

Oakland from the pages of a book

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

You can learn a lot about a city from a novel. Any halfway serious reader of fiction knows that there are whole genres of “city” novels: Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Miami all have their books. There are Oakland novels out there, too. As a longtime local history librarian and one-time fiction selector, I’ve read plenty of “Oakland” novels. Here’s a small sample that I hope will encourage you to get to know Oakland in fiction.

Oakland’s earliest appearance in fiction may be in *The Feud of Oakfield Creek*, an 1887 novel by California-born philosopher Josiah Royce. The story is based on the 1880 Mussel Slough gunfight between settlers and Southern Pacific railroad agents that also inspired Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*.

Lake Merritt appears as Webster Lake in Gertrude Atherton’s short story “A Monarch of a Small Survey” published in the 1905 collection *A Bell in the Fog*. In this story, an Oakland plutocrat and his sister’s abusive neglect of their spinster companion results in tragedy. Lake Merritt figures prominently in the story as do the mansions that dotted its shore at the end of the 19th century.

The late 19th century is also evoked in a very different story, Stephanie Mittman’s 1997 romance novel, *The Courtship*. Within the framework of a historical romance, the author provides a fairly convincing portrayal of the Oakland of boardwalk and carriage days.

Beautifully portraying the Oakland of the 1920s, *Carter Beats the Devil* by Glen David Gold (2001) tells a fictionalized story about a real-life magician, Charles Carter. The story weaves real people like President Warren G. Harding, Philo Farnsworth, and Borax Smith into a fast-moving, suspenseful yarn. Oakland is so specifically drawn in this novel that it



LAKE MERRITT IN THE 19TH CENTURY as the characters in Gertrude Atherton’s short story would have known it.

might as well be one of the characters. There are so many good passages — this is just one, set in Mountain View Cemetery:

Carter put some utensils, magazine clippings, and a light meal into a leather bag. He rode the trolley to the top of Piedmont Avenue. To his left was a stonecutter’s, and to the right, an actual florist, industries for the dead. Straight ahead was Mountain View Cemetery.

Mountain View was large, green, and uncrowded, with sections set aside near the entrance, by the flatlands, for the poor, the Jews, the Chinese, the Portuguese. There were foothills thereafter; and pathways that snaked around reflecting pools and fountains. A quiet knoll planted with lilies, representing innocence, was reserved for the unbaptized

babies, and a U-shaped valley for the Spaniards who wanted to be buried facing their ancestral home. There were rows of eucalyptus and sycamores placed so the wind would produce a soft rustling noise designed to aid contemplation.

... Passing the monuments to Crocker and Ghirardelli, he took a shortcut through some underbrush and approached the monuments one row below, those of a slightly lesser ostentation. He scrambled up an oak, and dropped from a low branch onto a tomb whose granite flagstones had one word spelled out in obsidian chips: CARTER.

Better known as a radical journalist and historian specializing in Latin America, Carleton Beals took a side-road into fiction with his 1929 novel, *Destroying Vic-*

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Fiction

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tor; set in Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this strange novel, Beals's hapless protagonist, Scroggin, stumbles from academia to journalism to advertising, laboring for years to complete a scholarly manuscript "destroying" Victor Hugo. Oakland is disguised as "Morgan City" here (Berkeley and San Francisco go by *noms de guerre* too) but local places, like Lake Merritt and the old Ye Liberty Theater, bear their familiar, Oakland-y names. Here's an example:

Scroggin emerged from the warm city hall. A cold wind was blowing. He clutched his overcoat lapels tightly together and stepped quickly across the square to catch a Fourteenth Street car. He was due to give a nine o'clock lecture at the Ruskin Club on the other side of Lake Merritt.

The car was slow in coming. He glanced into a basement store window, filled with leather goods. The black throat of a suitcase yawned at him. He stamped his feet, then took to pacing back and forth in front of Ye Liberty Theater. Entering crowds jostled him. Around the corner on Fourteenth Street he took to pacing again. Darker here; fewer people passing; but the Lake wind was keener. At each turn-about it bit sharply into him, making him brace his legs and duck his head.

The ghosts of Oakland's long-vanished Seventh Street Japantown come to life in



IN THE BESSIE BLUE KILLERS, the characters eat hot dogs at Kasper's.

Toshio Mori's short story cycle *Yokohama, California*, first published in 1949. Though completed in 1941, Mori's publisher postponed publication after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Mori and his family were evacuated to the Tanforan Assembly Center and later interned at Topaz, Utah. While at Topaz, Mori wrote the two wartime stories that are the collection's bookends. By the time the war ended and this book could be published, "Li'l Yokohama" had been blown to the winds.

Though set principally in southern California and on the highways, *Long Haul* is A. I. Bezzerides's gritty 1938 novel about long-distance truckers in the thirties. It includes scenes like this one set in Oakland's old Produce District:

He crossed the Bay and went down Franklin Street, through the market. It was past noon and only a few of the houses were open. Boys were packing oranges at Jake's. Men walked in and out of Mike's and the Produce Café. Already the street was taking on the quiet air of night. Dogs sniffed in the gutters. Moto waved, but Nick did not stop. He drove on, down Twelfth, past the Tower where trucks were waiting, down East Fourteenth, past Andy's. He did not want to see anybody, not even Andy.

Bezzerides got to know Oakland when he studied engineering at Berkeley. He

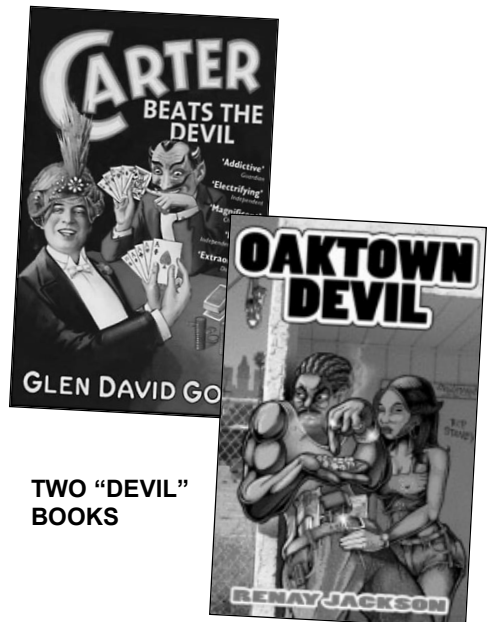
worked as a trucker before becoming a screenwriter and novelist. *They Drive by Night*, the noir classic movie with George Raft and Humphrey Bogart, was based on *Long Haul*.

Co-op, Upton Sinclair's 1936 labor novel, is set in Oakland's Depression-era "Pipe City" where homeless men and women created a co-operative village in a warren of surplus sewer pipes at the foot of 19th Avenue. A 1993 documentary called *Pipe City* was also based on this unique community.

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TWO "DEVIL" BOOKS

Fiction

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In Douglas Coupland's short collection of short stories, *Polaroids from the Dead*, Deadheads convene in Oakland for a series of concerts at the Coliseum in October 1991. Told from the point of view of several Deadheads, both local and itinerant, these stories are notable for the way they capture Oakland's eeriness and unease in the days just after the fire. Also making a theme of the 1991 fire is Maxine Hong Kingston's *Fifth Book of Peace* and Patricia Polacco's children's picture book *Tikvah Means Hope*.

The mushrooming Urban Fiction genre features plenty of titles with connections to and settings in Oakland. Many of these titles are self-published or distributed by print-on-demand vendors and can be difficult to get your hands on. Oakland's Renay Jackson is among the leading writers in this growing category. Initially self-published and marketed by hand in local African-American businesses, Jackson's novels have been picked up by Berkeley publisher Frog Books and now enjoy a broader distribution. Jackson's series of novels, beginning with *Oaktown Devil* in 1998, are very precisely set in the East Bay, giving the reader a lively feel for life in the 'hood. For an earlier take on Urban Fiction, try Kelley Eagle's 1977 *Black Streets of Oakland*.

Eric Miles Williamson's first novel *East Bay Grease* brought hard-luck white East Oakland in the '70s to life. T-Bird Murphy, Williamson's teen-aged protagonist, inhabits a bleak world populated by Hell's Angels, gunite workers, and garage mechanics. A vividly violent and harsh portrait of blue-collar Oakland, this is a difficult book to read. So are Jess Mowry's *Way Past Cool*, *Six Out Seven*, and *Children of the Night* with their keen observations of the lives of black teens scourged by poverty and drug-fueled gang violence in the 1980s.

Nick Twisp is a teenager in Oakland too, but his Oakland is light-years away from the one featured in the novels of Jess Mowry and Eric Miles Williamson. The hero of C.V. Payne's 1993 *Youth in Revolt* trilogy, Nick goes to St. Vitus Academy,

"the most elite and rigorous prep school in the entire East Bay." He divides his time between his mother in Oakland and his father in Kentfield. He wastes time. He sets fires. He drives around with his friends. He records his every angst-ridden thought and word in the diaries that make up this very funny trilogy.

Oakland provides fertile ground for mystery writers. Among others, Lucha Corpi, Janet Dawson, Shelly Singer, Marilyn Wallace, and Leonard Chang have all set their mysteries here. Nichelle D. Tramble's suspenseful Maceo Redfield novels, *The Dying Ground* and *The Last King*, are richly evocative of the city. Here's a short passage about Seventh Street:

The nickname for West Oakland didn't come without its own truths. On every block there were remnants of the area's past life as "Harlem West." Seventh Street still housed the buildings of the Creole Club, Harvey's Rex Club, and the world-famous Slim Jenkins's Place.

... Once-prosperous Seventh Street was now like every other skid row across the country, the last stop on a train going nowhere. Despite the frayed edges, many old-timers refused to leave their homes and abandon what had saved them from the Jim Crow South.

A really effective representation of place can change the way you look at a city. I can't drive through Temescal without thinking about Richard Lupoff's *The Bessie Blue Killers* (1994) and this homage to the long-shuttered Kasper's Hot Dogs at 45th and Telegraph:

Jamie tugged at Lindsey's hand. "Can we go to Mr. Harry's?"

Lindsey looked at Marvia questioningly.

"Mr. Harry runs Kasper's," she said.

"Original Kasper's. Go to no other."

Lindsey raised his eyebrows.

"Telegraph and Forty-fifth," Marvia said. "It's been there a million years.

They have a varied menu. You can have a hot dog with or without tomatoes, with or without onions and with or without pickle relish."

"Okay with me," Lindsey said.

... Kasper's was as Marvia had described it. A tiny triangular building stuck in an island where Shattuck Avenue merged with Telegraph. Its barn-red paint and signs bearing the logo of a white-hatted chef made it look like something taken brand new from another era and dumped it into the present.

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NICHELLE D. TRAMBLE describes Seventh Street nostalgically in *The Dying Ground*.



OAKLAND'S OLD PRODUCE DISTRICT as it would have appeared in *Long Haul*.

Oakland History Room



Oakland History Room

ONE OF THE ATMOSPHERIC SCENES in *Carter Beats the Devil*.

Fiction

Continued from page 3

Oakland doesn't get away without representation in science fiction, either. S. M. Stirling gives us an example in *Conquistador*, in which a 1946 East Oakland basement becomes the portal to an alternative world.

Gun, With Occasional Music, Jonathan Lethem's first novel, is a cross between science fiction and a hard-boiled detective novel. This hybrid paints a picture of a dystopian, futuristic, fantasy Oakland inhabited by "evolved" animals like the kangaroo mob enforcer Joey Castle; "babyheads," children with grown-up brains, tastes, and vices; and adults whose minds are numbed by abundant, free drugs with names like "Forgetol" and "Acceptol." Here it's so rude to ask questions that to do so will cost you "karmic credit," something that makes detective Conrad Metcalf's job mighty hard to do.

Philip K. Dick, onetime Berkeley resident and master of the dark future, wrote two so-so novels set in Oakland before going on to write science fiction classics like *A Scanner Darkly* and *The Man in the High Castle*. Neither *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* nor *Voices from the Street* was published during Dick's lifetime, for good reason. *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* is the marginally better book.

First written around 1960, it was brought into print in the U.K. by Gollancz in 1986 and in this country in 2007 on the strength of Dick's literary reputation. It concerns an ailing garage mechanic Jim Fergesen; his next-door tenant, a down-on-his luck used car salesman, Al Miller; and one of his customers, Chris Harmon. Is Harmon trying to fleece Jim? Is Al? Dick set the book in 1950s Oakland, Emeryville, and other Bay Area locales. The Oakland Public Library even gets a mention, if not an especially nice one.

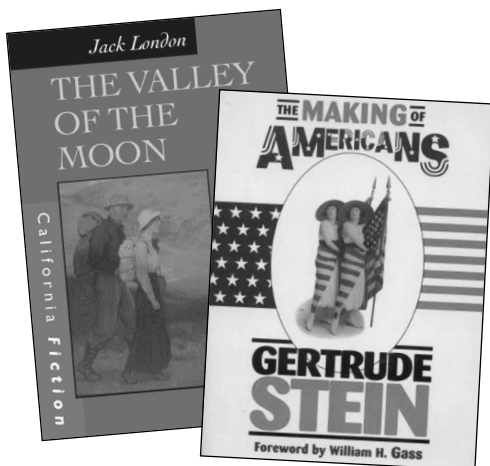
The library gets a sweeter turn in Gary Soto's *Poetry Lover*. In this sequel to his *Nickel and Dime*, also set in Oakland, Soto's poet-hero Silver Mendez visits the Cesar Chavez branch on Foothill:

Silver spent a few hours at the Cesar Chavez Library, rooting for names of Latino professors in a massive college directory . . . Silver wrote down addresses

and studied a rain-speckled window behind the reference desk. Already he visualized his departure from the library when the weather would be clear . . . This departure, however, did not occur until four in the afternoon, when the security guard poked Silver awake. He warned him that sleeping was not permitted — children might get the wrong impression and fall asleep, too.

What about Oakland's favorite son, Jack London? His novels *Martin Eden*, *Tales of the Fish Patrol*, and *The Valley of the Moon* all feature scenes of Oakland in their pages. And our favorite daughter, Gertrude Stein? *The Making of Americans* gives us the Oakland of Stein's childhood in many, many unconventional, experimental pages.

There it is. A concise, personal sample of Oakland in the pages of fiction. There's something for every reading taste and more is being published all the time. Get busy reading! ■



FROM OUR FAVORITE "SON" AND "DAUGHTER"

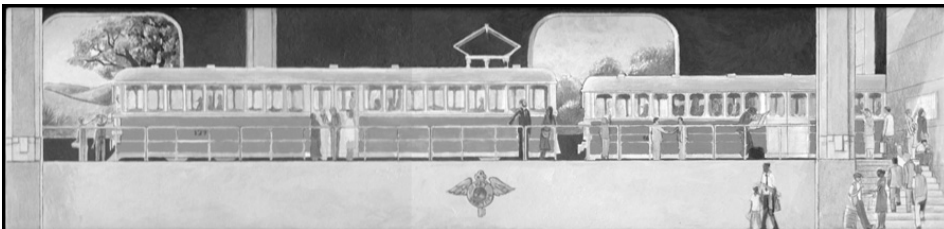
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Key System mural shows East Bay's transit roots



PAINTERS HARD AT WORK on the Key System mural, top. Moving clockwise, a detail of the design shows conductor and employees talking; Rische-Baird and his wife work on the mural; and the full design itself. Designs courtesy Rische-Baird. Photos courtesy Steven Wolmark.

By Doug Dove

Was yesteryear more eco-savvy than today? At least in one regard, artist Rocky Rische-Baird thinks so. “If the idea of implementing an efficient, electric rail system that would run throughout neighborhoods were put forth today in our current environmental nutshell, it would be regarded as a long overdue act of wisdom,” he said.

That’s why Rische-Baird was the perfect person to paint a temporary mural depicting one of Oakland’s long-dismantled Key System trains. OHA and SKS Investments commissioned this mural to appear at the site of the historic Key System building at 1100 Broadway in downtown Oakland. It will

commemorate the innovative mass transit system that once served communities throughout the Bay Area.

The Key Route System operated from 1903 to 1960, serving the cities of Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, Alameda, Emeryville, Piedmont, San Leandro, Richmond, Albany and El Cerrito. AC Transit and BART serve much of the system’s territory today. Fittingly, the Key System’s former headquarters sit directly above the 12th Street BART station and are one block from 20 AC Transit bus lines.

Rische-Baird will paint the 20-by-80 foot mural along the 11th Street elevation of the former Key System building. The facade of

the neo-classical structure will be restored and the building will be integrated with a new 20-story tower next door. The combined project will provide office space and ground-floor retail. Eventually, as construction of the building progresses, the mural will be dismantled and auctioned off as part of a fundraiser to support OHA.

“We, along with a number of other highly regarded institutional investors, recognize Oakland’s tremendous potential as a model for urban sustainability and livability,” said Paul Stein of SKS Investments. “Downtown Oakland offers a wealth of cultural ameni-

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Hildy tries not to walk the plank

Here's the place to get the latest gossip on Oakland's historic front. *Around the Town* is compiled by our crack newswoman Hildy Johnson.

Ahoy, mates! Is this ship listin' or sinkin'? Where's that \$41 million going to come from to fix the leaky Oakland deficit? Do we hoist taxes or lower the sails on expenses? Ay, there's the rub. It's tough to walk this creaky oak deck in high heels with a city hall pigeon on your shoulder. Didn't I warn ye in prior issues about the overheated real estate market? The rising bubbles of mortgage trouble?

Now look what's been done! The poor Wall Street sailors and bankers have lost their doubloons! Ay, it looks like it's all going the way of Davy Jones. Who's going to call Ishmael, the ex-mortgage broker, anything now as he sits at the 9th Avenue Terminal, hoping to catch a lead-free fish for dinner?

The voice of the turtle is not heard in the land and the mystical salmon have become mythical. No more do they swim home to sweet, sweet Sacramento. Is it because of gerrymandering and gridlock that they don't return to spawn? Is it related to the collapse of the honeybee? Yar, it's a sorry day for sea dogs like you and me. I would sing a salty shanty of boy-os and girl-os but this is a family-type publication, see.

But listen me hearties, just when things look the bleakest, there, out by the curling curlews and twisting fog rounding Goat Island, the sun will start to break through the clouds. And there will be the spectre of the Snark seen skimming towards the inland channel as an omen of better days to come!

Cough, cough. My, it's hard talking like a pirate. And before we are sued by Disney, we'll continue with our tales and return to our literary allusions and economic outlook at another time.

The nonprofit RAILS is starting up the project to restore the old Wood Street Train Station in West Oakland! A \$400,000 feasibility phase has Phil Tagami's CCG working on plans. (See the building in its prime at http://www.oaklandheritage.org/s_p_station.htm.) The neighboring area is under development by Rick Holliday, Bridge Housing and Pulte Homes, with 1,000 homes committed. Lots of ideas are being bandied about, including community uses, green jobs, and historic displays.

And speaking of Rick Holliday, he just opened the Pacific Cannery Lofts also in West Oakland, rehabilitating the old cannery building to provide affordable housing for frisky Friscans who can't afford Frisco.

More groundbreaking news: the Shorestein Company has just started construction on a 23-story office tower adjacent to 555 City Center, which will replace a parking lot and add to their collection of prime real estate buildings surrounding City Hall. We salute these savvy businessmen who have faith in our poor, old knocked-about Oakland!

Cheer up me boy-os and girl-os! Now that the election is over, a new day has arrived! Stop bleating about your problems and get back to pirating, er, I mean, work! ■



Mural

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ties, transportation options, and proximity to some of the Bay Area's best residential neighborhoods and has become one of the Bay Area's most dynamic urban centers."

"We are thrilled that publications like *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Outdoor Magazine* and *Bon Appetit* have all recently reported on the trends and developments that make Oakland such a wonderful place to live," said Deborah Acosta of the city's Community and Economic Development Agency. "This mural and the restoration of the Key System building are additional examples of the authentic urban experience that differentiates Oakland from so many other cities."

The mural depicts passengers boarding an iconic orange-colored Key System train at a station. Work started in August 2008; Rische-Baird expects to finish in November (stop by and check out his progress). This is his second mural commemorating the Key System (The other is at 41st Street and Piedmont Avenue.)

"My basic vision of this project is to place a bit of past upon the present," said Rische-Baird. "I have always been interested in the repetitive nature of history and the reasons of nostalgia. It has been said that if a society were truly satisfied with their present then nostalgia would not exist. I don't know if I completely agree with that, but The Key Route System, and the strong sentiments felt for it, offer a compelling example towards that argument . . . Working with the Oakland Heritage Alliance and SKS on this project has been an absolute pleasure. They are a group with real creative vision and it makes the whole artistic process all the more inspiring." ■

Calendar

We lists events related to history and preservation that may be of interest to members. To submit items, call 763-9218 or e-mail info@oaklandheritage.org. Events subject to change; please confirm before embarking.

EVENTS

7:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 13: Cindy Heitzm-

man presents as part of OHA's Lecture Series. See p. 8 for details.

7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 11: It's OHA's annual meeting, followed at 7:30 by the next installment in our lecture series. Dave Weinstein will discuss his new book *It Came from Berkeley: How Berkeley Changed the World*, an amusing, touching, anecdote-filled, and colorfully illustrated social history of Berkeley that shows how so much of what makes America great got its start, or at least a kick in the

pants, in the often-maligned city of Berkeley. \$8 members, \$10 non-members. Chapel of the Chimes, 4499 Piedmont Ave.

TOURS AND EXHIBITS:

After the Goldrush: 150 Year Photographic History of San Francisco's Mechanics' Institute. Works by Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Wakins and Pirkle Jones, as well as gold medals and memorabilia from the Institute's 19th century industrial fairs. Mechanics Institute Library. 57 Post Street, San Francisco.



How economic crisis trickles down to nonprofits like OHA

By Valerie Garry, President

As I write this, Congress is struggling to reach a deal to bail out this country's failing financial firms and we are only six weeks away from electing a new president. Some local nonprofits and charities fear they may lose millions of dollars in funding following the collapse of major Wall Street investment firms. Shockwaves are being felt far outside the corporate world to nonprofits that have grown accustomed to major support from commercial banks and investment firms.

What impact will this have on the Oakland Heritage Alliance? The good news is that the bulk of our revenue comes from memberships and from earned income from our educational programs and services such as our summer walking tour program and our new lecture series, which we began two years ago.

We count on these educational programs to reach out to the public, to our members, and to the community at large regarding our important mission. We also count on these activities to help us gain new members.

Our membership base needs to grow significantly. We currently have over 500 active members, down from over 700 members two years ago. Fortunately, our current members are continuing to renewing their memberships and we gain new members from our events.

But we must work harder to make sure that membership attrition doesn't follow in the wake of an economic crisis. I am confident we can do this if more people become involved in our organization as active volunteers. To be sure, we need greater financial support, but even more we need more involvement and leadership and participation. This becomes the way we support our mission. Dollars alone can't do it.

I am encouraged by the example of our 2008 summer walking tours, which we conducted between July and September and which drew hundreds of tour-goers to amazing places in Oakland. Each tour involved the considerable efforts of our Walking Tour Committee led by two

board members, Alison Finlay and Joan Dark, and managed by dozens of volunteers, our efficient and hard-working administrative director, Chela Zitani, and the marvelous and knowledgeable historians who lead these excellent tours.

Our Thursdays at Chapel of the Chimes lecture series, which started up again on October 9, has been a success and we especially appreciate having Julia Morgan-designed Chapel of the Chimes as the setting for these lectures, which the Life-mark Group provides to us for our use at no cost. They have been wonderful corporate allies in our mission and we appreciate all that they do.

We are also excited about our collaborative mural art project with SKS Investments, which will be restoring the facade

of the historic Key System building at 11th and Broadway. This handsome neo-classical structure which will be integrated into a new 20-story tower that will provide 310,000-square-feet of Class A office space and 10,000-square-feet of ground-floor retail.

But back to Wall Street and our economic woes. OHA is a grassroots organization, and we need to sow more seeds in our community. The best way for this to happen is for more of our members to get involved.

Please call or send us an email letting us know if you would like to help. More people helping will mean more members, more fresh ideas, more leadership and more outreach.

May we count on you? ■

OHA video now available for viral downloads!

OHA has gone hip! In an effort to reach a wider (younger?) audience, we've created our own YOU TUBE account and uploaded our first video. Kevin Dwyer created this brief film that gives a brief view of Oakland . . . before, during and

after urban renewal, that nefarious trend that robbed us of so many historical treasures and, ultimately, caused the backlash that birthed OHA itself. Check it out at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH_Id8jn4pk. ■

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members to our roster: Anna Davis, B. Medeiros, Betty McEady, Cara Bertron, Carl Kohnert & Kathleen Mohn, Carolyn Doelling, Cheryl Koehler, Cynthia Lie, Daniel Schullman, Dawn Holley, Deborah Greene, Garrett Mahoney, Jacqueline Collins, Jean Quirk, Joanne Rocklin, John D Coll, John Nelson, Karen McNeill, Kate Sculti, Kathryn Griffith, Larry Rice, Laurie Lau, Lee Jester, Linda Carlson, Lisa Hire, Margaret Rossoff, Mary & Keith McAllister, Maryanne Wilson, Nina Egert, Peter & Dana Barnett, Rob & Diane Johnson, Rory Anne Walsh, Sharon Kallenberger, Stephen Heide, Stephen Kearney, Victor Smallberg

OHA is grateful for the generous support of its members.

Donations made between March 11, 200 and September 18, 2008:

Elwood Gerrits, City of Oakland, Chuck & Jean Busch, Tim Hallahan, Caryn Combis & Jerry Barclay, Nancy Moore, Kevin Flynn, Sandra Tillin



Report from the Preservation Action Committee

Oak to Ninth still pending

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

Broadway Grand: As you may remember, over the summer OHA made attempts at Planning Commission and LPAB meetings to modify the conditions of approval for this project. We requested greater mitigations for the demolition of the brick arched-window building in the southwest corner of the project (Valley Street). We did get the city to include a condition delaying demolition until a project is permitted and ready to go, rather than allowing immediate demolition. Our concern was that if the project changed or the land was sold, an unnecessary demolition could occur.

A few weeks ago, we expected the project to return to the planning commission, but it was pulled off the agenda. In the meantime, the first phase of the project is leasing its units, rather than selling them, presumably due to economic conditions.

Oak to Ninth: A revised EIR document has been released to remedy deficiencies in the original EIR, as determined by Superior Court Judge Jo-Lynn Lee. OHA and CALM/Joyce Roy had filed suit. Attorneys and citizens are now in a 45-day period for comments, ending Novem-

ber 15. Copies are available from the Planning Department. The EIR is scheduled to go to directly to City Council in December. Arthur Levy is reviewing and will advise us. We are also in touch with Stuart Rickard of Ninth Avenue Terminal Partners, our fellow litigants, and others involved in the Oak to Ninth issues. A second part of the CALM/Roy lawsuit is still pending.

Downtown Zoning: We have had the wonderful help of Chris Buckley in presenting lots of ideas and information to the ZUC committee and to the LPAB at several meetings. We have succeeded in altering the terms of the discussion such that people are now considering "fine-grained" zoning approaches. We are still pushing for our proposed map of limited heights in the vicinity of sensitive historic resources. OHA has been making some progress and has had excellent communication with staff and members of the development community. Chris has a great reputation and a huge amount of technical knowledge. OHA owes him an enormous debt of thanks, and the City of Oakland does too.

16th Street Station: City Council loaned the Train Station Entity \$400,000 to get going on a six-month feasibility phase to

plan for the rehab and reuse of the Sixteenth and Wood station. The members of the TSE consist of three appointees by the Train Station Partnership (of which OHA has been a member), two appointed by BUILD, and Alan Dones, a local developer. They are now intending to hire a director who can serve as liaison to the fee developer, Phil Tagami's CCG company. Tagami's group is to be hired by the TSE (soon to be renamed!) to execute the actual planning and subsequent construction. Changes to the plan include consideration of adding on "parcel three" just to the north of the station as part of the project, in order to achieve better viability, parking, and more community-oriented services.

General Zoning: The city is embarking on a series of meetings and efforts to update zoning citywide. Neighborhood groups should be alerted! Several City Council members are including notices in their email bulletings.

Mills Act: The first year's projects for Mills Act grants have been chosen, 11 in all. This is a pilot program which grants property tax reduction in exchange for the improvement of historic properties. Among those winning grants was Carlos Plazola, an occasional critic of historic preservation efforts in Oakland. We are hoping that a good experience will make his project more successful, and help to prove the merit of this incentive program. ■

Great line-up of preservation speakers

By Kevin Dwyer, Lecture Committee Chair
We're planning our 2008-2009 lecture series now as we go to press. You'll see an exciting lineup of speakers, talking on preservation, architecture and local history.

We would like to give a hearty shout out to **Steve Vigeant** who worked tirelessly over the past two years to help plan the series. If you noticed a tall man with tousled black hair darting back and forth at the Chapel of the Chimes, with power cords or furniture or signage in tow . . . that was Steve. He has decided to take a rest from the lecture series. We express our deep gratitude to him for his invaluable contribution to OHA.

Last month, **Therese Poletti** presented in visual form her latest book, a biography of Art Deco architect Timothy L. Pflueger. The award-winning journalist discussed Pflueger, arguably the most prolific and stylistically-skilled architect of the period. He produced designs for buildings throughout the Bay Area and the state. Oakland's Paramount Theater is a well-known work and nationally recognized as a National Historic Landmark. The lecture covered his career as he rose as a young draftsman in San Francisco's Mission District to the chief consulting architect for the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge. The author sold and signed books at the lecture.

On Nov. 13, **Cindy Heitzman**, executive director of the California Preservation Foundation, will give her take on the state of preservation in California. CPF is well known for its educational programs and its annual meeting that draws participants from throughout the West. She will discuss the role of CPF in the preservation world and how OHA is a part of this picture. Here's an opportunity to learn about statewide issues, how organizations like OHA are faring in the face of significant challenges, and what the future holds for preservation. There will be ample time for questions. So come be a better-informed preservationist!

We look forward to seeing you at the lectures throughout this season!



Partners in Preservation awards go to deserving honorees

By Valerie Garry

While not quite on a par with the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, OHA recently awarded the preservation equivalent of those gold medals. The winners — who worked to preserve, highlight and promote Oakland's architectural and cultural heritage — received accolades for their success.

Held on May 8, 2008, at the beautiful Julia Morgan-designed Chapel of the Chimes, the Partners in Preservation Awards showcased projects that helped revitalize neighborhoods and cultural resources and preserve community character. Here is a brief summary of the winning projects and people:

Regional Bay Trail Historic Interpretive

Markers: Award-winning projects included the Regional Bay Trail Historic Interpretive Markers that help Oakland residents and visitors discover the history of Oakland's waterfront. The markers contain historic photos, maps, graphics and text. They interpret some of Oakland's most fascinating history, including the early settlement of West Oakland, the role of industrial rail and shipping, the Key System, the early jazz scene in Oakland, Jack London Square and the original downtown. They also highlight various developments along the Estuary, including the Depression-era Pipe City, Embarcadero Cove and Brooklyn Basin, among others.

1635 Telegraph Ave.: Brian Kendall, who heads up Oakland's Downtown Façade Improvement Program, won for his efforts to restore and beautify building facades in Uptown, Historic Downtown, Old Oakland, Chinatown and Lower Broadway. We have him to thank for the many newly-restored facades we now see in downtown Oakland. In particular, we honored Brian for the outstanding façade restoration project at 1635 Telegraph Ave. Prior to restoration, the facade had been covered over and "modernized" with concrete/stucco slab. Behind this slab, Brian discovered three tall, arched Palladian-style windows with elaborate ornamentation and the original Columbia Outfitter Co. sign. Komorous-Towey architects worked with Brian on the project.

The Sensory Garden, Lakeside Park Gardens, Oakland-East Bay Garden Center, Inc.: Work on this project began in October 2004 and was completed in 2006. Oakland-



IL PIEMONTE lends Italian glamor to Piedmont Avenue.

East Bay Garden Centers, Inc. was started in the 1950s as a place for Oakland and East Bay member garden clubs to meet and have public shows. The board of directors took on the challenge of designing a new hardscape and garden to replace the eyesore neglected over the years. Inspired volunteers led this collaborative effort with funding and skills provided by a variety of individuals and organizations. They raised money, coordinated volunteers, installed irrigation systems, added a water feature, removed a defunct pond and brought in more than 50 yards of soil. The Hillside Gardeners of Montclair planted the garden and maintain it.

The new Sensory Garden features the use of drought-tolerant plants. Color, sound and fragrance are integral features of the new garden. The old concrete wall coping has been replaced with new terra cotta wall coping.

Sandra Threlfall of Waterfront Action: OHA recognized the outstanding and energetic leadership of Sandra Threlfall, Waterfront Action's executive director, who has spent more than 15 years promoting citizen awareness and appreciation for Lake Merritt and the estuary. Sandra's interest in the estuary goes back to the mid-1990s when, as a member of the League of Women Voters, she began studying the issues pertaining to access to Oakland's waterfront.

Sandra was a key member of a group that planned the highly successful "Walk along the Waterfront" exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California. Waterfront Action was

founded in 1994 in response to requests for updates on waterfront projects. At the time, there were at least three different agencies with waterfront oversight. Waterfront Action grew into a monthly forum for discussion of waterfront projects and improvements with an average of 20 attendees comprising public agency representatives, community groups, developers, landscape architects and citizens interested in the waterfront. Its chief goal is to promote public access to the waterfront.

William Anderson and 2517-2519 11th Avenue: In 2005, William Anderson purchased an 1891 Victorian which had suffered more than its fair share of really bad "remuddling." The house had been stuccoed over, the original window openings had been shrunken to accommodate aluminum windows, the trim was gone, and a green fiberglass porch had been tacked on to the front.

William added a new foundation, removed the stucco, ordered custom windows to fill the original openings, and built a new wood porch. On the interior, he returned the house to its original floor plan and modernized the kitchen and bathrooms. This is the second house on 11th Avenue that William has restored; the other is his own house, which we featured on our 2007 House Tour.

The Floral Depot, 1900 Telegraph Avenue, Weinstein Commercial Properties and RPR Architects: The Floral Depot, a glorious cobalt blue, black and silver terra cotta

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PIP

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gem and one of Oakland's premier landmarks, stands diagonally opposite the Fox Theater at Telegraph and 19th. It is one of the finest examples of Art Deco Polychromed Terra Cotta in the country. Yet it had suffered over 50 years of neglect.

In the 1960s, parts of the 19th Street façade had been removed so that billboard signage for retail could be installed. Terra cotta had been stripped away, exposing the concrete substructure. Cast metal ornamental window surrounds were missing and the steel sash had rusted. Over the years, someone had added black ceramic tiles and covered the historic metal spandrels.

Weinstein Commercial Properties, which owns the Floral Depot, took on the challenge of restoring the historic façade. Working with Brian Kendall, project manager for Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency, Richard Weinstein and RPR architects committed to restoring the original building to its 1931 glory. RPR architects completed a detailed restoration and complied with the applicable Secretary of the Interior Standards for Restoration.

Sullivan Masonry cleaned and re-pointed the historic terra cotta and replaced deteriorated and missing terra cotta elements. Using a mold of the ornamentation, taken from the existing building, they created new aluminum ornamental window surrounds.

Il Piemonte, 4395 Piedmont Ave., Kirk E. Peterson & Associates, Architects: In 2005, Madison Park Financial Corporation hired Kirk Peterson & Associates to design a mixed-used building (condominium and retail space) at the corner of Piedmont Avenue and Pleasant Valley. For about 30 years, the vacant lot had been used only for a pumpkin patch and Christmas tree lot.

The architectural inspiration for the infill project came from Spain and Italy, and it has the feel of a small provincial city. The building is a California interpretation of an historic European model. The massing is traditional in concept, basically a symmetrical composition/plan with a strong central axis.

The central facade element (which the contractors dubbed "the Alamo") marks the formal entrance to the residences above. The side elevation was made to look more residential, like a row of houses, in part because the roof-lines follow the zoning height limit. The building has a strong rusticated base treatment to unify the composition.

The building fits well with the historic buildings in the neighborhood, which are primarily Mediterranean-revival styles, such as the Chapel of the Chimes, St. Leo's, the top-knot of Providence Hospital, and Fenton's. **5433 Carlton Street, The Rochlin Group:** This 1912 Craftsman house at 5433 Carlton suffered more than 20 years of neglect. The roof failed, and rain poured through to the basement. The porch structures, exterior trim, and window sashes had all rotted. There was

no functional heating system, most of the plumbing had failed, the wiring had not been upgraded and the garage was condemned.

In 2006, The Rochlin Group, a father/daughter team with considerable experience and expertise in restoration design and historic research, began a comprehensive restoration of this Rockridge-area house. They finished last year. They had three goals: 1) to restore the house as authentically as possible, 2) to make new work appropriate to the age and style of the house, and 3) to seamlessly incorporate the interior with luxuries appropriate to modern lifestyles.

They rebuilt window sashes using replacement parts and repair epoxies. All intact glazing was carefully removed, indexed and replaced to preserve the original rolled glass. Where glazing was lost, they found old glass in salvage yards to replace it. They pieced in new shingles where the siding had been burned by UV exposure. They built new porches and matched the original materials and detailing. They did extensive research for authentic hardware and fixtures and custom-designed and field built cabinetry for the kitchen and bathrooms. ■



**AWARD WINNER
SANDY THRELFALL**



A DRAMATIC BEFORE AND AFTER unveiling for the facade at 1635 Telegraph Avenue.



A response to last issue's cover story

In our last issue, we ran Kevin Dwyer's article, "Rediscovering Oakland's Japantown." Here is a response from a reader, followed by Dwyer's response in turn:

Dear Mr. Dwyer:

The Masuda Store of Oakland originated in the early 1900s by my grandfather, Torasaburo Masuda. It joined other family grocery stores and became the Wanto Shokai in 1916.

The Masuda family consisted of Torasaburo and wife Kuni, with five daughters, Fumiko, Mineko, Yoshiko, Shimako, and Shizuko, and one son, Tatsuro. The store was operated by the family members. After the death of Torasaburo in 1934, Tatsuro assumed ownership. It was he who graduated from U.C. and had the famous banner made.

The Masuda family migrated to the Fresno area during the early times of the mass evacuation of Japanese. From there they were all sent to Gila River, Arizona, for internment (not Utah, as Mr. Saito recalls).

After the war, the Masuda family, mother and five daughters, returned to Oakland. Tatsuro relocated to Salt Lake City and established a gas station business.

Mr. Dwyer, I sincerely appreciate your efforts in bringing attention to this part of Oakland history. It is a very special feeling when such historical information can actually touch your own personal memories. I only write to you to correct a few facts.

Thank you very much for your efforts to tell the story.

—Ted Tanisawa

I would like to express gratitude to Mr. Tanisawa for taking the time to write to OHA with correct information about the Masuda family. He has effectively solved the mystery! We now know that his uncle, Tatsuro Masuda, the owner of Wanto Grocery, never returned to Oakland to reopen his store after the war. Mr. Tanisawa and I exchanged several subsequent emails. In addition to the corrections he mentions in his letter, we also discussed the 1939 Oakland Business Directory (mentioned in the article) which associated Wanto Grocery with the names Mineko Masuda and Tauneo Ogata. Mr. Tanisawa explained that Mineko Masuda was his aunt. He asked his mother (Yoshiko Masuda), keeper of family memories, about Tauneo Ogata. She said that Mr. Ogata was simply one of the workers in the store, not part of

ownership or even management. It remains a mystery then, why an aunt and an employee are listed in the Oakland directory. Nonetheless, readers now know some intriguing history about this family, a nice backdrop to Dorothea Lange's poignant photograph. This author is pleased to set the record straight.

—Kevin Dwyer

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OHA News welcomes contributions: research projects large or small, historic photos and reports on preservation issues or events. Send to news@oaklandheritage.org.

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Venerable old church says last Mass

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

By the time this newsletter arrives in your mailbox, Oakland's pioneer Roman Catholic will have closed its doors, probably forever. On Sunday, September 21, the very last Mass was celebrated at St. Mary's Church at 8th and Jefferson streets.

St. Mary's got its start in 1853 with a cluster of worshipers who gathered once a month in a private home-turned-chapel at 7th and Grove. A visiting priest crossed the bay from San Francisco to celebrate its mass. Originally, the congregation named itself for St. Anthony but within the year had changed its name to St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception. The parish was formally established five years later in 1858.

In 1865, Fr. Michael A. King, St. Mary's great builder, came to Oakland. Fr. King expanded the tiny chapel early in his ministry while at the same time planning for a new church structure. Construction began at the present site in 1869, and the new church was dedicated by Archbishop Alemany in 1872.

This ambitious project reflected optimism for his flock: at a time when Oakland's population numbered only about 3,000, the "new" St. Mary's could seat between 1,500 and 2,000 faithful.

Ecclesiastical architect Bryan Clinch designed the wood-frame clapboard church, his first church commission. Among his other notable works were Sacramento's Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Joseph's

Cathedral in San José as well as the now-demolished old St. Anthony's Church in East Oakland. Church lore has it that one of St. Mary's bells originally hung at Mission San José and was a gift of the fathers there.

The church's exterior evolved over time. An illustration in the *Oakland Tribune* 1887 special edition depicts a wood-frame building faced with painted clapboards. Around 1907, when the next-door rectory was built, St. Mary's clapboards were replaced with a ground-story run of clinker brick and brown shingles above, imitating the Craftsman style of the rectory and providing a unified appearance to the complex. In 1959, the brown shingles came down and were replaced with the stucco that we see today.

City permit records do not document the removal of the finials atop the church's towers, but it seems likely that they were removed at the same time. The uppermost run of Gothic-style windows was also stuccoed over. The interior was renovated in the early 20th century to make it more "gothic" at the same time brick and shingles were added to the exterior to make it more Craftsman. According to a church history, further changes were made following the Second Vatican Council.

St. Mary's community of worshipers is diverse. Masses are said in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Tagalog. When the Loma Prieta earthquake closed the venerable Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales, that parish



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, CIRCA 1910

merged with St. Mary's. In 2006, the St. Mary's-St. Francis community was enlarged by the addition of the West Oakland's St. Andrew and St. Joseph parishes. At that time, the parish was redesignated "Cathedral of Christ the Light," the name assigned to the lakeside cathedral that is replacing St. Mary's. As of July 2008, St. Mary's had celebrated more than 4,900 weddings and almost 15,000 baptisms in its 155-year history.

Founded in 1853, St. Mary's is the second-oldest religious community in Oakland; only First Presbyterian, founded in 1852, is older. Similarly, it's Oakland's second-oldest house of worship, second to St. James the Apostle chapel, built about 1860. It is also the last of the four original "grantee" churches still in existence at its original location.

Though not an Oakland city landmark, St. Mary's is on the city's "preservation study list," making it a designated historic property. As of this writing, plans for the site have not been revealed. ■



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