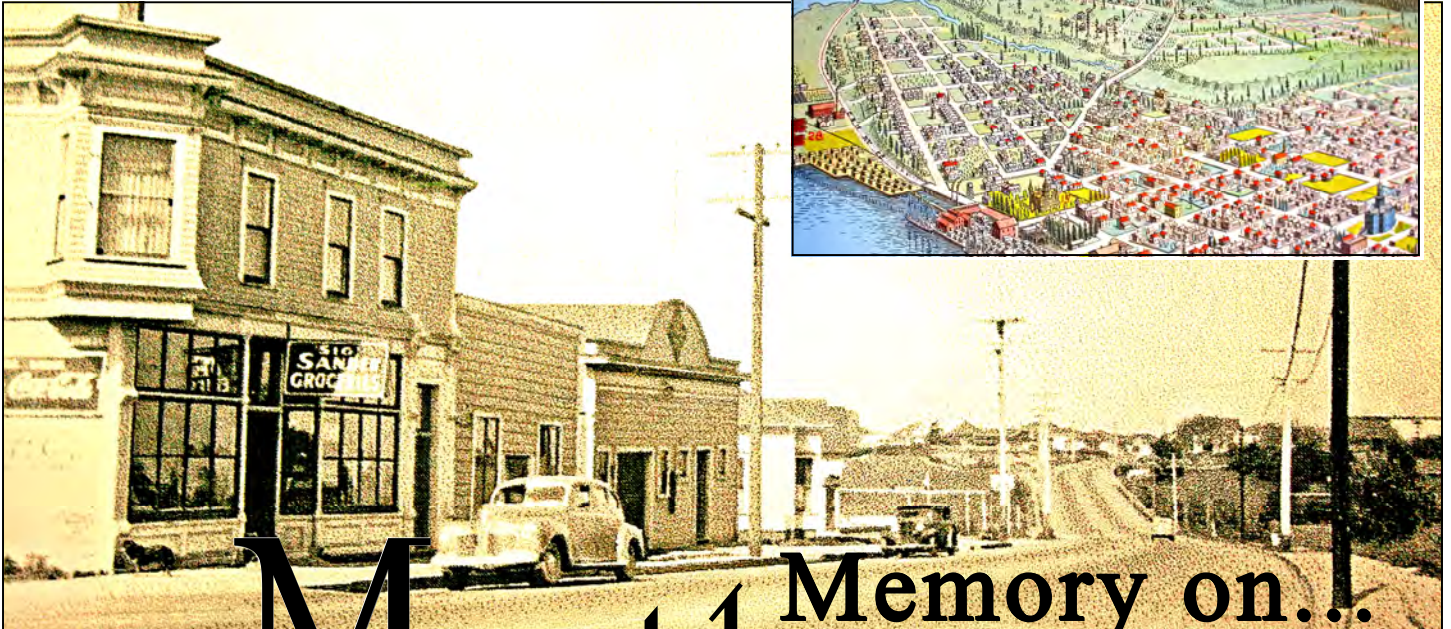




Architectural LEGACY

At right is part of the 1902 Noe-Georgeson map showing Myrtle Avenue (upper, left) intersecting Eureka's traditional square grid. Below are Sig Sander Groceries and Hose Company No. 7 in 1940.

(All period photos courtesy of the Humboldt County Historical Society)



Myrtle Avenue

Memory on...

A trip through time on Eureka's oldest roadway

By Kathy Dillon

Driving Myrtle Avenue is a typical, harried, modern-day experience: A quick way to get from here to there.

And yet here, travel, time and transformation extend far beyond what can be seen in a rear-view mirror. Pull over and take a closer look at this aged trail that gracefully slices through the southeast corner of the city's grid.

This road is one section of the Old Arcata Road/Myrtle Avenue Corridor –



An impressive tower tops the neo-Classical house built for James and Amanda Carter in 1909.

a pathway at least 2,000 years old. It began as the land route connecting Wiyot settlements that once rimmed Humboldt Bay's marshy lowlands.¹

In 1849, the earliest white settlers discovered the trail, and transformation followed. Soon, the old footpath was the county road connecting scattered homesteads and logging sites. Marshes were diked, drained, and reseeded with grass for dairy cows.

Traveling the road wasn't easy.

"It was a through wagon road, of sorts, as early as 1864," says historian Ray Hillman. "Before that it was a really rough horseback ride to Arcata. It took all day to get there."

Most didn't bother, he added. They went by boat.

Eureka's portion of Myrtle – mostly Seventh Street to Hall Avenue – was

rural and uncluttered during this settlement era.

Deeds, patents and maps reveal that Maine native Thomas Dean began establishing a farm along this section of Myrtle in 1859. Three years later, he filed a homestead declaration.

Dean appears to have been gentlemanly. One example: He granted lumber pioneer George McFarlan a neighborly right-of-way onto his timberland near Ryan's Slough.²

In 1861, Dean also donated a sliver of his property to the city for the establishment of Myrtle Grove Cemetery. It's believed McFarlan's infant daughter, Lizzie, was the first buried there.³ In time, she was joined by her father – and many of the town's early well-to-dos: Carson, Buhne, Clark, Ricks and Simpson.

It is unknown when Dean died, but his worldly success was cut short. In 1876, the *Humboldt Times* reported he lost his 316.4-acre farm in a government sale, much of it to wealthy Eureka banker William Huntoon.

Other landowners in the vicinity included the Hills, Thompsons and Worthingtons. The latter, Englishman James Worthington, donated a portion of his property for a schoolhouse on Myrtle near Hall Avenue in 1874.

Worthington School has been replaced five times over the decades. Its second reincarnation – a resplendent Stick-Eastlake built in 1893 – was moved a few blocks away in the mid-1910s, remodeled into a home that remains a showplace to this day.⁴

Ever-bigger schoolhouses were needed. After Huntoon's death in 1892, his widow began subdividing and



The second Worthington School, a striking Stick-Eastlake, was built in 1893, replaced in the mid-1910s, then moved and turned into a private home that still stands today.

selling her Myrtle Avenue property. Soon, the *Times* reported “the southeastern part of the city ... [was] being rapidly built up.”⁵

Eureka's Victorian- and Craftsman-era architecture is deservedly well-touted. Yet no postcards nor tourist maps point the way to Myrtle Avenue. Too much new, too cluttered – a place where aesthetics often give way to prosaic practicalities. Many old buildings may seem faded and easily overlooked as adaptive-use apartments and businesses.

Nevertheless, the wide scope of historical architecture here does rate respect, according to the Eureka Heritage Society's book *Eureka: An Architectural View*. They range from a fine Stick-Eastlake, circa 1885, at 1153 Myrtle to Eureka's only fiberglass “O'Domes” – a funky 1970s structure on the corner of McFarlan. In-between, Queen Annes, Colonial Revivals and Craftsman abound.

In 2007, the Heritage Society took special note of the simple Hose Company Number 7 building at 1450 Myrtle. The group presented owner Silas Morrison with one of its annual preservation awards. He was honored for the precise restoration/rehabilitation work he had done on the old Eureka Fire Department building, now the site of his accounting office.

A history buff with a penchant for details, Silas even flies an American flag over Number 7 with 48 stars on it – the number of states in the union when the building was constructed in 1908.

Number 7 is located on a stretch of Myrtle that is most historically intact, and perhaps most telling of life



Members of Hose Company Number 7, circa 1914, gather in front of the building. The company's original sign is still on the building, now an office.

on the avenue in the early 20th century. It, along with many of the houses here, is linked to the streetcar system that was brought to Myrtle Avenue just after the turn of the century. This proved to be a prime attraction for workers in the lumber mills along the bay and at businesses in town.

“Like anybody else, they wanted to have a piece of land, a house ... a milk cow, a garden, an orchard,” Silas said. “With good wages, they were able to take the streetcar ... and have it all out here.”

With more and more houses being built along Myrtle and intersecting streets, the necessity for greater – closer – fire protection was apparent. Thus reason for Hose Company Number 7.

Among the new homeowners were James and Amanda Carter. He worked at the Dolbeer-Carson lumber mill. She had a job at the Hanford Briggs hat shop downtown. In 1909, they had a stylish, neo-Classical home – with an eye-catching tower – built at 1549 Myrtle.

Their neighbors were Milton and Lucy Thompson, who lived in the modest house at 1557 Myrtle from around 1906 until their deaths in the late 1920s and early '30s. An especially fittingly resident on this ancient Indian trail, Lucy was a Yurok medicine woman.



Arlene Hartin photo/Humboldt County Library collection
Peter McRae (top, left) works in his store at Myrtle and Dean around 1920. Author Lucy Thompson (below) lived nearby for decades.



Lucy Thompson

She is remembered for her 1916 book *To the American Indian*, in which she strove to tell the story of the area’s native peoples beyond the stereotypes and bigotries of the time.⁶

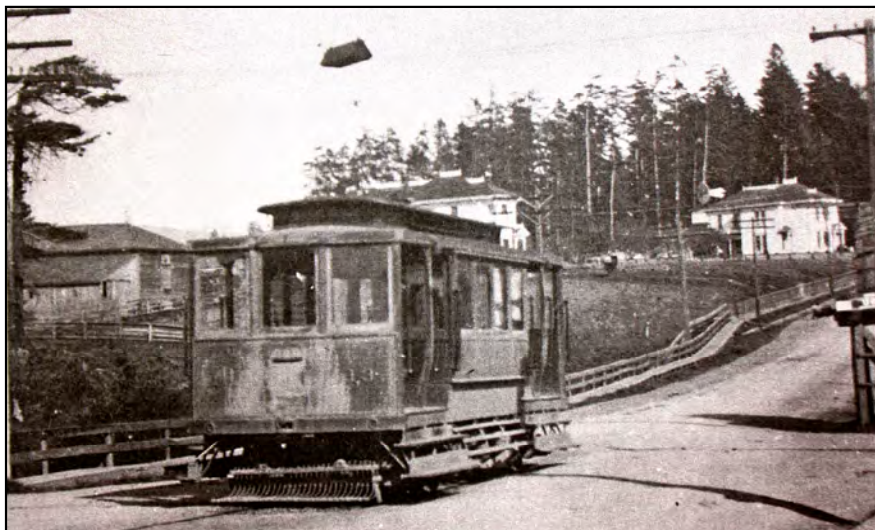
Nearby, at the corner of Dean, is an old grocery store at 1480 Myrtle. Now a medical office, it was built in 1905 and was one of a handful of such businesses scattered throughout the area.

The store has had several proprietors, including Peter McRae in the 1910s. He also served as a volunteer fireman with the hose company and operated the blacksmith shop at the corner of McFarlan.

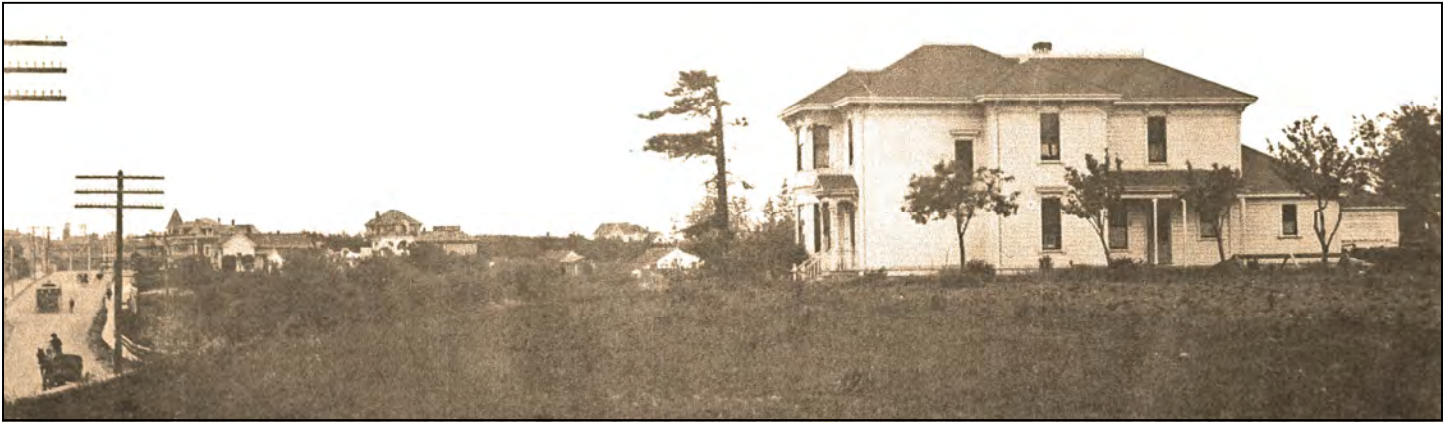
By far, the longest-lasting grocer was Sig Sander, who stayed in business from 1937 to 1973. This was not uncommon. City directories reveal many families and businesses remained on Myrtle Avenue for decades.

Beyond the city limits at Harrison Avenue, houses along Myrtle were scattered along the right, or west, side of the road until the mid-1920s.

Back in 1916, renowned New York horticulturalist Charles Willis Ward



A Eureka streetcar heads northwest on Myrtle Avenue near the intersection of Harrison Street in the early 20th century.



A sign of the changing times, circa 1910: A streetcar and horse-drawn wagon (far left) travel along Myrtle Avenue.

moved his Cottage Garden Nursery onto part of the open, eastern land. Bordering Myrtle between Trinity and Pennsylvania streets, it soon became an 81-acre showplace.⁷

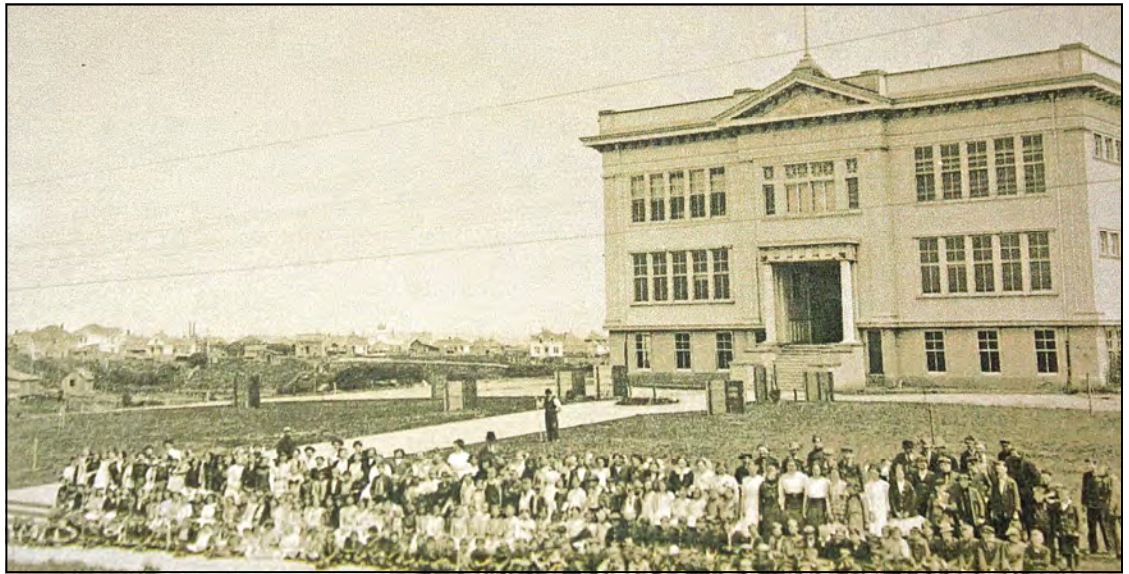
Most of Myrtle Avenue was evolving into a comfortable middle- and working-class residential area – with a bit less elbow room as the years passed.

By 1906, a second school, Franklin, had been built at 901 Myrtle Ave. In 1913, eucalyptus trees were planted as a backdrop for the two-story structure. The school was later replaced. The trees are still there.⁸

Back then one of the school’s students was Ben Nichols, who later recalled boyhood days that included swimming in the slough and watching blacksmiths at work.

The street, he said, “was bordered with wild-growing Myrtle bushes whose long branches, carrying their beautiful light blue blossoms, arched far over rickety, knot-holed redwood sidewalks. We kids would make what we called soap out of the blossoms by crushing them in the palms of our hands. What a gooeey mess!”⁹

Around 1916, Peter and Alice McCabe moved from mid-town to 2010 Myrtle to be closer to the family’s tannery business. The clan included their infant, Ruth. Now 93, Ruth McCabe Farmer still lives with fam-



The student body of the new Franklin Grammar School gather in front of the large building that opened in 1906.

The street “was bordered with wild-growing Myrtle bushes whose long branches, carrying their beautiful light-blue blossoms, arched far over rickety, knot-holed redwood sidewalks.”

- Ben Nichols

ily behind her parents’ Craftsman that the family sold in the 1960s and which now houses Hospice of Humboldt.

“We had a flowerbox upstairs that ran all the way under the windows,” she says, looking at the house that in recent years has had most of its broad porch pillars replaced.

Once, Ruth said, there was a pear tree, a reasonable garden and a milk cow – a godsend in the Depression. And while the street served as the main highway to Arcata until the mid-’20s, it was still ideal for roller-skating.

Driving along Myrtle, Ruth points out the houses, calling them by the surnames of families long gone.

The Colonial Revival at 1590 Myrtle, built for dairy owners Austin and Bessie Smith in 1903, is a star attraction. Dressed in classic white and black, it’s been kept in prime condition by the Benbrook family – as their home and business, the Tuxedo Den – since 1967.



Fine examples of Eureka’s historical architecture are plentiful on Myrtle Avenue. They include Stick-Eastlake and Queen Anne styles (top, left) from the late 1800s. Farther out, is the 1903 Colonial Revival home of Austin and Bessie Smith (below, left). The original Boyd house (below, right) is an impressive 1907 Craftsman.



Across the street is an empty, weedy lot, but Ruth remembers a similarly impressive home in the same grand style. “It had a tall front door with frosted glass, and as a little child I had never seen anything like that,” she said.

Another standout: The Boyd house at 1864 Myrtle, a serene, expansive Craftsman. It was built in 1907 for Bartlett and Jennie Boyd, who lived there until the late 1970s.¹⁰

The Boyds were known for their apple orchard and exquisite flower garden. “They didn’t have any children,” Ruth recalled. “He was an auto mechanic. She was a gardener, and she had 10 green thumbs.”

The building was turned into commercial offices by the early 1980s, its front lawn paved for parking. It is



In 1916, the McCabe family moved into this Craftsman on Myrtle Avenue. Today it serves Hospice of Humboldt.

Custom-made customers

HELLO ADVERTISERS!

Architectural Legacy is mailed to Eureka Heritage Society members and other owners of historic properties. Folks like these often search for goods and services—*like yours*. Legacy is also available at key outlets around town and on the EHS website. Our advertising rates are incredibly reasonable! Call 444-2720 to place your ad in our winter issue.



ARCHITECTURAL SALVAGE

Buy—Sell—Trade

VICTORIAN & CRAFTSMAN DOORS, WINDOW SASH, MOLDINGS, COLUMNS, BALUSTERS, HARDWARE OF ALL KINDS, DISTRESSED PIECES FOR DECORATION, LARGE SELECTION OF OLD-STYLE DOORS, IN NORTHWEST CALIFORNIA

Until we open in Eureka, please call 445-2117, day or evening, with your “want list”



This unusual building, which consists of two, connected fiberglass dome, was constructed in 1975 at 1364 Myrtle Ave.

Curiosity brings many people through the doors of the domes at Myrtle and McFarlan streets, says Ky O, who runs Ky's Hair Designs in the unusual building.

Dome-shaped dwellings date back to ancient times in many cultures, but the idea got a modern redesign in the 20th century with the development of the geodesic dome. Invented in Germany in the 1920s, it was popularized in the United States by Buckminster Fuller. The

selling points included economy, strength and energy efficiency.

The Myrtle Avenue variation is a mid-1970s offshoot known as the O'Dome. Made of fiberglass, it has arched, ground-to-ceiling panels instead of the triangular facets familiar on geodesic domes.

The Myrtle Avenue example is considered a noteworthy structure, and is included in the Eureka Heritage Society's book "Eureka: An Architectural View."

MODERN SLANT ON AN OLD IDEA



now home to Northwestern Mutual Financial and Paul Nicklas Insurance.

In 2001, Nicklas remodeled the house, retaining its natural brick fireplace and built-in dining room cabinet and bringing back the front lawn. He is also part of a group working to bring fish back to the sloughs that intersect Myrtle, an effort he says will help restore healthy fish habitat throughout the greater Humboldt Bay region.

Across from the Boyd residence there once was another house that burned decades ago. Ruth's mother had said it was a "house of ill-repute" – designed to be the first to attract lumbermen heading toward town.

"It was brown-shingled, and ours was brown-shingled, too. So my mother had ours painted a different color," she recalled, laughing.

Everyone used the streetcars. "They were the most wonderful things there ever were," Ruth said. "It was a crime they took it out."

Ultimately, the trolleys could not keep up with the automobile. Reports they were losing money appear throughout the 1930s in local papers. In 1942, the rails on Myrtle were removed by WPA workers.¹² This ushered in more changes, as property all around Myrtle began filling with houses.

Architectural Scavenger Hunt

WIN A PRIZE!



This impressive roofline is adorned by a series of handsome brackets. The first reader who tells us where this house is wins a \$10 gift certificate to Bon Boniere Ice Cream in Old Town, Eureka. Call 442-8937.

Eureka Woman's Club



Book your next event or meeting in our historic building
 For reservations call Claudia Cranford at
 442-3044 or 442-3458
 Or e-mail: claudiamasna@yahoo.com



A common, weekday scenario: Morning traffic backs up along Myrtle Avenue, past the old Sig Sander Groceries store and Hose Company Number 7.

In the 1970s, Dr. Sam Burre constructed the Burre Center mall at Myrtle and West. He also owned land on the opposite side of the street that was soon developed for a large pharmacy.

Yet even into the mid-1980s, when Silas Morrison moved his business into Hose Company Number 7, the avenue was still reasonably sedate, he said. In recent years, a slew of new apartment buildings have joined the scene, and the street now seems perpetually busy.

“It’s changed,” Silas said. “Myrtle has now become the busiest street in town.”



A time-worn statue on a toddler’s 1881 grave looks ever skyward, at Myrtle Grove Cemetery.

Ruth Farmer agrees.

“A rat race,” she said, looking at the apartment buildings surrounding her old family home and her current residence, a ranch house built behind it in the 1970s.

“My mother would turn over in her grave if she could see these apartments,” she said. “Don’t fence me in’ was her theme.”

Change seems the abiding element along this aged trail. So is memory. Ruth’s smile

returns as she remembers:

“All across here, from Edgewood to 18th Street, was cut-over forest – a wonderful place to pick blackberries.”

Architectural LEGACY

A publication of the Eureka Heritage Society

Editor, writer and photographer:
Kathy Dillon

This quarterly publication spotlights Eureka’s renowned historical architecture. Comments, and suggestions for future issues, are invited. Send them to *Legacy* Editor Kathy Dillon at kdillon72@att.net or c/o the Eureka Heritage Society, P.O. Box 1354, Eureka, CA 95592-1354

FOOTNOTES:

1. *An Historic Resources Inventory: Old Arcata Road-Myrtle Avenue Corridor*, Natural Resources Division, Humboldt County Department of Public Works, Eureka, CA – March 1978; research by Susie Van Kirk
2. “George McFarlan – Pioneer” by Susie Baker Fountain, *News Settler*, 1960
3. “George McFarlan – Pioneer” by Susie Baker Fountain, *News Settler*, 1960
4. “Eureka’s Schools of the 1800s” by Glen Nash, *Humboldt Historian*, Nov.-Dec. 1984, and “The History of Worthington School” by Lillian McGowan and Ethel McCann Thompson, *Humboldt County Historical Society*
5. *Humboldt Times*, March 29, 1894
6. “Her story in her own words” by Debra Webster, *Humboldt Historian*, March-April 1991
7. “Nursery entrepreneur Charles Willis Ward ... How his garden did grow!” by Glen Nash, *Humboldt Historian*, Nov.-Dec. 1992
8. “A look at Eureka Schools constructed in the 1900s” by Glen Nash, *Humboldt Historian*, Sept.-Oct. 1986
9. “Let’s Take A Walk Out Myrtle Avenue” by Ben Nichols, *Humboldt Historian*, July-Aug. 1975.
10. *Obituary*, *Humboldt Historian*, 1978.
11. *Humboldt Times*, March 25, 1942

Our thanks to Bob Libershal for his research on the Dean homestead.