

## Margaret Burnham's cute cottages full of sweetness

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

As we reach the season of winter holidays, some of us think a lot about chocolates. It's true that some of us also think about it on Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Halloween, and pretty much daily. Let's take a look back at one of Oakland's long-lost sweet traditions, Margaret Burnham's Cottage Candies, an Oakland-based regional tradition that once had shops from San Francisco to Stockton to Reno. You may recognize the pink building on Telegraph Avenue, Hooper's Chocolates, as an early Margaret Burnham confectionary.

The Oakland city directory for 1922 lists a Margaret Burnham for the first time as a confectioner with three locations: the central kitchen and shop at 3800 Piedmont Ave., a shop at 2213 Broadway, and a Berkeley shop on Allston Way. That same year, the business was advertising in the local papers for a saleswoman at the Piedmont Avenue shop. By 1923, Margaret Burnham's Cottage Candies had a wholesale operation as well. Shoppers could buy her treats at local groceries like Skaggs in addition to the free-standing shops.

In 1926 and in subsequent directories, a G.P. Ballachey was listed as president and manager of the company. According to George P. Ballachey's 1952 obituary and his son Robert's in 2008, he brought his family to Oakland in 1925 when he bought the Margaret Burnham Cottage Candies company. Under Ballachey, the business continued to add locations.

In November 1930, the cottage at 4632 Telegraph Ave. opened, the Cape Cod-style building we know as Hooper's. With the opening of this shop the production kitchen moved from Piedmont Avenue, and the chain had expanded to three Oakland locations, three in Berkeley, four in San Francisco, and one in Reno. The *Tribune* covered the opening with a full page of photos, advertisements, and congratulatory ads from contractors, suppliers, and fellow merchants.

Also prominently featured was a long promotional essay by Ballachey himself.

An aside: Ballachey's 1930 essay solved a nagging research problem. Over and over I found secondary sources reporting that the business was founded in 1925 when it was clearly listed in the city directories and advertisements starting in 1922. Why? Because in his 1930 essay Mr. Ballachey claimed to have founded the business in 1925, when, in fact, he had merely purchased the going concern in that year. Writers looking into this business and into Hooper's kept repeating his claim. File under "If You Say a Thing Again and Again It Must Be True."

As a testament to Ballachey's marketing flair, the *Tribune* reported on Nov. 28, 1926, that he was having an exact replica of the candy cottage built on a Dodge truck chassis



A DECEMBER 1957 advertisement in the *Oakland Tribune*.

for local deliveries. The replica was to be complete in every detail, down to wee little flower boxes under the tiny windows. A photograph remains elusive.

In 1931, another "cottage" opened, this one in the ground floor of the I. Magnin store at Broadway and 20th. As a candy store, tea room, lunch spot, it too opened with a splashy page in the *Tribune*, decidedly directed at women who shopped downtown. Again, as with the Telegraph Avenue opening the year before, Mr. Ballachey touted himself as the company's founder. He can certainly take credit for the business's expansion, not to mention some self-promotion.

In 1938, Ballachey closed the original location at 3800 Piedmont and moved that retail operation into a department in the newly-opened Piedmont Grocery a few blocks up the street. By that time Ballachey had expanded the business to 14 stores.



DELIGHTFUL DECO font graces the Thin Mints box from Margaret Burnham's.

See **CANDY** on page 2





# Candy

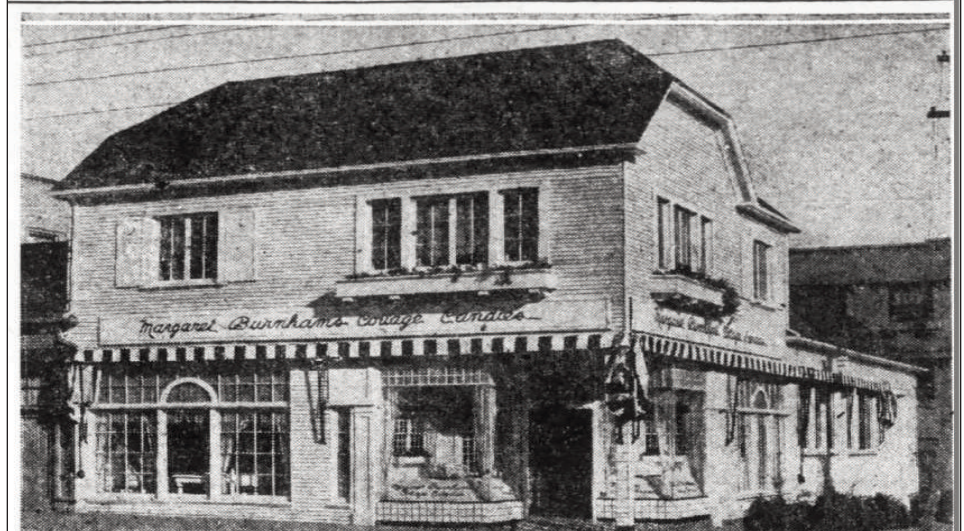
*Cont'd from page 1*

Ballachey's 1952 obituary noted that he sold the candy business "before World War II." That buyer's name went unreported but more than a decade later, on June 15, 1952, the *Tribune* reported that all 19 Margaret Burnham locations had been sold to the MacFarlane Candy Company for an undisclosed sum. MacFarlane's continued to operate at least some of the locations under the Burnham name until the early sixties. Newspapers ran ads for the San Francisco stores, and to report robberies at them.

Gordon Hooper bought the Telegraph Avenue location in 1950, changing its name to Hooper's. He later expanded to a second store on Park Street in Alameda. Hooper died in 1988, and two years later his family sold the business operations but retained ownership of the cottage. According to Will Callan's *Hoodline* article on Oct. 11, 2018, candy-making continued by various entities under the Hooper's name until coming to a final end in 2011. Since then, the building has hosted a variety of businesses: a skateboard shop, holiday pop-up, and an antiques store, among others. As of this writing, the building is untenanted.

The 3800 Piedmont Avenue and 4632 Telegraph Avenue locations appear to have been the only free-standing cottages. Others operated out of storefronts, one of which can be seen at 3249 Grand Ave. The Telegraph shop is recognizable today as our beloved old Hooper's with its iconic sign. The shop on Piedmont Avenue, at the corner of Yosemite with its unmistakable roof line is still there too, hiding behind a faux-stone facade.

**Margaret Burnham Cottages**  
(Above) Cottage No. 1 and factory, corner of Piedmont avenue and Yosemite. (Below) Interior view of newest cottage, No. 8, at Ashby and College avenue, Berkeley. A large and ever-growing volume of business is reported by I. P. Ballachey of Margaret Burnham Cottage Candies.



**ALMOST EDIBLE ITSELF**, this cottage sat on Piedmont Avenue at Yosemite Avenue.

Margaret Burnham memorabilia like matchbooks, sales promotion displays, and even a treasure chest turn up regularly on the collectors' market. You can see a couple of examples here.

Was Margaret Burnham a real person, like Mary See of See's Candies, or was she herself a confection along the lines of Betty Crocker or Mr. Clean? The answer is maybe.

Probably. For a few years anyway. City directories from 1922 through 1926 list her at 3804 Piedmont Ave., above the store. Extant evidence online doesn't provide any more verification than that, and the 1920 and 1930 censuses don't list her in Oakland. If any reader can provide an answer, this writer would like to know.

I'll bring the chocolates. ■

OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER



**THIS MARGARET BURNHAM'S** "cottage" was in the Glenn Building on Broadway between 13th and 14th streets. You can still see the etched "ashtray" of the Leighton store, but the cars have changed significantly from this 1935 shot.

**COLLECTIBLES** found online include a 1920s seasonal Halloween candy box, top left of page, and this tin trade stimulator, below.



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# Cryer Boatyard once integral part of Oakland’s canning industry

By Gene Anderson

Last month, Oakland lost an important part of its history to fire. Cryer & Sons Boatyard was in operation in Oakland from 1907 to 1989. Founded by William Cryer in San Francisco in the 1890s, the business moved—like many others following the 1906 earthquake—to the East Bay. It first touched down at the foot of 11th Avenue, and then moved to the Dennison Street site near Coast Guard Island in 1912.

Operated by Cryer and later by his sons, the shipyard originally built and repaired wooden powerboats, and, beginning in the 1960s, also repaired steel-hulled boats. The largest boat the company built was a 130-foot yacht for Oakland automaker R. Clifford Durant of Durant Motors. It built 40 launches and cannery tenders for the Alaska Packers Association, then the world's largest salmon-canning company, and during WWII it manufactured a number of small, coastal transports for the U.S. Navy. It even made a cement-hulled sailboat for then-mayor John Reading in 1974.

Like many industrial processes, building and repairing boats left behind pollution. The Port of Oakland already owned most of the land; following litigation in 2000, it purchased the rest and now leases it to the city as an extension of Union Point Park, including a segment of the Bay Trail. Using funds from a variety of sources, including Measure



**THE CRYER BOATYARD** on Dennison Street as photographed in 2013.

OAKLAND WIKI

DD, the city and the Port removed much of the contaminated soil and developed the upland portion of the property as open space.

The city had long been considering upgrading the shipyard’s building for community use. Its poor condition had made reuse challenging, but that is now moot since it was heavily damaged in a Nov. 13 fire. ■

*This article was adapted from the Wiki Oakland page on the Cryer & Sons Boatyard.*

Did you know? 59 sunken vessels (and much pollution) were removed from the estuary as part of the Oakland Estuary Enhancement Project in 2013–14.

## Cryer boat image found in old scrapbook



**OLGA**, a gasoline launch built by the Cryer Boatworks, on her 1909 test run.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

By Erika Mailman

In 2015, Stephen Canright, curator at the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, wrote a blog post about a woman named Vicki Kuells sharing images from her scrapbook with images of her family’s shipping history. Her forebears Peter and Hilda Nelson were in the salmon salting business in Alaska.

The boat *Olga* shown above was intended to be “shipped to Alaska on the deck of [a] schooner and used in the salting operations,” wrote Canright, and Peter is even one of the people pictured, along with his friends, on the boat’s trial run. The Nelsons purchased a number of smaller Cryer boats. Learn more at the original National Park Service article: <https://bit.ly/CryerOlga>. ■

OAKLAND WIKI



**THE CRYER SLIPWAY** that once permitted ships to enter the water. This photo was taken in 2013.



## OHC's Special Collections: fascinating railroad and housing history

By Dorothy Lazard

As the Oakland History Center staff sequesters inside the Main Library, we are as busy as Santa's elves, sending materials to the bindery, ordering supplies, planning virtual programming, and rearranging furniture to facilitate social distancing. All this activity is, of course, in anticipation of our yet-to-be determined reopening.

Ever-stalwart librarian Ron Heckart has been cataloging our Special Collections. We have curated Special Collections on many subjects, including women's clubs, civic organizations, local families, special events, orphanages, and schools. This unique collection is searchable in our online catalog by typing "ohr coll." Click on any of the results, and you will find a collection-level record (detailed notes about the contents of each box, the number and contents of folders in the box). Collection-level records allow you to search by location, names, names of organizations, subjects, neighborhoods, and streets that might not otherwise be accessible.

By the time you read this, Ron will likely be finished processing the Ted Wurm Railroad History Collection. Ted Wurm (1919–2004) was an Oakland-based railroad enthusiast who wrote scores of articles and six books about California's short line, steam railroads, including the best-selling *The Crookedest Railroad in the World* (co-authored with Al Graves) about the Tamalpais and Muir Woods Railroad in Marin County. Locally, he was a popular speaker who regularly gave talks at public libraries, senior centers, and historical societies. The Oakland History Center also maintains a biographical file on Mr. Wurm who lived a



**PERALTA VILLA** site in January 1940 while demolition is underway.



**PEOPLE WAIT** to see a newly-constructed model home at Peralta Villa.

fascinating, active (he began running marathons at age 55!), and politically-engaged life.

The Oakland Housing Authority Photograph Collection preserves the images of West Oakland during the late 1930s and early 1940s before the widespread demolition that displaced hundreds of people made way for the city's first federally funded public housing. These images show that the city's argument about dereliction in the community was

exaggerated, changing the lives of hundreds of families. This makes this collection an important historic document.

These Special Collections allow researchers to take a deep dive into many subjects of local interest. We can't wait to reopen the Main Library to make them available to you! ■

*Dorothy Lazard is head librarian at the Oakland History Center.*



**FUTURE SITE** of Peralta Villa taken from the roof of the Shredded Wheat Company, 13th and Poplar streets. Note new construction in the background and the older homes and Cole School playground in the foreground.





# Sculptor Akinsanya Kambon finds inspiration in Black Panthers

By Erika Mailman

Akinsanya Akinsanya Kambon, born Mark Teemer in Sacramento in 1946, has found plenty of inspiration for his art through the Black Panther Party. He took on the Yoruba name in the 1980s to strengthen his connection to his African roots, according to a Feb. 6 article in the *Sacramento News & Reviews* by Patrick Hyun Wilson. I recently saw his work at the Crocker Art Museum, in a solo show titled *American Expressions/African Roots*.

“When I first walked into Akinsanya’s Sacramento living room and saw about 50 of his clay sculptures, I was totally blown away,” says Scott Shields, associate director and chief curator at the Crocker. “I felt like I had discovered something amazing. He then said that there were several hundred more in Long Beach, which left me speechless.”

One of the pieces, “Chokwe Woman,” shows Queen Nzinga wearing a blue pwo mask. The didactic for the piece (yes, that’s what those plaques in art galleries are called! Or simply, a “tombstone” if there is no more than the name of the piece and the artist) written by Shields reads, “Kambon surrounds this figure’s eyes with ‘Panther Blue,’ a reference to the color of the shirts worn by members of the Black Panther Party. In doing so, he infuses the piece with his own personal history and honors the women members of the Black Panther Party, whose role he believes is often overlooked.”

Queen Nzinga (1583–1663) was a Ndongo queen who fought the Europeans who tried to colonize her territory, which is today’s



## THE BLACK PANTHER COLORING BOOK

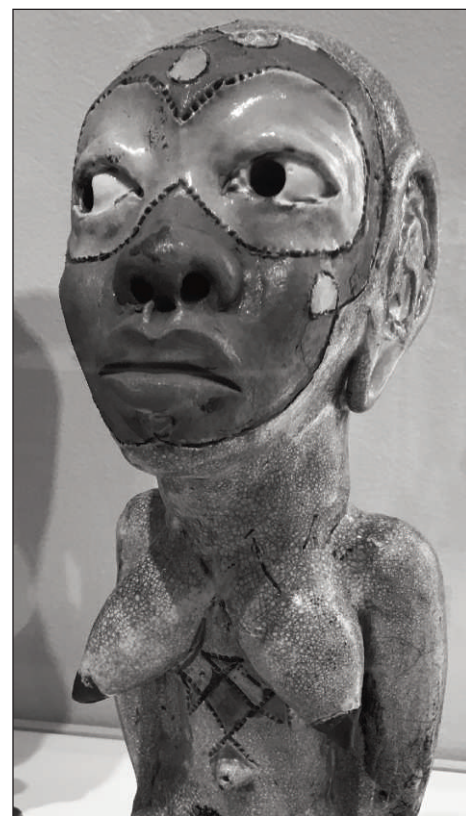
contains this page with the text, “Huey P. Newton, leader of the Black Panther Party, organized the Black Panthers to defend their families.”

Angola. She engaged in armed combat against the Portuguese and created alliances with the Dutch. She declared her kingdom (queendom?) a safe haven for people escaping slavetraders. Other aspects of her story are also fascinating: she is famous for making a servant serve as a chair so she was not humiliated by the Portuguese governor who did not provide her one, and legend says she kept a harem of 50 men dressed as women who were made to fight for the death for the honor of spending the night with her, only to be executed in the morning. This latter, probably apocryphal, story comes from a 1668 Dutch book written by someone who had not visited Africa.

Kambon is also noted for having drawn the 1968 *Black Panther Coloring Book*, a 13-page 8.5 x 11 newsprint booklet. One is in the collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In Kris Hooks’s Aug. 18, 2016 interview with Kambon in *Sacramento News & Reviews*, Kambon said, “What I was doing was trying to—in what’s really a history book—show that all of the bad guys in history are depicted as pigs. Now, it’s called a coloring book, so you can see a pig whichever color you want.” Some of the images are violent, depicting humanistic pigs being shot, stabbed, punched, burned and hatched, sometimes while children are watching or even participating, such as the page titled, “The Junior Panther Defends His Mother.”

Some sources say the FBI either created it or altered it to be more violent and mailed it to households to drum up fear and anger against the Black Panther Party. But Kambon told me in a telephone interview it is entirely his work. “I took it to Bobby Seale. He loved it and printed it up right away.” The coloring book was shipped to different Black Panther Party chapters, he said, and two weeks later, there were headlines against the book; “they claimed we were making kids study it before we fed them breakfast, to make the Panthers look bad,” he said. So the Panther leadership “stepped back,” said Kambon. “They tried to say they didn’t print it, that I wasn’t authorized to do it.”

“I don’t give a damn what nobody believes; I’m 74,” he said. But then averred that, “Children should know what the truth is. In a few years we’ll be gone; they should



ERIKAMAILMAN

“CHOKWE WOMAN,” detail, with the “Panther Blue” pwo mask, on display at the Crocker Art Museum.

know.” He added, “People lie all the time. I don’t understand why.”

Kambon’s past contains much trauma; at age 3, polio left his left side paralyzed, including affecting his left eye, a condition that plagues him still; he served as a combat illustrator in the Vietnam War where he earned three Purple Heart medals—each story harrowing, but the one involving the booby trap of punji sticks is especially upsetting; and he was accused of the sniper shooting of police officer Bernard Bennett, which had Kambon sitting on Death Row for a year, a case called the “Oak Park Four” case. Officer Bennett was shot May 9, 1967.

In the trial, prosecutors tried to introduce the coloring book into evidence against Kambon, then known as Teemer, but were blocked. Kambon was acquitted, but his time in jail was filled with abusive treatment by staff.

See **KAMBON** on page 6

# Kambon

Continued from page 5

After the trial, Kambon undertook the pursuit of art, taking ceramics classes and learning the Raku method which is used for the sculptures seen here. He earned a master's degree in art and taught African American studies at CSU Long Beach. In 2003, he and his wife Tamasha opened the Gallery Kambon in Long Beach, which has grown into the Pan African Art Galley & Studio. He believes he has created close to 4,000 drawings, paintings and sculptures. "I don't know of an artist who can paint pretty things, flowers; you can, but not when you're coming from an oppressed society. You have a duty, you have a responsibility: if you do not in your art speak about our suffering, then you have betrayed your ancestors. And you also betray your people," he said. He has used art therapy as well to sort through atrocities he witnessed while serving in Vietnam. He says the term PTSD was never used for his experiences until 2000, when Tamasha, who studied psychology, told him he had it.

■ **The rifle:** A family heirloom of Kambon's is in the collections of the Oakland Museum—yet he didn't donate it. The 1905 Winchester rifle was owned by his uncle, who was a 16-year-old Buffalo soldier at the time of the Spanish-American War, fighting in Cuba and the Phillipines. He later built roads in Yosemite. Kambon told me many extraordinary stories about this uncle and other ancestors; these deserve a fuller recounting. At any rate, the rifle was given to Kambon by his grandfather after he returned from Vietnam to honor his service. He decorated it with paintings of pigs and panthers.

When he was arrested in 1970, the weapon was seized. It was returned to someone else in a mix-up, and although he asked for it back, he was refused. "I never got it back,

but it's in the Oakland Museum," he said. "I treasured that rifle."

■ **Name confusion:** The SF MOMA listing for the coloring book has Kambon's name as Mark Teeter and as James Teeter. I asked him about the confusion. It turns out that when the FBI was putting together a subpoena for him, he and fellow Panther James Mott switched names to confuse the FBI. "It kept me from being subpoenaed," he said.

■ **Cultural references:** The 2010 movie *Night Catches Us* with Kerry Washington depicts Black Panthers in Philadelphia, and Kambon said the coloring book plays a role: "They even animated my drawings."

The 1972 movie *Buck and the Preacher* stars Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, and Kambon suspects the "Buck" of the title is his uncle Buck, whose rifle he once owned.

Chapters about Kambon's life are included in the books *Inside Black* and *Black Power Afterlives*.

Kambon and I talked for hours, and it's clear his own and his family's story, including the 1811 German Coast Slave Revolt, deserve a book-length treatment. His ancestral experience includes endless accounts of painful losses caused by racist behavior, including beheading and lynching.

He feels the Black Panther Party was weak for not defending the *Black Panther Coloring Book*.

"It was violent, but violent in self-defense," he said. "They try to make it a villain, but it told a history, what happened on the plantations and for sharecroppers, for people lynched, hanged, castrated, raped. That's why I was a Panther." He also illustrated the Ten-Point Platform and Program of the Black Panther Party.



"MENSES" is a Raku-fired clay piece by Kambon on display at the Crocker Art Museum.

"I've been fighting this fight a long time. The most powerful thing I did in this fight was the *Black Panther Coloring Book*," he said. "I feel proud that the work I did is still relevant. And I feel confident that we are going to be victorious."

As for the sculptures on display at the Crocker, his exhibition was extended through Feb. 2, 2021, making its ultimate tenure a year—which is misleading since few people were able to see it because of pandemic closures. "Akinsanya's art and ideas make me think about the world in a different way, and I think that's just about the best gift you can give someone," says curator Shields. ■

## Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members through Nov. 7, 2020:

Jeannie Graham, Michael Martinez, Chris Peeples

Holiday or New Year's gift idea: please don't forget you can give a friend or colleague a membership!

## Join our OHA Annual Meeting and party online

Please join us at 7 p.m. on Jan. 21 for our annual meeting and a presentation of 2020 OHA highlights. Look for announcements in your email and in your real-world mailbox! We look forward to a festive and pandemic-free celebration, and hope we will once again be able to celebrate in person.





## Oakland's built environment preserved, adapted, and reused in an era of change

By Naomi Schiff

Our Preservation Action Committee has been busy despite the pandemic. Here are some projects we have been monitoring.

■ **Posey Tube: state project to improve Oakland exit:** This fall, CalTrans issued a draft EIR for a reworking of the Posey Tube exit on the Oakland side. It's mostly an effort to improve traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and bike access, but historic features such as railings and retaining walls could be affected. OHA, the Jack London Improvement District, and Chinatown groups are all weighing in. OHA expects to be included as a consulting party when the State Office of Historic Preservation negotiates with CalTrans on a final design.

When it opened in 1928, the historic tube featured decorative light pillars on both the Alameda side and in Oakland. When today's 880 freeway was constructed in the 1950s, the Oakland pillars were brutally decapitated. We hope the new improvements will be handled more elegantly.

■ **Brooklyn Basin park opens:** One of the Brooklyn Basin park areas, on tidelands trust land along the shore, has opened. After years of discussion and controversy, which readers of the *OHA News* may recall, the developer removed most of the historic Ninth Avenue Terminal warehouse. Now the platform on which it stood has been repurposed as a park area. Einwiller-Kuehl, the landscape architects, proposed retaining more remnants of the old shipping warehouse than initially planned. Trusses and part of the ter-



PUBLIC DOMAIN POSTCARD

**BEFORE THE FREEWAY**, the portals matched those still visible in Alameda.

minal wall were kept as elements of the design which allow visitors to understand how big the structure had been, and interpretive signs explain its history. A thousand feet long, it was constructed in two 500-foot parts; about 20,000 square feet of the original

1920s headhouse remains, and houses commercial and public space. This new park is intended to provide the general public with an opportunity to enjoy the estuary's edge—

See **PRESERVATION** on page 8

GARY KNECHT

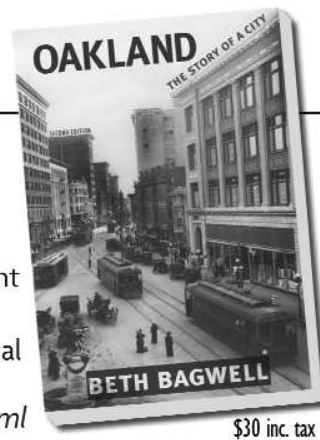


**POSEY LOST ITS PETALS:** To accommodate the freeway, pillars were cut off.

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DONATION IN REMEMBRANCE OF MARINA CARLSON  
Herbert Kennedy



# Preservation

*Continued from page 7*

not just the inhabitants who will live in the buildings around it. It is reached from Embarcadero at Ninth Avenue.

■ **Adaptation on the King Block:** At 316 12th Street, work is underway to install new commercial space in an old street front in the King Block Area of Primary Importance. Developers have removed the roof and interior, but kept exterior walls, with a plan to reuse the structure, keeping the street front intact. Discussions are underway about possibly adding a deeply set-back two-story addition in a later project.

■ **County considers proposals for 401 and 430 Broadway:** Two longstanding 1960–70s buildings on Broadway were long occupied by the county's Social Services and Probation departments, and the 1928 Corner's building, designed by County architect Henry H. Meyers. This was the original site of the old County Courthouse, before the

construction of the tower near Lake Merritt. Now, the County plans to leave its buildings, and is requesting proposals to build dense housing, with 40% affordable units, on the two whole-block sites near the freeway overpass. Three competing proposals will be considered.

■ **New Park dedicated to longtime OHA member Judge John Sutter:** Go out Burma Road off Maritime, and you can visit Oakland's waterfront at the foot of the eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and see some great views. This 22.47-acre park is named in honor of Judge John Sutter, who was one of the earliest OHA members, a former East Bay Regional Park District Director, city councilmember, and visionary. As far back as 1967, he proposed a park at this site for public recreation and access. John advocated this park for decades, and when the old bridge was taken down and the new one built, finally got a whole list of public agencies to cooperate and construct it. A pier reaches out near the site of the long-ago Oakland mole, and along remnant support columns from the former bridge. ■



BOTH: NAOMI SCHIFF



**HEADHOUSE AND FIRST 120 FEET** of 9th Avenue Terminal still stand; exposed trusses and a partial wall serve to indicate its former extent. Interpretive plaques such as the one below explain the history.

DANIEL LEVY



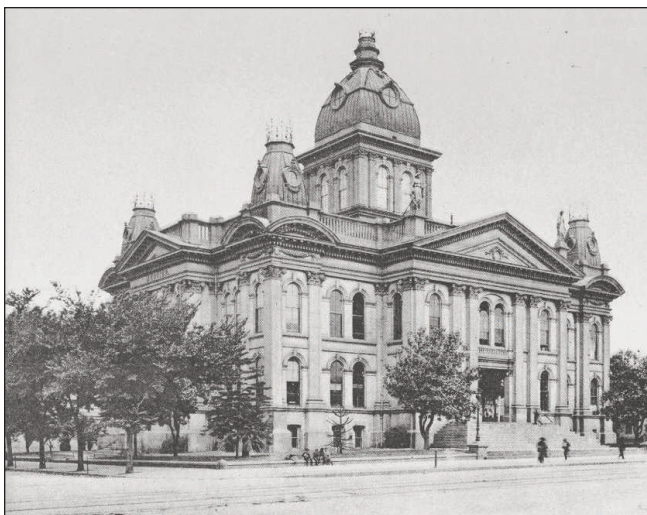
**KING BLOCK** work: an attempt to keep an old streetfront intact.

erate and construct it. A pier reaches out near the site of the long-ago Oakland mole, and along remnant support columns from the former bridge. ■



NAOMI SCHIFF

CALIFORNIA DIGITAL LIBRARY



**THE JUDGE JOHN SUTTER REGIONAL SHORELINE** on its new pier above boasts interpretive signs, benches, and incredible views. At left, the Alameda County Courthouse from a turn of the century postcard.

NAOMI SCHIFF





# Highland Hospital display highlights its long history

TOM DEBLEY



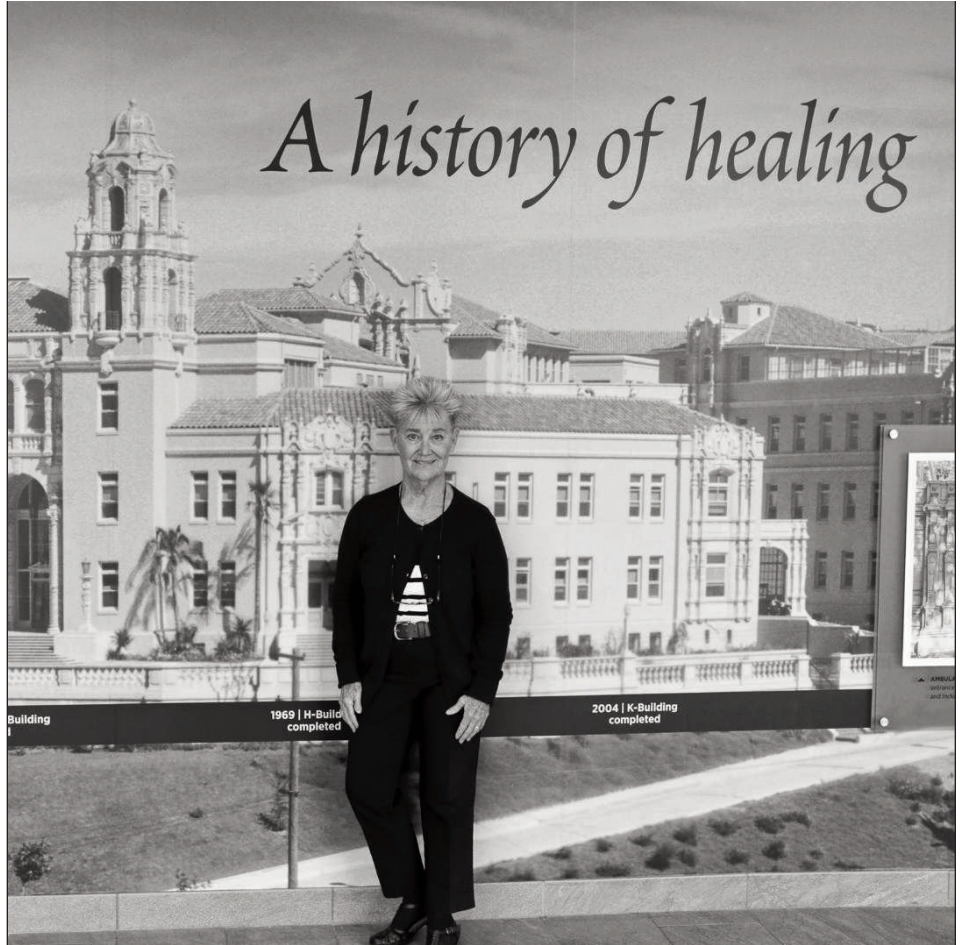
By Tom Debley

Highland Hospital’s campus renovation, approved in 2008, saw a nine-story acute tower dedicated a decade later—a segment of a three-part upgrade of the Alameda County public health system’s Oakland campus.

Highland, built in 1926, is a historically rich public hospital—and Oakland Heritage Alliance was an active voice in advocating for mitigation measures to help appropriately integrate new designs with the historic. One mitigation recommendation was to “develop a historic display of the history of the county hospitals, Highland in particular with a history of the site and its development,” including “locating it in a prominent space.”

That historic story is now in place, designed by Oakland designer Wendy Jung, who also is an OHA member. It covers 64 feet of wall space—floor to ceiling—in the fourth story connecting corridor between old and new, open to the public. The challenge, says Jung, was to “bring history to life.”

Imagery highlights the grandeur of original buildings, with intricate stucco facades and Spanish baroque design. Photos of people, including early nurses, as well as historic gardens, are featured as well. It is an eye-pleasing, grand history lesson for patients, hospital staff and the public using this expansive corridor. ■



TOM DEBLEY

**WENDY JUNG** stands before a portion of the Highland display showing the hospital’s Spanish baroque design. Below, a long view of the campus in an undated early photo.



OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER





## Keeping our landmarks out of the line of fire

By Tom Debley, President

Whenever we engage in a major preservation project, it means attending numerous meetings and hearings over a period of years, if not decades. That means your financial support is critical. It has kept us going for 40 years and counting.

This is an important reason why we need loyal members like you, many of whom have stuck with OHA over decades, paying dues and generously donating above and beyond.

Allow me to offer but one example of how time-consuming and costly our preservation work is over time.

Currently, a more than four-decade effort has tirelessly sought to preserve, restore, and reopen the 1864 J. Mora Moss House, a city historic landmark. Meanwhile, it continues to deteriorate and remain at risk decade after decade—in danger of ruin—though not for lack of OHA’s constant warnings. Today, we are closer to success than ever.

As both president of OHA and a resident whose closest park is Mosswood, I have been, over the past five years, pleased to take part in numerous city meetings and the two-year community engagement process to develop a new master plan for the park and build a new recreation center to replace the one that burned to the ground four years ago. And, happily, neither I nor others from OHA have been alone. Citizens are fully behind this effort.

The good news is the community’s overwhelming support for preserving, restoring, and putting Moss House back into public use, which was demonstrated repeatedly in the community engagement process.

The bad news is that the city, which has owned the property since 1912, continues to let it stand vacant as an unprotected, “at risk” historic landmark. It has no electricity and no security system. Windows, along with his-

See **SUPPORT** on page 11



NAOMI SCHIFF

**STUNNING WOODWORK** inside Moss House has been neglected for 60 years.

## Historical research during a pandemic

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Researchers like me depend on the physical resources of the Oakland History Center and the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey when digging into Oakland’s past. With both institutions closed to the public since COVID-19 entered our lives last spring, the researcher has to rely on the digital world. Believe me, it ain’t all on the Internet.

While researching this issue’s back page article, two big mysteries arose. One I eventually solved, but the other I still cannot. The first was who lived in the house at 14th and Union before the Heinz building was erected. If the library had been open, it would have been a matter of minutes to open the tax assessor’s plat maps to find the owner of that big house.

Lacking that, I had to turn to the digitized newspapers for clues. I searched “1264 14th Street” and “1264 Fourteenth Street,” then

sorted the results to display the oldest entries first, which revealed plenty of hits, beginning with a series of classified advertisements in 1880. It wasn’t until I read the social pages of the *Tribune* from April 3, 1888, that I could link a family to the address.

In that article, Mrs. Albert Miller of 1264 14th St. was identified as among the organizers of a dancing party to benefit the Free Kindergarten. Lucky for the 21st century researcher that Mrs. Miller’s name appeared in the correct 19th century manner, using her husband’s first name instead of her own. That detail connected the Miller family to the property, letting the story unwind.

As for the unsolved mystery, the Millers advertised often for domestic help. Why? Were they just hard to work for? Or were domestic workers forever on the lookout for better situations, leading employers to be forever seeking their replacements?

And why, why did the Millers seem to prefer German speakers? Sure, Albert Miller was born in Germany, but he had lived in this country since he was a young man of 20. By the time he built his house in West Oakland, he was a prosperous businessman of 50, so why this preference?

Library or no library, this mystery will have to remain unsolved. ■

BOTH: NEWSPAPERS.COM

**WANTED—A RELIABLE GERMAN OR Scandinavian to take care of two horses and a cow, and to make himself generally useful; must have reference; apply at 1264 West 14th street. dec7-1w\***

**WANTED—A FIRST-CLASS SECOND GIRL, must be a good waitress. Wages \$25. References required; 1264 Fourteenth street, Oakland.**

**TWO CLASSIFIEDS** from the Albert Miller family which ran in the *Tribune*. The one on the left is from Dec. 7, 1880, and the other from May 17, 1892.

**CHARITY AND SOCIETY.**  
**A Dancing Party for the Benefit of the Free Kindergarten.**  
 The fortunate ones who have received cards granting them the privilege of purchasing tickets for dancing party which will be given at Cavalry Hall on Tuesday the 10th inst., may all be expected to avail themselves of the opportunity. Tickets of admission may be obtained from any of the following: Mrs. J. C. Ainsworth, Postoffice box 353; Mrs. Albert Miller, 1264 Fourteenth street; Mrs. A. D. Starr, 1353 Grove street; Mrs. P. D. Browne, Highland Park; Mrs. W. H. Bailey, Harrison street; Mrs. J. H. Fish, 918 Grove street; Mrs. A. M. Simpson, 1265 Grove street; Mrs. A. J. Ralston, 534 Twenty-fifth street; Mrs. G. H. Wheaton, 154 Lake street.

**KEY INFORMATION** found in a simple advertisement let this researcher draw important connections.

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# Support

*Continued from page 10*

toric stained glass and glorious interior  
woodwork, have stood worn and repeatedly  
damaged by vandals over decades.

Indeed, a federal survey of the historic  
building in 1960 noted that the interior  
woodwork—clear redwood, Honduran  
mahogany, and Port Orford cedar—showed  
signs of hard wear from years of public serv-  
ice. Nothing has been done in the last 60  
years to address that!

OHA continues to fight for better protec-  
tion until funds—now estimated in the mil-  
lions of dollars—can be raised to restore Moss  
House. Our fear continues to be that we will  
lose it forever due to poor security, despite  
repeated pleas from OHA.

Should that happen, it will not be the first  
time. We faced this same problem with the  
historic Miller Avenue library, a landmark  
1914 Carnegie library. It was abandoned in  
1989 because it needed seismic repairs.  
Almost 30 years later, nothing had been  
done. In 2017, it was severely damaged in a  
fire. Still nothing was done. In 2018, a sec-  
ond fire destroyed it. Then-acting Fire Chief  
Darin White laid the blame with the city’s  
Public Works Department for what he called  
a “laissez-faire approach.”



NAOMI SCHIFF

**GABLES GALORE:** the dilapidated but beautiful Moss House

I live in fear that before money can be  
raised, we may awake one morning to find  
Moss House, too, has burned to the ground.

I am not kidding about the fear. Twice in  
the past year, when I was driving home, I  
have seen smoke billowing skyward in the  
vicinity of Mosswood Park. Both times, heart  
pounding, I diverted to the park and, with  
relief, found it was not the Moss House.

I tell you this extended story to appeal to  
you to give as generously as you can to our  
ongoing annual fundraising drive. The appeal

was sent to you a few weeks ago. This is  
costly and time-consuming work. Your gifts  
are critical to pay our office staff and our  
rent; purchase, maintain, and train on modern  
office equipment and services; develop and  
deliver educational programming and publi-  
cations; and, right now, your help will avert a  
second year of OHA revenue loss due to the  
pandemic by mounting an effective digital  
presence to continue to schedule new online  
educational events. We thank you and look  
forward to your continuing support. ■

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Gene Anderson, Tom Debley,  
Kathleen DiGiovanni, Gary Knecht,  
Dorothy Lazard, Daniel Levy, Erika Mailman,  
Amelia Marshall, Naomi Schiff

PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

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I'll contribute \_\_\_\_\_ to the Oakland Heritage Alliance Leadership Fund.

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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City, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (h) (w) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Visa  MC Card# \_\_\_\_\_

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## A venerable West Oakland institution returns to old neighborhood

*By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni*

Out on 14th Street in West Oakland, a venerable local institution has returned to its first neighborhood, creatively reusing a warehouse with a nifty 1930s style.

From its roots on Campbell Street as the West Oakland Home, to 80 years on Lincoln Avenue as the Lincoln Child Center, the child relief project began by Rebecca McWade in 1883 as the Little Workers of East and West Oakland returned in 2011 to its old neighborhood, re-named simply as Lincoln. Its new home on 14th Street is now the headquarters for Lincoln's community- and family-based services for children.

But what about the past life of the building itself? From 1938 to sometime in the 1970s, the structure at 1266 14th Street was a sales, warehouse, and distribution facility for the H.J. Heinz Company, whose Albert Kahn-designed cannery in Berkeley is a regional landmark. An *Oakland Tribune* article dated May 26, 1937, reported that Heinz had purchased the 14th Street site from the National Biscuit Company. The planned 46,000-square-foot reinforced concrete building would serve a dual purpose: the ground floor was to be a warehouse and distribution hub for Northern California and Nevada, and the second floor would house Heinz's Pacific regional sales and management offices covering 11 Western states and the Alaska Territory. The railroad spur along Poplar Street surely added to the site's appeal. According to the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, the architect of record was H.L. Porter and the builder H.K. Ferguson. It was completed and opened

in 1938. Sales and warehousing operations continued in Oakland long after the Berkeley cannery closed and canning operations moved to Tracy in 1955.

It's interesting to note that at the same time the Heinz Company was actively planning this facility, the West Coast canning industry was being roiled by a strike by the Cannery Workers Union that closed the Berkeley cannery for six months in 1937.

Since West Oakland is such an old neighborhood, we know that something had to have been on the block before the Heinz building. Research into Sanborn Fire Insurance maps turned up a map from 1912 placing a substantial house and grounds on that half block between Poplar and Union. But whose?

A stroll through digitized newspapers led to Albert Miller, banker, capitalist, and founder of one of the precursors of Pacific Gas & Electric. The family seemed to be perpetually advertising for domestic help. In the true 19th century manner, Miller, son of a prosperous German doctor and drug manufacturer, left home for America in 1848, landing in San Francisco in 1951.

He worked in the dry goods business until 1865, ultimately becoming a partner in his firm. At the same time, Miller had entered banking, first with Harry Meiggs, and later with his Oakland neighbor-to-be James de Fremery.

In 1884, he became one of the founders of the Pacific Gas Improvement Company, continuing as its president until his death in 1900. Miller and his wife Mary Ann had



KATHLEEN DIGIOVANNI

**LINCOLN** is again assisting children roughly 140 years after Rebecca McWade established a child relief project in 1883.

seven children, the most prominent of whom was C.O.G. Miller, who with his brother Horace became the owners of Pacific Gas Improvement and founders of the Pacific Lighting Company. C.O.G. Miller later served on the board of PG&E.

Two years after Mary Ann Miller's death in 1912, the Shredded Wheat plant went up across 14th Street from the Miller house, indicative of the change coming for West Oakland. Sometime after their mother's death, the Millers sold the old pile to National Biscuit Company who, as noted above, sold the property to Heinz in 1937, bringing us full circle and into the 21st century with Lincoln.

Every building has a story; some of their stories have many chapters. ■