

## The College Avenue Commercial District



Oakland's College Avenue was dedicated in 1868 on the official map of the Vernon Park tract, an outlying suburb covering what is now lower Rockridge. By the time the city annexed College Avenue in 1897, it had about 15 residences, a notions and bakery store, and two saloons, but no commercial district per se. The earliest known grocery on College opened around 1898. In the 1910s, driven by rapidly growing population and an expanding transportation system - and without much oversight by the city - College Avenue became a commercial district. The character and type of buildings were influenced by the Vernon-Rockridge Improvement Club, a group of residents and businesspeople who lobbied for civic improvements, providing

The Vernon-Rockridge Hall (1911) at 5515 College Ave. was built for the improvement club that oversaw the development of the commercial district. Around 1920, it became "The Hut," a recreation club. It has since been remodeled. (Oakland History Room)

cash and volunteer labor to make them happen. Today's commercial district is evidence of their persistence and energy.

Transportation turned College Avenue from a Victorian carriage suburb to a middle class streetcar suburb. In 1904, rails were laid on College as part of Southern Pacific's electric streetcar line from downtown Oakland to Berkeley. The Key System E line began operating on Claremont Avenue in 1907. The Sacramento Northern interurban freight and passenger rail was installed in 1913 on Shafter Avenue.

The 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco generated demand for homesites in Oakland. Among the several realty offices operating in the 1910s, Clayton B. Strong enthusiastically marketed College Avenue properties, using the company slogan "Pioneers." The "exclusive" Rockridge tracts south of Broadway were also developed during the 1910s.

What was to become the heart of the commercial district, near Shafter Avenue, got its start in 1911 when the Vernon-Rockridge Improvement Club erected its College Avenue clubhouse. In 1916, Vernon-Rockridge Hall, complete with kitchen, stage, and dressing rooms, could be rented at \$2.50 an afternoon or \$7.50 an evening. It was used for religious services, card parties, singing and dancing lessons, concerts, dances, plays, weddings, and meetings. In the 1910s, social and civic groups included the Kales Avenue Whist Club, Rockridge Tennis Club, Claremont School Mothers Club, War Service League, Taft Avenue Sewing Club, Neighborhood Reading Club, Evening Bridge Club, Tango Club, and the Lawton Avenue Dancing Club.

The club delivered a newsletter, **The Vernon-Rockridge Bulletin**, to every household in the district. By June 1914, it had 500 members. That year it joined with the Claremont College Club, but split with Rockridge members over park acquisition. A women's auxiliary became the Rockridge Woman's Club. Their combined efforts led to the building of a firehouse (1912) and Claremont School (1913), College Avenue street lighting (1914) and paving (1917), street garbage cans (1916), the Temescal Creek culvert, the Broadway extension, and a branch library (1919). Other issues were tree trimming, street cleaning, vacant lot clearing, sidewalks, the water shortage, and cars not stopping behind streetcars. The Vernon-Rockridge Improvement Club existed until 1958.

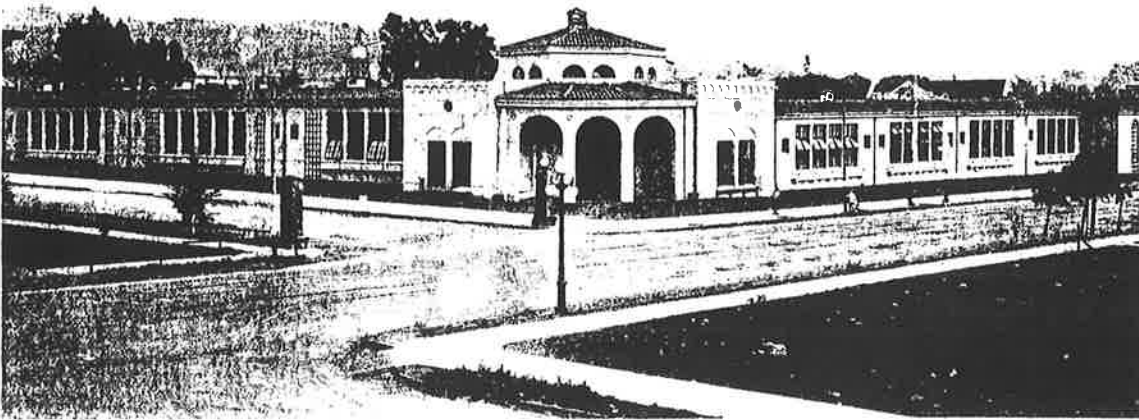
The club's first accomplishment was the firehouse. In 1912, the city erected a two-story brick station at 5800 College at Birch, costing \$5793. After it was built,

the club pressed for larger water mains that could support fire hydrants. (Developers had put in only 2" water lines for domestic water supply.) In 1962, a new firehouse was built on Miles. After a drive to convert the old station to a branch library failed, a Chevron station replaced the firehouse. Today a one-story commercial building occupies the site.

The 1911-12 annual report of the Oakland schools described the school at Claremont and College, built in 1899, as one room heated by a stove. To accommodate the swelling Rockridge population, in 1913 the new Claremont School was begun. Its architect was John J. Donovan, appointed by the City of Oakland to design all the schools funded by a 1911 bond issue. Donovan went on to write **School Architecture**, a widely used reference work. Walter D. Reed, co-architect of the school, did the Italian Renaissance gates to the Rockridge tract on Broadway (1910) and the flatiron store building at College and Broadway (1914).

To avoid construction delays when bonds did not sell, the improvement club raised \$450 to meet the interest payment. A club member, Harold Everhart, chaired the committee that built a sidewalk in front of the school. The Claremont School was ready one year before others built under the same bond issue, and was completed for thousands of dollars less than allotted. It opened in fall 1913 with kindergarten through eighth grade classes. Staff included Mrs. Eulalie Wilson as principal (formerly principal at the North Temescal and Peralta Schools), fourteen teachers (all unmarried women), two part-time staff and a janitor. By the time the school opened, it was already too small. Ten one-story, one-room classroom buildings were added between 1914 and 1918. In 1976 the original wing was demolished due to earthquake safety concerns.

The Claremont School (1913) at the corner of Birch Court and College cost about \$87,000 to build. Only the gates were saved when it was demolished. (Architect & Engineer). Right, a 1914 College Avenue streetlamp or "electrolier." (Oakland History Room)





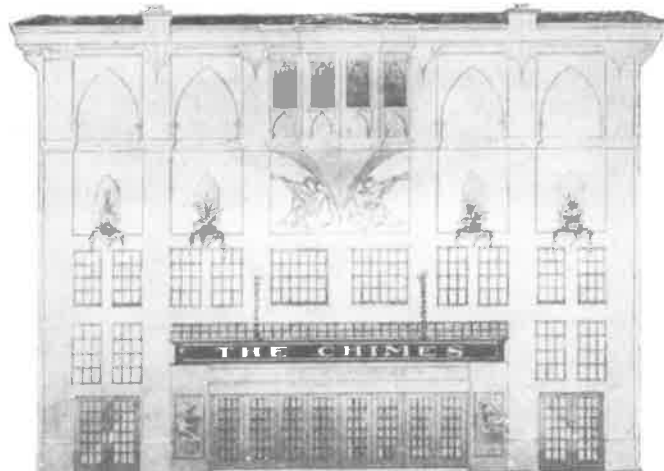
The Photo Play Theatre (1912) at 5609 College became a Woolworth store in 1923; in 1943, it was converted to wartime apartments. (Jennifer Katz)

A movie theater, the Rock Ridge Photo Play (called Chimes Photo Play on the building permit), was constructed in 1912 at 5609 College Avenue for William Seaver. Its builder, John A. Bischoff, built many homes in Rockridge between 1910 and 1937. Seaver advertised the greatest photo plays in the world - the same ones being seen in New York. This theater closed after a new Chimes Theatre was built two doors north. The second Chimes, owned by Beach-Krahn Amusement Company, was also originally a silent movie house. An advertisement for its December 15, 1917, grand opening said it was "the first theater in America to make a special features of chimes, which will be played at the beginning of each performance." In 1958 it was converted to a skating rink, demolished in 1965 when Shafter was realigned for the freeway.

The firehouse, school, and theater were followed by an eight-month surge of commercial construction in mid-1914. The new apartment and store buildings all greatly exceeded the size and quality of the earlier structures, and remain some of the largest on College Avenue. The two largest were completed and open within four months of the issuance of their building permits.

All this growth and change was marked by a parade and dance to celebrate the first streetlamps on October 31, 1914. C.B. Strong headed the program committee. The College Avenue electroliers were designed by San Francisco architects Bliss & Faville. Thirty-three 220 watt lamps were placed between Taft Avenue and 63rd Street. Half were lit all night, the others turned off at midnight. College Avenue property owners paid for installation; the city assumed the maintenance and lighting cost.

Other noteworthy buildings from the 1910s are the 1915 Mission-style stores and apartments by O'Brien Bros. at 5510 College; stores and apartments by Charles



The Chimes Theater (1917)--called the Uptown in the 1930s--was built by Archer F. Waid. Rockridge Market Hall now occupies its site. (The Bancroft Library)

Dickey, architect of the Claremont Hotel, at 5472 (1915); the 1917 College Avenue Presbyterian Church by Julia Morgan; and the 1916 apartment house by Rousseau & Rousseau at 5687 Miles Avenue.

By the end of 1917, College Avenue had all the elements of a mature commercial district. Then construction came to a temporary standstill as a result of World War I. By February 1920, there was not a vacant store in the district. Construction picked up again in the 1920s, doubling the number of commercial buildings on College. By 1927 there were few vacant lots. After 1930, most of the permits were for alterations, additions, signs, and billboards.

Until 1921, detached homes continued to be built adjacent to commercial buildings. According to C.B. Strong, the only building restrictions were those imposed by tract developers, which expired in ten years. He noted that people who owned lots near College Avenue were having their "place in the sun more or less unpleasantly affected" by the new apartment and



Two 1910 dwellings are behind storefronts added in the 1920s. Most houses on College have been razed or converted to commercial use. (Jennifer Katz)



The 1914 building boom began with permits for these store and apartment buildings in February through April. Two were open for business by July. (J. Katz)

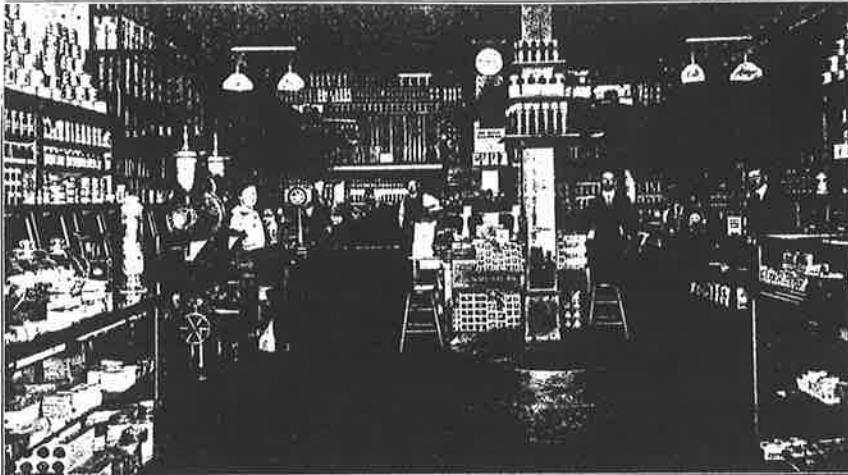
store buildings. In 1920, a **Bulletin** editorial said: "an owner can build any kind of a structure he desires, providing only that it is not a menace. But there is no law providing for conformity in building lines or in the proper structure to erect. Uniformity would add much to the artistic beauty of the neighborhood and would enhance the value of the property and the enjoyment of the residents."

In the 1910s, people usually walked to the store for groceries, or grocers delivered. Eventually, every block of College Avenue had one or more food stores. In 1917, the Free Market Building introduced a new way of shopping: "No credit - no delivery - no bad bills - no bookkeeping. But we pay you well to pay cash and carry your purchases home." The merchants in the market included a grocery, coffee store, creamery, bakery, produce, meat, and fish markets. The Rockridge Masonic Lodge held a dance to dedicate its quarters on the second floor which were used until it erected its own building in 1926.

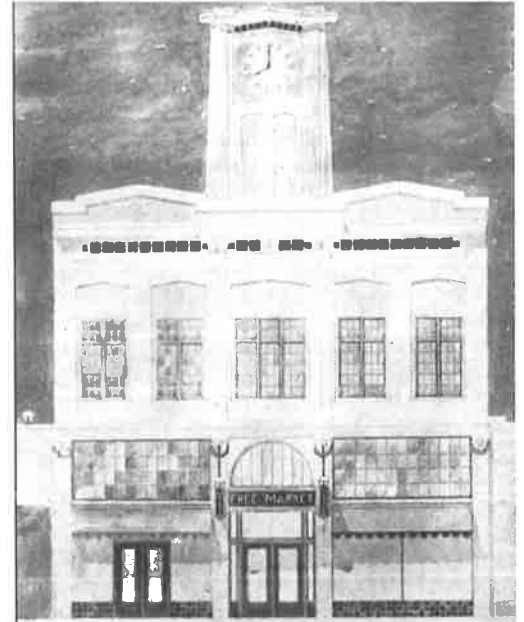
Chain stores came to College Avenue in the late 1920s. Among them were Piggly Wiggly, MacMarr, Hagstrom, and Safeway. Typical were the Safeways, averaging 1000 square feet in 1926 with 700 items. In 1939 and 1940, Safeway built stores at 6310 and 5450 College which were among the first in the area to have parking lots. The next generation of supermarkets came in 1964, when Safeway enlarged its unit at College and Claremont by the purchase of three additional lots. Two years later, Lucky Stores began construction at College and Oak Grove on 13 lots that had been dwellings and a service station.

The Security Bank of Oakland opened the district's first bank in the realty office of M.D. Nichols at Shafter and College in June 1914. Hours were 10 am to 3 pm weekdays, plus 7 to 8 pm for the convenience of commuters, and Saturday mornings from 10 to 12. In December 1916, the bank moved to a new location at 5701 College designed by Thomas & Olver. The bank entrance is still flanked by columns. At that time, H.C. Capwell was the bank president. The Bank of Italy (later Bank of America) took over the branch in 1921.

Efforts to secure a library began in 1913, when the Vernon-Rockridge Improvement Club and Ladies' Auxiliary requested that the Library Commission install a branch at the new school on Birch Court. The next year, they asked to be included when the city applied for four new Carnegie library buildings which cost \$35,000 apiece. When a library for Rockridge was ruled out, residents were encouraged to use the Piedmont branch. A private circu-



Above: In 1915, the Rockridge Grocery at 5525 College advertised that orders phoned in by 4 pm would be delivered the same day. The site is now a restaurant. Right: The Free Market and Lodge Building was designed by Allan J. Yerrick who painted this watercolor rendering. The clock came from the old Oakland City Hall. Shafter Avenue now passes under the market site. (Oakland History Room)



lating library at the Book Store at 5605 College also loaned books for 35 cents a month. It specialized in new fiction and occult works. Finally in October 1918, the city council allotted \$1000 to install and maintain a library room for five to six months. The Rockridge Library opened January 17, 1919, in a storefront at 5715 Shafter, at the southeast corner of College. A drawback was the noise and jarring of the interurban railway on Shafter.

In December 1924, better quarters were secured in the former Bank of Italy at 5701 College opposite Claremont School. A merchants organization called the College Avenue Commercial Club led a fundraising drive for linoleum, chairs, and tables. The merchants were joined by the Rockridge Woman's Club and three PTAs in sponsoring a series of films at the Chimes Theater for which 3,000 tickets were printed up. For more than sixty years the library remained there, until a substantial rent increase caused its move to a trailer adjacent to the school. A long-awaited new library is expected to open in 1996.

Before service stations came to College Avenue, motorists could buy gasoline, oil, and grease from W.H. Powers' hardware and plumbing store. In June 1914, two service stations were built on College Avenue. Standard Oil operated a station at Shafter which had cost \$240 to construct. It was replaced by a bank building in 1923. The second station was built at the corner of Claremont and College at the site of the present Shell station. It was operated in the 1910s by the Brown Oil Co. A third went up in 1915 at the northeast corner of Claremont and College (now Union 76).

The Burger Garage at 5291 College was also built in 1915. Most of the garages, shops, and stations were brick masonry.

Today, most have been converted to other uses. McCarthy's auto paint shop at 5354 (1922) is now a restaurant. Rockridge Garage at 5433 (1922) is a bookstore, having been used as a bowling alley in the interim. Galliano Auto Repair at 6021 is presently a coffee house and store. The latter building was designed by A.W. Smith who is credited with more College Avenue buildings than any other single architect.

In 1965-66, a freeway through the heart of the College Avenue commercial district took approximately 800 feet of frontage between Shafter and Miles Avenues. The freeway was completed in 1969. Five years later, the BART station opened, and a moratorium on building permits went into effect to allow time to study impacts to the district. In October 1974 the C-31 special retail commercial zone along College Avenue was created. It regulates height, signs, parking, and design review. Current zoning stands in contrast to the days when C.B. Strong said that one could build just about anything on College Avenue. --Jennifer Katz



Union Oil erected the steel station shown here (its second gas station on the site) in 1920. The brick garage at left was demolished when Safeway expanded. (Berkeley Historical Society, Louis Stein collection)



## Oakland Briefing

### ■ OLD MERRITT, CONTINUED

Renovation has actually begun at Old Merritt College, but the political atmosphere surrounding this complex project is murky as ever. The City of Oakland, which still retains title to the site, can be characterized as pursuing the development with one foot on the brake and one on the accelerator - or with both feet jamming first the accelerator and then the brakes.

Even to the casual passerby, progress has been made, witness asbestos cleanup funded by the City at a cost of about \$280,000 and arrival of the Hensel Phelps Construction portable on the grounds. The City appears willing to proceed despite uncertainty over the ability of the developers, IDG/Baner Urban Ventures, to lease up the site and repay the HUD 108 loan.

The City has agreed to guarantee another loan to the developers in the amount of \$200,000 from Union Labor Bank. (\$250,000 for pre-development expenses was loaned by Union Labor Bank in 1994.) One of the bank's conditions is a union workforce on the project, with union officials pledging creation of 20 journeymen jobs to locals, although not necessarily on this project.

The City is currently unwilling to take further steps either to turn ownership over to the developers, or to find them in default of their end of the Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) in terms of signed leases and commitments. Current strategy involves continuing to use IDG Architects and Hensel Phelps to begin the renovation, starting with removal of roof tiles and installation of a plywood membrane. City Council will be asked to approve \$3 million for other work to begin in late winter, with the money to be repaid from the \$11 million HUD 108 loan. The loan, as now written, requires the money to go through the current developer.

The current plan for uninterrupted core-and-shell renovation of the main building ("seamless construction") is being pushed by Mayor Harris and Councilmember Sheila Jordan, and represents a shift from the more cautious path of phased construction reflected in the long-negotiated DDA.

The best recent news for the project is that, once again, Children's Hospital Oakland (CHO) is considering the site. **OHA** readers may recall that CHO previously expressed interest in the entire site for hospital use, but were rebuffed by then Councilmember Marge Gibson-Haskell, the NORA supermarket scheme, and the Office of Economic Development and Employment.

This time around, CHO is considering expanding their Research Institute (CHORI) at the site. With a 65-member staff and a

budget of \$10 million in grants, it is outgrowing its current location. To help CHO decide, the City Council approved \$68,500 for a "programmatic and schematic design study" by IDG Architects. CHORI is looking for some 40-60,000 square feet, possibly shared with Western Nutritional Lab, affiliated with Lawrence Berkeley Lab. While CHO has issued a conditional letter of commitment, its final decision is not expected for at least a few months. City officials have indicated eagerness to help CHO underwrite this expansion. However, CHO may be in a bind at the moment, pursuing expansion on the one hand and yet worrying publicly about the 75% of its funding that comes from programs targeted by the Republican Congress.

North Oakland Voters Alliance (NOVA) has supported this proposed expansion by CHO, as the only logical place to expand in its existing location without destroying more housing (which it has pledged to stop).

Meanwhile, an active group of seniors - by far the largest component of the Citizens Advisory Committee - is meeting regularly to plan the senior center in the auditorium. They have been promised \$100,000 worth of dishes, furniture, and other surplus items from the soon to be closed Oak Knoll Naval Hospital.

Many questions remain to be answered: Will the City scrap the DDA in order to allow long-term City ownership of the site, perhaps in some relationship with the IDG/Baner developers? (The basis for this scenario is that the bulk of money for the renovation is public - HUD 108 and Measure K bond funds for the senior center - and the City is guaranteeing repayment of the 108 money against future Community Development Block Grants.)

Councilmember Jordan, who retires from the Council after this term, has said she wants the project wrapped up during her remaining year in office. But will her successor - chosen in March - begin to assume de facto say in the project? And who at the City level - the City Manager, Office of Housing and Neighborhood Development, Mayor Harris (minus long-time staffer/project liaison Kerry Hamill), or Jordan - is currently calling the shots?

Everyone will claim credit for (and want control of) a beautifully restored site with tenants of the caliber of Children's, but who will be left holding the bag if the project follows a rockier road, like Old Oakland, with long-term vacancies, subsidized tenants, and bankruptcies?

And will the City opt out of the preservation tax credit program, foregoing \$1.5 million but finding it easier to demolish the gymnasium and gut the historic interiors, justified as cost-cutting measures and freeing up space for new construction and denser housing? --Robert Brokl

## ■ FUTURE OF CARNEGIE LIBRARIES BRIGHTER

The fates of at least two of Oakland's Carnegie libraries look brighter, after developments on several fronts. National Register nominations of the Golden Gate, Temescal, Melrose, and 23rd Avenue (Miller Avenue) branches were sponsored by a bevy of organizations - NOVA, Temescal Neighbors Together, Rockridge Community Planning Council, Friends of Melrose Library, and Friends of Golden Gate Library. Betty Marvin assembled the documentation. The nominations were unanimously approved by the State Historic Resources Commission on November 17. (Support for the nominations barely passed the city's own Landmarks Board, after a tumultuous session in which Annalee Allen passionately overcame the objections of fellow Board member Phil Tagami and library and City Manager's staff, who talked like any other fearful private property owners about inability to use the buildings if they were designated. The nominations were referred to the Board for its expert review of the National Register eligibility of the properties - a topic which never quite came up.)

A Request for Proposals (RFP) has been issued by the Library for renovation of the Temescal and Golden Gate branches, both requiring upgrade under the Unreinforced Masonry (URM) ordinance. The RFP defines the scope of work as mandatory and voluntary seismic upgrades, ADA upgrades ("elevator additions" are suggested), and "critical code compliance upgrades." The RFP calls for work to be "reasonably sympathetic to the historic character of the building exteriors and interiors" (emphasis added). This wording survives from a Library Commission report, and is grounds for concern. Work on the libraries is estimated to cost \$2 million each, with no funding source yet identified.

Library advocates and staff have been refreshing in their support of the efforts to protect and preserve the two libraries, though some were initially skeptical of National Register status. Acting director

Golden Gate and Temescal libraries, shown here when just completed in 1918. (Oakland History Room)



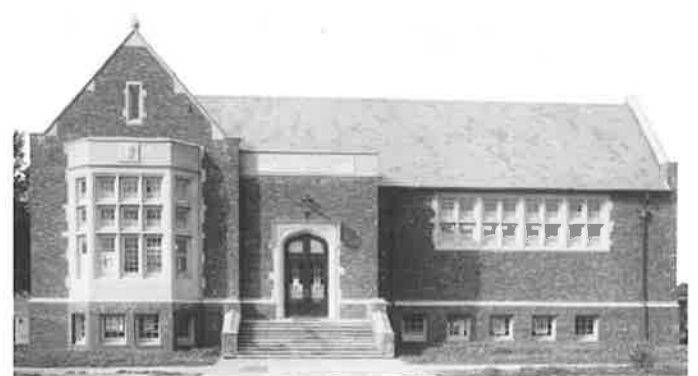
Susanna Gilden, branch coordinator Ruth Metz, engineer Ed Cheng, and Terry Preston of Friends of the Library all rallied in support of complete, not bare minimum, upgrades to the libraries, and have encouraged community efforts for the Carnegie branches. The very active Friends of Golden Gate Library group (contact Lottie Rose, 658-6509) has now been joined by a Friends of Temescal Library, chaired by architect Brier Tomlinson (653-6033).

Meanwhile, Andrew Carpentier of the Landmarks Board, Chris Rawls of Friends of Melrose Library, and Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente have called for similar efforts to protect and upgrade the Melrose branch, which escaped the URM net but may be slipping toward the fate of the Miller Avenue branch, an ex-library on the City's surplus property list. --Robert Brokl

## ■ UPHILL BATTLE FOR STUDIO ONE ?

Longtime Parks and Recreation Director Cleve Williams at the October 18 NOVA meeting perhaps inadvertently revealed the uphill battle facing those who would like to see the Studio One Art Center retrofitted and upgraded in conformance with the URM ordinance. Williams clarified that the \$300,000 for Studio One added at the last moment during budget negotiations was not, as many had assumed, for construction documents and design work, as was the \$500,000 allocated the two North Oakland libraries at the same time. Instead, this money will be spent on further "study" of the future of Studio One.

Williams said he hoped to secure some \$4 million for Studio One, and at that point the governing board would decide if the money would be better spent on renovation of an outmoded plant, or starting from scratch with a new one. Many of Oakland's recreation facilities such as Studio One have boards, sometimes of a mysterious and insular nature. Whether interested parties such as neighbors, preservation groups and arts advocates will have any say in the future of Studio One is an open question. Perhaps the only hope for the 1890s building is its acquisition by neighboring Park Day School. --Robert Brokl



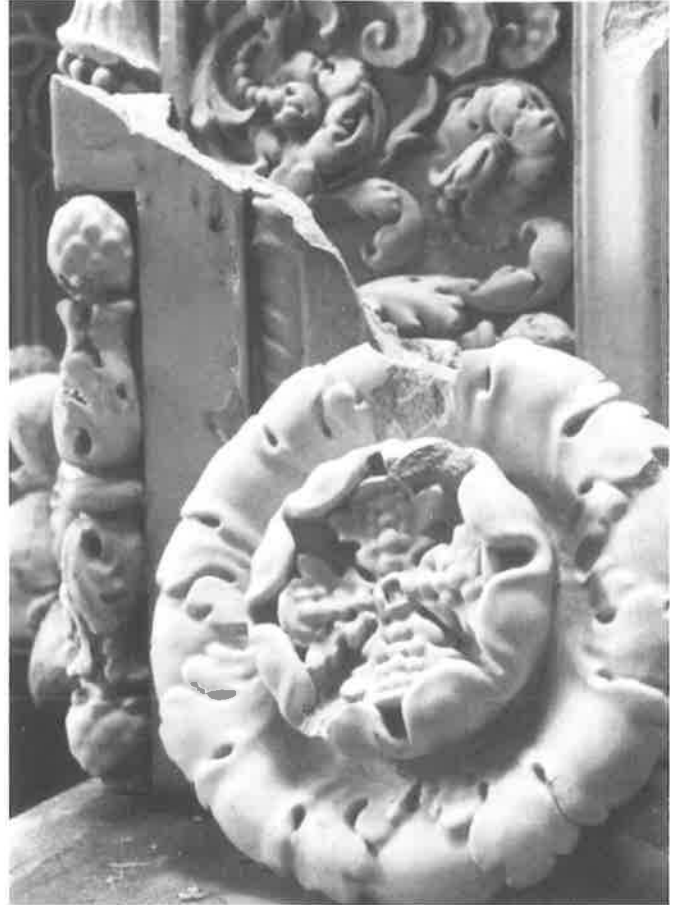
## ■ DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS LOST, FRAGMENTS SAVED

Contemporary "urban renewal" is transforming the heart of Oakland's downtown. Spreading west from Broadway, north of 14th Street to 16th Street and west to Jefferson Street, some 10 blocks are being reconfigured with the scattered site City Administration Complex and the megablock Elihu M. Harris State Office Building.

Promised as catalyst for private sector downtown development, these structures are being somewhat brutally jammed into the westerly portion of the Downtown Historic District. As documented by the Cultural Heritage Survey and determined eligible for the National Register in the 1980s by the Department of the Interior, the district was an L-shaped area of 17 blocks and 96 buildings centering on 14th and Broadway, representing successive early 20th century Oakland economic boom periods from 1903 to 1929. Demolitions, many for these projects, have shrunk the district by about a third. The Survey is now preparing a National Register nomination for the smaller but still very strong district.

The Harris State Office Building takes two partial blocks between Jefferson and Clay Streets. It closes 15th Street, which the building spans, creating a kind of superblock. The state's space needs are giant by Oakland standards. The 700,000 square foot building combines offices from a number of Bay Area cities. It will add 2,165 workers to the downtown economy by the year 2005: two-thirds the number recently added by the federal building. The project was plucked from San Francisco largely through the efforts of mayor Elihu Harris when he was in the State Assembly.

The \$100 million, 22-story Postmodernist state office tower will be somewhat adapted to design elements of its historic surroundings. Four buildings in the district have been lost to this structure. Notable,



Fragments from the Dalziel Building (Fred Reichman)

however, is the retention of the recently seismically upgraded Hotel Touraine at the northeast corner of the site. The stated design focus of architect Richard Keating of DMJM/Keating has been to aesthetically ground the tower in the American skyscraper tradition as exemplified by the 1931 Howe & Lescaze Philadelphia Savings Fund Society building. Keating's highrise will create a dialogue on the skyline with the major but overlooked International Style Smith's building at 14th and Broadway.

The City Administration complex, an earthquake baby, is delivered in a preservation package, if squeezed in somewhat imperfectly. The preservation community's reservations stem from the demolition of the Pardee and Dalziel Buildings and four other contributing structures to the Downtown Historic District. However, due to the awareness of city officials, notably former city manager Henry Gardner, the superb flatiron Broadway Building will be the prow for the new complex. Its preservation partner will be the Plaza Building at 15th and San Pablo, also spared from the wrecker's ball. The complex is a seven-story mid-rise campus plan, with the restored City Hall as masthead. Design of the complex was awarded in competition to Hensel Phelps Construction, with C.W. Fen-



This group of hotels at 15th and Jefferson, formerly part of the Downtown District, will be isolated by the state building, which will wrap around them and cut off 15th Street west of City Hall. (Survey)



tress-J.H. Bradburn Associates architects.

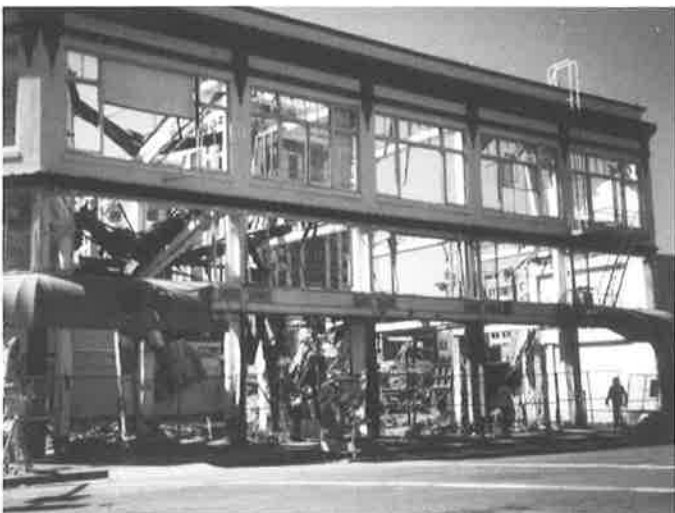
Lengthy debate on how to fit the complex into the City Hall neighborhood ended in the loss of some significant structures, but there were mitigations: commitment to pursue historic district designation, funds for downtown facade improvement, and increased awareness of historic assets.

A preservation ally in the office of the city manager, Alex Greenwood, allowed representatives of OHA and Oakland Point Historic Interpretive Center to pull out some handsome fragments of terra cotta and sheet metal work from the rubble, particularly from the Dalziel Building. These pieces will be auctioned at future events.

As a note of historic irony, early 20th century critic Werner Hegemann noted that Oakland's downtown skyline was a perfect mix of low and highrise structures, adding up to a visually stimulating urban fabric, though not the result of any plan. Let us see with the new generation of government buildings whether this delight is perpetuated - or demolished. --William Coburn

#### ■ PARDEE BUILDING: MATERIAL WASTE

While many say the trade-offs in sacrificing the Pardee Building for the new City Administration Building on its site justified the demolition, one additional painful consequence is now apparent to those who expected to find the rare opaque glass doors, ornate exterior metalwork, and plumbing and electrical fixtures from the late building at local salvage shops. According to Ohmega Salvage, demolition by all-union crews made any salvaging of materials - whatever their resale value - too costly, and nothing was spared from the wrecking ball. A lesson, perhaps, for future negotiations, if conservation of objects exhibiting the high craftsmanship of previous eras matters. --Robert Brokl



Roll it up and throw it away! The remarkable glass-fronted Pardee Building was demolished without any effort at recycling. (Betty Marvin)



Inspiring restoration of St. John's by its congregation of 37 years is nearing completion. (Betty Marvin)

#### ■ MISSION REVIVAL SURVIVAL

There is good news about two of Oakland's finest Mission Revival buildings.

St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, at 1909 Market Street, is well along on its rebuilding project, restoring the church structure after a devastating fire in 1992 (the same Easter weekend Sacred Heart was demolished). This structure was built in 1908 as St. Andrew's Catholic Church, at Adeline and 36th Streets. It was designed by Etienne Garin, also architect of Sacred Heart. It was bought and moved to Market Street by St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in 1958 when the original site was taken for the MacArthur Freeway. The 1992 fire destroyed the main sanctuary roof and the tops of the bell towers, but efforts of the fire department saved much of the facade. The congregation under the undaunted leadership of Rev. Carl Anderson has undertaken this dramatic rebuilding in the face of improbable odds. Progress can be seen on Market near 18th Street.

The long-vacant Madison Street Temple, on Madison just north of 14th Street, is perhaps the most robust and beautifully articulated Mission Revival structure in the city. Its intact interior spaces are impressive in overall effect and in detail. Designed in 1908 as the Scottish Rite Cathedral by O'Brien & Werner, and virtually untouched since, it was recently bought by IAB, a nonprofit Moslem group largely from Iran. A spokesperson for the group stated its intention of maintaining the integrity of the structure, focusing on roof repairs and other long-deferred maintenance. IAB indicated that the building may be available for a future OHA function and that the group hopes to be an active participant in the community of Oakland institutions. --William Coburn



## ■ A TRANSCONTINENTAL TERMINUS MUSEUM?

It has been said that if you hang around long enough you'll become respectable. That rule certainly applies to buildings, and Oakland has many Victorian structures that are admired. One of them, however, was respectable even before it was built.

The railroad station at 464 7th Street (just west of Broadway) was built five years after the first transcontinental trains arrived here in 1869. Accommodating passengers at the end of their journey, it played a significant role in developing the west. Today, however, it houses a marginal retail store and faces massive seismic retrofit costs. At present the Mi Rancho grocery store is carried along by the adjoining tortilla factory. Estimates are said to be \$100,000 to reinforce the building and \$30,000 to tear it down. While owner Robert Berber Jr. remains attached to the building, he says he is open to suggestions for selling or leasing it.

An excellent use of this small and very historic building would be as a museum that would draw more locals and tourists to Old Oakland and help the area realize its true potential. Not many historic districts have a comparable attraction. Fundraising would be needed to generate the low six figure amount necessary to reinforce the building, modify it, and collect artifacts for display. Afterwards a donation box and museum gift shop should pay expenses, and museum visitors would increase the money flow to Old Oakland, in effect adding a new business to an area that certainly needs one. This site should be watched, and the opportunity should not be allowed to pass by. If this vision appeals to you, contact **OHA**. --Daniel Falla

Daniel Falla, a former Oaklander now living in San Diego, adds "I'd like to see Old Oakland become as successful as the Gaslamp down here."



This photo of Oakland's oldest station was taken about 1939, just before S.P. service on 7th Street ceased. The crest reads "CPR," for Central Pacific Railroad, the first transcontinental line. Today it is altered but recognizable. (Oakland History Room)

## O.H.A. Update

### ■ OLD HOUSE JOURNAL: SPECIAL OFFER

You can subscribe to the **Old House Journal** at an 11% discount and benefit **Oakland Heritage Alliance** at the same time. Regularly \$27 a year, this highly regarded monthly magazine on the restoration and maintenance of pre-1939 houses is only \$24 a year through **OHA**, which gets to keep \$10 from each subscription. Renewals as well as new subscriptions qualify for this special offer. For more information call the **OHA** office at 763-9218. --Helen Lore

### ■ CULTURAL HERITAGE SURVEY UPDATE

The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey recently submitted its project report to the State Office of Historic Preservation in Sacramento on the final phase of the multi-year, city-wide Unreinforced Masonry Building survey, and is beginning three new projects for 1995-96. The Survey, Oakland's uniquely comprehensive historic resources inventory, is a project of the City Planning Department, co-sponsored by the Landmarks Board and **OHA**, and funded for the most part by grants from the State Office of Historic Preservation under the Certified Local Government program. Since 1979 it has researched and documented the Central District, Adams Point, and West Oakland in inventory forms that are available and much used at **OHA** and the Oakland History Room. The Survey's work is the basis of many **OHA** tours and articles. In fact, **OHA** was founded by a group of volunteers from the Survey's first year.

The Survey has now been awarded two new grants for 1995-96, for a neighborhood survey in the San Antonio section of East Oakland, and for a field survey and photography of the highest-rated buildings and districts citywide. The Survey is also preparing National Register documentation for the Downtown Oakland Historic District as a special project in connection with the City Administration Building.

All these projects can use your help. The Survey accomplishes astonishing work on a minimal budget thanks in part to dedicated volunteers. This year's surveys offer opportunities for research (in tax records, censuses, city directories, pictures, and newspapers at the library, and building permits, maps, and plans at the city); field work (photos, field notes, talking to residents); writing (building descriptions and histories); and data entry, organization, and production. You will learn a lot, and have fun. Hours are extremely flexible. San Antonio residents are especially invited to join the neighborhood survey. Call Survey Coordinator Gary Knecht at 238-3941. --Betty Marvin



The Unreinforced Masonry Building Survey learned that the 1912 Fremont Theater on Bond Street was converted to apartments in World War II. Another early theater, the 1914 Strand at 3420-26 Telegraph, now passes as a store building. The garage on East 14th Street is one of several brick fantasies built by Paul Lavergne in the 1920s. There are a million stories in the big city, and the Survey uncovers them. You can help.

#### ■ ARTS & CRAFTS TOUR: CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

OHA and Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA) will be teaming up for a Fall 1996 Arts and Crafts house tour, focusing on Craftsman style houses as well as furniture and decorative objects. We hope that members who share this special interest can step forward to support and direct this event. House tour experience is not necessary: most helpful will be an interest in this art movement, a desire to meet with others who share that interest, and a willingness to foster this awareness

in the larger community. There are tremendous resources available in this area, not only Craftsman houses but collectors of period artifacts. We hope this tour will encourage others to see the design links between their bungalows and the Craftsman style. --William Coburn

#### ■ CYPRESS HOUSES RELOCATED

In June 1995 three houses in the path of the Cypress replacement freeway were saved from demolition and moved to a concrete pad at the site of the Phoenix Iron Works at 9th and Wood Streets in West Oakland. A preservation-minded nonprofit is forming to shepherd these houses into the future.

Oakland Point Historic Interpretive Center will take ownership of the houses and seek a permanent site for them, and possibly for other endangered historic structures from West Oakland, and recreate the setting of 19th century West Oakland to tell the story of everyday life amongst everyday people in this part of town.

Focus will be on the myriad and powerful stories of immigration, migration, family and ethnic history among all the ethnic groups who have passed through West Oakland, historically known as Oakland Point.

This coalition of West Oakland based volunteers seeks others to join the effort and would welcome your interest. Call Melissa Rosengard, 444-2187. --William Coburn

#### ■ CITY HALL TOURS

The Oakland Tours Program is offering free narrated tours of the restored City Hall, the first Tuesday of each month at 10 am, from November through April. Tours showcase the 1914 Beaux Arts civic building and the \$85 million retrofit that has brought it acclaim as a state-of-the-art preservation project. For more information call the Oakland Tours 24-hour hotline, 238-3234. Reservations are encouraged.

#### ■ NEW SAUSAL CREEK AWARENESS PROGRAM

The San Francisco Estuary Institute is announcing the first citizens' meeting of the new Sausal Creek Watershed Awareness Program, Wednesday, January 24, 7-9 pm, at the Dimond Branch Library, 3565 Fruitvale Avenue. Sponsored by the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the National Park Service's River and Trail Conservation Assistance Program, the new program is modeled after the San Leandro Creek program. Like its model, it will educate the community about creeks, watersheds, and the effects of humans on the environment. Committees will be formed to oversee creek cleanups, restoration, and historical research. For more information contact Adrienne Yang at the Institute, (510) 231-9539 ext. 566.

## City Landmarks Board Actions

The Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board meets on the second Monday of each month. Meetings are open to the public. Landmark designation is recommended by the Board to the Planning Commission and City Council. Landmarks are subject to a 240-day delay in issuance of demolition permits. Exterior alterations require approval by City Planning staff, at the recommendation of the Board. Five districts and 124 landmarks have been designated since the Board was created in 1973. Meetings are held at City Hall, in Hearing Room #1, second Mondays, 4 pm.

Board members are Annalee Allen, Andrew Carpentier, Renee Dymond, Les Hausrath, George Lythcott, Mark Sennette, and Phil Tagami. Secretary is Helaine Kaplan Prentice.

### SEPTEMBER

In design review, Board discussed the City Administration Complex and redesign of City Hall Plaza. The plaza design was from a competition in 1985, and circumstances have changed since then. Under the current plan, the large oak at the center of the plaza would be retained, but the plane and olive trees would be removed, to create a large open space. The Parks Department had concerns about the trees. The mitigation measures were discussed, including a proposed revolving loan fund for downtown buildings, and historic plaques in the plaza were suggested.

Board discussed priorities for landmark designation, among them the PG&E Building at 1625 Clay Street, the Floral Depot (tabled by the Planning Commission many years ago), and the former Seventh Church of Christ, Scientist at 2333 Harrison.

Phil Tagami reported on a Library Board meeting regarding seismic work on the Temescal and Golden Gate libraries, noting neighborhood concern and conflicting cost estimates. Annalee Allen noted that Studio One also faces seismic requirements.

Secretary Helaine Prentice reported on a proposal for senior housing near the 23rd Avenue (Miller Avenue) library; efforts by Oakland Museum curator Tom Frye to save the Mission Motel sign; potential sale of the Madison Street Temple; and interest by a developer in reusing the former Cadillac showroom at Harrison Street and Bay Place. Les Hausrath agreed to speak at the City Hall rededication on September 15.

### OCTOBER

Prentice introduced Andrew Altman, new Comprehensive Planning Manager, and Denise Hart, new Landmarks Board volunteer from British Columbia with a background in natural resources management. Altman worked in Los Angeles for six years, in the Redevelopment Agency and the mayor's office. He asserted his commitment to preservation and welcomed Board assistance

in setting priorities for implementing the Historic Preservation Element. Annalee Allen commented on the reassignment of Chris Buckley, author of the Element, from Comprehensive Planning to the Zoning Division: Altman said Buckley would be available for consultation.

Board approved an application by IDG Architects to rehabilitate the exterior courtyards, add landscaping, and install a new rear entrance at University High School/Old Merritt College, 5714 Martin Luther King Jr. Way. The proposal calls for repair of existing windows, wide corridors to be retained, existing front door to remain the visual main entrance with a new rear parking lot entrance. Original roof tiles will be replaced. The anchor tenant is to be Children's Hospital. The auditorium is to be preserved except that the sloping floor will be made flush with the stage. Children's Hospital will use the library as a library. Tenant improvements as well as the overall project will be subject to federal Section 106 review. Bob Brokl and members of NOVA (North Oakland Voters Alliance) questioned removal of several trees: chair Les Hausrath asked IDG to keep in touch with the neighborhood on landscaping, and commended Brokl for his efforts on behalf of the building.

Patrick and Jane Miller, 2M Associates, presented the landscape restoration plan for Dunsmuir House. National Park Service guidelines for protection of cultural landscapes were followed, with a target period of 1905-1920. Historic plants were identified using digitized photos.

Walter Cohen of the Office of Economic Development and Employment presented OEDE's plan for the Fox Oakland Theater (1807-29 Telegraph Avenue; a city landmark and on the National Register of Historic



Latest reuse proposal for the Fox would revive the historic Uptown entertainment district. (Survey)

Places) as anchor of a North Broadway entertainment center. Cost was estimated at \$15 million for restoration, and \$2-3 million for acquisition. A preliminary feasibility study was prepared with the aid of Bill Graham Presents, for a 2400-seat theater producing up to 120 shows a year. Board asked Cohen to look at federal historic preservation tax credits, and whether the Fox would be competing with the Paramount, another city landmark.

Board commented on the Draft EIR for relocation of Chabot Observatory and Science Center. The present site is too near the Hayward Fault for school programs. Chabot proposes to move at least one of the two existing domes along with the two telescopes, and to feature the history of the observatory in the new building. Board asked for a stronger statement on the School District's responsibility for the old building.

National Register nominations for the four landmark Carnegie libraries - Golden Gate, Temescal, Melrose, and 23rd Avenue - were referred to the Board by the State Historic Resources Commission. Under the Certified Local Government program, the Board comments on local nominations. Annalee Allen urged the Board to follow the City's own policy on preservation of city-owned historic buildings, clearly stated in the Historic Preservation Element, and support the nominations. After discussion of possible financial consequences of the nomination, Board voted support "because it understood that listing would place no additional burdens on the libraries."

Andrew Carpentier said historic street furniture, such as the pylons in Maxwell Park and at Birch Court, the clock on Broadway, and the gates at Trestle Glen, should be protected. Prentice suggested it as a project for the Survey.

Prentice reported on concerns about the cost added to seismic upgrades when disability access improvements are required at the same time, as they are in Oakland. Review by the State Historical Building Safety Board has been requested.

Annalee Allen reported on a public art proposal involving historical plaques.

Board decided to write to the **Tribune** correcting the September 29 article on the Mission Motel sign, that said the Board was delaying the project and the Oakland Museum was making frivolous purchases.

#### NOVEMBER

Deborah Diamond of the Comprehensive Planning Division presented a slide show on the Historic Preservation Element, as a briefing for new Board members.

Gary Knecht, coordinator of the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, reported on the Certified Local Government workshop in Saratoga on November 3, where he and Betty Marvin presented Oakland's programs for

protection of historic resources and Carolyn Douthat spoke on economic incentives for preservation. He urged Board members to attend the State Historic Preservation Conference in San Jose next May.

Secretary Helaine Prentice reported that new owners of the Asa White house at 504 East 17th Street (a city landmark and on the National Register) had wanted to replace the historic iron fence with a security fence, but had agreed to a landscape solution with the existing fence.

Virginia Yang, representing the board of St. Paul's School, reported on plans for school expansion and demolition of the Oakland Club/Casa Romana building (1922, A.W. Smith, architect), on the Study List and rated B+ by the Survey. To move the building, it would have to be cut in four pieces and would still be too tall to go under the freeway; thus only sites in Adams Point are possible. Plans for the new building have been lowered one story in keeping with neighborhood scale.

Elois Thornton of the Comprehensive Planning Division reported on the ISTEPA grant, approved in December 1994, for an adaptive reuse study of the landmark 16th Street Southern Pacific station. The project has been delayed because until recently the city had not produced up-front funds which must be paid before the grant reimburses. Board directed staff to prepare a letter in support of a second grant application. Weatherization costs are estimated to be around \$300,000.

Prentice reported that a Mitigated Negative Declaration was being prepared for demolition of the Montgomery Ward building, 2825 East 14th Street. Concern was expressed for St. Joseph's Home (Little Sisters of the Poor/ St. Joseph's Medical Center) nearby, a city landmark.

Les Hausrath said the City Manager's office now agreed that National Register listing of the Carnegie libraries would not financially affect the renovations.

Renee Dymond, Mark Sennette, and Phil Tagami reported on a meeting on the proposed removal of trees in City Hall Plaza.

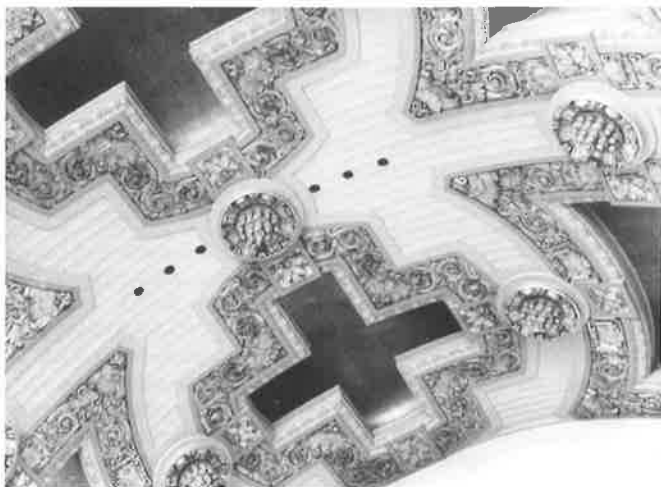
Mark Sennette reported on the landmark nomination of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters headquarters (1716-18 7th Street), approved by Planning Commission in 1992. The owner wants to sell the property and is not interested in designation.

Prentice reported on proposed rezoning of Adams Point including a lakefront S-7 Preservation District, and on progress of the Memorandum of Agreement for demolition of the Mission Motel, which is subject to the Section 106 process because it is eligible for the National Register.

Five landmarks were designated at the City Council meeting on November 28: the Shoong, McElroy, and Bates houses in Adams Point, and Fire Station #10 at 172 Santa Clara Avenue. --Kathy Olson

## OHA Calendar

The OHA Calendar lists events, activities, and meetings related to history and preservation that may be of interest to OHA members. Practical deadline for entries occurs at each solstice and equinox. To submit items for listings, contact Oakland Heritage Alliance or Donald Wardlaw, 2214 Thirteenth Ave., Oakland, 94606. 268-9524



**Tour restored City Hall on Oakland Tours Program's "First Tuesday" tours, and learn its secrets, from this early acoustical ceiling to base isolators and the space-age audiovisual system. (Fred Reichman)**

## Upcoming Activities

through January 28 (W-Sat. 10-5, Sun 12-7), "Silver and Gold: California Cased Images," ambrotypes and tintypes of the Gold Rush era; and

"Dorothea Lange: Archive of an Artist," 100 little known images from Museum's collection of 30,000 Lange prints: Oakland Museum, Oak & 10th Sts., \$5/\$3, members free.

through May 1996, "Bittersweet Triumph: The African-American Experience in World War II," African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 5606 San Pablo Av. (Golden Gate Library) 597-5053

January 24, Wednesday, 7-9pm, San Francisco Estuary Institute's "Sausal Creek Watershed Awareness Program," creek restoration, cleanups, and research. At Dimond Branch Library, 3565 Fruitvale Ave. Adrienne Yang, 231-9539 x566

February 7, Wed., 7:30-8 pm, Channel 9, "Crossroads: A Story of West Oakland," video sponsored by Caltrans as part of Cypress freeway mitigations, focusing especially on people who worked for the railroads; made with input from OHA, Survey, Oakland History Room, etc. Also shown Sunday, Feb. 11, 11 pm.

March 22, Friday, all day, Sacramento (location TBA): "The Mills Act and Other Preservation Tools," California Preservation Foundation workshop, tiered registration \$60-\$160, 763-0972.

May 24, Sunday, afternoon: OHA House Tour, another great Oakland neighborhood, details TBA, reserve this date! Docents admitted free.



**VOLUNTEERS for house selection, research, brochure production, publicity, reception, etc., can start work NOW!! Please call the OHA office, 763-9218.**

## Regularly Scheduled Exhibits & Tours

The African American Museum & Library at Oakland, museum, archives & programs, 5606 San Pablo Ave., 597-5053

Alameda Historical Museum, walking tours of historic Alameda, 1st. & 3rd. Sat., 1pm, 2324 Alameda Ave., \$5/\$3.50 members, 521-1233.

Ardenwood Regional Preserve, April-Nov., Th-Sun. 10-4; tour Patterson House hourly Sat. & Sun./variable Th-F., Ardenwood Blvd., Fremont, \$5/\$3 (Sr.)/\$2.50 (Jr.), 796-0663.

Berkeley Historical Society, museum, archives, walking tours, Th.-Sat 1-4, 1931 Center Street (Veteran's Memorial Bldg.), 848-0181.

Camron-Stanford House, 1876 Italianate house museum at Lake Merritt, (W. 11-4 & Sun. 1-5), 1418 Lakeside Dr., \$2/\$1, free first Sun., 836-1976.

Dunsmuir House, Colonial Revival mansion, 2960 Peralta Oaks Court, Oakland, 562-0328.

Hayward Area Historical Society Museum, (M-F. 11-4, Sat. 12-4), 22701 Main Street, Hayward, \$1/\$0.50 (children), 581-0223.

Judah L. Magnes Museum, Jewish ceremonial & fine arts, historical artifacts, Sun.-Th. 10-4, 2911 Russell St., Berkeley, 849-2710.

McConaghy House, 104 year old farmhouse, Th-Sun., 1-4, 18701 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward, \$2/\$1.50 (Sr.)/\$0.50 (children), 581-0223.

Oakland Tours Program, guided tours of restored City Hall, first Tuesday of the month, 10am, through April. Meet on front steps. Free; reservations encouraged, 238-3234. May-Oct., 7 free tours of central Oakland, every Wed. & Sat. 10am, schedule TBA in May.

Paramount Theatre, Art Deco movie palace, Tours 1st & 3rd Sat 10am, 2025 Broadway, \$1, 893-2300.

Pardee Home Museum, 1868 Italianate Villa, Pardee family residence 1868-1981, tours by reservation, (Th.-Sat. 11, 1 & 2:30), 672 11th St., \$4/\$3 (Sr.), accompanied children free, 444-2187.

Presidio, National Park Service walks, every Sat. 11am, meet at main parade grounds, 10am, free, (415) 556-0865.

San Francisco Heritage, Victorian & Edwardian Pacific Heights, Sun. 12:30-2, Haas-Lilienthal House Tours, Sun. 11-4, W. 12-3:15, Chinese New Year Architectural Walking Tour (Jan.)-call for date & time, 2007 Franklin, \$4/\$2\*; \*Srs./Jrs., (415) 441-3004.

## Regularly Scheduled Meetings

Oakland Heritage Alliance. OHA Board of Directors meets on the first Monday of the month, 7:30pm; for agenda and location, contact OHA, 763-9218. Preservation Action Committee: contact OHA, 763-9218, for time, place and agenda.

Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, 2nd Mon., 4 pm.

City Planning Commission, alternate Weds., 1:30 pm.

City Council, every Tuesday evening, 7:30pm.

All at City Hall. Contact City Planning Dept., 238-3941, for Landmarks Board and Planning Commission agendas.



## New OHA Members

The Officers and Directors of Oakland Heritage Alliance welcome and thank all those concerned citizens who have shown their interest in Oakland's history and preservation by joining OHA. OHA's new members (August through November) are:

Steve & Beth Armstrong, Sharon Bias, Terry Joan Dean, Bayle Emlein, Linda Geary, Marta Gutman, Shirley Heffron, Dave Hodges, Marge & Arnold Huberman, Mildred Hughes, Regina Johnson, Lorna Jones, Steven Lavoie, Thomas Maegher, Lee Etter Mouton-Butler, Janice Parker, Wanda Sabir, Sheila Saxby, Ellen Seltzer, Jim Snow, Henry Wieking.

## Donors

Special thanks to those joining/renewing as:

SPONSOR (\$100): Robert Adams, Phil Bellman/Betsy Yost, Christopher Buckley, Helen Rogers, Joe Ware/Don Wilkinson, June Yost.

ORGANIZATION/BENEFACTOR (\$50): Elisabeth Gorski, Susanne Hirshen/Preservation Park, R.W. Joyce, Harlan & Esther Kessel, Terry Kulka, Gaye Lenahan, Mary Jane McConville/Peter Carlson, David Nicolai, Ted & Adrienne Savetnick, George & Helene Strauss.

DONATIONS: Jerry Bowling/Libby Jacobsohn, Ernest Chann, Michael Crowe, Jon & Mio Good, Dario Meniketti, Montclair Women's Club, Marie Prichett, Robert Reese, George & Helene Strauss.

## Oakland Heritage Alliance News

### CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Brokl, William Coburn, Daniel Falla, Jennifer Katz, Helen Lore, Betty Marvin, Kathy Olson, Fred Reichman, William Sturm, & Donald Wardlaw

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Annalee Allen & Carolyn Douthat.

### EDITOR/PRODUCTION

Betty Marvin

OHA NEWS welcomes contributions--research projects large or small, historic photos, reports on preservation issues or events. Contact Betty Marvin, 849-1959, or OHA, 763-9218. Back issues \$2. © 1995 Oakland Heritage Alliance.

## Oakland Heritage Alliance

P.O.Box 12425, Oakland CA 94604 763-9218

Oakland Heritage Alliance, a California nonprofit corporation since 1980, 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. Membership dues and contributions are tax deductible.

### OFFICERS

President	William Coburn
Vice President	Xandra Grube
Secretary	David Nicolai
Treasurer	Alan Dreyfuss

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William Coburn	893-8826
Michael Crowe	415-398-1975
Alan Dreyfuss	465-4627
Xandra Grube	532-3010
Harlan Kessel	452-4474
Steven Lavoie	208-6420
Betty Marvin	849-1959
David Nicolai	444-4451
Jane Spangler	536-4260
Don Tyler	530-6840
Joseph Ware	893-9401
Marlene Wilson	655-3210

### ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

Helen Lore 763-9218

**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 make OHA a more effective organization.

Name _____	<input type="checkbox"/> New	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal
Address _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	Limited Income
City, Zip _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	Individual
Phone Numbers (H) _____ (W) _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	Family
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	Benefactor/Organization
I would like to serve on the following committee(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	Sponsor
<input type="checkbox"/> Development	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250	Patron
<input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising	<input type="checkbox"/> \$_____	Additional contribution
<input type="checkbox"/> Membership		
<input type="checkbox"/> OHA News		
<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation Action	<input type="checkbox"/> Publicity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Tours	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Oakland Heritage Alliance. • P.O.Box 12425, Oakland, CA 94604 • 1418 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, CA

## Oakland History Notes

### The Esquire Theatre

"Tomorrow night blazing searchlights will cut the evening sky, bands will blare forth a welcome, and a monumental neon beacon will flash above San Pablo Avenue and 17th Street to guide first-nighters to the new shrine of cinema." Thus did the **Oakland Tribune** announce, on August 31, 1939, the grand opening of the Esquire Theatre, which debuted with the film **When Tomorrow Comes**, starring Charles Boyer and Irene Dunne. The new movie house boasted a massive neon sign with green and gold tubing. Seats were upholstered in cherry red velvet and a thick carpet of peacock blue covered the floors. "A miracle of luxury, the new Esquire boasts a handsome

foyer, ladies' salon, and commodious smoking room." When the Esquire opened, Oakland was home to 36 motion picture theaters, 14 of them in the downtown area.

The Esquire was the latest transmogrification of a building that had seen many changes. The three-story brick block began life in 1892 as the Reliance Building, later Reliance Athletic Club. Opening in 1916 after alterations as the Reliance Theatre, the name was changed in 1918 to the American. In April 1932, after months of renovation, the American reopened as a "modernized" theater, featuring new drapes and seats, a neon sign, and a thousand white globes under the marquee. **Forbidden** with Adolph Menjou and Barbara Stanwyck opened the transfigured playhouse.

When the American became the Esquire, the building donned an Art Deco facade. Cornices and classic details were removed

to suit the 1930s trend of streamlining downtown structures. A fire in 1940 prompted further changes. On August 30 a "new and more modern Esquire" opened, complete with searchlights and Hollywood stars. **When the Daltons Rode**, with Randolph Scott, started the evening's entertainment. And lovers of the glittering screen were assured of the comforts of the ladies' lounge: "Modernistic furniture, French plate glass mirrors and indirect lighting make it a cozy place to enjoy a cigaret or retouch make-up."

The Esquire closed in 1952, victim of television and competition from other downtown theaters. In 1954 a sleek glass-walled building, now occupied by dental offices, was erected on the site by the Oakland Drive-In Food Co. Buildings are not without their ironies. The Esquire, once a diadem of modernism, was sacrificed to - modernism.

-- William W. Sturm

(Oakland History Room)



Oakland Heritage Alliance  
P.O. Box 12425  
Oakland, California 94604

Address Correction Requested

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Oakland, California  
Permit No. 31

