

The Man Who Named Fremont

(The following profile of Wally Pond was based on an interview conducted in mid-1997. Wally Pond died on December 5, 1997, at the age of 85. He was the last living member of the original Fremont City Council.)



Part philosopher, part pragmatist, Wally Pond looks back over Fremont's first 40 years with more realism than nostalgia. Although he gives credit to others for the City's early accomplishments, it is clear that Pond's own intent as one of Fremont's founders was to do what was best for the most people. His efforts toward this end helped set the City on its successful course, and his concern about Fremont's well-being is as resolute today as it was 40 years ago.

Born in Kelseyville, California in 1912, Pond spent most of his childhood in Irvington and graduated from Washington Union High School. He played football for San Jose State, then went on to graduate from the University of California School of Pharmacy, becoming the third-generation pharmacist in his family. He spent two years in the Army Air Corps during World War II, and eventually returned to Irvington. In 1950 he took over his father's pharmacy business, and in 1956 married his wife Rosaline.

It was during Pond's early involvement with the Chamber of Commerce that residents began to consider incorporating eight small towns (Alvarado, Centerville, Decoto, Irvington, Mission San Jose, Newark, Nilas, Warm Springs) into a city. Pond was named chairman of a committee to study the pros and cons of incorporation. Before the committee's work progressed very far, sometime around 1954, the City of Hayward considered annexing a portion of the area being studied (now a part of Union City). Soon after, Newark elected to go it alone. Worried that their towns might be next in line for annexation, the committee decided it had done enough studying. It dropped Alvarado and Decoto, and became a committee for incorporation of the five remaining towns.

"That scared the pants off us," says Pond, referring to Hayward's annexation. "We had studied enough to know that incorporation was inevitable, so we started talking with the local landowners. We had a meeting down at Patterson Ranch – now Ardenwood – and presented the reasons for incorporation. I remember Will Patterson saying, 'Well, my brother and I have talked this over and we don't think it's best for us, but

we think it's best for the area, so we'll support it.' Now there's some pretty nice people."

The Pattersons' support convinced other local leaders to endorse incorporation. Stuart Nixon, editor of the local paper, joined Pond as committee co-chairman. Nixon's public relations skills combined with Pond's organizational talent helped sell the community on incorporating. "I did what I did best and he did what he did best," says Pond. "I put the package together and he put the wrapping on it. It's too bad politics doesn't always work that way but of course it never will." It worked in this instance – when the voters cast their ballots on June 10, 1956, every precinct voted in favor of incorporation, and the community as a whole endorsed the plan by a two-to-one margin.

According to Pond, naming the City was more controversial. "Maurice Marks, chairman of the name selection committee, came to me one day and said a straw vote in Mission San Jose gave 'Mission Valley' the top vote, but that every other town preferred 'Fremont.' I told him we'd have to discuss it at our next committee meeting." Shortly after that, Bill Dutra, the engineer who drew the map for incorporation, called Pond and asked what the name was to be. "I said, 'Bill, I don't know.' He says 'We've got to have a name. Our map's ready to go to the Board of Supervisors. No name, no map. You might as well call up and cancel, and go for approval at a later date.' Well, the wheels were really spinning in my head – what do I do? So finally I said, 'Well, put down Fremont.' Sometimes you have to do things like that and make a decision."

At the next committee meeting, there was a lot of commotion over the name. But once Pond explained that "Fremont" was the preference overall, everyone agreed that it was better for Pond to have selected a name than to have postponed the incorporation approval date. "After the incorporation there was some move to change the name," says Pond, "but it never got anywhere at all because the majority of the people liked 'Fremont.'"

Pond was elected to serve on Fremont's first City Council from 1956 to 1960, and even though there were difficulties and conflict, he remembers that time with satisfaction. "We did manage to set the city on the right track. We did anchor the City Hall site, and we purchased land for a city park," (Central Park and Lake Elizabeth).

Pond cites the early adoption of a General Plan as an important event in Fremont history. "We had the advantage of getting a General Plan when there was a lot of open space," he explains. "One thing we were told by professional planning consultants was that there would be growth here, and

that we'd better plan for it. That's how we came to establish 'future width lines' on some of our roads, to allow for future development, and that's how Stevenson Boulevard came to be as wide as it is."

Although he chose to leave the City Council after only one term, Pond remained active in civic affairs. He served as District Chairman of the Twin Valley District of the Boy Scouts, on the Chamber of Commerce board, and to this day is a member of Fremont Rotary. Pond was president of the Fremont Concert Association, served on the Fremont Philharmonic board, and is past president of the Cultural Arts Council. For years he was active in the Northern California Pharmacy Association, and he served as president of the Epilepsy League of Alameda County. Along the way he even found time to tutor people who were learning English through Alameda County Library's Adult Literacy Project.

Why did he accept so many responsibilities? Pond modestly explains, "One thing leads to another. I did enjoy being involved in these organizations because in each case, whether at a meeting or a special event, I was with friends." He encourages young people to get involved in the community, and waves aside excuses. "Too many people are married to their jobs. Everyone should know a little something about their community. You should know what's happening and why, and what you can do to help. When your time on earth is gone, the world should be a little better for your being there, for your kindnesses."

Overall, Pond is happy with Fremont's progress during the past 40 years, and his affection for "this city on the sunny side of the Bay" as he calls it, is evident. "I do think we got it started in the right direction. Even though we are a large city now, there's still a lot of small town about it. There are more people who know their neighbors in Fremont than in any other city our size. I have a lot of friends here."