

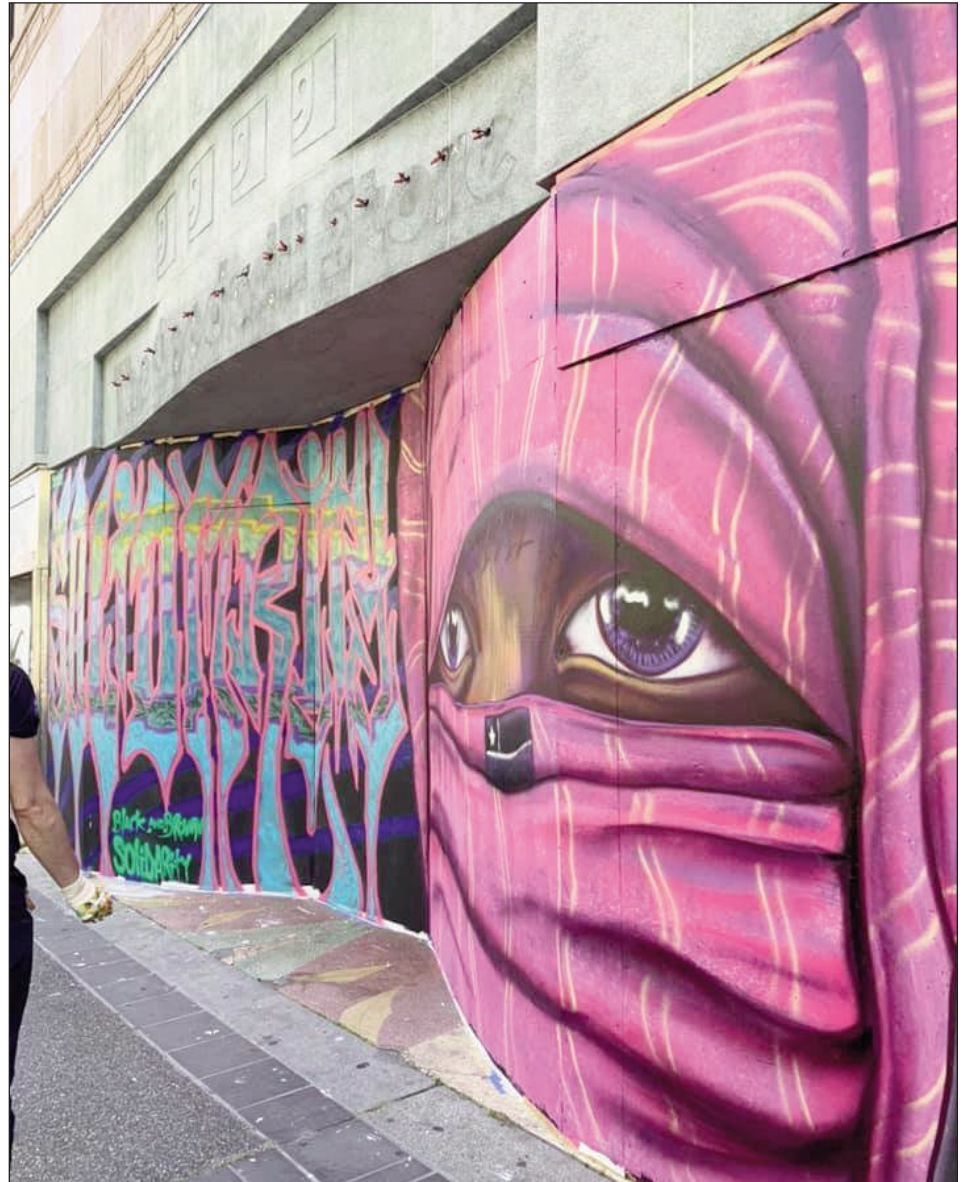
## History lessons

By Dorothy Lazard

Early in this pandemic shutdown, a colleague with whom I only had casual conversations asked me what I thought future generations would make of this period in our history. The question caught me up short. It was such a deep, existential question that made clear the gravity of our situation. The threat of wholesale death has a way of focusing the mind. After some thought, I told him that it would depend on how thoroughly and truthfully historians, journalists, diarists, filmmakers, and other chroniclers record the times. He expressed anger about the way the government was informing the public about safety measures, testing, and rates of infection. And I assured him that the mishandling of this public health crisis, sadly, was also part of the story. As the filmed police killing of George Floyd aired on repeat, massive anti-racism protests were mounted across the world, and Confederate statues were pulled down, I thought a lot about his question. How will we capture this unprecedented time?

America's secret is out. The jig is up. Covid-19 has seen to that. For all of America's boastful declarations of superiority, exceptionalism, and global leadership, this pandemic—and the disorganized, punitive way it's being handled—has exposed our societal inequities and economic vulnerabilities in a way, and with a velocity, that little else could have. The systemic racism that is the bedrock of this country has been revealed with such clarity that we can no longer ignore it. The Black Lives Matter protests are addressing the much-older, equally-urgent virus of American racism. Our country is being remade right before our eyes, convuls-

See **LESSONS** on page 4



NAYOMI MUNAWEEERA

## Oakland's power in protest

**THE BLACK LIVES MATTER** protests that began with George Floyd's death at the hands of police officers have brought needed attention to a long-embedded problem of institutional racism in our country. On the following pages, see Oakland writer Nayomi Munaweera's photographs of the outpouring of art that covered broken windows and storefront downtown, as well as her essay about witnessing people coming forward to make a difference.





ALL PHOTOS: NAYOMI MUNAWEERA

## Murals stand as vivid testimonial to inspire racial justice

By *Nayomi Munaweera*

As we now know, the killing of George Floyd has led to a powerful moment of racial reckoning in America. We were reminded that anti-Black racism is not just alive and well, but deeply entrenched in our institutions, police stations, jails, schools, courthouses, and every other facet of public and private life.

Murderous, institutionalized racism is a fact of life for Black Americans in a way that is very difficult for white people and,

yes, even non-Black POC (people of color) like me, to understand. We simply do not live as targets in the same way. Our bodies are not the site of state violence in the same way. Non-Black folks simply have various levels of privilege that Black folks are not afforded.

Soon after the worldwide protests began, business owners in downtown Oakland boarded up their windows with wooden panels out of fear of “looting” (a

narrative flamed into fire by the president himself.)

This landscape could have been grim and dystopian. Instead, as I drove through the streets, I saw something beautiful. The artists had gotten to work. They had transformed every wooden panel into a work of art. They had created a vivid testimonial to the memory of the Black folks murdered by police violence. They had reimagined the streets themselves as a clarion call to coalition and community.

As a non-Black POC, I know the work of anti-racism is long and hard. We are far from that post-racial society we long for.

And yet, these gorgeous images, this powerful artwork, this transformation of space into beauty, make me hopeful that our work fighting racism in whatever way we can matters more than anything. ■

*Nayomi Munaweera is the award-winning author of the novels Island of a Thousand Mirrors and What Lies Between Us. Find her at [nayomimunaweeraauthor.com](http://nayomimunaweeraauthor.com).*



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ALL PHOTOS: NAYOMI MUNAWERA

## Lessons

*Continued from page 1*

ing with change for better and worse. Now is the time for us to write a new narrative.

People who want to fight racism in America are now looking for ways to contribute to the anti-racist movement. One way is to broaden our views of history. As students and purveyors of history, we are obliged to confront it with open eyes and a curious mind. It's time for us to focus not only on "what happened," but why injustices happen, who benefits from them, and what impact prejudice and injustice have on us all. In this climate of racial violence, heated debates about heritage, virulent misinformation campaigns and racial profiling, our challenge today is to provide our readers with fresh, fact-based accounts of our shared history. We need to reposition the frame.

With our investigative and literary talents come a responsibility to reflect the times in which we live. Those reflections would be most useful to future generations if lay historians and professional historians alike broaden the narrative, consider the "other," and challenge the dominant narrative out of which white supremacy, Manifest Destiny, and nativism grew. Our willingness to discover and share the complex histories of our city, state, and country will ease some of the injury that too many of our citizens endure every day. Earlier this year, I sat for a public radio interview in which I spoke about the



responsibilities of managing a history collection. My conversation sparked a tough memory which I did not share with the journalist at the time. By the time I was ten, I had learned that there was a dominant narrative in our country that had nothing to do with me, the people I came from, or the life we lived. At San Francisco State, I found myself confronting not only invisibility, but also misrepresentation, misinformation, and stereotypes. In my Teaching Writing class, the professor, in explaining to the class why Black people don't speak standard English,

said: "Black people don't understand standard English." I was mortified. Not only at this heaping turd of misinformation, but at the confidence with which she shared it. Who told her that? Had she read it in a book? And how many white people believed this? It wasn't my way to challenge my professors at the time, but I felt, as the only African American in the class, that I had to speak up. This declaration was too egregious not to bat down.

See **LESSONS** on page 10





# You won't believe the amazing find in Howard's Barn

By Mike Ahmadi

Let me start with some background. My name is Mike, and I live in Mariposa California. I grew up in Ohio and moved to the Bay Area in the year 2000, after a 13-year stint in Florida. I have loved photography ever since I knew what a camera was. In junior high school and high school, I served on the yearbook staff—and by the time I was 13, I had my own darkroom at home. I remember my first “good” camera was a Canon AE1, which was stolen from me by an old roommate’s friend when I lived in Florida.

That did not deter me. I ended up buying more cameras and loved to take photos of the wildlife. I would walk right up to alligators basking in the sun and fill the frame with their eyes. For many years I was a junkie.

Things changed as things do, and I lost interest in film photography as the world moved to digital. It was a compromise at first, and then digital improved to the point that film nearly went extinct.

About 3 years ago, I found two Canon AE1 cameras at a yard sale in Mariposa. They had no batteries and don't work without them, so I was able to get both for \$15. I inserted batteries, and one of them worked. I immediately got some film at the local drugstore (I was shocked they still had film) and went to Yosemite, which is my local park. I took some shots and processed them, and when I



MIKE AHMADI

**YEP, THAT'S TEDDY ROOSEVELT** tipping his hat as he rides, possibly through Oakland. He visited Oakland in May 1903 to give an address in which he mentioned “driving through your beautiful streets.” If you recognize these homes, join the discussion at the Facebook group, “In Howard’s Barn.” For more on his speech, see article on page 8.

got them back I was blown away by nostalgia. There it was. There was that soft and warm look I remembered from the family snapshot days. I was immediately smitten and started buying film cameras like they were going out of style (which was exactly what was happening).

Since then, I go everywhere with my film cameras. I always have one with me, usually around my neck, and that brings me to Howard ...or more specifically, to Howard's Barn.

Howard is an old quirky guy that I know from a group we belong to called The Clampers. Google it. It is pretty interesting. I saw Howard in his front yard tending to his horse, and we

started chatting. He told me he had some old tobacco pipes and wanted to know if I wanted them, since he had seen some tobacco pipes at my house when he stopped by one time during an odd snowstorm. I told him I would love them, and he invited me to his big red barn.

So, it turns out that Howard likes to collect things. Lots of things. One might call him a hoarder. His barn is stacked to the rafters with boxes of “stuff,” and it is all really interesting material he has collected over the last 50 years or so. He used to live in Oakland, so a lot of it came from buying out contents of storage sheds and such. It is quite spectacular.

As he searched for the pipes, he saw the camera around my neck and asked if it was a film camera. I told him it was, and he said, “I got a few boxes with some old negatives in them, but the negatives are glass.”

My attention went into overdrive. Glass negatives are a thing of the far past. I defi-

See **BARN** on page 6

MIKE AHMADI



**THE CHABOT OBSERVATORY** predates the Chabot Space & Science Center. This view hides its rooftop observatory dome. The building once sat in Lafayette Square, at 11th and Jefferson. City light pollution encouraged the move to the Oakland hills where the current center was built.





# Barn

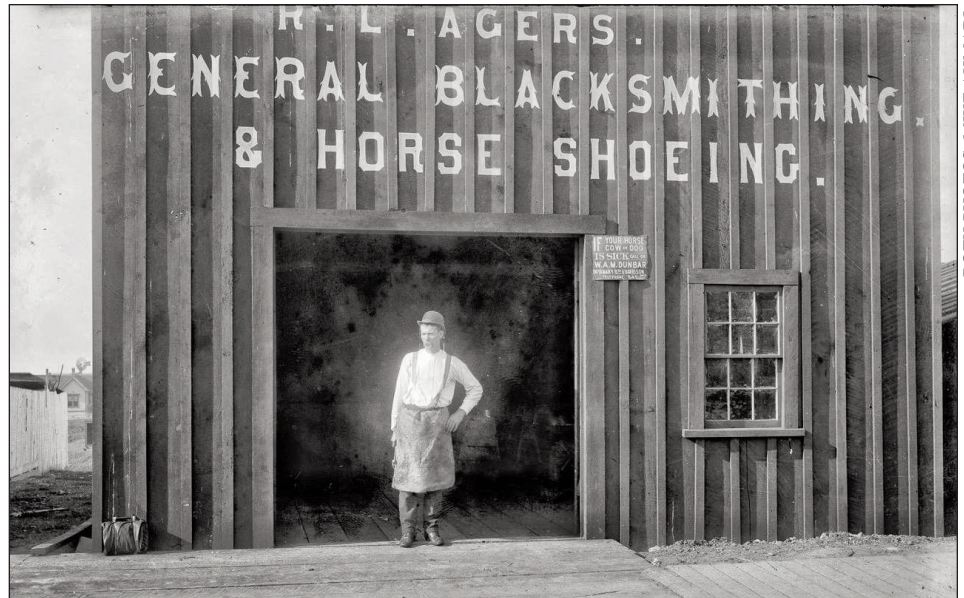
*Continued from page 5*

nitedly wanted to see them. As we walked over to where he kept them, he said that if I liked them we could work out some sort of deal. I nodded and said, “Sure thing, Howard.”

Then he showed me the negatives.

These were no ordinary negatives. These were mostly 5x7 glass plates, and it was clear that the photos were taken over 100 years ago. I told Howard that he was in possession of a real treasure trove of historic photos and asked if I could take them home and scan them on my negative scanner. He agreed, and I went home and made a beeline right for my Epson 850 scanner.

As I scanned the first negative, it was very clear that, first of all, this was not the work of an ordinary photographer. The photos were crisp and clear and very well composed and exposed and processed. The resolution was beyond astounding. A 5x7 glass plate negative yields a resolution equivalent to around 200 megapixels in digital. Moreover, glass plate negatives were the peak in photography. Everything else after that was a compromise in quality. Glass plates were followed by nitrocellulose film, which is highly flammable (nitrocellulose is the basis of gunpowder). Most early nitrocellulose film negatives have either burnt up or deteriorated to nothing by



BOTH PHOTOS: MIKE AHMADI

**OAKLAND BLACKSMITH** Robert Loftus Agers in the late 1890s. After Ahmadi posted this image, the man’s great-grandson contacted him.

now. This was followed by acetate and polyester film, which is far more stable, but not nearly as good as glass. What we have in these glass plates (and there are about 200 of them) is an extraordinary preserved history, and these are particularly interesting because they depict Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco prior to the 1906 earthquake.

I decided that these really needed to be shared with the world and reached out to some museums. Unfortunately, a pandemic

was happening, so museums were not operational.

I then decided to start a Facebook page called “In Howard’s Barn” and began posting the images there. It was (and is) a real joy to share these images with the Facebook community. The best part about it is that the

*See **BARN** on page 7*



**AN EARLY PRODUCE VENDOR** in front of the Downes & Byrne drugstore. Facebook commenters loved the attitude of the young boy at the right.

### Welcome to our new members!

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

Dave Allswang, Jonathan Chase, Dennis Evanosky, Joseph Garrett, Susan & Richard Hansen, Jonathan Kunze, Robert & Dana Lang

### GIFT MEMBERSHIPS/DONORS

All memberships below are gifts. We are pleased to welcome these new members and thank their donors:

Anthony Bruce (Jacci Harris), Cherie Donahue (Chris Roberts), Elin Hansen (Suzanne Masuret), Mrs. S. Hughes (Ari Dorsey), Calvin Kwan (Elizabeth Callaway), Mrs. A. Knodel (Ari Dorsey), Steve LaChapelle (Jamin Hawks), Jennifer Loh (Diane Daley-Smith), Diane Scarritt (Marlene & Steve Wilson), Judy & Kent Sokoloff (Chuck Schwartz), Jacob Wilson & Renee Johnston (Marlene & Steve Wilson)





# Barn

*Continued from page 6*

members of the group love to do detective work and have discovered many key pieces of information about the images. Many people have told me to keep them secret, but I decided that this is too important historically not to share.

My goal is to eventually compile these images in a book, but you don't have to wait for that. You can see them at the Facebook page and comment as you wish.

Some of the images ended up being really special in unexpected ways. The first one was an image of Oakland blacksmith Robert Loftus Agers. I posted it on the Oakland History page on Facebook and was contacted by his great-grandson who informed me he had lost a family album containing the photo many years ago and was thrilled that it had been found. Of course, I offered to send him a free print and he was very thankful. This picture dates to around the late 1890s.

Another interesting photo from the same time period shows a merchant standing outside the Downes and Byrne Drugstore on the corner of 8th and Washington streets in Oakland. Although the business is long gone, apparently the building still stands today.

A picture of Chabot Observatory, taken circa 1900, is from a 4x5 glass plate. What is most amazing about these photos is that they are new prints from old negatives, not faded photos that have been restored, so when you see the original scan, all the detail is there.

Here is one final image to tickle your fancy, a photo of President Theodore Roosevelt when he visited Oakland in 1903. This was scanned from a badly-damaged 8x10 glass plate, but you can clearly see Teddy tipping his hat to the throngs of well wishers. I have really enjoyed sharing these, and I hope they have brought you joy as well.

It makes me feel blessed to know that I have been entrusted to scan and share these images which have never been seen before by anyone alive today (or so it seems). Please go have a look, and I hope it brightens your day. ■

*Visit "In Howard's Barn" to see more of Ahmadi's scanned images, which he so generously shared with the online community: <https://www.facebook.com/InHowardsBarn>*

## Aiding an Oakland Point neighborhood survivor

**ONE OF THE** 2020 Mills Act projects, 724 Campbell St., was built in 1875 in Oakland Point near the 7th Street rail line and commercial strip. First owner Daniel S. Martin had run a trunk manufacturing company since 1863. After his death in the 1890s, English-born carpenter Evan Gill moved in. In 1910, it was rented to an Irish railroad brakeman. In the 1920s Eva Morgan, a West Indian widow, ran it as a rooming house. In 1936, porter George McBride lived here, one of many African Americans working with the Pullman Company. Their union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, had its West Coast headquarters at 1716-18 7th St.. —Mills Act application



CITY OF OAKLAND

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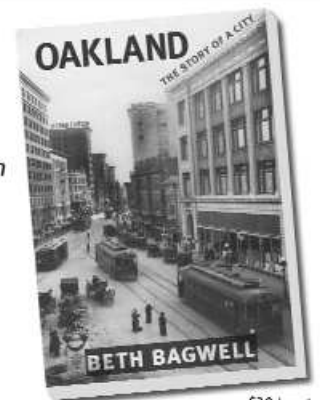
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## Theodore Roosevelt's Oakland speech

By Erika Mailman

I was intrigued by the address Roosevelt made in Oakland May 14, 1903 (see photo on page 5), and was able to find the text of it online. Troubling in our current time where our country battles racial injustice was his focusing on the concept of race suicide:

It has been a great pleasure to come in to your beautiful city and it could not but stir any man's heart to be greeted as you have greeted me. I am glad indeed to see you, to see the men, the women, and the children. As I drove through your beautiful streets I passed by one house where there was a large family party assembled, and they had a strip of bunting and printed on it were the words "no race suicide here" and I got up and bowed my acknowledgments and congratulations. I have been delighted passing through your streets, to be greeted by the children. They seem all right in quality and all right in quantity.

A quick search reveals that this was a term popularized by eugenicists in 1900, coined by Edward A. Ross, a sociologist who was concerned that if white Protestant Americans didn't have larger families, the children of immigrants from Japan and China would overtake the population. In Laura L. Lovett's book *Conceiving the Future: Protonatalism, Reproduction and the Family in the United States 1890-1938*, she quotes Ross as saying, "The higher race quietly and unobtrusively eliminates itself rather than endure individually the bitter competition it has failed to ward off from itself by collective action."

Roosevelt embraced this concept. Lovett writes, "As no other American could, Roosevelt used his various political offices to urge the 'nation' to procreate. However, Roosevelt's rhetoric drew the race suicide debate away from the issues of economics, immigration and urbanization that Ross had emphasized and recast it as an issue of women's duty to the state."

Many know that the Teddy Bear was named for Roosevelt in honor of his refusal in 1902 to shoot a black bear tied to a tree to make the "hunting" easier. But few know (I didn't until I fell into this research rabbit hole) that the Teddy Bear was briefly embroiled in the "race suicide" discussion.

"The 'Teddy Bear' fad was severely scored by Rev. Michael G. Esper from the pulpit in Saint Joseph's Catholic Church," reads an article in the *Colorado Republican*, July 11, 1907. "The priest held that the toy beasts in

the hands of little girls were destroying all instincts of motherhood, and in the future would be realized as one of the most powerful factors in the race suicide danger." For Rev. Esper, a doll that looked like a human baby was "natural...the first manifestation of the feeling of motherhood...the hope of all nations." Wait'll he meets Barbie!

Other newspapers picked up the story. "Teddy Bears Will Be Forsaken for Dollies," reads the all-caps headline in the July 14, 1907 *Oakland Tribune*, with sub-

heads, "Nature Fakers Are Now Losing Ground" and "Oakland Matrons Declare Girls Will Give Up Fad." The reporter consulted Oakland priests who "say they have not given the matter enough thought and consideration to warrant a definite statement," but added that, if necessary, they would "take arms with the crusade." Mrs. Cora Jones, president of the Oakland Club, said, "Dollies are by far a better educator." It seems Teddy Bears were new despite the 1902 event which inspired their creation; the paper reported that the "fuzzy little stuffed animals first appeared in store windows" a few months earlier. The article ended with the observation that weather would end the fad: "The children have become exasperated from the heat of hugging the toys with them wherever they go, so in this way much has naturally been done to eradicate the burdensome Teddy bear, an alleged incentive to race suicide."

Back to Roosevelt's 1903 visit. From the Oakland harbor he was conveyed first to Berkeley, where he gave a speech at the "State University" in which he asked the university students to be good citizens in return for the free schooling they received, among other things. He then boarded a special "palace car" named *Oakland*, built for the occasion, which took him to downtown Oakland. There, he switched to a carriage for



**THIS EDITORIAL CARTOON** by Clifford Berryman in the 1902 *Washington Post* spurred a New York toy store owner to create the first-ever Teddy Bear.

parading through the streets. He was accompanied by his secretary William Loeb, Jr., Oakland Mayor Olney, and R.H. Chamberlain, chairman citizens' committee—confirmed by three men in the carriage with him in the page 5 image. This article lists the parade route streets for anyone who wants to locate the two homes in the photograph. Geeky tidbit: former Oakland mayor and then-current California governor George C. Pardee was in the procession's fifth carriage.

The route included "the gallant appearance of 600 blue jackets from the fleet and a troop of the Ninth Cavalry, colored, who were with the President at the storming of San Juan Hill." An estimated 20,000 schoolchildren marched as well.

Roosevelt spoke at Oakland High School, then at 12th and Jefferson streets. Afterward, he boarded the torpedo boat destroyer *Paul Jones*, and steamed off to Vallejo.

Despite his racist topics, did he at least speak well? Of his Berkeley address, the *Tribune* says, "The voice is disappointing, not in keeping with the robustness of his frame and seems to be of the throaty character." And in Oakland, even he admitted, "I have not got much to say to you . . . there have been moments when I felt that the only thing that marred my visit was the fact that I had to speak." ■





## Oakland History Center pivots to thrive during pandemic

By Dorothy Lazard

This year began with such promise. Plans were drafted. Contacts reestablished. A new exhibit mounted and the next few planned. Speaking engagements out in the community were scheduled. Then COVID-19 landed, disrupting life as we know it, throwing our versions of normal into a tumult.

Once the novel coronavirus hit Alameda County, all Oakland public libraries closed, and library workers, like millions of people throughout the state, had to shelter in place. Library administrators pledged to keep as many of our services available to the public as possible. It was a hard pivot to work from home away from our collections and reference resources. Many of us, identified as “essential workers,” have been recruited by the city into disaster service work which entails answering the library’s phone lines, distributing food and prepared meals to the needy, and making wellness check calls to the elderly. We continue to provide reference service through our eAnswers service ([eanswers@oaklandlibrary.org](mailto:eanswers@oaklandlibrary.org)). We’re sharing information on the library’s “From the Main Library” blog and posting videos on our YouTube channel about gardening and children’s literature. Our informational programs have gone virtual and can be viewed on the library’s YouTube channel or through Zoom.

The mandatory shutdown couldn’t have come at a more inopportune time as I was in the process of orienting OHC’s new librarian Emily Foster. She had been on the job just four months when the library was closed on March 16. Though being away from the maps, photographs, municipal documents, and ephemera initially made our work particularly challenging, we managed to respond to a number of requests about houses, family histories, businesses, and Oakland’s complicated housing scenario.

While working from home is antithetical to library work, Emily, Ron Heckart, and I have worked on some necessary behind-the-scenes tasks that we rarely get to when the library is open to the public. We have updated the metadata on our digitized oral histories on Calisphere ([bit.ly/3jv1bor](http://bit.ly/3jv1bor)) which will make searching the collections by subject easier for researchers. Ron has cataloged some important Special Collections such as the West

Oakland Home Collection and the Oakland Housing Authority Collection (showing construction of Campbell Village and Peralta Villa housing developments). These collections, now nearing 100, can be found by searching “ohr coll” in our library catalog.

Though we are now back in the library working a few days a week on alternating shifts, Emily and I can best address queries through our eAnswers portal.

We are also managing to take on new projects. OHC, in collaboration with the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, has launched the COVID19 East Bay Community Archive, an online repository that will capture how we have individually and collectively experienced this pandemic. The archive, launched in July, welcomes submissions of documents, photographs, video clips, letters, diary entries, and blog posts. Not in an uploading mood? You can answer a few questions found directly on the form that will prompt you to reflect on this most unusual, challenging, and unprecedented year. Visit [bit.ly/3jVcvdF](http://bit.ly/3jVcvdF) to learn more.

Instead of hosting our Fall History Series in the library auditorium, I’ve been invited by the library’s Community Relations Department to host a series of history-related podcasts that will be available in October. Among the featured guests will be the *OHA News*’s own editorial team (Erika Mailman, Naomi Schiff, and Kathleen DiGiovanni), talking about the important role the newsletter plays in our community.

Unfortunately, our reopening lies somewhere in the indeterminate future. When the Main Library reopens, you will find a changed floor plan to accommodate social distancing and other changes. Whenever we resume normal operating hours, know that OHC staff will be there ready to satisfy your research needs. Until we’re able to see each other again in person, take good care of yourselves and stay safe. ■

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

### Thanks to our volunteers

Kathleen DiGiovanni: Zoom Lecture: “For the Advancement of Women; The Women’s Club Movement in Oakland”

## 2020 Mills Act projects approved



VIEWS OF OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, 1893



CITY OF OAKLAND

A GREAT COLLECTION of projects will benefit from the Mills Act property tax abatement program, which assists owners in restoring and preserving historic properties. The Landmarks Board and Planning Commission voted to approve them following a robust presentation by Betty Marvin, who leads the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey and worked with owners to prepare applications. Her report describes: “Three are houses in West Oakland, three are houses in the Lakeshore-Trestle Glen neighborhood, and one is a house on Picardy Drive in East Oakland. Three large projects involve adaptive reuse of essentially derelict buildings in the Central District, West Oakland, and Adams Point, fulfilling direction from Landmarks Board and staff to pursue Mills Act contracts as a preservation tool.” One of them, the Buswell block (above) on Broadway, is among Oakland’s oldest commercial buildings. For more on all the projects: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/documents/informational-report-part-2-of-2-attachments-status-of-2020-mills-act>.

—Naomi Schiff





## Lessons

*Continued from page 4*

“That’s not true,” I said. “What you said is not right. Of course, we understand standard English. I understand you. We consume too much mainstream television, talk to too many people in the business world, not to comprehend standard English.”

The teacher stood in front of the class, looking a bit stunned. I was also stunned when she confessed to the class that she had been telling her students this for years. To her credit, she asked me to tell her and the class more, and I, while no linguist, explained code switching.

I learned a hard lesson that day that continues to bewilder me more than 40 years later: I realized that a white person can grow up, go to college, become an employed, voting, tax-paying citizen, live to a ripe old age, and die without knowing a single thing about me or any other Black person.

Blacks, who were the country’s original “essential workers,” have never been seen as an essential part of its historical narrative. That’s only begun to shift in recent decades, thanks to the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, the Third World Liberation Front that changed college curricula to be more diverse, and writers and historians like John Hope Franklin whose scholarship was of undeniable national value.

The more difficult task for allies is to enter into conversation with people of different backgrounds to learn about their experiences of living as the “other” in America. These conversations are hard because they force us to pull our blinders off and examine not only the inequities in our society, but also the ways in which we individually contribute to those abuses in our everyday lives.

It’s not enough to be “not racist;” our society needs people to be consciously and actively antiracist: to speak out when you hear someone saying something you know to

be racist. To be truly antiracist, our allies must challenge racism in their classrooms, in their workplaces, at their dinner tables, at the malls, and the countless places where racism occurs.

For too long white people have stood witness to verbal slights, racial confrontations, or police harassment and violence, yet slip into a bewildered silence or offer up an innocuous “oh, that’s so sad” from the sidelines. We don’t need white sympathy. In this fight we need their allegiance, empathy, and understanding. We need their commitment to develop skills to discuss and confront systemic racism.

True allies can appreciate that the loss of a Black life is a loss for all of us, not just Black people. True allies don’t have to ask how I feel when yet another Black person is killed, harassed, unjustly convicted. Fighting racism is not solely the responsibility of those of us subjected to it, but also the charge of people who benefit, consciously and unconsciously, from it. Silence is compliance.

Today the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests are forcing us to take a hard look at our values, our interactions with each other, and our representations of what we witness. As I think again about my colleague’s question of how we will record this time, I recognize there is power and a heavy responsibility that comes with disseminating history.

Imagine what our society would feel like if we worked to recalibrate the American narrative to include full-bodied, inclusive histories. If we actually saw each other, listened to each other, gave each other the respect and regard that we expect for ourselves.

Honestly confronting today’s complicated, tragic events is the only way this society will become what it has claimed to be: fair, just, welcoming. It is hard work, but it must be done if we are to turn that American Dream from fable to reality. ■

## Marina Carlson, ardent activist, 1946–2020



CHRIS BUCKLEY

**MARINA** in Kyoto, Japan, in 2016.

*By Annalee Allen*

In the early days of OHA, citizens from different districts came together to form our organization celebrating Oakland’s heritage. One was Marina Carlson. She lived in the Brooklyn neighborhood in a large Queen Anne house. I remember her from early meetings in the ‘80s about how to make preservation more relevant to city policies. She understood that it was necessary to create incentives to encourage property owners to do the right thing to keep the character of their neighborhoods. East Oakland was changing rapidly, and older buildings were disappearing to make way for (sometimes poorly-constructed) multi-unit structures.

Marina took every opportunity to advocate for preservation, whether it be changes to planning regulations, or to raise awareness of the history and the beauty of the neighborhoods. She once wrote to a councilmember, “I just cannot believe the developers that come to Oakland can treat our historic resources with such disrespect and disregard for what came before them.” She passed away July 12, and will be greatly missed. Her family has put together a celebration of her life which can be found at <https://everloved.com/life-of/marina-carlson/obituary/>. For those who would like to honor her work in preservation, OHA is grateful for donations in her name. ■



NAOMI SCHIFF

### Development in Broadway Valdez

**AS THE HOLLAND** development company progresses with its 20-story tower project at the former Acura site on 27th Street, it proposes another at 24th and Harrison, which would remove four structures in the Waverly Area of Secondary Importance. A 16-story residential tower with ground floor retail would adjoin the Moana Apartments on Harrison (photo, left) and small homes on Waverly. Responding to residents’ concerns, a design revision steps the proposed building slightly away from the property line. Will the ASI survive the building boom? Despite OHA and resident advocacy, the Broadway Valdez Specific Plan did not prioritize it for preservation. —Naomi Schiff





# OHA special appeal helps us move through the pandemic financially

By Tom Debley, *President*

On behalf of the board of directors, I want to offer a heartfelt thank you to the many of you who responded to our summer special appeal to help us cover the Covid-19 budget gap we were facing. OHA does not often make special appeals, but it did so to offset revenue losses due to the pandemic.

At this writing, we have received more than \$9,000 in donations—in addition to membership renewals and gift memberships. This means you have helped OHA be able to continue its efforts for nearly 40 years. This work encompasses, as a nonprofit membership organization, advocating for the protection, preservation, and revitalization of Oakland’s architectural, historic, cultural, and natural resources through our publications, education, and direct action.

On the education front, the pandemic derailed our spring lecture series and our summer walking tour programs. However, thanks to your support, we have moved our lectures online, partnering with the Oakland History Center. The first lecture by Kathleen DiGiovanni, if you missed it live, was about how historic women’s organizations led the way in advancing Oakland’s cultural and philanthropic life. To watch it, go to

<http://oaklandheritage.org/online-lectures.html>.

Meanwhile, OHA is working hard to develop self-guided Oakland walking tours, also to be posted online when available.

And our advocacy work is continuing at a near-normal pace. For just a few examples, OHA has been:

- Working to shape the downtown Oakland specific plan, including advocating for a TDR program—Transfer of Development Rights—a tool that can assist in historic preservation.
- Following up with the Planning and Building department on preservation issues despite the pandemic’s hampering effects on the city bureaucracy.
- Actively meeting and discussing reuse of the California College of the Arts campus with developers, college leaders, neighbors, alumni, and OHA members.
- Participating in the planning process for Mosswood Park and working to save Moss Cottage, an historic landmark.
- Responding to myriad construction and renovation applications in Oakland’s many historically-valuable residential areas and advocating for good contextual design when new structures are near historic properties.

So again, thank you for your support. You are helping in so many ways to support OHA’s historic preservation work in the tradition of our founding president, Beth Bagwell, author of *Oakland: The Story of a City*.

We are bridging the pandemic budget gap as we move into our fourth decade, carrying us forward to lay a foundation for the next generations that can hopefully continue the work of preservation.

As Bagwell said in 1981, “OHA cares about the Oakland of yesterday because we care about the Oakland of tomorrow. The environment we live in today has been given to us from the past: the buildings that remain, the layout of the streets, the ethnic character of our neighborhoods, the forgotten creeks, and the lake that still forms the centerpiece of our city. The Oakland of today is the result of what Oaklanders of yesterday built or demolished, fostered or neglected. This is our inheritance. What we do with it is our choice.”

So, members and friends, let’s take continuing pride in Oakland that allows future generations to say, as we do today, “Oakland’s wealth of historic buildings and neighborhoods is matched by few other California cities.” ■

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Mike Ahmadi, Annalee Allen, City of Oakland, Tom Debley, Kathleen DiGiovanni, Dorothy Lazard, Erika Mailman, Amelia Marshall, Nayomi Munaweera, 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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## Blue Triangle Club had history of housing young, single women

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Earlier this summer, the residential hotel building at 2332 Harrison St. known as the Lake Merritt Lodge was in the news. Alameda County was negotiating with the owner to purchase it for use as a shelter for medically at-risk, un- and underhoused persons, with an eye to using it permanently as supportive housing once the COVID-19 crisis is behind us.

As of this writing at the end of August, that deal has fallen through. The building remains on the market, but the story has given this space an opportunity to return to the building's past.

It wasn't always called the Lake Merritt Lodge. From the time of its opening in 1926 until its closure at the end of 1957, it operated as the Blue Triangle Club, a YWCA residence for single, young, working women. At a time when respectable young women did not live alone, Oakland's YWCA made a priority of providing them with a safe, affordable place to live. Beginning in 1886 with a "sheltering home," the Y prioritized such housing. Efforts continued with a "boarding home" on Franklin Street in 1894 and, in 1909, another one on Castro Street. Housing for young women was built in when the grand Julia Morgan building on Webster Street opened in 1915. By the early 1920s, demand had grown enough that the YWCA's leadership undertook to build a larger boarding home. The board made use of a bequest and the proceeds of the sale of the Franklin Street home to buy the lot on Harrison Street and build a structure that would accommo-

date 160 women, complete with parlors, libraries, dining rooms, and a live-in house mother. The five-story residence was designed by Oakland architect Charles McCall, who created a C-shaped building to suit the irregular lot and maximize natural light in the rooms.

When it opened, the first residents, all minimum wage workers, chose the Blue Triangle Club name for their

home, adopting the Y's historic symbol. In that first year, 1926, a girl could rent a room for \$6.50 a week, two meals a day included.

Over the 31 years of the club's existence, the *Oakland Tribune's* social pages reported on the many weddings, dances, and other social and civic events held at the club, like the formal Open House tea in November 1937 and the May 1947 barn dance.

During World War II, Blue Triangle residents included women working in war industries and administration as well as wives of servicemen fighting overseas. In March 1947, the club hosted a formal reception for Eleanor Roosevelt during one of the former First Lady's trips to California.

Times changed, and by the later 1950s when it was no longer considered unseemly for young, single women to live in apart-



**THE LAKE MERRITT LODGE** in earlier days when it was known as the Blue Triangle Club.

ments, fewer chose the Blue Triangle's style of supervised living arrangements. Under capacity at around 100 residents, by 1957 the Blue Triangle Club was in the red, not bringing in enough rent to cover its expenses, leading the board to sell the club and move residents to the Y's Webster Street rooms.

The building was purchased by a 29-year-old San Francisco hotelier who rebranded the building as the Lake Merritt Lodge, renting rooms to men and women—on separate floors, of course.

Later, the lodge operated on an SRO model and, most recently, as a dormitory serving international students of San Francisco's Hult International Business School.

As it closes in on its second century, we're waiting to see what's next for this elegant beauty by the lake. ■