

The Oakland Larks



The decade and a half after World War II represented a Golden Age for baseball in America. In the 1940s every facet of American society seemed to embrace this sport even if barriers kept their best players out of the white male major leagues. For women and different racial and ethnic groups, specialized leagues sprang up across the nation to serve the public's voracious appetite for baseball. Some prominent African American businessmen in Oakland and Berkeley realized there was a ready audience waiting for Negro League baseball on the West Coast.

The West Coast Association Negro Baseball League was formed during a series of meetings held October 18-20, 1945, at the Elks Club on 8th Street in Oakland, by the board of directors of the High Marines Social Club, and representatives from the five original member teams. The first four teams were the San Francisco Sea Lions, Seattle Steelheads, Los Angeles White Sox, and an unnamed San Diego club. The fifth team was formed by the High Marines board

Four unidentified players pose in their Oakland Larks uniforms before a game. The Larks played Negro League baseball for Oakland from 1945 to 1949. (African American Museum and Library at Oakland: AAMLO)

of directors and called the Oakland Larks.

The league was officially authorized by a conference commission appointed by the High Marines Social Club members and the five team representatives. This commission was assigned the duty of drafting League bylaws and submitting them to the full conference for signature. Despite two unresolved issues, the entry fee for new teams (finally set at \$500) and the League's name (West Coast Association), the document was signed on October 18.

The purpose of the West Coast Association was to form a profitable Negro minor baseball league located in Pacific Coast cities. Although based on the West Coast, all teams were allowed to book non-league games throughout North America. The Larks played home games at parks in Berkeley and Oakland, and gruelling road games all over the west and midwest against such renowned



High Marines Social Club members and team representatives at league formation ceremony, October 18, 1945. Eddie Harris seated second from left; possibly club president D.P. Portlock at center. Little is known about this club. (E.F. Joseph photo, AAMLO)

non-league teams as the House of David.

The Larks had a standing arrangement for games with the House of David. This team was originally formed in 1903 to represent a Jewish religious colony called Benton Harbor, in Benton Harbor, Michigan. House of David players were known for their flowing beards (considered part of their uniforms, according to the contracts they signed) and trick plays on the baseball diamond. When these two barnstorming teams played, it was always to capacity crowds, as in Seattle on August 7, 1946, when 12,000 fans cheered a nine-inning "barnburner," part of a sold-out three-game

Left: Art Wilson played briefly for the Larks before moving to the integrated Pacific Coast League. Right: Eddie Harris, second from right, front row, played ball for the California Eagles before embarking on a brief career as business manager of the Larks. (AAMLO)

series the two teams played in Seattle.

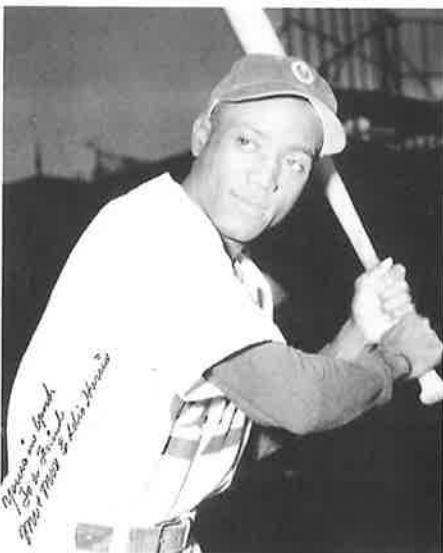
The league was also formed to give African American players an opportunity to play minor league ball in preparation for advancing to the Negro major leagues. This was viewed as especially important by league officials because the established Pacific Coast (minor) league was still segregated in the late 1940s.

The league officially opened its first season April 12, 1946. However, from the outset many of the teams were in financial difficulty. The league struggled along, many teams folding by 1947. The remaining teams carried on as a loose confederation before permanently disbanding in 1949. What had seemed a good idea in 1945 during the baseball-starved atmosphere of wartime America lost its luster by 1947 as the major leagues returned to full operation. Interest in the Negro Leagues generally declined after Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball's color barrier in 1947.

A key figure in the founding of the West Coast Association was Eddie Harris. Eddie Harris, who resided for many years at 1613 Derby Street in Berkeley, was a former Negro minor league player with the California Eagles. He approached the High Marines with the concept of a new Negro baseball league in 1945. He became business manager of the Oakland Larks and was credited with assembling the league's most dominant team. The Larks practiced at San Pablo Park in Berkeley, with league games played either there, or when available, at the Oakland Coast League ball park.

After the Larks folded in 1949, Harris took a civil service job in Berkeley while he searched for a position back in the world of his first love, baseball. There is virtually no personal information on Eddie Harris in the West Coast Association records held at AAMLO.

More detail is found in the records on Jim West, who was hired by Eddie Harris as





Oakland Larks star pitcher Ira Wells in a posed shot at San Pablo Park. The ball fields today are farther north in the park, but this view east along first base line toward Russell and Park Streets is little changed. San Pablo Park Tract was a popular early South Berkeley African American neighborhood. (AAMLO)

player/manager. West was a renowned Negro Leagues player from Philadelphia who brought several talented teammates to California to play for the Larks. His correspondence with Eddie Harris during negotiations over his contract reveal a flamboyant, even cocky, personality, as well as his philosophy on building a successful baseball franchise. As the negotiating process dragged on in early 1946, West wrote Harris in exasperation and declared that if he was allowed to implement his strategies and hire specific (albeit expensive) players of his choice, he would guarantee the league championship for the Larks. Harris finally relented, and West came through on his promise: the Larks were the league's first champions by a huge number of games in 1946.

Another man who appears frequently in the Larks' publicity clippings is Sammy Workman, billed as the "Limbleless Baseball Wonder." Workman lost both his arms and legs at the age of two, apparently due to infections. He was hired by the Larks as a traveling exhibition for their games and put on hitting, catching, and running demonstrations for the crowds while the teams warmed up for the feature game.

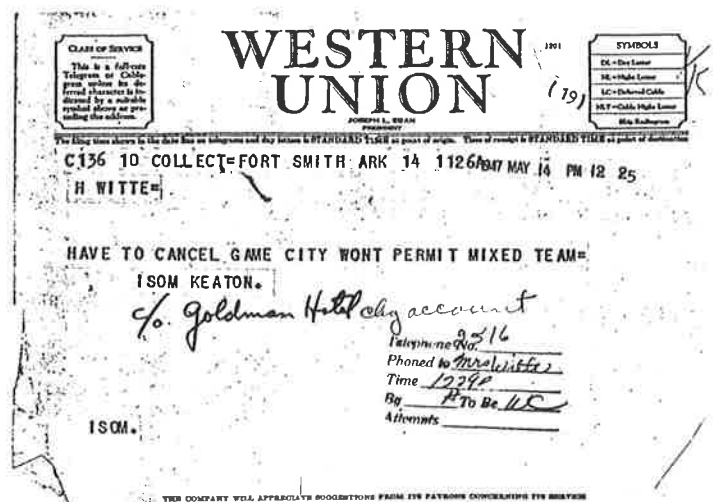
The West Coast Association records at AAMLO cover many aspects of the league's

operation from inception in 1945 through insolvency in 1949. These records contain the league's bylaws, contracts, minutes, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and regulations. Records for the Oakland Larks include financial records, correspondence, publicity releases, clippings from around the country, contracts, game schedules, personnel records, and photographs.

A large collection of Western Union telegrams received by the business manager of the Larks in the spring and summer of 1947 make it possible to reconstruct the team's road trips that year. Telegrams datelined Seattle, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Wichita, Houston, Detroit, Salt Lake City, Pine Bluff, and many smaller towns provide an excellent insight into a baseball team's typical daily operations, as well as the obstacles and tribulations faced by Negro League teams touring the nation. The specter of a racist society was never far behind. In May of 1947, the Larks were notified by telegram that a game with the "Davids" in Fort Smith, Arkansas, was canceled, due to a municipal policy prohibiting integrated sporting events.

What makes these records all the more valuable is that no other archive in the West is known to hold documents from this league. However, West Coast Association records contain little biographical information on its members or on league teams other than the Larks. The African American Museum and Library at Oakland would like anyone with information on the WCA, Oakland Larks, High Marines, Eddie Harris, or league players, to contact Michael F. Knight, curator specialist, at 597-5053. We are particularly interested in stories from former players or anyone who knew former players. --Michael Knight

Telegrams in Larks collection are vividly evocative of life on the road in the late 1940s. (AAMLO)



■ OHA member Michael Knight is Curator Specialist at the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, and is also the author of a study of Mary Netherland and the Northern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

Oakland Briefing

■ OHA APPEALS NEGATIVE DECLARATION ON MONTGOMERY WARD DEMOLITION

At its January meeting the board of directors of OHA voted to appeal city staff's Negative Declaration ("neg. dec.") on the Montgomery Ward project to the Planning Commission. The appeal prompted an outraged letter to OHA from Councilmember de la Fuente, the driving force behind the demolition proposal, and public and private comments from representatives of the St. Elizabeth's Parish Community Organization who have lobbied for years for action on the long vacant structure. Because OHA's appeal has engendered a certain amount of controversy, it is appropriate that OHA readers understand the rationale for challenging the city's environmental determination.

Last October the city signed an agreement with Montgomery Ward to demolish the historic 900,000 square foot catalog sales building at 2825 East 14th Street and redevelop the site with a 100,000 square foot shopping mall. The agreement would transfer ownership to the city in exchange for \$3.6 million in federal funds and an agreement by Ward's to clear the site. Subsequent to the demolition, which is projected to take about a year, the site would be transferred to the Redevelopment Agency which would, in turn, transfer an ownership interest back to Ward's in a partnership to redevelop the site.

After the agreement was signed, application was made for a demolition permit. As required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an Initial Study of possible adverse environmental effects was done for the entire project by the city's Office of Planning and Building, and a Mitigated Negative Declaration was issued for public comment on December 22. A "Mitigated Negative Declaration" states that if certain "mitigations" are performed, adverse environmental impacts will be "reduced to a level of insignificance," and no environmental impact report (EIR) is necessary.

The Landmarks Board reviewed the document at its January meeting and asked for additional mitigations having to do with historical documentation and design of the new building. OHA appealed the Negative Declaration, arguing in part that an EIR was required because the project involved demolition of a National Register-eligible building. The appeal was set for hearing on February 7. In the interim, the City Council met in closed session regarding the appeal, and the OHA board heard presentations from Councilmember de la Fuente, representatives of OCO, and two developers who had previously pursued

reuse proposals for the building.

At the Commission hearing, Bill Coburn presented OHA's position, noting that demolition or alteration can still occur even if National Register eligible properties are given due consideration: witness the Howard Terminal (Grove Street Pier), Southern Pacific Yards and Shops, Naval Supply Center Historic District, Peralta Villa, and the Mission Motel. Additional testimony was given by Xandra Grube, speaking for the Foothill Neighborhood in support of the appeal, the two developers, Kent Linn and Richard Deringer, and Fran Matarrese for the neighborhood group. With very little discussion the Commission denied the appeal, letting the document stand without incorporating the Landmarks Board's additional mitigations.

The OHA board's opposition to the Negative Declaration comes down to two basic points. The first is procedural, having to do with the city acknowledging its own policies under the Historic Preservation Element, and following state environmental review requirements (CEQA) where a project could result in significant adverse effects to a historic resource. The second has to do with the very reason for the existence of the environmental review process.

The Montgomery Ward building was evalua-



Fifty-two years ago, A. Montgomery Ward founded this great institution which today, after fifty-two years of progress, stands preeminent as the OLDEST AND MOST PROGRESSIVE MAIL ORDER HOUSE.

We have established branch houses where they serve the greatest number of people most efficiently, carrying in each branch great stocks of merchandise. The keystone of our policy is "Service to Our Customers."

In less than a year, we have doubled the size of our Oakland plant. A remarkable 100% expansion...to better serve California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah; and, evidencing a confidence that California and the Pacific Coast offer unlimited possibilities for increased business. We have not and will not be disappointed.

We now have plants in Chicago, Kansas City, Portland, Ore., St. Paul and Fort Worth. A plant in Baltimore is in the course of construction.

Montgomery Ward Co.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK, ESTABLISHED 1872

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

This full-page ad in the 1925 Tribune Year Book shows the Ward's building as a "factory beautiful" in the same tradition as the Shredded Wheat plant in West Oakland. Landscaped setbacks are currently filled in by low-rise additions, but could be restored.

ted as appearing eligible for the National Register by the Office of Planning and Building's own Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey. This rating was confirmed by a letter from the State Office of Historic Preservation. Despite this official opinion of eligibility, the Initial Study (and the subsequent staff report defending it) concluded that "maybe" demolition would result in a significant effect to a historic resource. It questioned the Survey rating and the State Office's determination, pointing out that Ward's was not a designated city landmark. The study went on to conclude that even if ("maybe") there was an adverse effect, it could be "reduced to a level of insignificance" by recording the building prior to demolition, erecting a commemorative plaque on the new shopping mall, and incorporating design elements in the one-story shopping mall that would echo those of the eight-story industrial building. OHA appealed these findings on the basis that demolition would be the ultimate adverse effect on a historic resource, and could not be rendered "insignificant" by the mitigations proposed. The Initial Study also failed to identify conflicts between the project and the policies of the city's Historic Preservation Element. In fact the study did not recognize the Element at all as adopted city policy.

The failure to follow procedure in this instance could have implications for other historic resources in the city. If, in the name of expediency, the process is ignored, the legal protections in place for the public's interest in cultural and historic resources lose their meaning. As a precedent, this cursory treatment of a National Register-eligible building could affect the fate of buildings like Swan's Market, I. Magnin's, the Floral Depot, and Holmes Bookstore, to name a few.

The second point is intertwined with the first. At the hearing on the appeal, one planning commissioner asked why the city should go through an alternatives analysis in an EIR when Ward's and the city had already looked for developers to reuse the building, implying that the public process required by state law would be redundant. Although proponents of demolition maintain that every effort has been made to find a reuse for the building, these efforts have been taken largely behind closed doors. The OHA Board's appeal was based on the clear intent of CEQA to inform decision-makers and the public about potential significant environmental effects of a proposed project before it is approved and to identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly mitigated.

As of this writing, the demolition permit is ready to issue. Demolition awaits identification of funding, and transfer of title to the city. --Carolyn Douthat



Southern Pacific station is approaching picturesque ruin status, if stabilization is not undertaken soon. You can help by writing to Metropolitan Transportation Commission in support of grant. (Betty Marvin)

■ 16TH STREET STATION UPDATE

In December the city applied for ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act) funding of Phase 2 of the 16th Street Train Station Reuse Project. The station at 16th and Wood Streets, closed since the Loma Prieta earthquake, has suffered considerable interior damage since the quake because of deferred maintenance on the roof and gutters, and the heavy rains in the past few years.

The good news is that the owner, Southern Pacific, has repaired the roof, hopefully securing the building from further water entry. The bad news is that the interior will continue to deteriorate unless remedial measures are taken to stabilize the building. Because of this urgent need, the city application asked for \$300,000 to prepare a stabilization plan, prepare engineering drawings and specifications for seismic work, and complete further analysis of toxic remediation work that may be necessary.

Both Phase I, approved for funding in early 1995, and Phase II anticipate that the reuse project will be part of a larger effort to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between Southern Pacific and the city for a master plan for the 22-plus acre site that includes the station, a site that will be ripe for development when I-880 construction is completed. Discussions between the city and Southern Pacific have again been initiated after a hiatus of several years.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which processes and ranks the



Southern Pacific Yards and Shops buildings, built between 1874 and 1914 and of supreme historical importance to Oakland and the west, will apparently be demolished since proposal to move them to Rio Vista Junction fell through for lack of time and funds. Caltrans told the railroad story in "Crossroads" video, and is also recording the buildings in HABS and other formats. (Fred Reichman)

applications, will be considering staff recommendations this spring. In the initial staff ranking the station project was rated 45 out of 112 applications, placing it beyond the anticipated funding levels. Public support can make a difference when the Commission reviews the rankings. OHA members are urged to write expressing support for funding the 16th Street Station project. Letters should be directed to: Dianne McKenna, Chair, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Metro Center, 101 8th Street, Oakland CA 94607-4700. --Carolyn Douthat

■ CREATIVE MITIGATIONS: WEST OAKLAND VIDEO

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Federal Highway Administration funded production of a 28-minute documentary video, "Crossroads: A Story of West Oakland," as part of the mitigation plan for the Cypress freeway replacement's adverse effect on National Register-eligible historic resources, in order to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act. The new freeway will go through the Southern Pacific Railroad's West Oakland Yards and Shops, a National Register-eligible historic district, and will demolish several historic buildings. The yards are extremely significant in Oakland history, because the Central Pacific Railroad (later Southern Pacific) located its repair and maintenance shops there when Oakland became the terminus of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. This is essentially the birthplace of industrial Oakland.

Representatives of **Oakland Heritage Alliance**, City Planning staff, the Oakland Museum, and the African American Museum and Library at Oakland were involved in developing the scope and content of the documentary. The video includes interviews with State Senator Nick Petris and Representative Ron Dellums, both of whom grew up in the neighborhood, and with former Southern Pacific employees, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters members, shipyard workers, local residents, and activists who took part in the nationally significant events that shaped the area.

To make the documentary available to the widest possible audience, it was broadcast on KQED in February. Copies have been provided to the Oakland Public Library (in the circulating video collection), Oakland Museum, Cultural Heritage Survey, African American Museum and Library, **Oakland Heritage Alliance**, and public schools in West Oakland. Copies may be purchased for \$10.82 (check made out to Caltrans) from the Caltrans Public Information Office, Attention: Anita Appiano, P.O. Box 23660, Oakland CA 94623. If you have additional questions, please contact Mara Melandry at (510) 286-5582. --Beth Kruse/Caltrans



Coliseum's "irresistible structural art" in 1969
(Martin J. Cooney photo, Oakland History Room)

■ OAKLAND COLISEUM: A LANDMARK LOSS

When the Oakland Coliseum complex was completed in 1965, it was enthusiastically praised in architectural journals in the United States and abroad. For 30 years it has been considered a major monument of postwar modernism. As a work of design and as a stadium, no others of its generation were as successful in the United States. For comparison one might look to the stadiums built for the 1960 Olympics in Rome. (Could the success of the A's and Raiders have been inspired by the architecture?) As recently as 1988, on the occasion of the American League playoffs, Allen Temko wrote effusively in the San Francisco *Chronicle* about this "irresistible work of structural art." The Coliseum and Arena together he called "unmatched in sports architecture. A spectacular interplay of related, curving shapes is set up by the two structures, unlike any other large-scale spatial experience in ancient or modern architecture."

Today the Coliseum is undergoing a \$100 million renovation that will destroy the circular geometry of the original design and obscure its artfully expressed concrete structure. Around the familiar flying saucer will be new ramps, walkways, ticket areas, and structures housing a club and restaurant, all dressed up in the spirit of the new old-fashioned stadiums in Baltimore and Denver. The seating area will be rebuilt to create lots of expensive new suites for the corporate market, equipped with bars, overhead TV monitors, and audio-visual centers. It is not clear whether this renovation will raise profits enough to keep the increasingly bizarre financial structure of professional sports from collapsing. At the very least, it should keep ticket prices in Oakland among the highest in the country.

The first indication for the general public that any of this was happening was on Pearl Harbor Day 1995, in a color rendering accompanying an almost unrelated article in the Oakland *Tribune* headlined

"A's Oil Marketing Machine." The article barely mentioned the renovation, but the juxtaposition made it clear at the outset that the purpose of the changes had more to do with marketing and finances than with sports or sports fans. Work started shortly after the rendering appeared.

After so many years of international critical appreciation, there has been no public comment about the architecture we are losing - not from Wurster Hall, the AIA, SOM, the fans, the newspapers, or the city. Press coverage has been devoted to construction details and to marketing issues. The city did not review the project for effect on a significant structure under CEQA. Though less than 50 years old, the Coliseum complex would certainly have qualified for the National Register for exceptional architectural significance.

Like the Claremont Hotel, the Mormon Temple, the clusters of highrises in downtown Oakland and Emeryville, Montgomery Ward's, and Albany Hill, the Coliseum is a feature of the landscape, rising above most everything else and visible from a great distance. Up close, according to Temko, "there is a sense of harmony and order, of simple heroic dignity, that is everywhere expressed in perfection of proportions and line."

The Coliseum was designed by Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill (SOM), with Whitney & Amman, consulting structural engineers. For SOM, Edward C. Bassett was partner in charge and Myron Goldsmith was senior designer. According to Robert Bruegmann, an authority on SOM at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Bassett and Goldsmith were leading figures at "the most successful large corporate firm in America in translating European modernist ideas to this country. The Coliseum was one of the largest and most conspicuous examples of rational clarity in site plan and structural design. It is a major monument of American architecture and engineering of the 1960s." With the current renovation, we must say that along with the Oakland Museum, in a national and international context it was Oakland's most distinguished architectural landmark of the period.

--Michael Corbett

■ LANDMARKS BOARD GOALS FOR 1996

At a dinner meeting following its February meeting, the Landmarks Board and its secretary Helaine Kaplan Prentice discussed goals for the coming year. The Board discussed co-sponsoring an event with OHA to acquaint owners of recently designated landmarks with one another, and to identify joint issues and concerns. Also discussed was recognizing the newest landmarks and their owners at a City Council ceremony for National Historic Preservation Week in May.

An important goal for the year will be to continue working toward implementing the city's Historic Preservation Element. One task will be to develop a list of city-owned properties and inform the city departments that oversee these properties how adoption of the Element affects their stewardship. Board members are concerned that persistent budget constraints and staff reductions are having a serious impact on effectively incorporating Element actions into city policy.

The Board agreed to continue looking at ways to present the design review process as a beneficial service to the applicant, not just a regulation that causes hardship and delays. Owners as well as members of the public are encouraged to nominate potential landmarks. --Annalee Allen

■ FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH RECONSTRUCTION

The long awaited reconstruction and restoration of century-old First Unitarian Church in downtown Oakland has begun. On November 26, after more than ten years of planning, members and friends marched ten blocks from the historic building at 14th and Castro to First Baptist Church at 22nd and Telegraph, which the congregation will call home for the next 18 months. An old-fashioned community groundbreaking is scheduled for spring, and if all goes according to plan, Wendte Hall and the east wing will be fully renovated by fall, and the auditorium/sanctuary by early 1997. The work includes structural and seismic reinforcement, upgrading of mechanical systems, and expansion to accommodate the growing needs of the congregation and the community - all while maintaining the historic integrity of the building.

During the past year the church hired Jack Shepherd as project director for this major endeavor. A close examination of the reconstruction plans resulted in one major change from the original project: because of prohibitive cost, a basement will not be added. Expansion will be achieved by addition of a third floor in the east wing with the east wall shifting five feet to the east. Despite this change, the roof line will remain true to its original height and form. An added lobby and court-



Parishioners and friends walk from First Unitarian to First Baptist Church, celebrating the start of renovation work. (Fern Tiger Associates)

yard at the main entry will provide an accessible entrance and improve internal circulation. The church has already raised more than \$2 million, has secured financing for another \$2 million, and is hard at work raising the remaining \$2.8 million necessary to complete the project.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and both a City and State Historic Landmark, First Unitarian has successfully and elegantly withstood more than a century of use, two earthquakes, about 5600 Sunday services, more than 30,000 meetings, and an untold number of weddings, ceremonies, and special events. Built solely with materials manufactured, quarried, or timbered in California, the quality of Walter Mathews' Romanesque-style building has been demonstrated over and over. The Loma Prieta quake confirmed the need for structural reinforcement. As the site of numerous community activities and public events, a homeless shelter, and the impetus for organizations such as the Center for Urban Family Life and the Gateway Collaborative, the church is a core institution in downtown Oakland. Its rehabilitation will benefit not only the congregation but all of Oakland.

--Harlan Kessel

O.H.A. Update

■ IN MEMORIAM: FREDERICK MITCHELL

Former OHA board member Frederick Mitchell passed away suddenly on February 4 from a cerebral hemorrhage. He was 63. Fred's tenure on the board was from 1986 to 1990. He was also president of Berkeley Architectural Heritage from 1990 to 1992.

Fred and his wife, photographer Margareta Mitchell, lived in a Berkeley period revival house designed by W.R. Yelland that looked across Chabot Canyon to downtown Oakland. He often said he maintained strong loyalties to both communities.

A native of Erie, Pennsylvania, and a Yale graduate, Fred moved to Berkeley in 1960. He became involved in publishing in the mid-1960s, with **Ramparts** magazine. Later he turned to fine arts publishing, founding Scrimshaw Press in 1969. Scrimshaw produced such highly acclaimed books as **A Gift of Place** and **Handmade Houses**. **East of These Golden Shores**, published in 1975, featured 125 photographs of historic buildings identified by the Junior League of Oakland in an early volunteer survey of over 1000 pre-1917 structures in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Thanks to Fred's willingness to publish **East of These Golden Shores**, steps toward saving these vanishing landmarks began in earnest.

In the 1970s and early 80s Fred was associated with Storek & Storek, developers of Old Oakland, and later with J.T. Ward Real Estate in Berkeley. Those wishing to make a donation in Fred's memory can contact Friends of the Bancroft Library at U.C. Berkeley, for the Frederick Cleveland Mitchell Collection. --Annalee Allen

■ HOUSE TOUR MAY 19: 10TH AVENUE DISTRICT

OHA's 1996 spring house tour will highlight the 10th Avenue Historic District in the Brooklyn neighborhood - Oakland's first designated residential S-7 historic district. This area has a wealth of stunning Victorian houses, including works of A.W. Pattiani and the Newsoms, as well as some distinguished Colonial and Craftsman houses. In 1988, neighborhood residents applied for and won district designation from the Landmarks Board. Houses on the tour will range from completed restorations with full period decor to works in progress with tips for your own restoration projects.

The house tour committee invites volunteers to assist with all aspects of the tour: neighborhood liaison, publicity, brochure preparation, docents, reception, and special exhibits and entertainment on the day of the tour. We hope on this tour to encourage a wide range of historic sensory experience, with period artifact

displays, costumed performers and docents, and more. A special invitation is extended to members who can lend items or install exhibits - cookbooks and utensils, tools, or other intriguing collections - or are interested in period costume or music, or have other ideas for making this a lively and distinctive celebration of history and neighborhood spirit. Call OHA, 763-9218, or tour chair Don Tyler, 530-6840.

--Bill Coburn & Marlene Wilson

■ THANKS TO 1995 VOLUNTEERS

The OHA Board wishes to recognize and thank the following members and friends who volunteered their assistance to the organization in the last year. Without their participation **Oakland Heritage Alliance** could not have provided its educational programs and leadership in preservation advocacy.

TOURS/EVENTS: Marita Abueg, Carolyn and Tom Armour, Glenna Barrette, Julie Barron, Yvonne Barsballe, Phil Bellman, Bob Brokl, Mary Brown, Marina Carlson, Ernest Chann, Yanie Chaumette, Bill Coburn, Risa Coplan, Al Crofts, Michael Crowe, Joan Dark, Carol Doty, Riley Doty, Carolyn Douthat, Alan Dreyfuss, Holly Babe Faust, Victoria Franklin, Gary Goss, Xandra Grube, Mary Hall, Jacci Harris, Ellen Hartzman, Jim and Helen Hill, Mary Jenevein, Betty and Bert Johnson, Shirley Mannedette, Nancy Marr, Michael Martinez, Betty Marvin, Gwen McCormick, Shereen Mendari, Jack and Bunny Moeller, Larry Moerke, Keith Morris, David Nicolai, Oakland High School Kiwins, Maxine O'Guinn, Anita Pender, Aida Peterson, Ed Phillips, Jeanne Pollak, Lisa Ruhland, Naomi Schiff, Barbara and Sam Skelly, Jeanne Pollak, Barbara Smith, Jane Spangler, Berenice Stoner, Betty Thomas, Sister Ethel Mary Tinnemann, Dvora Treisman, Don and Shirley Tyler, Bettie and Don Violich, Suzanne Waligore, Joe Ware, Diane Warner, Don Wilkinson, Marlene Wilson, Gloria Will, Diane Winters, Valerie Winemiller, Dean Yabuki.

PRESERVATION ACTION: Annalee Allen, Carolyn Douthat, Alan Dreyfuss, Xandra Grube, Frederick Hertz, David Nicolai, Naomi Schiff, Jane Spangler.

OHA NEWS: Annalee Allen, Phil Bellman, Robert Brokl, Bill Coburn, Carolyn Douthat, Daniel Falla, Xandra Grube, Donald Hausler, Jennifer Katz, Harlan Kessel, Helen Lore, Betty Marvin, Kathy Olson, Fred Reichman, Bill Sturm, Donald Wardlaw, Elizabeth Way.

MAILINGS: Jerry Bowling, Maureen Clarke, Betty Johnson, Sue Wong.

BOOKKEEPING: Betty Kennedy.

CULTURAL HERITAGE SURVEY: Jennifer Katz, Eugene Peck, Jane Spangler; and Survey staff Gary Knecht, Gail Lombardi, and Betty Marvin, who all contribute far beyond the call of duty. --Helen Lore



Cultural Heritage Survey field work: Betty Marvin and Gary Knecht document the late, great Mission Motel (Survey photo by Alieza Bircher, 1992)

■ CULTURAL HERITAGE SURVEY UPDATE

After a long winter of paperwork, the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey is looking forward to lots of field work this spring and summer, and you can help. We have about 1200 historic resources to photograph and document for this year's survey project, which will be submitted to the State Office of Historic Preservation in September. About half are houses and commercial buildings in the San Antonio neighborhood, and the other half are the most notable hitherto unsurveyed buildings and districts throughout the city.

These two projects will record buildings and districts at a reconnaissance level, with a photo and description of each building or district on the state's Primary Record form. This will document the resources until such time as they are covered by the intensive survey, which includes research and evaluation and usually proceeds neighborhood by neighborhood.

Field work is best done in teams of two to four: photographer, notetaker, driver, navigator. (Do you have a friend or two

you would like to volunteer with?) Building descriptions are begun in the field, and refined in the office from photos and field notes. Other office work includes labeling and distributing photos, data entry, map work, research, and final production of forms. The product will be a "best of Oakland" album that will be available at the Oakland History Room, City Planning Department, and **Oakland Heritage Alliance**. Your contribution of time and talent can make it a better and more useful record. You can explore parts of Oakland you may not have known about or revisit ones you love, and refine or acquire skills in describing buildings.

If this appeals to you, give the Survey a call: Gary Knecht, Betty Marvin, or Gail Lombardi, 238-3941 weekday afternoons. The Survey is a project of the Oakland City Planning Department, co-sponsored by the Landmarks Board and **Oakland Heritage Alliance**, and is considered one of the best in the state. The Survey's research provides the basis for many of **OHA's** tours and articles. --Betty Marvin

■ WEST OAKLAND EXHIBIT AT HISTORY ROOM

"West Oakland: History of a Community" is the current exhibit at the Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room. Displayed in conjunction with the release of Caltrans' video "Crossroads: A Story of West Oakland" (see Briefing), the exhibit honors one of Oakland's most colorful and historically important neighborhoods.

From the arrival of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 to the era of World War II, the display unfolds the panorama of West Oakland in historic photographs, newspaper articles, and memorabilia. The rich texture of the community's history is covered, from churches and clubs, schools and businesses, to the railroads and the changes in the outer harbor. This tribute to a neighborhood rich in tradition and history can be seen at the Oakland History Room through March 31. The OHR is located at the Main Library, 125 14th Street, open Monday and Tuesday 10-5:30, Wednesday and Thursday 12-8, Friday 12-5:30, Saturday 10-5:30, and Sunday 1-5. For information, call 238-3222. --William W. Sturm

■ OLD HOUSE JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

Would you like to subscribe to **Old House Journal** at an 11% discount and also benefit **Oakland Heritage Alliance**? Regularly \$27 a year, this monthly magazine on the restoration and maintenance of pre-1939 houses is \$24 a year through **OHA**, which can keep \$10 from each subscription.

Renewals as well as new subscriptions qualify for this special offer. For more information please call the **OHA** office at 763-9218. --Helen Lore



HELAINE KAPLAN PRENTICE ANDREW BRUBAKER BETTY MARVIN

"Who lived in these houses? Oaklanders, in all their diversity." *Through These Doors* puts generations of inhabitants back in Preservation Park.

■ NEW BOOK ON PRESERVATION PARK

The Oakland Redevelopment Agency has just published **Through These Doors: Discovering Oakland at Preservation Park**. The 48-page book is a lively account, beautifully displayed, with many historic photographs never before published. Each restored house in the Park is profiled, with detailed information about past occupants and distinctive aspects of style and design, all woven together within a historical context. The book is filled with illustrations and vintage photographs from the heady years of Oakland's emergence as a key West Coast port and trade center. Like holding a small museum in your hand, the book provides readers and students of regional history with a unique window to the past.

Two well known **Oakland Heritage Alliance** members and preservation experts have been involved with the project over several years: writer Helaine Kaplan Prentice, author of **Rehab Right** which won the Gordon Gray Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and historian Betty Marvin, **OHA News** editor and research artist extraordinaire. The integrated presentation of text and pictures was conceived by designer Andy Brubaker, who spent a year searching for illustrations

in libraries, private collections, and historical societies. Their combined talents, coordinated by graphic designer Terry Lim, have produced a unique document, rich with images of early days in the west. The book is available in Preservation Park and at local bookstores for \$12.95 plus tax. --Susanne Hirshen

■ MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY SEEKS DOCENTS

Mountain View Cemetery is looking for a few unique lovers of California history to become docents leading tours through the beautiful Mountain View grounds. Mountain View Cemetery, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (creator of New York's Central Park) is considered one of the finest examples of public landscaping in America. Nestled in the hills of Oakland, it is alive with the history of such notables as Julia Morgan, Samuel Merritt, Charles Crocker, and Anna Head. Docents will be trained by Barbara Smith, Mountain View's historian and popular **OHA** tour guide. For more information please call 658-2588.

■ SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

The recently established Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians had its inaugural meeting in Berkeley in January. Papers were presented by Lynne Horiuchi on architect Charles Whittlesey and by James Buckley on lumber company towns, and Susan Cerny led a tour of Panoramic Hill. This congenial group of public, private, academic, and avocational historians expects to meet again in late April. Those interested in joining should contact Michael Crowe, 640 Mason Street #503, San Francisco CA 94108.

■ SAUSAL CREEK EARTH DAY CLEANUP

The Sausal Creek Earth Day Clean-Up will take place on Saturday, April 20, from 9 am to noon. Everyone interested in Sausal Creek is invited to meet at William Wood Park, McKillop and School Streets, and help remove trash and debris from the creek bed, banks, and environs.

Participants should bring enthusiasm, boots, work gloves, and a brown bag lunch for the picnic that will follow. Drinks will be provided by the City of Oakland's We Mean Clean program. Latex gloves and trash bags will be provided by the San Francisco Estuary Institute. Keep California Beautiful, Inc., is also a sponsor. The cleanup is part of the Sausal Creek Watershed Awareness Program, sponsored by the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the National Park Service River and Trail Conservation Assistance Program. For more information contact Adrienne Yang at the San Francisco Estuary Institute, (510) 231-9539 ex. 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 127 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.

DECEMBER

Regina Almaguer of the Cultural Arts Division reported that the forthcoming Broadway master plan would include public art. Annalee Allen recommended including historic plaques as well.

Boardmembers Lythcott, Carpentier, and Allen agreed to look at the Glenview library building at 4231 Park Boulevard, a city landmark, to identify interior features that should be preserved. The building is no longer used as a library, and is on the surplus property list. The owner of the piano company occupying the building is interested in buying it, and would accept deed restrictions calling for preservation of the exterior and certain interior features. Board discussed wider issues of maintenance of city-owned landmarks with Mark Bryant of the city's Real Estate Division.

Board discussed plans for Adams Point rezoning, including a proposed lakefront



Though no longer used as a library, the Glenview Branch retains many interior features of Archie and Noble Newsom's 1935 Spanish-style design: tile floor, decorative beamed ceiling, built-in shelves. Board discussed protection if building is sold. (OHR)

CITY HALL SQUARE, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA



City Hall Plaza, now Frank Ogawa Plaza, has been renamed and redesigned many times. This postcard, mailed in 1910, shows a sculptured fountain, rustic bandstand or gazebo, palms, and a cannon captured in the Spanish-American War. The view is east along 14th Street from Washington: the curved building at right is the Macdonough Theater, on the present site of the Smith's building at 14th and Broadway.

S-7 (historic) district, whose boundaries would be determined by the Board.

A recently released seismic plan for St. Paul's Episcopal Church (110 Montecito, 1912, Benjamin G. McDougall architect) was reported to be sensitive to the architecture of the building; reinforcement will occur on the inside. St. Paul's is also working on design of a wheelchair ramp.

Annalee Allen reported on design guidelines being developed by a consultant for Upper Broadway Auto Row. Board decided to send a letter outlining city preservation policy and emphasizing the importance of consulting the Cultural Heritage Survey's research on properties in the area.

Secretary Helaine Prentice reported on a meeting on plans for City Hall Plaza. Topics included keeping San Pablo Avenue open, and reviving the fountain that was closed during the drought in the 1970s. She described landscape renovation plans for the Oakland Museum that called for replacing red ironbark eucalyptus with Italian cypress; Board was concerned that this would alter the historic appearance of the Museum. Landmark nominations of the Seventh Avenue Missionary Baptist Church (1740 7th Avenue) and Calou Laundry (730 29th Street) were approved by the Planning Commission and forwarded to City Council. Owners of three recently designated landmarks were honored at OHA's holiday party: Rose Arnold for Seventh Avenue Missionary Baptist Church, George Fong for the Chinese Presbyterian Church, and Mely Quan for Borax Smith's Red House.

JANUARY

Board reviewed plans submitted by the Camron-Stanford House Preservation Association for re-landscaping the front

and side of the house, including tree removal; this was reviewed in conjunction with a request from the Office of Parks and Recreation for a recommendation on replacing the white manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) that was removed because of disease. Board directed the applicants to modify their plans and include a new manna gum, subject to resolving problems with fungus and the sewer line.

Board reviewed an application by Noll and Tam, architects, to construct a restroom building at Dunsmuir House, first of a planned group of buildings for special events. Trees and a greenhouse would be removed. Plans were approved, subject to resolving issues of visual separation between old and new buildings with staff.

Secretary Prentice reported that she had approved minor exterior alterations for seismic upgrade and handicapped access at St. Paul's Church (see December).

Board appointed subcommittees to review modifications to approved plans for work on two city landmarks: First Unitarian Church (685 14th Street; see Briefing), and the Rancho Peralta Park complex at 2465-2511 34th Avenue (Peralta House and site of Rancho San Antonio adobe). Revisions involved new skylights at First Unitarian and hardscaping at the park.

An application to demolish the Casa Romana at 124 Montecito (the Oakland Club, 1922, A.W. Smith architect) for expansion of St. Paul's School was referred to the Board by the Zoning Division Manager. Board voted to request that the city delay issuing a demolition permit until plans for the replacement building are complete, as required by the city's demolition ordinance. Boardmembers Lythcott, Allen, and Tagami offered to work with the school as a subcommittee.

Board heard neighborhood representatives requesting that demolition of the Ward's building (2823 East 14th Street, a historic building under the URM Ordinance) be allowed to proceed (see Briefing). Board voted to recommend that the proposed mitigations be revised to include an oral history (suggested by Annalee Allen) and to require that the new project follow the Main Street design guidelines for the Fruitvale area rather than mimic design elements of the old building.

Phil Tagami reported that the I. Magnin building (2001 Broadway, 1930, Weeks & Day architects) was for sale by Federated, and that the prospectus describes it as a historic building to be preserved. A landmark nomination for this building has been pending for several years.

Secretary Prentice reported on design guidelines and tree preservation for City Hall Plaza. Revisions include a new row of plane trees in front of the Broadway Building and cherry trees in front of City Hall, and relocation of the fountain.



The Casa Romana's arches, columns, and decorative interior trusswork exemplify A.W. Smith's imaginative geometric designs. It was built in 1922 for the Oakland Club, a women's service organization founded in 1899 at First Unitarian Church. The club promoted playgrounds in "the crowded districts," public health and penal reform, and even paid the salary of probation officer Ezra Decoto for four years. (Survey)

FEBRUARY

In design review the Board approved an application by developer John Protopappas for work on the former Oakland Tribune complex: to replace all windows, install new storefronts, and make other exterior modifications at 401-19 13th Street (the Tribune Tower, an Oakland landmark, and the attached Tribune-Breuner's building, a historic building under the URM ordinance) and at 400-16 12th Street/1201-11 Franklin Street (Tribune Press building, formerly Pantages Theater). The proposal is for live/work, retail, and office space.

Board reviewed an application by Garcia/Wagner & Associates to construct exterior buttress walls for seismic reinforcement at 8925 Holly Street (Pacific Telephone Elmhurst Exchange, 1927), a historic building under the URM ordinance. Interior reinforcement would disrupt the telephone equipment. Board approved the concept but directed the applicant to continue to work with staff and seek community input.

Review of Casa Romana demolition was tabled until March after a meeting with the Adams Point neighborhood. Applicants wanted the project exempted from proposed downzoning in Adams Point.

Board heard a presentation by Jane Spangler of OHA, stating concerns about construction activity in City Hall Plaza, expected to continue for several years: job shacks at the doors of City Hall, construction debris, unsightly fences, and lack of consideration for one of the most important public spaces in Oakland.

The regular meeting was followed by a dinner meeting at which the Board discussed goals for 1996: see Briefing.

--Kathy Olson & Helen Lore

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)

Upcoming Activities

through March 31, (M-T. 10-5:30, W-Th. 12-8, F. 12-5:30, Sat. 10-5:30), "West Oakland: History of a Community," one of Oakland's most colorful & historically important neighborhoods, Oakland History Room, Main Library, 125 14th. St., 238-3222.

through May 19 (W-Sat. 10-5, Sun. 12-7), "People, Politics, Protest and Promise: African Americans in the News," 41 images from recent gift of 1,000,000 photos from Oakland Tribune archives, vivid view of African American life as portray by media since 1920, The Oakland Museum, Oak & 10th Streets, \$5/\$3 (members free), 238-3401.

through May 1996, (12-5, Th.-Sat.), "Bittersweet Triumph: The African American Experience in World War II", new exhibit commemorating the contributions of African Americans in WWII, The African American Museum and Library at Oakland, 5606 San Pablo Ave. (Golden Gate Library), 597-5053.

April 3, W. 8pm, "Arts & Crafts Design: A Gathering from Primary Sources," Tim Hansen speaker, Claremont Club, 214 Hillcrest Road, Berkeley, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, \$10 841-2242.

April 13, Sat. 6pm, "Literary Berkeley," Phil McArdle speaker, Berkeley Historical Society Annual Dinner Meeting, U.C. Faculty Club, info & reservations 848-0181 Th.-Sat.

April 17, W. 8pm, "Bernard Maybeck, Charles Keeler and Berkeley's Northside Architectural Revolution," Gray Brechin speaker, Hillside Club, Berkeley, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, \$10 841-2242.

April 20, Sat. 9-noon, "Sausal Creek Clean-up," Earth Day activity, bring enthusiasm, warm clothes, boots, work gloves, & packed lunch, William Wood Park, Oakland, McKillop & School Streets, details call Adrienne Yang, San Francisco Estuary Institute, 231-9539/566.

April 21, Sun. 12-5, "In Harmony with Nature: The Arts & Crafts Homes of North Berkeley's Scenic Park Tract," BAHA House Tour, early brown-shingle houses in Berkeley's first hillside neighborhood, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, \$21 members/\$26 general public, 841-2242.

late April, Meeting, Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, recently established chapter seeking new members, for info contact Michael Crowe, 640 Mason Street, #503, San Francisco, 94108.

May-June, 4 Saturdays, Berkeley Neighborhood Walking Tours, Berkeley Historical Society, details TBA, info Box 1190 Berkeley, 94701 or 848-0181 Th.-Sat.

May 2, Th. 8pm, "Transplanting an Aesthetic: Greene & Greene in the Bay Area," Ted Bosley speaker, Claremont Club, 214 Hillcrest Road, Berkeley, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, \$10 841-2242.

May 19, Sun., 1-5, "Brooklyn Tenth Avenue Historic District," OHA Spring House Tour, Oakland's only residential historic district. Victorians, Colonial. Docents admitted free.



VOLUNTEERS for house selection, research, brochure production, publicity, reception, etc., can start work NOW!! Call OHA office for details, 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.

Cohen Bray House, 1884 Eastlake Stick house owned continuously by descendants of first occupants, original furnishings & wall papers, 1440 29th Ave., Oakland, open 4th Sunday, 2pm tours by appt., for info Victorian Preservation Center of Oakland, \$5, 532-0704.

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.

McConachy 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 fo 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. 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 city meetings 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 (Dec. through Feb.) are:

Paul Cobb, Una Gilmartin, Logan Hopper,
 Michael Knight, Arthur Payne, Mr./Mrs.
 Jeff Sahadi, Janet Zampieri

Donors

Special thanks to those joining/renewing as:

SPONSOR (\$100): Les & Linda Hausrath, Norman & Florence Lind, Oakland Police Officers Association, Myron Zimmerman.

ORGANIZATION/BENEFACTOR (\$50): Peg Baldwin, Mary O. Davis, Jennifer & Randy Katz, David Leinbach/Leinton Properties, Sally Shaver, Howard & Dorothy Stein, Janet Zampieri.

DONATIONS: Bank of America matching grant from Yvonne Barsballe, David Beery/Allen Gordon, Teresa Burns Gunther, Raleigh Hughes.

Oakland Heritage Alliance News

CONTRIBUTORS

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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. © 1996 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.

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Oakland History Notes

The House of Albert Miller

Among many opulent mansions that once stood in West Oakland, the house of Albert Miller was distinguished for its regal presence and fine grounds. Born in Germany in 1828, Miller emigrated to the United States in 1848, settled briefly in New York, then headed to California in 1851 to seek his fortune. Arriving in San Francisco, he soon proved his prowess in business and finance. In partnership with James DeFremery, who also graced the city with a mansion (still extant), he founded the first savings bank in San Francisco. Settling in Oakland in 1878, he pursued sundry interests in railroads, powder companies, and civic endeavors.

In 1879, he built his two-story home in West Oakland. Built at a cost of \$25,000,

the house was one of many designed by the prodigious Charles Mau. Like Miller, the architect emigrated from his native Germany, arriving in Oakland in 1873. Through a career spanning more than forty years, he designed scores of Oakland houses and buildings, including the original Altemheim in the Dimond district. Hubert Howe Bancroft's 1892 sketch of Albert Miller in **Chronicles of the Builders** states that "the house was built after plans designed by his wife," leading one to the possible conclusion that Mr. Mau was firmly advised concerning the placement of rooms.

In 1943, years after the house vanished, one of Miller's sons would recall "there was a terrace surrounding the house." He remembered that the second floor contained seven bedrooms and two bathrooms, and that the attic held three servants' rooms. The main floor had a conservatory, sitting room, parlor, dining room, kitchen, pantry, servants' dining room, and a library containing 3000 volumes. A connoisseur of literature, Mr. Miller also enjoyed music and painting. Upon his death in April 1900, he was mourned as "one of the most widely known and respected citizens of Oakland." His widow continued to live in the mansion until her death. In 1919 the family sold the property to the Pacific Coast Shredded Wheat Company, which since 1916 had operated a factory (still standing) across the street. The house was demolished soon thereafter, and in 1937 the H.J. Heinz Corp. built a warehouse and office on the grounds, now occupied by Amtech Lighting. Today not a trace remains of Albert Miller's elegant estate.

-- William W. Sturm
(Oakland History Room)



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