

# 26. Era of the Builders

"A comfortable house is a great source of happiness. It ranks immediately after health and good companions."

—Sydney Smith

**W**HEN DALY CITY PAUSED to mark its fiftieth anniversary, it was noted that the building of houses had become one of its major industries. By 1957, in fact, the demand for homes became so great that newspaper reporters were detailed to write stories of the great number of buyers who came into the area looking for homes.

To meet the demand, the Zita Corporation was forced to grade its St. Francis Heights property on a round-the-clock basis. Meanwhile, other builders were rushing to complete plans for development on acres once reserved for vegetable gardens and dairy farms.

The Zita Corporation, a company that had erected 10,000 houses in other parts of California, moved its equipment into Daly City in 1957 and commenced building on a 276 acre plot.

Speaking for the corporation, George McKeon announced in the **Daly City Record** for February 7, 1957 that St. Francis Heights would be a fifty million dollar development.

In less than a year the **Record**, January 16, 1958, carried a picture of graded lots that had been sold to "home seekers who had put their cash on the line." The **Record** reported that during January, 1958, the Zita Corporation was moving a million yards of dirt per month to create the building sites. Subsequently, the reporter was forced to note that the constant hum of the grading machines had sent twenty-five Daly City residents to court to complain that the operation disturbed their sleep.

Building the houses in St. Francis Heights started in 1958 and was pushed so vigorously that by November 13, 1958 as many as seventy-nine units were being started each month while plans for other units and for roads, schools, utility lines and other improvements were being presented to the Daly City Planning Commission.

When the project was completed, St. Francis Heights consisted of over 2,000 homes, a multimillion dollar shopping center and three schools: Daniel Webster, M. Pauline Brown and Christopher Columbus. In the north it met Broadmoor Village while its southern rim extended into the hills that became the Serramonte portions of Daly City.

A 1972 report by the Daly City Office of Planning indicated that St. Francis Heights covered most of the area in census tracts 6014 and 6015. The estimated population of these areas was 11,454. There were 2,885 occupied housing units,

most of them being one-family structures.

Since October, 1959 a St. Francis Heights Improvement Association has been devoted to the task of keeping St. Francis Heights a beautiful area in keeping with the dream of the builders who described it as an "ultra-modern area of homes.

Aside from the development of St. Francis Heights and, of course, Westlake, the 1950's and 1960's brought developments in several other areas of the Gateway Cities. A firm headed by a Colma resident, Gus Pedemonte, developed apartment house complexes in the vicinity of Price and Garibaldi Streets and others in an area stretching from 88th Street to the Daly City Civic Center on 90th Street and from Sullivan Avenue into the heart of Broadmoor.

As builders and as an old Colma family, the Lagomarsinos have left their mark upon Daly City as well as Colma. It is reported that the Lagomarsino family started developing the land as soon as they arrived in the area. Under the guidance of the founders, the family developed large portions of the Colma area for flower culture. Speaking of the family's thirty acres of violets, Mattrup Jensen relates in his unpublished memoirs that the Lagomarsino family employed dozens of women to pick violets and fashion them into bouquets and boutonnieres that were sold during such events as the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco.

The second generation of the Lagomarsino family started early in their careers to buy and sell real estate and build housing units. Among these projects are the apartment houses along Hillside Boulevard in Daly City and Colma.

The list of other builders who erected single units and in some cases whole complexes has never been compiled. But let it be said that each has contributed greatly to the development of cities that have been called regions of comfortable homes.

The drama of the era of house building will long be remembered by Daly City and Colma residents. There were great battles over the location of highways, especially the connection between Junipero Serra Freeway and Skyline. There were court cases involving the realignment of roads. There were annexations that turned the residents of whole developments against those of others. There were heated elections with the fate of this or that project riding on the decision of the voters.

Through it all, schools, churches, playgrounds, shopping centers and all the other things that constitute a city were established to make the ever growing City of Daly City and the town of Colma interesting places upon the map.