

## Oak Center gets its due

### ■ After decades of citizen effort, historic district is declared

By Allyson Quibell

Some 40 years after the residents of Oak Center rebuffed the idea of demolishing their neighborhood in the name of urban renewal, Oak Center is Oakland's newest, and largest, Historic Preservation District.

The district has over 600 parcels with more than 500 buildings on approximately 50 city blocks—bounded by 18th and 20th Streets to the north, 10th and 12th Streets to the south, and Brush Street and Union Street to the east and west. Its distinguished examples of Victorian and early 20th-century architecture include nine houses already individually designated as City Landmarks—the highest number of any Oakland neighborhood. Approximately 70 percent of the residential buildings date from the period of significance (1860–1925), and 90 percent of those are intact enough to contribute to the district without restoration.

The Oakland City Council voted unanimously to make Oak Center an historic district in June 2003, after years of persistence and hard work by the Oak Center Neighborhood Association, a group founded in the 1960s and now led by longtime resident Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson.

While Wyrick-Parkinson speaks highly of the work done by all those involved—not only members of the community, but Oakland Heritage Alliance and numerous city officials—it's clear that without her stewardship and guidance, the designation never would have come to fruition.

The process had many starts and stops, especially with the changing faces on the City Council. "When Nancy Nadel was re-elected, that helped push it through," says Wyrick-Parkinson.



Alan Templeton

**THIS WELL-KEPT VICTORIAN** sits at 16th and Filbert streets, and was one of the stops on OHA's walking tour of Oak Center Historic District this summer.

Vice Mayor Nadel is, indeed, a strong supporter of the effort: "Preserving the historic beauty of a community always adds value to a city at large. . . It encourages people to value and understand the historic nature of the area."

"If a community shows pride, it's [the city's] obligation to help them enhance their neighborhood," she says. "It's a pleasure to have such a high level of civic participation in one neighborhood. . . I ride around West Oakland every morning and I'm always astonished by how beautiful the homes are. And I've seen more and more people making improvements."

Along with the historic designation, the City also adopted a new zoning classification: the S-20 Historic Preservation District Combining Zone.

The S-20 is a modification to the existing S-7 zone, designed to streamline the review process in very large historic districts like Oak Center.

Betty Marvin, the City's historic preservation planner, explains that "With S-20 we tried to write something that wouldn't increase the complexity of project review but would provide adequate historic direction. They get more protection [from an owner who wants to change grossly or alter a building's façade] and get design review fees waived."

She hopes that Oak Center will be the first of many S-20 zones. The City's Cultural Heritage Survey has identified hundreds of districts citywide, many of them good zoning candidates, and has had

see **OAK CENTER** on page 2



## President's message

By Mary MacDonald, President

We are pleased to bring you another issue of the *OHA News* soon after the publication of our last issue, and I would like to thank our layout editor Erika Mailman and stalwart contributors Allyson Quibell and Kathleen DiGiovanni for their diligent research and writing.

On the preservation front, OHA continues to keep tabs on proposals for development at the Ninth Avenue Terminal, in the Uptown area, and at the Altenheim. We also monitor the danger of eminent domain being used to displace the 5th Avenue artisan community in the Central City East Oakland Redevelopment District. Since January, we have been communicating with the Planning Department regarding the necessity for an EIR to be conducted for the planned expansion at Mountain View Cemetery. OHA believes that alternatives to the siting, size, and design of the proposed project must be considered under CEQA because of the historic significance of

the cemetery, which was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of landscape architecture in the United States. We believe that mitigations for any adverse effect upon the historic resource must be required. The Planning Commission was not persuaded, and approved the project in early August. The Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League was instrumental in bringing attention to the need for a CEQA analysis, and an article about that group's plans appears in this issue. Our Preservation Action Committee also recently met with the owner of the historic Fruitvale Hotel, who is eager to preserve the building once legal questions about its title have been resolved.

We need additional, committed members for our Preservation Action Committee. Planners, architects, engineers, or others with an interest in preservation action are encouraged to give us a call or send an email.

As you know, last December the OHA membership authorized the board to

increase the number of board members to fifteen. We now have some additional board positions, and we are looking to fill these open spots with responsible, interested persons. Serving on the board is a fantastic way to get involved in Oakland, learn about preservation and Oakland history, meet wonderful people, and do fun things. Some of our board members emphasize preservation action, while others focus on the programs, education and publication arms of our mission. We welcome all types! If you are interested in serving on the board, please send us a statement of interest and a description of your background for our consideration.

Finally, we have had a really good Walking Tour season, which has brought in many new members as well as some much-needed revenue. We are always in need of donations, however, to help with our expenses, including office and support staff. Any contribution you can make to OHA will be much appreciated and will help OHA continue its preservation action and education.

## Oak Center

*Continued from page 1*

"nibbles from other neighborhoods already. They are watching this process. . . . Now there's a model to follow."

### HISTORY OF OAK CENTER

The history of Oak Center as a residential neighborhood began when Dutch-born

banker and gentleman farmer James DeFremery built his grand estate west of Adeline in the early 1860s. At the time, other prosperous businessmen were building estates in the country—the East Bay, Marin and the Peninsula—to escape San Francisco's noise, dirt and fog. Improved ferry service and the arrival of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 made West Oakland ripe for development.

The prestigious Oak Center neighborhood developed at a leisurely pace through the 1870s and into the 1900s. About 360 of the 589 buildings in Oak Center were built before 1910. The earliest purchasers typically claimed corner lots of half or quarter blocks; later infill produced a neighborhood that is an elegant patchwork of 19th and turn-of-the-century styles.

Well-known early Oakland and Bay Area architects are represented in the district: Charles Mau, A.W. Pattiani, Howard Burns and Elmer Childs, just to name a few. Their work is a stunning collection

of Italianate, Stick, Queen Anne, Colonial and Shingle residential architecture. One of Oakland's finest remaining Italianate townhouses was built during this period (the Canning House at 954 16th Street).

Oak Center became home to many downtown Oakland professionals and San Francisco commuters. Prior to 1910, about half of the identified owners could be described as middle class or professionals: bookkeepers, government employees, produce merchants, manufacturers, teachers and newspapermen. After 1910, there were more artisans, clerks and individuals described as laborers. Many early residents remained in the neighborhood for decades. In fact, one reason why so many of the Oak Center houses have survived is because of long-term owner occupancy.

Like the rest of West Oakland, the Oak Center area began to fall from grace as the electric railways and the post-1906

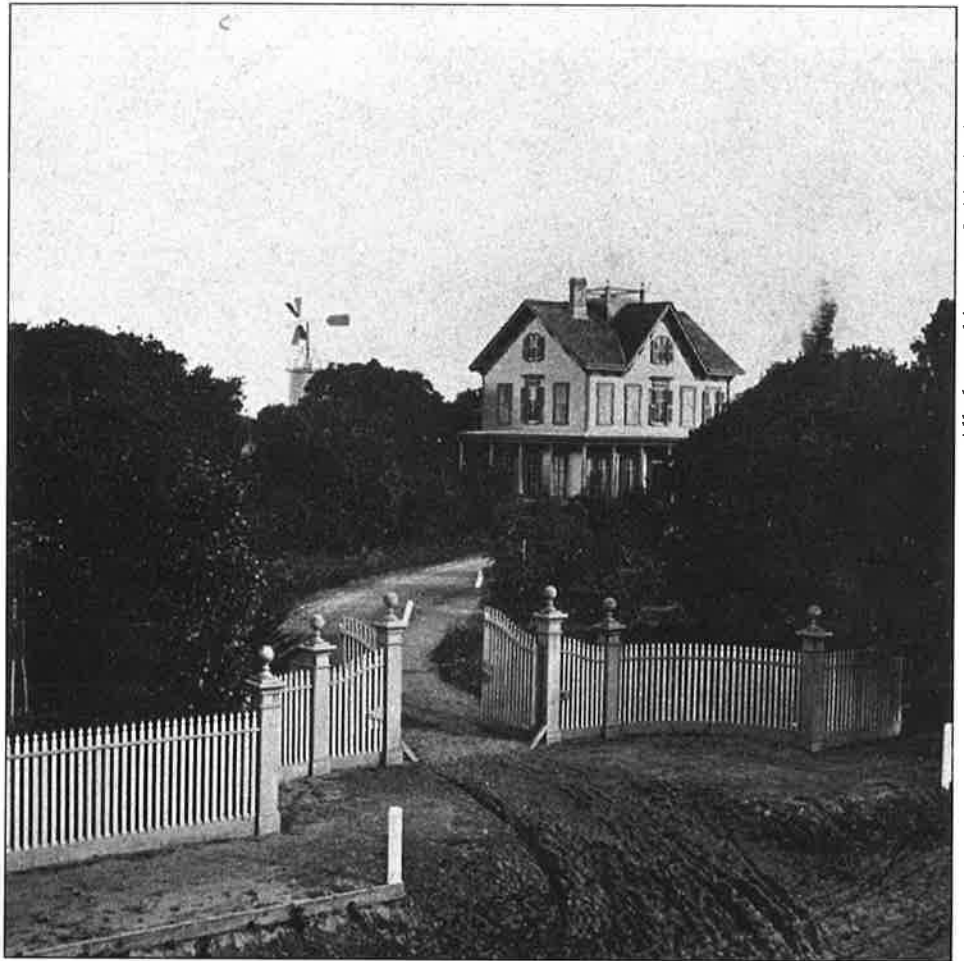
*see OAK CENTER on page 3*

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**THE DEFREMERY HOUSE** still stands today, although not on such a dramatically rural plot. At right is a c. 1873 Carleton Watkins stereograph print. At bottom right is a 1910 party to celebrate Leon DeFremery's coming of age, held in the music room, while above is the hall entrance, photographed in 1910.



All photos this page: Oakland History Room

## Oak Center

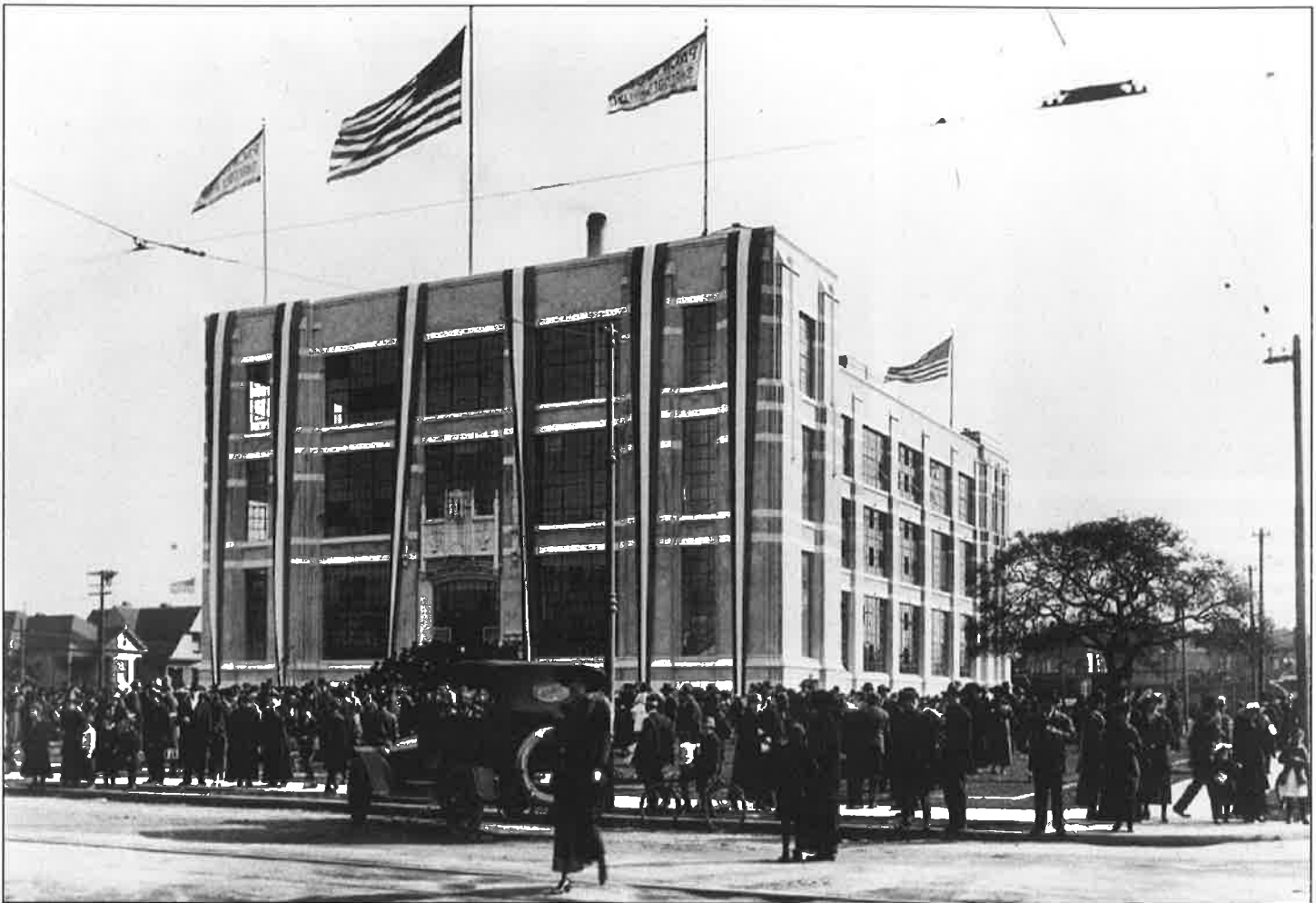
*Continued from page 2*

earthquake boom opened up the lower hills and "East of the Lake" districts, but its fall was very gradual. Even after the Nabisco Shredded Wheat plant was built at 14th and Union streets in 1915-16, houses still commanded some of the highest rents in the city: \$50 a month and up, according to a map in the 1921 *Tribune Year Book*.

After World War II, most residents were African-American, drawn to Oakland by wartime military jobs. As the older homes in the neighborhood deteriorated, many owners chose to evict renters and tear down houses rather than spend the money needed to bring them up to code. Large areas adjoining the neighborhood were razed in the 1930s for the Peralta Villa housing project, and more in the 1950s for the Cypress freeway.

See **OAK CENTER** on page 4





Oakland History Room

**OPENING DAY AT THE SHREDDED WHEAT FACTORY:** Two company flags flank the American flag in 1917, when the factory opened. Later, the company was sold to Nabisco.

## Oak Center

*Continued from page 3*

### 1960s URBAN RENEWAL AND BEYOND

The history of redevelopment in Oak Center is one reason for its historic district nomination. In the early 1960s, urban renewal projects spearheaded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development razed blocks of beautiful Victorian homes near Oak Center to make way for the Acorn housing project. Oak Center would have been next if not for the efforts of neighborhood activists, including Wyrick-Parkinson, whose pioneering efforts redirected redevelopment from

demolition to preservation.

Those activists' grassroots efforts, researching the history and lobbying politicians locally and in Washington, D.C., produced an area redevelopment plan in 1973.

The most recent push for historic designation and rezoning began in late 1999,

### **Oak Center: a district with many aliases. . . .**

*Historic Names:* Central Homestead, DeFremery Estate, Galindo Tract and North Oakland Homestead Tract.

*Common Names:* Oak Center, Oak Center Redevelopment Area

*Period of Significance:* 1860-1925

when the Neighborhood Association made its intentions known to the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. Community meetings and presentations followed before the nomination was officially made to the Board. The next two hurdles were getting stamps of approval from the Board and the Planning Commission, both of which came in late 2002.

### WHAT'S NEXT

"We hope this [designation] will preserve the façades of our Victorian homes, that it will go down in history and someday be a tourist attraction," imagines Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson.

*See OAK CENTER on page 5*



## Oak Center

*Continued from page 4*

A plaque from the city and appropriate new street signs are seen as first steps. “We want to make it stand out,” she says. Additionally, “We want to keep up the neighborhood and get the word out to owners to keep their homes and property up as much as possible.”

Joseph Taylor, a member of the Oak Center Preservation Committee and the OHA board of directors, agrees, noting that “If [the designation] spurs people to beautify their homes, that’s a positive.” He adds that while some see preservation as something that restricts growth, he sees it as an attraction: “‘Vintage’ and ‘classic’ are buzzwords these days. That’s what people pay for.

“Now people will become aware of the history. This will generate interest from both inside and outside the community, making the community what it could and should be.”

*For more about Oak Point, see back page for an article on a theater there. Also see photos of the Oak Center walking tour on p. 9.*



**THIS UNKNOWN YOUNG WOMAN** stands on the lawn at 929 Chestnut St. (near 11th Street). Behind her are the homes of Oak Center. The photo was taken by Nellie McGraw around 1901.

All photos this page: Oakland History Room



**OAK CENTER TRACK RECONSTRUCTION:** In 1918, the tracks on West 16th Street, looking east from Chestnut Street (right), were given fresh new sidewalks—you can see the “before and after” on either side of the tracks. The photo above (from a nearby street) shows how horses graded the material.







# Thanks, volunteers!

Oakland Heritage Alliance counts itself incredibly lucky that a large number of dedicated people donate their time to helping further the cause of preservation. You're the ones who help us make Oakland a city that protects and reveres its historical and cultural resources.

## HOUSE TOUR

Annalee Allen ♦ Ariel Anderson ♦ Lesly Avedisian ♦ Simao Avila ♦ Bettina Balestrieri ♦ Renie Bartolini ♦ Andy Born Lou Brenneman ♦ Jane Brown ♦ Nandi Brown ♦ Trish Buresh ♦ Patti Busk ♦ Kit Van Buskirk ♦ Barbara Bye ♦ Nancy Capell ♦ Carolyn Carolina ♦ Phyllis Carter Martha Chase ♦ Ed Chappell ♦ Yanie Chaumette ♦ Donna Cheng ♦ Deborah Cooper ♦ Rissa Copla ♦ Laurie Craise Bob and Pat Cross ♦ Jamie Cross Michael Crowe ♦ Gwen Davalier ♦ Maran Devadas ♦ Pipi Ray Diamond ♦ Riley Doty ♦ Dennis Evanosky ♦ Aparna Ewing ♦ Kathy Ferreira ♦ Alison Finlay ♦ Kevin Flynn and Marilyn Citron ♦ Patrick Gange ♦ Gary Goss ♦ Herb and Mary Graw ♦ Cindy and Geoff Haines ♦ Sally de Haven ♦ Jeffery and Barbara Heil Donna Hemmila ♦ Lynn Holt ♦ James and Cindy Horn ♦ Alan Howard and Erika Mailman ♦ Bob and Dottie Howell ♦ Judy Jacobs ♦ Dan Jepson ♦ Brian Johnson Mike Johnson ♦ Ann Killebrew ♦ Kurt Lavenson ♦ Susan Lee ♦ Tina Lee Gaye Lenahan ♦ Diane Levy ♦ Pam Litke Joshua Long ♦ Ruby Long ♦ Zachary Long ♦ Marianne Louri ♦ Yorkman Lowe Mary MacDonald ♦ Shirley Manette Tracy Manio ♦ Cheryl Marshall Gloria Martin ♦ Betty Marvin ♦ Sharon Mathis ♦ Pat McClosky ♦ Bruce and Linda McPherson ♦ Ethel McTiller Renee Melody ♦ Gary Mingle ♦ Paulina Minor ♦ Susan Montauk ♦ Bill Mous Val Mumford ♦ Ortrun Niesar ♦ Cat Nerney ♦ Gordon Newell ♦ David Nicolai Marlene Oehler ♦ Sarah Oehler ♦ Anita Pender ♦ Aida Peterson ♦ Gloria Pieretti



**OHA GETS A CHANCE TO THANK** its hard-working volunteers, on a lovely spring day with vistas of Lake Merritt from the back porch of the Camron-Stanford House. The Volunteer Appreciation Party was held May 31.

Elizabeth Way

Pat Powell ♦ Sharon Priest ♦ Allyson Quibell ♦ Sandra Rauch ♦ Joyce Roy Ekaterina Sabieva ♦ Ellen Seltzer Carol Sheerin ♦ Marcia Sherris Sam and Barbara Skelly ♦ Olivia Smith Carol Van Steenberg ♦ George Strauss Natalie Taylor ♦ Sharon Thomas Shirley Throen ♦ Robert Thyken Sandra Tillin ♦ Claire Tomkins ♦ Joel Toste ♦ Arwa Toulan ♦ Sofia Tselentis Sylvia Turner ♦ Judy Velardi ♦ Becky Waring ♦ Rachelle Watt ♦ Madeline Wells Diane Winters ♦ Randi Wood

## PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION

Annalee Allen ♦ Betty Marvin Pamela Magnuson-Peddle ♦ Alan Templeton

## OFFICE AND MAILING HELP

Melanie Archer ♦ William Bankhead Jerry Bowling ♦ Patti Busk ♦ Kathleen DiGiovanni ♦ Hilda Hansen ♦ Bonnie Killip ♦ Ruby Long ♦ Pamela Magnuson-Peddle ♦ Pat McCloskey ♦ Dawn Mueller Sandra Tillin

## PRESERVATION WEEK

Annalee Allen ♦ Pat Dedekian ♦ David Nicolai ♦ Alan Templeton

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS!

Jacob Adelman ♦ Annette & Haig Agigian American Indian Public Charter School Keiko Araki ♦ Kathryn Blake ♦ John Bliss & Family ♦ Hal Bornstein ♦ Cheryl Brink June Brumer ♦ Bing Budiarto ♦ Patti Busk Phyllis Carter ♦ James & Evelyn Clevenger Steve Colman ♦ Sheila D'Amiro ♦ Rary Darrah ♦ Kathleen Doyle ♦ Merle Easton, AIA ♦ Jean & Jerry Erben ♦ Marilyn Ford Loretta Forte ♦ True French ♦ Nancy Garner Jon Golden ♦ Leah Greenblat ♦ Michael Greenslade ♦ William Hall ♦ Deborah Hilton ♦ James & Sandra Holst ♦ Judith Jennings ♦ Kathryn Kasch ♦ Jerry Keller Ann Kittrelle ♦ Carole Klyce ♦ Elaine Koerner ♦ Turid Larsen ♦ Diane Leavitt Sherman Lew ♦ Elizabeth Love ♦ Carol MacNulty ♦ Rick Malaspina & Leigh Trivette ♦ Ray McAllister ♦ Lawrence Moehrke ♦ Marakami/Nelson Architectural Corp. ♦ Gary Peterson ♦ Howard & Joan Poulter ♦ JoAnn Price ♦ Jim Ratliff & Eren Berkenkotter ♦ Mitch Richman ♦ Kara Riley ♦ Rochelle Rodgers ♦ Emily Rosenberg ♦ Christine Saed ♦ Harold Saur Rich Schwartz ♦ Cynthia Shartzler ♦ Heidi Skolnik ♦ Louisa Spier ♦ Kiriyo Spooner Roberta Stern ♦ Joseph Taylor ♦ Sue Taylor Veronica Tinonga ♦ Claire Tompkins Carol Urzi ♦ Thomas Van Demark ♦ Nancy Ward ♦ Tammy Welcome ♦ Brenda & William Winston ♦ Sharon Wooten

# Calendar

The OHA calendar lists events, activities and meetings related to history and preservation that may be of interest to our members. To submit items, call 763-9218 or e-mail [oakland-heritage@california.com](mailto:oakland-heritage@california.com). All phone numbers in 510 area code unless indicated.

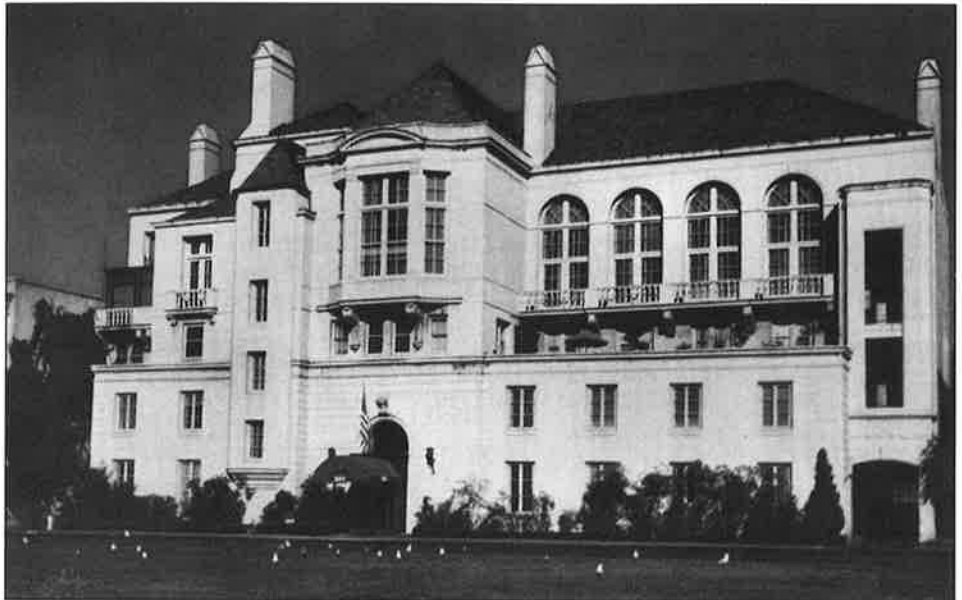
## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday, September 21:** Alameda Legacy Home Tour, "Victoria's Heritage in the Gold Coast." Tour the architectural gems located in and around Alameda's famous Gold Coast neighborhood. Call 523-5907 for more information.

**Thursday, September 25:** Architectural historian Michael Crowe lectures on "The ABCs of Preservation" at the historic Bellevue Club near Lake Merritt. Parking is free, and lecture attendees will receive a tour of the magnificent old club built in 1929. Crowe is a retired architectural historian with the National Park Service, and founder and president emeritus of the Art Deco Society of California. The lecture covers the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places and required each state to establish an historic preservation program. The Bellevue Club was originally the Women's Athletic Club and today is a private club offering social activities, dining and fitness programs for men and women. The event takes place on the third floor Terrace Room, beginning at 7 p.m. with light refreshments, and the program beginning at 7:30. The tour follows the program. \$5 OHA members, \$10 others. Tickets available at door, or in advance by calling 763-9218 or emailing [info@oakland-heritage.org](mailto:info@oakland-heritage.org). The Bellevue Club is at 525 Bellevue Ave., across from the Lake Merritt Bird Sanctuary.

**7 p.m., Sunday, October 19:** "The Hidden Treasure," a presentation by Jett Thorson on the task of restoring the original Bureau of Electricity ceiling on Santa Clara Avenue in Alameda. Sponsored by the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society. Call 523-5907 for details.

**5:30-9 p.m., Friday, October 31:** The fourth annual Halloween at the Mansion. Gather in a real haunted house for tours of the spooky mansion, other Halloween activities and refreshments. \$5/children 12 and under and \$10/adults for OHA or Pardee Home members. Others: \$7/children 12 and under and \$13/adults. The event is a fundraiser for OHA and the Pardee Home Museum. Come to the 12th Street coach house to enter the



Courtesy, Bellevue Club

**THE GRACIOUS LAKESIDE BELLEVUE CLUB** will host "The ABCs of Preservation," a lecture by OHA board member Michael Crowe. See Sept. 25 listing.

Pardee Home, 672 11th St. in downtown Oakland. Accessible by BART (short walk from 12th Street station) and buslines. For more info or reservations, call 444-2187.

## TOURS AND EXHIBITS

**African-American Museum and Library** is open in its renovated home, the historic Charles Greene Library at 659 14th St. Hours are Tues. through Sat., noon to 5:30 p.m. 637-0200 or [www.oaklandlibrary.org](http://www.oaklandlibrary.org).

**Black Panther Legacy Tour** conducted by the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation. Eighteen sites significant in the history of the Black Panther Party, last Saturday of each month, noon-2:30 p.m. Advance tickets required (\$25). Call 986-0660 or visit [www.blackpanther-tours.com](http://www.blackpanther-tours.com).

**Camron-Stanford House**, an 1876 Italianate house museum on Lake Merritt offers tours 11 a.m.-4 p.m. on Wednesdays and 1-5 p.m. on Sundays. \$4/\$2 (free first Sunday). 1418 Lakeside Drive, 444-1876.

**Cohen-Bray House**, an 1884 Stick Eastlake with original interiors, 1440 29th Ave. Tours at 2 p.m. on the fourth Sunday or by appointment. \$5. 532-0704.

**Dunsmuir House & Gardens**, a neoclassical Revival mansion, offers free access to its grounds 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. 2960 Peralta Oaks Court. For more information on the grounds and on mansion tours (charge), call 615-5555 or visit [www.dunsmuir.org](http://www.dunsmuir.org).

**Mountain View Cemetery** offers free docent

tours at 10 a.m. on second Saturdays. 5000 Piedmont Ave. 658-2588.

**Oakland Tours:** Discover Oakland's changing skyline, landmarks, churches and high-rises on one of the many free guided walking tours. Call the tours hotline, 238-3234, or visit [www.oaklandnet.com](http://www.oaklandnet.com) and click on the sightseeing/tours link.

**Paramount Theatre**, an art deco movie palace, offers \$1 tours of areas not usually open to the public. Learn the theater's history, at 10 a.m. on the first and third Saturday. 2025 Broadway. 893-2300.

**Pardee Home Museum**, an 1868 Italianate villa home to two Oakland mayors and one California governor, offers tours at noon on Fridays and Saturdays, reservations recommended. Private groups may arrange a special tour. \$5 adults, children 12 and under free. 672 11th St. 444-2187 or [www.pardeehome.org](http://www.pardeehome.org).

## MEETINGS OF INTEREST

**Friends of the Oakland Fox**, second Thursdays, 6-7:30 p.m., 229 Harrison St., at 3rd. 869-3519.

**Oakland City Council**, every Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. City Hall, Council Chambers. 238-3941.

**Oakland Heritage Alliance**, Board of Directors, first Mondays 7-10 p.m., Camron-Stanford House, 1418 Lakeside Drive. 763-9218.

**Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board**, second Mondays, 4-8 p.m., City Hall, Hearing Room 1. 238-3941.



# Summer walking tours a great success



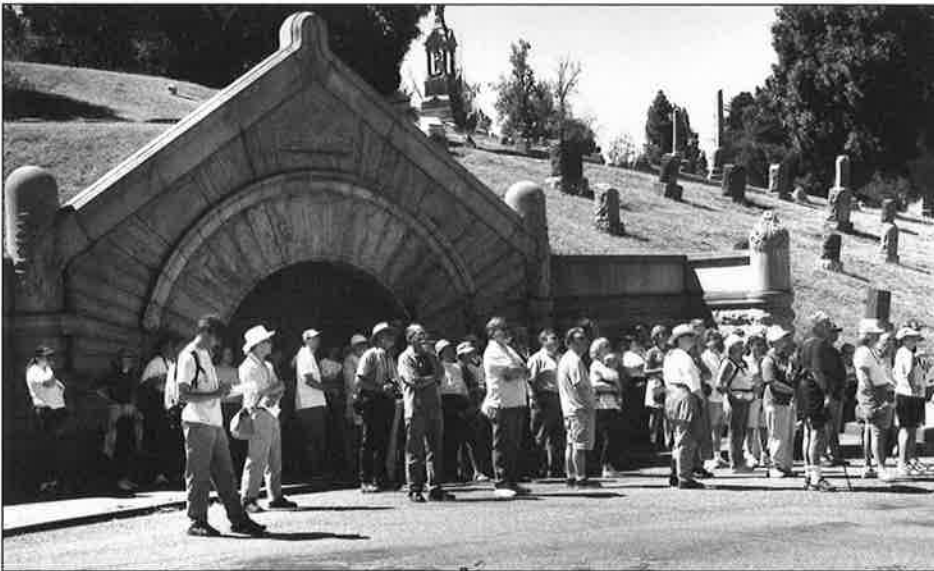
Dennis Evanosky

If you missed them this year, don't worry: the July and August weekend walking tours are a time-honored OHA tradition.

Several new tours were offered this year, including explorations of Montclair, Piedmont Avenue, the Splashpad and Grand Avenue, Upper Fruitvale Residential, Twenties Timewarp and Northgate.



Dennis Evanosky



Dennis Evanosky

**WHO ELSE BUT OHA** gets you wandering around in the crypts? The July 13 tour of Mountain View Cemetery drew a large crowd, as usual. The tour was co-led by Barbara Smith and Michael Crowe. Crowe appears in the photo at top left, in the OHA hat.



Dennis Evanosky

**KATHLEEN DIGIOVANNI**, at top in hat, led the inaugural Montclair Village tour on August 3. Above is the gang congregated near Coldwell Banker.



Eric Kos



Dennis Evanosky

**THE BORAX SMITH TOUR**, above, was led by tour veteran Phil Bellman on July 19. At left, Woody Minor led a tour of the **Oakland Airport's North Field** on July 26, including visits to five hangars, an administration building and hotel, all built between 1927 and 1929.





# Spring fundraising campaign generously supported

Oakland Heritage Alliance thanks everyone who went that extra step to help OHA fund its programs and continue working for preservation in a city increasingly faced with tough decisions. You have our enduring gratitude!

**\$300 OR ABOVE**

G. Pete Encinas

**\$200 OR ABOVE**

Stephen & Terry Beck ♦ Eldien J. Kistner  
Edmund Ord ♦ John Sutter ♦ Burlington  
Willes

**\$100 OR ABOVE**

Marilyn & Amos Goldhaber ♦ Heinolds  
First and Last Chance Saloon ♦ Frances  
Johnston ♦ Gary Knecht & Squeak  
Carnwath ♦ Stoner Lichty, Foxfire  
Property Management ♦ Norman &  
Florence Lind ♦ Mark Liss ♦ Mary  
MacDonald ♦ Thomas McCoy, BBI  
Construction

**\$50 OR ABOVE**

Jeffrey Adams & Susan Raffanti ♦ Annalee  
Allen ♦ Vicki Bandel ♦ Renie Bartolini  
David Beery ♦ Jana Olson Drobinsky,  
Omega Too ♦ Renate & Robert Coombs  
Colleen Gallagher ♦ Pamela Magnuson-  
Peddle ♦ Ruth & Ivan Majdrakoff  
Wendy Markel ♦ Mountain View  
Cemetery Association ♦ Roberta O'Grady  
Lois Over ♦ Janet Rodriguez ♦ Victoria  
Santiago ♦ Ardena Sandmeyer ♦ Christine  
Shields ♦ Stephen Spellman ♦ Sandra  
Threlfall ♦ Susan Wilder & Natalie Robb  
John Woodbury ♦ Ted & Betty Wurm

**\$25 OR ABOVE**

Emmi Ackermann ♦ Kay Andersen  
Elisabeth Olney Anderson ♦ Suzanne  
Baker ♦ Diane & James Bartoo ♦ Sally  
Beck & David Brossard ♦ Edward Bell  
Dolores Bermak ♦ Rober & Carroll  
Brentano ♦ Roxanne Bruns ♦ Jorgen  
Christiansen ♦ Edmund Clausen  
William Coburn ♦ Richard Colvig  
Cathy Craig ♦ Laurie Craise ♦ Janis  
Dunivin ♦ Jean Eichelberger ♦ Steven

Engle ♦ Leslie Finta ♦ Nancy Friedman  
Elwood Gerrits ♦ Merrill Goodall ♦ In  
Memory of Herbert L. Hoffmann ♦ Lucia  
Howard ♦ Kathryn Hughes ♦ Earle Ipsen  
Claire Jeanette ♦ Helen Katz ♦ Frederic  
Knapp ♦ Anita Kratka ♦ Diane Levy  
Barbara Ludlum ♦ Cynthia Mulholand  
Sharon Priest ♦ Ruth Ann Pruss ♦ Linda  
Randolph ♦ Vern Rogers ♦ Dagoberto  
Sanchez & Alison Siegel Sanchez  
Pamela Lee Simning ♦ Norma Smith  
William Spencer ♦ Barbara Sutherland  
Aaron Thom ♦ Jerry Thornhill ♦ Laurel  
Truscott ♦ Suzanne Van Bommel ♦ John  
Vallerga ♦ John Wallace ♦ Valerie  
Winemiller ♦ Bob & Vicki Wolfson  
Marcella Wong ♦ Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson  
Barbara Yost ♦ Mareev Zehavi

**OTHER AMOUNT**

Ralph and JoAnne Anderson ♦ Sunny  
Bloom ♦ Harry Cullen ♦ Adrienne  
Debisschop ♦ Patricia Frumentia ♦ C J  
Hill ♦ Rainer Hurst ♦ Mary Anne Joseph  
Carol Olmert ♦ Jeanne Porter ♦ Ruth  
Shibley ♦ Robert Warnock

## Oak Center Tour

Oak Center photos: Dennis Eyanosky



**THE OAK CENTER** Historic District Tour kicked off OHA's summer on July 12. At left, the group views one of many fine Victorians. At top, co-leader Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson speaks. Above, co-leader Betty Marvin (left) distributes handouts. The third co-leader was Joseph Taylor.

## Books of interest to our membership

- **Linoleum by Jane Powell.** Despite the word "linoleum" having become a generic term for resilient flooring, it is not the same material as vinyl. Drawing upon her expertise in restoring old homes, Jane Powell forays into the world of sustainable flooring with her usual humor, insight, and panache, sharing the history and evolution of floor coverings and linoleum in particular. Powell is a past OHA president. From Gibbs Smith Publishers. At bookstores.
- **Oakland: A Photographic Journey by Bill Caldwell.** This book presents recent color photos alongside historic views of Oakland. Caldwell sought out the same vantage points used by earlier photographers to shoot new pictures. Order from OHA for \$27 plus shipping; call 763-9218. From Momentum Publishing.

# Mountain View Cemetery Development Approved

## ■ PANIL and preservationists still want study of historic impacts

by Valerie Winemiller

The design integrity and historic fabric of Mountain View Cemetery (5000 Piedmont Ave.) are threatened by a planned 106-seat chapel and 18,800-square-foot mausoleum and columbarium complex on the central entry circle. The plan was approved by the Oakland City Planning Commission on August 6, after a process riddled with errors by city staff and by political pressure. Attorney Leila Moncharsh, working with the Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League (PANIL), is preparing to file a petition for a Writ of Mandate under the California Environmental Quality Act, asking the court to order an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR would focus on the potential negative impacts to the site's historic resources, and—unlike the city's review process—would require consideration of alternatives such as design revisions or alternate sites for the project and possible mitigations. Also advocating further study of the project's impacts are the Oakland Heritage Alliance, the California Preservation Foundation, and the National Association for Olmsted Parks.

Frederick Law Olmsted was managing the Mariposa Mining estates in Bear Valley, California, when the trustees of the newly-formed Mountain View Cemetery engaged him to lay out the cemetery grounds in 1864. Olmsted was already famous as co-designer of Central Park, but Mountain View Cemetery was his first major commission without a partner. While the cemetery's marketing materials tout its unique historic value, the site is not a formal landmark, and thus avoids the more thoughtful review that landmark status would trigger. Preservationists are not only concerned about the current project. The cemetery has announced plans to install landscaping from Olmsted's original plan which was never planted, an action considered "false historicism" under the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural



**THE TROLLEY LEADS** to the Mountain View gates at the end of Cemetery Street, as Piedmont Avenue was once called. This undated photo shows the superintendent's house and a horse-drawn carriage inside the grounds.

Landscapes. Other long-term concerns include crumbling infrastructure (such as early cement walkways and swale-shaped gutters), questionable maintenance of heritage trees, and the cemetery's recent policy of selling off Olmsted's grassy walkways as burial sites.

The Olmsted plan is still largely intact, but the proposed new complex, designed by Manhattan architect Alexander Gorlin, would remove the outer ring road of Olmsted's double roundabout at the cemetery entrance and alter side roads. Demolition of the ring road is already underway, as a city permit or approval is not required.

Olmsted biographer Witold Rybczynski said, "Architecture always took second place in Olmsted parks." But the highly modern Gorlin design, with a copper-clad oval chapel, and a large, formal interior court with lawn and water feature, will form visitors' first view at the entry roundabout. The cemetery proposed removal of the ring road to answer criticism that the

complex crowded the road like an urban development; the inward-looking court is also in conflict with Olmsted's intent. Members of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board felt it also did not relate well to existing buildings.

"... The new buildings ... can and should be made compatible with the aesthetic intentions of Frederick Law Olmsted, who planned the landscape with such foresight that it pleases the spirit in every season, from every angle, at every hour—[nearly] a century and a half after it was completed," wrote neighbor Jane Margold to the Oakland City Planning Commission.

*Photographs of the cemetery and photomontages of the proposed project can be viewed on PANIL's web site, [www.panil.org](http://www.panil.org). For further information, contact Valerie Winemiller at 653-4552, or at [vwine-miller@hotmail.com](mailto:vwine-miller@hotmail.com). To help PANIL pay for the appeal, write a check with the memo "Mountain View Cemetery" and mail to P.O. Box 20375, Oakland, CA 94612.*



## LANDMARKS BOARD ACTIVITY SUMMARIES

Compiled by Allyson Quibell & Jordan Harrison

**APRIL 2003:** Director's Report: City Council meeting dates set for New St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church landmark designation and Oak Center Historic District landmark designation and Rezoning: May 6 and June 17, respectively. Two major EIRs will commence: Uptown and Jack London Square. Both will come to LPAB for comment. There has been no re-submittal from Mountain View Cemetery following the last meeting with the board subcommittee.

**Action on Design Review Applications and Referrals:** Board discussed and approved (some with conditions) projects at 303 Derby Ave.; 1901 Broadway; and 718-722 Washington St.

**Board Reports:** Central City East redevelopment plan: Subcommittee comment letter on the draft Environmental Impact Report. National Preservation Week is the first week in May. OHA is working with Nancy Nadel's office to place on City Council's agenda.

**MAY 2003:** Director's Report: Central City East Redevelopment Plan: Report on

Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR): additional Cultural and Historic Resource mitigation measures were included in response to comments received from the Landmarks Board and others. West Oakland Redevelopment Plan draft EIR should be available mid-June.

**Board Reports:** Subcommittee for design modification of the proposed Mountain View Cemetery chapel reported the alternative designs did not address the Board's concerns about the relation of the chapel to the Circle and the insufficient space between the existing mausoleum and the proposed building.

**Secretary's Report:** Funding in Governor Davis's proposed budget for the California Main Street Program was eliminated (Oakland is a recipient); AB 1123 proposes to transfer the California Main Street program to the Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) for continuation. A Landmark Application for the 9th Avenue Terminal has been submitted.

**JUNE 2003:** Director's Report: Central City East Redevelopment Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) went

to City Council. Residents of the 5th Avenue area are concerned about their inclusion in the plan and eminent domain policies that would apply. Oak Center Historic District Designation also went to City Council.

**Actions Taken:** Discussion of Mountain View Cemetery Mitigated Negative Declaration; Board approved the recommendation to certify the Mitigated Neg. Dec. with a friendly amendment indicating the Board's disagreement with some of the document's conclusions regarding the impact of the proposed chapel on the existing historic site. A second motion directed staff to work with the applicant to redesign the building. Cotton Mill Studios, 1091 Calcot Place: Board recommended Planning Commission approval of the project to convert the building from mini-storage to 74 live-work units with conditions of approval for signage and exterior lighting.

**Design Review:** Cohen-Bray House, 1440 29th Avenue (City Landmark): Design for tree removal and pruning and replanting of three trees approved.

**JULY 2003:** No meeting due to lack of quorum.

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OHA News welcomes contributions: research projects large or small, historic photos and reports on preservation issues or events. Submissions by e-mail may be sent to news@oaklandheritage.org.

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# A neighborhood theater has many incarnations

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

Tucked in near the west end of 14th Street in Oak Point is a building that once housed one of Oakland's many modest neighborhood movie palaces. Now a church, the Peralta Theater building stands at 1480-88 14th Street on the corner of Peralta.

Although much altered with artificial stone and stained glass windows, the bones of the old Mission Revival theater building are still visible. The swooping awning is still there and the recessed entry reminds us of the long-absent ticket booth.

Building permit records tell us that the two-story theater and store building was built in 1915 for local real estate man Wallace Clark and designed by architect Allen J. Yerrick.

In the years before World War II, every neighborhood had its own movie theater. In 1916, the Peralta Theater's first full year of operation, the Oakland City Directory listed 42 moving picture theaters. Some, like the Oakland Photo Theatre and the Franklin, were downtown, but the majority were neighborhood theaters, like the Peralta. In 1953, the Peralta's last year of operation, 26 remained in Oakland.

According to cinematic savant Jack Tillmany, these neighborhood movie theaters catered to a strictly neighborhood clientele. During the teens and twenties, they rarely placed newspaper advertisements. Instead, they printed and distributed handbills in the

neighborhood announcing the coming attractions. Beginning in the 1930s, neighborhood theaters bought newspaper advertising, but the Peralta appears never to have done so.

The Peralta quietly went out of business sometime in 1953. By 1954, the old theater had become home to a church, a fairly typical re-use, but this church was anything but typical. It was the Mt. Zion Spiritual Temple, founded in Oakland in 1945 by "King" Louis H. Narcisse. A Louisiana native, Narcisse came to Vallejo to work at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard during World War II. The church he founded in a West Oakland storefront preached an amalgam of Catholic and Baptist teaching, but adherents were drawn more by his ideas of Black self-help and the motto he was famous for, "It's nice to be nice."

Controversial for a flamboyant lifestyle that included Rolls Royce automobiles and a 24-room house on Calmar Avenue, King Narcisse reasoned that he could not preach that God provides abundance to His believers if he did not demonstrate that principle.



Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

THE PERALTA THEATER as it appears today.

In its heyday in the 1960s and '70s, Mt. Zion Spiritual Temple was a multi-city empire, with King Narcisse broadcasting a weekly radio show that often featured gospel stars Mahalia Jackson and James Cleveland. The Monday evening broadcasts were preceded by "Blessed Bread," when bread and meals were distributed to the poor.

Following his death in 1989 at his Detroit mansion, his body was returned to Oakland where he got a send-off fit for a king, processing from a theater to a theater. A candlelight vigil was held at the church the night before the funeral. Then his body was carried in an antique horse-drawn hearse to the Calvin Simmons Theater for services attended by over 1,500.

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