

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Sean Gallegos](#); [City Council](#); [Public Comment](#)  
**Subject:** Removing Halsey House from the Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 21, 2021 4:35:35 PM  
**Attachments:** [Case for Removing Halsey House form HRI.pdf](#)

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Honorable Council and History Commission (via Liaison Gallegos)

I am the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Commission, but I write today as an individual resident of Los Altos.

Halsey House should be removed from the Historical Resources Inventory. The property fails to meet the criteria established for being listed in that inventory. To change the criteria now is moving the goal posts and is not a particularly transparent way to conduct government.

I would hope Council would be particularly sensitive to that appearance given that the only historical accomplishments of Theodore Vale Halsey were comprised of taking bribes and profiting from egregious public corruption.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards

Pete Dailey

Pete Dailey

Prepared for the Los Altos Historical Commission and Los Altos City Council

10 February 2021

The Case for Removing Halsey House  
from the City of Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory

Institutions around the country are reflecting on their history, removing statues, and unaming buildings when these institutions determine that those monuments venerate individuals unworthy by today's values. We see this locally where Stanford has decided to unname Jordan Hall, and the University of California at Berkeley has decided to unname Barrows Hall (among other facilities.) This valid and justifiable process of learning from history is ongoing. So it is incumbent upon the City of Los Altos to participate in this action and likewise, learn from history. Halsey House should be removed from the City of Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory (HRI) because it is entirely inappropriate to associate the structure with any of the five contexts specifically recognized by the HRI to convey historical significance. The structure is architecturally unworthy. Emma Halsey and Theodore Vale Halsey failed to contribute to the community of Los Altos anything of historical significance other than the redwoods they planted, which will still be there when their home is gone. But perhaps most importantly, Theodore Halsey was corrupt. His historical legacy is that of the notorious Graft Trials in San Francisco. T.V. Halsey also made part of his fortune as a war profiteer during a particularly ugly episode in the history of the United States as a colonial power in the Philippines. The Halseys were not worthy of veneration.

Theodore Vale Halsey was corrupt. He personally committed bribery on behalf of the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company. This is his historic legacy, documented as part of the narrative of the notorious Graft Trials in San Francisco. According to the noted University of California at Berkeley Historian, Dr. Walton Bean, Halsey hand delivered a stack of cash each month to Boss Reuf, the central figure in the Graft Trials, who would ultimately be convicted and incarcerated at San Quentin. These funds, eventually amounting to \$1,200 per

month, were to retain the ongoing services of Boss Reuf to protect the franchise of the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company from the competing efforts to take the franchise by the Home Telephone Company.<sup>1</sup> TV Halsey also paid bribes directly to the city supervisors.

“The second class of bribes included those which were paid directly to the Supervisors. They included the bribes paid by T. V. Halsey, agent of the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company to a majority of the Supervisors to prevent their awarding the Home Telephone Company its franchise.”<sup>2</sup>

Historical evidence of Theodore Halsey’s corruption is substantive. The bribes are documented in court records as 17 supervisors confessed to receiving various bribes. 11 supervisors confessed to receiving bribes from Halsey totally more than \$50,000 dollars, with Supervisor Andrew Wilson taking the lead among the 11 to coordinate the payments. These 11 supervisors (Boxtton, Walsh, Willson, Coleman, Nicholas, Furey, Maralock, Phillips, Lonergan, Sanderson and Coffey) testified to receiving \$5,000 each from Halsey, in an unfurnished room in the Mills Building which had been temporarily engaged for Mr. Halsey's use by Frank G. Drum, a director of the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company.<sup>3</sup> For those interested in reading the testimony of the San Francisco Supervisors regarding the minute operational details of how they received the bribes and interacted with TV Halsey, the transcripts of the testimony is included as an appendix to Franaklin Hichborn’s *“The System” As Uncovered by The San Francisco Graft Prosecution*, published in 1915.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walton Bean, *Boss Ruef's San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 29 and 102.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin Hichborn, *“The System” As Uncovered by The San Francisco Graft Prosecution* (San Francisco: Press of the James H. Barry company, 1915), 156.

<sup>3</sup> Bean, *Boss Ruef's San Francisco* 104 and Hichborn, *“The System”* 159

<sup>4</sup> Hichborn, *“The System”* 476-482

It would appear that bribery was by no means an ancillary side gig for Theodore Halsey; indeed, bribery was Theodore Halsey's primary occupation.

The Historical Commission should also consider Halsey's record in the Philippines, where he was a war profiteer during one of the darker periods of American history, when the United States was a colonial power. The opening paragraph of this document references the unnamings of Barrows Hall at the U.C. Berkley. While David Prescott Barrows was U.C. President from 1919 to 1923 and a high-profile faculty member, he was also known for his previous role overseeing public education as a U.S. administrator in the Philippines from 1903 to 1909, and for his imperialist and racist views.<sup>5</sup> Without claiming that Halsey held the reprehensible racist views of Barrows, the role that Halsey played in the imperialist colonial exploitation of the Philippines is still damning. This exploitation was rooted in the view, promoted by men like Barrows and Halsey, according to Susan Harris, that Americans "were doing the Filipinos a great favor, because a U.S. administration of the archipelago would protect the Filipinos from the consequences of their hereditary incapacity for self-governance."<sup>6</sup> In truth the narrative of Filipino racial inferiority was not just bigotry, but a useful rationalization for the greed of men like Theodore Halsey. The Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company, with a monopoly on phone service, remained an American-owned company until 1967.<sup>7</sup> This certainly does not burnish T.V. Halsey's historical bona fides.

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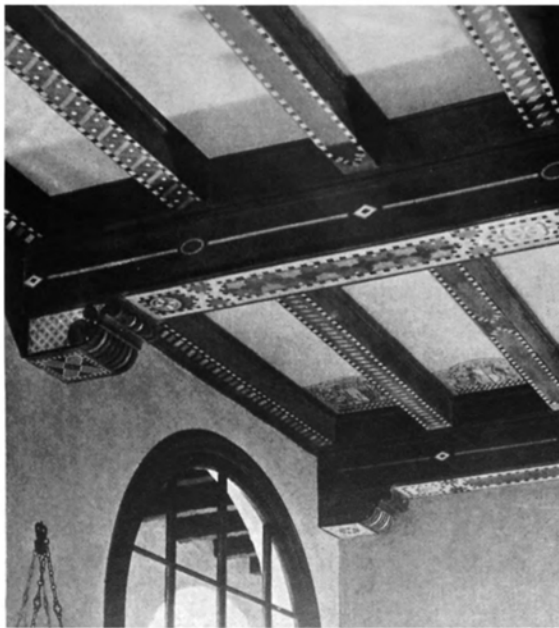
<sup>5</sup> Gretchen Kell, "UC Berkeley's LeConte and Barrows Halls Lose their Names." *Berkeley News*, November 18, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters : Americans and the Philippines, 1898 – 1902* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61.

<sup>7</sup> December 1967 a Filipino consortium led by Ramon Cojuangco bought PLDT from the American company, GTE. Primo and Elma Esteria, *The Kahimyang Project*, <https://kahimyang.com/kauswagan/articles/781/today-in-philippine-history-november-28->

The architecture of Halsey House is insufficiently historically significant to justify the structure's continued presence in the Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory. The only aspects of Halsey House that reflect Spanish Revival Architecture are the terracotta tile roof and the stucco exterior. Neither of these attributes are sufficient alone or together to justify characterizing Halsey House as a noteworthy example of the architectural type. There were many buildings throughout California from that time through the present that offer more design queues consistent with Spanish Revival.

Below the reader will see an example of a ceiling supported by heavy wood beams that are decorated. Notice too the arched window. Elegant arches were important design elements in Spanish revival. Halsey house neither exhibits the artistic ceiling flourishes nor any arches anywhere.



From an ad for A. Quandt and Sons, painters and decorators, San Francisco. A ceiling of heavy wood beams with plaster panels was stenciled with varying Spanish motifs "in gay Spanish colors, mellowed by an antiquing glaze." Residence of Han Nelson, San Francisco. Charles Strothoff, architect.

Below the reader will see a typical fire place found in a building from the Spanish Revival. Note the shape and placement. Corner placement was common, and the shape incorporates an arch.



From an August 1929 issue of *California Arts & Architecture*, tutoring proper fireplace design: "A quaint, tile-adorned study fireplace."



Here we see a home from the same period that the Hasley House was constructed. The only similarities being the tile roof and the stucco exterior. Notable in this image are wrought iron embellishes on the balcony, the arches, facades, and the decorative tile inlays on the steps and on the upper portions of the facades.

In conclusion, Halsey House never should have been added to the Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory, by the rules governing that process. The people venerated are unworthy and the architecture is not meaningful enough by itself.

## Works Cited

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<https://kahimyang.com/kauswagan/articles/781/today-in-philippine-history-november-28-1928-the-philippine-long-distance-telephone-company-pldt-was-established-through-act-3436>



**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Public Comment](#)  
**Subject:** PUBLIC COMMENT AGENDA ITEM 1- 09.21.2021 STUDY SESSSION.  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 21, 2021 2:26:35 PM

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I am in favor of Option 1: Total Rehabilitation of Halsey House (at once or phased)

Below is a summary of Advantages(+) and Disadvantages (-) of each Option

OPTION 1: Full Rehabilitation

- + Meets Historical requirements and criteria (delisting I prohibited)
- + Preserves Los Altos historic resource (allows phased approach to construction)
- + Exempt under CEQA and EIR requirements
- Cost (although it could be a phased approach and eligible for grants and donations)

OPTION 2: Partial Rehabilitation

- + Saves main section of Halsey House
- Cost is 70% of Full Rehabilitation
- Additional costs incurred due to CEQ and EIR requirements
- Can't use CA Historic Building Code which applies to Option 1

OPTION 3: Full Demolition

- Loss of Historical resource by Los Altos
- Opens the City to lawsuits (failure to maintain a historical resource is a misdemeanor)
- Opens Los Altos to negative publicity (our citizens are required to maintain their historical property but the City doesn't apply the law to itself)
- Additional costs incurred due to CEQ and EIR requirements

OPTION 4: Mothballing

- + Stabilizes Halsey House
- + Exempt under CEQA and EIR requirements
- Avoidance ("kicks the can down the road" again!)
- Does not solve the Halsey House issue
- May not solve the vandalism problem at Halsey House

Submitted by:  
Nomi Trapnell  
948 University Avenue  
Los Altos, CA 94022  
[REDACTED]