

Morningside Court

By Fran Cappelletti & Judy Coy

When we think of a classic neighborhood, we think of front yards decorated for Halloween, people walking their dogs and kids playing ball and riding their bikes without fear of traffic mayhem. One such neighborhood in San Anselmo is called Morningside Court. Just off Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, it is likely unknown to many passersby.

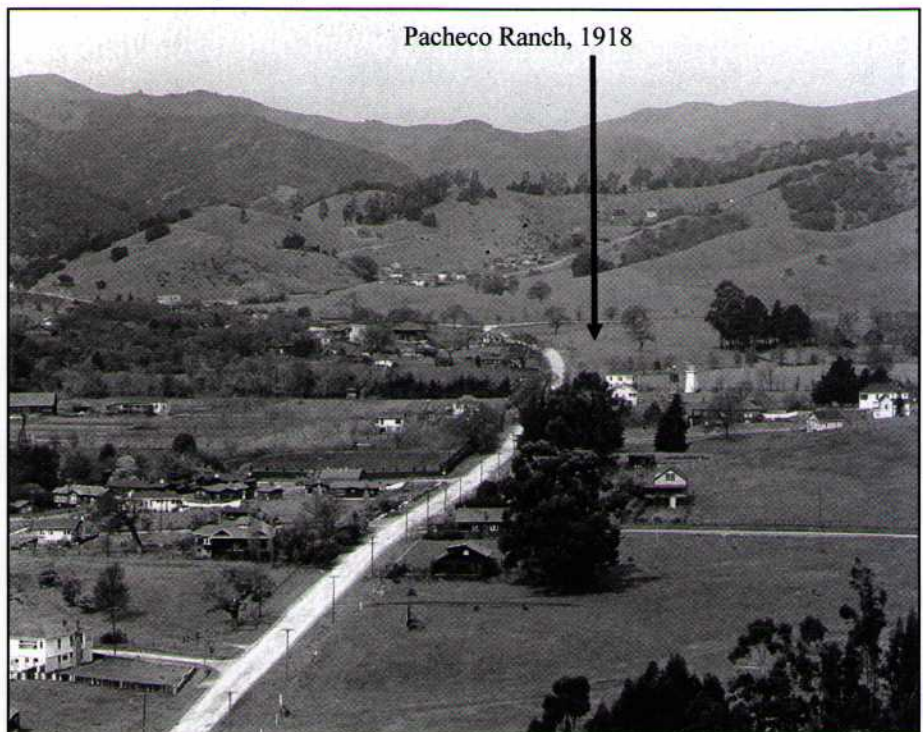
Morningside Court is a small portion of Canada de Herrera granted to Domingo Sais by the Mexican government in 1839. When Domingo died, the 6,658 acre rancho was broken up, and family members inherited portions of it. Daughter Vicenta Anastacia's portion included the 60 acres which would later become Morningside Court Subdivision 1 and 2. Vicenta married Salvador Pacheco, the son of Ignacio Pacheco, another Marin land grantee.

The Pacheco family held on to this tract land until 1916 when the surviving children of Salvador and Vicenta, Salvador A. Pacheco and Perfecta Crane, sold the land in exchange for an apartment building in San Francisco. According to an article in the *San Francisco Examiner* on April 30, 1916, the Pacheco ranch was valued at \$65,000.

A New Development

The neighborhood started in the 1920s. Earl L. Doherty is credited as the original developer. He already had a long history in real estate and Marin County at the time. The original owner of Doherty Lumber in Larkspur, he briefly served as a trustee of that city in 1909. In time, he sold Larkspur Lumber to his cousin Randolph Doherty. Known as "Dolph," he became an important member of the Larkspur business, civic and social community.

Earl L. Doherty also owned the Mill Valley Lumber Company and was active with the Marin Real Estate Board. He was also a bit notorious for marital infidelity and an occasional bar brawl, but that is another story.



View west from Red Hill, 1918. Pacheco Ranch, site of Morningside Court.

Development was announced in 1924 with a plan for \$100,000 in improvements for roads and services. The first of two portions comprised the area whose northeastern edge is defined by Sleepy Hollow Creek



Homesites offered for sale. *San Francisco Examiner*, April 1924

and included Broadmoor Avenue, Morningside and Meadowcroft Drives.

In 1925, the map of Morningside Court #2 was filed which extended Broadmoor and added Brook Lane, Brookside Drive and Court, Ridge Road, Stone, Wood and Parkside Courts.

House of the Future

The Quigley home at 18 Broadmoor was selected for an electrical home exhibition in 1925. The *Mill Valley Record* reported the opening of this most modern model home.

"In this home will be found the last word in electric cook stoves, with appliances which include a control clock that will permit the housewife to place the uncooked dinner in pots, pans, and oven, and at certain designated periods the electric current is turned on automatically under the foods and on return from church or bridge party the entire meal is prepared for serving. In case the family is delayed the heat is turned off automatically...

Another special convenience to be on display is a water heater with thermostat control which allows the water to become heated to the desired point and then shuts off the current and prevents possibility of an explosion of the boiler. The house will be lighted with a variety of lights, giving both soft and brilliant effects, and in the various rooms will be found conveniences particular to each daily need. The entire house will be heated by electricity, on a system which will permit one or more rooms cut off if desired. This will demonstrate most ably the non-necessity for the house being filled with dust and grime and also for carrying coal and wood into the home."

Architectural Styles

Many of the early houses here are in a Mediterranean or Spanish Colonial style. You will notice the textured stucco, red tiled roofs and arched windows throughout the neighborhood. This was certainly popular throughout the Bay Area and even today, the influence is found in many civic buildings such as the town halls in San Anselmo and Larkspur.

But such a look was not the only inspiration. As the *San Anselmo Herald* of June 10, 1927 noted, developers Doherty, Ruhl and Carlson planned homes in a Normandy or English style of architecture designed by W. W. Dixon.



Spanish Colonial Revival, 51 Brookside

Some examples of this are currently found on Morningside Drive. Consider 13, 15, 16 and 18 Morningside Drive, all dating to 1927. Each is credited to builder Everett W. Ruhl of the partnership mentioned earlier. He would remain as a resident of Morningside Court for many years as well.



Original Normandy houses from 1927. Above, 13 Morningside; below, 2 Meadowcroft.





View of Morningside Court in the early 1940s.

W.W. Dixon was very successful with his *Book of Working Drawings*. Notable was the ability to choose an architectural style with options from a large number of stock plans. He and partner R.C Hillen also published a magazine and collaborated on developments from the San Francisco Bay Area to Miami, Florida. This allowed builders and homeowners to construct houses without the direct involvement of an architect.

"Have You Seen the Pueblo Village" read the 1928 advertisement for a cluster of new Spanish style homes along the western end of Meadowcroft and Morningside constructed under the direction of Alfred Nicholaisen. A second unit of six houses, all in the same style, was in progress.

Casa Nyodo

In 1928, a \$1.00 raffle ticket bought a chance to win Casa Nyodo, a \$10,000 modern home in Morningside Court. The local Nyodo Lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows heavily promoted the raffle to raise money for a new lodge building. Over 10,000 tickets were sold, a 1,000 on July 4th, the day of the drawing. Robert Slyter of San Anselmo was the winning ticket holder; Slyter was a WWI veteran and a member of Nyodo Lodge and the San Anselmo Post of the American Legion.


Casa Nyodo remains in place today at 126 Meadowcroft Avenue with exterior changes.



A Spanish Colonial Revival on left at 168 Meadowcroft and a Pueblo Revival on right at 166 Meadowcroft.

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO OWN THIS HOME?



The Spanish type home shown above will be given away by the local I. O. O. F. The floor plans are shown on the right. The home is in Morningside Court.



**LOCAL ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS
TO GIVE AWAY BEAUTIFUL HOME**

Casa Nyodo, *San Anselmo Herald*, February 3, 1928

In the 1930 US Census, several houses are listed on Broadmoor, Meadowcroft and Morningside. Additional houses were built over time on Brookside Drive and other nearby streets. The May 30, 1931 *San Francisco Chronicle* reported "seventy modern new bungalows in Morningside Court, a lovely new home park which offers artistically designed homes at prices from \$5,250 to \$7,500, and lots from \$600 to \$1500."

Public transportation, with a train station a few blocks away connecting to the San Francisco ferries

via Sausalito was a selling point. The trains also provided efficient transportation to other communities in Marin County, along with a School Special to Tamalpais High School for students. At the time of development there was also wide support for a bridge to San Francisco, finally completed in 1937. Despite big dreams, it is likely that construction slowed here during the Great Depression.



Monterey Revival at 38 Morningside

By 1940, many houses were in place, but a significant number of lots were still available, as shown in the photograph from the San Anselmo Historical Museum on the previous page.

Most of the lots were occupied by 1950, and most of the houses were still noted as single level or split level with garage under living space. At the time of construction, the option for a second story did exist, but the single level option was common in this and similar communities across the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

After WWII, when an influx of new residents spurred the development of more homes in San Anselmo, two additional sections were subdivided, Morningside Court #3 in 1946 by local real estate developer Robert A. Carey, and #4 in 1949 adding Sunview and Berkeley Avenues.

The Town of San Anselmo acquired Oak Park, the densely wooded and steep parcel below Parkside Court, in June 1937 after paying \$6.04 in delinquent property taxes. It is likely that it was deemed too steep to subdivide for homesites.

Morningside Court remains a peaceful, yet busy neighborhood, a favored home for many San Anselmo residents. Yet it also provides a wonderful tour of the popular styles of architecture from the early decades of the twentieth century. ♦



Spanish Colonial Revival at 189 Morningside