

A hundred years ago, Henry Kaiser rolled into Oakland

By Tom Debley

In 1921, Henry J. Kaiser, a little-known Pacific Northwest road builder, and his first employee Alonzo B. Ordway literally rolled into California like a couple of tumbling tumbleweeds.

They'd jumped from a moving train while trying to meet the deadline for bidding on construction of the original segment of Highway 99 between Redding and Red Bluff in rural Shasta and Tehama counties.

A century later, in their honor, two of the tallest buildings in Oakland stand side-by-side on the shore of Lake Merritt—the Kaiser Center and the Ordway Building.

Kaiser became a legendary industrialist, described by Gary Hoover, executive director of the American Business History Center, as “one of the most unusual and diverse entrepreneurs in American history” in a 2019 profile.

He fell in love with the city of Oakland, all the while with Ordway as his number two until his 1967 death.

Kaiser's industrial empire grew into a storied global giant—described by one observer as the empire that succeeded Great Britain as one upon which the sun never set.

None of that, however, could have been predicted by his topsy turvy arrival in California, best described by Ordway, who, as a young man, had done some hoboing. Visiting in California, he had heard about the Highway 99 project and wired Kaiser suggesting they bid on it. The men met in Portland and hopped aboard the southbound Shasta Limited. That was their first problem. They did not read the schedule.

“After we boarded the train,” Ordway once reminisced, “we discovered it didn't stop at Redding, but it did slow down at nearby Cottonwood (about 15 miles south of Redding), just long enough for the engineer to grab his orders off a pole on the move.”

Then came error number two.

“I made the mistake of telling Mr. Kaiser,” Ordway recalled. “He decided to grab his suitcase and jump. I'd jumped off moving



HENRY J. KAISER and his wife Bess arriving at the San Francisco Opera House in 1945 for the opening session of the meetings that led to the founding of the United Nations. This Acme Newspictures photo is from the author's personal collection.

trains, but never at the speed this one would be traveling. I'm sure Mr. Kaiser had never jumped before. But this didn't bother him.

“We swung off right in front of the little station there. Henry rolled over a couple of times and skidded on his hands and knees under a clump of trees. I stumbled over my suitcase and came to a stop right in front of the station door. Our suits were torn, and our hands and legs were skinned, but we'd made it.”

Well, with skin literally in the game, they met the bidding deadline and won the project with a low bid of \$527,000. It was the largest job the Kaiser road paving company had landed since it was formed seven years earlier. Shortly after work began, Kaiser settled on Oakland as his new headquarters.

“I drove my car down here from the Pacific

Northwest,” he once said, “and stopped by twilight, feasted my eyes and spirit upon Lake Merritt and the friendly hills. . . . My heart leaped with joy. . . . This was my home city at last! . . . I resolved that Oakland would be a grand and perfect place to establish headquarters for our paving and construction business.”

He won road paving projects around Northern California, and then organized a group of companies, along with his own, into a consortium called Six Companies. As chairman of the executive committee, he led Six Companies in the 1930s construction of the great dams of the west—Hoover Dam on the Colorado River in Arizona, the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River on the

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Kaiser

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border of Oregon and Washington, and the Grand Coulee Dam, also on the Columbia River in eastern Washington, that formed Lake Roosevelt.

Kaiser followed that with his prowess in shipbuilding—not having ever built a ship before—during World War II, which earned him the nickname “patriot in pinstripes” with the construction of 747 ships. That story is told today in Richmond’s Rosie the Riveter World War II Homefront National Historic Park, where the park service notes it was a feat unequalled anywhere else in the world, before or since.

After the war, Kaiser Industries went global in engineering and manufacturing with products including aluminum, steel, cement, homes, aerospace products, and automobiles, among others. With the latter, his own car designs were unsuccessful, but when he purchased the wartime Jeep manufacturing companies, he turned it into one of America’s most popular vehicles, still a favorite today under successive manufacturers.

But less remembered, Kaiser became fabled for his social consciousness.

When the war ended, in 1945 he co-founded the not-for-profit Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and opened it to the public after providing health care for his tens of thousands of wartime workers. In the same year, he worked with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in supporting the founding of the United Nations, a role he was very proud of; he remained friends with her until her death in 1962. As if the year weren’t full enough, he led, at President Roosevelt’s request, almost 7,700 local chairmen in the National Cloth-

ing Collection for War Relief in collecting more than 150 million pounds of used clothes, shoes and bedding for war-torn nations.

At that point, Kaiser already was well known for working collaboratively with labor unions; bringing women into, and racially integrating, his workforce; as well as pioneering in health care, pension, and other benefits for workers. Indeed, he was the first businessman ever to receive the prestigious AFL-CIO Murray-Green award, for his achievements in health and welfare.

When Kaiser died, President Lyndon B. Johnson said that he, “embodied in his own career all that is best in our country’s traditions. His own energy, imagination, and determination gave him greatness—and he used that greatness unflinchingly for the betterment of his country and his fellow man.”

In addition, as the largest employer in Oakland, under his leadership Kaiser’s personnel played leading roles in many community activities and always set the pace in Oakland in total and individual charitable giving.

When he decided to build the 28-story



AT THE KAISER SHIPYARD in Richmond, C. L. Dellums, Spencer Jordan, and Ben Watkins pose with two welders, 1943.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM AND LIBRARY, OAKLAND

Kaiser Center on Lake Merritt, some associates tried to convince him that he and his company were too important for Oakland and to persuade him to move to “the more prestigious San Francisco.” He was unwavering in his commitment to Oakland.

Soon, the 28-floor Ordway Building rose next door to succeed Kaiser Center as what remains the tallest building in Oakland. It houses the headquarters of Kaiser Permanente, which 100 years after Kaiser’s arrival, remains the largest employer in the city. ■

Tom Debley, past OHA president, is retired from Kaiser Permanente, where he was director of Heritage Resources.

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FIRES CLOBBERED

many historic buildings in Oakland over the last few years. This one at 2nd Avenue and International is the latest; we hope it can be restored. In recent years, we lost the landmark Miller Library and the Cryer Boatworks. OHA works on your behalf to ensure its historic buildings are secured and safe from future fires. The Moss Cottage in Mosswood Park is our top priority in this area.

—Daniel Levy



DANIEL LEVY



Oakland through the camera's lens

*Images and captions
by Daniel Levy*



GET AN INSIDE LOOK at the Oakland waterfront with Liam O'Donoghue's Waterfront History Tours. Liam, of *East Bay Yesterday* podcast fame, takes visitors underneath the new eastern span of the Bay Bridge. Not only do you experience awe at the bridge's scale, you get to learn about the birds that live on the bridge itself in Caltrans designed nests.



ANOTHER STOP on Liam O'Donoghue's Waterfront History Tour provides a water-side view of the Ninth Avenue Terminal at Brooklyn Basin. OHA worked hard to save this building from complete demolition. It is Oakland's last standing long wharf terminal.

OMCA IS READY to welcome the public back with a new entrance on 10th Street. This ADA compliant entrance offers direct access to the museum's new cafe, Town Fare by Tanya Holland. The museum has also created a new entrance on the 12th Street side, a more direct connection with Lake Merritt.



AFTER MANY YEARS sitting empty, the Original Parkway Theater at 1834 Park Boulevard is open again for business as a cannabis dispensary. The building has undergone extensive work including plumbing, electric, and a great paint job. The theater space will open in a second phase. OHA has kept an eye on this project on your behalf to ensure this rehab was done right.



FINISHING TOUCHES are being put on the Key System Building at 1100 Broadway. This project is 30 years in the making and seismically secures the building. OHA gave extensive input on the design, and while we would prefer punch out windows, we were able to steer the design to be more sensitive to the historic structure.



Oakland History Center is opening to host visitors in person again

By Dorothy Lazard

By the time most of you read this, the public libraries in Oakland will be back to some semblance of normal. To visit the Oakland History Center (or the Magazine and Newspaper Room), you'll now have to make an appointment online at <http://oplvirtual-branch.setmore.com/>. The appointment times are currently limited to 30 minutes. When making the appointment, be as specific as possible when stating the reason for your visit so we can pull materials for you in advance. The library will be expanding hours this summer (per Alameda County health guidelines) and opening the OHC for walk-ins. OHC will maintain the same hours as the rest of the Main Library. You must still wear a mask while in the libraries.

The OHC staff continues to evolve collections and services as we all climb out of the suspended animation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Programming continues online, and recordings can be found on the Oakland Public Library's YouTube channel. In case you haven't been following us, look for Moriah Ulinskas's fascinating discussion on archiving orphan photo collections ("Restoring Historical Narratives Through Genealogical Research") or Robert Kanigel's book talk on Milman Parry, an Oakland-bred Classics scholar who revolu-



THE HISTORIC MAPS CABINET, newly installed in the Oakland History Center.

tionized how we read Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* ("Hearing Homer's Song"). We are also presenting history talks for community outlets. In February, I participated in a panel discussion for the Autry Museum of the American West that examined Oakland journalist Delilah Beasley as a pioneering California historian. I also chatted with our favorite podcaster Liam O'Donoghue of East Bay Yesterday to discuss the origins and legacy of the Afro-American Association, which influenced Black Panther Party founders. OHC librarian Emily Foster presented an engaging talk about East Bay amusement parks.

Speaking of parks, the OHC staff is continuing its digitization efforts and our next effort

involves scanning a collection of Oakland city parks and plazas photos, dating to the 1870s. These will be eventually uploaded to our Calisphere site: https://calisphere.org/search/?q=&repository_data=95.

Ron Heckart, OHC's Special Collections wrangler, continues to pull together collections received from community members, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions. Additions include the Occupy Oakland Memorabilia collection, the Oakland Junior Chamber of Commerce collection, the Ray Rainieri collection, and the University High School Playscripts collection. Kudos to Ron for his steadfast research and cataloging of these valuable pieces of history.

Our historic map collection is vast and diverse for a public library collection. We want to make sure that our patrons can access as many of these treasures as possible, so we continue to tweak records of our holdings to make catalog searching and staff retrieval easy. Expect to see more of our historic maps in the OPL catalog.

Our next exhibit will be one put on by the Emeryville Historical Society. Each year we make space for the EHS to mount exhibits since they don't have display space of their own. ■

Dorothy Lazard is head librarian at the Oakland History Center.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon!

We hope you are doing well.

With the uncertainty of the early part of the year, OHA hesitated to schedule a full season of weekend walking tours, much to our regret. We have been thinking long and hard about how to provide sociable, interesting, and safe activities for our engaged and curious members.

Now, we are back and making plans.

As we recover from a long and extraordinary disruption in all our lives, the stalwart Oakland Heritage Alliance lectures and tours committee is preparing opportunities both virtual and in-person!

Check for updated information on our website, www.oaklandheritage.org.

■ Great virtual presentations in July and August:

On July 15, hear about Austin Dunn, African American EB Regional Parks employee during the New Deal years. On Aug. 12, learn about John and Sara Lemmon: Early California Botanists, Civil War Survivors, and Influential Oakland Citizens.

■ **In-person walking tours!** A shorter and somewhat later-starting walking tour season (tentatively) begins Aug. 15. On Aug. 22, visit historic sites in the Oakland redwoods with *East Bay Hills* author and historian, Amelia Marshall. (Get the real story on those navigation trees!)

More details soon: watch your email! ■



OHA TOUR in West Oakland visits Bruce Beasley's studio, 2015

MARTHA PECK



A new life for Oakland's Sons of Norway

By Kitty Hughes

For years, Bjornson Hall offered low rent to a wide variety of small local groups, with a kitchen, a large space for dining and dancing, as well as tables and chairs. Owned by the local Norwegian lodge, the hall's interior featured two large murals, one of Norway's Declaration of Independence and the other of a Norwegian ship sailing toward America through choppy waters. Several paintings and other artifacts decorated other walls. The recent sale of the building to a private investor raises the possibility that the building, in need of some repairs, could be restored as an example of classic 1930s Streamline Moderne architecture, and that it might remain a rental space for small groups. **The Safeway connection:** The building that eventually housed Bjornson Hall was originally a Hagstrom's Store. It was one of many stores owned by a Danish immigrant by the name of Emil A. Hagstrom, who worked his way to America and started his first business with \$75 in his pocket.

He first opened a small store in Oakland in 1915, which grew into a chain of 325 stores by 1929, known as the Mutual Stores. Purchased by the MacMarr corporation in 1929, the chain in turn merged later with Safeway Stores. Safeway at the time was buying up parts of as many grocery chain stores as it could, including Piggly Wiggly, Skaggs, and Krogers. (Perhaps it is a coincidence, or maybe not, that a Safeway store today is located closely behind the Bjornson Hall to the left.)

In 1932, Mr. Hagstrom, by then a millionaire, started the Hagstrom Company. Hagstrom Stores operated a creamery, bakery, and an ice cream plant.

Architectural roots: The building permit for the Hagstrom Store is dated May 1, 1939. The contractor was Harry K. Jensen, the architect was Irwin Johnson, and the civil engineer was

Carl S. Replogle. Ancestry records show a Harry K. Jensen in California, who was born to Danish parents, who most probably is this Jensen. Irwin Johnson was born in California to Norwegian immigrant parents. Jensen and Johnson worked together on four other local buildings between 1945 and 1952. These first-generation Scandinavian builders relied on their social networks to create identifiably modern American architecture.

Built for \$9,000, the building today retains distinctive external features, with its canted corner entry and rounded canopy with speed lines; the architectural style is known generally as Moderne, or Streamline Moderne. Hagstrom's closed by 1952, and the store was briefly an independent grocery known as Fairview Market, before it became the Sons of Norway Bjornson Hall.

A tribute to ethnic history: The Bjornson Hall Norwegians met on first Fridays, going back as far as the 1950s, when they purchased the building. For over 40 years, the Swedish Tegner Lodge #149 met on the third Thursday of the month at the hall. The hall's Scandinavian roots reflect the period of the great migration to the United States when poverty and lack of opportunity drove people out of their home countries.

The Sons of Norway was founded in 1895 in Minneapolis; the Swedish Vasa Order of America (named for the great 16th century King Gustav Vasa) was formed in 1896 in New Haven, Connecticut. The Oakland Bjornson Lodge was founded in 1910, only two years after the Oakland's Vasa Tegner



OAKLAND WIKI

BJORNSON HALL has a long and interesting history. Note the Art Moderne features, with canted corner entry and rounded canopy with speed lines.

Lodge #149 was formed. These lodges, like many other ethnic organizations across the country, initially offered social opportunities, emotional support and financial aid to the many displaced arrivals.

The Swedish and Norwegian choices of names for their Oakland lodges bear a striking similarity. Both lodges picked the names of distinguished writers in the wake of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, a time of cultural regrouping in the East Bay.

Tegner was named for the Swedish poet Esaias Tegner. Tegner was one of the most well-known Swedish writers of the 19th century, known especially for his translation of the Icelandic Fritholf's *Saga*, which was admired throughout Europe. Tegner was known as the father of modern poetry in Sweden.

Bjornson was named for the Norwegian poet, Bjornstjerne Bjornson. (The lodge's

See **BJORNSON** on page 6

KITTY HUGHES



TEGNER LODGE #149's Swedish-born members baking semlor in the Bjornson Hall kitchen.



Bjornson

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first choice was Edward Grieg after the great composer, but that name was already taken.) Bjornson was a poet who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1903, distinguishing himself as one of the four great Norwegian writers. He also wrote the lyrics for what is known as the Norwegian national anthem. Bjornson Hall displayed his photo as well as a small Norwegian flag, which Bjornson's oldest son gave the lodge; the flag once sat on the poet's desk.

Future/Forward: Today, both lodges are open to anyone with an interest in Scandinavian history and culture. They also offer opportunities for live socializing, a needed alternative to the demands of virtual online activities.

For some years, the Oakland Magic Circle, a 90-plus year-old magicians' club, has also met regularly at Bjornson, as well as the Old Rails Club, and the Turnverein German Chorus. The hall has hosted many quinceañeras, adapting to East Oakland's cultural shifts. The frequent quinceañeras helped provide the needed income that kept the hall going for many years. Bjornson has also hosted dance events, club dinners, and more. These groups and events are now homeless, trying to find meeting places where they can stay in Oakland. Unfortunately, Covid-19 may have been the final blow to Bjornson Hall, as it could not survive without the needed rents. And Covid happened during a time when Oakland is losing so many viable rental spaces, as one by one they make room for mega-housing projects.

Bjornson Hall is a marker of Oakland's ongoing story of adaptability, having served a variety of cultural interest groups that reflect our city's eclectic culture. As of this writing, it is not clear where the displaced groups will continue to meet, or whether they can manage to stay in Oakland. The quinceañeras, dinners, and other events are now on their own as well. It is almost too much to hope that the new owner will restore the hall and retain its function as a community gathering place, two pretty hefty orders. But one can hope.

Thank you to the city of Oakland's Cultural Heritage Survey staff for invaluable assistance in researching the history of Bjornson

Brooklyn Fire Station: rich history worth protecting

By Kathleen DiGiovanni

Tucked into the middle of the block between two 1870s-era houses is the Brooklyn Fire Station, Engine #4, at 1235 International Boulevard.

Engine #4 has its origin in the Brooklyn Township Volunteer Fire Department formed in 1865, according to a fire department history by Neil Honeycutt. Organized to fight

fires in the burgeoning, wood-framed town of Brooklyn, its first home was on East 12th Street between 13th and 14th avenues. A few years later, it was renamed the Brooklyn Engine Company, though it continued to be a volunteer department. After Brooklyn's annexation to the city of Oakland in 1872, the company was designated Engine #4, but for reasons of municipal finance, it and its sister company Clinton Hook and Ladder #3 operated independently of the city until 1877.

Retired OFD lieutenant and OHA supporter Edmund Clausen once told this anecdote that he'd heard from the nephew of the principal character involved: "When the city of Oakland annexed the town of Brooklyn, the deal included two volunteer fire companies, the Brooklyn Engine Company and the Clinton Hook and Ladder Company. When the fire chief's job opened in 1872, the Brooklyn lads, filled with pride, believed that one of their own should be the next chief of the Oakland Fire Department. The Oakland boys thought otherwise. To settle the issue, the Oaklanders and the Brooklynites met at Lake Merritt, at the center of the 12th Street Dam, and 'duked it out;' the winner of the donnybrook getting to pick the next chief. George Taylor, recently of the Brooklyn Vol-

Hall. Also thanks to Karl Eikeberg, long-time Bjornson Hall member, for providing background information on the Sons of Norway. ■

unteers, served as chief of the Oakland Fire Department from 1872 to 1874."

The station moved from East 12th Street to its current address in 1874. Today's station was built in 1909, according to building permit records. It was designed by Oakland architect Fred Soderberg who had an active practice in Oakland in the first quarter of the 20th century. Besides the Brooklyn station,



KATHLEEN DIGIOVANNI

A 2015 OHA TOUR visited Oakland landmark Fire Station #4: if replaced, what would be its new use?

Soderberg designed at least three other Oakland fire stations: the old Elmhurst and Magnolia stations, both now demolished, and the former Chinatown station on Alice Street, now a private residence. He was also responsible for the design of the old Emeryville City Hall and the Jenny Lind Hall on Telegraph Avenue. Soderberg, a curious character, was elected to the Oakland City Council in 1915 where he also served as Commissioner of Streets. In 1920, he was the subject of an attempted impeachment along with two other councilmen. The impeachment effort failed to make it onto the ballot owing to

See FIRE STATION on page 8

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members through May 2021:

Glen Brewster, Claire Jeannette, Martin Levy, Linda Lewin, Ariana Makau, Alan Petersen, Amy Spade & Celia Melton, Erika Steiner



San Antonio Park may remain as much-needed greenspace after public outcry

By Naomi Schiff

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

■ **State legislation presents a challenge:** Proposed California legislation encouraging multi-unit development in residential neighborhoods may present a new challenge to historic preservation in areas all over Oakland, especially where older structures predominate but may not be within designated historic districts, which is the case for many thousands of buildings.

With the idea of increasing residential density, Senate Bills 6, 8, and 9 hold potential to prevent cities from exercising local planning measures and limit their prerogatives to insist upon contextual design and massing. If not substantially amended, they could open the door to demolitions in intact neighborhoods such as Maxwell Park, Adams Point, and West Oakland. While intended to help spur the development of more housing—an apparently reasonable idea—the measures also can have irreversible consequences for urban fabric and historic streets. Among other groups, California League of Cities and Livable California are tracking these issues and alerting citizens to opportunities to contact legislators.

■ **Update on Blue Triangle/Lake Merritt Lodge/Hult Dorm:** whatever you call it, it has a new use! As we recently wrote, the former YWCA residence at 2332 Harrison near Lake Merritt was established in 1926 for young, single working women. With pandemic-related funding, the City of Oakland worked out a lease and now it has reopened as 92 units of housing for homeless residents over 65, or those with medical conditions that put them at risk for COVID-19.

■ **300 Lakeside Drive: Kaiser Center is new home to PG&E headquarters:** The iconic Kaiser Center building facing Lake Merritt will have new owners as PG&E moves from its longtime headquarters in San Francisco. BART has been a prominent tenant in recent times, and the University of California has occupied various floors in the building.

■ **City changes: new Preservation Planner! New LPAB chairperson! New Planning Commissioner!** Welcome to Karen August, Planner III, who has become Historic Preservation planner and the secretary



SAN ANTONIO PARK MASTER PLAN RESOURCES

SPORTS, GEESE, lawns, and trees occupy the sloped block of San Antonio Park.

to the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. And thanks to Pete Vollmann for filling in! Betty Marvin continues to head the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey office, with the able assistance of Gail Lombardi.

At the June LPAB meeting, Vincent Sugrue presided over his final session as chairperson, having been appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council as a new Planning Commissioner. Klara Komorous-Towey (who had been vice chair) has been

elected the new LPAB chairperson, and Ben Fu as vice chairperson. Congratulations, all!

■ **San Antonio Park Master Plan may change course:** After a substantial outcry from neighborhood groups, which OHA supported, a master plan calling for a fire station to be constructed in Oakland’s oldest city park seems to be changing course, though it is too soon to be absolutely sure. Councilmember Fortunato-Bas announced that a

See **PRESERVATION** on page 8

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ZOOM LECTURE PRESENTERS/SPEAKERS

Alan Petersen: “Gunnar Widforss; The West in Watercolor; Spotlight on Oakland”

Ariana Makau, founder, Nziliani Glass Conservation: “Preserving the Past, Planning for the Future, Saving a 118-year-old inverted glass dome in Downtown Oakland”

Paul Brekke-Miesner: “A Basketball Revolution in Oakland”

Phil Bellman: “Life and Legacy of F. M. ‘Borax’ Smith”



Preservation

Continued from page 7

planned community meeting in June would be delayed, and that the fire station effort would be separated from the planning for park improvements. Many residents objected to placing a fire station in much-used park space, when other urgent park needs and improvements identified in previous plans had never been met. In the meantime, Oakland's oldest fire station, Station No. 4, is deemed too small and antiquated for modern use to continue there. What will be the fate of this landmark?

■ **Main Library RFP:** The library is issuing a Request for Proposals for a consultant to study plans for remodeling, replacing, moving, or expanding the present Main Library. The city of Oakland owns the square block where it sits, on 14th Street between Madison and Oak streets. For current uses,

the building has become old-fashioned, and librarians are eager to bring it up to modern standards, to enlarge it, allow for a wider range of media, better incorporate digital devices and computerization, and better meet patrons' needs.

■ **Posey Tube:** OHA has been commenting upon a plan to modify the exit onto Harrison Street from the Posey Tube.

This long-running project would entail demolition of some of the historic balustrade that flanks the roadways, and may require demolition of one of the two remnant pillars that stand under the 880 freeway, cut off to make way for the overhead lanes. As a historic landmark, the State Historic Preservation Office has to concur in a memorandum of understanding with CalTrans, and a federal "section 106" review. One outcome will likely be a contribution of \$100,000 to help fund the city's Facade Improve-



GENE ANDERSON/OUR OAKLAND

LANDMARK #58, the Williams Block on East 12th Street, is on the market in the Clinton/Brooklyn neighborhood.

ment Program, for building improvement projects in the Waterfront Warehouse National Register district. Another is the possibility that a new program may bring some lucky tourgoers inside the art deco tower that stands above the Oakland end of the tube, to see the inner workings of this key piece of 20th century tunnel construction innovation.

■ **1156 E. 12th St. on the market:** The venerable Williams Block, built in 1885, Oakland Landmark #58 in downtown Clinton, was recently advertised for sale. Eager community members hope to see it stabilized and gently repaired. Here's a bit of language from the landmark designation document: "The second story originally contained offices and lodging rooms, while the street level housed a grocery store, dry goods store and dressmaker. The building is a good example of the business blocks that were erected in the old Clinton/Brooklyn commercial district . . . " ■

OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER



HISTORIC MAIN LIBRARY, designed by Miller-Warnecke, architects, on the day of its dedication in January 1951. A Ken Rice photo.

Fire station

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irregularities in the petition-gathering process. According to newspaper accounts, Soderberg in 1907 accused his former partner of absconding with more than his share of the proceeds when they broke up their business partnership.

Though the original arches over the doors are gone, the old station retains much of the look it had when it was new. One of its notable features is that it still has a hose dry-

ing tower out back. Oakland's newer stations don't have them. Best viewed from the 13th Avenue side of the building, the three-story tower was used to dry water-saturated fire hoses. Drained cotton canvas hoses were hoisted up to the top of the tower with pulleys and left there to drip-dry. This fire station was designated an Oakland city landmark in April 1980 and, after 120 years, still has a lot of life left in it. ■

This is a slightly updated reprint of an article that ran in our Fall 2015 issue. To learn

more about the issues facing the fire station today, please see page 7, San Antonio Park.



KITTY HUGHES

INTERIOR of the fire station with stained glass window near the stairway.



Ellie and John Sutter's lasting legacy

AILEEN FRANKEL



LONGTIME ACTIVISTS Ellie and John Sutter, with John Klein, after a gathering of the Coalition of Advocates for Lake Merritt in 2020.

By Naomi Schiff

Oakland Heritage Alliance mourns the passing of Elouise (Ellie) Sutter on April 13, and Judge John Sutter on May 10. Among the earliest members of OHA, they were mainstays of Oakland civic life.

Ellie was an arts educator, schools advocate, and leader with the YWCA. John was a City Councilmember, a Superior Court Judge from 1982 to 1996, and an elected boardmember of the East Bay Regional Parks District from 1998 to 2018. He played a key role in establishing many East Bay parks and serving on the city council from 1971 to 1982 after a

campaign to save Snow Park from becoming a hotel. John helped inspire the rescue of the 12th Street end of Lake Merritt from an unwise development plan, and in what became Measure DD which funded many park, creek, and bay trail improvements.

John pushed for the creation of Oakland's Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline and the recently-rejuvenated Snow Park. Just recently, the idea he had in 1967 for a park at the foot of the Bay Bridge came to fruition, which is named after him. The Sutters have left an enormous legacy in the lives and open spaces of Oakland and



SNOW PARK: part of the Sutter legacy.

NAOMI SCHIFF



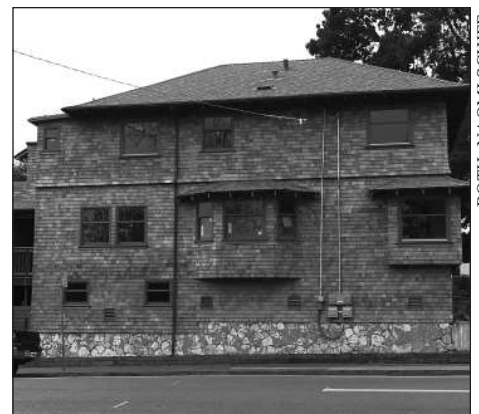
LONGTIME MEMBER John Sutter speaks at the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club.

AILEEN FRANKEL

the East Bay. We extend our condolences and warmest thanks for their life-long efforts to their three daughters and family. ■

From shingle to stucco to shingle again!

If you've wondered why a city's planning department interferes with the desire to update historic houses, consider: A few years ago, an ill-advised renovation coated an otherwise-blameless shingle house in "modernizing" stucco. But the ahistorical blandification didn't have the appropriate permit! Enter the city of Oakland's Cultural Heritage Survey, the sagacious advice of Betty Marvin, time and expense—and witness the recovered house (Chetwood and Santa Clara)! ■



BOTH: NAOMI SCHIFF



Who was Alice Pardee? We learned more

By Dennis Evanosky

In the last edition of the *OHA News*, my friend and fellow writer Erika Mailman wrote about our attempts to track down an infant named Alice Pardee who died in 1903. This child's burial appeared to signal secrecy around her death on the part of her famous, illustrious family. We had searched for her after my interest in her had been reawakened when I came across her paperwork again in 2020 at the Pardee Home Museum.

I first learned about Alice Pardee at the Pardee Home Museum about 20 years ago. She was just four months old when she died, so I called her "Little Alice." I thought of her frequently over the years. Her father was George Pardee. Because I had found her death certificate tucked away in a filing cabinet in Governor George Cooper Pardee's home, we assumed that he was her father.

I knew that the governor's family had a prominent burial lot in Plot 1 at Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery. Yet the paperwork said that Alice rested in a much-overgrown lot in Plot 44, an unendowed, uncared-for space on the northern fringes of the cemetery.

I am fortunate to have unrestricted access to all the records at Mountain View and permission to wander about at will. I visited the cemetery's office several times over the years and gathered all the information I could about Alice.

I also frequently, but fruitlessly, ambled through the brambles and bushes in Plot 44 looking for her.

Our investigation detailed in Erika's article led us to believe that Alice was part of George Cooper Pardee's family, and that

George or other members of his family might have something to hide. They did not.

Thanks to Oakland's premier historian and a self-described compulsive fact-checker, Betty Marvin, we learned that the information in the document at the Pardee Home Museum matched another George Pardee in Oakland: George Leverett Pardee.

Erika and I apologize to anyone who took offense at our assumptions and the underlying insinuations aimed at George Cooper Pardee and his family.

Let me introduce you to "Little Alice." Her father George L. Pardee hailed from Vermont. From what I could gather from the Pardee Genealogy, this branch of the Pardee family settled in Benson, Vermont, after leaving New Fairfield, Connecticut. On July 5, 1802, Asher Pardee purchased a farm in Benson from Isaac Wheeler. Asher's grandson was George L. Pardee.

George L. married Canadian Estella Blythe in 1894. Betty Marvin found them in the 1910 federal census, which also lists the couple's four children—Edith, George C., Ralph and Juanita. At that time, the family lived on 54th Street in Oakland. George told the census taker that he was a quarryman.

Let's step back 10 years because I also found the family in the 1900 federal census. The census taker listed George L and Estella Pardee as living on Vernon Street in Oakland. He noted that George was making a living as a farmer. According to that census, George and Estella were living with their children Edith, Clifford and Ralph. Clifford is not mentioned in the 1910 census, so perhaps Alice is not the only child they lost.



DENNIS EVANOSKY

ALICE'S GRAVE, outlined by palm fronds

My research uncovered a second similarity in names. George and Estella named one of their sons "George C." He and George Cooper Pardee are listed in R. L. Polk & Co.'s 1927 City Directory one after the other, each as "Geo. C." According to the directory, George L. and Estella's son was living on Chabot Road and earned his living as an apiarist (beekeeper).

I searched through the 718-page Pardee Genealogy that I downloaded and converted to a Word document but could not find what the "C" meant in our beekeeper George C.'s moniker. I suspect that the C may stand for Clifford, a memorial to the sibling who did not survive childhood.

Alice Pardee died March 20, 1903 and was laid to rest the next day. Earlier this year, I found, uncovered, cleaned, and reverently adorned with palm leaves her unmarked grave. I am working with the cemetery to hopefully mark her final resting place with a stone. I will also place her story in her folder at the cemetery so future taphophiles will know about her.

Rest in peace, Little Alice. You are not forgotten. ■

OHA loses early advocate Ed Phillips

Longtime OHA member Edward Phillips has passed away. Ed and Mary Phillips were among the earliest advocates for historic preservation in Oakland. Ed served as a boardmember, served as president in the 1980s, and led walking tours. An urban planner, Ed was planning director in Concord and later worked in Albany, El Cerrito, and Fremont.

Ed's calm demeanor, graciousness, and warmth—as well as his urban planning expertise were crucial at a time when

OHA was struggling to figure out its way forward and working hard to incorporate historic preservation into Oakland's vision of itself. He assisted in the first cultural heritage survey of Oakland in the 1980s. His ability to get along with everyone was an enormous asset to OHA at a time when historic preservation was not at all a core consideration in city decision-making.

Our heartfelt sympathies to Mary and to Ed's whole family, with gratitude for your longstanding support and assistance. ■



TOSCANA TILE TEASER! See page 12.



Emerging from the pandemic fog

By Mary Harper, President

Greetings, OHA members! Thank you for your support during this unprecedented time.

Although constrained by COVID, devoted OHA members accomplished some of the goals we set at the beginning of the year. Members put together a wonderful series of online lectures, from watercolors to Borax Smith. Many of us became experts in Zoom!

We will hold an abbreviated in-person walking tour season. Members also put in many hours commenting on new developments, as well as preparing for and participating in meetings and hearings. A few of the projects are:

In March, the California College of Arts and Crafts, 5200 Broadway, was back before the Design Review Committee. The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) is in progress. The commissioners recognized the need to preserve the historic elements of the buildings while fulfilling the need for affordable housing. Plans for 5200 Broadway include only 10% moderate income housing.

In February, the city published its DEIR for the Howard Terminal Ballpark. In April, OHA commented on the proposed variants, the Gondola Variant and the Peaker Plant.



SCREENGRAB of Paul Brekke-Miesner's online presentation, "A Basketball Revolution in Oakland," part of our lecture series held on Zoom.

The Memorandum of Agreement for the long awaited Oakland Alameda Access Project (Posey Tube) is in its final stages. OHA members attended many stakeholder meetings and are working very hard to save the historic western pylon on the Oakland side.

None of this would have been possible without the able assistance of our office staff, Amelia Cass, Lisa McLaughlin, and Joyce Hendy, our number one volunteer. Sadly, Lisa's last day was May 27th. OHA thanks Lisa for her hard work and for pushing us

forward with her excitement and new marketing ideas.

As I did in my first message, I encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas with us. I also encourage you to volunteer. We need people to help the preservation action committee, to monitor meetings, investigate proposed projects, and read reports. And, of course, we will need help with our walking tours.

Thank you again, OHA members and friends. ■

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PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

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A baking behemoth in Temescal continues to “rise” artisanally

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Rising from the southeast corner of Market Street at 40th is a building that this writer has long admired. From the imposing way that it faces the corner directly, to its parapets, to the darker red brick and green tile accents, it's got a lot of style for a utilitarian commercial structure. The mosaic tile entry clues us in: 3924 Market St. was home to the Toscana Bakery, a well-loved but long-gone baker of sourdough loaves.

Oakland newspaper reports and building permit records tell us that in September 1927, the city issued permits for a two-story bakery and apartment building, estimated to cost \$52,000. Toscana hired Eugene Campomenosi, a contractor active in Temescal at the time, throwing the business to another member of the Italian-American business community.

Though many sources say that Toscana first heated up its ovens in 1895, this seems to be another instance of secondary sources repeating each other without citation. There may also be some confusion with the almost contemporaneous Toscana Bakery in San Francisco. It's not until 1918 that a bakery with that name appeared in Oakland city directories, when Lawrence Bertolotto was listed as manager of the Toscana Bakery at its original location, 939 - 3rd St. Toscana was likely launched a few years earlier, though. City directories place George Lagorio as a baker at Lagorio & Co., a grocery store at the 3rd Street address in 1913 and in 1917 an M. Lagorio is a grocer there. Later, the Lagorios and the Bertolottos are jointly

associated with the bakery. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for 1912 show a store at the corner of 3rd and Myrtle with a building next door identified as a “bake house.” The available evidence suggests that Toscana operated both as a bakery and as a grocery store during this period and after their move to Temescal.

In an interesting aside that's worth noting, the 1906 directory lists G.B. Ratto at 939 - 3rd Street, working as a baker. This is the same G.B. Ratto who founded Washington Street's Ratto's, which dates its own founding to 1897.

After moving to 40th and Market, Toscana continued to operate a grocery store in association with the bakery. A Bill Fiset column in the August 3, 1973 *Oakland Tribune* cites a grocery handbill from the bakery from 1933 to make a point about grocery prices during the Great Depression. Adapting to the needs of the times, Toscana filed its application for a liquor license when Prohibition was set to be lifted in December 1933. Its wholesale business thrived through the decades, joining forces with its competitor Columbo in 1971.

Through a complicated series of mergers, Oakland's Toscana and Colombo bakeries joined San Francisco's Parisian and Boudin to become the San Francisco French Bread Company in 1984, a Northern California baking behemoth. Later on, Boudin was spun off, and in 1997 the remaining three companies were acquired by Interstate Baking, makers of Wonder Bread and Hostess Twinkies. The Toscana label continued to



KATHLEEN DIGIOVANNI

TOSCANA'S DOUGHY CORNER

appear in grocery advertising until 1997 before being discontinued for good.

Toscana moved out of the Market Street corner in 1984; baking operations had already moved to bigger, higher-capacity facilities. For the last 25 years, the old Toscana Bakery building has been home to Athowe Fine Art Services, a full-service fine art transportation, storage, and installation business. There are no signs out front, and the only suggestions that arty pursuits are happening inside are the wrought iron gate and entry door on the Market Street side.

“Home of the Famous Sour French”: Herb Caen quoted a banner that in 1964 adorned the Toscana building. He was making a crack about Charles DeGaulle, but we remember the bread. ■