

*(This paper shares stories told to Innes McElrath by her family as she was growing up in Oakland, California. This was written by her in about 1943 for an English assignment. It was retyped by her son from the original copy in the family's private collection.)*

In 1852 Solomon Alden, from Southport, Connecticut, journeyed West by steamer in search of adventure. He camped in the Eastbay for awhile and a few months later purchased a house and four hundred acres, on the present 51<sup>st</sup> Street, which extended North to Berkeley and South to Oakland. In 1854 he sent for his wife and three year old daughter, Elsie Ann, to join him. They arrived in the San Francisco harbor that same year on a steamer. The voyage took them many months around the horn, because whenever the ships would dock, the crew would desert for the California gold fields, or other adventure. Consequently the passage would be delayed until the ship could find a new crew.

When Mrs. Alden arrived in North Temescal, as the district was then called, she disliked the bareness of the yard, and she was homesick. She sent back to Connecticut for a small baytree, and when it arrived planted it outside in the front yard. There were no water pumps in those days, so every day after the dishwashing she would pour the water on her growing baytree. It grew immensely and for many years has afforded shade to Oaklanders.

In 1869 the Aldens traveled back East on one of the first runs of the new Continental Railroad. Before this time, however, when the Civil War was being fought, due to no communication system between the East and West to speak of, the people out here barely knew a war was being fought.

In 1872 Major John Edgar McElrath came West after the Civil War to practice law. He had finished Harvard in 1864 and after practicing in his home town of Cleveland, Tennessee, set out for new fields in San Francisco. In 1873 he married Elsie Ann Alden, and they made the old Alden residence their home. They had eleven children, who lived in the house, and many parties and balls were given in their home after it has been enlarged. The children were Hilda (Bangs), Elsie Alden (died at 16 of appendicitis), Marion, Phoebe, Katherine (Kate)(Black), Bertha (Bakewell), Ann (Myers), Hugh (died at 3), John, Alden and Clifford.

Major McElrath died in Tennessee in the early 1900s while visiting his family, and his wife died in Oakland in the 1930s.

In 1915 the house was sold to the Oakland Baby Hospital and used by them until 1918. Then the old Alden homestead was taken down and a new Baby Hospital was built.

The baytree which Mrs. Alden planted is still standing in front of the hospital, and if able to talk it certainly would have fascinating tales to relate.