

## TERRA COTTA, PART 2

### Oakland's treasure trove of colorful ceramic buildings

By Riley Doty

In our last issue of the *News*, the first part of this article surveyed eight terra cotta buildings representing a diversity of designs from 1908 to the late 1920s. The period that immediately followed was a time of rapid changes coinciding with the onset of the Great Depression. Architectural tastes had moved away from Beaux Arts toward various forms of modernism. Two main competing trends emerged, leaving latitude between them for intermediate solutions.

At one pole was Art Deco, which featured highly decorative work done in a modern idiom. It had a sensuous, exuberant, and fanciful nature. This contrasted with the design movement which came to be called International Style, which aspired to an elegant simplicity in which a building's design was composed from its intrinsic elements alone: its structural form and materials. Added ornamentation was forbidden, and a premium was placed on the efficient use of economical machine-made components. Art Deco emerged as the hallmark of Oakland's Uptown and that is the main focus of this article.

But the influence of countervailing trends was constantly felt. This came largely in the form of an underlying pressure for building designs that were flatter and more simplified in form. This interaction between contending styles was something that was being played out on a national scale. As Art Deco designers searched for a new card to play, they introduced the use of color into the mix. A crop of colorful modernistic buildings suddenly appeared in several American cities. Instead of imitating other materials, their terra cotta exteriors now unabashedly proclaimed their ceramic character, as if they were giant pieces of colorfully glazed pottery.

RILEY DOTY



THE FLORAL DEPOT

That liberating outburst turned out to be short-lived. However, developments occurring in Oakland's commercial hub were perfectly timed to catch the wave.

In 1928, H.C. Capwell relocated his flagship department store to 20th Street, occupying the entire block from Broadway to Telegraph. The move was calculated to intercept auto traffic before it reached the congested zone farther downtown. That strategy proved so successful that it sparked a building boom in the emerging Uptown Retail and Entertainment District. Specialty shops were eager to establish locations near Capwell's anchor store and they did so despite the risks of investing in new construction in those uncertain early years of the Depression. Retailers needed to attract customers, and they wanted their new buildings to be jazzy and exciting.

While some other cities have one or more surviving specimens from that adventurous, colorful era Oakland boasts a cluster of four such buildings in close proximity. The Mary Bowles, Floral Depot, I. Magnin, and Breuner buildings all opened for business in the

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**What do murphy beds have to do with Alice Street? See Gloria Cohen's feature, page 6!**

### Chabot Home provided needed haven for women

By Dorothy Lazard

Oakland has a long and commendable history of social service and philanthropy that has aided women and children since the city's beginnings. While some of these early social services are well-known—like the Ladies Relief Society in Temescal and the West Oakland Home—little is known about the Woman's Sheltering and Protection Home, commonly called the Chabot Home.

The home was established and maintained by a bequest of philanthropist Anthony Chabot (1813-1888), the man who established the local water utility. According to Jack Burroughs in his *Oakland Tribune* column, "This is the Story of Your Town," Chabot was a man of unique and generous character. On March 15, 1948, in profiling the Chabot Home, Burroughs wrote, "To set down even its genesis with anything approaching completeness would require a divine insight into those lost, the mind and heart of a great philanthropist who died before the present century was born."

The home's aim was to provide shelter and training to unmarried women, divorced women, and women who had been deserted by their husbands. All residents had to be "women of good character." The home officially opened June 12, 1890, at 74 Sixth St. between Fallon and Oak streets (the address was later changed to 69 Seventh St.). It was the former residence of Oakland pioneer Malachi Fallon and was financed by an endowment that Chabot established before his death. Its original board members were Henry Vrooman, John P. Irish, J.K. McLean, Horatio Stebbins, Stephen T. Gage, J.R. Glascock, and Miss Ellen H. Chabot (Chabot's daughter).

School teachers, waitresses, nurses, and domestic workers were among the women

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## Terra cotta

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single year 1931, each entirely clad with colorful Art Deco terra cotta. While sharing much in common, they also exhibit certain divergent tendencies. (The precepts of the International Style were gaining ground, but the Floral Depot, with its highly sculptural ornamentation, resisted the trend. On the other hand, the Breuner Building with its flat, rigorous regularity appears to have been more influenced by it.) This article will focus on these four buildings, as well as three Uptown movie theaters—the Dufwin, Fox and Paramount—which featured polychrome tile panels. Two of them opened in 1928; the other in 1931. These seven buildings are listed in geographic order from south to north.

### ■ Dufwin Theater, 511 17th St.

1928—Weeks & Day, architects—tile murals by Gladding, McBean

This understated Moderne building originally opened as a venue for live theater. Three tile murals form a triptych celebrating the performing arts. Executed in a lighthearted retro style, they evoke a fantasy of classic Grecian or Roman ideals. Colors are dynamic and finely tuned, ranging from soft blues and greens to bright gold. Allegorical figures on pedestals are framed by borders with a complexity of decorative elements. The compositions are balanced and harmonious, with symmetry and repetition creating an easy rhythm. Gladding, McBean took out a full-page ad in the January 1929 issue of *California Arts & Architecture* magazine, proudly showing off the murals. However, tastes changed and by the 1940s the murals were intentionally hidden under a plain white covering and behind an added marquee. In the 1980s when the building was converted to

offices they once again saw the light of day.

The Dufwin and Fox theaters are somewhat outliers in this section because their tilework is not overtly Art Deco in style. However, they both make effective use of ceramic color on their exteriors. This might even be considered a precursor to the color explosion that was shortly to follow.

### ■ Mary Bowles Building,

1718 Telegraph

1931—Douglas Dacre Stone, architect—terra cotta by N.

Clark & Sons

The Mary Bowles Building offers a striking display of ceramic color and modernistic design. The terra cotta here takes on a role similar to that of the proscenium surrounding a theater stage. Glazed ceramics frame the display windows for two stories of retail spaces, on the ground floor and mezzanine, intended to provide shops for four separate businesses.

A frieze of variegated green terra cotta spans the top section. This is divided into panels, each filled by an exuberant composition of repeating designs done in shallow relief. These offer a modernistic vocabulary and stylization—diagonals, spiky crowns, plumes, and elements that look like sunbursts or possibly machine parts—none of it derived from classic sources. The panels are separated by thin vertical elements in sharp relief, which appear to be stylized torches with finials. On either end are heavy square pilasters, glossy black with dramatic silver accents. These terminate at the top with uniquely styled lamps which appear to be highly ceremonial and exotic, stepped at the base and having three



MARY BOWLES BUILDING, detail.

RILEY DOTY

facets clad with zigzag strips of latticework. Each one of the black-and-silver terra cotta units required an extra step in its manufacture. First, it had to be glazed and fired to produce the shiny black finish. Then, a metallic overglaze containing actual white gold was applied, and a second firing was required, this time at a much lower temperature. (If fired too hot, the precious metals would have vaporized!) This added considerable expense since terra cotta was normally fired only once.

The building's overall design represents a compromise position in response to the impulse to downplay decorative elements, to keep them low profile and preserve the clean lines of increasingly streamlined composi-



THE DUFWIN THEATER: Next time you wander by, look up!

RILEY DOTY

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tions. Here we see both sculptural ornamentation and relatively flat work. But even the flatter sections are densely decorated and punctuated by relief elements

The second story windows are original. The blank panel below them was reserved for awning boxes and signage. Note that the north pier—on the left side when viewed from across Telegraph Avenue—is original. The south pier is a copy, cast in fiber-reinforced cement and painted to simulate the original glaze colors. The façade on that half of the building was hidden from sight for 50 years by a plain white false front. When that was installed, all projecting terra cotta elements had to be chopped off to accommodate it. The cover was finally removed in 2004 and the missing elements were reconstructed as part of restoring the building.

■ **Fox Theater**, 1807–29 Telegraph Ave. 1928–Weeks & Day and Maury Diggs, architects—terra cotta by N. Clark & Sons. This movie palace is bursting with an eclectic mix of design elements. The bulbous tower is patterned after a Hindu sikhara and clad with polychrome tiles. The façade of the central theater section has a surface of terra cotta ashlar while the office and retail wings on either side are faced with tan brick. The entire exterior is trimmed with terra cotta elements including parapet caps, window surrounds, moldings, and urns. Lovely tile panels above the marquee incorporate colors and designs reminiscent of Persian tilework. On either side of that section, two minor attached towers emerge at the top. Each has inset panels of polychrome tiles and is crowned by a complex ensemble of forms which include some of the largest and most complicated pieces of terra cotta that can be seen in Oakland. These include gargoyle-like figures that appear to be bat-faced angels within giant clamshells.

Restoration of the Fox Theater, following that of the Rotunda Building, represented a momentous success story from the first decade of this century.

■ **Floral Depot**, 1900–32 Telegraph Ave. 1931—Albert Evers, architect—terra cotta by N. Clark & Sons

The Floral Depot occupies what had been an unused part of the parcel H.C. Capwell bought for his department store. He commissioned this stylish low-rise to enliven the dis-



RILEY DOTY

**TERRA COTTA** on the Fox Theater

tract and provide income until something larger might be built there. It survives today as one of Oakland’s most beloved buildings.

Multiple storefronts spread out along two frontages from the oblique corner of Telegraph and 19th Street where a stubby, yet stylish tower lends its sculptural presence. The Floral Depot is the city’s foremost example of an Art Deco building which uses high-relief ornamentation. A profusion of decorative features adorns its upper surfaces, dramatically highlighted by the contrast of their bright silver finish against a background that is such a dark blue that it can appear black, depending on the light. Close inspection reveals a glaze with a fine-grained color combination, a black matrix sprinkled with a myriad of lovely bright blue specks (In bright light, the silver color can vary, taking on a tinge of gold.)

This building testifies to the notion that Art Deco might have taken the torch from Beaux Arts and embraced its proclivity for ornamentation, simply translating it into a modernized style. However, architecture developed in a different direction, and that trend did not ultimately gain traction.

The cast aluminum windows were a novel product in 1931. They are original, but their color comes from having been painted

because it turned out that when the aluminum weathered it did not retain a silvery color.

■ **I. Magnin**, 1931–2001 Broadway Weeks and Day, architects—terra cotta by N. Clark & Sons

The I. Magnin building’s form and its decorative elements deserve attention, but first and foremost it is defined by the powerful impact of its color. The expanse of blue-green terra cotta suggests a building faced with a gemstone such as turquoise or jade. The differences in color among the individual glazed units create an especially dynamic effect. The deepest green terra cotta units pop out more vividly because they are intermingled with ones that have duller or paler color tones. Whether due to accidental variations in the firing or from insights about the psychology of perception, the effect is stunning. The eye sees discordant color tones and the brain insists on melding them into a vivid impression of the overall color.

The building has a tidy, almost cube-like mass. Modern principles of simplification and streamlining were incorporated into its design. Its exterior form is an interplay of two planes which are set apart by only a few inches of depth. The outer plane begins with

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## Terra cotta

*Continued from page 3*

the facing below the second story windows. It extends upward to become the surface of the pilasters which divide the recessed stacks of windows and spandrels. The latter comprise the inner plane. The pilasters end abruptly just above the fourth-floor windows, leaving the recessed plane to occupy the uppermost section. In the preceding decades, virtually every large building terminated at the top with an overhanging cornice. A building without a cornice would have seemed as incomplete as an unframed painting hung on a wall. However, this design's openness at the top suddenly seemed refreshing, offering the antithesis of a cornice.

After establishing a baseline of flat and regular surfaces, the architects proceeded in a disciplined way to load the spandrels with a rich assortment of decoration. The building succeeds in delivering a full payoff of showy decorative work. No relief elements protrude far enough to break the outer plane, allowing the eye to skim uninterrupted across the smooth surfaces of the pilasters. Panels above each of the upper story windows offer repetitions of three distinct stylish patterns, the topmost of which extends higher than the pilasters and points skyward. The flat plane at the top is lightly accented with low-relief medallions.

This is a gem of a building which manages

to cover all the bases in an era of contending styles.

■ **Paramount Theatre,** 1931–2025 Broadway. Miller & Pflueger, architects – tiles made by Gladding, McBean

Timothy Pflueger was an extraordinary architect whose work often involved closely collaborating with artists. The Paramount exemplifies this, both inside and out. Its entire front facade consists of a huge tile mural beautifully designed by Gerald Fitzgerald. It is a vertical billboard celebrating by analogy the power of movies to transport an audience to worlds far removed from daily experience. The mural is divided into equal halves by a perpendicular 110-foot blade sign. On either side a puppeteer, one male and one female, is portrayed holding strings attached to marionettes. Four distinct scenes are shown on each side. Figures in colorful costumes appear to be momentarily frozen in poses that symbolize their various roles. The artist did not attempt to create an illusion of 3-

dimensionality; images are fielded from flat tiles of color in a manner reminiscent of Japanese wood-block prints. The mural's surface texture differs from that of the familiar type of mosaic work in which images are composed of tiny tesserae. In this case a variant technique called opus sectile uses glazed tiles that have been cut into larger-



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THE PARAMOUNT THEATER'S puppeteers.

sized units and precisely shaped to fit snugly together. The result is a very smooth finish, and the images are not granular or pixelated.

Gladding, McBean supplied the uniquely shaped tiles in the specified colors. They offered a rich variety of existing colors but could create custom glaze colors if needed. In that case, samples from test firings would be submitted to the artist for approval. The maroon tiles in the background are stock items that came from the company's catalog. Glaze formulas with real gold were used whenever that color was specified.

Architectural historian Michael Crowe speculated that the inspiration for this may have come from one of the entry gates to the 1925 Paris exposition, where a giant vertical panel painted with abstract figures hung above the turnstiles. Whatever the source, this mural is unique, a highly original Art Deco masterpiece. The theater's 1973 restoration was a major watershed event for Oakland and one that had a national impact.

The AC Transit bench across Broadway from the theater provides the ultimate view-



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THE I. MAGNIN BUILDING



ing spot for Oakland's colorful ceramic buildings. I. Magnin is to the left, the Paramount across the way, and Breuner's is visible up the street to the right, though the latter is best seen in winter when the street trees are bare of foliage.

■ **Breuner Building**, 1931–2201 Broadway. Albert Roller, architect—terra cotta and ceramic veneer from Gladding, McBean The Breuner Building is a two-part composition in a trim Art Deco style. It shares many characteristics with the I. Magnin building but is more understated and its pale celadon color is much quieter. It is clad in ceramic veneer (a variant of terra cotta which will be discussed in the following section). Its solid rectangular mass creates an unpretentious, utilitarian impression. Repeating patterns of uniformly spaced windows, grouped in pairs and threes, occupy most of the exterior. The main façade, facing Broadway, is bracketed by a pair of piers at either end that are wider and which project out slightly from the others, adding to the impression of the building's structural strength. This subtle exception is noticeable mainly because the overall surface rhythms are otherwise very regular and rigorous. However, for all its regularity, some lovely decoration has been used to trim out the exterior. The two-story base is a podium that stands slightly forward from the upper façade. A continuous frieze with designs, executed with incised lines and low relief, runs along its top, offering repeating swirls of stylized leaf and flower motifs. A series of projecting pods for floodlights punctuates the Broadway frontage and turns the corner at 22nd Street. These represent the only decorative elements which stand out in relief. (Uplighting was a feature that some Art Deco buildings incorporated to give them a dramatic presence at night. Recently this form of lighting has been reintroduced to the Breuner Building, though not using the original terra cotta holders.) Directly above the main entrance is an intriguing feature, a fanciful and very striking bas relief of two bare-chested workmen putting finishing touches on a giant throne. This scene, which embellished a commercial emporium, seems to have an uncanny similarity to social realist compositions which portray anonymous workers as heroes. Above the 22nd Street entrance, the chair reappears without the workmen, and

the company's name is inscribed beneath it. Both frontages are crowned by stepped parapets incised with decoration.

Besides night lighting, the building offers another special optical effect, this one visible in bright daylight. When sunlight hits either of the parapets at a glancing angle the carved decorative work emits a bright silvery light which traces out the patterns of the designs. Apparently this happens because the recesses have a slightly parabolic shape that intensifies the reflected light. Whether that was planned or is serendipitous is not clear. It is an example of an interaction between ceramic surfaces and changing conditions of light. Various glazes and surface textures produce interesting luminous effects which are unique to buildings with ceramic surfaces.

Note that the base of the building, the lower two floors, has been painted. The upper section remains unpainted, allowing for a direct comparison between them. Color variations in the unpainted sections create a livelier appearance in contrast to the "dead" monotony of the painted section. This exemplifies a characteristic that makes ceramics an appealing architectural finish material.

Another alteration is one that has affected the fundamental balance between the building's horizontal/vertical orientation. The original pale green window spandrels were replaced by dark anodized aluminum panels and the windows reglazed with tinted glass. This was done intentionally to create dark continuous slots that emphasize verticality. This change eliminated the lateral connections within the ceramic field. The solid surfaces between window bays have been reduced to thin vertical strips of green which are now separated from each other. This is in direct contrast to I. Magnin's facade which has retained its original spandrels, allowing the horizontal and verti-

cal elements to remain woven together as was intended.

■ **Ceramic veneer.** In the 1930s, the dual pressures for lower cost and flatter architectural profiles combined to increase the importance of ceramic veneer. The Breuner building is entirely clad with ceramic veneer except for the places where there is decorative relief work. This product was made by the same companies that had been manufacturing terra cotta, using the same clay, glazes, and kilns. Manufacturing ceramic veneer enabled companies to eliminate the labor-intensive process of individually molding each piece of terra cotta. The units do not have the boxlike structure which units of terra cotta had required. They look like large, thick tiles. They were mass-produced by extrusion, an industrial process by which a screw auger forces a stiff mix of wet clay through a metal die. The leading edge of the die can be cut in patterns to produce decorative profiles such as fluted or beveled shapes, (or a plain flat surface). Clay exiting the extruder runs as a continuous ribbon which is cut at regular intervals to produce the finished units. The decorative shape of the profiles can run in only one direction, lengthwise, along the axis of the extrusion. By necessity the finished product has a simplified, streamlined look.

One of the reasons terra cotta flourished at the start of its era was that it offered econom-

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THE BREUNER BUILDING



# Alice Street's connection to the Murphy Bed's ups and downs

By Gloria C. Cohen

Sometime around 1910, when William Murphy was renting a room on Bush Street in San Francisco, he found himself at a disadvantage because he had no parlor in which to entertain Miss Gladys Margaret Kaighin, the woman he hoped to marry. As Clark W. Murphy, who took over the Murphy Bed Company in 1983, explained, no gentleman at the time would invite a lady into his bedroom, the only room his grandfather had, and no lady would accept such an invitation. Compelled by his love for Miss Kaighin, William Murphy, a tinkerer, tinkered, inventing a disappearing bed, which, when concealed behind a closet door, would turn his bedroom into a parlor. One thing led to another, and Murphy and his muse were married in San Francisco in 1912.

With a loan from his fiancée's father, Murphy went into business manufacturing and selling his disappearing bed. They were soon to be found behind doors in single-family

homes, hotels, and apartments. By 1925, Murphy had orders for 100,000 of them a year. The company had factories in Oakland, Chicago, and New York. Murphy's beds were sold through Marshall & Stearns on 19th Street in Oakland.



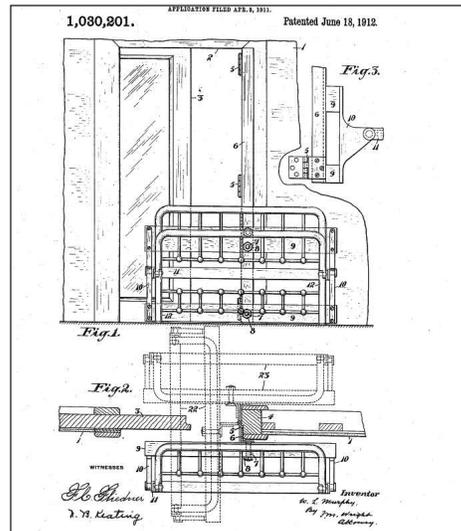
GLADYS MURPHY

The great value of the invention was immediately recognized by other wall bed companies as soon as Murphy put his on the market. As Murphy stated in 1924 in a petition for injunctive relief to prohibit the Rip Van Winkle Wall Bed Company from selling a bed that infringed his patent, the popular demand for this type of bed tempted practically every wall bed company in California to copy it. As a result, the Murphy Company had been compelled to litigate its rights over and over again.

Although it denied Murphy's claim, the Ninth Circuit recognized his achievement, noting that more than 800 patents had been granted over more than 70 years for inventions to improve the structure of wall beds.

Murphy was no pioneer, the court wrote, but his invention was seen as an improvement on what had come before. Murphy had conceived the idea for a bed that could be moved sideways on a vertical axis through an opening of less width than the bed, so that it could be concealed behind an ordinary closet door only three feet wide. Unlike other wall beds, Murphy's invention hid the bed in a way that would not even suggest that the room it was in was also used as a bedroom.

Murphy's early success depended on more than respecting the manners and morals of the day. The refugees fleeing the earthquake and fire in San Francisco in 1906 and the 3,000



MURPHY'S PATENT DRAWING

businesses that also fled across the bay brought about a housing shortage in Oakland. By 1910, Oakland's population had more than doubled to 150,000, making the demand for housing urgent. The wall bed made developing rental property to meet the demand especially profitable because, as developers say nowadays, it "juiced the square foot." With wall beds, which turned parlors into bedrooms—in effect, adding bedrooms without the cost of doing so—architects could design apartment buildings that had more apartments with fewer rooms, in this way maximizing rental income for the investor. Contractors such as East Bay Planners, Harry C. Knight, and California Builders, all doing business in Oakland, offered investors of moderate means package deals that guaranteed a comfortable retirement. Their package deals included design, financing, construction, and even finding tenants. As California Builders advertised in the *Tribune's*

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NAOMI SCHIFF



MURPHY BED enclosures still protrude from many Oakland fourplexes, 2022.

### Welcome to our new members!

OHA is pleased to welcome these newest members through mid-May 2022:

- Gloria Cohen, Nancy Donald, Iris Jamahl Dunkle, Jane Ellison, Vikki Vrettos Fraioli, Mitchell Schwarzer, Sharon Taylor

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# Chabot Home

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who resided at the home. Some stayed for a few days while others stayed for a few months. The women were provided with shelter, meals, and opportunities for employment. Once they found employment, they could contribute financially to their lodging, whatever they could afford, while they sought permanent lodging elsewhere.

According to a May 1902 *Oakland Tribune* article, the Chabot Home was a large, quiet place with big doors on either end of the building that opened out to two large porches. There, women could rest on hammocks and easy chairs and look out on the expansive lawn that surrounded the three-story building on all four sides. The home, which sat in the middle of the block bordered by Sixth, Seventh, Oak, and Fallon streets, had 35 large, sunny rooms. Each room had two iron beds painted white and oak furnishings. Framed art adorned the walls.

The women took classes such as Domestic Arts where they learned sewing, cooking, cleaning, and floral arrangement. In 1913, the home was hosting 25 women and girls per month.

The home worked collaboratively with the YWCA, the Catholic Ladies' Aid Society, the Women's Protective Bureau, and the Associ-

ated Charities, all of which referred women seeking shelter their way.

On the 50th anniversary of the Chabot Home, a celebration was held in honor of its achievements and its founder Anthony Chabot. At that time, an average of 200 women a year were making use of the home's services. Decades after the home's founding, citizens of Oakland still held the home in high esteem. One *Oakland Tribune* reader contributed her praise in verse, published in the "Cry on Geraldine's Shoulder" column July 28, 1949.

The poem, written by someone identified only as E.M.S. (Elinor M. Shaw), goes:

"Our city boasts a haven  
Where womanhood, in need,  
Oft come with weary footsteps  
Their heartaches, deep, to plead!

Tho' kind the help received there  
To light each on her way,  
The needy guest would linger  
Within those walls to stay!  
Such tranquil peace abides there  
Pressed on from bygone day;  
Bequeathed from those brave spirits  
Whose memoirs still hold sway!

The merciful endowment  
Of kindly pioneer  
Still stands, to grace our city,  
And hungry hearts to cheer!"



**MALACHI FALLON'S** home, later used as the Chabot Home.

The home, known in its later days as the Chabot Home for Girls, was still in operation in 1956. To make way for the construction of the Nimitz Freeway/Highway 17 (now Highway 880), it was demolished. ■

THUMBNAIL: OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

# Murphy beds

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yearbook for 1925, "A Living Income for Life" could be had "from One Apartment House."

With his four apartment houses, Clay N. Burrell, an architect well known in the Bay Area for his outstanding work, put Alice Street on the map as the heart of what was to become the Lakeside Apartment District. By bringing together the economy of the wall-bed formula and the public rooms of the grand hotel, he put upper class swank within reach of the aspiring middle class. A survey of construction in the *Oakland Tribune's* yearbook for 1921 declared the Lakeside Apartment District one of the best places to live in the East Bay, along with Piedmont, Claremont, and Rockridge.

But first things first. Alice Street, named for Mayor Horace Carpentier's sister, was one of 16 streets running from south to north in the plan for the City of Oakland, drawn in 1852 by Julius Kellersberger. Kellersberger envisioned a grid of 224 blocks to be bordered by the Embarcadero to the south, 14th Street to the north, Oak Street to the east and Fallon Street to the west. Alice Street was parallel to and four blocks east of Broadway, which ran up the center of the grid.

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# PG&E matches your donation to OHA 100%

*By Kevin Tam*

In the 1980s, I went on my first walk with OHA in downtown Oakland. The tour emphasized Henry J. Kaiser's influence, which fascinated me as my parents both worked for Kaiser. The tour was led by Tom Debley, foremost historian for Kaiser and prior president of OHA. My favorite aspect was learning more about the Kaiser Center and its roof garden at 300 Lakeside Drive. It is still my favorite building in Oakland . . . actually, anywhere. And if that was not enough to love the building, here I am 30 years later, and my current employer (PG&E) is moving into 300 Lakeside this Spring! I am thrilled. As Oakland is my hometown, I have found that these OHA walks bring Oakland's history to life. During this pandemic, the OHA walks, a primary

source of income, have withered. But they are returning with new programming! Please join me in supporting this great organization.



PG&E encourages its employees to give back to their communities through a new program called Peer to Peer fundraising. The idea is that employees build campaigns and spread the good word to get them funded. When people donate through my Peer to Peer link, OHA will get a 100% match, up to \$5,000. Please take advantage of this opportunity to earn a matching donation. PG&E will make it double! Scan the QR code or visit <https://pge.yourcause.com/public#/fundraising/14124> ■



## Murphy beds

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Security Investors Realty Company saw in the stretch of Alice Street north of 14th Street the opportune location—Yes, location! location! location!—to cash in on the housing shortage. Alice Street from 14th to what is now Snow Park was almost all vacant lots until, in 1908, apartment houses advertising wall beds began to appear. First was The Wollindale with 12 apartments at 1546 Alice and then The Sierra with 15 apartments at 1502 and The Granada with 28 at 1514, both completed in 1911. According to census records, there were no residents on Alice Street above 14th in 1910, but by the 1920 census there were more than 450. Around this time, apartment houses also began to appear on parallel blocks of Jackson and Madison streets.

In its survey of the Lakeside Apartment District undertaken in the 1980s, the city's planning department designated 23 apartment houses as noteworthy that had been built between 1908 and 1927 on Alice, Jackson, Madison, and 15th streets. Of the three apartment houses on Alice Street the planning department believed were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, two of them—The Como and The Palace—were designed by Burrell.

It was the Hotel Oakland that gave the new district north of 14th Street its cachet. The hotel was the brainchild of the business community, many of whose members were recent transplants from the rubble of San Francisco. By September 1906, five months after the earthquake, they were already planning what would be called Oakland's "BIG CARAVANSARY" in the *Tribune's* 1912 year book. The hotel, which would take up the block bordered by 13th, 14th, Harrison, and Alice

NAOMI SCHIFF



**THE ALISON**, formerly known as The Crystal Palace Apartments, in 2022.

streets, was to have 500 rooms to accommodate 750 guests. Public rooms were to include dining rooms, a ballroom, a room for lounging, a club room, and a smoking room—all to be decorated to suit the refined, expensive taste of Oakland's movers and shakers. A first-class hotel, they believed, was essential to make Oakland the West Coast's hub of commerce. More than a thousand of Oakland's elite celebrated the 1912 opening of the hotel with a dinner and a ball on Christmas Eve.

To appeal to middle-class renters with aspirations, Security Investors retained Burrell to design The Palace, an apartment house at 1560 Alice, that would do just that. Burrell's plans for The Palace not only offered a choice of 30 apartments with either two, three, or four rooms, each with one, if not two, wall beds, but also public rooms like the Hotel Oakland's. The Palace Apartments—first advertised in 1915 as The Crystal Palace Apartments—did not have just any wall bed. Installed were patented Murphy beds.

The Crystal Palace Apartments debuted in the *Oakland Tribune* with the biggest splash of any apartment house in the Lakeside District. In an advertisement appearing on July 25, 1915, it proclaimed among its selling points its proximity to the Hotel Oakland, only a block away, and its "magnificent Italian marble lobby and vestibules, reception room, dance hall, billiard room, and roof garden." For those prospective renters less confident in their own judgment, it reassured them, advertising on January 20, 1916, that Crystal Palace Apartments was "for the best people" and "in good taste." But to the discerning reader of classified advertisements, it was a tip-off that the apartments were not intended for the upper-

class tenant because rooms were described as "sleeping porches" or "fresh air rooms," another way of describing rooms with wall beds. Apartments and hotels for the upper-class market, such as the Hotel Oakland, the Women's City Club at 1428 Alice, and the Hill-Castle Apartments around the corner at 1461 Jackson, advertised bedrooms, rooms furnished with stationary beds to be used only for sleeping. The upper class slept in rooms that served only one purpose.

Although only down the street from the Hotel Oakland, The Palace's tenants would not be rubbing shoulders with the elite who made it their stomping ground. As they described themselves in the 1920 census, the employment of the majority of them was in the busi-



OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER

**THE HOTEL OAKLAND** in earlier days.

ness of buying and selling, situating them on the lower rungs of the middle class. The tenants included a purchasing agent, six salesmen, and three brokers. Three of the tenants described themselves as engineers who, as understood at the time, were monitors of engines. Among the rest of the tenants, four were clerks, three were managers (including The Palace Apartments'), and there were a physician, a banker, an art director, a hairdresser, and a milliner. They would not have been able to afford to live at the Hotel Oakland.

In the *Tribune* on January 3, 1909, The Wollindale on Alice Street, like so many others, advertised apartments with "patent disappearing bed." A half century later, advertisements for apartments in the *Tribune* were catering to renters' preference for bedrooms. In other words, the bed by then was on its way out of the closet. At the end of the 1950s, landlords were no longer advertising the number of

See **MURPHY BEDS** on page 9

NAOMI SCHIFF



**COURTYARD** of The Alison today.

### Thank you!

ZOOM LECTURE PRESENTER: Mitchell Schwarzer: "Oakland; The Good, the Could Have Been Good, the Sort of Bad, and the Very Bad"



# Looking back in time with posters

By Emily Foster, Oakland History Center

One of the things that initially appealed to me about working in the Oakland History Center was the opportunity to work with photographs, newspaper clippings, maps, correspondence, posters, and so much more than just books. I love books, but seeing photographs, artwork, or other visual materials can give a much more complete picture of the past than words alone.

After working on the digitization of our World War I and World War II posters, I started to notice the subjects of those posters elsewhere in our collection. I even found a few photographs with the posters hanging in the background. Most of the posters were produced for the American homefront, not specifically for Oakland, but it's hard to miss references to the war when researching any aspect of life in Oakland during these time periods. The topics advertised in these posters – recruitment for soldiers and war workers, fundraising, food and resource conservation, patriotism (and racist villainization of enemy combatants) – were omnipresent. Seeing the posters advertising these concepts gives us an amazing visual record of the times, as posters and other propaganda were likely impossible to avoid for anyone leaving their home. Besides the posters, we also have many other collections here that reflect life during wartime – books about shipbuilding,

maps showing air raid shelters, collections about Japanese Americans in California, photographs of Red Cross workers, and ephemera collections including things like ration books and tokens. Together these materials can give a view of the time that is more colorful, tactile, and immersive than reading even the best-written history.

I'm currently working on OHC's upcoming exhibit on the Oakland Zoo centennial.

OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER



**THIS 1944 poster** was designed by artist Martha Sawyers for the U.S. Treasury.

# Murphy beds

*Continued from page 8*

rooms in the apartment. Now they were advertising the number of bedrooms.

New owners of The Palace Apartments got on the bandwagon in the 1960s. In the *Tribune* on May 18, 1968, the elite Palace Apartments was no more and now appeared for the first time as the egalitarian Alison. More than the name had been changed. Apartments for rent were now described as “One Bedroom” and “One Bedroom with Dining Room.” “Redecorated” meant, in fact, that some redwood burl paneling and oak woodwork had been painted a fresh and cheerful white. Oral tradition has it that stained glass windows were removed and sold, and the hallways were carpeted in red shag. Of the 38 Murphy beds installed in the

apartments in 1915, 30 had been taken out to be consigned to the junk heap of history, leaving alcoves that are just right nowadays for home entertainment centers. The billiard room and ball room had been turned into apartments. The roof garden was long gone, and the garden in the courtyard paved over.

Then, in 1983, The Alison Apartments changed hands once again. Its new owner, Robert McCallum (of fond memory), was committed to preserving the building and undoing whatever he could that had unfortunately been done in the ‘60s. One of the most admired changes he made was in the courtyard, where he dug up the pavement and replanted the garden. His azaleas bloom there to this day. He tore out the red shag that was the despair of many. He cleaned up the Otis elevator, the 115th in California, had lighting fixtures made for the lobby appropriate to its

Research led me to files of correspondence and monthly reports from the Snow Museum, which was the first site of the zoo in what is now Snow Park. I wasn't expecting to find a connection to the World War II posters in the monthly reports



OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER

**CITY HALL** was a giant WWI fundraising meter for Liberty Bonds.

of a museum of taxidermy animal displays, but of course there were mentions of the impacts of the war on their work. One of Nydine Snow's very conversational monthly reports described her delight at the success of a recent bond drive. With the digitized bond drive posters fresh in my mind, I was immediately able to picture the advertising that helped to make the bond drive a success. The zoo's history is another fascinating story, which you can learn about in the OHC display from early June through mid-September 2022 and in this issue's back page article.

See the posters on OHC's Calisphere page, along with other digitized collections, such as the newly digitized images of Oakland Harbor and Oakland Parks: <https://calisphere.org/institution/95/collections/> ■

*Emily Foster is a librarian in the Oakland History Center.*

Beaux Arts design, and removed the gold paint from the marble lions that guarded the terrace. On June 23, 1991, The Palace Apartments was designated Landmark No. 113 by the City of Oakland's Landmark Preservation Advisory Board.

**Epilogue:** In 1988, a federal district court in New York denied the request of Murphy's son, William K. Murphy, to reconsider registering “Murphy Bed” as a trademark. The court concluded in *Murphy Door Bed Co. v. Interior Sleep Systems* that “Murphy Bed” had become generic over the years, so that it could not qualify for registering. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, a Murphy bed is understood to be “a bed that may be folded or swung into a closet,” including Murphy's patented bed and other types of wall beds in the definition. ■



# Terra cotta

*Continued from page 5*

ic advantages over carved stone, with both lower production costs and lighter weight. Ceramic veneer further extended these advantages. In addition to lower purchase costs, this also meant reduced construction costs since the foundation and frame of a building would carry a lighter load.

**Postscripts:** A few other Art Deco terra cotta buildings that once graced Uptown did not survive the wrecking ball. Two of them were described as having had gloss black glaze with gold trim, which would have made a nice addition to the collection. 1933 was the last year that a building of this type was erected in Oakland.

Here are a few outstanding terra cotta buildings in Oakland which were not mentioned in this two-part article:

■ The sea-green terra cotta building at 337 14th St. (corner of Webster) has lovely Art Deco relief work. It would have been a wor-

## Preservation Action Committee briefs

*By Naomi Schiff*

Here are a few of the items our committee has been monitoring.

■ **Temescal brick building in danger:** A 24-unit residential development may soon require demolition of the 1931 arched-brick building on Telegraph, originally the Shuey Creamery. OHA has commented in hopes of at least partial retention of some of the building, a familiar sight in the neighborhood.

A 1931 *Tribune* article describes Robert Shuey's start in the business: "While attending the Berkeley high school he decided to adopt the creamery business for his future activities and while still a freshman in the school purchased his first cow and opened his first milk route arising at three each morning to milk the cow and deliver the milk to his limited number of customers."

■ **Calou House:** An astute OHA member alerted city staff that an unwise repair was underway at the 1913 Calou House on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Perhaps not realizing that it is in an Area of Secondary Impor-

thy fifth example of this type of building except that it is located too far away from the group in Uptown. It too dates from 1931.

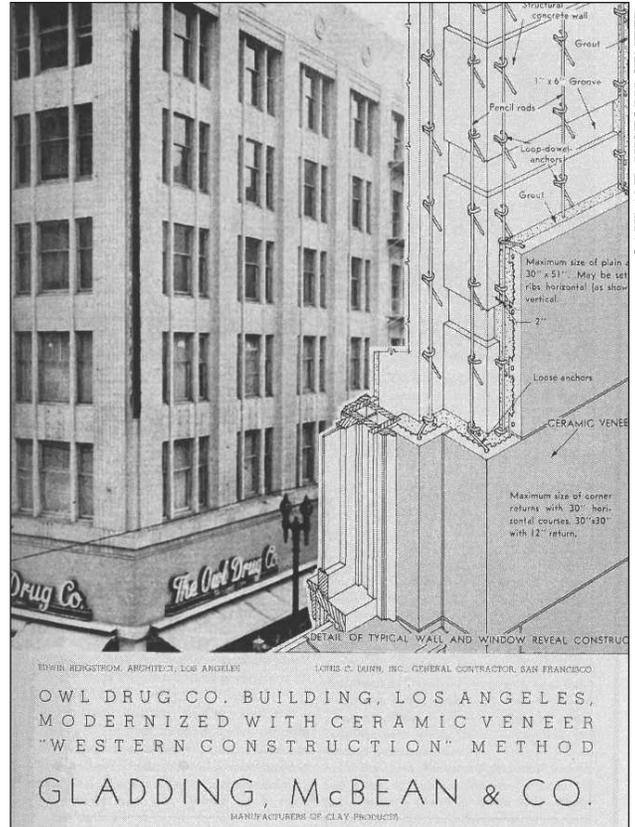
■ Swan's Market has colorful terra cotta ornamentation (made by N. Clark & Sons) commemorating the goods sold in a public market. Images of steers' and rams' heads, crabs, fishes, and cornucopias of fruits and vegetables enliven the exterior walls of white glazed brick.

■ At the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center, there are seven monumental arched niches facing the lake. These were elaborately sculpted with classical allegorical compositions by Alexander Stirling Calder (father of the mid-century artist Alexander Calder). This is a classical Beaux Arts extravaganza, dating from 1914. These amazing pieces were cast and fired by Gladding, McBean at their factory in Lincoln, CA. ■

*We thank Riley Doty for this expert, engaging two-part tour of All Things Tile in Oakland!*

tance, a permit was issued for replacement of the shingle siding, substituting a modern material that would likely deface this much-abused building. OHA is trying to weigh in!

■ **Club Knoll:** The tower was reinstalled onto the building at the building's new site at Oak Knoll, where it will be part of a community center for 900-plus new residences. ■



**AN AD** in *Architect and Engineer* magazine promotes Gladding, McBean's ceramic veneer. The method of attachment shown uses 1/4-inch rebar to supplement mortar in attaching the material. In other cases, it was fastened by adhering it with mortar alone. (The facing of the Piedmont Piano Company building at 1728 San Pablo Ave offers a good example of this product. That installation was done to modernize an older building, similar to what is shown in the ad.)



The Club Knoll tower being reinstalled

OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER

GARDEN CITY CONSTRUCTION



# OHA needs to diversify membership, leadership

**We look to increase our racial and cultural reach as well as bring in younger folks**

*By Mary Harper, President*

As we emerge from the second year of COVID, I want to thank you, our members, donors, volunteers, and event participants for your continued support. Because of your generosity, OHA remains a viable organization.

It's no secret that our membership is aging. It's also no secret that our membership isn't diverse enough. In order to thrive in the twenty-first century, OHA needs a multi-generational and multiracial, multicultural membership base, one that can provide new perspectives and ideas which reflect Oakland's demographics.

OHA's mission of protection, preservation and reevaluation of Oakland's architectural, historic, cultural and natural resources has not changed, but needs more voices. I urge you to encourage neighbors, co-workers, and friends to become OHA members.

Please remember that you can purchase a gift membership for others!

I also urge you to join the board of directors, again to provide new perspectives and

ideas, and to represent your neighborhoods. By joining the board, you will:

- 1) Participate early and directly with developers to influence project design
- 2) Learn how to be effective in the public process
- 3) Build excitement and support for historic preservation by getting our members out on the walking tours and bringing lecturers to our members on Zoom.

Additionally, I ask you to volunteer. We need help with walking tours as well as volunteers to attend Landmark Preservation Advisory Board hearings, Design Review Committee meetings, and developer presentations. To volunteer, please e-mail us at [info@oaklandheritage.org](mailto:info@oaklandheritage.org). Put out the word that OHA seeks more energy and involvement, and wants your help as we diversify. ■



NAOMI SCHIFF

**KIDS PLAY** at Snow Park. We hope to see them become future OHA participants and board members!

## PIP Awards deadline has been extended

Submit your projects now! July 1, 2022 is the new deadline date for Partners in Preservation Awards applications. We hope to celebrate in October at a live, in-person event at a terrific venue! For more information, visit <http://oaklandheritage.org/partners-in-preservation.html> ■

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 PRODUCTION: Erika Mailman

**MISSION STATEMENT:** OHA is a nonprofit membership organization which advocates the protection, preservation and revitalization of Oakland's architectural, historic, cultural and natural resources through publications, education, and direct action.

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**Become a member!** Explore Oakland's cultural and historic treasures, and receive discounts on OHA events. Membership is a great gift, too!

- \$45 Cornerstone (individual) membership
- \$75 Pilaster (household) membership
- \$110 Pediment (Organization/Corporate) membership
- \$250-\$499 Doric membership
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*Some limited income memberships are available. Call 763-9218 for information.*

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## Zoo's history of big game safaris

By Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni

The Oakland Zoo is having a big, big centennial celebration this summer. It dates its founding to June 1922 when Henry Adelbert Snow opened a natural history museum and menagerie on the shore of Lake Merritt at today's Snow Park.

Henry Snow was an exemplar of the 19th century autodidact, a true amateur naturalist. Born in Santa Cruz in 1869, the young Snow began his career at age 12 collecting birds' eggs. After his father's early death, he left school and went to work. At 17 he ran away from home and lied about his age to enlist in the cavalry but was reeled back by his mother once she tumbled to where he had gone. After that he worked as a foundry moldmaker, and "progressively ran a livery stable, dealt in coal, wood, hay, and grain, leased farming land, operated a blacksmith shop, pioneered an automobile agency, and promoted the Newark baseball team," according to the *Oakland Tribune*. All the while, Snow continued collecting specimens from nature.

In the municipally boosterish 1910s, Oakland's city fathers decided to expand the city's cultural offerings beyond the Municipal Art Gallery. A natural history museum would be just the ticket. Snow offered to donate his collections and even add to them, if the city would build a fireproof museum to house them. With confidence that this would happen, Snow and family headed off for two years on safari to then-colonial Africa, returning with thousands of specimens, living and dead, among them a trio of white rhinos. He

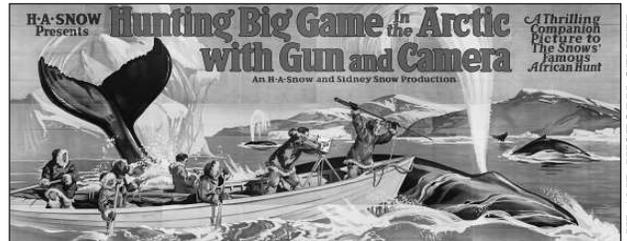
had taken a film camera to Africa and in 1922 released a film, *Hunting Big Game in Africa with Gun and Camera*. Son Sidney Snow was the cameraman. Hitting movie screens just months after *Nanook of the North*, it was among the earliest documentary films. A partnership with Carl Laemmle, founder of Universal Pictures, ensured wide distribution for this silent pioneer. Posters and lobby cards found in library catalogs worldwide tell us that it appeared on screens as far from Oakland as Hong Kong.

On their return, the Snows found that the city hadn't built a museum. Snow threatened to donate his goodies to San Francisco instead, prompting Oakland to offer the Cutting mansion at 19th and Harrison. Its 30 rooms provided display space, upstairs quarters where the family lived for years to come, and outdoor space for live animals.

The Snows went on an Arctic expedition in 1923, returning with a polar bear and footage for a second documentary, *Hunting Big Game in the Arctic with Gun and Camera*.

Despite extensive fundraising by Henry and his supporters, and plans drawn up by Maury Diggs, the city continued to rebuff his wish for a new building.

By the time he returned from the Arctic, his health was failing. He had contracted malaria



VINTAGE AD for the Snow documentary about the Arctic, top, and a peek into the Snow Museum's interior.

BOTH: OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER

on his African expedition, later developing a complication called Blackwater fever; he died July 27, 1927. Erika Mailman wrote in a 1999 *Montclairion* article that the white rhinos Snow killed had taken their revenge on him. Upon his death, daughter Nydine Snow Latham carried on as the museum's curator until its closure and her retirement in 1967.

The nascent zoo moved from the Snow Museum site in 1926 to Sequoia Mountain Park, now part of Joaquin Miller Park, and in 1939 to its current site. Sidney Snow led those efforts. He was a founder of the East Bay Zoological Society and headed the zoo until his death in 1959. ■