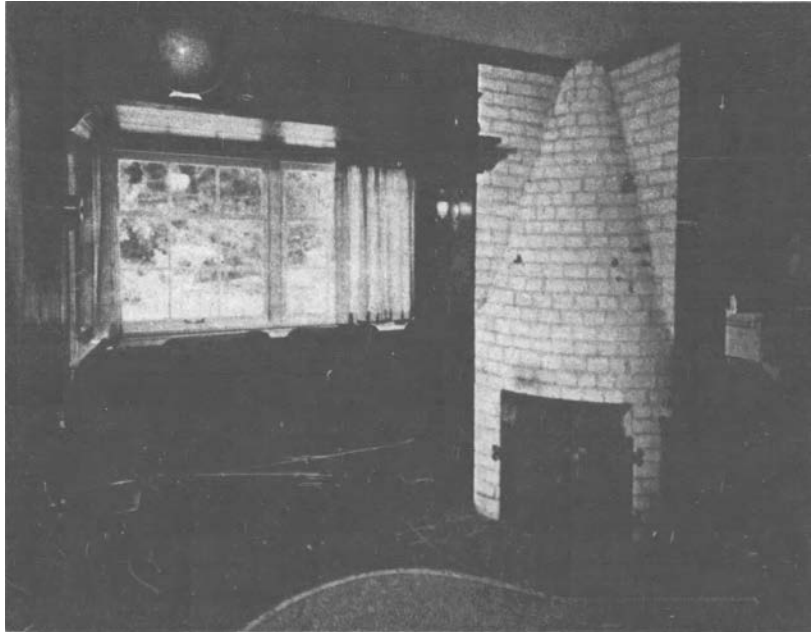
Edla Muir's Mature Career The last published design attributed jointly to Byers and Muir is appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on 4 January 1942. The exteriors were of oiled redwood, interiors of oiled pine, with open rafters. Furnished with traditional furniture and rugs, it had the atmosphere of the rustic cabin, yet in space and fenestration (including a skylight) it was a transition into the Mid Century Modern that Muir would master after World War II. The Dr. and Mrs. James L. McPherson House, published on April 5 the same year—the first under Muir's name alone—was a more explicit essay in the contrasting and clustered planes of Modernism and was titled by the *Times* simply "Modern." The

⁵⁷. Margaret Sell, *The Residential Architecture of John Byers and Edla Muir*, master's thesis, Home Economics, California State University, Northridge, 1979.

contention of some scholarship that Muir only turned to Modernism after the Case Study houses were published is false.

She did, however, go on hiatus, which seems to have been a combination of limited building activity during World War II (at least for domestic architecture) and the birth of her son Alec Lambie on 19 December 1942.

Before VE Day the *Times* published her drawing for a rambling Tudor in Westwood for the DeHaases, and by late 1945 she was advertising for an experienced draftsman. 1946 brought Los Angeles Times photographic spreads of completed houses, but they were Minimal Traditional and Ranch style. In 1947 film stars Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor commissioned a house from her, also a rambling Traditional, but the glamour seems to have prompted her name to be included for the first time in real estate ads: “design by Architect Edla Muir featured in Home Section of Times.”



Example of innovative detail in a traditional home. White-painted brick fireplace in redwood-paneled room, 1946 Mandeville Canyon house by Edla Muir. “Woodland Seclusion,” Los Angeles Times Home Magazine, 7 Apr. 1946.

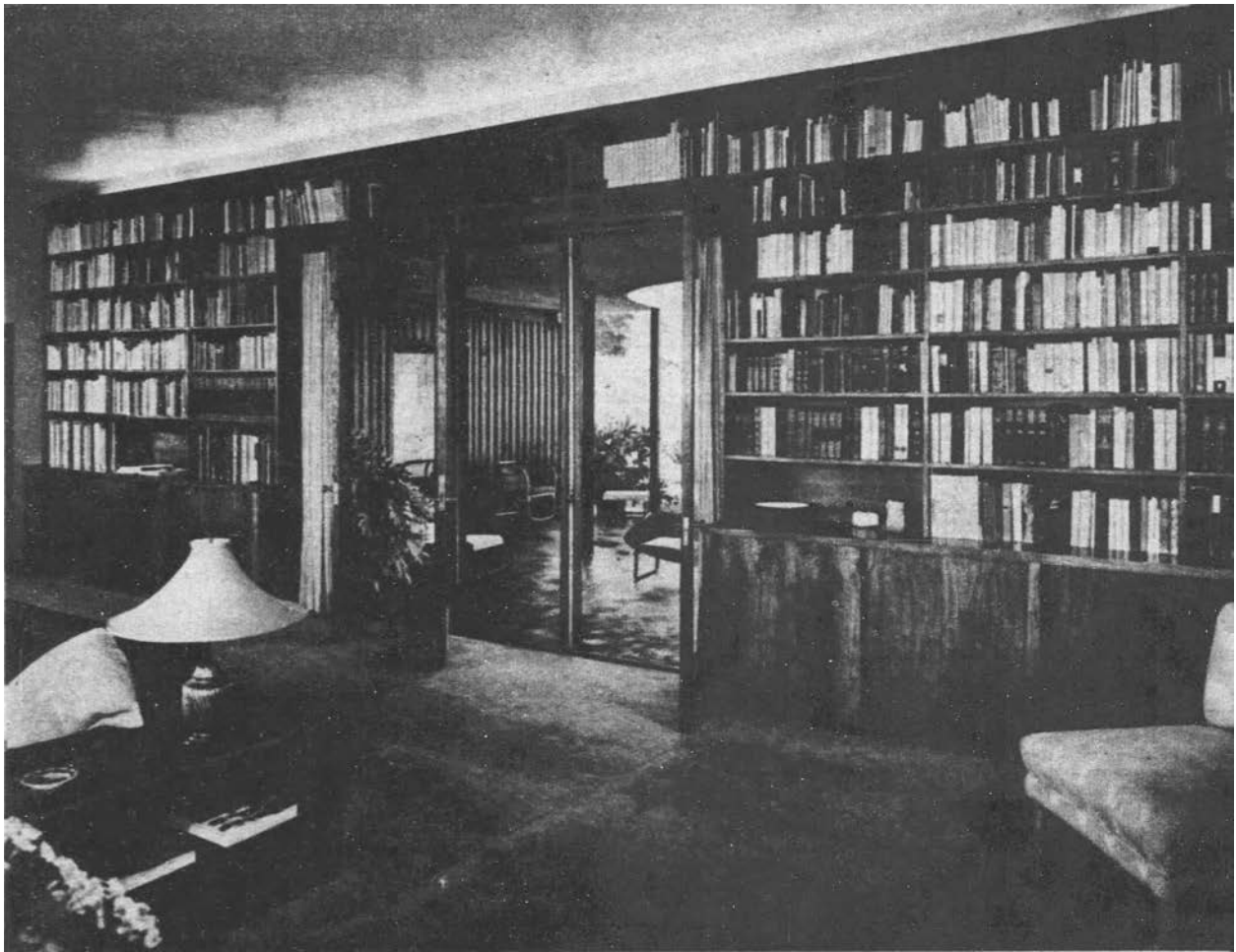
Her big splash into Mid Century Modernism came (quite literally) with a house for Philip Ilsley, “father of the modern swimming pool,” on a hilltop overlooking the San Fernando Valley, with a pool that encroached into the living room. The Mid Century Modernist view house, with its glass expanses, open plans, and integration into a designed landscape, was now in Muir’s repertory. It was a far cry from her “Delightfully Californian” hillside house for Ilsley with hipped roofs, a pergola, fieldstone fireplace, and traditional furniture only three years before. The Southern California style had arrived with a vengeance—and a thirteen-hour-long launch party with Muir, Olympic swimming champions, and Boris Karloff.⁵⁸

In the same year, however, Muir proved she could master an almost Zen-like Minimalism with the Mr. and Mrs. George Howard House in Malibu. A wall of books faced a glass wall of ocean and sky, broken by a great stone chimney and fireplace in an inverted T. It was a house as muscular in its simplicity as the Ilsley House seemed evanescent in its exuberance, its manmade pool in the shape of a fallen leaf. *Seemed*, because the Ilsley House and its pool

⁵⁸. Belle Meade, “Here and Hear About,” *Nashville Banner*, 18 Mar. 1949.

are still there. But the Howard House received serious attention, with its *Times* write-up by Modernism proponent Ethel McCall Head and photographs by Julius Shulman, the first time the great photographer of California Modernism had done a Muir house.

Edla Muir had been taken seriously as John Byers' partner, having been included in the California House and Garden Exhibition in 1936 with Richard Neutra and Paul Revere Williams. She was taken seriously in 1948, when *Architectural Record's* "A Thousand Women in Architecture" featured Muir as one of only ten female architects written up, for her Stanwyck-Taylor House. But now she was combining her ability to conjure domestic comfort with Modernism's cutting edge. She even designed a Brentwood house for George and Selma Sturges to replace their Frank Lloyd Wright house of ten years earlier and a few blocks away. She had already developed a reputation for livable Modernism.



Wall of books facing wall of glass to ocean views, Mr. and Mrs. George Howard House, Malibu. Photograph by Julius Shulman.

The *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* was a key factor in this. Unlike her male forebears, Edla Muir did not gain publicity for scandal, and her architecture career had much greater staying power in the press than her mother's singing career, but in the post-World War II era, newspapers were looking for content to pad out its real estate and home products ads

for a suburbanizing readership. Muir's designs (apart from the Ilsley House with the swimming pool that came inside the living room and an underwater viewing room) were an imaginable aspiration.

In December of 1951 the *Home Magazine* The *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* ran a two-page spread on "Four Houses and Our Future," with built designs by Richard Neutra, Spaulding-Rex, Henry L. Eggers, and Edla Muir. Where in 1936 her and Byers' traditional New Orleans House at the House and Garden Exhibition was a counterpoint to Neutra's experimentalism, now she was in the Modernist pantheon. Featured was her house for Zola Hall. Not only would this win the Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects, Southern California chapter in 1952; not only would it be the only house by an individual woman architect to be chosen for the 1952 volume *82 Distinctive Houses from "Architectural Record"*, but John Rex of Spaulding-Rex, one of the earliest Case Study designers, would shortly after marry Zola Hall and move into the house (which is why it is sometimes known as the John Rex House).

Now, at the height of her reputation, Edla Muir moved with her husband and son, Clyde and Alec Lambie, to rural Washington, where she designed a ranch house for them to live in outside Ellensburg. While they ranched, away from the Los Angeles that had become one of the centers of Modernist architecture, and particularly the center of suburban Modernism, Muir designed local buildings, including a still extant supermarket.

On her return to Los Angeles she joined Matcham, Granger, a new firm that would specialize in sleekly modernish institutional and commercial projects, as an unnamed associate, but the association did not last long. Muir went back into individual practice designing the private houses at which she excelled. In 1962 the *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* featured her third house designed and built for herself, this time on the cover. An ingenious hillside house of plywood, hearkening back to her 1936 encounter with Neutra's plywood house at the House and Garden Exhibition, it yet had the sort of care and detailing that she had learned working with Byers, including saw-surfacing on the plywood and fin-shaped battens separating the sheets.

This was to be her last house featured in the magazine. Though Muir continued to practice for the rest of the 1960s, LA Modernism had moved on to a flashier variety. After Muir's early death in 1971, her houses on the resale market continued to be advertised as "designed by Edla Muir," and a new interest in the history of California's pioneering women architects focused articles and exhibitions on her in the mid to late 1970s and again in the early 1990s. But interest ebbed, and real estate ads began to refer to "Edna Muir" houses.

It seems time for a re-assessment of Muir, who with Riggs was one of the two pioneer California women architects who mastered Modernism. For Muir, that mastery came from the attention to material, detail, and human comfort that she honed in a twenty-year association with Byers, who entered architecture through his interest in the craft of adobe. The thoughtful interiors and dramatic exteriors of the Muller House are a precursor to the Modernist work that would bring her a national reputation a decade and a half later.

The Muller-Noggle House The permit for the house and garage lists contractor but not architect; it is likely the Stolte Company had in-house architects with knowledge of the many pattern books of the new suburban architecture, who could assemble the desires of clients and anticipate them with inventions. The Muller-Noggle House is notable for its numerous unusual features: not only the reception pavilion's pyramidal roof with central chimney and bay windows with bell-cast eaves, but a projecting south wing for bedrooms, necessitated by the house's being a single story; a curved quarter-bay connecting reception room pavilion and bedroom wing in the interior angle, fronting a nook inside; pilastered front door with sidelights; and matching garage with pyramidal finialed roof, like a *pigeonnier*. The resource exemplifies the afore-mentioned Minimal Traditional's close-clipped rakes, minimized windows, decluttered walls, broad expanse of steeply pitched roof, prominent chimney, curvilinear features, and smooth transitions. Interior features include paneling, coves on the bedroom wing's exterior walls, reception room crown molding, and octagon dining room (formed by built-in cabinets in two corners topped with arches, faux keystones, and interior coves and a recessed ironing board in a third corner). The Haselmans have been painstaking in retaining and restoring interior details.

The overall style—including such decorative details as the built-in cabinets, crown moldings, sconces, and front door pilasters and sidelights—is Late Georgian Revival.



Pigeonnier, Whitney Plantation, Louisiana. The right to build towers was reserved in France for the nobility. For practical purposes, these usually took the form of stair towers on houses or pigeonniers.

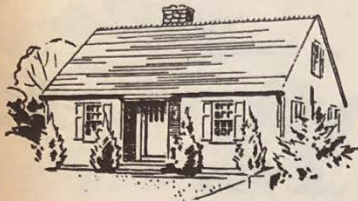
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Styles of Architecture



Colonial. Original New England homes were built by craftsmen who learned their trade in England. Difficulty in obtaining materials resulted in simple and restrained style.



Norman A man's home is still his castle, as modern homes in the style of the ancient Normans prove. The tower adds interesting detail.



Georgian Early Southern planters imported architects from abroad to design formal homes in the Georgian style known in Europe. Sophisticated homes of great refinement resulted.



French There is a touch of formality in our modern French houses, reflecting the high culture of the period from which they sprung.



English The picturesque, rambling type of house first used in rural France and later in England during the time of Elizabeth is known as English Tudor.



Spanish Once a Spanish province, California has a colorful Spanish background. Homes in the manner of old Spain are entirely appropriate here.

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Guide to Minimal Traditional revival types from the 1939 San Luis Obispo County City and Telephone Directory, identifying the Georgian style not with English squires but Southern planters.



Photos above and right: Mai Haselman



5. Period of Significance

The Muller-Noggle House and Garage are significant for their Minimal Traditional Late Georgian Revival architecture as constructed by the F. C. Stolte Company from late 1936 to early 1937. Their period of significance is therefore the year of their construction.



6. Integrity and Character-Defining Features

Location The Muller-Noggle House and Garage retain their original locations.

Design The bedroom wing of the house was extended after its original construction and period of significance. The addition is undetectable on the front façade, however, and though the proportion between the reception room pavilion and bedroom wing are slightly altered by it, their relationship to each other and the resultant stylized proportions that define the character of the Minimal Traditional survive.

The house's pyramidal roof and central chimney, north-facing bell-cast bay windows and south-east-facing rounded quarter bay, pilastered and side-lighted front door, and muntined fenestration, as well as the pyramidal roof and finial of the garage, are all character-defining features of the Minimal Traditional Late Georgian Revival design. The garage doors are not character-defining features of the design.

The brick posts and white fence, with their wrought iron gates, including a steel silhouette front gate that references the Mission Era, adds greatly to the charm of the resource, but there is no documentation as to whether it is original or not. The brick differs from that of the base of the bedroom front façade, whether earlier or later. Johnny Noggle was a Mission historian and bell ringer, and it is plausible the Mission-themed front gate was added by him, given that it doesn't match the Neo-Georgian theme of the house.



Setting The Muller-Noggle House and Garage retain their original suburban setting dominated by Minimal Traditional houses and its relationship to Cerro San Luis and the Brizzolara Creek tributary.

Materials The variegated brick border that runs along the base of the bedroom wing's front façade is likely a later addition, possibly added at the time of the wing's extension, and not a character-defining feature. A separate brick structure on the Mission Street frontage, by the driveway, is of varying materials and ages; it and the connected structure of corrugated translucent fiberglass panels are not from the period of significance and need not be protected for the resource's integrity. The master extension of the bedroom wing is also not of original materials.

Otherwise, the exterior materials of the Muller-Noggle House appear to be original, including fenestration. Asphalt shingles on the house are recent. Wood shingles on the garage appear to be original but are unlikely to survive.

The matching stucco skin of both structures is a character-defining feature.

Workmanship The workmanship of the framers, stuccadores, and finish carpenters of the period of significance retains its integrity.

Feeling There is no doubt that Albert and Elizabeth Muller would recognize their house through the minor changes as the young lawyer's showpiece built as America emerged from the Great Depression. Johnny and Neva Noggle served as long and dedicated conservators.

7. Conclusion

A. V. and Elizabeth Biehl Muller and Johnny and Neva Noggle House and Garage are of Minimal Traditional Late Georgian Revival design rare in the United States and unique in San Luis Obispo, with the reception pavilion's extraordinary pyramidal roof echoed by the garage, plus a plethora of elegant Georgian Revival features—including ones never used in the Georgian era but defining the exaggerated but streamlined aesthetic of the Minimal Traditional. The resource is one of only two documented houses in San Luis by the F. C. Stolte Company, the historically significant builders of Hearst Castle. The Muller-Noggle House and Garage qualify for the Master List as one of “the most unique and important historic properties and resources in terms of architectural or historical significance [or] rarity” and retain the high degree of integrity to communicate their significance.



Photo: Mai Haselman