

## OAKLAND HOUSING: The Task Force Report

What is the truth about Oakland's housing needs? The Mayor's Housing Task Force, specially appointed in October 1980 to try to answer this question, has recently completed its work and published a 25-page report that could have a major impact on the city.

The task force grew out of a neighborhood-vs.-developer controversy that resulted in September 1980 with the City Planning Commission recommending downzoning for a portion of the Rose Garden Neighborhood. Mayor Lionel J. Wilson asserted then that no further downzoning in Oakland should be approved without a comprehensive housing plan for the city, and formed the task force to prepare one.

In part, the task force study is also a response to widely-publicized comments in the press, such as the following from the Bay Area Council, an independent organization which recommends regional planning policies:

"The Bay Area is experiencing critical housing problems--an inadequate supply of housing, and rapidly rising home prices and rents. These problems not only have serious social effects; they also threaten the region's economic vitality and quality of life."

The task force, comprised of sixteen members representing real estate and building industry and various community organizations, met over a seven-month period. It agreed on the need for new housing in Oakland, and addressed the central concern of increasing the City's supply of housing. The report, issued in June 1981 and entitled "Housing in Oakland: the Report of the Housing Task Force to the Mayor and City Council of the City of Oakland", describes specific actions and policies designed to encourage development.

Acknowledging that "many of the factors

affecting the housing market are beyond the ability of the city government to significantly affect", the task force directed its attention to those factors within the city's influence. (However, the task force did not discuss the issues of condominium conversion and rent control, for, as stated in the report, "These two areas clearly involve policy matters which have an effect upon housing, but which have been studied by other committees.")

Among the specific policies and recommendations of the report are:

1) That the City Council declare that  
*Continued on page 4 ▶*

## BRIEFING...

● Since at least 1975, Alameda County has been considering provision of additional parking at HIGHLAND HOSPITAL and now appears to be heading towards a specific proposal. The hospital, designed by county architect Henry Meyers in the 1920's, is situated in a large triangular site, bounded by 14th Avenue, Vallecito Place, and East 31st Street.

A specific parking proposal will probably be selected from six alternatives developed from the county's 1975 Highland Hospital Campus Feasibility and Parking Study. The County recognizes the architectural quality of the Highland  
*Continued on page 5 ▶*



*Highland Hospital, circa 1929*



# OHA CALENDAR

The *OHA* Calendar lists events related to history and preservation that may be of interest to *OHA* members. To submit events for listing, contact Dean M. Yabuki, 842 Grosvenor Place, Oakland, California 94610, (415) 893-1278. The deadline for the January-February calendar is Monday, December 7. *OHA* is looking for a person to take over the preparation of the calendar. Those interested please contact Dean Yabuki.

**Oakland Heritage Alliance was formed to bring together community groups and individuals sharing an interest in the history of Oakland, and in the preservation and conservation of the city's archaeological, architectural, cultural, environmental, and historical resources.**

## OFFICERS 1980-81

President ..... Beth Bagwell  
 V.P. Programs and Education ..... Leslie Flint  
 V.P. Fund Raising ..... Marlene Wilson  
 V.P. Public Relations ..... Beth Bagwell  
 Financial Officer ..... Brad Niebling  
 Recording/Corresponding Secretary Marlene Wilson  
 Membership Secretary ..... Jon Good

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1980-81

Beth Bagwell ..... 653-5968  
 Leslie Flint ..... 658-4915  
 Melinda Young Frye ..... 763-1642  
 Jon Good ..... 655-7477  
 Bruce Judd ..... 421-1680  
 Gary Knecht ..... 865-6382  
 Brad Niebling ..... 839-1600  
 Laura Pan ..... 254-6819  
 William Sturm ..... 465-1321  
 Michael Swernoff ..... 654-1865  
 Marlene Wilson ..... 832-8700  
 Dean Yabuki ..... 893-1278

OHA was incorporated in 1980 as a California non-profit corporation. Membership dues and contributions are tax deductible.

© 1981 Oakland Heritage Alliance



**CREDITS** Editor: William Sturm; Design: Blair Prentice; Production: Gary Knecht, Diane Judd; Contributors: Charles B. Oakland, Dean Yabuki, Richard Lloyd, Melinda Young Frye

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Mon 5 Oct - Sun 11 Oct  
Annual Meeting of the Association for Preservation Technology. Washington, D.C.
- Tues 6 Oct 7-8pm & Sat 17 Oct 1-2:30pm  
Elmwood: Turn-of-the-century Residential Park. Trish Hawthorne. Friends of the Berkeley Public Library evening talk & Saturday tour. Claremont Branch Library, Benvenue at Ashby, Berkeley. Reservations required for tour. Free. Contact (415) 644-6880.
- Mon 12 Oct 7:30pm  
OHA 1st Annual Membership Meeting. Election of new Board of Directors; includes tour of the Landmark Paramount Theatre, 2025 Broadway at 21st Street, Oakland. Enter from the box office entrance on 21st Street. RSVP by 10/1/81, Leslie Flint (415) 441-3000 (days), (415) 658-4915 (evenings).
- Sat 17 Oct 9am-1pm & Sat 24 Oct 9am-1pm  
Teaching Berkeley History Workshop. Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili/Chuck Wollenberg/Trish Hawthorne. Vista College class. Teachers' Center, 1720 Oregon Street, Berkeley (10/17); Walking tour, Delaware & San Pablo, Berkeley (10/24). Free. Contact Vista College (415) 841-8431.
- Sat 17 Oct 10:00am-Noon  
Reconstruction San Francisco: Friends of Terra Cotta walking tour of the San Francisco Downtown retail district. Gray Brechin, Architectural Historian. Meet at the Lotta Crabtree Cast-Iron Fountain, intersection of Market/Kearny/Geary, San Francisco. No reservations required. \$2/FOTC member, \$3.50/other. Contact David Look (415) 556-7741.
- Sun 18 Oct All Day  
Bus Excursion to Sacramento. The Victorian Society of America/Northern California Chapter. Includes the Crocker Museum, Railroad Museum, & Old Sacramento. TBA. Contact Hank Dunlop (415) 285-4633.
- Late October  
History of the Berkeley Waterfront. Curt Manning. Berkeley Historical Society lecture. TBA. Contact Gloria Cooper (415) 524-3892.
- Tues 20 Oct 7-8pm & Sat 31 Oct 1-2:30pm  
Peralta Park: Rancho, Resort, and Subdivision. Trish Hawthorne. Friends of the Berkeley Public Library evening talk & Saturday tour. North Branch Library, Hopkins at the Alameda, Berkeley. Reservations required for tour. Free. Contact (415) 644-6850.

- Wed 21 Oct 7:45pm  
The Rainbow Fairs: The Expositions in San Francisco. Gray Brechin, Architectural Historian. Heritage monthly program. Haas-Lilienthal House ballroom, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco. Free/Heritage member, \$2/other. Contact Heritage (415) 441-3000.
- Sat 24 Oct All Day  
Camron-Stanford House Care of Collections Seminar. John Burke/Deborah Cooper, Coordinators. Camron-Stanford House, 1418 Lakeside Drive at 14th Street, Oakland. Pre-registration required. \$25/person. Contact John Burke (415) 658-6539 or Deborah Cooper (415) 530-7844.
- Sat 24 Oct 4:00-7:00pm  
Office Party Reception for the Californians for Preservation Action Boardmembers. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association. Boardmembers from other local preservation organizations will also be present. BAHA Office, 1930 Addison Street, Berkeley. Pre-registration required. Cost TBA. Contact BAHA (415) 845-6591.
- Sun 25 Oct 11am-4:30pm  
Haas-Lilienthal House Birthday Open House. Heritage docents will be on hand to answer questions. H-L House, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco. Free. Contact Heritage (415) 441-3000.
- Sat 31 Oct All Day  
Sonoma's Italian Heritage. California Historical Society bus tour. Departs from CHS, 2090 Jackson Street, San Francisco at 8:30am. Pre-registration required; transportation & lunch included. \$28/CHS member, \$33/other. Contact CHS (415) 567-1848.
- Tues 3 Nov - Dec 31  
The Key System Trains. An exhibit of photographs and railroad memorabilia. Sponsored by the California Railroad Museum of Rio Vista Junction. Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library, 125 14th St. (415) 273-3222.
- Sat 7 Nov 1:30-3:30pm  
Developing Oakland: Friends of Terra Cotta walking tour of Oakland's early 20th century Downtown & Art Deco Uptown. Dean Yabuki, Architectural Programmer & OHA Director. Meet in front of City Hall, Washington & 14th Street, Oakland. \$2/FOTC member, \$3.50/other. No reservation required. Contact Dean Yabuki (415) 893-1278. This will be a great opportunity to also attend the Paramount Theatre Tour on the same day (see regularly scheduled tours).
- Wed 18 Nov 7:45pm  
The Cliff Dwellers of San Francisco. Gray Brechin, Architectural Historian. Heritage monthly program. Haas-Lilienthal House ballroom, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco. Free/Heritage member, \$2/other. Contact Heritage (415) 441-3000.
- Mid-November  
Masonry Building in California. California Historical Society exhibit ends. Open Wed/Sat/Sun 1-5pm. CHS, Whittier Mansion, 2090 Jackson Street, San Francisco. Free/CHS member, \$2/other adult, \$1/other child-student-senior. Contact CHS (415) 567-1848.
- Fri 20 Nov All Day  
Bus Tour to the Gladding, McBean & Co. Terra-Cotta Plant and a Walking Tour of Sacramento. Friends of Terra Cotta. Bus departs 8am - 2090 Jackson St., San Francisco, & 8:30am - Rockridge BART Station, Oakland. Space limited; pre-registration required by 11/10/81; transportation included; lunch not included. \$15/person. Contact George Johnson (415) 567-1848.
- Fri 20 Nov 8:00pm  
Irish Castles. Desmond Guinness, Irish Georgian Society. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association sponsored lecture. TBA. Contact BAHA (415) 845-6591.
- Sat 5 Dec 3-6pm  
Heritage Holiday Open House and Raffle Drawing. Heritage annual celebration for members. Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco. Contact Heritage (415) 441-3000.

## REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS

- Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. Meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month, 3:30 pm, City Hall, Room 221, Washington & 14th Streets, (415) 273-3941.
- Oakland City Planning Commission. Meets the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of the month, 1:30 pm, City Hall, Room 115, (415) 273-3941.
- Oakland City Council. Meets every Tuesday evening, 7:30 pm, City Hall Council Chambers, (415) 273-3266.
- Oakland Heritage Alliance Board. Meets the 1st Monday of the month, 7:30 pm. For location and agenda, contact Marlene Wilson, (415) 832-8700 (days).
- Brooklyn Neighborhood Preservation Association. Meets the last Sunday of the month, 7:30 pm. For location and program, contact BNPA, P.O. Box 187, Oakland 94604.
- Oakland Design Advocates. Meets the 2nd Wednesday morning of the month, 7:30 am, Tom Lovely's Restaurant, 336 Grand Avenue, (415) 893-6834.

## REGULARLY SCHEDULED TOURS &amp; ACTIVITIES

- Camron-Stanford House. Free tours are offered Wednesdays 11am-4pm, and Sundays 1-4pm. 1418 Lakeside Drive at 14th Street, (415) 836-1976.
- Paramount Theatre Tours. Tours are offered the 1st & 3rd Saturday of the month, 10am. 2025 Broadway at 21st Street. \$1.00. Meet promptly at the box office entrance on 21st Street, (415) 465-6400.
- Dunsmuir House. Tours are offered Sundays at 1, 2, and 3pm. 2960 Peralta Oaks Court. (415) 562-7588.
- Oakland Tours Program. These regularly scheduled free walking tours will take a winter break at the end of October and commence again in March 1982. The last of the Fall tours are as follows (all meet at 1:00pm): Chinatown 10/3, City Center Towers, 801 Franklin Street; Old Oakland 10/3, 10/7, 10/24, Ratto's, 831 Washington Street; City Hall/City Center 10/10, 10/14, City Hall steps, 1421 Washington Street; Uptown to the Lake 10/17, 10/21, Paramount Theatre, 2025 Broadway; and Preservation Park 10/28, 10/31, Unitarian Church, 14th Street & Castro Street, (415) 273-3234. ■

*HOUSING, Continued from page 1*

Oakland has a "housing crisis". (Some members of the task force believe that the report fails to demonstrate that the housing problem in Oakland is significantly greater than elsewhere in the Bay Area.)

2) To provide 1,000 new housing units over each of the next five years, 500 of which would be privately developed, 300 of which would be governmentally assisted family units, and 200 of which would be governmentally assisted units for the elderly.

3) That the City should have "a strong policy encouraging the construction of new houses and protection of existing housing quality."

4) That, in order to lessen the uncertainty and delay sometimes accompanying city approval of housing construction, a pre-clearance program be implemented whereby:

- a) potential development areas can be identified
- b) developers can meet with community groups at the earliest possible stage so that potential projects can be evaluated, discussed, and modified when necessary, avoiding opposition at the earliest possible stage."

5) That the City identify all vacant land within the City and evaluate it in terms of suitability for housing.

6) That the City seek to encourage housing in certain areas, among which are the downtown area, City Center Project, the Lake Merritt area, the area around BART stations, the hill area, Port of Oakland land, and along major commercial arteries such as San Pablo Avenue and East 14th Street.

7) That greater housing use be made of existing high-density zoned areas. The report also provides a list of specific areas recommended for up-zoning. Regarding the matter of downzoning, the Report states, "The City must be more cautious and selective in downzoning than it has been in recent years, although the task force recognizes that a few areas presently zoned for high density are inappropriate

for that type of development. Although there is some disagreement among members of the task force as to the precise boundaries of the area to be downzoned, the task force agrees that a portion of the Rose Garden area merits early consideration for downzoning."

8) That numerous and specific changes in the text of the zoning ordinances be made in order to encourage development of additional housing. The task force lists and delineates these changes.

9) To provide incentives for developers of low and moderate income housing. "The choice of incentives is left to the sole discretion of the local government", states the report, "However, the City of Oakland should clearly state which ones it offers to developers."

10) "To educate developers, investors, the real estate industry, the general public, and the City Staff as to the City's housing goals."

The Task Force noted that its study was hampered by the unavailability of accurate information on existing housing and housing demand. (The 1980 Federal Census Statistics, for example, were not then available.) Accordingly, the report urges the adoption of the recommendation of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee (December 1979) that a centralized, current, and accessible collection of accurate housing data be established within the City government.

The City Council, at a hearing on the report in July, decided to hold special City Council sessions in each Council district to hear community views on the report before adopting the policies and recommendations in it. If adopted, the report could have a major impact upon housing in Oakland, and would affect decisions concerning the zoning of such neighborhoods as Richmond Boulevard, Rockridge, the Rose Garden, Piedmont Avenue area, Fruitvale, the hill neighborhoods, and others.

Copies of the reports are available through the Oakland Office of Community Development 273-3502. A copy can also be seen in the Oakland History Room of the Oakland Public Library, 125 14th St. ■

## BRIEFING, Continued from page 1

Hospital complex and has been soliciting community response to the six alternatives, all of which involve varying amounts of demolition. Three of the alternatives require demolition of the administration building. The three others involve placement of a three or four level parking structure on the site of the terraced stairway, an action which would severely compromise the design integrity of the hospital complex.

According to the study, a hospital the size of Highland should have 1059 parking spaces. This number might be achieved by placing additional levels underground or over existing surface parking areas in the complex. OHA has urged the county to consider this alternative as well as any other alternatives that restrict parking to existing areas and retain the existing building for future use.

● The burned-out shell of the FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH at 24th and Broadway remains standing. The building was gutted by a six-alarm fire on July 4th. An investigation into the causes of the fire by the Oakland Fire Marshal has been closed, with no conclusive findings. The church property had been for sale at \$1,500,000 and continues to be listed at the same price. After the fire, the church had architectural and structural evaluations performed, which estimated that repairs would cost \$7,000,000. The fire had left the upper portions of side walls leaning inward. Although these were later demolished by the insurance company as a safety precaution, no further demolition is presently anticipated.

The church is considering rebuilding on the old site or on a new site. It might consider reconstruction of the old church if the required \$7,000,000 could be raised, but this possibility appears remote. The church is postponing any rebuilding decisions until its insurance claim is settled, a process which, according to a church spokesman, could take a "long time". The church has removed several undamaged and salvagable items and put them in storage.



*Surviving portion of Gibbons' Folly before the fire. The fire burned through the roof and damaged portions of the walls.*

● On August 17, a six-alarm fire destroyed or severely damaged several Victorian residential and commercial buildings at the northwest corner of 7th and Chester Streets in the PRESCOTT NEIGHBORHOOD. One of the damaged structures was the last surviving portion of "Gibbons' Folly", a towered mansion built in the 1860's by Rodman Gibbons, one of the organizers of Oakland's first railroad and one whose visionary schemes, often exceeding the reach of his pocketbook, earned the sobriquet of the house. Other portions of "Gibbons' Folly" had survived into the 1970's, when they were demolished by the City for code violations. All of the burned buildings were a part of a possible Oakland Point historic district that contains Oakland's largest and most intact concentration of Victorian structures. This area is particularly vulnerable to fire because of the large number of vacant buildings. (A brief history of Oakland Point appears on page 7 of the June-July issue of *OHA News*.)

● The Adams Point Neighborhood Preservation Association is continuing its efforts to retain the VICTOR H. METCALF HOUSE on its present site at 245 Perkins Street. The house was ordered moved to 14th and Brush streets as a condition of the City's approval of a new condominium project on the site. The developer originally planned to demolish the house. On August 28, the Association obtained a ▶

Superior Court order halting any further work on the property, until the Association's petition against the City's approval of the projected condominium is resolved. The petition argues that the City should have prepared an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) before taking action on the condo. If successful, the petition would delay construction of the condominium while the EIR was being prepared. However, the City could still approve the condominium once the EIR was completed. The petition was scheduled for hearing September 28.

● The Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District's long-standing proposal to culvert the half-mile section of TEMESCAL CREEK between Grove and Adeline streets has been revived. The \$3.2 million project had originally been scheduled for approval last spring, but was shelved after opposition was expressed by the North Oakland District Council, the Sierra Club and OHA. The decision to revive the proposal was apparently stimulated by the concerns of homeowners living in the area who feel threatened by erosion of the creek's banks.

OHA has joined the Sierra Club, the North Oakland District Council and neighborhood residents to form the Temescal Creek Coalition. The Coalition believes that if the creek must be culverted, a reconstituted controlled creek should be installed over the buried creek channel, as has been done with Peralta Creek in the Fruitvale neighborhood.

A public meeting sponsored by the Flood Control District will be held in the neighborhood sometime after mid-October. Those who are interested in preserving the natural character of the creeks may contact OHA Community Awareness chairperson Marlene Wilson, 832-8700 for time and place of the meeting.

Detailed information on the proposal can be found in the Flood Control District's Environmental Impact Report, copies of which can be obtained from Rick Baker at the District's office, 399 Elmhurst Street, Hayward, CA 94544, 881-6470.



*Ali Baba Ballroom, circa 1963*

● Despite a broad-based and widely-publicized preservation effort, demolition of the ALI BABA BALLROOM at the southeast corner of Grand Avenue and Webster Street was begun September 15 by its owner, Kaiser Center Properties, Inc. The ballroom was distinguished by its unusual Middle East style architecture and its continuing use as a public ballroom, a type of activity fast fading throughout the country.

Kaiser claimed that the building required demolition because it was structurally unsafe and unfeasible to rehabilitate, basing this conclusion on a report prepared by structural engineer Jay F. Helms of Novato. However, Kaiser has refused to release Helms' report to the public, thus fueling speculation that Kaiser was using the safety issue as a pretext for evicting the present tenants, allowing the vacant land to be used for other purposes.

Ali Baba enthusiasts, with support from OHA, had quickly initiated efforts to save the structure. A 250-signature petition was sent to Cornell Maier, president of Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp. Preparations were made to ask the City Planning Commission at its August 26 meeting to place the building on the City's preservation study list, an action which could have delayed issuance of a demolition permit for up to 60 days. The delay would have allowed time to obtain City Landmark designation for the building,

which would have extended the demolition delay for up to 240 days and provided time to implement a better-prepared preservation campaign. However, this strategy was thwarted when the City Planning Commission, for the first time in years, lacked a quorum and canceled its meeting, postponing action on the Ali Baba to September 16. This delay gave Kaiser the opportunity to apply on August 27 for a demolition permit, which was issued several days later. Although on September 16, the Planning Commission was asked to urge Kaiser to reconsider the demolition, this failed on a 2-2 vote, with Commissioners Jose Arce and Bruce Black in favor of reconsideration, and Alfredo Abbott and Elijah Turner opposed. A similar effort failed the day before at the City Council meeting. ■

## Oakland Landmarks Board Actions

Following is a summary of the actions taken by the board at its meetings of August and September, 1981.

### Landmark status recommended:

- James De Fremery House, 1651 Adeline Street (in De Fremery Park). Home of early Oakland pioneer; built in 1860's.
- Dr. William Bamford House, 1235 East 15th Street. Home of pioneer Brooklyn physician; may have been built for Thomas Eager, a pioneer who gave Brooklyn its name.
- Seymour C. Davisson House, 1527 Union Street. Designed by Samuel and Joseph Newsom.
- Captain Henry E. Nichols House, 2304 9th Avenue, built 1889-90, attributed to Samuel and Joseph Newsom.
- James Preshoe House, 1810 10th Avenue, built 1894, attributed to Samuel and Joseph Newsom.

### Landmark status under investigation:

- St. Joseph's Home, 2647 East 14th Street. One of the owners, Roger Huddleston, said that he would support landmark designation for this 1912 brick structure which was formerly a nursing home, but which is now vacant. ■

## The Ali Baba—A History

In the dark and dreary years of the early Depression, people sought diversion among those pursuits which had provided pleasure during the more sanguine times of the Twenties -- moving pictures, the radio, amusement parks -- and the public ballroom. Oakland had a number of dance halls where, to the swing and sway of live orchestras, one could waltz or tango away the evening. There were the Danceland Dance Hall at 409 12th Street, Melody Lane at 1616 Franklin, Rose Room Dancing at 431 12th Street, and most well-known and venerated, Sweet's Ball Room at 1414 Franklin, which, since the Hydrophobic Twenties, had pleased Oaklanders with the sounds and rhythms of the day's leading bands and which, during the Depression and wartime years, would offer the strains of Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Harry James and the Dorsey Brothers.

In 1931, Sweet's opened an additional ballroom at 111 Grand Avenue called, sonorously, Sweet's Persian Gardens. Wrote one local observer of the new ballroom, "At night the place is transformed into a magnificently decorated salon, with amazingly beautiful effects succeeding each other in an infinite variety of colors and design. The explanation is Colorama -- the first installation of its kind west of Chicago. Colorama, by the blending of colored electric lights, paints Sweet's ▶



*Interior of Sweet's Persian Gardens, 1931*



ballroom with living, moving decorations in every imaginable hue and combination of hues. And to these mobile murals it adds such effects as aurora borealis, sunburst, growing flowers, and printed greetings." The Persian Gardens prospered for a number of years and then gently faded into oblivion, the ballroom being turned to sundry other uses. (It was an Army communications center during the war.)

In the flush and optimism of the post-war period, the building began anew as a ballroom -- the Ali Baba. There were still a number of dance halls in Oakland, but the Big Band era, which had spawned and nurtured many of these pavilions, was slowly yielding to the less mellifluous sounds of be-bop and rock n' roll. The Ali Baba, however, persisted bravely. From the opening night in May 1947, when Sid Hoff and his ten-piece orchestra filled the air with waltzes, fox trots, cha chas and tangos, to the era of Disco and Motown, the Ali Baba maintained the tradition, fast fading elsewhere, of public ballroom dancing. Sid Hoff still played under the pastel lighting of the ballroom, gentlemen yet appeared in coats and ties, and time froze gently, somewhere, perhaps, in 1940. Many dancers went with partners to pleasantly while away the evening; others came alone to meet other dancers. Some had come to the Ali Baba for over thirty years, dancing or sitting about the dozens of cafe tables and chairs ringing the oval dance floor. Others ascended to the third floor balcony to watch the festivities below. "We're always worried that it'll close down," remarked one patron several years ago. "We're like family here and we've seen some of the same faces here every week for years and years."

Until September 1981, the Ali Baba continued to attract about 800 dancers on Saturday nights, including some too young to remember the ballroom's opening night and far, far too young to remember the now legendary Sweet's Persian Garden days. The building is now no more -- a victim of the wrecker's ball -- and the Ali Baba management is in search of a new ballroom.

At this writing temporary quarters have been found in the Veterans Building, and it appears that an old and beloved Oakland tradition will remain, albeit in a different home. ■

-- William Sturm

## The New Channel Park

For nearly 65 years, citizens of Oakland have envisioned a park extending from Lake Merritt to the Oakland Estuary. This park link has been shown for years on both Oakland's Master Plan and the Alameda County Master Plan. Perhaps now this evasive goal is coming into reality.

The proposed one-mile long, 22-acre park, known as Lake Merritt Channel Park/ Sculpture Garden, will include a bike and pedestrian path system, landscaping and other related park elements. An integral component of the park will be attractive sites for temporary and long-term placement of sculpture pieces as part of a sculpture garden. The sculpture garden will be the main backdrop for the Twelfth International Sculpture Conference to be held in Oakland, 1982.

The proposed park area is rich in the history of the East Bay and Oakland. The present land was originally tidelands of San Antonio Creek, and during high tide the water was deep enough for supply boats and ferries.▶



Lake Merritt channel, north from East 10th Street bridge





Lake Merritt was originally the northernmost portion of San Antonio Slough. In the mid 1860's a few visionary city leaders saw the recreation potential of the waterway and in 1869, Mayor Samuel Merritt contributed \$18,000 of a total of \$20,000 to build a dam which converted the arm of San Antonio Creek north of the 12th Street bridge into a beautiful lake. Today the lake provides a great diversity of educational and recreational activities. Now some of these activities have a chance to spread down to the estuary. Channel Park will meet the demand for more public access to the waterfront along with enhancing the downtown area as a place to live, shop, and work; and as a place for private investment. ■

-- Richard E. Lloyd

## Revisions to Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

(The *National Park Service* of the U.S. Department of the Interior has sent *OHA News* the following information, dated August 6, 1981. For additional information see the last paragraph of this article.)

The Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 includes significant revisions to the historic preservation tax incentives which were first authorized by Congress in the Tax Reform Act of 1976. The new provisions should provide major impetus to encourage capital investment in historic buildings and to spur revitalization of historic neighborhoods. The new law provides:

- a 25% investment tax credit for rehabilitation of historic commercial, industrial and rental residential buildings which can be combined with

- a 15 year accelerated cost recovery period for the adjusted basis of the historic building. Historic buildings with certified rehabilitations receive additional tax savings by their exemption from any requirement to reduce the basis of the building by the amount of the credit.

Buildings which qualify are:

- buildings listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places and
- buildings located in Registered Historic Districts if they are certified as contributing to the significance of the district.

Registered Historic Districts include:

- National Register historic districts and
- State or locally designated districts if the ordinance authorizing or creating the district as well as the district itself is certified.

The existing certification process administered by the National Park Service will be used to identify eligible buildings and qualify their rehabilitations. To qualify for the investment tax credit, the building must be substantially rehabilitated. This means the rehabilitation costs must equal the greater of \$5000 or the adjusted basis of the building (actual cost minus any depreciation already taken). The monetary test to qualify for the tax credit must be met within a 2-year period or, for phased projects where architectural plans and specifications are completed before the rehabilitation begins, over a 5-year period.

The owner of a building in a historic district must have his rehabilitation work reviewed by the National Park Service to qualify for the 25% credit. If the building is determined not to contribute to the historic district, the owner may be eligible for lesser tax credits (see below).

The law also includes a 15% investment tax credit for buildings 30 years and older and a 20% investment tax credit for buildings 40 years and older. These credits apply only to commercial and industrial buildings and not to residential rental buildings. To qualify for these lesser credits, review by the NPS is required only when the buildings are within Registered Historic Districts.

Lessees with a leaseterm of 15 years or greater can qualify for the investment tax credit. The owners of buildings leased to tax exempt organizations and government entities are eligible for the investment tax credit. This provision was made retroactive to July 30, 1980. ▶

The new investment tax credit is available for projects which begin January 1, 1982 and after. The provision was enacted with no expiration date. The 15-year accelerated cost recovery period is available for buildings placed in service January 1, 1981 or after. If the investment tax credit is elected, projects are limited to straight line depreciation over the 15-year period.

#### Impact on Existing Preservation Tax Provisions

-The 5-year amortization provision will be repealed effective January 1, 1982, (IRC sec. 191). Owners may use the 5-year write off for expenditures made in projects through December 31, 1981 and use the investment tax credit for expenditures made after that date.

-The accelerated depreciation provision is repealed (IRC sec. 167 (o)), effective January 1, 1982.

-The denial of accelerated depreciation for a building built on the site of a demolished historic building is repealed effective January 1, 1982, (IRC sec. 167 (n)).

-The 10% investment tax credit is replaced effective January 1, 1982 (IRC sec. 38 and 48). Owners may use the 10% credit for costs incurred through December 31, 1981 and the larger credit for costs incurred after that date. Owners of 20-29 year old buildings may use the 10% credit for costs incurred in their entire projects if physical work begins before January 1, 1982.

For further information please contact Paul Alley, architectural historian, for questions about the certification of significance and David W. Look, AIA, historical architect, for questions about the certification of rehabilitation work (both at (415) 556-7741).

NOTE: This report was prepared prior to the signing of the law and is based on information available to date. For an in-depth "Summary of Preservation Tax Incentives in the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981" contact the Western Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 681 Market Street, Suite 859, San Francisco, California 94105, (415) 556-2707. ■



*Erected in 1914, the Cathedral Building at the junction of Telegraph and Broadway has been rehabilitated using the preservation tax incentives.*

## Care of Collections Seminar

A day-long seminar on Saturday, October 24, sponsored by the Camron-Stanford House Preservation Association will offer detailed, practical advice on caring for a variety of objects found in history museum collections and among treasured family heirlooms. Workshops will focus on selected topics in collection management, security, and artifact conservation, including textiles, photographs, works on paper and decorative arts. The speakers include conservators, curators, and fine arts insurance and documentation specialists. Each session will include opportunities for questions from the audience and for discussion of specific examples. A packet of materials, supply lists, and information resources is included in the registration fee of \$25.00. Participation in the seminar is open to museum and historic house personnel as well as collectors and interested individuals.

For more information write: Collections Care Seminar, The Camron-Stanford House, 1418 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, California 94612. Or, call John Burke at (415) 658-6539, or Deborah Cooper at (415) 530-7844. ■



## OHA UPDATE

● Special thanks go to *OHA* members Stanley Chan, Joolia Harper, and Richard Lloyd who volunteered their time to help boardmembers Jon Good, Dean Yabuki, Brad Niebling, Laura Pan, Melinda Frye, and Gary Knecht in the *OHA* booth at the Fourth Annual Oakland Preservation Fair, Sunday, September 20, 1981. The afternoon, complete with music ensembles, Lake Merritt boat tours, audio-visual programs, and over 60 exhibitors, was sponsored by the Camron-Stanford House. The fair was organized by Annalee Allen, a Camron-Stanford House boardmember and *OHA* member. Annalee merits much appreciation for her time and efforts.

● This issue of *OHA News* went to press just before *OHA*'s first Annual Membership Meeting which was held Monday, October 12 at the Paramount Theatre. The schedule for the evening meeting included a tour of the Landmark building and election of the 1981-82 Board of Directors. In September every *OHA* member was mailed an announcement of the meeting and a proxy. We thank all those who attended, and look forward to more chances for members to meet each other.

● The newly elected Board of Directors will immediately begin planning projects for next year. Among those under consideration are the following:

▷ Possible co-sponsorship of the Seventh Annual California Historic Preservation Conference which will take place in late April or early May. The location of this three-day event will be announced October

21st by the California Preservation Foundation. Previous conferences have been held in Pasadena, San Jose, San Diego, Sacramento, and Riverside. We think it is about time to hold one in the Bay Area and we have expressed our interest to the state.

▷ Possible co-sponsorship of Oakland's Cultural Heritage Survey during its third year (April 1982-March 1983). Initially *OHA*'s role would be small, but as federal and state funds continue to dry up, private sector support will be needed, and *OHA* may be asked to play a larger role.

▷ Possible creation of a program to assist owners of Oakland landmarks in locating the technical skills and financial assistance necessary to preserve, maintain, and restore their landmark buildings and sites. Though oriented toward officially designated city landmarks, this program would be able to provide information to all preservation-minded property owners.

● During the coming months *OHA* members will be asked to volunteer their time and talents for some of the above-mentioned projects. If you are particularly interested in one or more of them, please let your Board of Directors know (telephone numbers are listed on page 2). The Board needs your help and your ideas.

● The president has prepared a comprehensive written report summarizing *OHA*'s first year and making detailed recommendations for the coming year. A copy can be seen in the Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library, 125 14th Street, 273-3222. ■

Oakland Heritage Alliance, 5569 Lawton Avenue, Oakland, California 94618

**JOIN OHA TODAY! Your annual tax-deductible membership dues include the *OHA News* and announcements of all *OHA* activities. Additional contributions and your active participation will make *OHA* a more effective organization.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Numbers (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

I am willing to participate in the following ways:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\$ 5 Senior/student/limited income (1 vote)

\$10 Individual (1 vote)

\$15 Family (2 votes)

\$25 Organization (1 vote)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Additional contribution

New  Renewal

Change of Address only



## THE SURVEY: Old Year, New Year

In August, Oakland's Cultural Heritage Survey brought to a successful conclusion its first full year of field recording and research on significant structures and landscape features within the City and delivered to the State Office of Historic Preservation 180 Historic Resources Inventory reports (see *OHA News*, August/September 1981 issue for a summary of the project). These reports are available for viewing at the City Planning Department, 6th floor, City Hall, and at the Survey Office in the Camron-Stanford House. Copies are available.

One historic district recorded, the 6-block area bounded by Broadway and Clay Streets and by 7th and 10th Streets, contains Victorian Row, the creative rehabilitation project which brings new life to Oakland's late 19th-century "downtown." Other outstanding buildings surveyed include: Oakland's first brick structure

at 301 Broadway; Capwell's 1929 building at 20th and Broadway; and St. Elizabeth's Church and School complex on Fruitvale Avenue, to name only a few.

Melinda Frye, who has served as the Survey's coordinator since its inception in 1979, is moving to a consulting role this fall. Laura Pan, who has assisted her for over a year, will assume the coordinator's duties. Together, and with the help of many volunteers, they are continuing the Survey with a concentration on the Central District. Many additional researchers are needed immediately! Free time during weekdays is almost a necessity for access to the Oakland History Room of the Library and the Building Permits Department in City Hall. Please call Laura or Melinda (835-4620) as soon as possible if you can give a few hours a week to this historical detective work that plays so important a role in preserving our cultural past. ■

- Melinda Frye

## OAKLAND HISTORY NOTES

Fondly called the "Old Brick Pile," this building at 12th and Jefferson was Oakland High's third location. Opening in 1895, the school was attended by Jack London and other luminaries. In 1928, Oakland High relocated to its present site. The "Old Brick Pile" was demolished in 1940.

*Postcard, courtesy of Oakland Public Library*



Oakland High School, Oakland, California

Oakland Heritage Alliance  
5569 Lawton Avenue  
Oakland, California 94618

Non-profit organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Oakland, California  
Permit No. 31