

THE ROUNTREE HOUSE.

An intriguing brown-shingle house at 2730 Webster Street with a high-peaked gable can trace its lineage to a well-known group of late Victorian houses in San Francisco. In 1891, San Franciscans watched as the Rountree brothers began developing a block of Lyon Street near the Golden Gate Park "panhandle." The group of seven houses drew admiration then as today for the individuality of design of each house that together create a harmonious whole. The two Rountree brothers, Edmund and James, had arrived in San Francisco from Texas in about 1885 and soon made their mark in the house-building sphere. An 1891 feature article in the San Francisco Call extolled their work, as well as their work ethic and abilities. "They are both practical builders and architects and able to at any time take hold and do any portion of the work on a building. By this means they are enabled to watch every detail with care."

James Rountree (1862–1914) built the house on Webster near College Avenue in 1907. One can compare the house with the earlier Rountree houses and see a kinship. In 1895, James married Daisy Lucinda Rockwell at a wedding at her parents' house in San Francisco. Edmund was his brother's Best Man, and the parlors were decorated with La France roses, lilies-of-the-valley, and smilax. At some point after the turn-of-the-century, the Rountree family moved to the East Bay. Perhaps they wanted a more child-friendly environment for their growing family. The Rountrees had four children—Julia, Milton, Earl, Ruth—born between 1901 and 1912. As was typical with a number of contractors, the Rountrees did not live in one house for long, but instead would sell and build anew. They lived in the Webster Street a relatively long time: three years. While there, James received a patent in 1909 for his invention of a "disappearing bed" for use in apartment buildings, and he built a second house next door to the west.

In December 1909, James Rountree was at work on a new house on Shafter in Oakland. In April 1910, James, as designer and builder, advertised both the Shafter and Webster houses in the San Francisco Call: "2730 Webster St. near Claremont train; all modern; terms or will trade for unimproved property or ranch. \$5,500." The Rountrees sold their Berkeley house and moved to Oakland, first to Locksley, then Shafter, and finally Ygnacio Avenue in East Oakland. A few months before he died in December 1914,