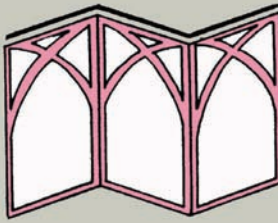
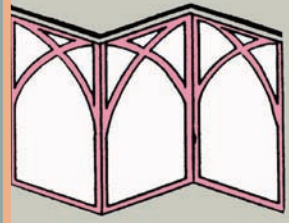


BERKELEY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE ASSOCIATION



THE BAHHA NEWSLETTER



NO. 157

HISTORY NUMBER

WINTER 2022

*Berkeley's first
Post-Modern building
bites the dust*





THE BAHA NEWSLETTER

NO. 157

WINTER 2022



Berkeley Horticultural Nursery

H. Tulanian Oriental Rugs

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- BAHA's website includes notices of events, a list of Berkeley landmarks, illustrated essays, and more: berkeleyheritage.com/

- BAHA also maintains a blog where stories and notices of immediate interest are posted in a timely manner: baha-news.blogspot.com/

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COVER: Oxford Court, 2150 Kittredge Street. Anthony Bruce, November 2021. Left above: Berkeley Horticultural Nursery, celebrating 100 years. From Berkeley Horticultural Nursery website; Right above: H. Tulanian Oriental Rugs, celebrating 100 years. Anthony Bruce, 2020.

Gifts to BAHA

Memoirs of Jannette Howard (daughter of architect John Galen Howard). gift of **Mary Blissfull**

BAHA is grateful for the monetary gifts that came from **Blair Dean** (\$100), **Christopher Franco**, (\$25) in appreciation of **Daniella Thompson's** article on *High-Peaked Colonial Revivals*, **Margaretta Lovell** (\$100), **Katherine Rinehart** (\$40) in appreciation of **Daniella Thompson's** *Storybook Lecture*, **Barbara Robben** (\$228), **Jim Sharp** (\$120), **Richard Wesell** (\$100) towards election expenses, and an anonymous donation through Network for Good (\$68).

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It is that time of the year! BAHA's nomination committee is meeting now to decide this year's slate of Board of Director candidates for submission to the current Board of Directors. We welcome names of members (including yourself) interested in serving on the BAHA Board for the nomination committee's consideration. Board service requires attendance at monthly board meetings and service on board committees such as Events, Annual meeting, and Publications. All suggestions should be directed to baha@berkeleyheritage.com no later than March 17, 2022.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome. I am the Acting President (formerly VP) of BAHA while Carrie Olson is on leave due to ill health of her parent. We send best wishes to Carrie and her family, and look forward to her return.

It is a pleasure to communicate with you through this message, especially given that while Covid-19 is slowing down, at BAHA we are speeding up. Currently, we are putting together our events for the year and just finished a zoom presentation by Davarian Baldwin, the Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of American Studies at Trinity College, Connecticut. He spoke about the harm many large universities cause their host cities, including loss of historic resources. A very timely presentation given our ongoing issues with UCB demolishing landmarks to make way for new housing to accommodate more student growth, although the housing never catches up with the continual enrollment increases.

Over the last year, a committee of six BAHA board members have concentrated on UCB's recent expansion plans with its attendant impacts on Berkeley's historic resources. UCB has already demolished the Ratcliff-designed and landmarked gas station located on Oxford Street and we anticipate further UCB demolition of other landmarks in the near future. Although there are multiple lawsuits pending, we do not know at this point what, if any, impact they will have on stopping these demolitions. According to a 2018 document from UCB's planners, the Hearst Gym and the Anna Head School building, both on the National Register of Historic Places, are just two examples of the many structures UCB intends to demolish.

The committee has studied the town/gown problems in a more global fashion than is typical for BAHA. Rather than zeroing down only on preservation of landmarks, we have researched why UCB is visiting so much harm on our beloved city given its continual enrollment increases with inadequate student housing. In a nutshell, UC and other large universities across the country have been **predating** on host cities as a way to offset decades-long state cutbacks.

In his book, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower – How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*, Professor Baldwin describes how large universities such as UCB have “plundered” their host cities in various ways, including expanding off campus and into cities by purchasing land that was intended for rent controlled housing, artificially increasing rents through student enrollment increases that reduces the minority population, competing against cities' retail and commercial establishments, and using subcontractors to undermine labor unions. As we see from the current news stories, UCB heavily rides the popular assumption that it only “does good” and not any harm, rather than mitigating the harms it visits on Berkeley. In coming Newsletters and elsewhere, we will continue to talk about these issues.

On a happier note, we are now looking forward to presenting by zoom Victoria Kastner, author of *Julia Morgan: An Intimate Biography of the Trailblazing Architect* on March 23. The pictures amassed by Ms. Kastner are gorgeous and her research into the personal side of Julia Morgan promises to be enlightening. Keep an eye out for an e-mail and watch our website for information about this event.

Sincerely,

Leila Moncharsh, Acting President

P.S. Davarian Baldwin's book was published by Bold Type Books in 2021 and Victoria Kastner's book was published by Chronicle Books this year. We will have these books added to our bookstore soon.

BAHA PRESERVATION AWARDS ARE RESUMING

Good news! After a long hiatus — in part because of the complications of COVID-19 — BAHA is resuming its long standing and popular Preservation Awards program. We are now open for Awards nominations!

We have a revamped awards program with more categories for nominations and awards than in the past, so please take a close look at the list of award types and the criteria for each type of award. Nominations will be accepted through May 1, 2022. Winners will be recognized and honored at an Awards ceremony in summer or early fall. We will monitor the situation with COVID-19 as the year progresses, and decide later whether this year's revived awards will be given in person as they used to be, or in an online ceremony.

Preservation Awards: These are BAHA's traditional awards, given for specific building projects, including respectful renovations, repairs, and additions. Judging criteria may include aesthetic quality and quality of work, historic significance, and contribution to the fabric of the city. We have given many well-deserved Preservation Awards over the years for laudable projects including sensitive remodels and repairs to older homes, restorations of commercial and institutional buildings, and sensitive additions. Each Award acknowledges the people involved in bringing the project about—who may include owners, designers, contractors, skilled craftspeople, and consultants.

John English Preservation Advocacy Award: This is a new Award, to be “given to an individual, group of individuals, organization, or institution that has done significant work to promote, advocate for, or bring about, historic preservation progress in Berkeley, and/or preserve Berkeley's built environment or natural/designed local identity and values.” The Award honors the indefatigable, gentle, honorable, and astute John English, a retired city planner who gave decades of volunteer service helping to shape Berkeley's planning policies for the better.

Infill Design Award: Berkeley is changing, with many new, typically larger, buildings that are “infill”—constructed on sites where older buildings have been demolished. Some of the new buildings do little for their neighborhoods, and some have been constructed literally on the ruins of unnecessarily destroyed historic structures. However, there are also some new buildings which are good neighbors, fit in with the community, respect Berkeley's architectural traditions, and enhance Berkeley's streetscapes. This new Award is designed specifically for those new-built projects that “demonstrate considerable sensitivity and skill in in-

tegrating a new structure or structures into a Berkeley site or streetscape so as to enhance and respect the historic character of Berkeley”.

Landscape/Garden Award: for a project that exemplifies Berkeley's sensitivity to place and the environmental and long-standing character of the community as a “city of homes and gardens.” Winners might be public or private historic landscape preservation projects, restorations, or improvements, or protection of public views and public spaces. Small projects are fine.

Lilliput Award: Here we get whimsical! This award will be for the best small structure or project with public visibility that enhances the lively built environment of Berkeley. Possibilities include streetside features like gates, arbors, benches, small art projects on private property... even “Little Free Libraries” are eligible!

Eligibility: Because we haven't given Awards for several years, award eligibility for 2022 applies to any project completed in the past five years (January, 2017 though December 31, 2021). In future years, eligibility will probably be reduced to the past two years.

To receive an Award, a project must have been “complete” by January 1, 2022. This does not necessarily mean finished in absolutely every detail, but it must have been finished sufficiently so the Awards Committee can evaluate it as a complete, not a conceptual or under construction, project.

You do not need to be associated with the project to nominate it! Conversely, if you are associated with a project (as owner, designer, contractor, etc.) feel free to nominate yourself for a project you are proud of!

The project must be within Berkeley City limits. But people associated with projects do not need to be Berkeley residents. John English Award nominees do not need to be Berkeley residents, but at least some of

the acts for which they are being honored should be directly associated with Berkeley.

Public Visibility. As a general rule, we are looking for nominations of projects that can be at least partially seen from the public street or another publicly accessible site. But if you know of a spectacular “hidden” garden renovation behind a gate or if you restored the fantastic interior of a Craftsman house or if your project was a concealed foundation or hidden structural support—go ahead and nominate it.


Please note: nominate projects for the awards you think apply. The Awards Committee may choose to move winners from one category to another.

How to Apply: Good news: we do not have a complex nomination form! Just send an e-mail—or a hard copy note—to BAHA, at the addresses given below. *Please note that e-mail submissions may not exceed 5 MB in size.* Clearly mark your communication as for BAHA’s Preservation Awards. At minimum, you must identify the project and its site sufficiently that it is readily identifiable to the Awards Committee. A brief description of the work that was undertaken is very helpful. Before and after photographs would be helpful if you have them, but are not required.

It is also very important that you try to provide us with some contact information so we can locate an owner or designer of a deserving project. But even if you don’t know who to contact, you can still nominate and we can try to identify the owner or designer.-

Send awards to either address: E-mail address: baha@berkeleyheritage.com; or, by mail: BAHA, 2318 Durant Avenue, Berkeley, California 94704.

(see more about Awards on next page)



100 YEARS
The Star Grocery at 3068 Claremont Avenue is celebrating its 100th anniversary during 2022, as are H. Tullanian Oriental Rugs, 2998 College Avenue, and Berkeley Horticultural Nursery, 1310 McGee Avenue.

Anthony Bruce, 2020

Student Essay/Video Award

BAHA is considering creating a new award category for students. The details are currently still under discussion, so this award is not yet officially announced and does not yet have a submission deadline. Below is part of a developing description of the possible award. Watch BAHA’s social media (Facebook, and emails in particular) for further information in coming months. One unresolved question is whether the award will be open to high school students only, or high school and college students. That is still under discussion. But the focus is on a prize specifically for young people/students.

The contest is likely to call for entries of essays (1,000 to 2,000 words) or short videos—up to 15 minutes duration—on this topic: Describe a special Berkeley building or place that is meaningful and important to you and why. This might be a prominent place or historic building, but it might also be a humble structure or site. It could be a favorite restaurant or business, a street you love walking down, a hiking trail, a corner of a park, a single-family home, or a grand institutional building—or even a sight or vista you enjoy! Entrants will be asked to describe in their own words and “voice” why this place is important to them and why it could or should be important to others in Berkeley. The essay or video should include some information and context on the history of the building or place, but should also focus on the entrant’s understanding and interpretation of it; the award is not intended for entries that only describe the history.

Deadline for submittals will probably be later this spring. BAHA will have the right to use the winning entries in publications, on websites, and on social media such as YouTube. BAHA reserves the right not to give the award in a given year if no entries of high quality are received.

BAHA is discussing accompanying this award with a cash prize. Most likely this will be \$1,000 for first place, and \$250 or \$500 for second place, but a final decision has not yet been made. Prize money would be made available to the winner(s) when the Awards are presented, most likely by the beginning of Fall, 2022. Winners will be recommended by a special panel of BAHA Board members, rather than the larger Awards Committee.

IN MEMORIAM

John Sutton English

(1936–2021)



John English at the moving of the Blood House in August, 2014. Anthony Bruce.

BAHA is mourning the passing, on 30 November 2021, of our old friend and stalwart supporter John English. A retired Oakland city planner, John was the ultimate authority on land-use matters in Berkeley.

Born in Washington, DC and raised in Sacramento, John lived in Berkeley since his student days in the late 1950s. His father was the surveyor for the Mason-McDuffie Company's St. Francis Wood subdivision; as a child, John accompanied his father on a visit to see Duncan



John English when he was in the Oakland Planning Department, newspaper photo, 1973.

McDuffie at his home. Although he never worked for the City of Berkeley, his opinion was sought by Planning staff, city commissioners, building professionals, and preservationists alike.

John was an invaluable resource for preservation. He wrote numerous landmark applications and National Register nominations, including those for California Memorial Stadium; Mario Ciampi's University Art Museum on Durant Ave-Bancroft Way; the Claremont Hotel; and Berkeley Iceland.

He was a constant presence in Landmarks Preservation Commission and Zoning Adjustment Board meetings, as well as at BAHA, where his deep knowledge, dedication, and attention to detail were relied upon again and again. John was a quiet, unassuming man who gave his all to the causes he embraced. The fight for preservation will not be the same without him.

—Daniella Thompson

Interested in being on the Preservation Awards Committee?

Consider whether you would like to propose yourself (or some other BAHA member) for participation on the Awards Committee. Candidates for Committee membership must be: members of BAHA; available for a series of committee meetings mid-May to the end of June (these may be virtual meetings at the discretion of the committee); available to read and review Award nominees; and, when necessary, visit and view nominated projects. Committee members do not have to be design professionals; only a lively and discerning interest in Berkeley's built environment is needed.

Committee members should disclose to the Committee

any connections they have that might influence their consideration of specific nominees, and must recuse themselves from discussion of nominees where they are the owner, designer, contractor, or otherwise directly or closely associated with a project. Members will serve for one year, with renewable appointments.

Please send your suggestions for Committee members to BAHA via e-mail (baha@berkeleyheritage.com) or paper mail (BAHA, P.O. Box 1137, Berkeley, California 94701, noting "BAHA Awards Committee Membership" as the subject. The BAHA Board will make the final determination of Committee membership.

OXFORD COURT: A FAREWELL TO BERKELEY'S POST-MODERN JEWEL



Demolition of Oxford Court (Muller & Caulfield, architects, c. 1983) in November 2021. Anthony Bruce

LAST November, when I walked over to Kittredge Street to take some pictures of a 1904 house, I was taken aback to find Oxford Court, at 2150 Kittredge, being demolished!

Years ago, the BAHA office was located in downtown and we were involved in so many surveys of the area and so much research on the individual buildings that we soon knew Downtown backwards and forward. A favorite oddity that we “discovered” was Herb’s Hamburgers, a classic mid-century fast food diner on Kittredge, built in 1949. In the early 1980s we learned, sadly, that it was to be replaced by a new building.

As compensation for the loss of Herb’s (at least for us at the BAHA office), the new building was to be designed in the up-to-the-minute Post Modern style. Post Modern was in the news a lot and we were excited that Berkeley would have its own Post Modern building! It was designed by the local firm of Muller and Caulfield (Rosemary Muller, FAIA, is president of the firm). I believe the building, named Oxford Court, was built in either 1982 or 1983, even though the firm’s website says 1988. On their website, the architects have written a good synopsis of the building’s design rationale:

“Oxford Court, a new building, shows a synthesis of

classical and modern — an intentional hybrid of the streetscape’s styles and of community values and architectural taste.”

The building has stood quietly on this downtown side street, at 2150 Kittredge, for thirty-five years. Its colorful peach and teal stripes have provided a festive backdrop to the car wash on the corner, and its modest size was the right scale for its surroundings. A special feature of the design was the second floor garden courtyard that gave light and views to inner offices. An especially attractive element of the front façade was the two-story gate leading to the lobby. In 2000, the architects worked with the owners on a major seismic upgrade using the latest seismic technology.

On that November day when I stopped in front of the building, I asked a workman coming out of the enclosure if the building was, in fact, coming down. When he replied in the affirmative, I expressed surprise that such a new building would be demolished. He said, “Well, I guess the owners can do what they want with it.” It seems that Oxford Court’s only crime was that it was only four stories high in an era of twelve-story downtown buildings!

—Anthony Bruce

The Thomas Block's Future is Dim

by Daniella Thompson

IN August 2021, an application for a 17-story mixed-use development at the intersection of Center and Oxford streets was submitted to the City. The proposed project includes a 181-foot stretch on Center Street that is currently occupied by the historic Thomas Block, designed by the architect William H. Wharff in 1904 and remodeled for the John Breuner Company in 1925.

In a State of California Primary Record prepared in 2015, the Thomas Block was deemed a Contributor to the Shattuck Avenue Downtown Historic District:

Built in 1904 and altered in 1925, much of the historic fabric has been preserved. The proportions and materials of the two-story façade continue today to serve as a clear example of an early-twentieth-century commercial design in the downtown core.

The Thomas Block is part of a setting of mostly historic buildings that form the primary corridor of commercial buildings lining Shattuck Avenue and the transit center that connects the city with the University of California campus. From 1908 through 1938, the Berkeley train depot sat at the end of this block on Shattuck Avenue. The Thomas Block was developed when the station was active in the city, and when Center Street was the main thoroughfare between the station and the University.

How the building received the name Thomas Block is a yet unsolved puzzle. The name first appeared in print in the May 9, 1904 issue of the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, where it was announced that “[w]ork of construction is now in full blast on the Thomas Block [...] — a building that gives promise of being one of the most important business structures in the city. The commodious block will contain ten large stores on the lower floor and 50 rooms that will be devoted to flats and offices on the second floor.”

On June 17, 1904, the *San Francisco Call* reported, “The Republican Club of Berkeley has taken the first step toward rounding up all the Republicans of Berkeley before the next campaign by engaging rooms in the new Thomas block on Center street, where headquarters will be established.

Could the new building have been named after Charles E. Thomas, a young Republican politician

who had just completed several years in the role of Berkeley Town Clerk, also serving at times as secretary of the Board of Trustee and of the Board of Education? In June 1901, the *San Francisco Call* described him as “one of the most prominent and popular young men of Berkeley. He graduated from the university in 1899 with the degree of B. L. During his college days he was the recipient of many student honors, holding the offices of speaker of the Students’ Congress, editor in chief of the *Daily Californian*, and president of the Associated Students. He also made a reputation as a student of unusual brilliancy and promise. Since his graduation he has been admitted to the bar, but has not practiced. He has been connected with several business enterprises, which he has conducted with marked success. In the last municipal election he was elected Town Clerk by an overwhelming majority.”

After leaving his municipal job, Thomas managed the Realty Title Co., whose office was located in the Thomas Block.

The building’s name appeared again on July 27, 1904, when a classified ad for the Wawona, an establishment offering rooms and apartments in the Thomas Block, was published in the *Oakland Tribune*. (The Wawona became the Campus Apartments in the early 1920s, followed by the La Loma Apartments in 1926.)

The owner of the land since early 1879 was the Town (later city) of Berkeley, which erected its first school building, the Kellogg School, on the site. The Kellogg School eventually gave way to Berkeley High School, and when the latter moved to a new building on Grove Street in 1901, the old school building became home to the public Commercial School. In order to make way for the Thomas Block on Center Street, the Commercial School building was moved south to face Allston Way. After construction, the Board of Education owned the building until it was sold to furniture merchant Louis J. Breuner in 1925.

The Thomas Block was designed by William Hatch Wharff (1836–1936), a prolific San Francisco architect and Civil War veteran who moved to Berkeley in 1899 and is best known for the landmark Masonic Temple



The south side of Center Street, showing the long Thomas Block in the middle. Looking west. Early postcard courtesy Anthony

2105 Bancroft Way. An article about architect Wharff is available at berkeleyheritage.com/eastbay_then-now/wharff.html.

The builder of the Thomas Block was the Lindgren-Hicks Company, engineers and contractors, who specialized in reinforced concrete construction and would soon take part in San Francisco's post-earthquake reconstruction, touting their Earthquake-resistant work on the 19-story Humboldt Savings Bank and the Fairmont Hotel.

The son of a Swedish builder, Charles J. Lindgren (1859–1913) immigrated to the U.S. in 1879. After learning brick masonry in post-fire Chicago, he made his way out west. In 1889, Bakersfield, CA suffered a disastrous fire, and Lindgren settled there, taking advantage of the rebuilding boom. There he met Lewis Albert Hicks (1868–1945), a civil engineer and pioneer in steel-reinforced concrete. In 1900, the two joined forces, establishing themselves in Berkeley as macadam and cement contractors. The following year, they expanded their business by purchasing John A. Marshall's cement contracting firm. In late 1902, they signed a contract with Phoebe Apperson Hearst to construct the Hearst Greek Theatre, promising to have it ready for President Theodore Roosevelt's commencement address in May 1903.

Lindgren moved to Fresno in 1903, but the partnership with Hicks endured until 1907.

Construction of the Thomas Block was supervised not by Lindgren-Hicks but by the realtor Simcoe S. Quackenbush, who, like the builders, moved his office into the new building to stimulate sales. For a while, the building was called the Lindgren-Hicks Co. Bldg., but after the partnership's breakup it became the Lewis A. Hicks Co. Bldg.

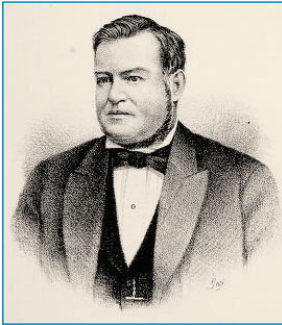
By the 1920s, Hicks, too, was gone, having moved his office to 2735 Durant Avenue, across Piedmont Avenue from his Julia Morgan-designed home. When the City of Berkeley put the Thomas Block up for sale, Louis J. Breuner's bid of \$90,000 was the highest.

Breuner immediately remodeled the Thomas Block in the Mediterranean style, but as the State Primary Record affirms, "the proportions and materials of the two-story façade continue today to serve as a clear example of an early-twentieth-century commercial design in the downtown core."

A fuller version of this article is published at berkeleyheritage.com/eastbay_then-now/thomas_block.html.

Known Only by the Space They Briefly Occupied

by Annabelle Long



Peter Mathews

ON THE 1880 Carnall and Eyre Map of Berkeley, there is nothing remarkable about the land owned by Peter Mathews except, maybe, for the fact that “Mathews” lacks a second “T.” The text reading “Peter Mathews” is plain and serifed, the land he owned appears beige and undeveloped, and

it requires a significant stretch of the imagination to conceive of anything exciting occurring there, in that apparently yet-unbuilt-upon pocket of West Berkeley. The land was empty and fertile, and to Peter Mathews, it probably smelled of untilled earth and the very thing he’d left Ireland for in 1849: opportunity.

The Mathews Tract, as his land was later named, was his foothold into Berkeley, the first sign of his new Californian wealth, and it would go on to become a thriving, working-class neighborhood for long after his death. But the story of the development of his land was not without its complications, and the Mathews Tract saw much more disorder than its idyllic-looking, generic-reading map depictions would indicate. Peter Mathews himself, for the most part, stayed out of it, the industrious, pious patriarch of a large family and a larger plot of land, but his sons did not, and even his careful management of his property could not prevent trouble from tumbling into it and out of it. There is a rich history to the neighborhood now known more for the broad greensward and playing fields of San Pablo Park than for Peter Mathews. Being that the land bore his name for half a century, and that there is indeed still a Mathews Street, just west of the park, the events of his life and of his land, when it was indeed still his land, are worth paying some attention to.

Peter Mathews was born in County Meath, Ireland in 1821, the second son of two parents that the historical

record remembers only as Mr. and Mrs. Mathews. An 1883 history of Alameda County says that his parents shaped his conscience in “virtue and that pure simplicity of faith which characterized him in after life as a man.” This, while flattering, seems to be only part of the picture of Mathews, who seemed driven by a dogged desire to succeed despite all obstacles as much as by his faith. The 1883 history describes him as hard-working and interested in business from a young age, “especially that business so peculiar to County Meath.” What this peculiar business was, the history neglects to say, but Mathews traded cattle between Ireland and Great Britain until 1849, the fifth year of the famine, and the year he left his country for America. His older brother, John Mathews, preceded him in immigrating to the United States by two years, and he lived in Boston for six years. Peter Mathews spent nine months in Salem, Massachusetts before permanently heading west, “following the train of his business thoughts.”

ARRIVAL IN CALIFORNIA.

In California, predictably for an 1849 immigrant, Peter Mathews looked for gold. He spent four years in the mines, “moving hither and thither,” but apparently without much luck. Ever the striver, he left the ungenerous mountains for the Sacramento Valley, and he left the Sacramento Valley for the untapped opportunities of Alameda County, where his wife’s father, another Irish immigrant, controlled a significant amount of land. Patrick Dunnigan, Mathews’s father-in-law, had four daughters, and he reserved four plots of land to give to each of them upon their weddings. That reserved land did not become the Mathews Tract, but in any case, the 1883 history recalls that “at no time was Peter Mathews other than a rich man since his arrival in Oakland until his death.” Most of the Dunnigan farm (which was located between 59th and 60th streets) was eventually donated for railroad right-of-way. John Mathews followed his brother west in 1854 after purchasing “squatter’s rights,” and the two brothers established themselves as some of Alameda County’s most prominent men.

The land that Peter Mathews owned—the land that became the Mathews Tract—consisted of plots 57, 58, and a portion of Plot 56 in Rancho San Antonio, also known as the Peralta Grant. The Peralta Grant was given by the last Spanish governor of California in 1820 to Luís María Peralta, a sergeant in the Spanish army, in recognition of Peralta’s long and faithful service to his country. In 1842, Peralta divided the land amongst his four sons, who quickly found themselves overwhelmed by squatters who stole and sold their cattle. The Peraltas took their squatters to court, but by the time the United States Supreme Court confirmed their title, they had been forced to sell most of the land to cover legal fees and taxes. Consequently, one of the Peralta sons, José Domingo, frequently found himself in debt, unable to pay his county taxes, and in 1862—notably, after Peter Mathews had already purchased some of his land—his property was confiscated by the sheriff and sold at an auction. The other Peralta land had been previously sold and partitioned into plots, and these plots were recorded in Kellersberger’s Map, which was surveyed in 1853, partitioned in 1854, and filed on 21 January 1857.

Peter Mathews is recorded as one of the first twelve landowners in the area after California received statehood; his plots were just three of many. Many of the settlers on Rancho San Antonio land were squatters, as John Mathews had been, and a history of Berkeley states that “...most of them left without a trace... they remain known only by the space they briefly occupied.” Peralta “died a wretched man” in 1865. A colorfully written and unsympathetic local history criticized his decision to leave his land to his children in an attempt to deny others’ claims to it: “Peralta, this pathetic, stupid, broken man, managed to figure out what was happening much too late.” On the Carnall and Eyre map, printed fifteen years after Peralta’s death and nearly thirty years after Mathews came to own land in plots 56, 57, and 58, the land looks no more exciting than it did on the earlier Kellersberger’s map. Two creeks wend through the property, and surrounding plots are visibly further subdivided into neatly squared-off blocks, but nothing appears to be happening on the three sections that Mathews owned. In between the time of Kellersberger’s map and Carnall and Eyres’, though, plenty happened.

Peter Mathews died in his home on San Pablo Avenue in 1879, at age 58. According to the 1883 history, he left his eight children a legacy of “honesty, industry, and truth.” Read one way, where Peralta left a legacy of being “pathetic, stupid, [and] broken,” Mathews was apparently a model of vigorous business management and fortitude. He founded the Oakland Bank of Savings, engaged in mining speculation, owned properties across the East Bay and in Santa Barbara, and alongside other Irish Catholic settlers in Berkeley, he offered up a portion his land to the San Francisco Sisters of Presentation to build their convent. Mathews and his other Irish Catholic acquaintances were eager to establish a more robust religious life in Berkeley, especially as it pertained to educating his children, which is why he was so intent on recruiting the Sisters of Presentation, a teaching order, to Berkeley. The Sisters didn’t end up building on his land, instead building on land offered to them by James McGee, another prominent businessman and member of the Berkeley Irish Catholic community, but Mathews’ offer of his land displays his public reputation for “honesty, industry, and truth.” His children’s adherence to these principles, though, certainly remains up for debate.

PETER MATHEWS’ FAMILY.

Peter Mathews and Mary Dunnigan had eight children: Mary Alice, Charles, Peter Jr., John, Annie, Joseph, Teresa, and Francis. The family lived in a palatial farmhouse on San Pablo Avenue, and the Mathews Tract was used as farmland while it was under their ownership. Upon Peter Mathews Sr.’s death from consumption, the fate of the Mathews Tract became the responsibility of his two eldest sons, Charles and Peter. Charlie, as he was known, and Peter Jr. did not seem to be particularly interested in following in their father’s footsteps. Peter Jr. worked as a teamster in the stockyards in West Berkeley, driving animals around the yards, and it’s unclear if Charlie worked at all. In 1886, seven years after his father’s death, Peter Jr.’s life took a melodramatic, almost fatal turn that emphasizes the Wild West aura of the Mathews Tract in the years after Spanish control and before development. In October of that year, while he was working at the stockyards for Hayes, Carrick, & Co. wholesale butchery, he provoked—or was provoked by—a fellow teamster, Louis Dockery. Dockery stabbed Mathews twice in the abdo-

men and fled for San Francisco, wearing a “checked suit and soft felt hat” and armed with a rifle. The original reporting on the incident actually alleged that Mathews stabbed Dockery and then fled, but every subsequent report over the months that Mathews was hospitalized and treated for his wounds flipped the attributions.

Mathews was not expected to survive his wounds. He suffered from peritonitis, and an article in the *Oakland Tribune* described him as “hovering between life and death, with the chances greatly against his recovery.” But Mathews persevered, and thanks to the dutiful care of Dr. E. H. Woolsey, he beat the odds. Months later, after Mathews was discharged from Woolsey’s hospital, the *Tribune* wrote a short feature about the hospital, praising it for its impeccable service and “pleasant and extensive grounds” and praising Woolsey for his “best and intelligent supervision.” Mathews was noted as the hospital’s most famous patient, his case having been regularly written about in the *Tribune* and elsewhere. So, Peter Mathews Jr. survived his brush with death, his brush with the disorder and apparent lawlessness of the land he lived on. His story, while melodramatic and perhaps reminiscent of something from an old western film, is as telling about the nature of the time as it is about the details of his life: despite being the son (the namesake) of one of Berkeley’s wealthiest men and the grandson of one of Oakland’s wealthiest men, and despite inheriting valuable property that quite literally bore his name, Peter Mathews Jr. still worked in manual labor, and still found himself in the midst of a distinctly unglamorous drama, his insides literally hanging out. “Honesty, industry, and truth”? Maybe, but not obviously.

FAMILY TROUBLES CONTINUE.

Charlie Mathews found himself similarly troubled—and even, somehow, further than Peter from their father’s legacy. In August of 1888, the *Oakland Tribune* wryly reported that “Charlie is evidently trying to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious brother,” the brother being Peter Jr. It continued, “Yesterday he dropped into a saloon on San Pablo avenue and while there got into a discussion on athletic subjects with a number of men who were refreshing their desicated [sic] throats with cool lager.” This, somewhat predictably, did not end well. Charlie wrestled one of the

men, Greco-Roman style, and then wrestled another, and upon beating them both, “A brother and several friends of the vanquished wrestler jumped on Charlie and began to beat him. They thought if they could not beat him wrestling they could beat him with their fists. And they did.” From there, the *Tribune* goes into graphic detail about the rest of Charlie’s near demise: a bulldog was set on him and “took the traditional ground floor” out of his pants (and with it “a large slice of epidermis”), several men stabbed him in the wrist, and the dog almost finished the job when it took a bite out of his ear and scratched his face. When Charlie was taken to Dr. Woolsey for treatment—like his “illustrious brother” before him—he said that he had cut his hand by hitting it against a window. “Charlie wanted to keep the affair quiet,” the article concludes, “and hence there have been no arrests.” The saloon in which the incident took place was in Butchertown—now Emeryville—and the name is fitting for the events that transpired there.

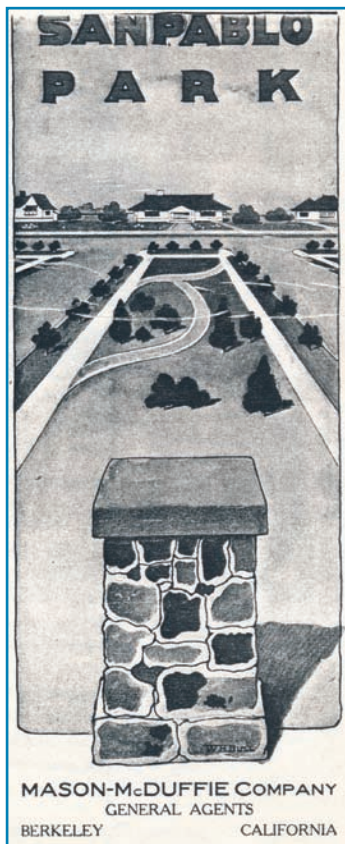
The Mathews Tract saw several other Wild West-style events worth noting. In 1875, Peter Mathews’s barn burned down—an act that the paper described as “incendiarism” and that Mathews blamed on vengeful Chinese laborers who worked on a nearby farm. “Mr. Mathews says that a number of his hired hands have lately had several ‘musses’ with the Chinamen on an adjoining ranch,” the paper said, “in fact, had ‘walloped’ some of them—and that it might be that some ‘Heathen Chinees’ now consider they are about even.” Other records reveal no more information about this fire, or the veracity of Mathews’s obviously charged allegations, but this report alone is revelatory of tensions that defined life on and near the Mathews Tract. Census records from 1870 and 1880 reveal a fledgling Chinese population amongst west Berkeley’s thriving Irish one. In 1870, records indicate that across Alameda County, there were several households of Chinese laborers—all bachelors, all immigrants—and a few other Chinese immigrants who worked as live-in laborers for white families. Nearly all Chinese immigrants were listed as having the last name “Ah.”

Mathews’s allegations fall within an important broader context of relations between Irish and Chinese laborers in California. Some have argued that Irish immigrants fanned the flames of anti-Chinese sentiment

in order to secure their own standing in California; their own standing as white. Though the cause of the particular “musses” Mathews spoke of have been lost to time, it is more than likely that Mathews and his men were influenced by—and acted on—the prevailing anti-Chinese views of their community.

Another noteworthy detail of the barn fire is the fact that the Mathews Tract was “beyond the fire limits” and so “the engines did not proceed to the scene of conflagration.” This gives a sense of the Mathews Tract as out in the “boonies,” beyond the reach or jurisdiction of any sort of government or succor—not yet West Berkeley, but the wild, wild west. And fifteen years later, not much had changed. In 1890, Mrs. Peter Mathews’s barn burned down, killing several horses and other livestock inside. No other information is known about this fire, but its occurrence emphasizes the challenges of life on the Mathews Tract, the disorderliness of life in west Berkeley before it was developed and became West Berkeley, the proper noun, not the geographic descriptor.

The same year as that barn fire, though, the Wild West aura of the Mathews family and their tract seemed to fade. Peter Mathews, Jr. got involved in politics, following in the footsteps of his father. He joined a group of men as “Vice Presidents” of Alameda County’s Democratic Party. He worked on a congressional campaign for John P. Irish, an anti-women’s suffrage, anti-organized labor, pro-Chinese and Japanese immigration, pro-gold standard newspaperman-cum-politician, who went on to lose his congressional race to Joseph McKenna, the future Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and U.S. Attorney General. It is important to note that political involvement did not entirely signal the end of chaos; American political culture at the turn of the twentieth century was still very much a culture



Cover of Mason-McDuffie's brochure for San Pablo Park, 1906. Artwork by W.H. Bull.

of raucousness and disorder, where bosses and gangs prevailed and election days were as much celebrations of debauchery as they were of democracy. In fact, the platform of the *Sun and Letter*, a West Berkeley-based newspaper that was in circulation from about 1900 to about 1920 (records are sparse), is revealing of much about pre-development West Berkeley. “We stand for the improvement of West Berkeley in every possible way,” it began. “Politically we are independent of any gang or bosses and will support the best men and the best measures. We favor the stopping of all trains at West Berkeley.”

The next couple of decades saw the realization of many of these principles, but not without digressions back into chaos. The area saw the arrival of so-called “gypsy” caravans, attempted (and also, successful) stick-ups, and even more incendiary barn fires that somehow landed outside of the jurisdiction of both Berkeley and Oakland fire departments. But by 1906, the Mason-McDuffie Company was knocking on the door of the Mathews Tract.

It had been almost twenty years since two-thirds of the Mathews Tract had been parceled up and auctioned off by the Woodward and Gamble Company in 1887—then, ads for the properties ran every day, and special train lines were routed from across and outside of California—and Mason-McDuffie was ready to transform the area into Berkeley’s newest, swankiest neighborhood. Perhaps “swanky” is not entirely accurate, but Mason-McDuffie certainly saw the area as a diamond in the rough, as it were. In 1906, a provision was made for a “public playground,” and a year later, Mason-McDuffie aggressively advertised the Mathews Tract as “the best of it.” “The best of *SAN PABLO PARK* is now to be sold,” one advertisement said. “The Mathews Homestead, the one un-subdivided block in

San Pablo Park, has at last been mapped and will on Saturday be placed on sale in lots. The *CHANCE TO SECURE A HOMESITE* in the garden locally celebrated for its splendid trees is here.”

All of the ads were enthusiastic and hyperbolic—probably too dramatic—and all of them described the Mathews Homestead as the crown jewel of the shimmering San Pablo Park neighborhood. “SAN PABLO PARK is coming to be recognized as the tract best suited for modest homes,” another ad read. “There’s a stir in SAN PABLO PARK.” The description of development as “a stir” is interesting. It seems to imply that before bungalows popped up, or before there were artfully trimmed hedges and a neat, sprawling park, the area was sleepy. But the area was arguably always stirring. It makes sense that Mason-McDuffie would want to frame the Mathews Tract as the idyllic, scenic area that it appeared to be on maps; if the activity to be spoken of was mostly criminal or agricultural in nature, high-minded, comfort-seeking buyers probably would not have been interested. So instead of being “west of it” or “the rest of it”—as the Mathews Tract’s previous distance from infrastructure and civic activity had maybe previously implied that it was—the Mathews Tract was now marketed as “the best of it.” The brothers were surely proud (if they paid attention).

Peter Mathews’s legacy is most visible on Mathews Street, located just a block west of San Pablo Park and east of San Pablo Avenue. There, early bungalows sit side-by-side with more modern feats of architecture, and there, no barns have burned down (or existed) for a century. The area, on maps, looks no more exciting than it once did, save for the existence of neatly carved out blocks, but I can imagine similar dramas—maybe less Wild West in nature—unfolding where the Mathews family once lived and worked and recovered from gunshot and knife wounds. It is easy to assume that maps are indicators of activity—because if there were no blocks, and no houses, how could there have been such drama? But the forgotten stories of Peter Mathews and his sons are evidence of what is lost when the human side of history is neglected. How might Berkeley be different if Peter Mathews had found gold in the Sierra Nevadas? If he had left Alameda County when his barn was burned to the ground? If Patrick Dunnigan had not saved land for his daughters? All

of these questions are certainly interesting and probably unanswerable, but the point remains the same: Berkeley, along with the rest of the world, is as much the product of very human decisions, and very human dramas and squabbles and misjudgments, as it is the product of bigger, more rememberable political decisions and unchangeable natural forces. Berkeley exists as it does because the land was fertile and the views of the Golden Gate were stunning, yes, but Berkeley also exists as it does because Domingo Peralta could not pay his county taxes, and because Peter Mathews tried his luck in the gold mines and failed, and because Patrick Dunnigan thought his daughters deserved the farmland he owned, and because the Sisters of Presentation built their convent on James McGee’s land, not Peter Mathews’s. Berkeley exists as it does because Peter Mathews once existed here, and that fact, alone, is the source of so many stories worth telling.

This article was researched and written in a seminar at U. C. Berkeley, “Berkeley’s Built Environment: Two Residential Neighborhoods,” Fall 2021, sponsored by The Art of Writing Program, Professor M. M. Lovell, GSI Elizabeth Fair, as part of a larger project to engage undergraduate students in original research and in Public Art History.

Join the BAHA Events Committee!



Now that the Pandemic is easing, the BAHA Events Committee is working on programs for the year. Do you have an idea for an event or a topic you could suggest? A speaker you would like to hear? Send us your ideas—for either *in-person* or *virtual* events—and we will put them in the mix. And if you’d like to volunteer yourself to do an event, or help with events, that would be doubly appreciated! You can write directly to Phyllis Gale, the co-chair of the BAHA Events Committee, at p2gale@gmail.com

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Claremont Creekside Gardens

A Garden Tour: Sunday, May 15, 2022 from one to four o'clock

Berkeley's Latest Landmarks

The landmark applications and associated documents are accessible online.

341. Schneider-Kroeber House, “Semper Virens” Bernard Maybeck (1907) 1325 Arch Street

Constructed almost entirely of unpainted redwood and featuring wide eaves, brackets, and numerous balconies with decorative railings, the Schneider-Kroeber House was designed during a period when Maybeck was experimenting with Swiss chalet-style forms. Standing at the crest of Arch Street, on a steep lot facing sweeping bay views, the house anchors a nearly intact block of First Bay Tradition houses that survived the 1923 Berkeley Fire and reflect the aspirations and ideals of the nearby Hillside Club to create residences and neighborhoods that conformed to the natural landscape.

Mary and Albert Schneider, members of the Hillside Club, commissioned the house. Dr. Albert Schneider (1863–1928) was Professor of Pharmacology and Bacteriology at the University of California. He collaborated with Berkeley

Police Chief August Vollmer in planning a three-year police school and became known as the inventor of the lie detector.

About 1927, Professor Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876–1960) purchased the house. A nationally prominent anthropologist, Kroeber was an expert in the cultures and languages of the indigenous peoples of western North America and founded the U.C. Museum of Anthropology. He and his wife, Theodora, raised four children in the house, and it remained their home for the rest of their lives. Theodora Kroeber (1897–1979) became a well-known author and scholar in her own right with her best-selling book, *Ishi in Two Worlds*, and other writings about native culture.

The Kroebers' daughter, Ursula K. Le Guin (1929–2018), grew up in the house “from birth to maturity” (in her words). She was a towering and influential figure in science fiction and fantasy literature. Le Guin once observed, “I don't know what novel our Maybeck house could be compared to, but it would contain darkness and radiant light; its beauty would arise from honest, bold, inventive construction, from geniality and generosity of spirit and mind, and would also have elements of fantasy and strangeness ... I wonder if much of my understanding of what a novel ought to be was taught to me, ultimately, by living in that house. If so, perhaps all my life I have been trying to rebuild it around me out of words.”



Schneider-Kroeber House. Steven Finacom,



Wurts-Lenfest House. Anthony Bruce, 2021.

342. Wurts-Lenfest House Builder unknown (1901) 2523 Piedmont Avenue

Structure of Merit, designated: 3 February 2022

This well-preserved High-Peaked Colonial Revival house is the first of its type to be designated a historic resource in Berkeley. It is one of four adjacent houses constructed in 1901 by developers Myron and Rebecca Wurts (two of the others survive at 2522 and 2524 Warring Street).

The architect's identity isn't known, but it's possible that the house could have been designed by the well-known and prolific architect A.W. Smith, who popularized the style in the East Bay, and who designed a High-Peaked Colonial Revival house for Mrs. Wurts's brother at 2820 San Pablo Avenue. The Landmarks Preservation Commission found that the house exhibits architectural merit as a good example of High-Peaked Colonial Revival, dating to the period during which this regional style emerged, and retaining all of its character-defining features, including original design, materials, and workmanship.

The Wurts-Lenfest House is also significant as the longtime home and workplace of the political activist David Mundstock (1948–2020), who was a key figure in the development of progressive politics and government in Berkeley—the author of major reforms in elections, fair representation, and local government structure and policies—and who also compiled invaluable records and analysis of this era as a community historian.