

*A shortened version of this article was published in The Tall Tree in October 2024. This is the full article with additional photographs.*

## **Building Their Dream Home in Palo Alto**

**By Jane Israel Honikman**

My parents, Delmer and Beatrice Israel, signed the California Real Estate Association Standard Form on November 24, 1947, agreeing to pay \$1,000 in cash as a deposit to purchase Lot 7 and a portion of Lot 8, Block 75, Subdivision No. 8 of the Seale Tract, consisting of 100 ft on Webster Street situated in Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, CA. Their Real Estate Agent was Maurice Hill. He played tennis with my father and had a daughter my age.

The Articles of Agreement were signed on February 8, 1949 by my parents and their contractor, Charles O. Harris of Mountain View. It lists the details of paying labor costs, materials, workmen's compensation, public liability, property damage insurance, unemployment insurance, Social Security, and taxes plus a fixed fee of \$1,500.

Their bank was American Trust Company, established in 1854 with a head office in San Francisco. The early loan number was 2001, and payments of \$160 each month commenced on February 2, 1949, with an interest rate of 5%. The blue passbook lists 46 monthly entries until December 1952.

The original estimate for the single story, 5 bedroom, 2 ½ bath residence with an attached two-car garage was \$25,992. The cost for each of the 44 items was typed out with a removal, adjustment or increase noted in pencil next to it. The revised total was \$22,425.88.

It is interesting to note that the cost of nails, for example, was lowered from \$100 to \$85. Fire insurance allowance, metal tiles, Formica in the kitchen, building paper and sheetrock and taping were eliminated. The contractor's fee was originally \$1,800 but was lowered to \$1,500. The price of the General Electric tile-in dishwasher, built into the top of the counter, dropped from \$427.50 to \$315. The house also had a large basement, an unusual feature in California. It cost \$240 to excavate the basement, and waterproofing the concrete was an additional \$50. My one memory

as a four-year-old was being upset when one of my two older brothers pushed the other into the deep basement hole during construction!

On April 14th Mr. Harris billed my parents \$4208.57. This total included \$1.00 to record the contract, \$38 for the building permit, a \$50 street deposit, \$1.35 for one set of blueprints and \$510.66 for the foundation. Rat proofing cost \$76.67. The city of Palo Alto also charged a monthly fee of \$1.25 for water in May through September. I noticed the concrete poured at the back of the house for the outside clothesline totaled \$37.08. We had a front-loading washing machine in the house, but a dryer was never installed.

In celebration of my parents' wedding anniversary on June 18<sup>th</sup>, they received a Guest Log "to wish them happiness in The New House". The first entry says, "with regret and pleasure; regret that you have departed from Dartmouth Street, College Terence, and pleasure in the grandness of your new home". Another wrote, "I think your home is lovely! And do I envy you your closet space". A Stanford friend said "The dream finally came true, and it surely was worth waiting for. Everything seems perfect!" The final notation on August 10th states, "Your house is beautiful, and my professional eye tells me that you have a marvelous resale value here."

My parents were smart business partners, and both had good interior taste, aesthetics, and design. The floors were made of oak and cost \$750. It was my job to dust what seemed like miles of baseboards. Their selection of furniture was superb and their mid-century fine pieces are now considered antiques. Our home was filled with music, usually classical, coming from the radio/record player. Intellectual discussions (a polite word for arguments) accompanied our sit-down three course family dinners every night in a separate dining room. Mother was a terrific cook, and the kitchen was her domain. One of her rules was no one was allowed to intrude during food preparation. I was assigned to set up and clear the table.

The landscaping surrounding the house was as well planned as the interior. Both of my parents had an eye for beauty and had "green thumbs". Their major difference was pruning the rose bushes. Mother thought that my father did not cut them back enough. A gardener maintained the lawns in front, side and back yard, but no one else purchased, planted, and fussed over the rest. On Sundays, my father's only day off from work, we routinely visited the nursery or the dump

by the Bay. He planted flowering fruit trees in the easement between the street and sidewalk but was forced to remove them by the city officials who insisted they didn't conform to their standards. He was angry and argued that their trees' roots would damage the pavements. Father lost that battle, but he was of course correct.

My idyllic childhood included playing in and outside of the dream home and garden. The basement was an endless source of mystery and hideouts. Father had set up a workshop and lots of shelving. The children ran up and down the basement stairs that descended from the kitchen. It was spooky when someone turned off the lights and wouldn't let us out! The Webster Street neighborhood "gang" consisted of children who attended Walter Hayes Elementary, Jordan Junior and Paly High schools. During the summer months we stayed outside until it was dark and were called in for dinner. My home was in the middle of the block and the large front lawn was the perfect gathering place for hanging out, playing outdoor games and making plans to build a fort, write a play, carnival, or circus.

Our family had the good fortune to live at 1991 Webster Street from our move-in date in August 1949 until a year after our father passed away in 1970 when my mother sold it for less than \$100,000. I am nostalgic reminiscing about the two decades of our family celebrations spent there, including our wedding reception in 1967. We took a photo in front of my parents' dream home and garden on our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary standing on the brick walkway in front of the original front door. It looks almost the same. My parents would be proud of how beautiful it has remained.

House construction  
1991 Webster Palo Alto  
Started Feb 1949  
finished Aug. 1949



