

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Looking for Fruit Flies

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An Automotive Innovator's Historical Home *The house that busses built*

By Cathy Tyson

The stately Mediterranean home on the ninth fairway of the Orinda Country Club, built in 1929, can trace its history back to one of the brothers who was a leader in the bus construction business with the Fageol Motor Company started in Oakland in 1916. Innovators Frank and Bill Fageol had a vision that began with the redesign of a tractor, and turned it into a successful business that revolutionized how buses and trucks were built.

Prior to the 1906 earthquake, the Fageol brothers were in charge of sales and service at the Rambler dealership at the corner of Telegraph and 37th Street in Oakland, eventually acquiring the Rambler distributorship. Business of these new-fangled cars must have been good – a directory circa 1908 reveals that six other Fageol family members, no mention of spouses or children, had moved to Oakland from Iowa and were working at the dealership. Presumably the grandiose Orinda home was meant to house the large extended family.

Fageol Motor Company was in the right place at the right time to leverage growth in California; the firm purchased four acres of land



View of the front of the Casa del Sueño.

near Foothill Boulevard and 106th Avenue for their auto, truck and bus plant in 1917. In the early days of bus manufacturing, multi-passenger vehicles were basically stretched automobile touring cars mounted on a truck chassis.

The Fageol brothers teamed up

with designer Horatio Smith, and started building busses from the ground up with a wider stance to resist flipping over while cornering, unfortunately a common occurrence back in the day. The vehicles were called “safety coaches,” featuring a floor just two feet above the roadway

for ease of use, and a door at the end of each row of seats, firsts for the fledgling bus business. Business was good, the Oakland Tribune announced, “gross sales of Fageol Motors in 1925 were \$5,345,000.”

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