

Professor Bartholomew's Equine Paradox

By Valerie Winemiller

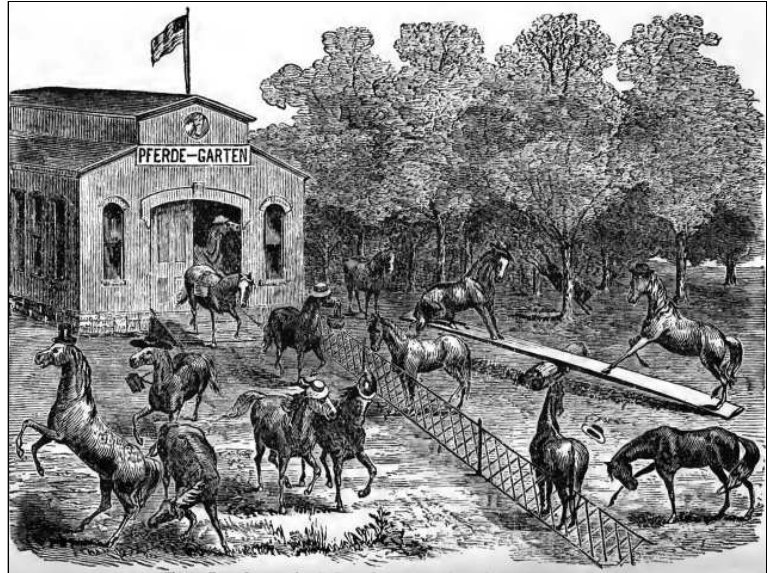
Sometimes an impulse buy can lead you on a fascinating research journey, even if it takes a few decades for the journey to commence. Back in the 1980s, I purchased a Victorian-era photo album at an estate sale on Rose Avenue on the Oakland-Piedmont border. It wasn't until recently, however, that I prised a mysterious photo of a group of horses (see below) out of its mounting and found my curiosity aroused. In Victorian-style fonts, the back was emblazoned, "Professor Bartholomew's Equine Paradox," followed by lists of the horses' names and of other photographs available of the troupe. This led me to investigate an internationally-acclaimed traveling horse circus based here in Oakland for nearly two decades. Here's some of what came to light in my search for details on one of Oakland's more colorful early characters.

George Bartholomew was born May 14, 1833, in Erie County, New York, to a farmer who had a reputation for his skills with difficult and even vicious horses, and young George showed similar talents early. The family moved to Jackson, Michigan, in 1836, and later to Missouri. In 1848, at the age of 15, Bartholomew struck out for California on his own, drawn by the idea of training wild

horses. He arrived in San Jose as the Gold Rush began, and was distracted into that different kind of stampede for several years, followed by three years of farming. But by 1855, he found greater success performing to high accolades with a horse he had named "Young America," for which he refused the staggering offer of \$10,000

(\$289,000 in today's dollars). The horse was poisoned by a disgruntled former groom in 1860, the first of a number of reversals of fortune over Bartholomew's performing life.

Bartholomew toured throughout the western U.S. with his performing horse troupes under a series of different names over the next decade and a half: Bartholomew &



"THE PROFESSOR'S SCHOOL AT OAKLAND CALIF.," as depicted in an 1884 souvenir pamphlet. Note that the mares wear beribboned straw hats. The teeter-totter was part of the Equine Paradox act.

Co.'s Pacific Circus, 1860; Bartholomew's Circus Co., West Coast, 1861-62; and Bartholomew's Great Western Circus, 1867-69. The latter included bareback riders, equestriennes, acrobats, tightrope walkers, and clowns, but horses were always the central feature and the only animals. In 1871, he opened a pleasure garden in Denver, purchasing additional horses which he trained and toured as The Bronchos. The Bronchos inspired high praise from millions of viewers, but after a five-week exhibition in St. Louis in 1875, he was defrauded and lost the entire troupe.

Penniless, Bartholomew returned to California, settling in Oakland, where he slowly rebuilt his stable to ten highly-trained horses. In 1877, he was living on East 14th Street near 28th Avenue, near where Oakland's landmark Cohen-Bray house (1884) stands today. On July 4, 1879, the new troupe performed in an Oakland garden to an audience said to be of over 10,000 persons. It was the auspicious launch of Professor



PERFORMING HORSES in a souvenir photo from a Victorian-era album purchased at a local estate sale.

VALERIE WINEMILLER

WEBSTER FAMILY LIBRARY, TUFTS UNIVERSITY

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Bartholomew

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Bartholomew's Equine Paradox, which went on to greater fame.

By this time, Bartholomew was married and had four children; his family often traveled with him. The 1880 census shows Bartholomew living at 1514 (now 1520) Fifth Street in the Prescott neighborhood of West Oakland, between Henry and Chester streets. The family included his wife Emily; daughters Nettie (Minetta), age 15, and Emilie, 4; and sons George, 13, and Willie, 11. The census says the oldest three are "at school," but elsewhere they are also credited as performing with the Equine Paradox. A fifth child, Estella, was born in 1884.

The Fifth Street house is still standing (see photo at right). The Italianate cottage was built 1876–77. It has one story over a basement, which was raised 1886–91 and converted into a second unit. It sports a false front, a square bay and off-center entry, with the rustic wood siding, wood cornice and bracketed eaves typical of the style. Much of this neighborhood was developed in response to the busy railroads nearby, and many neighbors would have been employed there.

With such valuable animals and what must have been daily training sessions, one would expect the horses to be kept nearby. But while there were livery stables and a number of undeveloped lots on surrounding blocks, it was not possible to determine where the performing horses were kept. An 1884 pamphlet pictures Bartholomew's "Pferde-Garten," or horse school (see photo, page 1, top).

The Equine Paradox ultimately consisted of up to 20 animals. The troupe toured



HOME OF GEORGE BARTHOLOMEW and family in 1880, an Italianate cottage at 1520 Fifth St., between Henry and Chestnut streets, at left. The family lived in an Italianate cottage at 1023 E. 14th St. in 1881 (right). Even the wrought iron fence survives.

nationally and even into Mexico, performing in runs of a week or more in theaters in Chicago, New York, Boston and other major and mid-sized cities, to audiences totaling many hundreds of thousands. The "educated" horses appeared in drills and tableaux, executing maneuvers to voice command; they were said to respond to over 300 commands containing a vocabulary of over 1,400 words. A contemporary review in the *Los Angeles Herald* gushed, "Plays are enacted by these horses, each one sustaining the characterization of the part entrusted to them with as much care as an accomplished actor."

The Professor advocated a kind method of training, in an era when cruelty to animals was commonplace. He wrote, "Too long has brute humanity out-bruted the brute, not sparing the whip or the club to enforce commands willingly obeyed if understood." In the same 1884 pamphlet, Bartholomew wrote, "The Question Is:—Is the Equine race capable of progressive intelligence! As we have known them who could say yes? As we have seen them in the Professor's school, who could say no? . . . no thinking mind can watch them as they give expression to their remarkable intelligence without saying: 'It is incredible, but I am forced to believe what I have seen.'"

Contemporary newspaper ads announced admissions of 25 and 50 cents, with reserved



BOTH, VALERIE WINEMILLER

seats at 75 cents, to engagements at the California Theater in San Francisco, the Grand Opera House in Los Angeles, and other theatrical venues. Ticket purchasers on certain days were promised a souvenir photograph of one or more of the horses. The album photo (page 1, bottom) was undoubtedly such a premium. I imagined the excitement of the photo album's original owner upon seeing the show, and wondered what she or he would think of the idea that the treasured souvenir was still being enjoyed over 125 years later.

As educated as the animals were, things did not always go as expected. In December of 1889, the *Sacramento Daily Union* reported that a donkey in Bartholomew's show shot a man during a performance in Bridgeport, CT. A trained horse was supposed to fire the cannon by pulling on its specially-designed trigger mechanism with its teeth, but before it was properly positioned, the donkey did the job instead, hitting the troupe's business manager in the back and knocking him over the footlights and into the orchestra. The donkey then "trotted to the footlights and looked complacently down on the confusion." The poor stage manager was seriously hurt.

Bartholomew and family were listed at 517 (now 1023) East 14th Street in the 1880–81 city directory. Though now shadowed by a large billboard, this Italianate cottage built in

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Bartholomew

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1876–77 in the Clinton neighborhood retains most of its original exterior details (see photo page 2, top right). In 1881–82 they were back at 1520 Fifth St.

As the popularity of the Equine Paradox grew, the Professor's travel arrangements became more sumptuous. In 1884, the *Daily Alta California* reported that the Laconia (New Hampshire) Car Company had just completed a palace stable railroad car for the twenty horses of the Equine Paradox. The horse car, over 70 feet long, was remodeled in 1892. Each horse was given a bay window, with its name in silver, and the professor's life-sized portrait in oil on canvas was mounted on each side of the car. It was fitted with solid bronze rails and nickel gates, and hand-carved mahogany. The Professor also took delivery of a new 70-foot "palace car" to be occupied by himself, his manager and the manager's wife, a cook and a porter, consisting of a kitchen, dining room, reception room, and two separate apartments. The cars were undoubtedly still shiny when the Equine Paradox performed at the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago.

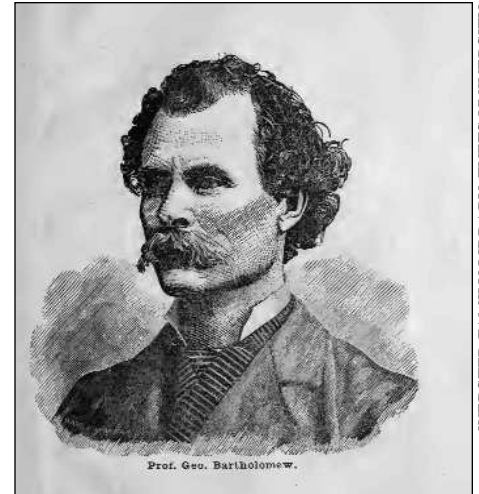
With the overwhelming success of the Equine Paradox tours, the family purchased five and a half contiguous lots, nearly a quarter of the block, at Sixth Avenue and East 10th Street in about 1887, moving into a large house in the fashionable Queen Anne style. The *Oakland Tribune* described it as a "pretty garden spot . . . the cement sidewalk

of which is defaced by an atrocious horse block showing the heads and necks of two horses, and also showing in great gilded letters the sign 'Prof. Bartholomew.'" They added another six lots next door in 1890, now owning nearly half the square block. Other structures on the lot may have been sufficient for stabling the horse troupe.

Another reversal of fortune can be traced. A portion of the second quarter block was sold in 1892, and the remaining lots with 11th Street frontage were sold in 1896. A foreclosure suit was brought in 1897 by the Union Savings Bank against Bartholomew for a debt of \$5,750 (close to \$170,000 now), which had been secured by his house on Sixth Avenue, and by 1898, the house and remaining property had been sold. That house was lost to an industrial building in the 1940s.

In 1889, the *Oakland Tribune* described the fate of a small chapel that Bartholomew, a "modern, non-polygamous" Mormon, had built for the local Latter Day Saints. He had left on tour with his Equine Paradox shortly after its construction, when ". . . members of the church had a row, schism followed, the congregation succumbed," and the chapel became the Harrison Street Baptist Church. The chapel, located between Third and Fourth Streets, was demolished in the construction of the present warehouse and produce district.

The Bartholomew family becomes difficult to trace after 1897, but in the 1910 census, George, now age 77, is retired, and he and his wife are living in Independence, Mis-



PROFESSOR BARTHOLOMEW, as depicted in an 1884 souvenir pamphlet.

souri. The 1920 census has George widowed and living in Independence with youngest daughter Stella and her husband Mark White. His death in April of that year was an event deemed worthy of notice in *Variety* magazine, the venerable entertainment weekly still in publication.

The Victorian photo album rests safely on my shelf. It also contains a rare photograph of a Chinese American man in traditional Chinese clothing. In a future issue of *OHA News*, I'll share what I've been able to learn about his life. ■

Thanks to staff of the Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library; and staff of the Cultural Heritage Survey, City of Oakland, Planning and Building Department.

Great events to look forward to in January and February

■ 10 a.m., Sat., Jan. 23. **Piraneseum: Souvenirs of the Grand Tour:** Join OHA on a special tour of Piraneseum, the private collection of architect Lucia Howard. The leading source of architectural souvenirs of the Grand Tour, Piraneseum offers four types of 17th, 18th and 19th century mementos—paintings, etchings, and works on paper, models, and decorative arts. Location released upon reservation.

■ 7 p.m., Thurs., Jan. 28. **Recovering from Depression: The New Deal's Contributions to the East Bay:** Dr. Gray Brechin will delve into the history of the Bay Area's

Depression-era architecture and public art, including iconic sites such as Woodminster, the East Bay Regional Parks, Alameda County Courthouse, and the Bay Bridge. He will talk about the Living New Deal project and its plan to build the nation's first museum and memorial to the public works and people of the Franklin Roosevelt's work relief agencies from which we all continue to benefit. Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Ave.

■ 7 p.m., Thurs., Feb. 18. **Partners in Preservation Awards.** At this much-loved annual ceremony, we recognize key contributions to Oakland's culture, architecture, and

historic heritage. Location to be determined.

OHA will be sending you information, and will post all the details at www.oaklandheritage.org.

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See our membership
form on page 11.



Remembering beloved history buff Ray Raineri (1938–2015)



JOE JOHNSTON

RAY RAINERI leads a walking tour of the Alden Tract, July 2011.

By Annalee Allen

The OHA community has lost a guiding light with the passing of local historian and tour leader Raymond Raineri. Ray devoted himself to collecting memories of his childhood North Oakland neighborhood and his Italian American heritage. Since his retirement, Ray's enthusiasm for North Oakland and Temescal history found a wide range of outlets. He curated numerous exhibits at the History Room at the Oakland Main Library, and contributed articles to local newspapers, including the *Piedmonter* and the *Montclarion*.

He led the popular OHA summer walking tours of Temescal for several years and he co-authored the publication, *A Walk Through Temescal*, a self-guided tour pamphlet, which was published by OHA in 1997.

According to fellow Temescal resident Jeff Norman who worked with Ray on many projects, Ray had amassed a very large collection of historic photographs of North Oak-

land and he generously shared his collection and knowledge with one and all.

He was excited to take part in the Oakland Technical High School Centennial Project this past year. He was a proud alumnus of Tech. He also graduated from San Francisco State with a degree in Sociology.

Ray's expertise ranged from early public transit in Oakland (the Key System) to the Oakland Oaks baseball team, to the city's Italian American heritage. He was a longtime member of the Colombo Club, an Italian social club located on Claremont Avenue, across from the DMV. The club was formed by Italian quarry workers who had moved to Oakland after the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906.

Whenever he spoke, says Jeff, "Ray always brought his unique style, combining historic fact with personal anecdote, in a way only someone who has lived it can provide."

"I can add, on behalf of the Oakland History Room," says librarian Kathleen DiGiovanni, "that he was a great friend to us, generously lending us his expertise on so many topics, from baseball, to streetcars, to the canneries, to the Italian community in Temescal. I can go on and on. He was a terrifically entertaining storyteller, too. I remember a story he told about the day that the contents of Vernon Sappers's house—all his vast collections—were emptied from the family home and into a shipping container. And though he had met my son only once, Ray absolutely always asked about him."

"Ray was a beautiful guy, full of life, and

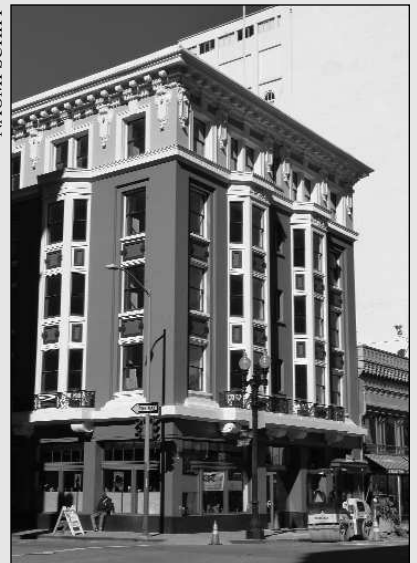
generous toward others in countless ways. We have lost another of the greats within the Oakland, Emeryville, and Piedmont history communities. For many of us, we have lost a friend as well," concludes Jeff.

"OHA Walking Tour fans will remember Ray's amusing, anecdote-filled tours through Temescal, or perhaps his presentation about Idora Park that packed the Chapel of the Chimes a few years ago," says OHA president Alison Finlay. "Ray shared his love of Oakland's history generously and we will miss his warmth, his humor and his upbeat nature. Thank you, Ray."

A celebration of Ray's life was held in November. ■

Changes downtown

NAOMI SCHIFF



MOST RECENTLY HOME to The Academy of Chinese Culture and Health Sciences, which has moved to Broadway, this 1910 building at 1601 Clay Street has been restored as 20 residential units over ground floor retail. Learn more about current plans for downtown on page 10.

Thanks to our volunteers

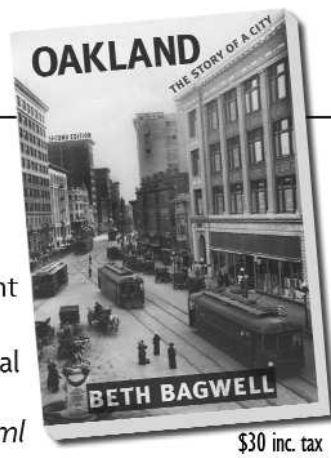
Dea Bacchetti, Suzanne Brenner, Charles Bucher, Chris Buckley, Myrna Dean, Alison Finlay, Donna Graves, Kristopher Mandell, Amelia Marshall, Claudia Reet, Steve Rynerson

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Oakland's De Rome Foundry created enduring monuments

By Erika Mailman

More than a century after the death of Louis B. De Rome, a spunky self-made man, his bronze work endures. Statues, bells, historical plaques: many of these can still be found today, attesting to his quality of work.

De Rome was born in Buffalo, N.Y. In an 1892 *San Francisco Call* article "Some of Our Self-Reliant California Boys," De Rome and partner Neil C. Whyte talked about their humble, bootstrap beginnings. De Rome arrived in California in 1858 at age four, while Whyte was born on a ship moored in the bay in 1852. "I claim that we do a business second to none of its kind in the U. S.," De Rome told the *Call*, "and it has been worked up entirely by ourselves. Both of us were left poor boys and had no parents' wealth to help us on the road forward."

De Rome learned the trade of a molder with the California Brass Works and apprenticed for nine years with W.T. Garratt's brass works. He left to join forces with Whyte, who had trained for 13 years as a machinist at the Pacific Iron Works, both of them bringing \$400 to the partnership.

In 1880, Whyte and De Rome's partnership began "in the lower store of John Center's windmill house on Sixteenth Street [of San Francisco], their entire premises being about 25 feet square," reports an 1892 book *The Bay of San Francisco: the Metropolis of the Pacific Coast & its Suburban Cities*. A year later, prosperity permitted them to rent a larger space downtown at 292 Howard St. Over ensuing years, they added an L to that building, fronting at 137 Beale St. In 1888, a disastrous fire laid low Beale Street to the bay. They then leased 126-28 Main St. and erected a three-story brick structure (with base-

ment) for the Globe Brass and Bell Foundry. The front was office and machine shop, the rear the foundry itself. The men also formed the firm Whyte & De Rome. "De Rome resides at 600 Oak St., San Francisco, with a homestead at Golden Gate, Alameda County," says *The Bay of San Francisco*. The difference is between residence and homestead is unclear, but De Rome's Oakland home at 1076 59th St. still stands.

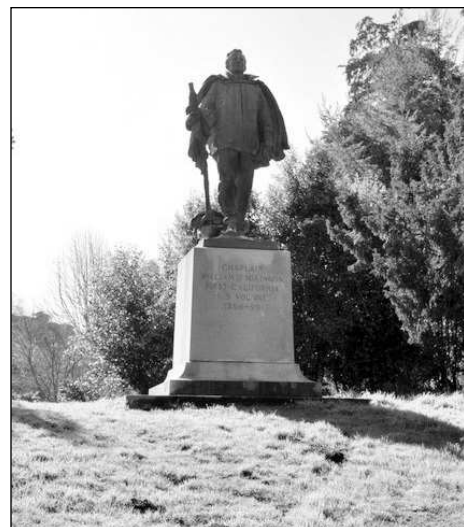
Sadly, in the 1906 earthquake and fire, the three-story brick foundry lost everything (it appears it was later rebuilt nearby at 150-56 Main St). De Rome had been in the process of creating a statue honoring William D. McKinnon, a chaplain of a California regiment that served in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. At the time of De Rome's death, the *Oakland Tribune* looked back on a fond memory: [De Rome] "resurrected the McKinley [sic] memorial statue, which had just been completed, from the ruins of his factory, and set it upon Market

over the inscription, 'I'm here with you boys!' Its message was seen by thousands of refugees as they fled the city." The *San Francisco Call* agreed: "The statue and its cheering message never failed to arouse a cheer from the refugee bands which marched down the thoroughfare during the exodus from the burning city."



ROBERT BURNS

Although the statue heartened escapees, it didn't find a permanent place to stand until several decades later. The website Artandarchitecture-sf.com reports an amusing story about its travails, citing the book *San Francisco's Golden Gate Park: A Thousand and Seventeen Acres of Stories* by Christopher Pollock. "This sculpture, created by D. John MacQuarrie was placed in the park on August 21, 1927, fifteen years after it was cast at the Louis de Rome Memorial Bronze, Brass and Bell Foundry of Oakland. The donors, the Bay Area Spanish American War veterans and American Legion Posts, had not



THE MCKINNON STATUE that encouraged people fleeing the 1906 earthquake and fire.

liked the outcome of the final bronze and consequently, the park commission had denied its installation. The statue sat in an Oakland backyard but was finally rescued and redesigned." The McKinnon statue still stands in Golden Gate Park.

Another victim of the 1906 fire that finally found a home in the park, an 11-foot statue of poet Robert Burns stands atop a nine-foot pedestal. Sculptor Melvin Earl Cummings had to start from scratch; the statue was unveiled in 1908. It stands off JFK Drive near Rhododendron Grove.

The foundry didn't limit itself to statues. *The Knave* reported in 1947 that Whyte and De Rome played a fundamental role in getting the San Francisco cable cars outfitted, casting brass trimmings for 32 cars for \$1,370.24. "When steel grip frames for the Market street line had been tried and proved a failure, Mr. De Rome came to the rescue, and from a bronze composition of his own origin manufactured grip frames which stood the test, and were put into general use," reported *The Bay of San Francisco*. The foundry also had the clever idea of putting brass name plates on the cars as gifts to various contractors. *The Knave* noted that the cars were built in Oakland and "turned over, freshly painted and ready to climb the hills of the transbay city."

See **DE ROME** on page 6



A DE ROME BELL rests on the lawn of the Golden Gate branch library.

GOOGLEMAPS

ARTANDARCHITECTURE-SF.COM

ARTANDARCHITECTURE-SF.COM



De Rome

Continued from page 5

The foundry also cast bells, something once so vital to burgeoning cities that they were included in the firm's name. An Aug. 9, 1888, article in the *Daily Alta California* reported that Whyte and De Rome had bought the original bells from San Francisco's Mission Dolores with the intention of melting them for the silver and gold in them, perhaps for casting new ones. "Since their acquisition, there has been a steady stream of callers to see them, and the firm had the bells refurbished up and put a man in charge of them to give all the particulars of their history to the visitors. The firm have received so many importunities, both verbal and written, to save the bells as relics that they have not come to any definite conclusion as to what disposal they will make of them." Today, the original bells are in place at the mission; it seems their melting was forestalled.

Another bell is well known to Golden Gate branch library patrons; it sits on the grass outside. It was cast in 1905 for Oakland Fire Department Station No. 7. The Claremont Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West presented the 1,000-pound brass bell to the library Feb. 22, 1926, George Washington's birthday, writes Wanda Sabir on the Friends of the Oakland Public Library website.

Those who enjoy walking through Mountain View Cemetery will recognize De Rome's 1897 monument marking the area where Elks Club members lie. Writes local cemetery enthusiast Michael Colbruno on his *Lives of the Dead* blog, "The elk was modeled after an actual animal in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park known as 'Father Elk' who had been moved to the park from the wild. The sculptor was Frank Hapersberger and the cast was completed at the Whyte & De Rome Foundry in Oakland. The burial

plot where the elk stands is known as 'Elks Rest.' It is the common term for Elks burial plots."

His biggest

commission: Undoubtedly, De Rome's most enduring (and

unusual) work is the statue atop an enormous pedestal at the Donner Summit Emigrant Trail Museum in Truckee. It shows a man, woman, baby and child struggling against wind (and clearly, bad fate). Cast at De Rome's Oakland foundry and designed by John MacQuarrie, the 18-ton monument caused much controversy. Although work commenced in 1901, the statue wasn't dedicated until 1918, long after De Rome had died. It purports to honor pioneers in general, but its original intent was to memorialize the Donner Party, an item of contention as fundraising began.

The other battleground was the statue's placement. Charles McGlashan, a Truckee newspaperman who first collected oral histories from survivors, wanted a memorial on the very spot of the Breen family cabin, which was burned to the ground by a military party horrified by its grisly contents. It's unknown whether McGlashan could truly identify the exact site after so many years had passed since the 1846–47 tragedy; he brought survivors in 1879 where, he stated in a 1920 testament, "the print of the foundation logs was distinctly visible, the fireplace remained intact, and about four feet from the northwest corner of the site of the cabin stood a jagged stump about eight feet high." He performed excavations at the site, and found china and a whetstone. It's a sad loss that official archeology did not take place and now never can with the monument in place. McGlashan lost a "staunch friend" in arguing over the cabin's footprint: Dr. C.W. Chapman, who waited until 1920, two years after the dedication, to lodge his complaint.

The 22-foot pedestal is meant to indicate the level of snowfall the winter that the Donner Party was entrapped in the Sierras and some were pressed into cannibalism as a desperate measure. At the dedication, 3,000 watched the three survivors in attendance who had been children during that wretched winter: Eliza and Frances Donner and Martha Reed, married with new surnames.

Three "powerful service trucks" brought the statue in three pieces from Oakland to Truckee, according to the May 19, 1918 *Tribune*. "The Donner statue is said to be the fourth largest bronze casting ever made in the United States and the largest ever cast in California," reported the article. A large crane lifted the three sections onto the trucks, tak-



FAIR USE

THE PIONEER MONUMENT at its June 6, 1918, unveiling. From left is Nevada Governor Emmet Boyle, Martha Reed Lewis, Eliza Donner Houghton, Frances Donner Wilder, and California Governor William Stephens. The three women were survivors of the Donner Party tragedy.

ing nearly all day to do so. Since motoring was so new in this era, the use of trucks required explanation. "Selection of the service trucks . . . in preference to ordinary drays [pulled by horses] which have in the past been used by the De Rome foundry for similar purposes was due to a recognition . . . of the greater ease, speed and safety of handling such problems with a motor truck."

The statue is well worth a visit as you head into Tahoe. A new Visitor's Center opened this June at the site, replacing an older museum steps away. It includes displays about the Washoe people, the building of the Transcontinental Railroad and the role of Chinese workers in its more dangerous aspects, and the creation of the Lincoln Highway. This new building is ADA compliant unlike its predecessor, and has more space to host large groups such as schoolchildren. Unfortunately, the older museum, built in 1962 and now closed to the public, contains artifacts that didn't make it to the new facility. The iconic Patty Reed doll has been moved to a prominent display in the new center, but visitors will miss the painted dioramas and other

See **DE ROME** on page 8

DENNIS EVANOSKY



ELK MONUMENT at Mountain View Cemetery



Preservation news: houses on the move, downtown on the upswing

By Naomi Schiff

NINTH AVENUE TERMINAL PARK: In several public hearings, Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, and Planning Commission declined to approve proposed designs for a park to be built on the site of the Ninth Avenue Terminal, in the “Brooklyn Basin” development. OHA and the Coalition of Advocates for Lake Merritt provided a detailed critique of the park design, focusing on accessibility, friendliness, usability, and the lack of a thought-through design for commemorating this taxpayer-funded break-bulk facility, which operated from 1928 until recently. The developers have hired a new landscape architect, and at a joint meeting of representatives from the three boards on Nov. 12, attendees and Commissioners felt more hopeful about the direction of the plans. About 20,000 square feet at the front end of the terminal is to be preserved; an additional area will retain its roof and supports. The park will occupy the rest of the 180,000 square feet of the building’s footprint, as well as areas around it, and will include a section of the Bay Trail, and retain the curved trestle that stands out in the water between the Brotzeit Restaurant and the old terminal building. It will remain in public hands under the Tidelands Trust doctrine.

ZONING CHANGES HELD OFF: OHA and community groups objected to the City of Oakland Planning Bureau’s submission of a 600-page zoning and use change document to the Planning Commission in late October. Among the changes were a handful of trivial corrections, and a few quite major changes. Planning commissioners expressed unhappiness at having to comprehend such a huge pile of detailed language, submitted at the deadline for agenda materials, but allowing only a few days to read and understand it. They supported a delay, passing only one element, and leaving the other 41 in abeyance. OHA and other community representatives met with the planners, who agreed to submit only the most urgent items, and to hold the others for further discussion and review. Worrisome proposed changes included two height increases right on the edge of the “Art Murrur” area—otherwise known as the his-



NAOMI SCHIFF

SIGNAL TOWER of the historic 16th and Wood Train Station.

toric auto garage district—and changes to the thresholds for requiring a conditional use permit for large projects. Advocates pointed out that only property owners were informed of proposed revisions, not residents and commercial tenants. And, in a strong letter, the Chinatown Community Coalition pointed out that after years of meetings and public involvement, it was wrong to make large changes without consulting the participants in the Lake Merritt BART Station Area Plan.

A LITTLE HOUSE MOVES: A small stucco house on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, was moved to a nearby lot early on Saturday, Oct. 18, making way for a section of the huge construction project beginning at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland. The owners of the house had held out for years, refusing to sell to the hospital, which built a parking structure around it. Then it had a second life as part of the hospital campus. Finally, as hospital plans moved forward, Children’s offered to help pay for the move, an unusual offer to a property owner. The house was low enough to fit under the BART tracks and was sold to nearby owners who had room on their large lot for a second structure.

SIGNAL TOWER, 16th AND WOOD STREET: A proposed project just north of the 16th and Wood train station in West Oakland would spare the historic Southern Pacific Signal Tower. The original presentation by staff did not focus on the tower, which is part of the historic resource along with the 16th Street S. P. Station, but OHA presented comments. The Planning Commission agreed to require conditions on the project approval, safeguarding the tower and requiring restoration that will respect its national register-level historic status. The City Ventures project would create 44 condos; how would the

See **PRESERVATION** on page 8

GET YOUR HOUSES! (JUST FIND A PLACE TO PUT THEM)



NAOMI SCHIFF

Three Victorian houses in the path of a new housing development are being offered for moving. Do you have a lot that needs a wonderful old structure? Quick, take a look at 48th and Telegraph!



Preservation

Continued from page 7

landscape and development retain a sense of the connection of the tower with its station at this former important rail hub? Would passersby still be able to see this building, long used to coordinate the train traffic at this busy intermodal station?

FORMER MELROSE BAPTIST

CHURCH: OHA board members saw a presentation about an adaptive reuse for housing in the Melrose neighborhood. At Bond Street and 47th Ave., Riaz Inc. plans about 60 apartments within the former Melrose Baptist Church (constructed 1928–30 by Blaine & Olsen, reconstructed and altered by Charles McCall in 1939–40) and its school buildings. Most recently, the property served as a mosque. Plans include modifying interiors to accommodate residential use and re-landscaping the grounds.

DOWNTOWN PLAN: In the latest of a series of area plans, the City of Oakland has hired consultants Dover-Kohl to plan the downtown area, including areas just inland from the Port of Oakland, jogging around Chinatown (which was included in the Lake Merritt BART Station Plan) and extending up to about where the Broadway-Valdez Plan began. The Florida consultants were here in September to launch the project, then spent a bit more than a week in Oakland gathering opinions and getting a sense of the area and its people. Some of the subconsultants to the team are local companies. Among the ideas batted around were establishing parkland on the former Howard Terminal site at the port and considering whether to radically change Freeway 980, perhaps by turning it into a boulevard instead of a sunken freeway. As well as looking at zoning and use regulations, the consultants will be reviewing streetscapes and traffic patterns, thinking about historic buildings, and eventually, coming up with an EIR that would allow developers to move forward without each producing a separate document. Send in ideas, subscribe for updates, and see relevant documents: www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/PBN/OurServices/Plans/OAK051133#about. For more on OHA's advocacy and ideas for this plan, see page 10. ■

De Rome

Continued from page 6

objects, including a photograph of someone at the foundry casting the statue, pouring bronze into a waiting mold.

De Rome's personal life: De Rome married Emma Birdella Harris of New Jersey in San Francisco on April 8, 1886. She was the stepdaughter of a successful San Francisco grocer. They had four children: Louis M., Viola C., Charles R., and Merle W.

Tragedy struck the family many times. They had a daughter who died young, whose name seems lost to time. Louis's nephew Albert was hazed at the Hopkins Art Institute in San Francisco "to the degree that he was crippled for life," reported the *Berkeley Gazette* in March 1905. Albert was taken to a studio off campus where he was beaten with a strap and shocked in an electric chair. In June 1900, the *Tribune* reported that Louis "was experimenting with acetyline gas when an explosion occurred." His eyes were badly injured, "though there is little danger he will lose his sight."

Louis was active in his community, a one-time head of the San Francisco Sanitary Board and a member of the Odd Fellows and Sequoia Lodge 349 of the Masons.

At the young age of 55, he died on Jan. 7, 1910. Newspaper accounts contradict each other about the length of his illness, whether two years or two months, but agree that heart problems during a ferry trip on the bay caused his eventual death. "His fatal illness was an affection [sic] of the heart that began April, 1908. He was stricken suddenly while crossing the bay on a ferry boat and although he partially recovered from the first attack had been an invalid at intervals since," said the *San Francisco Call*. The *Tribune*, however, used the headline "Louis De Rome Dies Suddenly" and positioned the fatal ferry

ride as taking place in April 1910. The funeral was held at the family home and he was interred at Mountain View Cemetery.

Son Louis M. carried on the family name and business. He married Cora Virginia Klinkner, the daughter of Charles Klinkner of Klinknerville fame, and they moved into the 59th Street home after their wedding. According to Sanborn maps, the home included a foundry behind the house, that went in sometime after 1911, after his father's death.

"Members of the de Rome family continued to live in the stately home for many decades," writes Annalee Allen in the May 24, 2015 *San Jose Mercury News*. "Sometime in the 1970s it became a boardinghouse and the once-grand rooms divided into rental flats and studios. When asked, tenants of the house will say ghosts sometimes haunt the property."

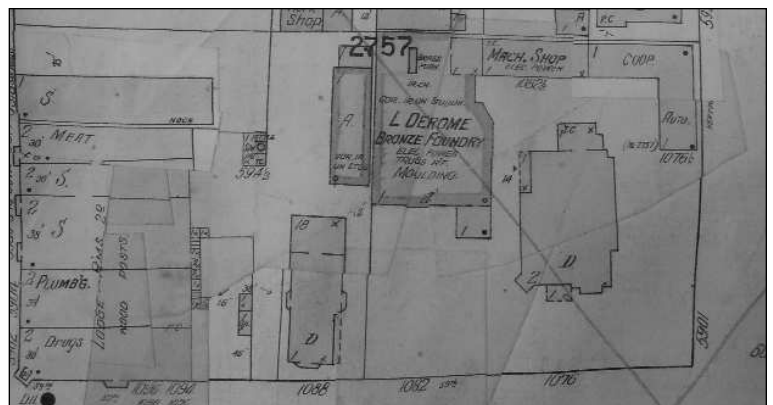
Surely the man who made grand mementoes of others' lives would've received a fitting marker himself, yet "it's a little, tiny, weeny stone near the Civil War plot," says Mountain View docent Dennis Evanosky. It's sad De Rome only got a small stone when he was so "monumental" himself. ■

Inventory of De Rome's work can be found at <http://bit.ly/IPNCBfu>. Many thanks to Kathleen DiGiovanni of the Oakland History Room for her excellent help!



FAIR USE

DE ROME in the 1892 *San Francisco Call*.



SANBORN MAPS (1911–30) show the home at 1076 59th St. in Oakland, between San Pablo Avenue and Herzog Street, encircled at the back by the foundry and machine shop.



Action needed for Oak Knoll Officers' Club

NAOMI SCHIFF



GRAFFITI AND DEBRIS mar a loggia off the planted courtyard.

By Claire Castell

In July, OHA hosted a neighborhood tour of Sequoyah Hills, including the Officers' Club, originally the 1927 clubhouse of the Oak Knoll Country Club. SunCal, the developer that bought the Oak Knoll property in 2014, plans to build around 900 homes and condos on the site. In 2005, their plans included restoring the Officers' Club and making it a community center. However, SunCal now states the Officers' Club is too damaged and expensive to restore, and plans to demolish it. SunCal must present an Environmental Impact Report to be finalized in December.

The club has been deemed historically significant by the Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board and the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey. OHA presented a powerful letter to the landmarks board and the Oakland Planning Commission in April 2015 and won their support for the preservation of the club. While this is an important step, preservation is not guaranteed and recent conversations with the builders confirm their plan is still to remove the club.

The building remains grand with many wonderful architectural details. We can imagine it as an events venue or a restaurant, much like San Francisco's Officers' Club at the Presidio. Finding a good re-use option might help save the club house.

There will be city hearings by June 2016. Please write to council members about your desire to save this building. Learn how: <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/CityCouncil/>. OHA is organizing people interested in saving the club; email info@oaklandheritage.org to be added to a our communication list to stay informed. ■



LONG USED AS A CHURCH, the theater has been left largely intact.

KRISTOPHER MANDELL

The Palace Theater on 23rd Avenue

By Naomi Schiff

On Saturday, Sept. 12, Kristopher Mandell and his remarkable team led a tour of amazed OHA members and friends through the Palace Theater on 23rd Avenue, gave a presentation about its history and its neighborhood, and described plans for a reawakened venue and community focal point.

The Palace was built in 1923 as a vaudeville house by Roaring Twenties showman Allen E. King at a cost of about \$110,000. It was remodeled in 1931 by the Reid Brothers Architects as an "atmospheric theater" in a Spanish Colonial Revival style. The Reid Brothers were also known for the Grand Lake Theater, San Francisco's Cliff House, and San Diego's Hotel Coronado.

The theater, which seated nearly 1,500 people, served as an entertainment venue for the factory workers living in the neighborhood.

According to a press release from the theater, "In 1944 the theater was sold to Fox West Coast and temporarily converted to wartime housing for the shipyard workers. The theater came to its end as a movie palace after the last surge of business from WW2 at which point the Palace was sold to the Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, which preserved the building for the next 60 years. In July 2014, the Palace was taken over by LDL, Inc."

That's when Mandell came on the scene; he is co-owner of LDL, Inc., and now theatrical director of the Palace Theater. Man-



THE PALACE THEATER EXTERIOR

ARTHUR LEVY

dell says, "I have accumulated a great wealth of information related to our theater and am very excited to showcase the story of the Palace and the 23rd Avenue Commercial District."



CURVING STAIRCASE

ARTHUR LEVY

Although long use as a church kept the building largely intact, there is still plenty of restoration work underway.

To learn more about the Palace Theater's history, to see events planned for the future at the theater, or to find out about renting it for a private event, please visit the website palacetheateroakland.com. ■



OHA members weigh in on the Downtown Plan



NAOMI SCHIFF

OAKLAND'S OLDEST COMMERCIAL BUILDING, 301 Broadway, built in 1857 as a wine shop: can the Downtown Plan recognize and protect modest but irreplaceable historic structures such as this? Its neighbor on 3rd Street is the much more elaborate Western Pacific train Depot of 1910.

By Naomi Schiff

After having participated extensively in the 2009 zoning revision for the central district, OHA now turns again to commenting on the Downtown Plan now underway. One rationale for preparing it is to provide an overarching Environmental Impact Report, which would save many developers from having to prepare one for each project.

Among OHA's areas of focus as the plan goes forward:

- Establishing or maintaining fine-grained zoning appropriate for historic preservation, in particular on both sides of the street around lower Broadway, Produce Market, Waterfront Warehouse District, Jack London District as a whole. These areas should be zoned with low floor-to-area ratios (FARs). The city should consider use of the transfer of development rights (TDRs) in the downtown, and in these areas in particular. TDRs allow a developer to preserve a historic property in exchange for granting higher density on a less sensitive site.
- Keeping the FAR in the produce market at 1.5. We believe the city should not propose putting towers on top of small old buildings, but rather build elsewhere, such as on our many parking lots. Historic preservation and sensitive development will allow us to enliven the recent, somewhat sterile developments on our waterfront, and enhance Oakland's sense of place. Prioritizing work-live over live-work would be good on the western side of Broadway, particularly, where there are still older small-scale industrial buildings.

- Actively encouraging arts and small independently-owned business uses in historic buildings, in the auto garage area (where Art Murrmur/First Friday events occur) and elsewhere. If we want these cultural contributors to stay around consider incentives to landlords to keep their commercial rents within reason. What incentives and protections can be instituted? Arts, small manufacturing, and craft users generally cannot afford to locate in newly-constructed commercial space. Buffer zones should be established around such areas, with moderated heights and not so much residential density that the arts activities cannot be continued. Arts activists have mentioned their needs for vehicular access, parking, and the ability to make noise. Conflicts of use should not be created.
- Planning for families. Cities with no families are incomplete and lopsided, and tend to age up too quickly. Look at the options for family-friendly development. The planning effort should include thinking about public schools, parks, and playgrounds as well as safer pedestrian conditions.
- Planting and maintaining public landscape. Parks and trees seem to be a focus of

streetscape presentations by the consultants. OHA hopes they will include planning ideas for maintenance. Budget cuts in recent years have left our urban forest in bad condition.

- Preserving Lakeside Park in a sensitive way. The consultant showed a sketch for a new structure at the east end of Thomas Berkley Way. However, the park surrounding the lake is a historic district, and the park contains many historic structures already. Some are underused; for additional covered area, if it is needed, we recommend rehabilitating the Fire Alarm Building. This historic structure retains interesting equipment inside, was long used as the hub of Oakland's emergency alert system, and is part of a grouping of distinguished buildings. ■

In our next issue, we'd like to showcase anecdotes about people's relationships to their historical homes. Do you have a good tidbit of a paragraph or less about discoveries you made? Email us at info@oaklandheritage.org with the subject line *house story*.

A big thank you to our kind, thoughtful donors

We're grateful to the generosity of our donors, who make our programs and advocacy possible:

Stephanie Cimino, Kevin Dwyer,
Susan Sawyer, Naomi Schiff

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members to our roster:

Carlos Camargo, Stephanie Christmas,
Patricia Lipscomb Hadden, Jami Matanky
& Vandi Linstrot, Jim McSilver,
Jonathon Rusch, Ruth Stroup



Mushrooming City, “invoicing” renewals, a successful year

By Alison Finlay, President

Decades ago, Fruitvale developed as a second downtown, seemingly overnight, earning the district the nickname “Mushroom City.” Today, folks fleeing San Francisco’s largely-unaffordable housing are seeking shelter in Oakland and rents are surging. Per the *San Francisco Business Times* of Nov. 2, 2015, Oakland has the sixth highest rents of a large city, nationwide, and this is spurring development at a faster rate than we have experienced in years, another “Mushroom City!”

Our challenge is to guide development in ways that are sympathetic to our historic buildings and won’t displace longtime residents. Oakland’s diversity is a point of pride, and we have more artists here than anywhere outside New York City.

In the next 15 years, developers seek to build 14,000 residential units in Oakland. Some of this development imperils historic treasures such as Club Knoll (the former Officers’ Club in Sequoyah Heights), may change the surroundings of the Southern Pacific 16th Street Station, threatens to pressure Art Murrum out of the Garage District, and may demolish the former Biff’s Coffeeshop on 27th at Broadway.

On the other hand, a new generation is enjoying its discovery of Oakland’s fantastic architectural and cultural resources. OHA depends on our citizen members to speak up and send in opinions about development. We welcome thoughtfully-considered development that includes reusing Oakland’s important buildings, but oppose developments that seek to destroy the historic fabric of our city. We need more housing that is affordable.

Oakland is our city. We live here. We work here. We care about Oakland and her future. Please join your voice with ours as we advocate for thoughtful, constructive development that preserves and reuses Oakland’s historic resources. To pitch in, please call the office (510 763-9218) and leave your name and number. Thank you!

This month the office sent out the first renewal appeals using the new database system. (Our previous database crashed twice last year, prompting the urgent search for something more reliable.) This new system prompts us to “invoice” you when your membership expires. It’s clumsy to presume money is owed on the expiration of your membership. We hope your membership is a free-will gift and an

endorsement of the work we have done and continue to do. We hope you will overlook the awkward nature of the invoice and renew your membership. We believe this system will lessen data entry in the office and allow us to work more efficiently. Please bear with us. If there’s a mistake on our part, let us know. We’d also appreciate your thoughts on the new system. Do you like it, or hate it? And, please, what can we do better?

Our office is getting organized! A big thank you to Joyce Hendy, who has been making inroads into our backlog of filing. Her efforts are treasured.

Our programs were especially strong this year. The tours of the California Hotel, Geoffrey’s Inner Circle, Swan’s Co-housing and Mills College were enthusiastically received. The Buehler House event and the Sequoyah Neighborhood and House Tour brought in new members. The 2015 Partners in Preservation Awards will be celebrated in February.

Also coming in 2016, we are planning to highlight some of the historic buildings in downtown with handsome enameled steel educational plaques. Stay tuned! ■

CONTRIBUTORS:

Annalee Allen, Claire Castell, Kathleen DiGiovanni, Dennis Evanosky, Alison Finlay, Erika Mailman, Naomi Schiff, Valerie Winemiller

PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

MISSION STATEMENT: OHA is a nonprofit membership organization which advocates the protection, preservation and revitalization of Oakland’s architectural, historic, cultural and natural resources through publications, education, and direct action.

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The View from “The Top of the World”

By Kathleen DiGiovanni

Today, an Oaklander can hardly imagine why you’d ever have to make an effort to sell a lot with a big view. The view sells itself, right?

In the mid-1920s, when the hills area was just opening for residential development, this wasn’t something you could assume to be true. Realty Syndicate, then turning its thousands of acres of hillside land into house lots, wanted to show prospective buyers just what they could see if they built in the hills, so in 1925 they put up the Montclair Highlands Observation Tower. For a run of about four years, that tower was the best sales tool in the toolbox. Located at the intersection of present-day Aztec Way and Asilomar Drive, the tower was called “The Top of the World.”

In 1946, the *Montclarion* newspaper published the recollections of Raymond Emge, who had been a Realty Syndicate sales manager in the 1920s. Emge described the opening of the Montclair “townsite” in 1925 along with subdivisions spreading from Lake Temescal in the north to 35th Avenue, bearing such evocative and appealing names as Merriwood, Country Club Acres, Joaquin Miller Acres, and Montclair Highlands. The bill for newspaper advertising amounted to thousands of dollars each week. The company paid for two buses and seventy-five private cars to shuttle prospective buyers around the hills. There were banners and flags, free lunches, music, and lectures. Montclair High-

lands Observation Tower played a big part in this promotional program.

The tower opened on June 21, 1925, to splashy newspaper advertisements that ran for weeks on end. Realty Syndicate equipped the place with a telescope and field glasses for the prospective customer to check out views that extended from the Golden Gate to Mount Tamalpais and even, on a clear day, to the Farallones. The twinkly night time view did not go without notice, nor did the promise that the tower would be illuminated after dark by the Idora Park searchlight (“most powerful searchlight in the world!”). How to get there? You could “follow the arrows” and drive yourself to the tower or take a Realty Syndicate bus or private car to check out the views.

In August, the *Oakland Tribune* reported on a lunch excursion to the tower organized for the Piedmont Avenue Merchants Association, promised to be the first to benefit from homesite sales in the hills because of the proximity of the already-established Piedmont Avenue shopping district to the new residential areas. Montclair Village, the “townsite” then in its infancy, would gain traction later.

Besides a telescope and field glasses with which to take in the views, what else could



MONTCLAIR HIGHLANDS OBSERVATION TOWER

OAKLAND HISTORY ROOM

the visitor do at the Observation Tower? The summer of 1925 must have been a hot one: newspaper ads encouraged Sunday drivers to beat the heat in the Oakland hills and stop by the Observation Tower for a look around. You could take your out-of-town visitors there, too. One ad, published in July, began “Eastern guests will always remember the view from the new Observation Tower.”

As hillside development took shape, a lot across the intersection from the tower became the site of the 1929 “Model View Home.” House shoppers and day trippers alike could visit the tower and tour the model home, which had been fitted with an electric kitchen, colored plumbing, a piano from Sherman-Clay, and ultra-violet ray glass.

What happened to the tower? It went out without fanfare sometime toward the end of 1929, probably when the land it stood upon was sold. Today houses sit on all the lots at the site, testifying to the effectiveness of showing the buyer just how appealing a lot with a view could be. ■