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Harold G. Stoner's Architectural Legacy in Marin County

By Jacquie Proctor

A soft-spoken British gentleman named Harold G. Stoner quietly left his mark in Marin County, as well as in San Francisco and beyond. His architectural work on the "Tam" Theater with Sam Heiman and the El Paseo Apartments with David Adams are familiar landmarks along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Few people likely know he was also the creator of San Francisco's historic Art Deco façade (below) and Ice Rink at the Sutro Baths, the medieval mountaintop mansion for Adolph G. Sutro (right), and the most popular exhibit at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island – Sally Rand's Nude Ranch.



Ice Rink at Sutro Baths



ADOLPH G. SUTRO: RESIDENCE: SUTRO FOREST.
Harold G. Stoner, Architect
This residence will be illustrated in detail in a future issue of "Architecture and Allied Arts"

Adolph Sutro Mansion

Arriving in San Francisco from Canada in 1914, he fought in France for the Allies during World War I before gaining U. S. citizenship and starting his architectural career with fellow veterans August and Rudy Lang in the early 1920s. The Lang brothers formed a real estate company and developed the West of Twin Peaks neighborhoods of Forest Hill and Balboa Terrace in San Francisco with Stoner as their chief architect. The Lang Realty Company expanded their development activity to Marin as early as

1923 when the *Marin and San Anselmo Herald* reported, “Lang Co. reports activity in Fernhill Tract. Architect Harold Stoner of the Lang Co. is also building in the Fernhill Tract.” This article refers to the home Stoner designed for his family to live in on Circle Drive in Ross.

A talented artist, he painted a picture of his home (below) to advertise his architectural services on the September 1923 cover of *The Home Designer* magazine created by Oakland architect Walter Dixon. The magazine featured another Stoner painting on its cover of the residence he designed for Rudy Lang in 1924 at the entrance to the Balboa Terrace neighborhood on Junipero Serra Boulevard in San Francisco.



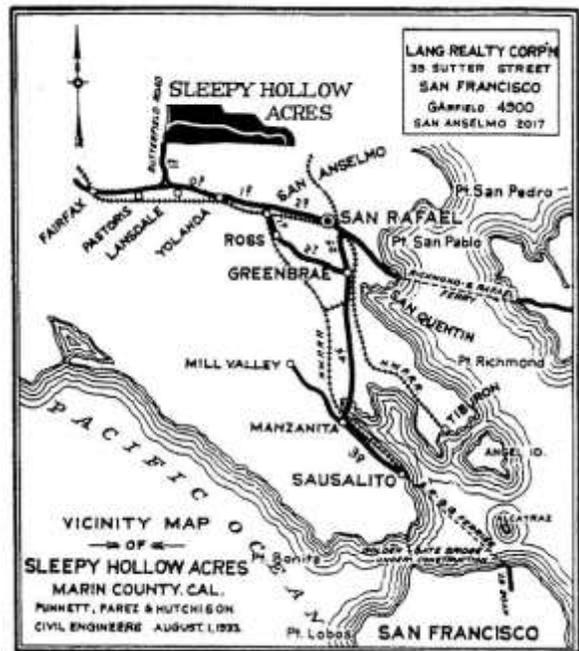
Stoner Home on Circle Drive in Ross



Lang Residence in Balboa Terrace

A year later, in 1925, the *Herald* noted “conclusion of a real estate deal whereby the Sleepy Hollow Ranch, long one of the bones of contention in the Hotaling family rows, is to

become a highly exclusive residential tract.” Development of Sleepy Hollow Acres, shown on the map below, by the Lang Realty Company was delayed, however, until 1932. Working as their supervising architect, house plans were subject to approval by Stoner. It was noted there was no cost of building restriction on the acre lots selling as low as \$750 and that only “the artisticness of building will govern.” Fellow immigrant David Adams was the sales manager for the tract.



The 1933 Lang brochure offered this timely incentive: “And listen, my friends, you can get an acre of this beautiful valley for less than the price of a 25-foot city lot ... And here’s something else – can you estimate what your acre in Sleepy Hollow will be worth after the Golden Gate Bridge is completed, and you can drive from the heart of San Francisco to San Anselmo in approximately 30 minutes?”

Among the 35 lots initially put up for sale in Sleepy Hollow along Deer Hollow Road, was one Stoner chose to build a Norman-Provincial style home at No. 18 (Stoner pictured above right in front of his residence) where he, his wife

Jeanne, son Hal, and daughter Joan, lived from 1936 to 1943.

Selling residential property during the Great Depression was not easy. The Golden Gate International Exposition was created to boost the Bay Area economy and the San Francisco Board of Realtors used it to promote home sales with a model home on Treasure Island. They also organized a tour from May 15 to October 1, 1939, of 30 architect-designed homes and promoted it as “one of the greatest home shows ever held in this country.” Official home No. 6 in Sleepy Hollow at 701 Butterfield Road (seen below during the event) was one of two Stoner designs on the tour. The home was lauded



701 Butterfield Road, 1939



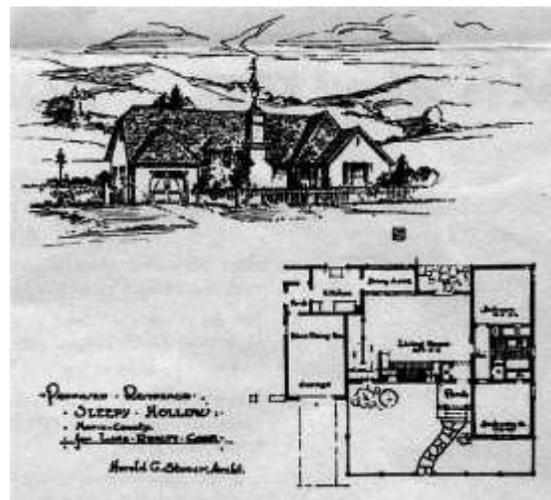
701 Butterfield Road, 1939

in the April 29, 1939 issue of the *San Rafael Independent* with the headline “Sleepy Hollow

Exposition Model Home: Where Living is Better, Even in Marvelous Marin.” The article described it as the “last word in comfort – a home for gracious living. Such is the Mexican rancho ‘inspired’ estate. . . . Palms are planted along the drive which circles in front of the low-roofed, California stucco home, with its broad red-tiled veranda. A wide door opens into a living room which, with its broad windows, brings the glory of the outdoors, indoors. Only an arch divides the spacious living room and dining room so that through the windows of the latter can be seen the curving brow of Tamalpais.”



The home across the street at 700 Butterfield (above) was also a Stoner design featured in the Lang Realty Company brochure (below).



Stoner designed many more homes in Sleepy Hollow and was a familiar figure in the neighborhood. Chuck and Patricia Swensen hired him to help with their home design in 1954. Patricia recalls, “He was perfectly delightful and gracious – a nice English gentleman ... very pleasant to work with, efficient, very knowledgeable ... an asset to the community... Someone everyone spoke highly of and was glad to have around. Civilized and well-dressed in his tan tweed jacket, [I] enjoyed seeing him in San Anselmo and at the Sleepy Hollow clubhouse.”

In addition to commissions in the prestigious Sea Cliff and St. Francis Wood neighborhoods in San Francisco, Hillsborough, San Mateo, Oakland and Berkeley, Stoner designed many homes and apartments throughout Marin County, where he and his family lived from 1936–1963. Several of his designs are in the Larkspur’s College Park subdivision and San Rafael’s Country Club Tract. His modern design for Mr. and Mrs. George Stevenson on Moncada Way in San Rafael was featured in several issues of the *Marin Independent Journal*. A 1951 article noted his collaboration with the famed landscape architect Thomas Church on the Stevenson home.

Born in Brighton, England in 1890, Stoner’s distinctive architectural career spanned many decades. Known for their livability, charm, and fine attention to detail, most of the 500-plus homes and buildings he designed are in the San Francisco Bay Area, but range as far away as Lake Tahoe and Los Angeles. He lived until 1971 and is buried in the Golden Gate National Cemetery.

Jacque Proctor is the author of *Bay Area Beauty: The Artistry of Harold G. Stoner, Architect*. The 160-page historical survey of Stoner’s work features nearly 400 archival images of his designs in Marin County and throughout the Bay Area. Find out more at www.JacqueProctor.com.



Harold G. Stoner at 18 Deer Hollow Road