In Search of Quirky Berkeley – Tom Dalzell

To whatever extent Berkeley ever earned its clichéd reputation as “Berzerkeley” – if it ever did – it remains a place like no other.

We live in a beautiful spot. We have a university that provides constant innovation, thought, creativity and novelty. We benefit from the rejuvenating socioeconomic friction between the flats and the hills and our multiculturalism. We value individualism and we manifest our individualism in many ways, including architecture, design, and placed-for-public-view art and artifacts.

Late in 2012, I set out to walk every block of every street, path, and alley of Berkeley, cataloging and photographing the quirky material culture that serves as a physical and visible manifestation of our inward quirkiness. Now I want to show those who like to wander Berkeley our inward quirkiness.

As we walk from major quirky site to major quirky site, we’ll also do what I do when I walk by myself: look for smaller manifestations of for-public-view quirkiness, such as a unique mailbox, happy clam curtains, intriguing color choices, little-seen murals or small lawn sculptures.

And depending on our pace and progress, there are several more wonderful big quirks near our route that we can add or save for another day.

For me, walking Berkeley in search of quirky is pure fun – 100 percent pure, unadulterated fun. Being outdoors, walking, being nosy, compiling, cataloging, talking with people I meet. And with this walk, we will have many eyes, many stories, and many cameras to discover and capture all the quirkiness. That will make big fun even bigger.

Tom Dalzell will lead his “Quirky Berkeley” walk on Saturday, Aug. 24. Details of the walk can be found in the BPWA Walks list in this issue.
BPWA News and Notes

Have you come across damage, vandalism, deterioration, vegetation overgrowth or any other issues or concerns as you’ve walked your favorite paths recently? Please let us know. Send an e-mail to info@berkeleypaths.org and let our path maintenance crews know which paths need attention. You can also sign up to volunteer for path work parties by e-mailing path building leader Charlie Bowen at charlie_paths@comcast.net.

WANDER BY AT THE SOLANO STROLL
Mark your calendar for this year’s Solano Stroll. BPWA will have a booth at the annual event, which is scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 8. We’ll have all kinds of helpful information for those interested in learning about Berkeley’s path system, as well as Path Wanderer merchandise, including t-shirts, caps, posters and the most recent edition of our exclusive map of all Berkeley’s paths. Stop by and say hello!

HELP RESTORE FOUNTAIN WALK
Friends of the Fountain and Circle, a BPWA ally, is raising funds to repair and restore the century-old balustrade that lines Fountain Walk and The Circle at Marin and The Arlington in North Berkeley. Tax-deductible donations of any size are welcome to ensure that this key element of Berkeley’s first public art project lasts another 100 years. Send check to Friends of the Fountain and Walk, P.O. Box 7343, Berkeley, CA 94707, or donate securely online via PayPal at: donate securely online via PayPal at:

HELP US MAINTAIN OUR PATHS

BPWA Board Meetings
The BPWA Board meets on the third Thursday of each month, except April, Oct, and Dec. Meetings are at 7 p.m. at Live Oak Community Center in Live Oak Park. Board meetings are open to all.
Finding Poetry and Art on Berkeley’s Paths

–Aleta George

She was California’s first poet laureate, the first ever designated by any state when she received the title in 1915. She is Ina Coolbrith (1841-1928), and I am at work on a biography of her.

One of the strategies I use to get focused writing time is to go on mini writing retreats at friends’ houses when they go out-of-town. One of my favorite retreats is in Berkeley, up the hill from the Gourmet Ghetto.

When at my friend’s home several years ago, I decided to take a lunchtime walk. I was working on a chapter that features many of Ina’s friends and contemporaries, including Bret Harte, Charles Warren Stoddard and Mark Twain. Their stories still buzzed in my head when I set out without a map or planned route. I only knew a few of the major streets at the time, just enough not to get lost.

I found myself on Euclid Avenue, on a portion too flat for getting much aerobic exercise, and was looking for an opportunity to go up when I came around a bend and saw a sign for what looked like stairs.

When I got close enough to read the sign, I couldn’t believe what I read: Bret Harte Way! Harte was Ina’s editor at the renowned literary magazine The Overland Monthly, and he called her the “pearl of our tribe.” It was as if I had conjured him.

At the top of the stairs things got weirder when I came to Keith Avenue.

Charles Keeler would have loved as much as he loved Ina.

That same day I discovered paths, ways and lanes named after Joaquin Miller, Charles Warren Stoddard, John Muir and Mark Twain, all of whom were Ina’s friends. And when I reached Parnassus Road, I thought: how perfect.

In Greek mythology, Parnassus was home to the gods and muses.

Since that day I have taken many walks with Ina’s friends in the Berkeley Hills. Since she doesn’t have a path, way or lane named after her (why not, I wonder?), I bring her along by reciting her poems as I walk.

I haven’t memorized the entire poem that she wrote for the first graduating class of the University of California, though the last stanza could easily have been inspired by the view seen from these hills:

[I] saw the Gate
Burn in the sunset; the thin thread of mist
Creep white across the Sausalito hills;
Till the day darkened down the ocean rim,
The sunset purple slipped from Tamalpais,
And bay and sky were bright with sudden stars.

Aleta George will lead an “Ina Coolbrith & Friends” walk on Saturday, Sept. 21.
Details can be found in the BPWA Walks list in this issue.

Berkeley Hiking History:
Walks About Berkeley, 1909
–Michael Gray

Even a century later, this excerpt from an essay by UC Berkeley English and rhetoric professor Cornelius Beach Bradley (from the book A Berkeley Year: A Sheaf of Nature Essays, published by the Women’s Auxiliary of the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley) captures the spirit and wonder of a hike through the Berkeley hills today:

“The casual observer might find very little of promise in the Berkeley hills to lure him on to their exploration…. The imagination pictures no secret nooks, no wooded ravines, no crag or waterfall behind the straggling screen of fern and scrub that fringes its waterways. Yet, after

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Improving our paths: Halkin Walk work under way

BPWA work crews led by Charlie Bowen and Steve Glaeser have started improvements on the upper portion of Halkin Walk, which begins on Euclid Avenue between Poplar and Acacia and climbs up to Hilldale Avenue, just below Grizzly Peak Boulevard.

This is one of the most challenging projects our volunteer workers have undertaken, Steve says. The bottom of the pathway, near Euclid, is very steep, rising 32 feet over a run of just 44 feet. That has required employing a new technique for installing switchbacks so that the climb for path users is safe and not too strenuous.

As of June 1, 16 steps had been installed, covering a quarter of the steep portion. Once that job is done, there is an additional 80 feet of elevation where steps will be installed.

Says Steve: “I would love to get it done by the end of the year, but six months is a short time for a job this big. My guess is that it would be sometime next year.”

He adds: “I am looking forward to the point where we can accommodate community work parties because there is a very pleasant green, open space near the top with a wonderful view.”

You can get on an e-mail list to volunteer for community work parties by sending an e-mail to Charlie at charlie_paths@comcast.net.