

## Rediscovering Oakland's Japantown

By Kevin F. Dwyer

I AM AN AMERICAN—Someone printed those four words in bold lettering on a long white banner, hung over the door of a Japanese grocery. Photographer Dorothea Lange captured it on film in 1942.

Mineko Masuda, a U.C. graduate and native Californian, owned Wanto Co. Grocery, then located at the corner of Eighth and Franklin streets in Oakland. When Lange asked him about the banner on his storefront, he said that a sign painter had hung it, “but I paid for it, the day after Pearl Harbor.”

Masuda was no doubt shocked, as were most Americans, when the air fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. He foresaw that many Americans, angry at the Japanese Empire, would misdirect their sentiment against persons of Japanese ancestry living in the United States—ergo his pre-emptive declaration, writ large across his storefront.

Americans today may recall a television ad campaign that aired after the tragedies of Sept. 11, 2001. Individuals of all ages, religions and ethnicities—Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, Caucasians, Jews in yarmulkes, Muslim women in hijabs, robed Buddhists, Christians, Hindus in saris, turban-adorned Sikhs—one by one, each stared into the camera and with pride or defiance firmly said, “I am an American!” The television spots sought to reinforce the unity intrinsic to our nation’s diverse populace and to deliver the message, as much to ourselves as to anyone abroad, that an act of violence against the U.S. was a transgression against every American, without exception.

At the time, people worried that the 9/11 attacks would ignite profiling of Muslims and Arab-Americans. Not ironically, Japanese-Americans spoke up quickly. The Japanese American Citizens League drew a historical parallel between the attacks and Pearl Harbor, hoping to minimize backlash against Americans of Middle Eastern descent.



DOROTHEA LANGE'S photograph of Wanto Co. Grocery's storefront, 1942.

### WAR HYSTERIA

For Japanese-Americans in 1942, no slick ad campaigns advocated their civil rights. To the contrary, Hollywood launched into high gear, mass-producing patriotic films in response to Pearl Harbor, frequently with ugly characterizations of the Japanese. Big screen imagery and domestic panic easily overpowered America's budding appreciation of its cultural diversity. The derogatory term *Jap* became vernacular.

It was a time of upheaval and distress for Japanese Americans in Oakland and other Western cities. On Dec. 8, 1941, the day after the attack upon Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government began arresting community leaders and seizing Japanese bank accounts and businesses. Soon thereafter, the government established curfews, travel restrictions and freeze orders, which forbade Japanese-Americans to travel outside of specific zones.

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9066, setting in motion a series of progressively restrictive laws concerning *Nikkei* (people of Japanese ancestry), living in the Western United States. Ultimately, Japanese-Americans were forced into relocation centers in California, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas.

The War Relocation Authority organized this mass mobilization of *Nikkei*. The WRA commissioned Dorothea Lange to document the relocation; her thousands of photographs, supplemented by her personal observations, portray the disruptive effect that the operation had on *Nihonmachi* (Japantowns/ Japanese communities) across the Western states.

Lange learned that Masuda fled to Fresno shortly after she photographed his storefront.

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# Japantown

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According to her notes, preserved at the Oakland Museum of California, Masuda voluntarily evacuated Oakland to avoid an imminent freeze order.

Was Masuda ultimately sent to an internment camp? Did he return to Oakland after the war ended? Some sleuthing in the Oakland History Room reveals bits and pieces. The 1939 Oakland city directory lists Wanto Co. as a grocery located at 401–8th Street. The directory associates the names Mineko Masuda and Tauneo Ogata. Oddly, Wanto Co. does not appear in the 1940 or 1942 directories—Oakland did not publish a directory in 1941. The trail grows cold and we are left wondering what became of the grocer.

Japanese-Americans did return to Oakland after the war. Many of Lange's images depict *Nikkei* returning through the 16th Street train station in West Oakland. But the internment survivors returned to a changed Oakland and an uncertain future, both individually and as a community. The war proved to be a watershed moment for Oakland's *Nihonmachi*.

The community as it existed prior to the war simply never resurfaced.

## RECLAIMING HISTORY

Where was Oakland's Japantown? What historical or architectural evidence attests to pre-war Japanese cultural and commercial life in Oakland? Where are the *Nihonmachi* today?

Enter *Preserving California's Japantowns*, an historical project with a mission to identify and document resources from the numerous pre-War *Nihonmachi* across California. The group, sponsored by the California Japanese American Community Leadership

Council, reviewed a broad range of historical sources and consulted with an expert advisory committee to develop a list of 43 communities for continuing research.

Project director Donna Graves, a Berkeley resident, remarks that the *Nihonmachi* in her hometown rebuilt their businesses and community institutions after the war, but the resettlement pattern in Oakland is harder

to define. She learned that many *Nikkei* came back to Oakland, but whether they remained in the city is not always evident. Churches and other public spaces served as hostels, housing displaced *Nikkei* until they found homes and work. Oakland's resettled *Nikkei* population was significantly smaller and less defined than it had been before the war.

Graves describes Oakland's pre-war *Nihonmachi* as sizeable and robust. With a population of 1,800, it was the fourth largest in the state, behind Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose. Graves explains that San Francisco's pre-war *Nihonmachi* had a population of 5,000, and San Jose's community was similarly sized. Los Angeles' Japantown housed many more *Nikkei*. Graves attributes the strong post-war re-emergence of these three communities, in some part, to their sizes; they had the numbers to network and regroup effectively once their *Nikkei* were released from the internment camps.

Japanese immigrants first began settling in Oakland in the 1880s, with the 1906 earthquake bringing large numbers of Japanese from badly-damaged San Francisco. Oakland's Japanese population by the 1910s was in excess of 1,500. By the time of World War II, Oakland hosted a thriving *Nikkei* community with its own professional and commercial services, and an extensive list of religious, cultural, recreational and educational organizations.

Like most Japantowns, Oakland's *Nihonmachi* included community halls, bathhouses, a Buddhist church, Christian churches, markets, nurseries, laundries and *gakuens*



**THE BUDDHIST TEMPLE** at 825 Jackson St. was cut in half to move it from its original location three blocks away.

(language schools). Graves explains that the *gakuen* was one of the most important components of any *Nihonmachi*. Through these schools, *Nisei* (the first generation of Japanese born in the U.S.) were taught to speak, read and write Japanese. They learned Japanese culture through dance, music and film.

Graves cautions that not all *Nihonmachi* fit the stereotype of a typical ethnic neighborhood. While San Francisco's centralized hub in the Western Addition serves as an identifiable Japantown, the *Nihonmachi* in cities such as Oakland, Pasadena, Alameda and Berkeley were more dispersed.

Oakland's enclave of *Nikkei* overlapped with the city's Chinatown, but was larger than this downtown district. West Oakland was home to another large and thriving *Nihonmachi*. Additional, less dense groupings existed in the flatlands of East Oakland and North Oakland. Ethnic diversity may be an assumed aspect of modern Oakland, but in the first half of the 20th century, the city was divided into ethnic districts. The interlacing of Japanese through these other neighborhoods was remarkable.

Graves also notes other factors that affected Oakland's *Nikkei*: legal prohibitions. Beginning in 1913, Asians born outside of the U.S. could not own property, residential or business. American-born sons or daughters could circumvent this obstacle by signing the deed of ownership. Unfortunately, as Graves states, the community prior to the war was young; most *Nisei* were not old enough to qualify as property owners. Some *Nikkei*

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# Japantown

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enlisted the aid of sympathetic Caucasian citizens to sign deeds. But on the whole, Japanese-Americans resorted to leasing or renting space. Consequently, when they returned after release from relocation centers, their former homes and places of business had been let to other tenants in their absence. Nomads, they often began anew in completely different cities.

In an Oakland Museum collection note, longtime OHA member Dean Yabuki said of the formerly-restricted Lakeshore area: "My grandparents moved here in 1953, so they were probably the first Japanese Americans in the neighborhood."

## ASTONISHING DISCOVERIES

Graves and her cohorts at *Preserving California's Japantowns* worked to identify buildings across Oakland that once housed Japanese-owned businesses and cultural life. Using 1940-41 directories published by the San Francisco-based *Japanese American News*, they found 360 pre-war *Nikkei*-owned business listings and as many as 140 existing structures. Graves describes this number as astonishing and the highest number of historic resources found in one city, across the entire statewide survey. The total number of sites, both existing and demolished, is staggering, considering that Oakland's *nihonmachi* was nowhere near as large as those of Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose.

*Preserving California's Japantowns* shared its research with mapmaker Ben Pease of Pease Press. Pease describes himself as a white guy with a sansei (third generation) Japanese-American girlfriend. His girlfriend Shiz, editor for the quarterly publication *Nikkei Heritage*, has family roots in Stockton's Japantown. Pease began by exploring the history of that *Nihonmachi*, learning that it had been nearly erased in the 1950s when the freeway system was constructed directly through Japantown.

Pease turned his focus towards Oakland and, using data shared by Graves and her team, created a comprehensive map of its pre-war *Nihonmachi* businesses. The map is an eye-opener for latter day Oaklanders.

This author found that his North Oakland neighborhood, an Italian stronghold prior to

the war, hosted a variety of Japanese-owned businesses: Miramoto Radio Shop, Yamanshi Shoe Repair, Kanahashi Shoe Repair, Sakura Cleaners, Handwork Laundry, and Midwife K. Hotta. Some Japanese-owned businesses adopted names indigenous to the neighborhood, such as Grove Super Market (Grove Street, now MLK Way) or Key Route Cleaners on 40th Street (one of the Key System's main trolley lines). Many of the buildings that once housed these businesses still stand.

Frank's Market #10 also appears on the map, in this district. It still stands today, one of many in the "Frank's Market" chain owned by the Iino family. The chain employed many *Nikkei* during the years of the Great Depression. The Iinos family leased their markets and lost them while interned during the war—even though three of their sons served in the U.S. military.

East Oakland was sprinkled with Japanese-owned nurseries. The corridor along International Boulevard (then E. 14th) boasted Yoshihara Nursery, Nagata Nursery, Golden Gate Nursery, Nakano Nursery, East Bay Nursery and Matsui Nursery. Motorists driving along Foothill Boulevard prior to WWII would have passed a variety of *Nikkei* businesses: Yoshi's Beauty Shop, Blue Bird Grocery, Yasui Sewing School, and Tomono Shoe repair, to name but a few.

The *Nikkei* enclave that overlapped with Oakland's Chinatown included clothiers, restaurants, physicians, bathhouses, churches and *gakuens*. Many of these structures still stand in today's Chinatown, their Japanese

heritage hidden from view. Of particular interest is the Buddhist Church, designed by *Nisei* architect George Shimamoto. In 1927, parishioners dedicated it with a traditional ochigo procession, marching band and parade of dignitaries. In the tense period just before WWII, church members removed the *manji* (ancient Buddhist symbols similar to swastikas) from the church's entry and roof tiles. For the duration of their incarceration in the camps, church members stored their belongings in the building. The church transformed into a hostel, temporarily, to house *Nikkei* returning to Oakland in 1946. Soon thereafter, they again used the church for spiritual purposes and it thrived, although not without formidable obstacles. In the early 1950s, the State Highway Commission announced plans to build a freeway along Oakland's waterfront. The final route was to pass directly through the Buddhist Temple. Having survived the war, church members resisted losing their temple to a freeway, which was named, interestingly, in honor of Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Naval Forces during WWII. Instead of surrendering their church to the wrecking ball, the congregation cut the building in half to move it. They reconstructed it three blocks north, at 9th and Jackson streets where it still stands today, serving as a spiritual center for Japanese Buddhists.

Outside of Chinatown, Oakland's largest population of *Nikkei* centered in West Oak-

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**IINO FAMILY MEMBERS** stand in front of Frank's Market, 1480 14th St.



LEO SAITO and his family.

## Japantown

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land. Here one found fish markets, groceries, piano studios, midwives and shoe repair shops. Another Frank's Market operated at 1480–14th St. West Oakland also boasted two large *Nikkei*-run laundries, the Contra Costa Laundry and the Market Laundry. Market Laundry incorporated in 1909 and thrived despite the activities of an Anti-Japanese Laundry League. Sanborn maps from 1912 note that employees slept on the premises, which included a large structure for washing and ironing and a separate one to shelter delivery vehicles. The larger Contra Costa Laundry several blocks north offered dormitory-style lodgings for its male and female employees as well as a dining hall.

### LEO SAITO: DENTIST, VETERAN, NISEI

Few in Oakland today could better serve as torchbearer to Oakland's *Nihonmachi* than 92-year-old Hirisho "Leo" Saito, a resource to many investigating Bay Area *Nihonmachi*. Although born in San Francisco, Saito has lived most of his life in Oakland. He attended public schools in Oakland, graduating from University High School (now the Research Institute at Oakland Children's Hospital). He graduated from UCSF Dental School in 1941 and soon thereafter was inducted into the U.S. Army, serving four years in Germany.

Saito expresses mixed feelings about the war years; his family was sent to Topaz Relocation Center in Utah despite his serving in the armed forces. He visited Topaz while on leave and was even married there in 1944.

Preserving California's Japantowns

Friendly and engaging, Saito does not seem to hold deep-seated bitterness over internment history, although he does comment that "relocation center" and "internment camp" are misnomers. He likens them to concentration camps, asking rhetorically, "What else would you call a place that is surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards?" He explains that the centers were designed to hold Japanese aliens, but citizens lived there as well, including children born on U.S. soil, too young for their parents to leave behind. Saito reflects that, in some sense, the camps were a mixed blessing. War hysteria, he says, motivated numerous rabid anti-Japanese groups. While overseas, he could rest assured that his family was safe.

Saito's parents both owned businesses. His father ran Saito's Shoe Repair and his mother operated Swans Cleaners. Both stood side-by-side at 2019 23rd Street in West Oakland. The Mission-revival style commercial building still stands today as a laundromat, Saito says. The Saitos owned their stores thanks to an American-born Japanese man who signed the deed to the property. He also signed the deed on the family home, an old Victorian on Market Street in West Oakland. Later, when Saito's parents were naturalized, the properties transferred to their names.

During the war, a family acquaintance ran the family businesses, although sloppily. Failing to pay the bills, the acquaintance angered wholesalers and left the Saitos with a large debt after the war. Meanwhile, the family home became a boarding house for shipyard workers who apparently did not treat it with TLC; after the war, it required extensive renovations before the family could move back into it.

When asked to recollect Oakland's pre-war *Nihonmachi*, Saito chuckles. He says that outsiders probably would not recognize it as a traditional *J-Town*. He says Oakland's Japantown sat near the mouth of the Posey Tube, with *Nikkei*-operated restaurants, gas stations, barbershops and groceries. He also recalls the Wanto Gakuen (no relation to the grocery), also near the Tube. Wanto Gakuen was an independent facility, whereas many churches ran their own *gakuens*.

Saito says the Market Laundry in West Oakland was demolished during Redevelopment, which in the 1950s and 1960s drastically restructured West Oakland. He laments

that Redevelopment also bulldozed his own West Oakland Dental Office, which he subsequently moved to East Oakland.

And in partial answer to the mystery posed by Lange's photo, Saito remembers Masuda and his Wanto Co. Grocery. Masuda had three daughters and one son who were interned in Utah. To the best of Saito's memory, Masuda did not re-open his grocery after the war. His son resettled in Salt Lake City, opening a gas station, while the daughters married and returned to Oakland.

When asked for an example of a pre-war *Nikkei*-operated business still in operation today, Saito says he can't think of a one. He was fond of a Japanese restaurant in Chinatown, but it has since closed. He now travels to Berkeley for fine Japanese cuisine.

*What does a 42-year-old Irish-American author and New England Native know about the rich history of Oakland's Nihonmachi? The answer is, a lot more than he did before writing this article! The information presented here is but the tip of a Nikkei iceberg. For more information, visit Preserving California's Japantowns at [www.californiajapantowns.com](http://www.californiajapantowns.com) and view Ben Pease's maps at [www.Japantownatlas.com](http://www.Japantownatlas.com). ■*

## Ride the rails with Rodna!

*By Valerie Garry, President*

At our final lecture this year, Rodna Taylor will present "Riding the Rails with Rodna," describing her experience as a Zephyrette on the *California Zephyr*. People describe the *Zephyr*, a sleek streamlined train in the 1950s, as a "cruise ship on wheels" and "a vacation unto itself."

Zephyrettes were train hostesses who also functioned as social directors, tour guides, babysitters, and nurses: in short, just about any role required to give passengers a memorable trip. At any given time, a pool of about 12 women worked the *Zephyr* this way.

Taylor also played a Zephyrette in "Sudden Fear," a film starring Joan Crawford, who played a wealthy San Francisco heiress who meets Lester Blaine (Jack Palance) on a train. Don't miss Taylor's delightful recounting of her experiences! 7:30 p.m. June 12, at Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Ave. \$8 OHA members, \$10 nonmembers. ■



## New priority list for neighborhood preservation

By Valerie Garry, President

After a long winter's hibernation, and thanks to the energetic and enthusiastic efforts of our newsletter committee, we're pleased to present to you our Spring 2008 newsletter, which covers a range of fascinating topics, updates on our current preservation advocacy efforts and viewpoints on historic preservation from candidates for City Council. The OHA newsletter will now be published three times a year and our next issue is scheduled to arrive in your mailbox in early summer, shortly before the start of our great summer walking tour season!

We have two new board members I'd like to introduce: Kevin Dwyer, who researched and wrote the cover story in this issue on the Japanese-Americans in Oakland in the World War II years, and Mary Becker, who helped us plan the San Antonio house tour last October and has joined our Development Committee. Both Kevin and Mary bring fresh new energy to our organization and we are delighted to have them on board.

Speaking of Kevin's lead article, we are indebted to Donna Graves and Jill Shiraki, project director and project manager, of Preserving California Japantowns. The project's efforts to reclaim historic resources from numerous pre-World War II Japantowns in California and document them were the inspiration for Kevin's piece. We are also grateful to Leo Saito, a retired dentist and WWII veteran whose parents owned businesses in West Oakland, whose personal memories helped shape the article. Dorothea Lange's photograph, which accompanies it, eloquently conveys the heartbreak and pride of the Japanese community during this difficult and controversial chapter of American history.

With an eye on strengthening and improving communication with our members, plans for a new website are underway. We hope to debut the website over the summer. Our heartfelt thanks go to Kevin Flynn who has so graciously and tirelessly maintained our current website for the past several years. And finally, our new OHA e-Bulletin gives us a flexible, fast and economical way to deliver timely information on preservation events and issues. If you have an email address and are not currently receiving the e-

Bulletin, please send us an email at [info@oaklandheritage.org](mailto:info@oaklandheritage.org) and let us know you want to be added to the list.

### HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Recently the Board of Directors engaged in a lively discussion on the topic of the importance of preserving Oakland's historic neighborhoods, particularly those undergoing intense redevelopment. As a result of that conversation, the board has developed a priority list of what we believe are the most important values relative to urban neighborhood preservation in Oakland.

Since our mission is to advocate the protection, preservation and revitalization of Oakland's architectural, historic, cultural and natural resources, it makes perfect sense that we advocate the inclusive protection of our many diverse and historic neighborhoods, which make up a significant portion of Oakland's architectural and cultural heritage. We believe that neighborhood preservation must be an integral part of any new development projects, planning, economic growth, and community consciousness and have defined the following core values:

- Building an economically-vibrant community succeeds where residents and preservationists protect the high-quality architecture, mature landscape, and pedestrian orientation of traditional neighborhoods.
- We must protect the types of buildings that define the common, vernacular heritage of a community and not just the spectacular or exceptional examples of architectural styles and craftsmanship.
- Preserving and recycling older buildings is green building and must be a priority in developing a sustainable Oakland.
- It is wasteful to throw away old buildings, both because their materials and embodied energy are valuable and because they contribute to the urban fabric. Solid waste landfill is expensive in both dollars and environmental quality, and 60 to 65 percent of most landfill sites is made up of construction debris.
- Infill construction in older neighborhoods should conform to the scale of surrounding buildings. Building height, width, setback and lot coverage should be in keeping with historic patterns.

## Beaux Arts building's rehab graces downtown

By Valerie Garry

OHA wishes to note Oakland businessman Mo Mashoon's recent achievement downtown. He rehabilitated a beautiful Beaux Arts building, the historic 1904 Union Savings



Valerie Garry

Bank, located at the corner of Thirteenth and Broadway. Walter Mathews designed it as one of the first steel-framed buildings in Oakland, touted as being "Oakland's only skyscraper, the largest office building in Alameda County . . . ahead of any other edifice in Oakland" (*Oakland Herald*). We are delighted to see this elegant building brought back to life! ■

- Density should be compatible with that of the older neighborhood in which it occurs.
- More historic districts should be created in Oakland!
- Attractive and well-preserved historic neighborhoods bring in new businesses.
- Historic preservation is *economic* development and *community* development rolled into one and should always be high on the agenda.

Finally, thank you, OHA members and friends for your continuing support. The success of our educational programs and advocacy efforts depend almost entirely on the financial contributions and active involvement of our members. It's a great way to make new friends who share our concern about preserving Oakland's heritage. Volunteers get to enjoy, at no cost, the lively programs we offer. Our lecture series and summer walking tours need volunteers—so let us know if you want to join the fun! Give us a call or send an email to [info@oaklandheritage.org](mailto:info@oaklandheritage.org) and tell us how you'd like to become more involved. Thank you! ■



## Walking tours!

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Oaklanders always love the OHA walking tours, and this year there will be even more to love. Rather than two months of tours, this year you can participate for nearly three months! Our 28th season of walking tours will begin the weekend after the 4th of July and run to the end of September. Think of it—a walk in the fresh air that comes with insights into Oakland's history and fascinating views of her built environment each Saturday and Sunday all summer long!

Complete tour details will come to you in the walking tour calendar, scheduled for mailing to our membership in June. Walks range in difficulty from the very gentle to the fairly strenuous. Here are a few highlights of what should be another great season.

The perennially popular Mountain View Cemetery tour, led by Barbara Smith and Michael Crowe, will repeat this summer, and Civil War and military history aficionados won't want to miss Dennis Evanosky's new walk highlighting Mountain View's Civil War history. He will also repeat his very popular walk through the redwoods and debut a new tour of the Dimond district.

If you missed Jason Patton's "Oakland's Walkways and Streetcar Heritage" walk, you can catch it this time. The same goes for Phil Bellman's popular Borax Smith walk and Celia McCarthy's fabulous "Rail Meets Water: Then and Now" walk at Middle Harbor Shoreline Park.

Oakland neighborhood walks include South Prescott and the Fruitvale commercial district with Betty Marvin, Temescal with Ray Ranieri, and Richmond Boulevard with Valerie Winemiller, along with the new Dimond walk mentioned above.

Also new this summer is a walk with tile maven Riley Doty, "Architectural Tile in Downtown Oakland." Go on the walk then stop for a bite at Flora café in the rehabilitated Oakland Floral Depot building. Not new but not given for quite awhile is Chris Patillo's Woodminster walk and Kathleen DiGiovanni's Lakeside Park tour.

There are lots of other great walks on OHA's summer schedule! Bring your hat, your sunscreen, your camera, and your walking shoes and come out and join us as we explore Oakland on foot. ■

## Exhibit includes Oakland artifacts

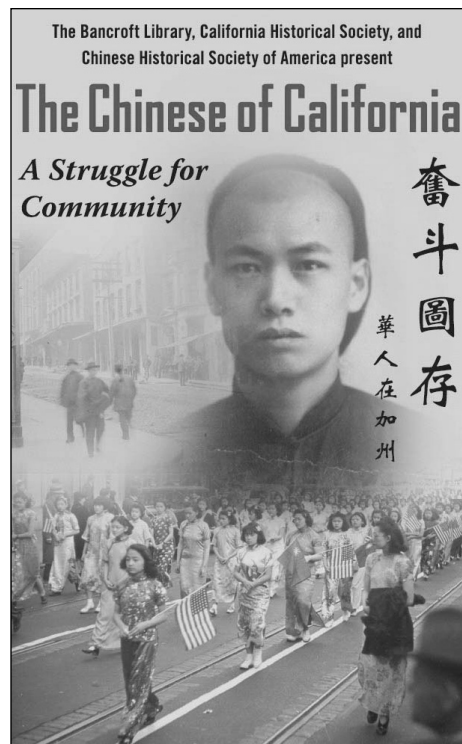
By Allyson Quibell

Discover the complex history of Chinese Americans in California through a unique collection of artifacts, images, documents, and personal stories in the exhibit "The Chinese of California: A Struggle For Community," on display at the California Historical Society in San Francisco.

This first-ever collaboration of The Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, the California Historical Society, and the Chinese Historical Society of America aims to challenge preconceptions about the Chinese immigrant experience by telling the story through the voices of Chinese Californians themselves.

The Oakland Public Library contributed several artifacts to the exhibit. One, notes Anna Naruta of the Chinese Historical Society, is a clipping from the *Oakland Tribune* reporting that Governor George C. Perkins declared a state holiday for people to demonstrate against Chinese Californians and encourage Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act removed the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law for people of Chinese descent.

Subsequently, the passage of the Geary Act of 1892 required all people of Chinese descent to register with the federal government and carry special identifica-



THE EXHIBIT POSTER.

tion papers. Oakland resident Jee Gam, who worked as an interpreter for the Alameda County courts, spoke out against the "dog tag law," and the exhibit also shares one of his writings on the dangers the registration scheme posed to American democracy.

The exhibit shows through Aug. 30, 2008 at 678 Mission St. in San Francisco. Open Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 4:30 p.m. Admission \$3. ■

## Calendar

The OHA calendar lists events, activities and meetings related to history and preservation that may be of interest to our members. To submit items, call 763-9218 or e-mail [oakland-heritage@california.com](mailto:oakland-heritage@california.com). All phone numbers in 510 area code unless indicated.

### EVENTS

**June 12: RIDING THE RAILS WITH RODNA!** See description of this exciting lecture on page 4 of this newsletter. 7:30 p.m. at Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Ave., Oakland. \$8 members, \$10 nonmembers.

**July 5: FIRST WALKING TOUR OF THE 2008 SUMMER SEASON** See article this page for more. Mark your calendars!

### TOURS AND EXHIBITS:

**Oakland Tours:** Discover Oakland's changing skyline, landmarks, churches and high-rises on one of the many free guided walking tours. Call the tours hotline, 238-3234, or visit [www.oaklandnet.com](http://www.oaklandnet.com) and click on the sight-seeing/tours link.

**Paramount Theatre,** an art deco movie palace, offers \$1 tours of areas not usually open to the public. Learn the theater's history, at 10 a.m. on the first and third Saturday. 2025 Broadway. 893-2300.

**Pardee Home Museum,** an 1868 Italianate villa home to two Oakland mayors and one California governor, offers tours at noon on Fridays and Saturdays, reservations recommended. \$5 adults, children 12 and under free. 672 11th St. 444-2187 or [pardeehome.org](http://pardeehome.org).



# Landmarks Board meeting summaries

By Naomi Schiff and Joyce Roy

Following are summaries of the meetings of the city of Oakland's Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board.

■ **May 14, 2007:** Board discussed sending representatives to advise the Planning Commission in person when a LPAB recommendation is made.

■ **July 9, 2007:** Boardmember Tavernier gave a presentation about the **Joaquin Miller Abbey and Fremont Tower**, Oakland Landmark 74-335.

Catherine Payne and project architects presented plans for a 14-story building at 19th and Telegraph, a 370-unit residential component of the **Forest City Uptown** project, formerly the site of the Sears auto center. OHA members commented that the design was insensitive to the nearby historic buildings—the Fox Oakland Theater and the Floral Depot. Joyce Roy advocated for open space on the corner. Chris Buckley presented sketches for more sensitive ways to design it, taking into consideration the uptown art deco buildings and the theater. The board unanimously sent comments to the Planning Commission, addressing the building's massing, placement, its façade design, and its impacts upon historic buildings.

LPAB declined to pass a motion about the project proposed for **Courthouse Athletic Club**, as developers declined to preserve any of the historic fabric. Some design alterations were shown. The major change in the mitigations was the agreement by Trammell Crow to contribute to a historic façade grant program. Some neighbors spoke to request minor alterations to the design to better respect neighboring residential buildings.

■ **Aug. 13, 2007:** The Board heard a presentation on the revised design for **St. Joseph's Professional Center**, focusing on Phase I, the main building and the laundry building. Extensive discussion of window replacement and design yielded several recommendations. Board consensus was to try to retain the confessional windows in the former sanctuary part of the main building. There was discussion

of the difficulties of retaining some historic interior flooring elements in the face of ADA requirements and floor heights. Staff was directed to work further with the project architects. Board unanimously approved the proposed Phase I restoration and adaptive reuse, subject to the board's comments, and agreed that the proposal meets Secretary of Interior standards.

■ **Sept. 24, 2007:** Reviewed the proposed **Highland Hospital** site reconstruction which would demolish two wings of the original hospital to construct a new Acute Tower to meet current seismic standards.

Changes to the proposed **St. Joseph's Professional Center** reuse for affordable senior and family housing were presented. The change preserved more of the historic

fabric and it was recommended to be forwarded to the Planning Commission.

■ **Nov. 5, 2007:** The rehabilitation of the historic **Key System Building** and construction of a 20-story commercial office building addition was reviewed. A link is provided between the new and the old so they read as two buildings.

The reuse and relocation of the historic structure at **412 Monte Vista Ave.** will require an EIR.

■ **Dec. 10, 2007:** The 42-story residential building proposed for 222 19th Street on the site of the historic **Schilling Gardens** was presented and drew many public comments in favor of saving the garden. The public and the board provided scoping comments for the EIR. ■

## Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members to our roster:  
Arthur & Roz Rosenfeld, Charles Robinson, Claire M Lucas, Delphine Prevost, Diane Peers & Steve Longwell, Fei Li Holmes, Glenda Robinson, Ilene Levinson, Iona Gage, Jamin Hawks, Joan Ruderman, Jon Norman, Kevin Dwyer, Linda Skare, Margaret Pillsbury, Robert Apodaca, Suzanne Renne

## OHA is grateful for the generous support of its members.

*Donations made between September 1, 2007 and March 10, 2008:*

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## Report from the Preservation Action Committee

# Mills Act draws much interest

By Naomi Schiff

Here are some of the projects OHA's Preservation Action Committee has been monitoring recently.

**Mills Act Applications Received:** Lively interest in the city's pilot Mills Act tax incentive program resulted in more than 20 applications for the inaugural year of operation, according to Joann Pavlinec of the Oakland Planning Department, who also serves as secretary to the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. The program provides for property tax reductions in exchange for signing a 10-year agreement with the city, and following historically acceptable standards for renovation or rehabilitation of vintage properties. In the first year, 10 properties will be chosen for the program. During the second year, 20 properties will be eligible. For information, visit

[www.oaklandnet.com/government/ceda/revised/planningzoning/HistoricPreservation/](http://www.oaklandnet.com/government/ceda/revised/planningzoning/HistoricPreservation/)  
**Highland Hospital EIR: Demolitions Proposed:** Alameda County released a Draft EIR covering a mammoth project of demolition, reconstruction, and new construction at Highland Hospital. The county plans the project so that it will comply with state seismic requirements for hospitals. The proposal includes demolition of a large mid-century auditorium and two (of five) of the historic original Beaux Arts hospital wings, but would retain the original entry hall and Howard Gilkey-designed grand stairway. Comments on the EIR must be received by April 10, 2008. For information, visit [www.acmedctr.org/article.cfm?AID=176&M1=1&M2=0&M3=0&P=10](http://www.acmedctr.org/article.cfm?AID=176&M1=1&M2=0&M3=0&P=10)

**Old Rectory Threatened:** The Diocese of Oakland applied for permission to demolish the old rectory associated with the now-demolished St. Francis de Sales, taken down after the 1989 earthquake. The Diocese wants to create a bare development site for eventual sale. However, the rectory is recognized by the Cultural Heritage Survey, and OHA questions whether it might be reusable as a component of a future development.

**Oak to Ninth:** Judge Jo-Lynn Lee issued her judgment in the Oak to Ninth case, setting aside the EIR and suspending all project approvals. OHA had argued that the analysis of the Ninth Avenue Terminal was inadequate. We did not win on that issue, but did succeed with our argument on seismic issues, according to OHA's attorney, Arthur Levy of Levy, Ram, & Olson. A 60-day appeal period runs until early May.

In the meantime, Ninth Avenue Terminal Partners pursues its proposal to reuse the older section of the terminal as a Vintners' Hall. The City Council will review the proposal in the coming weeks. Oakland Harbor Partners chief Mike Ghielmetti says that they do not oppose the reuse plan. To express support for the reuse idea, write, fax, email or telephone city council representatives. To find out about the proposal, visit [www.ninthavenueterminal.com/](http://www.ninthavenueterminal.com/)

**Key System Building:** SKS won approval from the Planning Commission to con-

struct a 20-story office building adjoining the historic Key System Building at 1100 Broadway. Its revised plan will connect the old and new buildings with floor heights that match the historic building's, and will restore its exterior. Features of the original banking hall will be retained and reused as much as possible. The new building will feature energy-conserving devices and provide retail frontage on the street edges of the ground floor. After a number of failed development attempts, it seems that the earthquake-damaged landmark may finally be restored.

**Fox Oakland Theater:** Work on the Fox Oakland restoration and reuse proceeds briskly with completion scheduled for late 2008. Additions to the outer areas of the building will help accommodate the Oakland School of the Arts. Another Planet Productions will book the large theater commercially as an entertainment venue. In the meantime, workers have been refurbishing the main theatre interior. They have restored the ornate plaster ceiling, worked on the lobby area, and ordered historically compatible light fixtures. Visible from the outside, repair of the tile and terra cotta elements is evident, and decorative metal elements have been repaired and repainted.

Phil Tagami of California Capital Group heads up the theater's reawakening. He assembled an elaborate financing structure that draws on public and private funding, including federal historic tax credits and state Proposition 40 money. He drew together a large team of consultants, contractors, and experts, asking them to trim their budgets as closely as possible in order to pull off the complex project. Tagami says, "The restoration of the Fox is been challenging and expensive. Speaking for our entire team, I can say that we are all extremely grateful for all of the financial and moral support we have received from the city council and community to date. Someone who drives by and says 'good job' can do amazing things for our spirits. Getting through the next 220 days and raising the last \$5 million dollars will be the most challenging of all. I know we would

See PAC on page 9

Oakland Heritage Alliance



**THE FORMER KEY SYSTEM** headquarters at 1100 Broadway began life in 1914 as the Security Bank of Trust, as seen in this vintage postcard. On the now-vacant site (once, two-story Victorian storefronts) to its north, a 20-story commercial building is planned.





## Council candidates on historic preservation

By Erika Mailman

We'll be voting again before we know it! OHA polled City Council candidates about their stance on historic preservation, and we print their responses here. We posed the question, "What role does historic preservation play in your conception of urban planning, and what would you do to preserve cultural and historic resources?" We asked them to limit their response to 100 words or less. Attempts to reach the remaining candidates were unsuccessful.

### AT LARGE CANDIDATES

**Charles Pine:** Oakland has a wealth of living history in buildings and green spaces across the city. The sad fact is that much proposed development today has little aspiration to be as long-lasting, gracious, and public-spirited as constructions of generations past. Two principles: 1) I will take the far-sighted approach—cherishing the past and doing right for the future—on projects coming before the council. (I can do this because I am not a career politician always looking for the next quick deal.) 2) I will respect democracy; I joined with you in resisting the steamroller that surrounded Oak-to-Ninth.

### DISTRICT 1 CANDIDATES

**Jane Brunner:** Preservation of historic buildings makes an essential contribution to the unique character of Oakland. The Paramount and the Rotunda Building are highly successful examples of historic reuse that prove that preserving the charm of older buildings can also make an economic contribution. I expect that preservation and historic reuse of the Fox Theater and the Train Station on Wood Street will be comparably successful. As Oakland brings its zoning into conformation with its general plan in neighborhoods like Temescal, it is important to balance smart growth with neighborhood preservation that protects the historic structures that give the neighborhood its flavor.

**Patrick McCullough:** Historic preservation is the trunk of our family tree. Buildings of historic and cultural significance are reminders and guides. They remind me of the virgin forests from where the lumber came; of the labor and skill of the craftsmen; of the ability to create lasting utility with the most basic of technology. These reminders should

guide future planning so that new building emulates the lasting attractiveness and durability of the old. It's wasteful and counterproductive to tear down old buildings and create expensive buildings to replace them. I'll develop policies to ensure compatibility between future needs and our historic past.

### DISTRICT 3 CANDIDATES

**Nancy Nadel:** Oakland has an aesthetically beautiful mix of historic buildings with architecture that exhibits detail and craftsmanship no longer seen in modern buildings. With the West Oakland train station, I made it a high priority to find a developer who appreciated the asset and would contribute it for public use; I still strive to keep the integrity of the entire building. With the Oak to 9th Ave. project, one issue on which I based my support was saving as much of the terminal building as possible. Advocacy for preservation should be one of our community benefits in developer agreements.

**Sean Sullivan:** The history of a city shapes its future. As a city is planned the history of that city is vital. As Oakland grows, and to support the millions of people who are expected to locate to the Bay Area in the next 10 years, Oakland must grow, it must do so in an environmentally sensitive way that respects its past. I believe that zoning that suggests architectural conforming standards would help our city set an expectation for new development to complement historic settings. People are part of the cultural resource of a community and so we must create housing that does not displace long standing residents. Cultural and historic resources can also be protected through protective legislation that honors the history of neighborhoods.

**Africa Williams:** I have enjoyed the historic buildings in Oakland for many years. I appreciate the current work on the Paramount and Fox Theater; I want to work on strengthening the landmarking policy process as we also make way for urban regeneration. If elected I would consider recommendations from the preservation organizations and the public which help to reinforce preserving our great architecture as well as new constructions that will affect our natural spaces like Lake Merritt and the Bay. We need to learn to respect

these structures; they represent the pride and success of our city for generations to come.

### DISTRICT 5 CANDIDATES

**Mario Juarez:** As treasured photos capture the soul of our personal histories, Oakland's cultural and historic resources link our past and present, memorializing Oakland's spirit. Our world renowned architecture and unique story must be preserved and maintained as fully as possible. As our overall conservation ethic grows, we must include conservation considerations as the city's development direction is decided. I do not believe in tearing down everything old to make way for new development and will be vigilant about, keep an open door for and listen carefully to citizens focused on and knowledgeable about preserving our city's soul through relevant historical artifacts.

**David Wofford:** Historic preservation accomplishes several things including the preservation of specific architectural designs and style. It helps to maintain existing community integrity and character. In many cases there is an aesthetic which enhances the quality and value of local properties that can be identified and maintained through historic preservation. Historic preservation allows for a process of intelligent planning rather than mindless market development. Lack of historical preservation can and has led to the loss of properties with significant social value. ■

## PAC

*Continued from page 8*

not have gotten to this point without the support of the City, OHA, and FOOF. That support is more important than ever before."

Friends of the Oakland Fox, a support group originally formed by OHA members and later spun off as a freestanding nonprofit, works to raise money to support the restoration. The City purchased the theater from rescuer Erma DeLucchi during Elihu Harris's mayoral administration. From its founding, OHA began advocating for preserving the building; only 27 years later, success seems to be on the horizon at last. Visit the website at [www.foxoakland.org](http://www.foxoakland.org) for more information. ■



## Oakland loses longtime historian Sister Ethel Mary Tinneman

By Annalee Allen

A longtime advocate for landmarks, Oakland history, and the right to vote has died. Sister Ethel Mary Tinnemann, 91, for 65 years a sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and a professor of history at Holy Names University, died March 11.

Jean Spees, wife of former City Councilmember Richard Spees, served with Tinnemann on the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board in the late 1970s, and recalls that Sister Ethel Mary was a strong advocate for historic preservation. "She had an incredible memory for details and research, and over time collected many wonderful photographs of early day Oakland which she had made into slides to show to her history classes," says Spees.

Chris Pattillo, another landmarks board member from that early period (which predated the formation of OHA), recalls that Sister's strong academic background lent considerable weight to the credibility of the Board, as it was seeking to raise awareness of the importance of preserving

structures such as the Wood Street train station and the Camron-Stanford House.

Sister Ethel Mary led tours of Oak Center for OHA in the 1980s and spent countless hours at the Oakland History Room researching the Victorian homes of the early residents of West Oakland and tracing how these families shaped the development of the city. Over the years she was also very active with the League of Women Voters and received special recognition for her tireless efforts to register new voters.

In 2003, her long-awaited book on the 150 years of Holy Names University was published by XLibris Press. She was also a contributor to the OHA News: examples of her work include an article on the Mary R. Smith Trust Cottages (Spring 1985) and Oak Center Neighborhood: Victorian West Oakland (Fall 1992).

She was born and raised in Oakland during the era between the world wars. She and her twin sister lived with their parents, Otto and Sue (Parrish) Tinne-

mann, who met while attending the University of California. Their daughter Ethel Mary followed in her parents' footsteps, graduating from Cal in 1938. After entering the religious order, she later earned a Ph.D. in Modern European Studies. ■

## Save the date for 2008 Preservation Awards

By Valerie Garry, President

On Thursday, May 8, Oakland Heritage Alliance presents its annual awards program to highlight the best of Oakland preservation efforts. The event, which starts at 7:30 p.m., will be held at the Chapel of the Chimes at 4499 Piedmont Ave. A champagne reception follows. Suggested donation is \$15. Please join us for this special evening and help us thank those who are working to protect Oakland's historic, cultural and architectural heritage!

## The first children's book about Oakland in decades!



Sample page: Visiting the Oakland Ice Center.



Randolph, that's not what you wear to the skating rink!

This 32-page book follows toy pony Randolph as he visits 21 fun places in Oakland for kids. 9 x 7 paperback with full-color photos. Index gives info on the places Randolph goes. By local writer Erika Mailman with a grant from the City's Cultural Funding Program. \$17.99 plus shipping. Only available online at <http://stores.lulu.com/randolphinoakland>



# A women's philanthropic society of 130 years keeps going

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Please see article on back cover for more on the Society and the Matilda Brown Home.

What does the future hold for the Ladies' Home Society now that the Matilda Brown Home, that it funded and ran for over a century, has closed? Board member Jane Hal-dane reports that the organization will not disband. They have not fully formed plans, but they hope to establish a new foundation "to continue the same mission to care for elderly people who need assistance" as well as the potential for funding intergenerational efforts. Their hope is to develop a mission that is "open-ended" and one that can "change with the times."

Park Day School now holds title to two of the three institutional properties once owned and operated by the Society. The third site was what is now the Studio One Art Center, the Society's former orphanage building, which the City has owned since the 1940s. Park Day purchased its existing main campus, the former DeFremery Nursery, from the Society in 1993. The Nursery housed babies and children under 4 years of age, while the Orphanage cared for children up to the age of 14. Park Day operated as a K-6 independent

school until the 2006-2007 school year when it added 7th and 8th grade classes. The school leases space on Ridge-way Avenue for the two upper grades. Ultimately, those 7th and 8th graders will be brought over to the main school site, but the earliest that that move can be completed is the 2010-2011 school year, according to Park Day development director Martha Henderson. Now that the school's purchase of the site is complete, it will be able to start its planning process for renovating the building. At the same time it will be developing a conditional use permit application to enable it to operate the structure as a school. Henderson said that Park Day plans to make few changes to the building's exterior. Plans are still unsettled as to which grades will occupy which site and much depends on Park Day's ability to raise renovation funds.

While Park Day cannot use the Matilda Brown Home building for classrooms yet, they are already using the site for meetings. "The public rooms are already in constant



THE MATILDA BROWN HOME IN 1931.

Oakland History Room

use," Henderson says. She adds that the purchase of the adjacent site "answered a lot of questions" about long-term planning and growth for the school. She cited the school's history of outreach to low-income public schools and said that more space will allow for more outreach and "will extend Park's already active public service mission." Certainly the continuing use of the property to serve children observes the spirit of the Ladies' Relief Society's founding mission and preserves an urban oasis. ■

CONTRIBUTORS: Annalee Allen, Kevin F. Dwyer, Kathleen DiGiovanni, Kevin Flynn, Valerie Garry, Allyson Quibell, Joyce Roy, Naomi Schiff, Chela Zitani

PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

OHA News welcomes contributions: research projects large or small, historic photos and reports on preservation issues or events. Send to [news@oaklandheritage.org](mailto:news@oaklandheritage.org).

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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# Matilda Brown Home closes its doors

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

In June 2007, an Oakland institution of over 130 years standing closed its doors for good. The Ladies' Home Society made the difficult decision to close its Matilda E. Brown Home, the home for elderly women that it funded and operated since 1872. The home fell victim to the high cost of care for the frail elderly and the increased range of residential options for the able-bodied. In January 2008 the Society sold the site to the neighboring Park Day School.

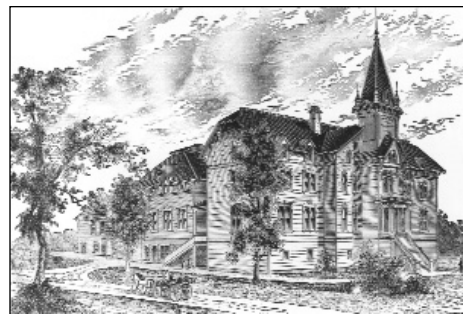
The Ladies' Home Society, originally the Ladies' Relief Society, first organized to provide relief to the victims of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Local women from diverse backgrounds gathered to make and ship warm clothes to victims before the Midwestern winter set in. While sewing for needy Chicagoans, these women "resolved to organize permanently for the alleviation of suffering and of want among elderly women and children in Oakland," according to Max A. X. Clark's *Social Service Organizations of Oakland*. The Society incorporated early in 1872, making it the oldest charitable organization in Oakland, and among the very oldest in California.

That same year a gift of land at 14th and Franklin from Oakland capitalist Elijah Bigelow got the ladies started toward a permanent home. They deemed the site too close to downtown's bustle, though; a series of trades and purchases over several years led the Society in 1876 to own the Temescal site,

known as the "Beckwith Place," a 10-acre plot then considered substantially out in the country. Before moving to Temescal, the Society rented houses in other parts of town to shelter those they cared for.

At a time when assistance to the less fortunate was private, not public, Oaklanders gave generously. The Society secured large pledges from Oakland's rich and solicited door-to-door for smaller sums. In 1878 the Oakland Police Department pledged to "divide with the Home all police fines collected from drunkards and vagabonds." In the first year, this added \$50 to the Society's coffers. The *Oakland Tribune's* Knave reported in a 1967 column that the ladies were "great party-givers." They held festivals and amusements at which they would press attendees for donations. Early lists of board members are a Who's Who of the wives of Oakland's most prominent men. In later decades, the board remained one of the most selective women's groups in Oakland, requiring years of apprenticeship on the Society's Associate Group, helping out at its Grandma's Attic thrift shop and visiting the Home's residents.

The original home was replaced in 1882 by the wood-framed structure pictured here. The present building, seen on page 11, opened in 1928 and was designed by local architect Hugh C. White. The Society raised the \$98,000 to build it through private pledges and solicitation. It christened the building the Autumn of Life Home; over its front door an inscription reads, "Welcome Home." Present



THE HOME IN 1885.

at that 1928 dedication were Mrs. Louise DeFremery and Mrs. R. E. Cole, who had been present at the dedication of the 1882 building 45 years before.

In 1935, the home was renamed the Matilda E. Brown Home. Miss Brown served as the Society's president from 1906 until her death in 1935. Brown, herself an interesting local character, was the granddaughter of Oakland pioneer and plutocrat Frederick Delger. Like many women of her class and period, she dedicated her adulthood to philanthropy. Besides her tireless work for the Society, she helped found the Oakland Club and the Mutual Benefit Club, a social welfare club for working girls. She also organized for women's suffrage and was active in the Ebell Society and the Oakland Forum.

In 1952 the organization's name changed to the Ladies' Home Society; "the word 'relief' had fallen into disrepute," says a Society brochure from the 1960s. By that time, its orphanage and nursery had long been closed. See page 11 for what will happen to the Society now that the home has closed. ■



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