

From actual horse power to ‘horsepower’

■ Moal Coachbuilders: working nearly a century to create custom motor works in Oakland

By Michael Dobrin

It wasn't the promise of commerce, trade or industry that brought William Moal to Oakland in 1911 . . . it was love.

Although the details are lost in the haze of a long-ago Paris summer, there was a chance meeting in the City of Light between Moal and a lovely University of California French language student, Marie Rose Prenveille, whose home was in Berkeley. The romance was intense enough for “Guillaume” Moal to take passage aboard the liner *La Touraine* on October 24, 1910, from Le Havre to Oakland.

The passenger manifest listed his profession as “coach builder.” Moal was trained as a wheelwright in Normandy and had spent long years as an apprentice building wooden wheels for coaches and carriages. His was a craft that had its roots in the medieval guild system, one in which like artisans banded together to pass along the special skills of their work, as well as ensure fair compensation for their labors.

When Moal arrived in the East Bay in 1910, he found a bustling economy built on manufacturing and trade. Oakland, then a city of 150,000 (many of whom were San Franciscans who resettled after the fire and earthquake of 1906), had finally wrested control of its estuary, a deep water port, from the railroad, which had maintained a right-of-way effectively cutting off access.

There were foundries, machine shops, mills, huge food processing operations, breweries and lumber mills.

Prompted by an aggressive road building program in Alameda County, East Bay residents rapidly adopted the newfangled motorcar for its convenience and freedom.

Drawn by rail access and a ready labor force, auto manufacturers moved west — to the East Bay. William Durant opened a Chevrolet assembly plant in the



Moal Coachbuilders



Peter Vincent

WILLIAM MOAL stands center holding a torch in this 1918 shot, top, while the “torch” is passed in the bottom photo, where Hank Torian’s ‘46 Boattail resplendently lounges.

Eastmont district of east Oakland in 1916. Soon a score of manufacturers — Flint, Star, truck builders Peterbilt and Fageol, Ford (a sprawling assembly operation in Richmond), Fisher Body, then Chrysler, Hall Scott marine and Atlas — fulfilled the Chamber of Commerce’s proclamation that Oakland was the new “Detroit of the West.”

William Moal had gone into business as a woodworker by 1912, but he quickly re-focused his skills on automobiles. The Broadway auto repair garage of Moal and Federle Auto Metal Works was one among 35 firms listed in the 1915 City Directory servicing the motorcar trade.

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Moal

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Today, nearly a century after his grandfather arrived in Oakland, Steve Moal, now 64, directs a motoring enterprise in his family's 65-year-old, 10,000 square foot garage on East 12th Street that certainly derives a workaday heritage of hands-on craftsmanship inherited from grandpère Moal, but with a flair that has garnered world attention. The House of Moal is one of a handful of enterprises creating custom coachwork vehicles--rakish, high performance, one-off vehicles created for a discerning clientele that in Moal's words "capture the essence of spirited motoring."

Moal knew his grandfather well and recalls, "He could do it all. He repaired bodies, bent fenders and busted radiators, which in those days were soldered up with lead. He and his partners, of course, repaired wooden spoke wheels and rims. He was an extremely good welder. I remember him shaping header pipes. He was beginning to make bodies for early race cars."

One of these was a custom roadster, the Battistini Special, a sleek speedster built on a 1920s Buick frame.

The Moal-Prenveille union produced nine children and four of the sons, George, (Steve's father), Rene, Ben and Don, all worked in auto services.

George Moal collaborated with his father in the body-fender repair business and in 1946 built the unique structure now housing the Moal Coachworks operation. Designed to accommodate auto body repair activities, the free-span structure was built on two contiguous lots by Oakland contractor Abe Doty

with ample skylights and a drive-through center aisle.

A speedboating enthusiast, George Moal was a long time friend of Oakland boat-builder Don Philbrick and shaped cowlings and aluminum hull coverings for hydroplane racers like Lon Gradetti and George Mateucci. He was also a master woodworker who created handsome scale models of Philbrick runabouts.

Later, he would shape elegant, laminated wooden steering wheels for Steve's coachwork creations. (See *OHA News* Spring 2006 edition for an article on Philbrick Boatworks.)

Young Steve grew up in this environment. Every day after school and after finishing his *Oakland Tribune* newspaper route, he'd ride his bike from the family home off Park Boulevard to East 12th Street where he got to weld and handle body and fender jobs.

"I just couldn't get enough of this place," he says. "This is where I preferred to spend my time."

Steve was also witness to the emergence in the 1950s of the hot rod and its sleek, low, cruisin' cousin, the custom (or in the orthography of George Barris, its most famous practitioner, the Kustom). Reflecting a post-war quest for homegrown performance, hot rodders took advantage of a burgeoning speed equipment industry, the ready availability of inexpensive pre-war body and chassis material, and how-to speed magazines like *Hot Rod*, to create their own street and drag strip performance machines. Hot rodding became an American phenomenon that has forever shaped our sense of motoring style and speed, even influencing American music, attire, food, language, and our entire car-crazy culture.



THE DESIGN TABLE where all the magic happens.

Peter Vincent

Oakland was a hotbed of hot rodding. Steve's Uncle Rene was a devoted street rodding-racer, and just a couple of blocks from the Moal shop was the Circle Drive-In, a hang-out for the show-and-go hot rodders. Moal's was an after-hours gathering place for noted stylists like striper Tommy "The Greek" Hrones, who learned his trade from itinerant Oakland painter and gold leaf artist Neil Hoegsberg. Circle track racers like Freddie Agabashian and Ed Elisian dropped by. Steve knew of the advanced bodyworks of regional metalsmith Jack Hageman.

And just up the street in the old Exposition Building (now the site of Laney College) was the "granddaddy of them all," the Grand National Oakland Roadster Show. Beginning in 1950, this singular event became the "must see-must go" showcase of the hot rod and custom car art form for over 50 years.

In this environment Steve began building his own street cars — a '53 Dodge Hemi-powered coupe, a '57 Ranchero, hot rod muscle cars, a classic '32 Ford roadster. The firm took on repair work for Mercedes-Benz, and he was soon poring over exotic machines like the 300SL. He was doing paint, body work and parts fabrication for owners whose cars were slated for show at exotic venues like Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance (John Mozart's best-in-show 1938 Type

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57SC Bugatti); he re-created the grille, body and windscreen cowl for collector Ed Hegarty's 1920s Miller racer. He developed a reputation as a master craftsman who could restore, recreate and repair everything from exotic Ferrari racers to grand American carriages of the '20s and '30s.

Reflecting motoring's own diverse history, he began amalgamating styles, shapes and forms from such disparate disciplines as American open-wheeled sprint cars, American hot rods, European sports and Grand Prix racers, and elegant coaches from the Continent's Grand Epoch.

In this period, too, he refined a long-lost coachwork art of *superleggera*, Italian for "super light," a body fabrication technique used in Europe's carrozzeria or coachbuilding period. In the '20s, handbuilt cars went from one specialist to the next: frame and chassis to bodymaker to engine and driveline fabricator, then a leather shop for seats. In *superleggera* fabrication, a shaped aluminum body skin is crimped to an internal matrix of light aluminum tubing, which is in turn affixed to more substantial chassis systems.

The addition of world class metalsmith Jimmy Kilroy gave Moal the latitude to move beyond the predictable. Using his hands, eyes, venerable hand tools and the English wheel metal shaping device, Kilroy is a timeless

craftsman who intuitively shapes a vehicle's aluminum skin to both the technological challenges of its individual chassis as well as a future owner's individual vision of what his unique coach should look like — either at rest, or at speed.

Cars from this period include the blood-red Torpedo roadster for collector Eric Zausner, the black open-wheeled Licorice Streak Special for TV-film actor and avowed "motorhead" Tim Allen, and the small, elegant California V8 Special, owned by Ted Stevens.

The Moal team — which includes fourth-generation craftsmen (and sons) Michael and David — refined chassis and component systems to not only carry dream carriages ordered by international clients, but allow Steve to build sophisticated, race-bred suspension systems that fulfill his insistence that Moal cars handle smoothly and readily transfer very high horsepower to the roadway.

Upon entering the Moal works today it does not stretch one's imagination a bit to conjure a *carrozzeria* of the 1920s. Artisans are shaping, pounding, painting, grinding, buffing all manner of components — large and small — in an artful orchestration, one bent on the step-by-step-by-step assemblage of a lovely, uniquely-contrived motoring coach.



STEVE AND MICHAEL MOAL in the office overlooking the shop floor.

Although under the tutelage of mechanical engineer David Moal the company has moved to computer shaping technology, all construction and fitting is still done by hand: just as it was when William Moal and his crew fixed the earliest horseless carriages nearly a century ago in his Broadway garage.

Michael Dobrin is a Bay Area writer with special interests in California car culture and boating and maritime history. His articles have featured many of the legendary car customizers, hot rodders and boat builders who helped shape the California Dream. He was for many years a publicist with the Grand National Oakland Roadster Show. He is the former head of public information at the Oakland Museum of California, and the co-curator (with Phil Linhares) of the museum's landmark exhibition, "Hot Rods and Customs: the Men and Machines of California's Car Culture." His firm, Michael Dobrin Public Relations, is located in Alameda. He can be reached at mdobrin@mdpr.com.

The OHA summer tour program will offer two tours of Moal Coachbuilders on Aug. 1, by reservation only. Call the OHA office to reserve your place: (510) 763-9218. ■



STEVE MOAL AND JIMMY KILROY talk, surrounded by projects in the second shop where Jimmy's metal shaping magic is done.

Peter Vincent

Peter Vincent



Report from the Preservation Action Committee

Transforming lake's edge at 12th Street

By Naomi Schiff

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

Park to replace dam: On May 6, a happy group assembled at the corner of 12th Street and Lakeshore Avenue to mark the start of the biggest Measure DD project. Here comes another chapter in the history of Lake Merritt!

Originally a tidal slough, numerous streams flow into the lake, which connects through a channel to the bay. Our first mayor, the shrewd scoundrel Horace Carpentier, charged a toll to cross this channel at 12th Street. By the 1860s, the lake smelled terrible because it contained much of Oakland's sewage; Mayor Samuel Merritt masterminded a project that in 1868 created the "lake" and then planned modern sewers using actual pipes. In 1870, the lake was declared a bird sanctuary, to discourage shooting in the neighborhood with its big houses along the shore.

In the 1940s, city engineer Walter Frickstad addressed traffic problems at 12th Street with a proto-freeway of sweeping curves, automo-

tive and pedestrian tunnels, a mid-roadway bus island, and exciting lane merges (See article, p.12). Finished in 1950, the Frickstad Viaduct was later overshadowed by freeways 880 and 580, completed in 1958 and 1964.

For 140 years people have studied Lake Merritt: from making plans to fill it or build across it, to researching its water quality and wildlife. In 1988-89, a group of landscape architects and other citizens produced the Community Assistance Team Study; it planted the idea of a master plan for the lake.

In 2000, the Diocese of Oakland wanted to purchase the parking lot of the city's landmark Henry J. Kaiser Auditorium for a cathedral, planning to build on a platform extending over the roadway. OHA joined a coalition of residents and civic groups who opposed this, calling themselves the Coalition of Advocates for Lake Merritt. In a creative breakthrough, some architect members created a thrilling site plan showing a reduced-width 12th Street, a waters' edge park, and separate pedestrian and auto bridges. Community discussion ensued, and in 2001 the Diocese withdrew its proposal. In the meantime, the 12th Street reconfigura-

tion ideas were included in a new Lake Merritt Master Plan. The current project refines this vision, adding pedestrian access from the lake to a trail along the outlet channel toward the estuary.

Once the Master Plan was complete, City Council members built Measure DD around lake improvements, adding funds for the restoration of North Oakland's Studio One Art Center, the Boat House, and the Pergola at Lakeshore, as well as for urban creek preservation, waterfront trails, and an East Oakland Sports Center. It passed overwhelmingly in 2002.

Soon, the big wall at the lake's end will disappear, to be replaced by a 4-acre sloping park. The slimy tunnels will vanish. Safer, more pleasant crossings at street level will provide better access to the museum and the auditorium. A continuous shoreline path for walkers, bike riders and runners will cross the outlet channel on its own bridge. Increased tidal action is planned, for improved water circulation. Removing culverts in the channel should reduce chronic storm flooding in the Lakeshore and Grand Avenue areas, and lessen summer's stagnation, oxygen depletion and algal aroma. A bird marsh along the channel will be greatly enlarged.

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Get ready to be schooled, y'all, Oakland style!

By Kevin F. Dwyer

OHA is happy to announce the lectures slated for its fall series. Join us for entertaining, well-researched, informative lectures on topics near and dear to us preservation-minded folks!

■ **Sept. 9: Jane Powell: The Bad Girl of Bungalow Writing.** According to Powell, "There is no such thing as a pure style." She will address the transition elements and eclectic features that characterize many of the homes in Oakland's Rockridge District. She is a restoration consultant, house restorer, lecturer, and author of six books. Her writing has appeared in a number of magazines, including *Old House Journal*, *Style 1900*, and *American Bungalow*. She has also appeared on HGTV's *Curb Appeal* and Food Network's *Ultimate Kitchens*. Her lecture should whet our appetites in advance of

OHA's Rockridge Pagoda Hill House Tour on Sept. 26.

■ **Oct. 7: "We Can Do It!"** Ric Borjes, historical architect, will talk about the creation of the Rosie the Riveter/Home Front National Historic Park in Richmond, which "honors those who toiled in the arsenal of democracy." He will discuss the resources associated with the site, and why it is significant to the Bay Area and the nation. He has worked in Cultural Resources in the Western regional office of the National Park Service, at the Presidio, and at the Rosie the Riveter site.

■ **Nov. 11: From Orphanage to Art; Oakland's Studio One Art Center.** Community artist and neighborhood historian Jeff Norman will present a talk and slide show on the history of the Studio One Art Center, a much-beloved program run by the city of

Oakland since 1948. His presentation will cover the history of the 115-year-old building in the Temescal district that is home to Studio One, as well as the philosophy, vision, and leadership within both the city's Recreation Department and the North Oakland community that gave birth to and then sustained this program. Norman's projects have included Beyond the Pussycat: Nine Lives of a Neighborhood Landmark, mounted in 2000 on the former theater site at Telegraph Avenue and 51st Streets; Station 8 History Walk, a tile walkway outside the fire station on 51st Street; and several books, including *Temescal Legacies: Narratives of Change from a North Oakland Neighborhood*. (IMPORTANT: This lecture will be held at Studio One, 365 45th St.)

Each lecture is \$10 for OHA members (\$15 non-members) and takes place at Chapel of the Chimes unless otherwise noted. ■



PIP Awards go to highly-deserving projects and people

By Dea Bachetti

One of our proudest moments as an organization each year is the night we announce the Partners in Preservation. The slideshow presentation at Chapel of the Chimes is always a visual pleasure. We invite you to join us next year if you weren't able to come this year and to stir your interest, here is a listing of this year's winners.

■ Lake Merritt Municipal Boat House and Phase 1 Parks.

The Lake Merritt Municipal Boat House is a 17,000 square-foot, mixed-use, steel and concrete building on the shore of Lake Merritt. Designed by John Galen Howard, it was built in 1909 as a salt-water pumping station for the Fire Department as a disaster protection measure in the wake of the 1906 earthquake. In 1914, two wings designed by Walter D. Reed were added to provide public boating facilities. Over the next 90 years, the boat house underwent a series of modifications that concealed the quality of the spaces and added detracting elements. Starting in the 1960s, the Parks and Recreation Department used it as office space until 2004.

A primary goal of the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse project started in 2003 was to embrace the building's industrial and boating heritage and use that to define how the spaces (interior and exterior) were redeveloped for public use. Using the Secretary of Interior Standards to guide efforts, noncompatible structures (such as an adjacent restroom building) and elements were removed. The few remaining original wood windows were repaired and reused. The ceiling of the original loggia was restored and is now visible over the spectacular bar. Even roofing tile was removed only to the extent needed to do the seismic

strengthening and to install equipment. Balconies were strengthened and reframed where necessary and exterior plaster was patched. The result was that the inherent qualities of the boat house are once again clearly visible.

A commitment to sustainability was central to rehabilitation. This commitment by the city of Oakland, design team and contractor made it possible to achieve LEED Gold (pending) Certification. A variety of sustain-

Hotel, a four-story Victorian structure built in 1880. In 1946, it was extensively remodeled to become the California Furniture Company, a one-story (with a mezzanine) Art Deco retail building with a prominent marquee sign. After a long use as an art supply store, and many years as a vacant building, Jim Callahan, owner of Piedmont Piano Company, purchased the building and started his project to return the structure to its original retail configuration for use as a piano store,



DEA BACHETTI, OHA president, congratulates the team from Piedmont Piano Company. To her immediate right is owner James Callahan, then architect Lynn Harrison, and stretching out his hand is Ed Hemmat of Kashaneh Electrical & Construction. *Photo: Kevin Dwyer*

able features were incorporated into the design, not the least of which was the reuse of the building. A staggering 93 percent of the building's existing structure was reused.

Historic rehabilitation along with improvements to the interior and surrounding park were completed on the building's 100th anniversary in August 2009 at a total construction cost of \$18.3 million. *Award: Adaptive Use/Rehabilitation/Sustainable Design.*

■ **Piedmont Piano Company Building.** This building, at 18th Street and San Pablo Avenue, initially began life as the Juanita

performance space, and music school.

Key aspects of the exterior work included retention of the tile that remained in excellent and original condition and the vertical marquee sign that after careful consideration was rebuilt as an exact duplicate of the original with only the color and message changed. Interior project details included retention of original, open interior retail configuration that is ideal for the display of pianos. However, to adapt the building to all of needs of Piedmont Piano Company, it

was necessary to add main floor office space for sales and office staff; construct a stage for concerts and student recitals; and add an elevator lift for transporting pianos to the basement warehouse.

The offices were created by enclosing portions beneath the mezzanine for the offices and incorporating wood moldings milled to match existing window and doorframes. The stage was designed incorporating the mezzanine overhang and support columns, with a seating area in the center of the showroom

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between the column rows, creating a natural auditorium with excellent acoustics and sight lines. The elevator lift was constructed unobtrusively under the mezzanine with direct access to the rear loading dock and showroom floor.

Another prominent design feature of the interior is the dramatic staircase leading to the mezzanine, with its original Art Deco wrought iron railing. The railing needed to be extended at the wide staircase leading to the basement, and an exact duplicate of the original was fabricated and installed at the lower staircase.

The distinctive color scheme of the building was developed by Harrison Architects, using color palates popular in the late Art Deco period. The green and cream colors of the exterior marquee sign were chosen to complement the two terra cotta tile colors of the original exterior, and the theme is carried to the interior where versions of the green are used on the stairways, carpeting, and astral ceiling, complimenting the terra cotta and cream colors of the walls and columns.

Through the rehabilitation and adaptive use of the building, it has brought another vibrant business into our historic downtown area and will undoubtedly become another critical contributor to the revitalization of the Uptown district. Particularly notable is the careful reconstruction of the marquee sign, which maintains the deco character of the building. The careful attention to detail exhibited throughout design and construction breathed new life into this building and adapted it beautifully to serve the needs the Piedmont Piano Company without sacrificing the unique character of the building. *Award: Adaptive Use/Rehabilitation*

■ **First Unitarian Church of Oakland.** The church, designed by Walter J. Mathews and completed in 1891, was the largest Romanesque-style building west of the Mississippi River when completed. It was known for the use of materials timbered, quarried, or otherwise made in California (except for the stained glass windows) and the old-growth redwood columns and ceiling constructed with wood harvested from the Oakland hills. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, the church is also a California

landmark (896) and arguably one of Oakland's more significant historic buildings.

The earthquake retrofit and preservation project undertaken by the church for the sanctuary, known as Hamilton Hall, began on April 27, 2009, and was substantially completed by Nov. 26. This project cost \$2,000,000 and was intended to bring the church up to the "substantial life safety" standard of earthquake readiness and to meet city of Oakland requirements; address substantial deterioration; improve ease of use by improving access to the building; upgrade lighting, soundproofing, fire sprinklers and sound system; and meet Americans with Disability Act requirements, all with the overarching goal of maintaining the beauty and historic nature of the building.

The major challenge was to insert materials, especially large steel channels, to substantially strengthen this timber and unreinforced masonry building in a manner that did not detract from the open space, redwood columns and redwood ceiling. The solution was threefold: first, to insert steel beams inside the walls and alongside the existing redwood columns; second, to place carbon fiber reinforced composite over the structural masonry wall on the interior west side of the building, and insert anchors into the structural masonry wall from outside; and third, to substantially enlarge and rebuild the foundation piers. The result is a new, mostly steel framework that does not change the appearance or ambiance of Hamilton Hall.

Lighting was improved in part by using a third chandelier, one of three handmade of antique brass, from the old Page building on Franklin Street. Vintage exit signs were used to maintain historic character, and the wall between Hamilton Hall and Wendte Hall was soundproofed while keeping the appearance intact. Emergency exits were improved to comply with ADA requirements and substantial repairs made on the exterior masonry, including sandstone and cast stone repair and brick repointing where necessary. To top it off, a new roof was installed.

The rehabilitation and restoration work was beautifully done and the church and its congregation have shown themselves to be wonderful stewards of this premier historic building. *Award: Stewardship*

■ **Spice Monkey.** The restaurant Spice Monkey occupies what used to be the main por-

tion of the former showroom for the Howden Tile Company. Robert Howden, Sr. operated a tile business in Oakland from 1893 to 1923 and upon retirement had this building erected both as a monument to his career and in hopes that his sons would carry on the business to his standards. The manufacturers provided all tiles gratis and the building was finished in 1925.

In 2008, Kanitha and Guy, private contractors and owners of Spice Monkey, took over the space, formerly home to an Indian Restaurant, with the goal of creating a downtown oasis for the community. They knew the best way to accomplish that would be to restore the building back to its original atmosphere of the 1920s.

The renovation of Spice Monkey took place from March through July 2008. The owners' vision for what the space could become helped them see beyond the dirty and aging interiors to bring back this forgotten treasure. The majority of the project was completed by Kanitha and Guy and building owner Dan Fichte.

Project challenges included how to retain the 1920s look while allowing the space to function as a modern-day restaurant complying with building codes. The space needed significant work, from the clearing of the kitchen drains to scrubbing years of grease off the walls and applying several layers of primer to return the restaurant walls to their previous color. The tiles were cleaned predominantly by hand to avoid damage since they are softer than modern-day tiles. Missing tiles were replaced with loose originals.

One of my favorite things they did was to restore the fountain by re-running pipes to unclog it and removing paint and plaster on the interior. New toilets were installed for ADA compliance and they restored the origi-

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members to our roster:
 Laura Gardinier & Philo Bemis,
 Kathleen Whitlow, Cliff Franco &
 Roz Graves, Tamara Nicoloff,
 Kay Cheatham, Carl Price, Will King,
 Jerry & Michele Harrison,
 Janet Gracyk, Anthony Meadow,
 Martin Meeker

nal door. The fireplace was scrubbed to remove layers of grease.

They added in a bar area built from scratch out of recycled wood with a foundation built above the tiling using anchors between the grout so if the bar were removed there would be no trace of damage along the tiles. Missing brass pieces from the stairway and balcony were reinstalled and a custom-fabricated piece for the bottom end of the stairway for safety was created. An antique stained glass piece was installed onto the upstairs loft windows; they also created an outdoor garden on the ground floor for a more inviting entry. To top it off, an artist built custom tables that display dried herbs Kanitha had saved for years, the walls received a hand toweled faux finish, and sheetrock walls were torn down to reintroduce natural light.

Award: Restoration.

■ Interpretive Signs and improvement Along Shepherd Canyon Historic Walk:

Shepherd Canyon, once part of the Sacramento Northern Railroad route, is preserved today as a bicycle and pedestrian route. Designated a Scenic Route by the Oakland City Council and Planning Commission in August of 1975, signage was called for but never installed. The Shepherd Canyon Homeowner's Association, with help from the Boy Scouts, installed interpretive panels, benches and a Torii Gate to tell the history of the canyon. The project sought to create a greater understanding of the history of the area, while documenting the advocacy work that went into its preservation. These signs also educate people as to the process, importance, and success of civic action for preservation. The project consists of four interpretive signs and other trail improvements; it was started in May 2006 with design and conception, with sign installation completed in November 2007.

The first sign, "The Railroad History of Shepherd Canyon," details the history of the railroad, including the stops in Shepherd Canyon and Montclair village. This early form of mass transit shows that it is not just an idea for the future! The second sign, "Shepherd Canyon: The Highway that Almost Was," tells the story of plans for Highway 77 along the then-abandoned right-of-way which Caltrans had purchased. Citizen activism seeking to cancel the highway plans and promoting ridership on the BART



Kevin Dwyer

VISITORS ARRIVE at Chapel of the Chimes for the awards ceremony.

was ultimately successful. The third sign, "The Shepherd Canyon Corridor Plan," illustrates the importance of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and describes one of its first applications in 1975. After Highway 77 was cancelled, Caltrans sought to sell parcels for haphazard development. Again, citizen activism prevailed and Oakland ceased land sales until an environmental impact report (EIR) could be completed. The EIR resulted in mitigation requirements to preserve the railroad trail land and a shepherd creek trail parcel and established the Scenic Route designation. The fourth sign, "Scenic Overview of Shepherd Canyon," summarizes the history as presented on the previous three panels on one sign. It is located at the scenic overlook, with a view of San Francisco Bay, framed by a Torii gate in a western rustic interpretation of the Japanese Shinto Style.

As companions to the interpretive signs, four benches including a "Sunset Bench" face west, overlooking the bay, and another "Sunrise Meditation Bench" faces east.

Award: Education

■ **3018 Courtland Ave. and 2822 Short St.** The next two projects are residential restoration projects completed by the same individual. The Courtland Avenue home is an 821-square-foot bungalow in Maxwell Park near High and Virginia streets. Built in 1920, it

fell into disrepair over the years and became bank-owned. Mila Zelkha acquired it in April 2009 and incorporated green design process and materials to restore and renovate the home. The work done included: New concrete foundation and new roof; new wooden, dual-glazed, double-hung windows to replace some aluminum and vinyl windows (hurray) and font fenestration remade to resemble period details. A few highlights of the extremely detailed remodel include: installing a vintage stove and bamboo butcher-block counters in the kitchen, buying salvaged cast iron and porcelain tub and sink for the bathroom, and using salvaged exterior and interior doors from the 1920s.

The Short Street house is a 920-square-foot bungalow in Allendale near 35th Avenue and Penniman. Previous owners of the 1923 home had added an un-permitted third bedroom, second bathroom, and covered deck in the rear of the property. The addition fell into disrepair with issues such as water intrusion, faulty foundation, and bad wiring. Also acquired by Zelkha as a bank-owned property in August 2009, it too was restored and renovated using green design principles and materials. It was sold to a first-time homebuyer in December 2009. The uncommitted structures were demolished and the home got

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a new reinforced concrete foundation, as well as many of the same remodels as the other home. Both projects are notable for similar reasons. To look at the structures before, in disrepair and often with ill-conceived remodels, and to be able to see what they could become makes these projects especially noteworthy. The small residential structures can become catalysts of change in a neighborhood through the transformation of an otherwise uninhabitable property into shining jewels. *Award: Restoration*

■ **Karen Graf Residence, 379 Bellevue Ave.** After 99 years, a 1911 residence in the historic Bellevue neighborhood needed a major facelift. The home was featured in *Selections from the San Francisco Architectural Club 1915 Yearbook*, is a Class C Oakland landmark, and is eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources. The original architect was William Knowles, a local master architect, and the original owner was L.E. Boardman. The current owner has resided in this house for over 30 years and took on the brunt of this work. The project included exterior finish restoration work, major drainage improvements, new shingles, and a legal back porch. The kitchen and shower room received a complete upgrade and two bathrooms upstairs were modernized. Begun in the spring of 2007, and completed three years later, the refurbishment leaves the home ready for the next 100 years.

Downstairs on the main floor, the remodel induced reorienting the dark, cramped kitchen towards the backyard, which an existing laundry room occupied, and custom built tall windows fabricated to match the existing historic windows in the Dining Room were added. Custom cabinets were milled to match original cabinets in the Butler's Pantry and soapstone was selected for durable countertops. Antique tiles were incorporated into the large hood and traditional light fixtures were installed. A new shower room was added featuring period plumbing fixtures and marble tile work complements the refurbished kitchen next door.

Upstairs, the master bathroom and "sink room" were reconfigured to harmonize with the neo-Jacobean house incorporating traditional marble finishes and classic plumbing fixtures. The master bathroom features a beautiful hand-cut mosaic tile floor and antique tiles in the tub surround.

This project reinforces the historic neighborhood fabric in the face of encroaching high-density development on all sides. The home is a part of the neighborhood's renaissance with many of its grand old homes being remodeled and restored, a sign of the enduring value of neighborhood character and strong architectural traditions. *Award: Restoration*

■ **The Oakland Ballet Company.** For more than 40 years, the Oakland Ballet Company has inspired the East Bay community through ballet performances that are exciting, vibrant and accessible; by championing innovative choreographers and by presenting and

preserving historically-significant ballets from the Diaghilev Ballets Russes and American masterpieces.

In 2005, due to a severe reduction in funding, Oakland Ballet made the difficult decision to close its doors. In 2007, with a passionately-committed board of directors, founding artistic director Ronn Guidi, and a few key funders in place, it returned.

Oakland Ballet has endeavored to enable everyone to enjoy the ballet, regardless of their economic situation. As a professional ballet company that reflects the rich diversity of Oakland and through its outreach efforts to schools and senior centers, Oakland Ballet has grown an audience.

Performing at the Paramount Theatre, Oakland Ballet has brought fascinating ballets alive again, breathing life and form into gems such as Eugene Loring's Billy the Kid (Loring thought Oakland Ballet did his ballet best), Kurt Joos's anti-war classic from 1932, The Green Table, Bronslava Nijinska's Les Noces and Les Biches, the frothy Cocteau ballet Le Train Bleu, and the crowd pleaser Bolero, among many others, and presenting the works of new choreographers such as Betsy Erickson, Val Caniparoli, and Michael Lowe. Each program has brought new and reprised delights. *Award: Stewardship of a Cultural Resource*

■ **Children's Fairyland.** Happy 60th birthday to Children's Fairyland! Imagine a 10-acre park on the shores of Lake Merritt where children's literature comes to life and kids can be kids . . . Welcome to Children's Fairyland, the first theme park in the U.S. created for families with young children.

Fairyland includes whimsical storybook play sets, small rides, gentle animals, and Open Storybook Puppet Theater, the oldest continuously operating puppet theater in the country.

On a 1947 trip to the Detroit children's zoo, Oakland nurseryman Arthur Navlet saw a collusion of small nursery rhyme themed buildings, and envisioned something similar in Lake Merritt Park. He wanted much larger sets that children could climb in and interact with. With the backing of the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club, he took his ideas to William Penn Mott, Jr., director of Oakland's parks department. Mott and the Breakfast Club were able to raise \$50,000 from Oakland citizens. Earl Warren, Joseph R. Knowland and Thomas E. Caldecott were among the early sponsors. Navlet hired fantasy architect William Russell Everitt to design the original 17 sets. Everitt originally presented models that followed standard fantasy architecture. When told his models were too staid, he delightedly destroyed them and came back



WHIMSICAL, MINIATURE ARCHITECTURE has long made Children's Fairyland a favorite.

Erika Mailman

See **AWARDS** on page 9



Have we got a tour for you: check it out!

Join us for OHA's 30th anniversary walking tours! All summer we'll be roaming the town, seeing links between present and past, looking at patterns of change and growth, and enjoying the riches of our diverse and unusual city. *Most tours are \$15, \$10 for members. Reserved tours \$20/\$25.*

■ Saturday, July 10, 10 am–12:30 pm **MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY.** Meet at Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Ave. Led by Barbara Smith & Michael Crowe

Awards

Continued from page 8

with buildings with no straight sides and unconventional colors. Apparently it was exactly what Navlet was looking for.

The park opened Sept. 2, 1950. Admission was 9 to 14 cents, depending on age. The entrance to the park was the shoe from The Old Woman in the Shoe: perfectly sized for children, but adults had to bend over to go through. The original sets included Pinocchio's Castle, Thumbelina, Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Merry Miller, The Three Little Pigs, Willie the Whale, and several others.

The park was reported on nationally, with numerous newsreels shot in the park. During the City Beautiful movement of the 1950s, Fairyland inspired numerous towns to create their own parks. Walt Disney came often to get ideas for Disneyland.

Television personality Bruce Seeley often made appearances at the park to tell the stories of the sets. The constant strain of speaking threatened his voice, and he invented a system of talking books with recorded stories on tape, activated by a plastic key. Seeley took the system he developed at Fairyland to zoos and children's parks across the country, where they are still used extensively. Many artists, including notables such as Ruth Asawa and Frank Oz, have contributed exhibits, murals, puppetry, and sculptures to the park. *Award: Stewardship of a Cultural Resource.* ■

■ Sunday, July 11, 10 am–1 pm **OAKLAND'S WALKWAY & STREETCAR HERITAGE.** By reservation only & limited to 28. Call 763-9218 to reserve. Led by Jason Patton

■ Saturday, July 17, 10 am–12 noon **F. M. "BORAX" SMITH ESTATE.** Meet at Redwood tree, corner of McKinley Ave. and Home Place East (1 block off Park Blvd.) Led by Phil Bellman

■ Sunday, July 18, 10 am–12 noon **A "HILLSIDE BOHEMIA" - JOAQUIN MILLER'S "THE HIGHTS."** Meet at The Abbey, corner of Sanborn and Joaquin Miller Roads. Led by Phoebe Cutler

■ Saturday, July 24, 10 am–12 noon **PICARDY DRIVE: A STEP BACK IN TIME.** Meet at 2800 55th Ave. Led by Andy Carpentier

■ Sunday, July 25, 11 am–1 pm **NEW! LAKE MERRITT'S WEST SIDE STORY.** Meet at Lake Chalet Restaurant, 1520 Lakeside Drive. Tour does not loop, but ends at Whole Foods. Led by Annalee Allen

■ Saturday, July 31, 10 am–12 noon **GLENVIEW.** Meet at Glenview Elementary School, corner of Hampel St. and La Cresta Ave. Led by Kathleen DiGiovanni & Patsy Eagan

■ Sunday, Aug. 1. Tour offered twice: 10 am and 1 pm **NEW! FROM COACHES TO HOT RODS: A CENTURY OF MOAL COACHBUILDERS.** By reservation only! Limited to 60 per session. Call OHA to reserve: 763-9218. Led by Steve Moal, Michael Dobrin & Phil Linhares

■ Saturday, Aug. 7, 10 am–12:30 pm **NEW! MODERNIST APARTMENT BUILDINGS OF ADAMS POINT.** Meet at St. Paul's Church, Montecito Ave. and Bay Place. Led by Bill Coburn, Riley Doty assisting

■ Saturday, Aug. 8, 10 am–1 pm **SABORES DE FRUITVALE! Flavors of Fruitvale!** Meet at Fruitvale BART Station. Led by Pamela Magnuson Peddle

■ Saturday, Aug. 14, 10 am–12:30 pm **SHEFFIELD VILLAGE.** Meet near the traffic island at the southeast corner of Revere Ave. and Marlowe Dr. Led by Michael Crowe

■ Sunday, Aug. 15, 10 am–noon **NEW! CIVIL RIGHTS SITES OF OAKLAND CHINATOWN.** Meet at Oakland City Hall plaza, 14th and Broadway, near BART City Center/12th Street Station. Ends at Madison Square Park/Lake Merritt BART Station, allowing easy transit back to the starting point or convenient access to lunch in Chinatown. Led by Anna Naruta

■ Saturday, Aug. 21, 1:30 pm–3:30 pm **FERNWOOD.** Meet in front of Montclair Branch Public Library, 1687 Mountain Blvd. (near Thornhill Dr.) Led by Kathleen DiGiovanni

■ Sunday, Aug. 22, 10 am–12:30 pm **BROADWAY AUTO ROW.** Meet at 28th St. and Broadway, tip of the flatiron building. Led by Valerie Winemiller

■ Saturday, Aug. 28, 10 am–1pm **NEW! BUTTERS CANYON HIKE** Meet at Butters Drive and Joaquin Miller Road. Led by Dennis Evanosky

See TOURS on page 10

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

Lorna Jones, Vicki Bandel, Mary MacDonald, Dena Sandmeyer, Lisa Kramer, Larry Mortimer, Andrew Carpentier, Chris Pattillo, A.W. Childs, Bob & Dorothy Howell, Bruce & Candis Kerns, Lynne Costain, Susan Jaeger, Suzanne Masuret, Valerie Winemiller, Catherine Burns, Liz Rebensdorf, Michael Colbruno & Alex Paul, Huston Household, Kathryn Webb, Brenda Cooper, Jessea Greenman & Darlene Ceremello, Paul Grunland, Anne & William T. Woodell, Ralph E. Anderson, Job Household, Norman & Florence Lind, Lise Thogersen, Jane L. Erwin, Ellen Michael & Emil Kroening



Bungalow gets street cred, featured on cover

By Erika Mailman

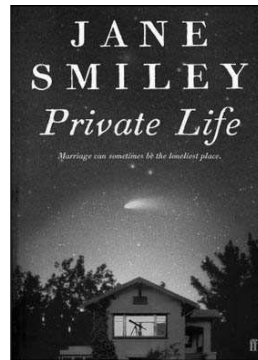
When we wash our windows and touch up paint on our porches, we never really think about the fact that our homes could be recognized — but that's what could happen to Diana Sherman. Her Westlake neighborhood home is featured on the British cover of Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Jane Smiley's latest, *Private Life*, released in May. (The U.S. cover is a photo of Edwardians watching San Francisco burn post-earthquake.)

Sherman's fiancé Dan Bluestein bought the 1915 bungalow three years ago after living in the neighborhood for a decade and admiring its gardens. Says Sherman, "We met the next-door neighbor a few months before the house went on the market, and he gave us a heads-up that it would be for sale soon, so we waited, and eventually it was listed. It's in pretty good shape as 95-year-old bungalows go, but we still have a long list of renovation projects that we're slowly working our way through."

These days, to live is to blog, and Sherman began one about house projects a year after she and her partner moved in. "Eventually this became a blog about the neighborhood, including local history. My academic/professional background is in urban history and city planning, so I love place-based history, and delved into the assessor records and old issues of the *Tribune* to find out about who had lived in the house," she says.



WALTER KIEDAISCH'S photo of the home, taken sometime 1921–1927, while his family lived there, top, and the book cover that incorporates it, right.



An amazing post details her comprehensive research of every single owner of the home, replete with bar graph showing the names and years of ownership (see <http://cityhomestead.wordpress.com/2008/12/16/whos-been-living-in-my-house/>). Comments following the post show that googling brought relatives (even great-grandchildren!) of those owners to her post.

One of those descendants inherited her great-grandfather Walter Kiedaisch's archive. He was a professional photographer who lived in the home with his wife and children in the 1920s. "She went through [the archive] and finally found a photograph he'd taken of the house, and gave me permission to post it on the blog," says Sherman.

Her blog relates the next bit of news: "Faber and Faber, a British publishing house, found the photograph on this blog while searching for pictures of Bay Area bungalows to use on the cover of the British edition of *Private Life*. (The moral of the story is: tag, and tag well!) They were good enough to write and ask for formal permission to use the image, and have included a photography credit for Walter Kiedaisch, 50 years after his death. And the icing on the cake: this gig even came with an honorarium for use of the photograph that, with the blessing of the Kiedaisch family, we asked the publisher to donate to Oakland Heritage Alliance."

Sherman hasn't read the book yet, but she's next in line after Bluestein finishes the one Faber and Faber sent. She also bought several extra copies to give future owners of the house. And that encapsulates her connection to those who once lived, and those who will, in the same rooms she now does. She too is a stop on the carefully-created bar graph.

Erika Mailman is a past board member of OHA, and an historical novelist. ■

PAC

Continued from page 4

Passed when the economy was booming, the \$40 million project is getting underway now when construction prices are lower and jobs much needed. Federal government and State Coastal Conservancy funds are assisting. Construction should be complete in

about two years: OHA should be proud of its role in supporting this wonderful rejuvenation of a treasured city asset!

Zoning all over town: The citywide zoning update continues, with community meetings this spring followed by a number of presentations at the Zoning Update Committee and Planning Commission. It is not too late to weigh in on zoning changes in your neighborhood! (www.oaklandnet.com/govern-

[ment/ceda/revised/planning.html](http://www.oaklandnet.com/govern-ment/ceda/revised/planning.html)). Other city actions moving forward this summer include a view corridors study of views from Lakeshore toward downtown, a new demolition findings ordinance articulating rules for demolition of historic properties, and a new set of green building standards. (www.oaklandnet.com/government/ceda/revised/planning.html). ■

Tours

Continued from page 8

■ Sunday, Aug. 29, 2 pm–4 pm
OAK CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
Meet at DeFremery Park, 16th and Ade-

line Streets Oak Center Historic District.
Led by Betty Marvin & Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson

■ Saturday, Sept. 11, 10 am–12 noon
JACK LONDON DISTRICT. Meet at 3rd and Franklin Streets. Led by Gary Knecht

■ Sunday, Sept. 12, 12:30–3 pm
TILES AND TERRA COTTA IN UPTOWN OAKLAND. Meet at Howden Tile Building, southeast corner of 17th and Webster streets. Led by Riley Doty. ■



Action saves important city services

By Dea Bacchetti, President

Again, hearty congratulations to all of this year's Partners in Preservation Award winners! We had a fantastic group of projects, people and organizations to honor this year; we had fantastic residential restorations, commercial buildings, civic projects, places of worship, education projects, our very own Children's Fairyland and can't forget the Oakland Ballet! Thank you to all of our winners for doing what you do and helping to make Oakland the fantastic place it is.

We were especially pleased to be able to honor Children's Fairyland with a Stewardship Award on their 60th birthday and give the Oakland Ballet a Stewardship Award for bringing the joy of dance to generations of Oaklanders. If we has a "Little Engine that Could" award, The Oakland Ballet certainly would have gotten one. To think that in 2005 they closed their doors and many of us feared the worst. In 2007, thanks to their dedicated board of directors, they were once again able to take to the stage. It is cultural institutions such as the Oakland Ballet and Fairyland, along with our built and natural resources, that make Oakland a vibrant and interesting place. It is vital that we continue to support

them so take a child to Fairyland this year or your family to the Ballet and know by doing so you are helping to preserve Oakland's cultural heritage.

I also wanted to take a moment to thank all of our members and supporters that took the time to write in and show up to City council meetings that decided the fate of Betty Marvin in our Cultural Heritage Survey department and Annalee Allen and the Oakland Tours program. We are elated to report that efforts were successful and both of these positions were retained. This underscores the importance of civic action and demonstrates that indeed, we can make a difference and have our voices heard. We are very happy that both Betty Marvin and Annalee Allen will be able to continue to do their important work.

Keep your eyes out for our flyer on our upcoming walking tours starting in July. We have some exciting new tours this year as well as some of our old standards, so keep your eyes out for our flyer and we hope to see all of you on our tours this summer.

We are also in the planning phases for another House Tour this year; we will keep you posted as planning progresses.

We are always looking for volunteers to help us with our programs. If you would like to volunteer for a walking tour, house tour, or for the lecture series, please contact our administrative director Chela Zitani at 763-9218.

I also would like to share with our members that we have set up a new email address for the president of the board so you may share your thoughts, ideas, and concerns about what is going on your community. Please feel free to contact me by emailing president@oaklandheritage.org. Looking forward to hearing from you. ■

"Baker's Gold" show will air in July

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Updating the cover story on the television program History Detectives from our last issue, Oregon Public Broadcasting has announced the air date for that episode. The segment, filmed in Oakland and Berkeley in January, is set to air on July 5, the second segment of Episode #803. It features "detective" Wes Cowan investigating a drawing by Gold Rush-era photographer I.W. Baker. ■

CONTRIBUTORS: Dea Bacchetti, Deborah Cooper, Michael Dobrin, Kevin F. Dwyer, Kathleen DiGiovanni, Erika Mailman, Naomi Schiff, Peter Vincent, 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.

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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OHA membership keeps you informed, helps make our city more livable, and puts you in touch with our many events. It makes a wonderful gift, too!

- \$45 Cornerstone** (individual): newsletter, advance notice and discounted pricing on programs, events and tours.
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Some limited income memberships are available. Call for information

- I'd like to contribute _____ to the OHA Leadership Fund, and help assure the future of historic preservation in Oakland.

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Walter N. Frickstad: Father of the Viaduct that now becomes part of history

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

When Walter N. Frickstad retired in 1949 after serving nearly 20 years as Oakland's city engineer and superintendent of streets, the City Council gave him an unusual going-away gift. Mayor Clifford Rishell presented him with a resolution designating the as-yet-incomplete 12th Street Dam project the "Frickstad Viaduct," with a plaque to be installed on the completed roadway.

As Oakland says goodbye to the Frickstad Viaduct, the 12-lane expressway crossing the estuary channel, let us recount the career of the man who lent his name to it.

Born in New York but reared in Oakland, Frickstad was a graduate of Oakland High School and a member of the University of California class of 1901. Before becoming city engineer in 1930, he worked in various capacities for Oakland's city engineering department and the State Bureau of Public Roads. He was an Army captain in World War I, and taught civil engineering at Cal.

His namesake viaduct was the product of years of planning and design. A consultant's 1946 report cited the statistic that about 179,000 persons crossed the dam daily: 95,000 in 54,000 automobiles and another 84,000 in buses, streetcars, and interurban trains. When completed in 1953 with a final pricetag of \$3 million, the viaduct met its goal of easing the traffic bottleneck at the south end of the dam. Previously, backups could reach a reported quarter mile in length during peak periods.

Frickstad fought successfully to acquire the Key Route Hotel for the city and use it to open Grand Avenue rather than allow it to be sold to developers. He developed the street and highway element of the Oakland's Master Plan of Development, still in use at the time of his death.

He was also a leading regionalist of his day. His obituary cited his "instrumental" role in the creation of Sewage District No. 1, now the EBMUD sewage treatment plant, an effort that required the cooperation of six East Bay cities to direct their sewage to a single plant and reduce shoreline pollution. Another signal achievements was to bring together city engineers throughout the region to insure that the Bay Bridge, when completed in 1936, would direct cars onto a system of roads at its east end. Original plans had called for the bridge to end abruptly at the Oakland waterfront. He also lent his considerable energy and expertise to the development of the Eastshore Freeway and the Caldecott Tunnel.

In his spare time, Frickstad was active in civic and fraternal organizations and was a



WHAT GOES UP must come down: the viaduct under construction.

noted philatelist who in 1955 published *A Century of California Post Offices*, and in 1958 *A Century of Nevada Post Offices*.

He was not a man to be idle. After the city forced him to retire at 70, he immediately returned to work for another four years as engineer for Joint Highway District No. 26, the body coordinating highway development in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. His principal assignment there was to bring to completion the "Mountain Boulevard Freeway," a north-south route intended to expedite traffic from San Leandro and East Oakland to the Caldecott ("Broadway Low-Level") Tunnel. Frickstad had been involved in plans to build this freeway, now Highway 13, since the 1930s. ■