

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: The MacGregor Building

Other names/site number: Assessor's Parcel Number 067 2844 016



Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number (one building):

1389, 1391, 1393 and 1395 Solano Avenue and 856 Carmel Avenue

City or town: Albany State: California County: Alameda

Not For Publication:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_ statewide      \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A      \_\_\_B      \_\_\_C      \_\_\_D

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p>             | <p>_____<br/> <b>Date</b></p> |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p> |                               |

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| In my opinion, the property meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet <input type="checkbox"/> the National Register criteria. |                                       |
| <hr/>   |                                       |
| <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>  | <b>Date</b>                           |
| <hr/>   |                                       |
| <b>Title :</b><br><b>or Tribal Government</b>   | <b>State or Federal agency/bureau</b> |

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:  
entered in the National Register  
determined eligible for the National Register  
determined not eligible for the National Register  
removed from the National Register  
other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

|                         |                |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Signature of the Keeper | Date of Action |
|-------------------------|----------------|

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
-



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

---

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Spanish Revival

Mediterranean Revival

---

---

---

---

**Materials:**(enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stucco & Tile

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Stucco

Roof: Clay Tile

Other: Ceramic Tile, Iron, Sandstone, Terra Cotta, Glass

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

### Summary Paragraph

The MacGregor Building in Albany, California, is located on a prominent corner of the small town's main commercial thoroughfare, Solano Avenue. Built in the mid-1930s by the City's most prolific master builder and developer, Charles Manning MacGregor, it contained MacGregor's own office as well as retail and professional offices. It was the City's first large commercial structure on Solano Avenue and is its most architecturally significant building. It is also the most important building of MacGregor's long career. An iconic two-story building with a good degree of integrity, it is wood frame construction with stucco walls and a Mission tile roof in the Spanish/ Mediterranean Revival Style. It features many excellent examples of craftsmanship and period detailing.

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

---

## Narrative Description

The MacGregor Building in Albany, California, is located on a prominent corner of the small town's main commercial thoroughfare, Solano Avenue. Built in the mid-1930s by the City's most prolific master builder and developer, Charles MacGregor, it contained MacGregor's own office as well as retail and professional offices. It was the City's first large commercial structure on Solano Avenue and is its most significant architecturally. It is an iconic two-story building with wood frame construction and stucco walls with a Mission tile roof in the Spanish/Mediterranean Revival style. It features many fine examples of craftsmanship and period detailing.

Neighboring and adjacent retail buildings are generally single-story from about the same period. Later, during the 1950s and 60s, nearby two-story multi-unit dwellings became part of the commercial environment. The building's historic occupancies were the same as current ones: the ground floor of the Building contains retail businesses while the upper floor houses professional and commercial offices.

### Significant Features

The building's significant features are its two-story stucco facade which turns the corner off the main street, Solano Avenue, and continues down the side street, Carmel Avenue. The south elevation fronting Solano Avenue is the primary elevation while the east elevation along Carmel Avenue is also significant.

The MacGregor Building has a unique parapet roof with raised central portions on both the south and east elevations which break up the roof lines. The parapets are capped with red Mission tiles which are supported by wood-framing to mimic a multi-gabled, staggered roof.

On the south elevation, a faux chimney terminates the façade at its west end, capped with Mission tile. An Adobe pattern distinguishes the textured stucco wall finish. Originally, divided-light wood casement windows were installed on the upper floor while large panes of butt-glazed windows were used on the lower, retail spaces. Wrought iron balustrades are located on upper floors beneath main windows and an arch-top casement window is featured on the two-story corner elevation. On the lower floor, the large retail windows had transoms above which were framed in shaped stucco corbels. Below the windows, a tile wainscot runs along the base of the building.

All the building entries are recessed. The main entrance to the upper floors on Solano Avenue is marked by a tiled ceramic archway with ceramic building numbers in the center. It features two distinct spiral plaster columns (from the Baroque "Churrigueresque" style), terra cotta floor tile, and Spanish tile work at the door's threshold. The entry to the corner retail space is offset forty-five degrees to Solano and Carmel Avenues. The recessed entry to the retail space on Carmel Avenue, on the east elevation, is marked by a Moorish arch with a tile rondelle above it, inset

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

into the stucco. The recess contains tiled benches with terra cotta floor tile and a handmade wrought-iron light fixture. With the exception of the corner door, all the entry doors are original, wood, single-light french doors.

Decorative plaster panels are located above three large windows on both Carmel and Solano facades. On the east elevation, wrought-iron work covers the smaller windows. On the upper floor, smaller spiral plaster columns (similar to the spiral columns marking the main entry on Solano Avenue) separate some of the casement windows.

### Interiors

The interiors of the ground floor retail spaces have been remodeled many times by tenants over the years and contain very few of the original materials with the exception of the large plaster corbels in the corner retail space. However, the small, Carmel Avenue retail space on the ground floor still retains its original plaster walls and plaster fireplace. Upstairs, the skylight-lit central stair and atrium still have their original textured plaster walls, wrought iron rails, office doors, and door and window casings. Many of the bathrooms contain original tilework while the main corner upper office still retains three original plaster fireplaces.

### Integrity

The MacGregor Building has a high degree of historic integrity and is in reasonably good shape. No major additions or alterations have been constructed that impacts the two main facades.

**Location** - The building is in its original, corner location with very little of its footprint changed. The surrounding neighborhood is still configured around it with older single-story small commercial buildings directly adjacent to it. The adjacent residential neighborhoods contain small single-family suburban homes from the 1930s, mostly built by Charles MacGregor. Original lot lines remain, as do streets, sidewalks, and circulation patterns.

**Design** - The design of the building is unchanged and its form, structural system and architectural style (Mediterranean Revival) are extant and original. It retains its original composition of roofline, massing, and recessed door and window openings. Its floor plan and interior spaces retain their original spatial organization with retail stores on the ground floor and a central staircase leading to the professional offices on the second floor. Architectural materials and motifs are extant and original.

**Setting** - Constructed on a prominent corner of the City's main commercial thoroughfare, the 1934 building still dominates the neighborhood, with its large 2-story stucco façade, materials, and workmanship intact. The surrounding 1930s commercial and residential neighborhood is also intact, reflecting the original physical environment which was a small commuter suburb at the end of the train line. While no evidence of the train line remains, street and sidewalk patterns are original and the historic setting is very similar to its original scale. The corner building is adjacent to its commercial neighbor to the west

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

and is separated from the residential neighborhood to its north by a parking lot, similar to its disposition in 1934.

**Materials** - The building retains most of its original key exterior materials, including its red Mission roof tiles, textured stucco walls, some original wood doors and storefront windows, tile bulkheads, as well as its wrought iron, handmade light fixtures, plaster reliefs, terra cotta floor tiles, and tile rondelles.

**Workmanship** - The building's original Spanish Revival workmanship is intact and retains its aesthetic values to a high degree. The artistry and craftsmanship includes textured stucco walls, decorative plaster reliefs over windows, handmade tile rondelles, Spanish tile work, arched openings, spiral columns in doorways and windows, tiled benches, and wrought iron planter boxes and light fixtures.

**Feeling** - Because the building retains most of its setting, design, materials, and workmanship, the cumulative effect is a building that conveys a very strong sense of its 1930s Spanish Revival architectural style. Because the corner building has not been significantly altered, it still expresses its importance as an anchor in the City's commercial district.

**Association** - Because the building retains most of its original massing, significant materials, important character-defining features, and its relation to the surrounding commercial and residential neighborhoods, it retains direct association with its important Master Builder, Charles MacGregor. The building was the place where MacGregor worked and MacGregor was the most significant person in Albany's early history, between 1920-1950.

However, like most structures of this vintage, the Building has lost some of its integrity. Historically, the building contained a single-story extension with three small retail spaces along Carmel Avenue (see Figure 5). These small tenant spaces were demolished when the rear portion of the original property was sold to the Bank next door and reconfigured into a surface parking lot sometime in the 1960s. While all the original window openings remain, wood casements have been replaced with aluminum sliders and original storefront glazing has been replaced with aluminum storefront. These replacements could easily be restored with windows similar to originals. The tile wainscot was replaced with sandstone tile along Solano Avenue. The corbelled transoms have been concealed and the original neon clock removed.

---

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Community Planning & Development

Commerce

Settlement



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Period of Significance**

1934 – 1944

**Significant Dates**

1934-36

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

MacGregor, Charles Manning

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

MacGregor, Charles Manning

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The MacGregor Building, built in 1934/35, is Albany's most significant commercial structure and the most important building by a regionally prominent builder. Charles Manning MacGregor constructed the building for his own development office as well as for retail and professional offices. "MacGregor Homes" built most of the homes in Albany from the early 1920's through the early 1940's. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C. It is significant in the areas of Architecture, Community Planning & Development, Commerce, and Settlement. The Building's Period of Significance is 1934-1944. Associated with the Mediterranean Revival style architecture of the 1930's, with a Master Builder, and with the residential and commercial development of Albany, California, the MacGregor Building retains and conveys its historical significance.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **CRITERION A - ASSOCIATED WITH PATTERNS AND EVENTS**

The MacGregor Building meets National Register Criterion A because it is associated with important residential and commercial events and patterns in Albany's history.

#### **Community Planning & Development**

Between 1920 and 1940, Charles M. MacGregor directed Albany's most prolific period of residential building. These small homes, many featuring Spanish or Revival Styles, comprise over half of Albany's housing stock and give Albany its distinctive character (see Figure 8). To house his expanding home development company in Albany, MacGregor constructed an office building on a prominent corner on the City's main commercial thoroughfare in 1934. The MacGregor Building played an important role in both residential and commercial building patterns in Albany for many years.

The history of Albany in the 1920's and 1930's is intimately connected to the story of its "Builder of Homes," Charles Manning MacGregor, and the office building he built for his company, MacGregor Homes. The Regents Park housing tract, from which most of Albany was formed, was only 1.7 square miles when the small City incorporated in 1908 over a waterfront dispute with its Berkeley neighbor. Like many East Bay cities, Albany had an influx of San Franciscans after the 1906 quake who were attracted to Albany's inexpensive lots. Early homes in the hamlet were a sparse group of simple wooden Victorians. Due to the discovery of oil in southern California, most cities in the state began expanding in the 1920's and Albany was no exception.

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

At this time, the main East Bay streetcar line ended at the top of Solano Avenue, in Berkeley, with nothing but open land surrounding it. Charles MacGregor, a well-known builder and real-estate entrepreneur from Oakland, started purchasing inexpensive lots in the rural area around the stop, mostly in Albany. According to his daughter, MacGregor's plan for the small, inexpensive lots he purchased was "to build a good family town" (p. 68, Webb). The lots he purchased were often odd-sized or less desirable and therefore, in less demand. Many of the lots were narrow, only 25' wide, and MacGregor became adept at designing and building small homes at very competitive prices (see Figure 6). Because of the many affordable homes MacGregor built at the end of this streetcar line, and the many jobs his company provided, Albany experienced its largest population growth in the 1920s.

### **Settlement**

During the Depression, MacGregor was able to purchase even more parcels in Albany as many properties were being sold at auction rates. Despite the 1930s economic downturn, his home development company continued to thrive building affordable homes. MacGregor's company was well known through out the Bay Area for its solidly built cottages, but it is best known for building over 1500 homes in Albany. Starting in the late 1920s and ending in the early 1940s, MacGregor developed tracts and bungalows on every block in the small town.

During this early period, Albany was essentially a one-company town. MacGregor Homes was the single most influential company for establishing the residential settlement character of Albany. MacGregor's small homes marked the beginning of the community's residential development. They still comprise over half of Albany's dense housing stock and give the small town its distinctive bungalow character.

Ever since, Albany's primary growth has remained residential in nature. MacGregor's settlement pattern of developing tiny suburban lots between 1920 and 1940 is still evident – today Albany is, *per capita*, one of California's densest cities. The MacGregor Building represents this important historical context not only because MacGregor built most of the homes in the City, but because he built the structure for his important real estate business. The homes and office building are intimately connected and convey the same Albany story: small-town residential and commercial development in the 1920s and 1930s.

### **CRITERION B - ASSOCIATED WITH A SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL**

#### **Commerce**

The MacGregor Building meets National Register Criterion B because it is associated with a significant local individual, Charles Manning MacGregor (1871-1954), a Master Builder. During a career that spanned 60 years, Charles Manning MacGregor (1871-1954) constructed over 10,000 homes and apartments in the Bay Area, mainly in Oakland, Albany, Alameda, Piedmont and San Leandro areas while some of his earlier homes can be found in San Francisco as well. From the early 1900s until the 1940s, Charles Manning MacGregor was the most prolific

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

and well-known home builder in the East Bay. A Master Builder by trade, MacGregor had also mastered the art of architecture by the end of his long career.

MacGregor was born in Nova Scotia and in his teens, joined his sister in Boston where he learned carpentry. His brother persuaded him to California citing many construction opportunities and in 1889 he moved to Oakland. Between 1898 and 1906, MacGregor's name frequently appeared on building permits for houses designed by well-known architects such as A. W. Smith, Leo Nichols, Maxwell Bugbee, William Knowles, Coxhead & Coxhead, Albert Farr, and Bakewell & Brown (p. 1, Thompson).

With sufficient savings, he became a builder and real estate entrepreneur. His first house of record, a 6-room cottage, went up in 1896. By 1904, he was designing his own buildings until his projects grew too numerous and he hired draftspeople. One of his first early large apartment projects in Oakland, the Vue du Lac, is a well-preserved, 3-story Arts & Crafts shingled building built in 1906. Another of his large projects was Madison Park Apartments in Oakland. At the time it was built in 1908, the 98-unit, 5-story apartment building was the largest wooden structure west of the Mississippi. A handsome Edwardian-style building, Madison Park Apartments is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building was renovated in 1995 and currently offers affordable housing units (see Figure 10).

In contrast to his large apartment projects, MacGregor's company remained renowned mostly for its well-built cottages. It offered a one-stop shop for homes which were affordable and built to last. Constructed in all styles of the day, these early Craftsman and Colonial Revivals were quite popular and by the age of 36, MacGregor had built over 600 homes.

By the early 1920s, he was a prominent East Bay developer when he began building homes in rural Albany, at the end of the Solano Avenue streetcar line. Here he began his biggest development and ultimately built over 1,500 homes in Albany between 1920 and 1940. MacGregor developed tracts and bungalows on every block in the small town, mostly in revival styles which were popular at the time (see Figure 8). Today, these well-built homes still comprise over half of Albany's existing housing stock.

By the 1930s, most of Charles MacGregor's development business was in Albany. Consequently, he relocated his office from downtown Oakland (470 - 13<sup>th</sup> Street) to Albany where he constructed the MacGregor Building in the center of town on a prominent commercial corner. In 1934/35, he set up his business, MacGregor Homes, in the two-story retail and office building on the ground floor at 1391 Solano Avenue (see Fig. 4). From 1934-54, he conducted his successful business from the MacGregor building. It was the headquarters of the City's most prominent business and businessman and the building ushered in modern commercial development on Solano Avenue. For over two decades, MacGregor built homes – not houses – in Albany. He continued building Albany homes into the early 1940's and had construction going at the time of his death in 1954.

### **Community Planning and Development**

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

MacGregor's contributions to Albany's welfare did not end with his architecture. During the post-earthquake building boom of 1907, he pioneered the practice of building several houses concurrently, thus keeping his crews continuously employed, and was one of the Bay Area's first "mass" builders. By saving interior construction work for winter seasons, MacGregor was known for keeping his workers employed year-round through the rainy season, especially appreciated during the Depression. MacGregor eliminated the need for subcontractors by directly employing carpenters, plasterers, painters, tile setters, and finish craftsman. The Depression did not slow him down as his efficient working and selling methods were suited to frugal circumstances. Perhaps most important for Albany residents, MacGregor evolved the "rent to own" policy which helped many young families gradually acquire home ownership (p. 2, Thompson).

Well-loved in Albany because of his many outstanding contributions to the City and its citizens, MacGregor was made 'Mayor for a Day' in 1936. September 12, 1936, was Albany's first celebration of MacGregor Day (see Fig. 6). For over two decades (1936-56), Albany celebrated an annual "MacGregor Day" with a parade, a concert and athletic events. The highlight of the Day was his treat to the schoolchildren of Albany of a movie and ice cream. Subsequently, two Albany public schools were named after him. No other individual in the history of Albany has been so honored or remembered (see Fig. 9).

Today, his sturdy homes continue to serve the small, but dense, community. Thanks to MacGregor's vision, Albany is the community he planned back in the early 1920's. It retains small-town ambience in spite of being surrounded by a large metropolitan area and the family-friendly City is renowned for its excellent public schools and Solano Avenue commerce. While other large MacGregor buildings exist, the MacGregor Building in Albany is the most important property associated with his life and work. It represents the most prolific period of his building career, he designed it himself, and he built it with his own company. Albany has been benefitting from it ever since.

### **CRITERION C - ASSOCIATED WITH ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND MASTER BUILDER**

The MacGregor Building meets National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture because it is the best example in Albany, California, of the Mediterranean Revival style, it represents the best work of a regionally prominent master builder, Charles MacGregor (1871-1954), and it possesses high artistic values.

#### **Architecture**

The MacGregor Building is the most important representative of MacGregor's large body of work. Designed by MacGregor and built by MacGregor Homes, the Building is an iconic example of the commercial Mediterranean Style that was popular in California and peaked from 1924-1932. The Building articulates the Style's artistic values and represents an exemplary design by Master Builder and Developer, Charles M. MacGregor. The two-story building is constructed of stucco and red Mission tile in the Mediterranean Revival style and contains many

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

fine examples of craftsmanship and period detailing. The existing building retains most of its original materials and features with a good degree of integrity. Because of its local significance, the building was given a rare Plaque by the Albany Historical Society in 2015 (see Figure 7).

Before 1920, Spanish Mission style was prevalent in California. After the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, Mediterranean prototypes from other countries were widely publicized and architects and builders began incorporating a variety of new details into their buildings. Identifying features of this style are low-pitched red tile roofs, prominent arches used for important doors or windows, stucco walls with minimal eaves, and – in contrast to the Spanish Mission style – asymmetrical facades.

Informal and additive massing was important and the Mediterranean Style's irregular form lent itself to a wide variety of new and old building types. The style was very popular in the 1920s and 30s, most notably in Florida and California. It was also compatible with one of America's least expensive construction methods, the stucco-sheathed wood-frame building. Both the style and construction method had been perfected in many of MacGregor's Albany bungalows so it was logical for him to use both when he built his 1934 office building in Albany.

However, the larger scale of his office building demanded a different interpretation and adaption of the Style. MacGregor carefully proportioned his two-story facade to turn the corner and intersect with the residential neighborhood next door. [The East Elevation originally had single-story retail spaces extending to the North which are now gone.] Well-placed details, such as plaster reliefs and tile rondelles, signify important elements and create the overall attractiveness of this commercial building. Most notably, these motifs were executed at a domestic scale so that the larger building fit into its residential community without overwhelming it.

In the MacGregor Building, the two-story, two-street asymmetrical stucco facade is the dominant feature of this corner building. Its mass is broken up with staggered, low pitched roof lines and seemingly random upper window placements. This corner building is also an excellent example of a 1930's "artistic front" building where one overall effect or design concept – in this case, Spanish – dominated a building comprised of different stores or offices. Symbolically, the details on these buildings were usually derived from cottages or houses that identified with local residents and this is true for the MacGregor Building. On his office building, MacGregor used many of the same materials, details and themes that he built in his Albany Revival homes including textured stucco, arches, Mission roof tiles, feature windows, hand-made ceramic tile and wrought-iron work.

In addition to numerous Spanish and Mediterranean Revival style bungalows and cottages, two other major buildings in Albany represent Spanish architecture from this era. The Albany Veteran Memorial Building by Architect Henry Meyers from 1932 is a classic Spanish Colonial Revival building located in Memorial Park. The Mosaic Church on Marin Avenue is a Spanish Mission Revival structure from the early 1930s.

### **Artistic Values**

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

Mediterranean buildings incorporate a variety of design references and the MacGregor Building embodies all the distinctive characteristics of this style. Like most Mediterranean Style structures, it has classic red-tiled parapet roofs with minimal eaves and highly textured “adobe” stucco which finishes the asymmetrical massing. On the south elevation, a faux chimney terminates the façade at its west end, capped with Mission tile. Because it is a corner building, the Style’s informal form is expressed in two different street facades with irregularly-spaced windows on the upper floor. For further emphasis, important windows are distinguished with plaster relief elements and wrought iron work.

In combination with tiled roofs and stucco walls, all types of prominent arches distinguish Mediterranean buildings, especially around important doorways. In the MacGregor Building, the main entry on the primary Solano Avenue elevation features spiral “Churrigueresque” columns and hand-crafted terra cotta tiles below a half-round arch. The secondary entry on Carmel Avenue is distinguished by a Moorish arch – with a decorative tiled rondelle above it – and tile benches and a hand-made wrought-iron Medieval light fixture. The two-story corner facade is highlighted with an arch-top feature window while the large storefront windows on the ground floor were marked by solid transoms and large, rounded stucco corbels. Below the windows, a tile bulkhead runs along the base of the building, typical of pre-WWII retail buildings.

Decorative plaster work is another aesthetic feature of this building’s Mediterranean language. Spiral columns at the entries and in between windows distinguish important elements on the facades. Cast lintel plaster panels above three large windows on both facades denote significant interior spaces.

The MacGregor Building has all the distinctive characteristics of the commercial Mediterranean Revival Style of the 1930s. Romantic and decorative features of the Style are elegantly combined in MacGregor’s building to achieve an aesthetic effect: informal stucco massing with Mission tile roofs, Spanish and Moorish arches, terra cotta and ceramic tiles, ornamental plaster, and hand-crafted wrought iron work all convey the building’s high artistic values and MacGregor’s expert craftsmanship.

While MacGregor’s many revival homes served Albany’s housing needs, his office building represents the community fabric. Not only is it the best example of a Mediterranean Revival Style structure in Albany, the MacGregor Building conveys the heart and soul of the small town’s architecture from an important early era. Even more significantly, it exemplifies a mastery of style that is the crowning jewel of a renowned builder.

### **Master Builder**

During a career that spanned 60 years, Charles Manning MacGregor (1871-1954) constructed over 10,000 homes and apartments in the Bay Area, mainly in Oakland, Albany, Alameda, Piedmont and San Leandro areas while some of his earlier homes can be found in San Francisco as well. From the early 1900s until the 1940s, Charles Manning MacGregor was the most prolific and well-known home builder in the East Bay.

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

Alameda, California

County and State

MacGregor was born in Nova Scotia and in his teens, joined his sister in Boston where he learned carpentry. His brother persuaded him to California citing many construction opportunities and in 1889 he moved to Oakland. Between 1898 and 1906, MacGregor's name frequently appeared on building permits for houses designed by well-known architects such as A. W. Smith, Leo Nichols, Maxwell Bugbee, William Knowles, Coxhead & Coxhead, Albert Farr, and Bakewell & Brown (p. 1, Thompson).

With sufficient savings, he became a builder and real estate entrepreneur. His first house of record, a 6-room cottage, went up in 1896. By 1904, he was designing his own buildings until his projects grew too numerous and he hired draftspeople. One of his first early large apartment projects in Oakland, the Vue du Lac, is a well-preserved, 3-story Arts & Crafts shingled building built in 1906. Another of his large projects was Madison Park Apartments in Oakland. At the time it was built in 1908, the 98-unit, 5-story apartment building was the largest wooden structure west of the Mississippi. A handsome Edwardian-style building, Madison Park Apartments is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building was renovated in 1995 and currently offers affordable housing units (see Figure 10).

In contrast to his large apartment projects, MacGregor's company – MacGregor Homes – remained renowned mostly for its well-built cottages. It offered a one-stop shop for homes which were affordable and built to last. Constructed in all styles of the day, these early Craftsman and Colonial Revivals were quite popular and by the age of 36, MacGregor had built over 600 homes.

By the early 1920's, he was a prominent East Bay developer when he began building homes in rural Albany, at the end of the Solano Avenue streetcar line. Here he began his biggest development and ultimately built over 1,500 homes in Albany between 1920 and 1940. MacGregor developed tracts and bungalows on every block in the small town, mostly in revival styles which were popular at the time (see Figure 8). Today, these well-built homes still comprise over half of Albany's existing housing stock.

In prosperous California, in the 1920s and 1930s, Eclectic Period Revivals were rapidly replacing regional styles. Whether it was due to soldiers bringing back memories of Europe from WWI or due to the expansion of the cinema industry, entire tracts were being developed in Mediterranean or Provincial mode. Like miniature European settlements, these homes conjured up romantic times and faraway places. The coastal Mediterranean climate of California is one of only five such climates found in the world and the Mediterranean and Spanish Revival styles that derived from Spain and Italy fit right in with the California landscape. The styles were immensely popular in suburbs all over California. In Albany, MacGregor employed revival styles in the majority of his homes and on his most important building, the MacGregor Building.

A Master Builder by trade, it is evident from his many projects that MacGregor had also mastered the art of architecture. Fluent in the many popular styles of the day throughout his lengthy career, the consistent features found in all his buildings were solid construction techniques, high quality materials, and superior craftsmanship. All of which were used in the MacGregor Building and can still be seen today.



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

### **Commercial Architecture**

From the Nineteenth Century to the present, corner commercial buildings are perhaps one of America's most ubiquitous building patterns, more so perhaps in smaller cities. They mark the edge or heart of a business district and their design focus is on the corner where the two sides intersect. The scale of these buildings usually fit their residential neighborhoods and they represent the importance of business in town and small city life (p. 243, Gottfried).

During the 1930s, Albany continued to expand because of MacGregor's many inexpensive homes and employment opportunities. In response to its growing residential population, a school district was formed and the City constructed three new public schools between 1928 and 1935. To take care of his thriving business in Albany, in 1934, MacGregor constructed his own office building on a prominent corner on Solano Avenue in the geographical center of town, within walking distance of the street car line (see Fig. 4). Once completed, because of MacGregor's prolific construction activity, the building served as a focus for the community's emerging business district. It was the place where MacGregor conducted his company, the largest business in town, between 1934 and 1954.

This significant building was the first two-story structure on Solano Avenue and was the largest commercial structure of its day. It remains a dominant presence on Solano Avenue. Soon after, on one of the last remaining open parcels on the Avenue, in 1938, Albany constructed its own Post Office cementing the business district. By the 1940s, when hundreds of shipbuilders from Richmond's shipyards were buying up MacGregor homes in Albany, Solano Avenue was an established business district.

The MacGregor Building is a classic example of a corner commercial building from the 1930s and the best example of the pattern in Albany. First and foremost, it was built by -- and for -- the town's most important business. Second, it's Spanish Revival style relates to the scale of the homes that surround the building. Third, the corner is clearly expressed with a forty-five degree, two-story corner elevation which is distinguished on both floors with special architectural treatments: a recessed entry on the ground floor, an arched feature window on the upper, both highlighted by a neon clock [now gone].

Between 1910 - 1940, a secondary type of commercial building developed in American cities. "Artistic Front" buildings used architectural details as attention-getting devices. The idea was to attract shoppers with one large style, a pattern usually inspired by a particular historical style such as Tudor, Art Deco, or Spanish Revival. The buildings usually had different stores or goods but were unified with integrated elevations that were scaled and related to surrounding residential neighborhoods (p. 247, Gottfried).

Addison Mizner (1872-1933) in Palm Beach, Florida, was a master of the Spanish Revival Artistic Front building type as was George Washington Smith (1876-1930) in Santa Barbara, California. These Architects also designed many Spanish-style residences, often in proximity to their commercial buildings.

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

The MacGregor Building is an excellent representative of the Artistic Front pattern and one of the rare, preserved Spanish Revival Fronts in the East Bay. With its corner elevation and two street elevations all unified in one Spanish Revival style, the building exhibits a variety of architectural elements that embody Spanish style buildings. Staggered tile parapet roof lines, textured stucco walls, wrought-iron work, tile rondelles, arched doorways, plaster reliefs, spiral columns, and ceramic and terra cotta tiles all reflect Mediterranean motifs. Like Mizner and Washington, MacGregor also built hundreds of Spanish Revival bungalows within a mile of his Building often utilizing similar architectural elements.

The MacGregor Building was also the first commercial building in Albany to provide retail on the ground floor with professional offices on the second. Eventually, this pattern of "mixed uses" became quite common for Albany commercial buildings and today, many are found throughout the town. This mixed occupancy created – and still creates -- opportunities for the expansion of community businesses. Originally, the building was anchored by a pharmacy in the corner store with doctors and dentists occupying upper floors, a precursor to the modern medical center building. Today, the MacGregor Building still retains similar commercial and professional uses and is the only significant unaltered Spanish commercial building from the 1930s that remains on Solano Avenue.

Recognition of the MacGregor Building establishes the significance and integrity of a masterful corner commercial property which is also intimately connected to the history of Albany's residential development. The Building conveys the feeling of 1930's – a time when Albany experienced its most prolific period of home building – while it marks the beginning of Albany's Solano Avenue modern business community.

### **CONCLUSION**

Associated with the Mediterranean style architecture of the 1920's and 30's, with a regionally-prominent Master Builder, and with the residential and commercial development of Albany, California, the MacGregor Building conveys its historical significance. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C.

---

## **9. Major Bibliographical References**

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Gellner, Arrol, *Red Tile Style, America's Spanish Revival Architecture*, Viking Studio, Penguin Group, New York, NY, 2002.

Gottfried, Herbert and Jan Jennings, *American Vernacular Buildings and Interiors*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2009.

Localwiki.org, *Charles M. MacGregor*, Oakland, CA

McAlester, Virginia Savage, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2015.

McMillian, Elizabeth, *Casa California*, Rizzoli, New York, 1996.

Oakland, *Rehab Right*, City Planning Department, Oakland, 1978.

Perkins, Stephen and James Caughman, *Addison Mizner, The Architect Whose Genius Defined Palm Beach*, Lyons Press, Guilford, Connecticut, 2018.

Sorensen, Karen & the Albany Historical Society, *Images of America – Albany*, Arcadia Publishing, San Francisco, California, 2007.

Thompson, Daniella, "East Bay Then & Now, Charles Manning MacGregor, Indefatigable Builder," *The Berkeley Daily Planet*, December 15, 2006.

Webb, Catherine, *Stories of Albany*, Albany Historical Society, Albany, California, 1983.

---

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

MacGregor Building

Name of Property

     Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Alameda, California

County and State

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** Less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.891185 | Longitude: -122.290322 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:             |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:             |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:             |

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Assessor's Parcel Number 067 2844 016 - Boundaries are indicated on attached Sketch Map (see Figure 1).

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property located on the northwest corner of Carmel and Solano Avenues in Albany, California, which contains the MacGregor Building.

---

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jerri Holan, FAIA

organization: Jerri Holan & Associates

street& number: 1323 Solano Avenue, Suite 204

city or town: Albanystate:CA zip code: 94706

e-mail: [jerri@holanarchitects.com](mailto:jerri@holanarchitects.com) telephone: 510/528-1079

date: January 25, 2019

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: The MacGregor Building  
City or Vicinity: Albany  
County: Alameda  
State: California  
Photographer: Jerri Holan  
Date Photographed: June 24-26, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0001)  
Corner view of front façade, camera looking northwest.

2 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0002)  
View of right (south) façade, camera looking northeast.

3 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0003)  
View of front, left (south) façade, camera looking north.

4 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0004)

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

View of entry to upper floor on left (south) façade, camera looking north.

5 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0005)

View of feature window, upper floor on corner (southeast) façade, camera looking northwest.

6 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0006)

View of side, right (east) façade, camera looking northwest.

7 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0007)

View of side entry, right (east) façade, camera looking west.

8 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0008)

View of window details, right (east) façade, camera looking west.

9 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0009)

View of rear (north) façade, camera looking south.

10 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0010)

Interior view of east wall in retail unit, showing original plaster transom windows, camera looking southeast.

11 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0011)

Interior view of upper floor hall lobby, showing original wrought iron rails, plaster, and office doors, camera looking southwest.

12 of 12. (CA\_AlamadaCounty\_MacGregor Building\_0012)

Interior view of upper floor office, showing original plaster fireplace, camera looking southwest.

## **Index of Figures**

Figure 1 – Sketch Map and Photo Key

Figure 2 – Ground Floor Plan of MacGregor Building and Photo Key

Figure 3 – Upper Floor Plan of MacGregor Building and Photo Key

Figure 4 – Mid-1930's Photo of Building

Figure 5 – Original East Elevation Drawing of Building from MacGregor's Office

Figure 6 – MacGregor's Day and Real Estate Files from MacGregor's Office

Figure 7 – Albany Historical Society MacGregor Building Plaque

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

Figure 8 -- Examples of MacGregor's Albany Spanish & Revival Style Homes

Figure 9 – Charles Manning MacGregor, 1871-1954

Figure 10 - Examples of MacGregor's Early Oakland Apartments

### USGS Location

37.891185 Longitude: 122.290322

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

Figure 1 – Sketch Map and Photo Key

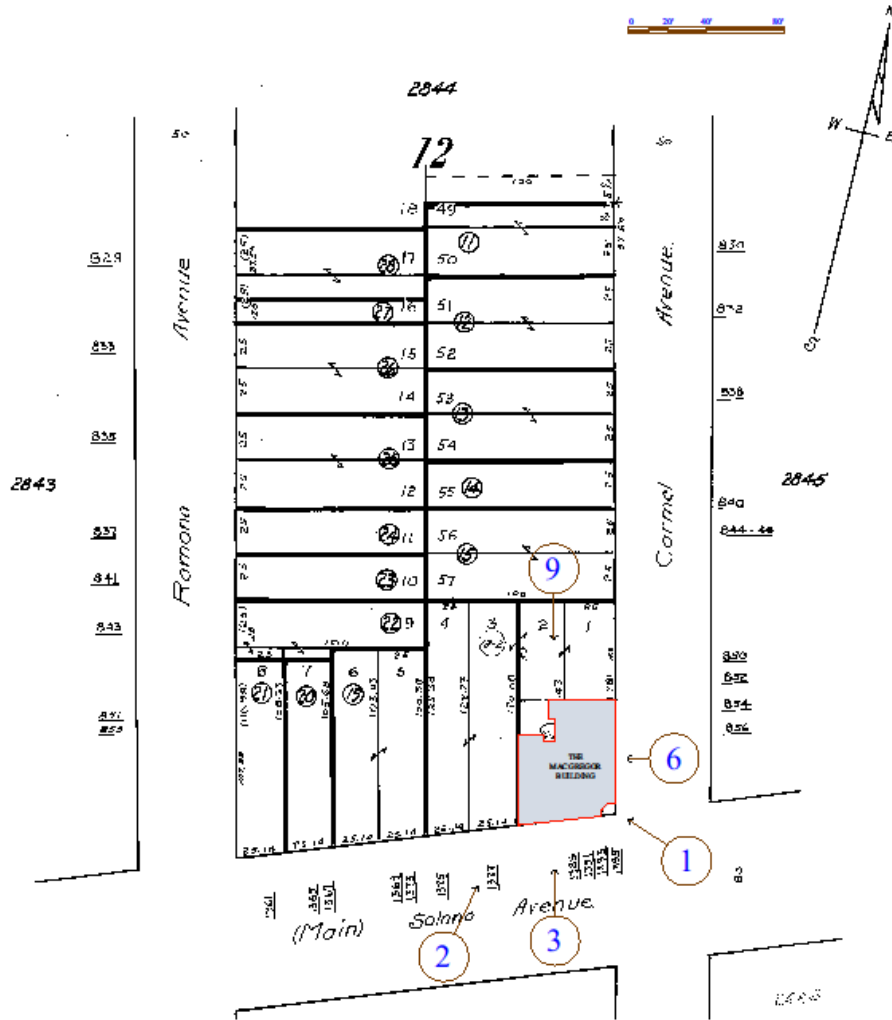


Figure 2 – Ground Floor Plan and Photo Key



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

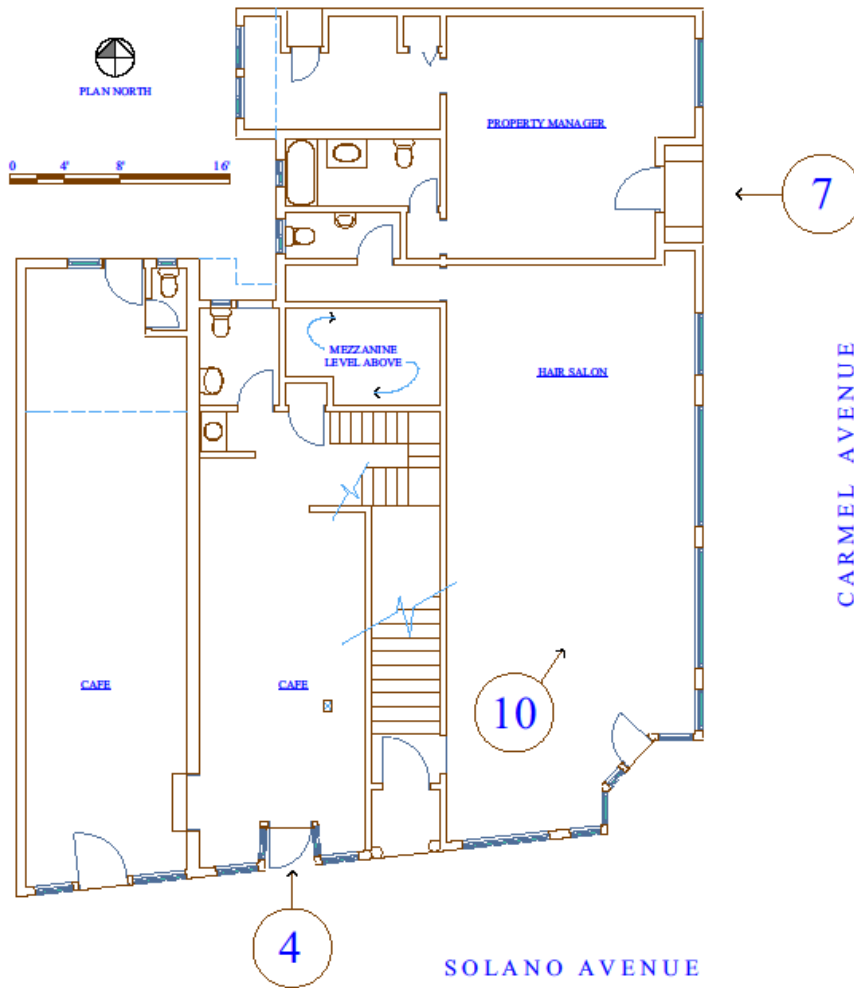
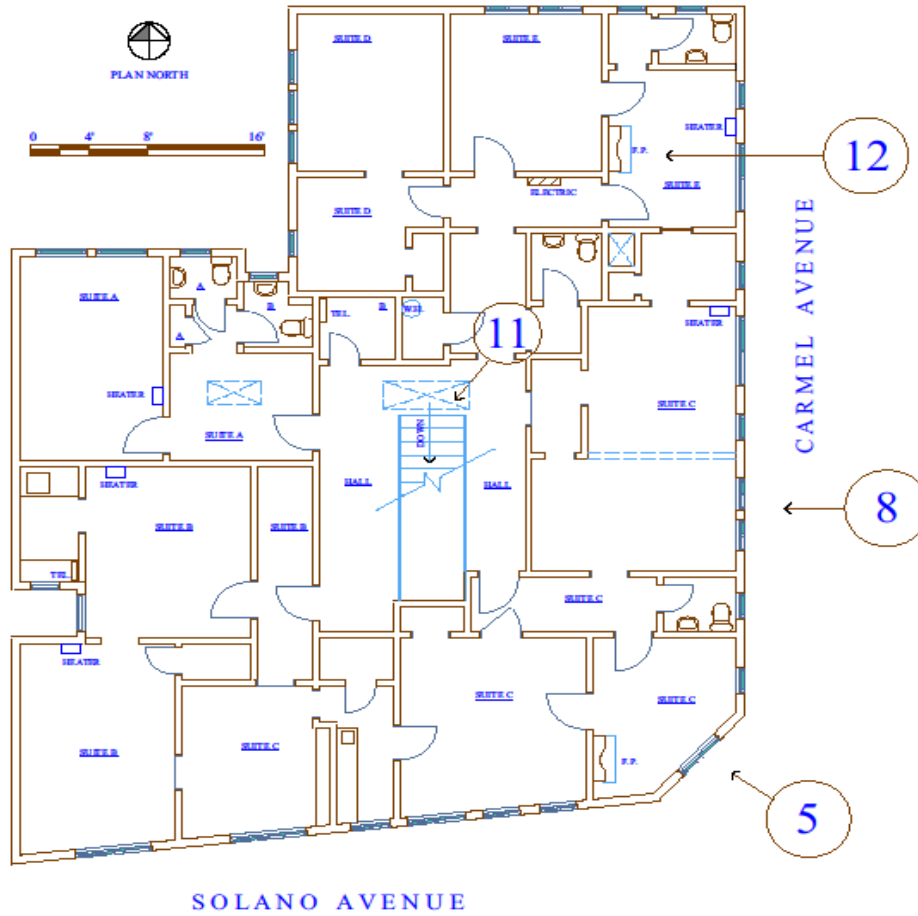


Figure 3 – Upper Floor Plan and Photo Key

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Figure 4 – Mid-1930's Photo of Building**

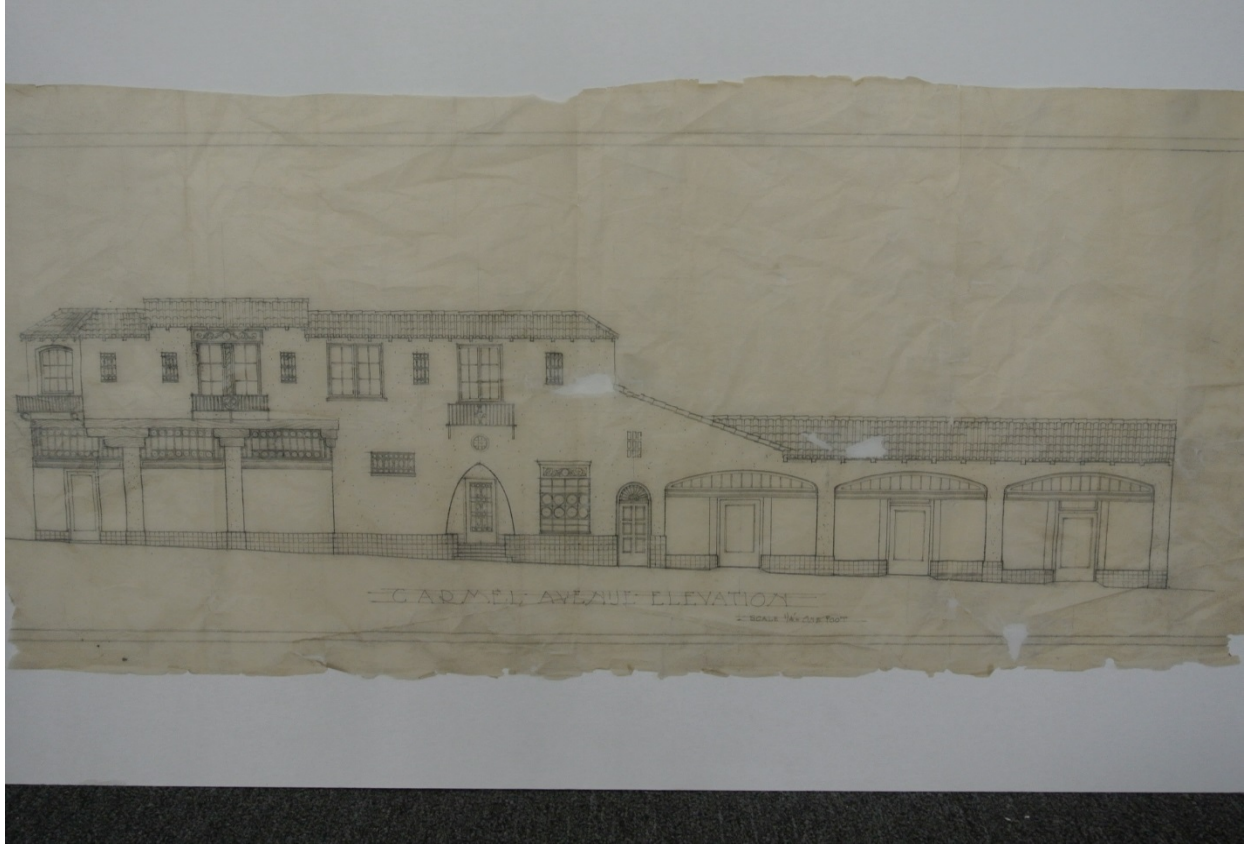


*Charles M. MacGregor's office at 1391 Solano Avenue  
(located in the commercial building he also built)  
circa mid 1930s*

**Figure 5 – Original East Elevation Drawing of Building from MacGregor's Office**

MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

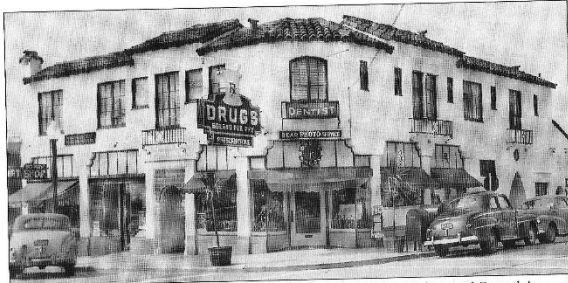
Alameda, California  
County and State



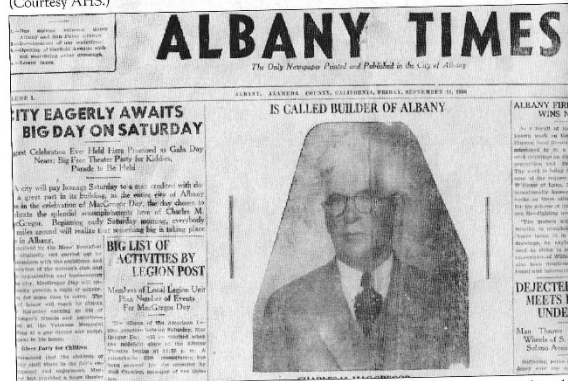
MacGregor Building  
 Name of Property

Alameda, California  
 County and State

Figure 6 – MacGregor’s Day and Real Estate Files from MacGregor’s Office



MacGregor built this commercial building on the northwest corner of Solano and Carmel Avenues in the mid-1930s. By this time, so much of his business was in Albany that he had moved his company here from Oakland, setting up the office of MacGregor Homes at 1391 Solano Avenue (visible on the left, next to the Bo-Kay Gift Shop). He was known for keeping his workers employed year-round through the rainy season—especially rare and appreciated during the Depression. (Courtesy AHS.)



September 12, 1936, was Albany’s first celebration of MacGregor Day—announced in this front-page Albany Times article—an event that would be held every year for nearly the next two decades. Among the many activities of the day were a parade, athletic events at Memorial Park, a watermelon-rolling contest, a band concert, and a “women’s parking contest” on Solano Avenue. The highlights, however, were the free Albany Theatre tickets and ice cream Charles MacGregor provided for Albany schoolchildren. (Courtesy AHS.)

14

PRICE: \$3950.00  
 TERMS: \$500.00 CASH  
 \$35.00 PER MO.  
 INTEREST: 7%  
 DESCRIPT: 5 Rooms  
 2 Bed Rooms 1 Bath  
 Double Garage

PORT LOTS 1,2,3&5 BLK.4 REGENTS PARK\*8- 647 SPOKANE AVE.

PRICE: \$4950.00  
 TERMS: \$500.00 CASH  
 \$45.00 PER MO.  
 INTEREST: 7%  
 DESCRIPT: 6 Rooms  
 3 Bed Rooms 1 Bath Room  
 Double Garage-Corner Lot-

KEY ROUTE BLVD  
 52.80  
 41.94  
 18.14  
 63.42

PORT LOTS 26,27&28 BLK.3 REGENTS PARK\*8-1272 PORTLAND AVE.

PRICE: \$4750.00  
 TERMS: \$500.00 CASH  
 \$42.50 PER MO.  
 INTEREST: 7%  
 DESCRIPT: 6 Rooms 3 Bed  
 Rooms 1 Bath Double Garage

36.61  
 4.88  
 37.73  
 54

PORT LOTS 23,24,25&28 BLK.3 REGENTS PARK\*8- 1268 PORTLAND AVE.

This sheet of new home listings, from Charles MacGregor’s files, shows that two- and three-bedroom MacGregor homes on Spokane and Portland Avenues were first priced between \$4,000 and \$5,000. In the market of the early 1930s, just \$500 (10 percent) down was required, and monthly payments ranged from \$35 to \$45. Today many Albany MacGregor homes sell for well over \$500,000, and one extensively upgraded three-bedroom on Ordway Street was listed in 2007 for \$1.1 million. (Courtesy AHS.)

55

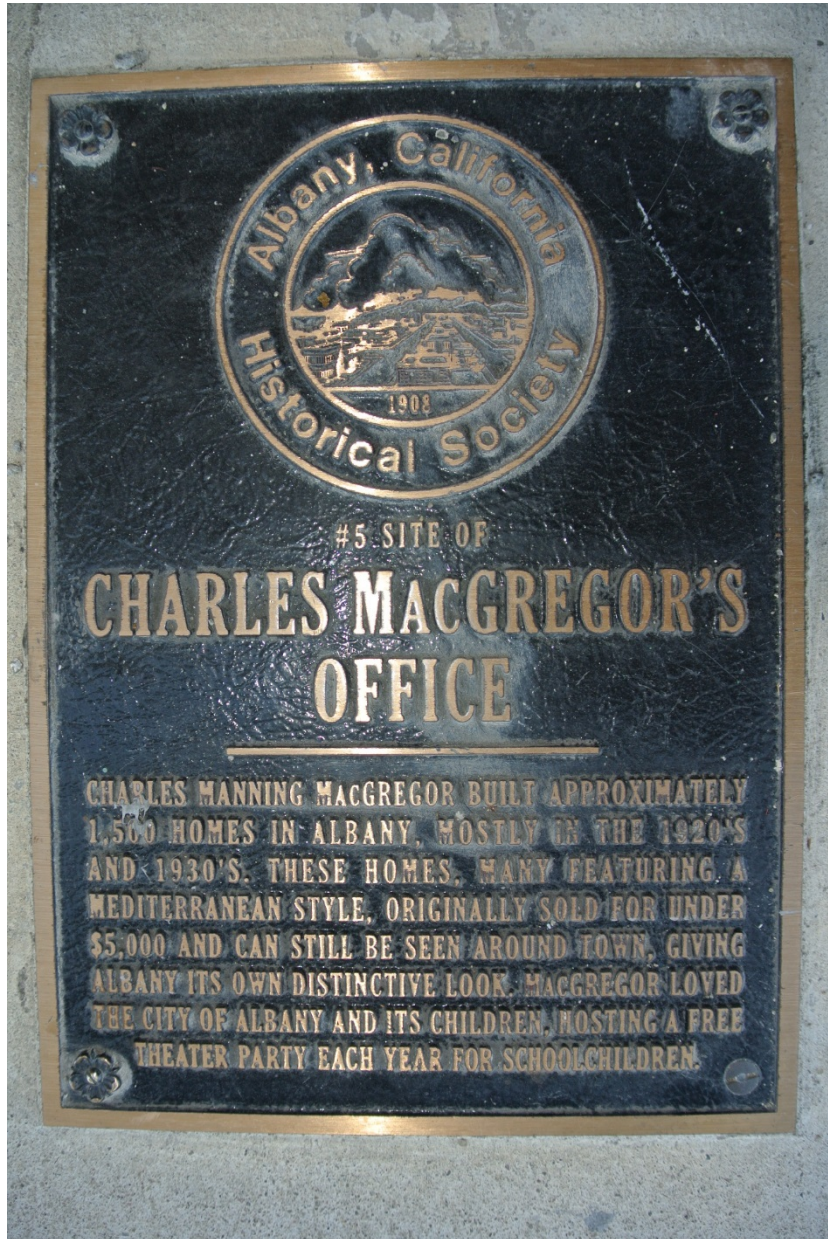




MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Figure 7 – Albany Historical Society MacGregor Building Plaque**





MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Figure 8 – Examples of MacGregor’s Albany Spanish & Revival Style Homes**



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Figure 9 – Charles Manning MacGregor, 1871-1954**



Charles M. MacGregor, a prominent East Bay developer, built more than 1,500 homes in Albany beginning in the late 1920s and continuing through the early 1940s. Pictured in his later years, he became known as “One-Nail MacGregor.” Over the years, the nickname has come to have several meanings, according to MacGregor’s grandson Ingraham Read Jr. One story was that MacGregor himself put one nail somewhere in every house his company built. Another was that he would hand all job applicants one nail and a hammer—part of their success in landing a job depended on how well they drove that nail. The most common story relates to quality: that he added one nail more than his competitors to each home. MacGregor’s competitors told it differently: that he put in one nail less. (Courtesy AHS.)



MacGregor Building  
Name of Property

Alameda, California  
County and State

**Figure 10 – Examples of MacGregor's Early Oakland Apartment Projects**



Vue du Lac Apartments, Oakland, CA 1906



Madison Park Apartments, Oakland, CA 1908