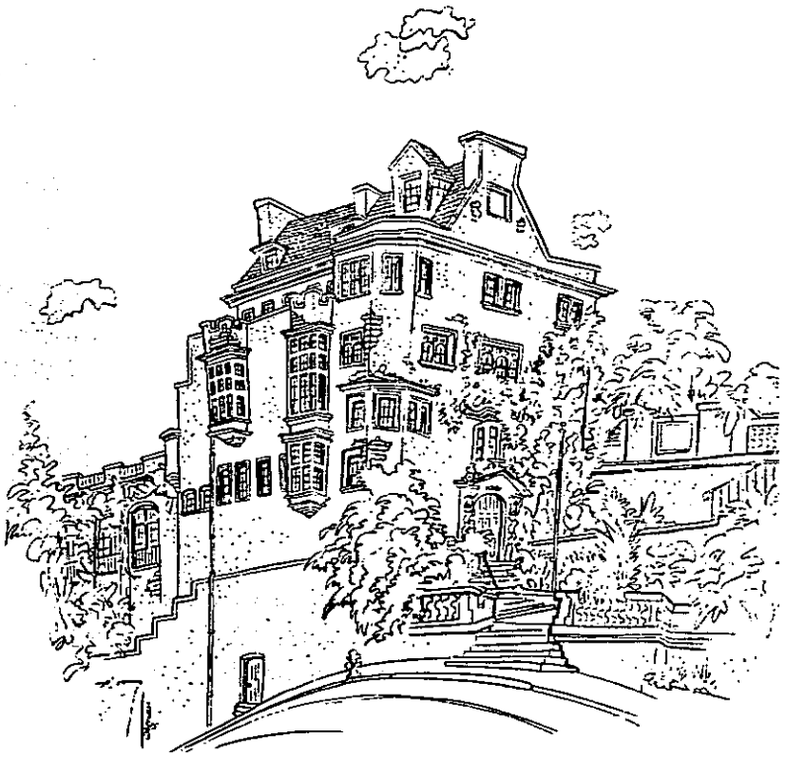
1001 VALLEJO STREET

"House of Dreams"



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The house, which is one of the largest in the city, was built between 1905 and 1906 by Robert G. Hanford, a Western Pacific Railroad Executive. The architect was Houghton Sawyer, well known for his residential work, particularly the apartments at 1001 California Street and 901 Powell Street, a house at 2518 Buchanan Street and a major addition at 2220 Sacramento Street.

Work began in 1905 and the building was complete at the time of the 1906 earthquake. A 1906 post-earthquake photograph shows the building standing amid almost total devastation on Russian Hill. The building originally had a pitched roof with three dormer windows. It has an outer layer of concrete mixed with rocks.

Hanford lived there only from 1907 to 1909. He had built the house for his second wife, Gabrielle Guittard Cavalsky, but the marriage was not a success. Although the house survived the earthquake and fire of 1906, Hanford is said to have remarked "I wish the cursed thing had burned." After Hanford left, his in-laws, the Guittards who were in the spices and chocolate business, occupied the house. After this, it lay empty for several years and was known as "The Haunted House". It was sold by Hanford in 1913 and then had several owners before it was purchased in 1919 by Paul Verdier of the City of Paris store.

On 17 November 1915, the San Francisco Examiner reported: "At last there has come a use for that wonderful Pompeiian bungalow that R.G. Hanford, the financial stormy petrel, built for the one grand passion of his life, Gabrielle Guittard on the top of Pine Street Hill. Those Italian pillars, that huge fireplace in the loggia, the great stone fountain will not fade and crumble as did his love for the beautiful Gabrielle... The Club de Vingt comes as a distinct Eastern importation heralded by the arrival of Mrs. R.W. Hawkins and Mrs. A.A. Carter. It will be a dancing club with dansants every afternoon and evening, and dinner dances every Friday." Although the architectural description does not match 1001 Vallejo Street, the date and the reference to Gabrielle Guittard imply that the article does refer to that house.

In August 1916, under the headline "Pipe Dreams in Hanford's Dream House: Rendezvous for Opium Smoking Clique", the San Francisco Chronicle described "the great gray mansion of Normandy type with huge bastions rising up from the cliff with medieval window panes, Pompeiian court and Italian garden built in 1905 for his beautiful bride Gabriel Guittard Covalsky [sic]. For some reason unknown it was soon afterward left to ruin. Weeds have choked the garden and the fountain, the pergola has fallen into decay and the quaint leaden window panes are broken." The Chronicle, on 21 April 1918, waxed lyrical about the condition of the house: "It was almost unimaginable that such a desolation should be allowed to exist on one of the loveliest sites in San Francisco. But there it stands today, gray and melancholy. Even the great fire of 1906 gathered in its skirts as it passed that way and left the House of Dreams unscorched, unwithered."

In March 1917 the house was used briefly as a theater. The poet, playwright, artist and critic Sadakichi Hartman rented the building for three months. The first and only play performed there was Ibsen's "Ghosts". Seats were sold by Sherman, Clay and Co. However this venture was not successful and as the San Francisco Examiner said this "added another unpropitious touch to its atmosphere of mystery."

An article in the San Francisco Chronicle on 21 April 1919 referred to the "House of Dreams", "the marvelous mansion in bastard Norman style". The author said that the house had remained empty, "its leaded windows a prey to the small boys of the valley, its garden choked with weeds and deserted."

Paul Verdier's purchase of the house was reported in the Examiner of 3 June 1919. He bought the property for his new bride Mrs Z. Woallson. At the time he was President of the City of Paris Dry Goods Company. The Society page of the Chronicle of 20 January 1920 reported a "Delightful Dinner Party at opening of Haunted House", with the Verdiers hosts to the "Polo set". The invitations bore the design of the home. Dinner was served in the "spacious living room with the guests seated at five tables representing France, America, Asia, Africa and Oceania."

It soon became popularly known as the Verdier Mansion. The Verdiers lived there until the late 1930's, but owned the building until 1953.

There is a reference in the Hope-Hamilton archive at the Bancroft Library, Berkeley to the use of the building in 1939 as the "Studios of Lassen and Galpern".

In the late 1930s the house was rented to a Russian Dancing School and then in 1940 to Sally Stanford who used it as a brothel. There is supposed to be a dent in the front door caused by police trying to break in. Complaints from the neighbors and visits by the police persuaded Sally Stanford to close down the premises and move to 1144 Pine Street in 1941.

The property was then rented to a Mrs. K. Hope-Hamilton who intended to establish it as Inter America House, with the aim of promoting good will and fellowship among the many national groups in San Francisco. It was dedicated on 26 June 1941 when Latin American consuls were honored at a reception and a tea was given on 22 July 1941 for educational leaders from South America. A plaque outside commemorates this use of the building. However, the week before American involvement in the Second World War began, it became an Officers' Club. The purpose was to provide rest, comfort and culture to the officers and "to express to them our appreciation and gratitude for defending the bright glory of our Democratic Ideals." The club was open three nights a week until midnight and land was cleared at the back for a barbecue which is still there. The club was specifically intended for junior officers, "the forgotten men" and was open to anyone with a rank of Ensign through Colonel. Enlisted men could only provide music or other entertainment or help out in the kitchen. 50,000 men visited the house between 1941 and 1946, many of them using the 'E' street-car from The Presidio.

The Club was run on pledges from the wealthy and volunteer labor; visitors were not allowed to make any contribution. There was only one paid employee, Chester the Chinese cook, and the staff was supervised by "Big Sisters". Pilings from Treasure Island were used for firewood and food was donated by San Francisco merchants. Sullivan's Pet Shop donated a dog called Amiga and gifts of rugs, furniture and books were made. $125 a month was paid for lighting, water and insurance to Paul Verdier and although he received no rent, visitors were advised to shop at the City Of Paris. In 1944 Mrs Hope-Hamilton sent several letters to Verdier about leaks in the roof and dangerous stairways. There is a reference in the Hope-Hamilton archive to the extension of the house to provide a stag suite.

The building had its own flag and an eternal flame burned in the window to welcome sailors home. Flags of many of the Allied nations were presented and displayed on the wall opposite the fireplace in the ballroom. This period is well documented. There is a detailed log and many photographs in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley and a box of archives at the Hoover Institution at Stanford. There is also apparently an article in the London Spectator of April 1943.

John F. Kennedy visited the club seventeen times and wanted to make a large donation but this, along with all other offers from servicemen, was refused. Crown Princess Juliana of the Netherlands visited in November 1944. For this occasion Blums donated a large cake worth $275 and Podesta donated flowers.

The flame was extinguished on VJ day although the center continued until its fifth anniversary on 26 June 1946. In July 1947 it was reported in the Marin Herald that a permanent home for Inter America House had been found in the Sausalito Hills on the Robbins Estate.

While Mrs. Hope-Hamilton was the tenant she gave parties for the neighborhood children. She was bodily evicted from the house when Verdier decided to install his mistress who was a music teacher. This was presumably Verna Osborne who ran a music academy from the house sometime between 1946 and 1953. She later "established a man" on the upper floor which led Verdier to decide to occupy the lower floor. Mrs Verdier heard of this arrangement and returned from Paris to file for divorce. She also wanted the house or at least half of it as was her right under the community property laws.

The conservatory was used for a time as a tea room and was popular with local residents on the Hill.

The Verdiers separated in 1937 and newspapers reported on Paul Verdier's failure to make monthly payments of $400 to his wife. In 1953 he sought to avoid the payments on the grounds that she had "molested" him by attempting to move into the house.

Following the Verdiers' marital split, the building was acquired by Catherine Doliani, then of 1191 Green Street, at an auction in November 1952. Bidding started at $25,000 and Doliani acquired the house for $27,475. One of the two other bidders was Mrs. Hope-Hamilton. At the time of the auction Verdier and his estranged wife Alexandrine were in Paris where their divorce suit was pending. Ms. Doliani was asked about her plans for the property and replied: "Maybe it will sell the way it is. Maybe I'll remodel it and rent it. Maybe I'll divide it up into apartments. Right now, all I know is the roof leaks." (Examiner 15 November 1952).

Ms. Doliani agreed to lease part of the building to the Interplayers Theater who used the ballroom as a 100 seat theater in 1953. The plays performed there included "Dear Judas" and Christopher Fry's "A Sleep of Prisoners". At this time the conservatory garden was described as being full of dead vines and broken statuary "that looks like a setting clipped out

of a film by Jean Cocteau" and the main building was cracked and weather-stained. "Wrought iron bars cover the windows, secret panels are to be found in the wainscoting, the rooms are full of inglenooks and enchanting little alcoves and mysterious teeth-marks on the molding as if some animal had once been trying to gnaw its way out. You fully expect to see the ghost of a long-forgotten guest appear suddenly in a murky hallway and ask how to get out." (Chronicle 1 March 1953).

Ms Doliani created eight units of accommodation in the house and built over part of the garden. The property was put up for sale in 1992 for $1.7 million which did not include the substantial sum which will be required to restore the house to its former glory.

David French
1320 27th Avenue
San Francisco CA 94122
Tel: (415)-664-4541

Appendix 1 - Robert G. Hanford - 1920

In his obituary in the San Francisco Examiner on 27 January, 1920, Hanford was described as one of the most interesting figures in California finance. "His elastic fortunes rose and fell about the six-figure mark twice ...he was three times married and twice established homes in mansions of unique design in San Francisco."

He built 1001 Vallejo Street for his second wife, the recently divorced Gabrielle Guittard Cavalsky. The Examiner of 21 April 1918 states "Before he could install her there, however, the unhappy tragedy of Mrs Lorena de la Montanya's suicide seemed to put a rift in their connubial felicity and the great grey house was left empty on top of the hill." Hanford was in the same room as Mrs. de la Montanya when she shot herself with his revolver. This incident occurred at her Jones Street apartment in July 1909 and C.O. Whittemore was also present. The two men left the scene and reported to the coroner the next day. The headlines read "Mining Magnate Asserts he placed his revolver on table and as he turned his back he heard the report." The cause of the suicide was apparently financial problems and Mrs. de la Montanya had told a medium that she was going to kill herself but planned to return in spirit.

Hanford wrote in 1915 about his second wife to his first wife: "She is the one grand passion of my lifetime." They were divorced in 1914. Hanford spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the upkeep of her estate at Locust Valley, Long Island. She later married Frederick William Schuetter and moved to the Far East.

On the front page of the Chronicle of 2 November 1915 was the headline "Financier's Third Wife Is Typist". Helen Maud McCann was described as "a young woman of unusual beauty" and was a stenographer in the offices of Hanford and W.S. Tevis. They apparently married in the East and later lived at 1144 Pine Street.

Hanford's career began with the organization of United Railroads and ended with the United Properties Company but he was involved in a variety of other enterprises such as acquiring water systems in Alameda.In 1913 he had a bitter public argument with "Borax" Smith when the latter was in the bankruptcy court. From 1915-1918 (at least) he was based in the East.

He died suddenly in January 1920 at the age of 57. He was in New York completing a project of supplying piped heat and furnace oil for office buildings. At the time of his death, his wife was in San Francisco and both were due to again become permanent residents of the city in two weeks.

His will filed on 20 March 1920 created a $1,000,000 trust from the estate for the benefit of his wife then listed as living at 159 E 88th Street in New York. $1,000 was left to his son in Detroit. $50,000 was left to his secretary and the rest to Miss O'Connell "for long and faithful services."

The Examiner of 8 April revealed that the attorneys for the estate had been unable to find "one penny" of the $1,000,000 estate of which he made disposition in his will which had been drawn up on 20th January 1919.

On 16 December 1920 the Examiner stated that his estate which had been once worth $1,000,000 was now worth only $1200 and that the it would be probated to the three heirs - his widow Helen Hanford, his son Robert G. Hanford and Miss Mary O'Connell, his secretary.

Appendix 2 - Paul Verdier
c. 1892 - 1966

Paul Verdier was well-known in San Francisco as the President of the city's oldest department store, the City Of Paris. When the store celebrated its 85th birthday on 24 April, 1935, the Chronicle reported that the store began when "Felix Verdier and his loyal wife came sailing around the Horn with boxes of French merchandise. The first little shop [in 1850] was on Clay Street near the waterfront." The store moved six times before 1935.

Paul Verdier was born in Paris into a distinguished French family. He was educated at the University of Paris and came to San Francisco at tha age of 19. He immediately joined the staff of the City of Paris which was founded by his father Gaston Verdier and his uncle Felix Verdier. He was named President in 1904 and remained so for over 50 years.

But Paul Verdier gave up his business in San Francisco to serve as a private in the French Army in the First World War. He was in Paris on a buying trip when the war broke out and he immediately enlisted. He ended the war as a captain with many decorations for bravery including the Croix de Guerre and a knighthood in the Legion of Honour. The San Francisco papers regularly reported his activities and promotions - in June 1915 the Examiner reported his promotion to an aide-de-camp to a general and noted his impending transfer to Italy or Turkey. He had met his French-American bride, Mrs. Zins Woallson, in Europe. They married on 31 December 1910 in Paris.

After the war he returned to San Francisco to resume his work as a store executive. His views on a number of diverse matters were reported in the local papers. In 1933 he opined that Prohibition "had played havoc with the American palate and that the people of America must be re-educated in the appreciation of fine wines." He stocked the City of Paris with all kinds of wines in anticipation of the end of Prohibition. In 1936 after being held up for an hour and a half on the Oakland Bay Bridge, he prepared a plan for speedier handling of automobiles at the toll gates which was submitted to the State Engineer and published in the Chronicle. He also had plans to introduce Parisian style telephone boxes to America. In the late 1930's, after a visit to "war-fevered Europe" he was appointed Rumanian Consul to San Francisco. Asked why he received the appointment, he replied "Darned if I know." He did however reveal that he was a friend of the late Queen Marie. (Chronicle 13 October 1938). He

also expressed his belief that the strikes taking place in San Francisco at the time were giving the city a bad name in Europe. He was a keen polo player and had a number of polo ponies.

In 1940 he became an American citizen and after Pearl Harbor he joined the State National Guard serving as a Captain. He was a leader of San Francisco's French community and served on many trade missions. He was President of the California Legion of Honour for many years and was appointed Monaco's first Consul in San Francisco. He was a benefactor to many of the city's young artists and musicians. His clubs included the Pacific Union Club, the St. Francis Yacht Club, the Burlingame Country Club and the Lafayette Club. At the time of his death in 1966 he was living at 2724 Pacific Street with his sister and also owned a ranch in Sonoma.

His obituary in the Chronicle of 10 May 1966 referred to "a hero soldier, a businessman of remarkable acumen, an arbiter of good taste, a civic and cultural leader and a sportsman." Verdier was reported as saying: "If I have missed anything in life, I apologize."

Appendix 3 - K. Hope-Hamilton
c. 1890 -

Mrs. Hope-Hamilton was active as an interior decorator (designer) in the 1920's. Her work included the Mandarin Cafe and a cyclorama stage at the Fairmont Hotel ballroom. Her firm was called Hamilton Interiors. She was particularly interested in Chinese art and design. In 1928 the Chronicle described her as "one of the most prominent interior decorators in this part of the state." She was noted for her rich furnishings and colorful fabrics. She favored using the Spanish mode believing it to be the only type of decoration which is distinctively Californian.

In 1926 she was invited to join the San Francisco Art Association. She contributed many articles to the Apartment House News, a monthly journal based in San Francisco. In 1924 she invented a brunch table for 4-6 people with an electric grill in the center.

Appendix 4 - Sally Stanford
1903-1982

In her unreliable autobiography of 1966, "The Lady of the House", Sally Stanford describes her humble origins in Baker, Oregon and her move to California in 1917 at the age of 14. In the 1920s she ran or owned a number of brothels in San Francisco including 693 O'Farrell Street, 837 Geary Street, 1526 Franklin Street, 929 Bush Street and 1224 Stockton Street. In 1940 she briefly used 1001 Vallejo Street but after a visit from the police and numerous local complaints "from some of the wealthiest, socially prominent people in the Bay Area" she moved operations to 1144 Pine Street (demolished 1967), known as the Fortress. Coincidentally this was also built by Robert Hanford. There were many famous visitors including Errol Flynn.

Sally Stanford later became Mayor of Sausalito. She died in 1982.

Appendix 5 - Catherine Doliani
1898 -

Catherine Doliani bought the house at auction on 14 November 1952. The Examiner described her as a $135 a month part-time bookkeeper with the Giusti Produce Company of 516 Front Street. Her employer described her as "a quiet type and a hard worker" and she had previously worked as a seamstress. She then lived at 1192 Green Street. She paid the 10% deposit and said "I have no idea what I am going to do with it." She already owned a number of properties.

She made news when she married William von Weiland on 19 May 1991 at Love's Lake Tahoe Wedding Chapel in a ceremony carried out by "Dan the Marrying Man" Rawls. The groom was 48 and the bride 93. The marriage took place one day before a court hearing in which attorneys for her niece were seeking to remove von Weiland and William Schacht, her accountant, as her trustees. Von Weiland was arrested in February 1992. He and two others were accused of looting about $6,500,000 from her holdings of approximately $19,000,000.

A detailed account of Ms. Doliani's times at the house is given in an article in "West", a publication of the San Jose Mercury News, 26 April 1992.