Before the car dealers, upper Broadway was home to pastures, livery stables, wagon construction businesses, and St. Mary’s College (1889 to 1928). Amid the construction racket as Broadway Auto Row is transformed again, we interviewed former car sales executive Steve Lindsey about its heyday.

My dad came to California during WWII. He worked for the Army Corps of Engineers with a crew, building bunkers up and down the coast. When that ended, he went to work in a foundry in Emeryville, Bacon-American Brass and Iron Foundry. They moved to Indiana and wanted my dad to go with them. But all six of us and my mom dug in our heels and said we weren’t gonna move to Indiana.

We lived at Hawthorne Ave. near Knapp’s Market [30th and Telegraph]. My Dad used to hang out at the Golden Saloon across the street. I remember my mom, when I was three years old, saying “Go get your dad out of the bar.” Officer Kelly, a foot patrolman, would be standing around there because the call boxes were right in front of the market. He would make sure I got across the street, dodging Key System trains. Then I’d go over to the bar door, pull myself up, and put my eyes over, and say “Hey, is my dad in here?”

As kids, we’d cut over the hill [behind the used car lots, once St. Mary’s College]. We’d take big cardboard boxes and go sliding down the hill. The house we lived in was from the Civil War period: 489 Hawthorne Avenue, Twin Oaks 3-8935. Knapp’s Market sat in the front yard. The front door opened onto the roof of the market. We used the side entrance, once the servant’s entrance, over the carriage entrance. We went to the Mormon Church in the Mosswood Chapel, now Evergreen Baptist Church.

I went to Westlake Junior High for a year. Then we moved up to the Rockridge district, and went to Claremont; then I went to Skyline High. One of my younger brothers was in the same class as Tom Hanks.

I was used to thinking that Broadway Auto Row was just it: it was exciting, and my dad would go over there. All the new car showings were in the fall. It was an extravaganza. My dad would have a newspaper announcing what models were being shown—the Oakland Tribune. We’d walk over after dinner. “You always know when you are on Broadway because you can read the newspaper at night”—because of all the lights. Some of the car dealers had searchlights out. On Broadway you’d have to go into the buildings, except Connell Oldsmobile had room to park them outside.

I used to go into the Studebaker dealership when I was in high school because I bought a 1950 Studebaker Champion from my uncle for $50 and I went in there for parts. My uncle Jerry Ryan was the bookkeeper at Val Strough for 30 years. The sales manager there was a friend of my dad’s. They all had fancy cars and they all lived in nice houses. Uncle Jerry always had a new Chevrolet.

I came to work here in December 1981. I’d been on the highway patrol eight years. I had

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town with him. He knew everyone from 30 years of working for JAL.

I found it hard to believe then but still, that is the way it was and had been. I said to Tony Caruso, “I don’t care what color they are, because money is all green.”

So I hired a sales group that matched the demographics of Oakland—Chinese, Hispanic, African-American, and one guy held on from the previous regime, an Italian-American guy from Piedmont. I made him start coming to sales meetings. He hated it. We eventually moved him up the street. We had a separate truck center there for awhile, starting about ’83. He was happy to sell 3, 4, 5 cars a month, to his own clients.

John Strough, when he took over from his dad, he hired a black salesman, very smooth, very polished, dressed well, and they hired him specifically to deal with the black clientele. San Francisco was no different. In San Francisco people were a little more prone to demonstrate. Sometime in the 1970s, black employees marched up and down in front of the dealers on Van Ness.

As a kid growing up in Oakland, I really was colorblind even though my parents were from Texas. My father was the baby of 16 kids. He remembered his father getting his three older sons and going to prevent lynchings in Texas. My father, Hubert Hefman Lindsey, was named after a sharecropper who worked for my great-grandparents in Mississippi during the Civil War. This sharecropper saved my grandmother’s life. Their farm was attacked by the Yankees and drove off their livestock and these Yankee soldiers nearly beat him to death. He put up enough of a fight to prevent them from attacking my great-grandmother. My grandfather was hiding in a stump with a washtub over his head. My aunt Mamie is named after Mamie who was a wet nurse and cook with my grandmother. When I was growing up and going to Grant School, if you look at the pictures, it was a pretty diverse group of kids.

In 1985, we still had a new 1983 Datsun King Cab diesel pickup truck and those things just didn’t sell. And it was the wrong color. So we decided to have a big sales extravaganza, and have a contest to win that truck. We’d fill it up with ping pong balls. The ad agency came in under cloak of night. They had large cardboard cases filled with little boxes, four ping pong balls in each. People were in there all night opening little boxes and throwing ping pong balls in the windows of the truck. I came in the next morning. “Have you kept count of how many there are?” The agent said, “Well, we didn’t actually count them.” “How are we gonna know what the total is?” We had hired Lloyd’s of London to insure the contest. I think we paid a thousand dollars to the insurance policy against somebody guessing. But we wanted that truck to go away. “You need to certify to Lloyd’s what the count is.” “Well, I know. . . . There were five of these big cartons, and it had the number printed on them.” “Well someone might be able to figure that out if they knew how these things were shipped.” But he said, “I know,” and he reached in his pocket and pulled out one of the little boxes. He had taken one ball out, so that left three. “It’s minus these three.”

I did the math. I called my friend Barbara: “You’re coming to fill out the contest. Make your guess 9635.” Then I told a couple of people, “well, guess 9634, 9633. . . .” —in case the agent had kept another ball in another pocket. Well, Barbara won that contest, put an ad in the Montclairion, and sold it. We couldn’t sell that truck for the life of us! We went down to $3,000, and then Barbara sold it for $3,500! Stale inventory: if you have one of something, they don’t want to buy it.

From ’82 until ’87 I was at Oakland Datsun Volvo. Craig Cokeley was hardly ever there. He was building a big home in Wyoming and starving us for cash. He also was one of the founders of Summit Bank. And he ended up developing a cocaine problem. Craig basically lost the dealership. Volvo looked at us as a pain in the side anyway. They liked me because we were selling cars, but they wouldn’t supply us with cars. So I was literally buying new cars from all over the western states. Volvo would give us about 12 or 15 a month and I would buy 50 from other dealers—SLC, Portland, Seattle, even Calgary.

Volvo wouldn’t supply us because of their feud with Craig, which I think was over money. He wrote a computer program to do these dealer trades just to trade checks with other dealerships to make our payroll. I was not happy about that. Shirley, the president of the bank, caught Craig kiting checks. You can’t be on the board of directors of a bank and do that kind of thing. So they ousted him.

Craig got mad at me because we had halfway agreed that I would put $100,000 into the business for half the stock. The night I was to do the wire transfer, the vice president of Volvo called: “If you put that in, you are only going to buy about 30 days. We’re going to pull his franchise no matter what.”

The next day I had the unfortunate experience of telling Craig I wasn’t going to put money in. He basically fired me. So I walked up to the VW store. I talked to Al Sanchez, and he said, “Why don’t you just come to work over here?” He sent a few of his porters up to the Volvo store, and they moved my desk and bookshelves down the street. The Cokeleys decided to sell the dealership to Dick Cochran.

Reynolds C. Johnson was the first distributor of Volkswagen in the U.S. Every Volkswagen—well, at least the paperwork for every VW—came through Broadway Volkswagen. That’s why it has such a large service department upstairs. It was for doing the predelivery inspections for the VWs that came from the Oakland Port. They would inspect them, and then distribute them up and down the coast from Burlingame.

Uncle Jerry told me that Val Strough really wasn’t that interested in the day to day operations. Upstairs—and I remember seeing this
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when I was a kid—Val Strough had miles and miles of railroad tracks, model railroads. He would come to work and play with railroad tracks all day. Jerry told me that at the end of the ’40s or early ’50s, he and Strough were outside, across from Mosswood Park. (At that time, ice cream wagons would line up on the street, and scoop ice cream for you.) It was a summer day. They were outside, in white shirts, wearing straw hats, having an ice cream cone, and all of a sudden they heard backfiring, sounded like a .22 being shot several times. They saw this goofy little car pulled up behind the ice cream trucks. Val Strough saw Reynolds C. Johnson getting out of this little car. And he said “Reynolds, what in the hell is that?” Reynolds said, “I’m not quite sure, Val, but if it sells I’m a rich man because I own everything west of the Mississippi.” That was the VW bug.

Another sad aspect of the car business here: when Reynolds started there, the factory reps were still Germans. And not all of them were happy that Germany lost the war. VW was designed by Ferdinand Porsche, and Hitler named it the “car of the people”—Volkswagen. And even when I was working there in the ’80s, in the parts manager’s office, in the belly of the dealership—not out on public display—they had portraits of Adolf Hitler and they actually had a large portrait, signed by Adolf Hitler and Ferdinand Porsche, of Hitler dancing a little jig when they unveiled the first Volkswagen in Berlin.

The Johnson estate sold the dealership to Al Sanchez of Gilroy, and Stan Antonio of Sunnyvale. It was the largest Volkswagen dealership in the U.S., much of the time, until Ron Greenspan opened in San Francisco. And then it was like the Battle of the Bay, in the ’80s. The Jetta came out, the Golf, Volkswagen Westphalia, the camper, the Scirocco. Those cars sold pretty well. Eventually Al Sanchez died, and Stan Antonio was under federal indictment for money laundering for the mob. Al was a Mazda/VW dealer in Gilroy, and a pillar of the community. Stan Antonio looked like a mobster, dressed like a mobster, traveled with bodyguards. If there was an attractive woman in there, he would go introduce himself and the next thing you know they would

VOLKSWAGENS sold in the 1929 Pacific Nash Building.

go to lunch. He was kind of a playboy, a likeable guy, charismatic.

Starting the next block down, where King Covers was, all the way down to Val Strough, were once carriage houses. And you can actually see remnants of it now. At the end where Oakland Datsun/Ray Cockeye Motors was, there was a flight of steps that went down about six or seven steps below. If you look at the floor, you can see large circular areas that have been filled in with cement. That was a foundry. That was where they poured steel rims for carriage wheels, back in the day. Ray Cockeye converted that to a place to sell cars.

There was a motorcycle shop up there, Broadway Honda. A woman owned that store, Verna; I bought a couple of motorcycles from her. At one time they fitted carriages with leather seats in there. The street level was the showroom, and the lower level was where they built the carriages. And the carriages went from building to building, and across the streets. They were connected enterprises. When carriages began to be replaced by horseless carriages, they naturally got into that business, and then cars.

Going down 27th Street, not too far down there was a drive-in, where the girls would come out on roller skates. Where the Kaiser Center is now, was Herrera Buick, an extraordinary building. They actually would pull cars up onto pedestals, with searchlights going on, over by the lake. And Pat Patterson Cadillac [now Whole Foods].

There’s so much history here. I spent 30 years in the car business, 10 or 12 of it here on Broadway. Where my son dropped me off, I used to meet in there with our service manager and parts manager. Across the street was where all the used cars were. I guess Connell is getting torn down now, too. And across the street, back when I was a kid, was Ceremeli Ford. My dad bought a ’56 Ford Wagon in there. The car dealers back then, especially if they recognized you as a neighborhood kid, they’d buy you a soda pop, let you get in a car, sit behind the wheel.

I think it was during Jerry Brown’s tenure that they tried to get the auto dealers out of Broadway Auto Row. Al Sanchez and I looked at property out near the Coliseum. We thought about it because it was right on the freeway, would be easier to steal sales from Ron Greenspan. Who would go to Van Ness Avenue to buy an automobile? But then, who would go to Auto Row in Oakland?

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AT 2735 WEBSTER, cars are still displayed in the 1924 former Smith-Dahl Chevrolet showroom, where Webster Street was cut off in the 1980s.
John M. Heinold’s saloon revisited
By Elliott Myles

In today’s political climate, many people have become familiar with facts, alternative facts, and fake news. This is nothing new for the customers of Heinold’s First and Last Chance Saloon at Jack London Square.

The story of John Michael Heinold and his saloon has been told and retold in numerous books and articles, as well as on the plaques affixed to the front of the building. However, the articles and plaques rarely agree, and are often contradictory even within their text. This is an attempt to set some of the matter straight.

Discovering the early history of the saloon is not easy. Original source documents, such as the Oakland city directories and the Oakland tax assessment maps, are often missing or incomplete. People’s recollections may also be biased, colored by the passage of time, or just made up. For example, in 1926, when the earthquake hit. It looked like the building was built from the sturdy timbers of the old steamer Umatilla, which was once a figure in local shipping.

In July 1923, a San Francisco Chronicle journalist interviewed Johnny Heinold, and wrote that when Johnny took over the business 40 years ago, there were three other previous owners, and the place has been in operation as a saloon some ten years before Heinold came on the scene and bought the whole plant for $100. The same article states that the “building was built from the sturdy timbers of the old steamer Umatilla, which was once a figure in local shipping.”

The Umatilla (the correct name) was a two-deck, stern-wheel paddle steamer, built as the Venture or Adventure in early 1858 on the middle Columbia River in the Oregon Territory. On her maiden voyage, she left the bank under a low pressure of steam, and was swept over the Columbia Cascades, ground- ing on a rock in the middle of the river. After being salvaged, she was sold to new owners, $100.00, which had formerly been used as sleeping quarters for men working the oyster beds nearby. The bunk house story has been repeated ever since. . . . but may be bunk.

Johnny told a reporter that his wife, whom he divorced in 1898, was dead, when she was alive and living with her second husband. In the same year, the San Bernardino News wrote that a “strange pact between the thieves and night prowlers of this community, that Johnnie Heinold’s saloon is to be immune from burglary, has been broken after having been maintained in an ironclad state for 42 years.” However, the saloon was burgled in June 1889, September 1901, November 1904, and November 1905, all within 42 years of 1926.

The first fact to pin down is the date Johnny opened the saloon. Everyone agrees on the First of June as the day, but not on the year. The centenary was held in 1983 and the 125th in 2008, relying on an 1883 opening, possibly based on a 1944 cartoon, which read in part “61 years ago, John Heinold built this bar out of an old whaling ship. Part of the ship is 20 ft underground.” Moving back in time, in 1936, George Heinold wrote that his father opened the saloon on June 1, 1884, not 1883. A short biography published in 1926, and apparently based on statements made by Johnny himself, states that since June 1, 1884, Johnny had “been continuously at First and Webster.” The year 1884 is also supported by a letter from the Comstock silver magnate John MacKay dated July 29, 1883, and addressed to Johnny at his first Oakland saloon located at 1425 San Pablo.

It seems more probable than not that Johnny Heinold opened the saloon on June 1, 1884.

What about the building the saloon inhabits? In 1936, George Heinold wrote that his father “purchased an old bunk house for

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who repaired her hull, renamed her the *Umatilla* and, in June 1858, sent her north to
British Columbia to serve in the Fraser River
gold rush. She steamed on the Fraser until
October, when she was sent to San Francis-
cos. An 1895 history of the Pacific Northwest
states that the *Umatilla* had “the distinction
of having been the first sternwheel steamer
on the middle Columbia, the first steamer to
go over the Cascades, the first to the Sound
from the Columbia, and the first sternwheeler
from the Sound to San Francisco.”

In California, the *Umatilla* was first an
independent steamer on the Sacramento
River and the San Francisco Bay, before later
becoming associated with the California
Steam Navigation Company. Between 1862
and 1867, she was abandoned at the foot of
Webster Street in Oakland. In September
1867, her owners owed the City and County
of San Francisco $126.25 in back taxes, and
1867, her owners owed the City and County
of San Francisco $126.25 in back taxes, and
in December, the machinery was removed
from her hull, probably to pay the back taxes.

Between November 1870 and April 1871,
construction of the first bridge from Oakland
to Alameda across San Antonio Creek (also
called San Antonio Estuary) was held up by
the “hulk of an old steamer, lying at the foot
of Webster street.” This hulk was undoubtedly
the remains of the *Umatilla*.

It is more probable than not that the saloon
was built between November 1870 and 1874,
from the remains of the abandoned *Umatilla*.

Was the saloon ever a bunk house for oys-
ter men? Apparently not. However, it was
used as a residence at least once. The 1887
city directory lists Conrad Heinold, Johnny’s
brother, as a bookkeeper residing at 542
Webster, the saloon’s original address.

The city block the saloon is located on,
block 212, is bounded on the north by
Embarcadero, formerly First Street, on the
south by Water Street, on the west by Web-
ster, and on the east by Harrison. Unfortu-
nately, block 212 cannot be traced in the
early Oakland tax assessment map books.
Most of the volumes labeled 1, which would
include the block, are missing from the collec-
tion at the Oakland Public Library. An
educated guess is that they were used in the
city’s lawsuits against Southern Pacific and
the Waterfront Company to recover access to
the port, and not returned. The volumes that
are available begin at First Street and go
north, and do not include the southeast corner
of First and Webster.

In the map included in the 1872 city direc-
tory, block 212 is partially a water lot on San
Antonio Creek. The map shows both the
drawbridge to Alameda, completed by April
1871, and the City Wharf constructed at the
foot of Webster and Franklin Streets in 1872.
Unfortunately, it does not show any build-
ings.

In 1869, George H. Naegle owned a wood
and coal yard between Broadway and Wash-
ington and resided at the south-east corner of
First and Webster streets. His residence prob-
bly became the Washington Lumber yard,
or its predecessor, which by
1889 was on the north side of
the saloon. In 1871–2,
Edward Orax was a laborer
residing at the corner (no
direction given) of First and
Webster.

In 1874, Robert Calhoun
owned an oyster depot at the
southeast corner of First and
Webster. He was listed under
“Additional Names,
Removals, etc.,” indicating
that he had recently opened
the business. This may be the
fact that gave rise to the alter-
native fact of the saloon being
built as a bunk house for oys-
termen. By the next year,
Robert Calhoun was the owner of the Over-
land Oyster House on the northwest corner of
First and Webster, kitty-corner from his loca-
tion the year before.

The 1875 directory lists three names at the
northwest corner of First and Webster, one at
the southwest corner of First and Webster,
and one, Edward Aroux, living at the corner
(no direction given) of First and Webster.
Edward was the Edward Orax living there in
1871–2.

The 1876–7 directory complicates matters
somewhat. Robert Calhoun was still the pro-
priator of the Overland Oyster House on the
northwest corner of First and Webster. The
southeast corner was the site of a laundry
owned by Wah Chung, a saloon and resi-
dence of A. F. Johnson who dealt in retail
wines and liquors, and the residence of mas-
ter mariner Charles Johnson. A. F. Johnson
was again listed in the 1877–8 directory as
“wines and liquors, saloon and residence,
southeast corner First and Webster.” A. F.
Johnson may have been the first of three
owners of the business previous to John
Heinold. The fact that he resided in his
saloon may also have contributed to the bunk
house alternative fact.

John Heinold moved from San Francisco
to Oakland by May 31, 1878, when he regis-
tered to vote in Oakland’s second ward. The
1878–9 directory lists John M. Heinold as a
barkeep for John M. Ludwig, living at the
southwest corner of Telegraph Avenue and
Brown. It also lists Augustus Johnson as an
oysterman in San Francisco, living at the cor-
ter of Webster and First. This is no doubt
the same person as A. F. Johnson of 1877–8. In
July 1879, A. F. Johnson sold a 25 x 100 lot
on the southeast corner of First and Webster
to F. Cunningham for $350.

In 1880–1, John M. Heinold owned a
saloon on San Pablo Avenue, and Charles E.
Nommensen was a retail liquor dealer at the
foot of Webster. There is no entry for F. Cun-
nigham or A. F. Johnson. If A. F. Johnson
were the first owner of the business, Charles
Nommensen may have been the second.
Edward Shaw was a laborer residing at the
corner of First and Webster.

In 1884–5, John M. Heinold was listed
at his saloon on the corner of Nineteenth and
San Pablo Avenue, A. E. Bean was a ship
 carpenter residing on the south side of the
foot of Webster, and Jacob Johnson was a saloon owner on the south side at the foot of Webster. A. E. Bean may have been the ship carpenter who helped Johnny set up the saloon. Jacob Johnson may have been the third of the three owners of the business previous to Johnny.

The local papers are not of much help. Although the full archive of the Tribune has not been searched, it appears that, with few exceptions, Johnny did not make the papers until 1898, when he divorced his wife, Christine Marie née Gunderson, in a somewhat nasty lawsuit. Following Jack London’s death in November 1916, he appeared in a number of articles as Jack’s friend. The 1923 Chronicle article, however, gives the most information regarding the saloon.

John L. Davie, in his autobiography, wrote that he leased two acres of tidelands at the foot of Webster Street owned by the Morgan Oyster Company under the Oyster Act of 1874: “Johnny Heinold’s First and Last Chance Saloon was on the property. Also Jack London’s shack.” Both the saloon and a “shanty” are shown on the 1889–1901 Sanborn Insurance Map. Davie filled in the land and built a wharf. While Davie was careless with his dates in his autobiography, he was listed at the foot of Webster by 1891.

Summing up, there is evidence from the city directories of a saloon and residence at the foot of Webster Street or on the south-east corner of Webster and First Streets. Title to the land on which the saloon sat was claimed under the state oyster bed acts (1851 and 1874). The building may have once been an oyster depot or may have been owned by an oysterman, from as early as 1873 or 1874, which is some 10 years before John Heinold bought the business. The year before Johnny bought the business, a ship carpenter was living near the saloon. There is no evidence the building was used as a bunk house, but at least once and possibly twice, it was used as a residence.

Has the saloon ever been moved? Somewhat surprisingly, the answer appears to be yes. According to Johnny in 1923, John L. Davie who operated the wood and coal yard to the north of the saloon moved the building 17 feet to the south. This move is reflected in the overlays of the Sanborn Insurance map for Oakland for the period 1889 to 1901. The map shows two Chinese lodging houses, a wood and coal yard with two sheds and three offices, and the saloon, all on the south-east corner of Webster and First. It is not clear, however, when Davie moved the building.

In May 1890, the Oakland train crossed the drawbridge while it was open. The locomotive and some passenger cars fell into the estuary. The San Francisco Call reported that “the saloon of J. M. Heinold, just at the north end of the bridge, was thrown open to the dead and dying, and four women were taken from the water.” On the Sanborn map, there are other buildings between the saloon and the bridge. In the directory for 1891, John L. Davie was a coal dealer with a wharf and bunkers at the foot of Webster. It seems probable that John L. Davie moved the Saloon between 1884 and 1890, probably ahead of building his wharf.

JOHNNY HEINOLD pours from a soda bottle during Prohibition, about 1929. He died in Spring 1933; the law was repealed in December.
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At the new site, 17 feet south of the old one, the tide apparently lapped against the building, and Johnny had to bulkhead the south side of the saloon. Clearly, the saloon was built on infilled tidelands or swamps, explaining why it sank during the 1906 Earthquake.

What about the moniker, “First and Last Chance”? The earliest discovered use of the name is in the 1892 city directory, indicating Johnny used the name in 1891. Prior to 1891, the only evidence of the name of the saloon are a few old photographs, showing the name “J. M. Heinold’s Saloon” on the front of the building. Most of the early directories just give “saloon” after his name.

A long-standing tradition of fake news is that Alameda was a “dry” town and the saloon was the first chance to have a drink after leaving and the last chance before entering the town. However, before Prohibition, Alameda was never dry. The closest it got to prohibition was in 1874, when the issue of local licensing was put to the vote. The statute allowing local licensing was held unconstitutional the same year.

In 1913, Jack London in his autobiographical memoir John Barleycorn called the saloon the “Last Chance.” He knew Johnny from at least age 15, when he purchased the building. Most of the early directories just give “saloon” after his name.

Perhaps of passing interest, in 1890, John L. Davie began his long battle against the Southern Pacific by building a wharf from his coal and wood lot at the foot of Webster. In addition to landing coal and other dry goods at the wharf, in 1892 or 1893, Davie began the “nickel ferry” to San Francisco as direct competition to the Southern Pacific’s ferry at the end of Broadway. In his autobiography, Davie describes the physical battles he had with the Southern Pacific on his wood and coal yard next to the saloon. It is not too far a stretch of the imagination that Johnny named the saloon with reference to Davie’s ferry service.

The fact seems that the name was related to transportation by bridge and ferry, an alternative fact is that Johnny adopted the name in anticipation of John L. Davie’s ferry scheme, and the fake news is that Alameda was dry.

Revisiting the saloon, then, it’s astonishing the stern-wheel paddle steamer Umatilla has had such a long and fortunate life. Who knows how many more centuries she may continue on?

Elliott Myles is an amateur historian.

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American Library. In 1975, the branch closed permanently when Latin American moved to a new site on Fruitvale Avenue. After that, the Miller Avenue site was leased to the school district to house the Emiliano Zapata Street Academy. By the summer of 1989, the school had moved out. Meanwhile, the branch building became a City of Oakland landmark in 1980, along with our other Carnegie branch libraries, and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1996. An August 1989 letter from Lelia White, then library director, implored the city to return this “most beautiful” of Carnegie libraries to the library’s control for book storage. Just two months later, the Loma Prieta earthquake hit, heavily damaging the foundation. A few years later, in 1993, library director Martin Gomez wrote to the city’s real estate division, washing his hands of any further oversight for the building. Since then, the building had been mostly vacant except for squatters and a brief stint as a community library and garden organized by Occupy Oakland protesters in 2012.

Although landmark designations and the love of the community couldn’t save this graceful old beauty, I hope that the spirit of its service will live on.
What to preserve? How to design hybrid projects? What works and doesn’t?

By Naomi Schiff

OHA welcomes your participation in discussions and advocacy about preservation in Oakland. We are grappling with issues of demolition, of partial preservation—some of which might be called “façadism”—and of compatibility, as development roars ahead. While we hope for reawakened use of some too-sleepy, underutilized stretches of thoroughfares, we hope that the specific plans the city has prepared, and zoning and design requirements in place, keep Oakland from turning into Anywheresville. Without succumbing to complete nostalgia, here are some questions for OHA members: 1) How is Oakland doing in encouraging compatible new construction? 2) Are we preserving creative uses, unique neighborhoods, and historic areas? and 3) Are we successful in preserving key façades, characteristic building types, and Oakland charm? What do you think? Below, some projects that exemplify these questions:

- **Chapel of the Oaks**: The BuildZig company has moved its offices into the one-time Chapel of the Oaks on Telegraph at 30th St., and now proposes to develop a residential building to its west. The plan presents a quandary about compatibility versus differentiation: can it appear contemporary and exciting, and still fit into the historic context?

- **Uptown Garage and Arts District**: Several projects are being constructed or planned in and around the historic garage district between 24th and 27th Streets, Telegraph and Broadway, also the site of recent years’ Art Murmur. Can new construction come in and some of the feeling of the old district be preserved? Can arts and maker uses continue, when new buildings generally mean that commercial rents go up? Is there a way to preserve arts spaces through zoning measures or other means? An effort to create a cultural district in the area seems to have stalled, despite promises by some city officials to support it. In the meantime, the pressure to develop and rising land prices cause owners to sell.

- **Auto Row**: The Broadway-Valdez Specific Plan is being put to the test. Its design guidelines do require the reuse of some historic façades in the area; does incorporation of old storefronts and building facades succeed in preserving a sense of place? Some examples are complete, such as the Whole Foods at Bay Place, and the CVS on Broadway at 30th. Projects at two locations on the east side of Broadway will preserve the front walls of older structures, building taller residential buildings behind them, and another on the west side of Broadway preserves a rounded corner section, highly recognizable from its years as a car dealership.

- **King Block**: This spring, the Bureau of Planning, Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, and Planning Commission agreed that a high-rise on the King Block, at Harrison and 13th streets, should not be approved. On the site of a 1920s “sanitary market” occupied by small businesses, developers propose a 450-foot tall mixed commercial and residential tower. The historic block is built around an old brick-walled alley. OHA has firmly objected that the project doesn’t belong on this block, because it would damage the historic resources and use up one of only two remaining special height exemptions in the Lake Merritt BART Station Area Plan’s western half. The project will return to the Planning Commission; if they vote to deny the project, the developer may appeal it to the City Council.
Top Three Items of Pride for Oakland in 2018

*By Tom Debley*

This year is the 150th anniversary of the University of California’s founding in Oakland. The Oaklander who led that was Henry Durant, first president of UC and later a mayor of Oakland. With UC headquartered in Oakland, this is a point of pride—and a worry, too, because one of our most treasured city-owned historic properties, the J. Mora Moss Cottage in Mosswood Park, is at risk. Moss was a member of the first UC Board of Regents. We need to rescue his landmarked house, one of the finest surviving examples of Victorian Gothic architecture in California.

This year, too, is the 150th anniversary of the historic Pardee Home Museum. Enoch Pardee and his son, George, had distinguished public service careers, both serving as mayors of Oakland. George Pardee also was elected governor. Among his accomplishments as a noted conservationist, he worked, at the behest of John Muir, with President Theodore Roosevelt, to align state and federal laws to pave the way for creation of Yosemite National Park.

Next year will mark the 150th anniversary of Mayor Samuel Merritt’s declaration of his namesake Lake Merritt on the Pacific Flyway as a wild bird sanctuary, which was codified in state law the following year. This makes Lake Merritt the first wildlife sanctuary in United States history.

In short, we have much history to be proud of, and we have a lot of work ahead of us. I have great hopes for continued achievements in the years ahead. Let’s continue to work toward impressive achievements we can celebrate when we turn 40 in 2020.

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You know it’s summer when we hit the streets!

*Summer walking tours are back!*

*By Daniel Levy*

Come explore a new part of Oakland with us by attending our annual summer walking tours! We have some great new tours lined up as well as some classics. From exploring the Borax Smith Estate, looking at mid-century buildings in downtown Oakland, to learning about the geology under our feet, we have you covered this year. We would like to thank each of our tour leaders for the effort they put in to share their insights with us and to thank you all for your attendance each year. Last year we had more than 700 people go on our tours!

Watch for our mailer to land in your mailbox. Before your tour, please check our website, www.oaklandheritage.org, in case any details change. If you are interested in volunteering, please call our office at 510.763.9218 or email us at info@oaklandheritage.org. You will get to attend the tour for free. Don’t forget good walking shoes, plenty of sunscreen, and a water bottle.

- **F.M. “Borax” Smith Estate**
  - Saturday, July 7, 2018 10:00 AM

- **Mountain View Cemetery**
  - Sunday, July 8, 2018 10:00 AM

- **Fernwood**
  - Saturday, July 14, 2018 1:00 PM

- **Terrain and Treasures, Reservoir Hill to San Antonio Park**
  - Sunday, July 15, 2:00 PM

- **Terrace and the Forgotten Trestle**
  - Saturday, July 21, 10:00 AM

- **Tracing Terraces, The Linda Vista Tract**
  - Sunday, July 22, 10:00 AM

Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members through mid-May 2018:

- Lisa Aliferis & John Storella
- Kevis Brownson, Elizabeth Byrne
- Brenda Cooper, Ron Heckman
- Neil S. Kaplan, Judy Curtis Sokoloff
- Eric Sorensen

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**SALES BROCHURE** shows Linda Vista Terrace, around 1900.

- **Sheffield Village**
  - Saturday, July 28, 2018 10:00 AM

- **Tiles and Terra Cotta in Uptown Oakland**
  - Sunday, July 29, 2018 10:00 AM

- **Wholesale Produce Market and Waterfront Warehouse District**
  - Saturday, August 4, 10:00 AM

- **West Oakland/Clawson**
  - Sunday, August 5, Time TBA

- **Temescal’s Broadway Historic Landmarks**
  - Saturday, August 11, 10:00 AM

- **Mid-Century Downtown Oakland**
  - Sunday, August 12, 10:00 AM

- **Weeds in the Urban Landscape**
  - Saturday, August 18, 10:00 AM

- **Glenview**
  - Sunday, August 19, 1:30 PM

- **African American Museum & Library at Oakland: Visions Toward Tomorrow**
  - Saturday, August 25, 12:30 PM (building tour)

- **Steinway Terrace**
  - Sunday, August 26, 12:30 PM
Meet new OHA president Tom Debley

By Tom Debley, President

Greetings, OHA members and friends! Let me introduce myself. I’m Tom Debley, the new president of OHA. Before anything else, let me say a hearty thank-you to Alison Finlay, our immediate past president, for all her hard work on behalf of OHA over the years. You will be happy to hear that she will continue to serve as our vice president.

A little background about myself: I’ve been a resident of the Temescal neighborhood since 1980 and spent virtually my entire career in the East Bay.

The first third of my career was as a newspaper reporter, photographer and editor with daily newspapers in the East Bay. Next, I worked as a public affairs leader at the University of California: assistant director of the news office at UC Berkeley, public affairs director at Hastings College of the Law and chief of news services for the Office of the President. The last third of my career was as a public affairs leader at Kaiser Permanente. I retired in 2010 as founding director of its Heritage Resources Department.

History was an important part of my entire career, having been taught by one of my journalism professors at California State University, Los Angeles, to learn the history of any community or institution I’d serve. That important context, he maintained, would always serve me well. It did.

Looking forward, I’m impressed with the knowledge base, skills and successes of OHA and its many partnerships over nearly 40 years of service to the community. It is a small but mighty nonprofit fulfilling a mission of advocating for the protection, preservation and revitalization of Oakland’s architectural, historic, cultural and natural resources through publications, education and direct action.

We must persevere and redouble our efforts as we go forward. Everyone involved with OHA, from charter members from our inception in 1980 to members joining today, looks at challenging and exciting times in our beloved city.

Development pressures are stronger than in many years with about 10 high-rises on the drawing boards or under construction, along with dozens of other projects across the city. And, as a city, we have desperate needs for new housing and commercial space. Each day brings new challenges to our doorstep.

Although sometimes feeling stretched thin, we can be proud of the board members, volunteers and staff. Month in and month out, we spend hours developing and conducting our programs in addition to studying proposals, developing ideas and advocating before city boards and commissions or with developers, architects, planning staff and others in support of our mission.

And a special thank you goes to you for your tax-deductible donations, which were most generous in response to our recent annual appeal letter. Your gifts are critically important to our work.

Finally, I’ll ask that we redouble our efforts to build pride in Oakland and its history—and encourage our friends, colleagues and neighbors to join OHA and support our efforts.

The next few years offer us an especially good window for pride-building. Please see my Top Three Items of Pride on the preceding page for some striking examples.
Miller Library burns to the ground

By Kathleen DiGiovanni

In this issue we mourn the former library branch building at 1449 Miller Avenue. Lost to fire on February 23 and demolished on April 24, the landmarked building made it almost, but not quite, to its 100th birthday.

Library services began at 23rd Avenue in 1890 with the opening of the 23rd Avenue Reading Room. It was the fourth reading room opened by the library, after West Oakland, East Oakland, and North Oakland, expanding the library’s reach beyond the downtown Main Library. The reading rooms did not lend books but were a venue for reading magazines and newspapers. 23rd Avenue was redesignated a branch library around 1911. For the first 28 years, it occupied a series of rented quarters on 23rd and around the corners on E.14th and E.15th Streets.

The reading room was so popular that it was chosen as one of the four permanent branches to be built with a Carnegie grant of $140,000. Articles in the Fruitvale Progress in 1916 and 1917 trace the efforts of East Oakland area improvement clubs in making sure a Carnegie library would be built. Acquiring a site for the new library was not without its own drama. As late as November 1916, the city council favored a site at E. 14th and 8th Avenue while the library board of trustees favored E. 15th and 24th Avenue. In the end, local businessman Henry Root donated the lots at the corner of E.15th and 24th Avenue, land valued at $10,000.

An Oakland Examiner article from July 1, 1917 describes the building to be put up as having the basic Carnegie plan with a delivery room flanked by two reading rooms. These would be sunlit during the day, with windows on three sides, and by “semi-direct electric fixtures at night.” The delivery desk would be positioned “that the librarian in charge will have complete command of the two reading rooms and of the main entrance.” It was to be able to hold 15,000 books, in addition to magazines and newspapers. The library’s lower level would contain another study room and a public meeting room with a capacity of about 250, fitted out with a stage and “electric connections for a moving picture machine.” Photos of the branch’s interior demonstrate the architects’ (Charles Dickey and John J. Donovan) attention to detail. Though no longer located on 23rd Avenue, the new branch building held onto that name for another four and a half decades. It was dedicated March 14, 1918.

In the Oakland History Room’s Library Archive, a 1965 letter from the branch manager, Mrs. de Timofeev, asks for a name change: “People tell us they go up and down 23rd Avenue looking for us.” The following year, the branch was renamed to honor Ina D. Coolbrith. Monthly reports over the decades paint a picture of a lively neighborhood hub, home to Boy and Girl Scout troops, school visits, plays, English-language classes, parent education classes, public meetings, and war bond fundraisers during both world wars. Reports documented the close relationship between librarians and teachers at the nearby Garfield and Lazear schools and featured frequent pleas for more staff. A report dated August 1945 tells the story of an outing the branch librarian took with her Girl Scout troop. They were out at 14th and Broadway when V-J Day was declared. Miss Sterns described the jubilation and chaos on the street and the way she calmed the girls by getting them to sing all the songs they knew on the train home.

A series of letters from William Brett, library director in 1970, assured Garfield teachers and other library patrons that the branch was in no danger of closing. That’s exactly what did happen only two years later. The branch library closed in August 1972 and re-opened two months later as the Latin Miller Library, on Miller Avenue side. See MILLER LIBRARY on page 8