

Experiencing a pandemic: the 1918 flu in Oakland

By Erika Mailman

The word “pandemic” used to have a historical whiff attached to it for me. I felt so sad looking at the photo of the poor souls quarantined inside the Oakland Municipal Auditorium during the 1918 flu and felt a certain misplaced confidence in our era’s relative freedom from outbreaks. The Coronavirus has changed all that, and once again we turn to the past to see its parallels. Here are some highlights from an assortment of news articles around the 1918 flu. Not to arouse alarm, but that flu epidemic circled back twice in 1919—in a fall and spring cycle—and again in 1920. These reports capture the beginnings of the influenza, through its crests and declines, to closure in February of 1920.

The CDC website says, “Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918–1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918.” One third of the world’s population became infected, and 3 percent died. Of the estimated 50 million who died, 675,000 of those were Americans.

Although there is dispute about where the flu originated, early cases came from Fort Riley in Kansas, and were exacerbated by troop movements in World War I. People of that era fought both the demoralizing encroachment of influenza and the brutalities and more mundane shortages caused by war.

THE WAR

World War I had begun in 1914. Despite President Woodrow Wilson’s initial pledge of neutrality, the U.S. became involved in April 1917 after Germans sank merchant ships—and the infamous sinking of the liner *Lusitania* brought public sentiment around to support entering the war. Families worried about the soldiers sent abroad to fight, and as the war escalated, influenza started unfurling its wretched reach.

In fact, influenza killed *ten times* more Americans than the war did. Twenty-eight



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THE MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM was pressed into service as a quarantine hospital on Oct. 22, 1918. Many pitiful details can be found in this one image: the child sitting up in bed looking towards the nurses, the hatted matron holding what looks to be her daughter’s hand, the discarded bedpans in the hallway at right. Notably, the decorative theatrical backdrop was used to separate wards.

percent of Americans were infected, a little more than one in four persons.

Perhaps indicative of the paranoia that can accompany such a scary disease, some soldiers believed the flu to be a biological weapon of the Germans, or that it perhaps arose from a deadly combination of ammunition smoke and mustard gas used against troops.

THE NEED FOR SELF-MEDICATION

Another aspect of the influenza battle that we don’t tend to think of—as some of us shelter in place nowadays with cocktails, beer, and wine—was Prohibition. In 1917, President Wilson declared a temporary prohibition on alcohol so that the grain required for production could instead be used for wartime food.

The 18th Amendment was created that same year, was ratified in January 1919, and enforced beginning Jan. 17, 1920. This amendment was the national Prohibition that comes to mind when we think of bootleggers and the Roaring Twenties, but as was clear in some of the newspaper reports, residents were already facing strictures on alcohol purchase and consumption.

Here is a chronological synopsis of some of the news stories, with interesting elements highlighted.

■ **San Francisco Examiner, Oct. 9, 1918:** An article reports that 11 nurses at Oakland’s Fabiola Hospital were ill with influenza, with ten other new cases reported the day before,

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Flu

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“making 33 in Oakland since the disease started. The nurses contracted the grip from patients.”

The grip, you ask? It derives from the French *la grippe*, the term for influenza, which has roots in the word for “seizure.”

And Fabiola Hospital, you ask? This was originally a training school for nurses, opened in 1887, at the corner of Broadway and MacArthur. Please see sidebar, page 3.

Similar to the current pandemic’s quarantining of the *Diamond Princess*, a mail steamer from the east coast was quarantined at San Francisco’s Pier 44. Some of the crew onboard had been rescued from ships that sank in a September hurricane off the coast of Mexico. The ship’s captain and some crew members had contracted the flu en route and had recovered by the time of arrival. The article contained this sobering paragraph: “Captain Jones reported that Mexicans on the west coast are dying by the thousands from Spanish influenza.”

This issue included news of Senator Hiram Johnson announcing his support of “social health insurance.” His statement read in part, “Our old individualistic democracy of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost is gone forever. No longer can the welfare of the individual be disregarded as of no concern to society.”

■ **Oakland Tribune, Oct. 13, 1918:** The city hosted two parades in one day! During the day, marchers created enthusiasm for the sale of war bonds, while at night they also celebrated the “virtual surrender of the kaiser,” said the *Tribune*. During the sunlight hours, 7,500 schoolchildren walked (and



IN THIS RARE print from a glass negative unearthed from the Library of Congress, American Red Cross canteen workers at Nevers, France, are under the direction of Mrs. Georgia Hunt of Oakland, California. They are watching a game of craps on Nov. 17, 1918, six days after the armistice was signed.

more, who were “too tiny to march,” were driven in automobiles) in the Singing Pageant of Children. They waved banners and were clumped in groups of 250, taught their songs by the public schools’ Superintendent of Music. The superintendent also organized the children’s garment colors in red, white and blue, so that “the effect produced was as of a great flag being borne along.”

That night, 2,000 women participated in a torch-lit night parade, as thousands more watched from the sidewalks. Playing to accompany the women was the band of the Moore Shipbuilding Company (two decades later, makers of WWII liberty ships). The parade ended at the municipal auditorium, not yet converted into a quarantine space, where a “monster Liberty bond sale” filled the space to overflowing.

With hindsight, some posit that the bond rallies were in part to blame for the flu’s rapid spread, as enormous crowds gathered without any thought of social distancing.

■ **Sacramento Bee, Oct. 18, 1918:** Oakland Mayor John Davie announced that all schools, churches, theaters and “assemblages either public or private” were forbidden as of midnight, until further notice. Saloons, though? Those were allowed to stay open.



DIRECTRICE Mrs. Hunt with her team of nurses. The woman to her right hailed from San Francisco.

■ **San Francisco Examiner, Oct. 22, 1918:** Just as now, the citizens and leaders of Oakland tried to determine whether mask-wearing by non-medical residents was helpful and effective. Unfortunately, the masks of 1918 were made out of gauze, a wispy fabric made of a loose, open weave: great for protecting wounds while permitting airflow, but terrible for keeping out microscopic flu particles.

A boxed element in the *Examiner* contained the Oakland Red Cross’s instructions on how to make a mask to “balk” flu germs. It involves folding gauze to a thickness of

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six, sewing pleats, and attaching “tape” to make the ribbon. The maker was urged to use black thread to distinguish the outside of the mask, an unspoken allusion to the idea that germs will surely stay on that side.

The Owl Drug Store advertised that it could not keep “made-up masks” in stock but still offered sterilized gauze. The one-yard package, which could make four masks, cost 24 cents, along with printed directions for making and caring for the masks.

It was announced that all private hospitals were now closed to the “contagion cases,” with those being directed instead to the newly-opened municipal auditorium’s isolation wards. Street car windows were ordered to be kept open, and all meetings were to be discontinued, including open air churches.

Masks were now expected to be worn as residents stepped outside. The *Examiner* reported, “The gauze influenza mask yesterday made its appearance on the streets. Interested gazes soon turned to looks of concern, and before nightfall they were as common a sight as the gas mask during a trench raid.” Clerks, elevator operators and ticket takers were now required to wear masks.



A WAR BOND RALLY in front of City Hall brought a crowd eager to assist in the war effort by purchasing liberty bonds. Note the nurses in front of the temporary hut.

Oakland took an interesting strategy to combat the shortage of nurses: “City authori-

ties yesterday ordered the release of 20 women held for vagrancy and assigned them to duty as nurses.” Saloons were not required to be closed yet, but it was “requested” that they do so.

The names of the dead in the last 48 hours were listed in the newspaper along with their addresses.

■ **Oakland Tribune, Oct. 26, 1918:** On the heels of Oct. 25’s mandatory mask-wearing ordinance, 30 “War Service special police” were to help the police department enforce it. They were not empowered to arrest citizens, but instead to gather their names and addresses, so follow-up could be made by OPD officers who would then fine the persons “not less than \$5 and not more than \$100,” or give them ten days in jail.

■ **Oakland Tribune, Oct. 28, 1918:** Despite the headline reading, “Influenza epidemic reported well in hand in Oakland,” this page included a call for all Oakland physicians to attend a conference to be held that night in the second floor ballroom of the municipal auditorium: “Will you not kindly lay aside other professional duties for a brief period of half an hour and help us to organize in detail for the medical care of these

Fabiola Hospital founded and run by women

By Erika Mailman

A doctor once told the newspaper, “I can save this patient if I can find a Fabiola nurse.” Fabiola was established in 1887 by Kate E. Kirkham, who was inspired by seeing a serious accident near her home and lamenting the long travel time for the victim to reach the San Leandro hospital ten miles away, a long, bumpy wagon ride.

Kirkham convinced 17 other women to pledge a \$50 donation, and the hospital’s first iteration began on Market Street, near 25th Street, called the Oakland Homeopathic Hospital and Dispensary. It was only large enough for one patient. In 1883, the institution moved to Alice and 11th streets, with private rooms for patients.

When Fabiola Hospital opened four years later, it was under the dictate that management would always be in the hands of a woman, and every staff doctor would be a woman. Fabiola offered Oakland its very first ambulance and dietary hospital kitchen, and offered health care to those who couldn’t afford it: all self-sufficient and without gov-

ernmental funding. Anthony Chabot donated the land for the hospital.

By the time of the 1918 flu, Kirkham had been dead 21 years, but surely would have been proud of how her staff cared for patients. Over the years, Fabiola expanded, including a Julia Morgan-built nursing home across Broadway. The Great Depression spelled the end for the hospital, which closed in 1932. Its main and associated buildings were demolished in 1933, except for the 1923 maternity hospital, which in 1942 reopened as the first Kaiser Permanente hospital (torn down in 2005). And that’s why the Kaiser Permanente building on Howe Street is named the Fabiola Building. ■



FABIOLA HOSPITAL, undated postcard.

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Flu

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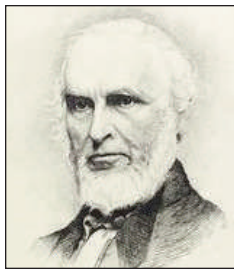
patients?” Perhaps we can conjecture that getting physicians physically into the building where, on the main floor, so many patients languished, was a strategy to get them to help more.

The paper also reported Dr. George Ebright, president of the State Board of Health, saying, “The State Board of Health is distributing vaccine, but we are not placing too much confidence on its results.” He added, “The mask is the surest safeguard and citizens who wear them and gargle with an antiseptic solution are practicing the best rules.” Meanwhile, in New York, a steam shovel was used to create a trench for temporarily interring the dead because of a shortage of grave diggers.

The page was filled with statistics. The number discharged from the auditorium as cured was double the number of those who had died. The count at noon at the auditorium was 224 cases, arriving more slowly as well, averaging “less than one in half an hour.” A boxed front page tally tracked how many patients, day by day, were sick, released or deceased. On Oct. 27, there were 100 new cases, 160 released, and 22 dead—but overall since Oct. 2, there had been 3,878 cases, of which 2,529 were still “on hand,” with 161 dead. Some math leads to the realization that 1,188 must have recovered and gone home.

Now, along with vagrant women, Oakland’s schoolteachers had been organized into nursing.

■ **Oakland Tribune, Nov. 9, 1918:** Vigilant San Francisco police had taken to meeting the ferry coming in from Oakland to arrest commuters as they arrived, including those who had masks but had let them slip to “adorn their chins after the fashion of late [poet] John Greenleaf Whittier’s whiskers.” Charles Mark of Oakland was sentenced to 10 days in jail. A repeat offender, he had previously served time in Oakland’s jail because he “absolutely refused to mask himself.”



SLIPPED MASK WHISKERS on poet Whittier.

NYPL DIGITAL COLLECTIONS



RED CROSS WORKERS in Oakland sew masks out of gauze and ribbon.

■ **Oakland Tribune, Nov. 11, 1918:** Armistice Day! Residents had been hoping for and even expecting the news of the signing of the peace agreement with Germany. The *Tribune* had been keeping its news service wires open for three days and nights, with newspaper staff anxiously waiting “to prepare and serve this great news . . . The newsboys especially were restless, eager, like greyhounds at leash, like runners at the barrier, chafing to be away with their cry.”

It came just before midnight to the *Tribune* office’s receiving station. Telegraph operator Abe Simon was the first to hear word in the East Bay, “but he didn’t keep it to himself for more than a fraction of a second.” Three “bombs” were instantly set off over the *Tribune* tower in red, white and blue, and “every whistle” in Oakland sounded. Anyone who was in bed immediately jumped out of it. Fire bells and church bells pealed out. “Every door bell was rung where there was not a light already and the glad news was told that not another American boy will need to offer himself a sacrifice,” said the paper.

“End of war causes wild celebrations” was one thrilled and relieved headline, while “Thousands in pandemonium over peace” read another. Everyone came downtown to the streets to share their jubilation. “Automo-

biles, trucks, street cars freighted with masked but joyous humanity filled the streets,” said the *Tribune*. A “serpentine race” was concocted, as strangers jumped off the sidewalk and joined arms, “caught on” to the



FAMOUS CAPTAIN WILLIAM SHOREY succumbed to the flu in 1919. He was a pioneer, as an African American master of a ship only 20 years after slavery was abolished, and with largely white crews. Learn more on page 12.



snake as the line grew at every block. Steamboat captains out on the bay could hear the singing from outside City Hall. In Chinatown, celebrants set off firecrackers, and one man even put gunpowder between two anvils “and shook Eighth Street with the blasts.”

Other moments of exultation captured by the reporter: a man turning somersaults on a truck driven through the crowds, a parrot squawking, “We’ve won! We’ve won!” out of a Clay street window, and a man who rolled a keg out into the streets, inviting everyone to drink until the police made him wheel it back. Nurses piled out of the auditorium onto the streets, still masked, to celebrate the end of the war.

“Everyone was smiling under his mask—their eyes showed it—the noise proclaimed it—and confetti scattered over it,” read the report. Another article on the same page waxed poetic, “Millions of throats have broken into audible song, raucous perhaps but such a glorious raucousness that even the stars must rejoice.” This celebration, in the midst of all the worry over the pandemic, must have been incredibly stirring to be part of. Festivities in the streets lasted until past 2 in the morning.

Not a single news report about influenza marred the joyous front page, but there was a small advertisement at the bottom left about how “Papa’s Cold Compound” could end colds and the gripe in just a few hours.

And, buried on page 14, a longer article told personal anecdotes from the illness. One talked of how a family, struck with influenza, had sent their baby to the Prescott Day Nursery (Campbell and 9th streets), and when they had recovered days later, sent the father to fetch the child. The child could not be found, and there was uproar until the mother sent a photograph of the baby, which all the nurses howled at because they instantly recognized the child—better than the father! The baby had been there the whole time.

Another tale was of two boys who fell ill. The father did not speak much English and could not get a doctor to come to the family home despite trying for four days. The elder son died. The father happened to read a newspaper report that the Red Cross could send doctors and nurses—and so the younger son was treated and recovered.

A third story was of a husband and wife lying in adjacent cots at the municipal audito-



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IT’S PROBABLY HARD for us to conceive of the incredible, ecstatic joy Oakland experienced as the end of WWI was announced. This image of Broadway, near City Hall, captures the pandemonium in the streets.

rium. He had just drifted off to his first sleep in days, when “the little partner of his years reached out her thin, white hand and bid him goodbye before she slipped away into the shadows. When he awoke, freed from death, they had already taken her poor, little body away.”

The article, headlined, “Emergency brings out heroines: lights and shadows of the fight,” tried to end on a high note, praising the “weary little clerks from the downtown department stores who have been the heroines of these critical times,” who came to the auditorium after work for a six hour volunteer shift nursing the ill. It ended with a plea: “Volunteers to aid in the end of the epidemic fight are still needed desperately.”

In the wake of the war’s end, the flu did seem to be abating. The auditorium’s emergency hospital, which had tended to thousands of patients starting on Oct. 22, closed on midnight Nov. 15, and four days later, the mask ordinance was removed.

■ **San Francisco Examiner, Jan. 1, 1919:** “Masks May come Again in Oakland” was the headline. 1918 may have closed, but the first day of the new year brought continued worry. The *Examiner* reported, “Concern over the increase in influenza cases in the east bay cities resulted yesterday in consultations among the authorities of Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda.” However, this meeting did not close with an ordinance for mask usage. Statistics had risen since the last count: “For the entire epidemic, Oakland has

had 7,093 cases and 677 deaths. Yesterday 55 cases and seven deaths were reported.”

■ **Oakland Tribune, Jan. 10, 1919:** Worry grew as the headline announced, “147 new flu cases here in 24 hours,” with 12 deaths in the same time period. This was a definite uptick from ten days ago, but the secretary of the board J.H. Mellos called this a “small number” and hoped it represented a waning, but added that he would not be surprised if doctors weren’t properly reporting all their cases.

Sometimes reading the news of the past brings a jolt to one’s heart, and this next article qualifies, a brief reporting about a Mrs. Bernard T. Miller convalescing at her East 25th Street home along with her five children, when the youngest, a baby of 17 months, died. The father was stationed at Camp Alexander in Virginia, so the sickly Mrs. Miller was handling the entire family’s illness, as well as her own, alone, along with this new tragedy.

The rest of the page contained notices of deaths from influenza, including a report of a “wedding turned to funeral by plague” before the groom, coming in from New York, could reach his Oakland bride. A lengthy advertisement for Oil of Hyomel advised that using its germicidal inhaler several times a day would ward off a second epidemic, citing that “hundreds of people in this vicinity used Hyomel in this way during the recent crisis and avoided danger.”

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Flu

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■ **Oakland Tribune, Jan. 12, 1919:** In a boxed notice, City Health Officer Dr. Daniel Crosby referred to the flu as a “cold,” possibly to downplay panic, even as the article to its side pronounced, “Famous sea captain is flu victim” (it was San Francisco’s Captain Emery Rice, whose fame included being in “command of the first American vessel to sink a German submarine”). “Go to bed if you have a cold and stay there,” Dr. Crosby advised. “Take good care of yourself and you’ll help not only yourself, but your city.”

Berkeley’s Anna L. Saylor, a member of the legislature (women had gotten the vote in California in 1911, well before suffrage passed nationally in 1920), was stricken with flu but determined to maintain a grasp on her hard-won seat. She said she would be happy to be carried into the Assembly chambers on a stretcher if her vote was required.

The flu numbers in Oakland continued to waver up and down. As counted by the board of health each day at 5 p.m., there had been 167 new cases and 12 deaths.

“The health department cooperating with the Red Cross is making a strenuous fight to check the ravages of the disease which is again menacing the community,” the article read under the headline “Decrease in flu shown in report.”

Dr. Crosby was again quoted, saying, “The present weather is apparently just right for the propagation of the disease, and each and every citizen should constitute himself a committee of one to see that all proper care is taken to prevent those suffering from bad colds from infecting others.”

A meeting of the public health committee of the Alameda County Medical Society held at the Hotel Oakland led to the suggestion that “all persons congregating” should wear a gauze mask of four to six layers, depending on the tightness of the mesh,” yet this was only an advisory.

“Houses need not be placarded,” concluded the committee; in other cities such as Alameda, homes where flu was present bore a placard to alert others.

■ **Oakland Tribune, Jan. 14, 1919:** The Red Cross Motor Corps delivered meals to

Caught without his mask, Mayor Davie pitches a fit

By Erika Mailman

By the time of the 1918 flu, Oakland’s Mayor John L. Davie was three years into his second stint as mayor (he served five terms in total). The walrus-mustached gentleman had already experienced much excitement, serving as a mule driver on the Erie canal as a youth and fleeing Chicago’s Great Fire to wind up as an opera singer in San Francisco (also, rancher, butcher, actor, attorney, and bookstore owner). His 1931 autobiography is charmingly titled, *His Honor, the Buckaroo*. In photos, he resembles the man on the Monopoly box.

A year later, Oakland considered itself out of the woods. The municipal auditorium’s emergency hospital had closed in November 1918—yet in January 1919, there was pressure to re-issue the call for masks as cases were on the rise again. City Council met to decide whether to compel residents to wear them. A surprising opponent was Mayor Davie himself, who recounted his tale of being arrested for not wearing his mask. On Jan. 16, he had been staying at a hotel in Sacramento. Plainclothed officers entered the lobby, where the *Sacramento Bee* says they “espied the Mayor of ‘My City’ sitting in a chair, with his mask gracefully draped over one ear. As they approached, Davie put the mask in place, probably noting that the men had the air of officers.” (“My city” alludes to the slogan “My city Oakland” which appeared on postcards and banners of the time). Why was his mask at a dangle? So he could smoke his cigar, naturally.

The mayor was arrested and brought to jail because the officers couldn’t make change for his \$20 bill; bail was \$5. On the way, he threatened to ring the Police Commissioner and burst into swearing: language “too foul to repeat in print.” He ranted against the hotel not being able to protect its patrons and the doctors who passed the mask ordinance, and



MAYOR JOHN DAVIE with cast members of *Our Gang* in 1927.

declared, “If a member of the Oakland police did a trick like this, I would put him off the force.” He also made a curious and repeated assertion, that Sacramento was a “jay town”—the insult even appeared in the *Bee*’s headline.

Quick detour: a jay is a “greenhorn or rube.” This term persists in the word jay-walker, and mindblow: there’s an older word “jaydriver,” a person who drives their carriage erratically. Merriam-Webster says the term originates from Kansas, which is, perhaps not unrelatedly, called the Jayhawk state.

Mayor Davie cooled his heels in the Sacramento jail until another man was arrested with enough cash to make change. He failed to make his court appearance, “and the five-spot was added to the city’s exchequer.” At that City Council meeting days later, his opposition proved persuasive, and the mask ordinance did not pass.

Hindsight is 20/20, and we who live in the year 2020 might take note of the fact that influenza resurged nationwide in spring/fall cycles until early 1920. ■

Historical tidbit!

Oaklander Allen Hoskins, the boy dressed as a girl directly in front of Mayor Davie in the photo above, played the very popular character Farina in *Our Gang*. After his theatrical career ended, he worked for Alameda County in rehabilitation therapy for many years.

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members through March 2020:

Robert Brokl, John Citron, Ray Craun, Susan Fitzgerald, Mike Healy, Lorryne Leong, Sarah Miller, Adrienne L. Morgan, Edmund Ord, Jared Stratton, Lise Thogersen, Susan Tierney

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Flu

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sick families, cooked in the kitchen of the Congregational Church by repurposed school teachers. The paper said, "As soon as a stricken family is reported to the food bureau as needing food, food is sent."

Moreover, volunteers had responded to a call to go into homes to assist with housework and tasks that ill families might need.

■ **Stockton Daily Evening Record, Jan. 17, 1919:** Seven hundred soldiers returning from the French front received a hero's welcome as they marched through San Francisco streets. Once on Market Street, a band played as they passed under a "mother's arch" erected for the purpose and attended a welcoming ceremony. They were given cigarettes and candy by the Red Cross. Afterward, they all went to be demobilized at the Presidio, which included an anti-flu quarantine which was going to be fast-tracked. "It is likely that the men will arrive home in small squads throughout the coming week."

■ **Oakland Tribune, Jan. 21, 1919:** A man who had been languishing in jail since Dec. 8 pressed for a jury trial and was told by the judge, "I'm not going to bring a jury into this court while the epidemic is raging."

■ **Oakland Tribune, Feb. 18, 1919:** Oakland's death toll from the active period of the flu, calculated from September 14 and ending February 8, was 974. San Francisco's total from the same period was 3,163. The newspaper clipping also included pneumonia deaths: 239 for Oakland and 561 in San Francisco.

■ **Salina Daily Union (Kansas), April 14, 1919:** Phoebe Apperson Hearst died at age 76 of pneumonia which developed out of the flu. Her only child, noted newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, was at her bedside in Pleasanton as she died. She had been UC Berkeley's first female regent and a major benefactor, including founding the museum of anthropology which bears her name.

Frighteningly, following the cycles of Spring and Fall sickness, the flu was in the news yet again in 1920.

■ **Fresno Morning Republican, Jan. 30, 1920:** The headline ran, "Report spread of flu from all over nation," and the article's dispir-

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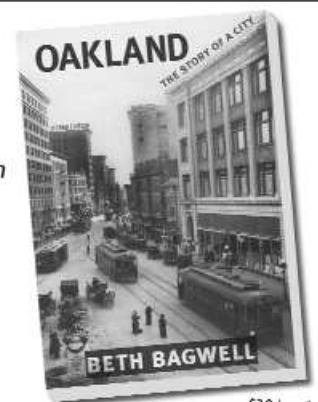
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Cubist dream will come true for you!

By Naomi Schiff

As part of the general pandemic shutdown, planning and building functions at the city of Oakland are limited, and few meetings have been held. Nonetheless, some activities continue. (If you see non-permitted construction, you can still reach the building department to submit inquiries, although the staffers are largely working from home.)

■ **CCA campus redevelopment:** Recently, there have been key changes to a proposal to build a large housing development at the soon-to-be-former California College of the Arts campus. The environmental review is still in progress, but the Emerald Fund has advised that the project description will likely change to eliminate a proposed 19-story tower on the property, and to construct lower buildings instead, perhaps preserving more of the landscaped area. The consultants and the city are still studying the implications of a Historic Resources Evaluation by Page and Turnbull, which evaluated both the landscape and general campus area and its numerous buildings that contribute to the Area of Primary Importance. The developers and the city will explore several possibilities. Depending upon which version of the proposal is selected, the total number of units is likely to be reduced from its peak of approximately 590 units.

In addition, CCA will now likely sell its dormitory across from the campus, Clifton Hall, as a separate transaction, not as part of the Emerald plan. Neighborhood groups such as Upper Broadway Advocates and the Rockridge Community Planning Council are

now hearing about these revisions, as community discussion resumes.

■ **Downtown Specific Plan:** This long-running planning effort, which will likely culminate in revised zoning designations in the downtown area, lumbers on; a community advisory group is to convene May 14. When last heard from, a consultant was working to assess the potential for generating community benefits in cases where density would increase. The result of that initial study claimed that insufficient profits would be generated to support much in the way of such benefits. The consultant was asked to do some more work, but no further results have yet been revealed. Now, with uncertainty about the pandemic's economic impact and the timing of an eventual recovery, OHA will advocate strenuously to at least incorporate a Transfer of Development Rights program to protect historic buildings. We will also be reviewing proposed zoning changes in detail to attempt the continued preservation of important areas with architectural, cultural, and historic importance. Working with other community

groups, OHA will propose workable standards that preserve a sense of place and opportunities for small businesses, cultural and non-profit endeavors, and a full economic range of residents.

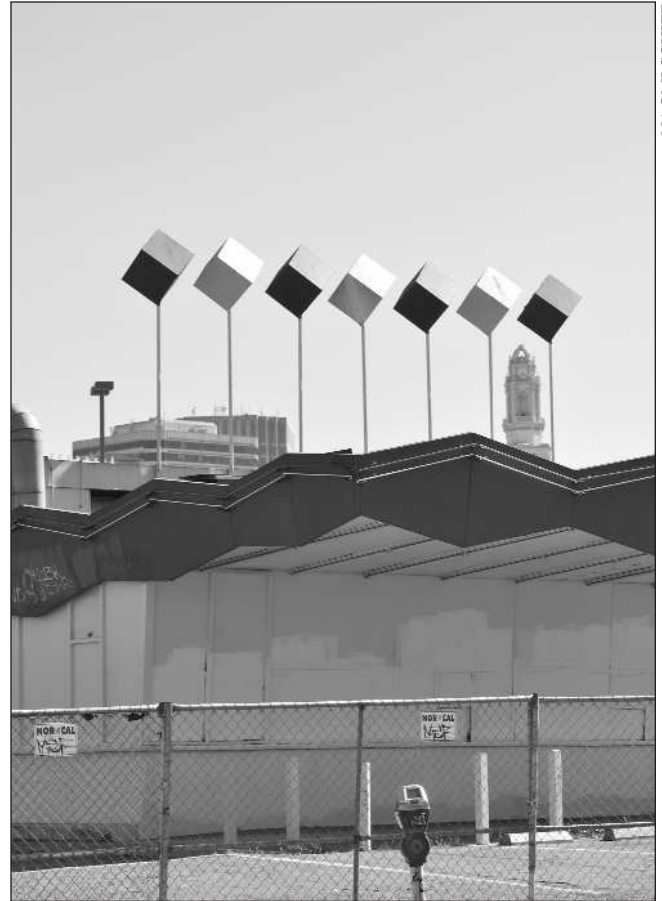
■ **A small but significant project:** At 369 MacArthur, the subject of a lot of media attention a few years ago, OHA was delighted to review and support an application to restore the front of a serviceable shin-

gled Craftsman dwelling, with addition of a compatible expansion in back.

The site was notable for a fracas in which a previous owner had attempted to demolish the house around a tenant who was still living in it, had cut down a very large redwood tree, and then had left the house abandoned, leaking, and blighted. New owners plan to bring it back and rescue the neighborhood from an unfortunate period of distress.

■ **Looking for a home for cubes in the sky:** Owners of the large site known as the Eastline Project seek someone to take the old Kwik Way (Space Burger) structure, with its cubes in the sky, and its overhanging zig-zagged front roofline.

Constructed in 1953, this great Googie drive-in is small enough to be moved, and the developers would like to help. It needs a new site and someone to take it on. Please contact OHA by email or phone if you have ideas, a location, or an inspiration! ■



STYLE CONTRAST: the Googie drive-in needs a new home, but City Hall in the background is staying put.

NAOMI SCHIFF

NAOMI SCHIFF



CRAFTSMAN HOUSE on MacArthur needs a little work after much abuse, but it has great bones.

Coincidence claims sisters

By Erika Mailman

Just one of many heartbreaking stories, the tale of Oakland sisters Ruth and Viola Lundholm captured imaginations and headlines.

In June 1919, they were en route to the war front and “purely by chance,” says the *Oakland Tribune* of June 17, placed on the same vessel. The two Red Cross nurses, both graduates of Merritt Hospital’s nurses’ training school, must have thought it incredibly good fortune until pneumonia and flu took them before they ever reached the soldiers they were determined to assist.

Viola died on board ship Oct. 11 and Ruth six days later at a hospital in London. “The two sisters who were stricken while on their way to aid in what is perhaps woman’s greatest service in war now find a resting place in the Magdalen Hill Cemetery in Winchester, England,” says the *Tribune*. ■



BOTH PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

OAKLAND SISTERS Ruth (left) & Viola Lundholm were Red Cross nurses who died in June 1919, while en route to assist soldiers overseas.

Flu

Continued from page 7

iting news was that influenza and pneumonia were back. In Michigan, there were 11,610 cases of flu (an increase of 2,418 in the past 24 hours), while L.A. Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City and Salt Lake reported much less dramatic increases.

The use of whiskey warranted its own article, with the sale of more than one pint over ten days forbidden by law, “even if the person’s life depends on having more alcohol,” according to California’s prohibition enforcement officer Frank M. Silvia. An Oakland doctor had petitioned Silvia for relief for one of his patients who needed more than the allotment, and so Silvia had brought the case to the internal revenue bureau—which ruled to uphold the limit. Luckily, the Oakland patient was reported to be recovering.

It may surprise readers that the IRS’s original iteration, the internal revenue bureau, was involved in enforcing Prohibition.

Another article reported, “the bureau had compiled a system of permits, providing a definite and fixed channel through which all intoxicating liquors must move and by which hereafter the government will know the loca-

tion of every gallon of distilled liquor within the nation’s boundaries, except that stored in private homes.” The permits were held by pharmacists and prescribing doctors (who were required to use a specialized prescription pad) and were obtained by application to the federal prohibition director.

■ ***Oakland Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1920:** The city was congratulating itself that influenza was dying down, with only three new cases and one death in the past three days. City Health Officer Dr. Crosby, who had been in this position in 1918 as well, said that the disease “had been eliminated as an epidemic and that if people will exercise due care and avoid exposure, there will be no recurrence.” The tally this time, for the worst week of the flu taking place in the week ending Feb. 7, was 3,065 casualties in the nation’s 46 largest cities (with 38 deaths in Oakland that week, and 965 in New York).

Perhaps some of us see strong similarities between our 2020 pandemic and the 1918-1920 flu. Now, as then, we thank our front-line medical workers and volunteers for doing everything possible to fight disease. ■

Many thanks to Naomi Schiff for research assistance.

Ducks rejoice! Wildlife refuge turns 150

By Erika Mailman

This year marks a special anniversary for Oakland’s favorite lake, its 150th year as a wildlife refuge. On March 18, 1870, the lake became the “first wildlife refuge declared by any public body or agency anywhere in North America,” wrote Fred Garretson in the *Oakland Tribune* on the 100th anniversary of the declaration. Yes, we beat out Yellowstone by two years! The state legislature did the honors to make it illegal to shoot birds at the lake, and to protect the “newly-created lake.

Previously known as Laguna Peralta, Lake Merritt was a marsh shaped quite differently

See **REFUGE** on page 10

Sally Woodbridge, 1930–2019

Sally Woodbridge, the noted author and architectural historian, passed away in November. Her outstanding books and essays on Bernard Maybeck and John Galen Howard and other aspects of architecture are just a small part of her legacy. To learn more about her life and accomplishments, visit <https://legcy.co/2T7Wxlg>. ■



A treasure trove of glass negatives comes to light, with new views of Oakland

By Erika Mailman

It's not often we get to "break news" here, but this is the first time this image has been seen outside the realm of Facebook. Photographer and vintage camera collector Mike Ahmadi was invited into his Mariposa neighbor Howard's barn to see his collection of glass plate negatives—and a world of incredible images came to view under Ahmadi's scanner. With the exception of one image, "this is the first time anyone alive today has seen these images," says Ahmadi.

It's very time-consuming to create the prints, but thanks to great interest in the Facebook group "In Howard's Barn," Ahmadi has been trying to release one or two every day, and a beautiful collaborative process arises as eager commenters jump on researching the images. "People start doing the detective work," says Ahmadi, who plans to create a coffee-table book of the images (over 150 of them) once the project is over.

As for the barn-owning Howard, Ahmadi says, "He's got a small Smithsonian Institu-



COURTESY OF MIKE AHMADI

CARL DECHOW got a liquor license at 1080 Fourteenth Ave. in September 1890, as noted in the *Oakland Tribune*. By this time the Brooklyn neighborhood had become part of the city of Oakland. This building was probably near where the 880 freeway cuts off Fourteenth Avenue today.

tion in there." We all await with excitement the new images. Two highlights were a photograph of President Teddy Roosevelt riding in his carriage through Oakland streets, perhaps on his way to deliver the 1903 commencement speech at UC Berkeley, and a

strange image that seems to depict a medical school dissection of two corpses. Ahmadi has agreed to write up a story of his find for our next issue. In the meantime, start visiting <https://www.facebook.com/InHowardsBarn/> to be part of the daily fun! ■

Refuge

Continued from page 9

than today's loose heart. It was the place where four creeks came together from the hills, and Native Americans used these waterways to hunt waterfowl. Early mayor Horace Carpentier installed a tollbridge where previously boats or long trips brought one around the edge of the lake—its placement is where the 12th Street dam now exists, in front of the memorial auditorium.

Dr. Samuel Merritt saw that the goopy, stinky mass could be made into a tidy lake for recreation. He paid \$20,000 of his own money to build the dam that stopped the creep of tidal waters, completed in 1869. Bay Area birds saw an attractive span of sparkly water and started stopping by. Beloved Oak-

land naturalist Paul Covel told the *Tribune* in 1970 that he believed Merritt wasn't necessarily against the hunting of waterfowl at the lake, but that loud gunshots were scaring folks who might purchase Merritt's real estate holdings along the shore.

Merritt got the state legislature to pass the sanctuary bill, signed into law by Governor Henry Haight. Mayor Mott helped create Lakeside Park, and Mayor Davie (see story on page 6) gave the birds their own island so they would not have to deal with humans or chase-happy dogs. The island used fill from the creation of the municipal auditorium and was opened "for business" in 1925.

Davie even ran a water line out to the island, to provide a fresh-water drinking basin for the fowl and irrigate plants at their new digs. Davie's opponents called the island "Davie's Folly," but the ducks took to it...

like a duck takes to water. That little island is still there today, along with four others created in the 1950s with the efforts of Covel, near the Rotary Nature Center (now closed, but once with four full-time naturalists working there). ■

Thanks to our volunteers

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Judith Offer: "Scenes from the Life of Julia Morgan"

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Shifting gears a bit to stay connected with you

By Tom Debley, President

My strongest memory from when I moved to Oakland 40 years ago is of befriending an elderly woman who told me her story of the 1918–20 flu pandemic. My wife and I used to take our friend to dinner regularly. She loved Brennan’s Restaurant and, like me, a gin martini.

In 1918, she was a young newlywed with an infant son when the pandemic hit. Unlike Covid-19, a unique feature of that pandemic was high mortality in healthy people, including those between the ages of 20 and 40. One evening over our martinis, she told me how her young husband, in his early 20s like herself, fell victim early in the pandemic and, in a few days, died. With her infant, she was suddenly a widow. That little boy also survived the pandemic, and I was happy to remain his friend until he died at age 84.

This story came flooding back into my memory in the early days of Covid-19 when word came from Honolulu that a dear friend of almost 40 years had died – a prominent South Pacific botanist and only the third pandemic victim in Hawaii. It was a stark reminder that Oakland’s history of the influenza pandemic is a story of so many individuals’ lives and deaths.

Thus, on behalf of OHA’s board of directors and staff, I want to share our most heartfelt wish that you, your families, and your friends are well, and that in this difficult and challenging time disruptions to your lives are not overwhelming.

As you must know by now, pandemic disruptions are being felt within our organization. While we are all well, our programs are not. We have had to cancel our spring lecture series, summer walking tours, Partners in Preservation awards for 2020, and more.

However, not to be deterred, we are forging ahead. Board members and staff are planning how we can use our website to create digital lecture programs and digital walking tours. We will update you as we make progress so that we can keep connected with each other and with Oakland history. We also hope to continue to build our membership.

Most importantly, we continue our work in advocating for preserving the cultural, built, and natural environment in Oakland as we adapt to new processes at City Hall.

Thank you for your continued membership and donations to OHA. That financial assistance is critically important this year because revenue from lectures, walking tours and other programs has been eliminated for now.

If you are able, we ask for your help as we present some of our much-loved programs in new online formats, continue to produce the newsletter, work with our city government, and keep Oakland an amazing place.



TOM DEBLEY

JEANNE DUNN

Please consider giving a gift membership to someone who might be interested in Oakland, renewing your membership at a higher level, and/or donating to help us re-make our programs as digital offerings.

Please remember, of course, if you are one of the many on furlough, without work, or bearing unusual expenses at this hard time, we welcome your participation as the most important contribution of all.

In closing, on another topic, I want to share sad news that longtime OHA member Jeanne Dunn died on Saturday, March 21, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Jeanne left OHA a generous bequest, and we are very grateful for that and for our vice president, Alison Finlay, whom we acknowledge for her role in being friends with Jeanne Dunn and reinforcing Jeanne’s warm feelings of inclusion and participation with OHA over many years that led to this special gift. ■

CONTRIBUTORS:

Mike Ahmadi, Tom Debley, Kathleen DiGiovanni, Erika Mailman, Amelia Marshall, Naomi Schiff

PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

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

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Oakland's Black Ahab felled by influenza

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

On April 15, 1919, Captain William T. Shorey died of pneumonia at the age of 60, one of Oakland's many victims of the influenza pandemic.

Born in Barbados in 1859, Shorey was the son of a Scottish sugar planter and his wife, a Creole woman named Roza Frazier. The eldest of eight children, Shorey went to work early, apprenticing first with a plumber before going to sea as a cabin boy as a young teen. On that first voyage, north to Boston, the captain took a shine to young Shorey and taught him the basics of navigation, which he studied further in Provincetown, Massachusetts, under Captain Wiffier D. Leach.

In 1876, Shorey set sail on a whaler for the first time, out of Provincetown. He was 17 years old. He shipped out as a "greenhorn" and returned to port as a boat steerer, attesting to his hard work and his ambition to rise. During this period of American whaling history, as Herman Melville showed readers in *Moby Dick*, whaling crews were a diverse lot; think of the fictional *Pequod's* crew members Queequeg, Tashtego, Fedallah, and Pip. Shorey's nickname "Black Ahab" is a nod to the main character in *Moby Dick*.

White American-born sailors, their numbers already reduced during the years of the Civil War, were also leaving this "difficult, demanding, dangerous occupation" for better opportunities on land, according to E. Berkeley Tompkins in his 1972 article on Shorey for the *California Historical Quarterly*.

In 1880, Shorey set off from Boston as an officer, Third Master, on the whaler *Emma*

H. Herriman for a three-year voyage that would take him around the world and see him rise to First Master. The journey ended in San Francisco as the American whaling industry was shifting from the east to the west coast. Shorey stuck with the *Emma H. Herriman* and by 1886 he was Master of that ship, "the only colored captain on the Pacific Coast." He captained her until 1892.

While on shore in 1886, Shorey met and married Julia Shelton of San Francisco. She joined him on a honeymoon voyage aboard ship, at least as far as Honolulu, where she waited for him to return from the Northern Pacific with a rich haul. In 1888, the Shoreys bought a house on Eighth Street in West Oakland where they lived until the end of Shorey's life.

After the *Emma H. Herriman*, Shorey captained a series of other ships, the *Andrew Hicks*, the *Gay Head*, the *John and Winthrop*. In 1903, Shorey received his steamship master's license, enabling him to act as "master of a steam whaler over 700 tons in any ocean," according to the *Oakland Tribune*. He retired from active seafaring in 1908 but kept his master's license active, renewing it for the last time in November 1918, just six months before his death.

Shorey was a hard master. Newspaper articles from the mid-1880s report charges of beatings and mistreatment filed against him by his crew. In 1886, the *Examiner* reported that he was fined \$20 in one of these incidents. But he was also an astute and capable seaman. In 1907, in charge of the *John and Winthrop* on a voyage to the North Pacific,



CAPTAIN SHOREY and his family

Shorey sailed through not one but two typhoons in the Othotsk Sea, the second of which carried off the sails. At the end of the storms, Captain and crew found themselves in a dense fog which, when it cleared, left the ship only 20 feet from a reef. His crew testified that "nothing but Captain Shorey's coolness and clever seamanship saved a wreck."

Yet his nerve couldn't save him from disease. Influenza took him as it did so many others. Following services at St. John's Episcopal Church in West Oakland, he was buried in the family plot, rather than the flu plot, at Mountain View Cemetery, the "Black Ahab" brought to earth in the end. ■