

# DIGGING WEST OAKLAND

*What archaeologists found under the Cypress Freeway*



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# DIGGING WEST OAKLAND

## *What Archaeologists Found Under The Cypress Freeway*

I-880 CYPRESS FREEWAY REPLACEMENT PROJECT

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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District 4  
Oakland, California

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*West Oakland in about 1870. This bird's-eye view by Snow & Roos shows the area's neighborhoods and local landmarks.*

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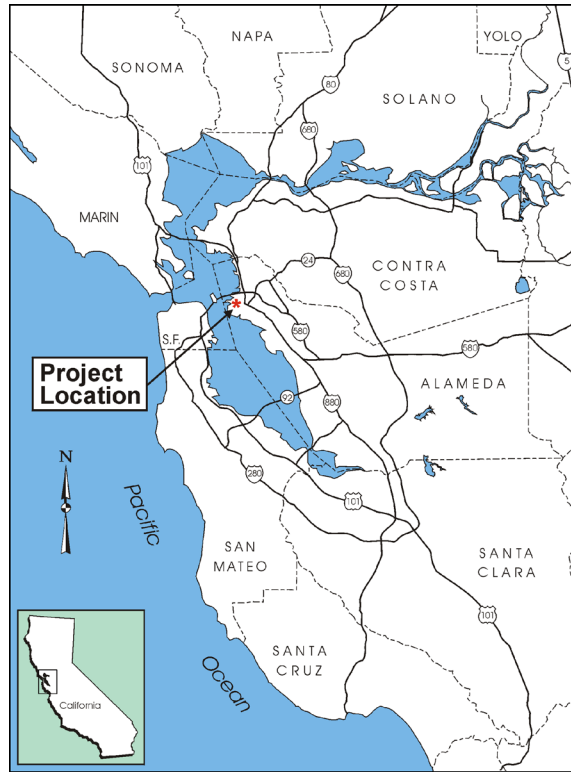
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# INTRODUCING THE CYPRESS PROJECT



*ACROSS THE BAY from San Francisco, the Cypress Archaeology Project was located in West Oakland, California.*

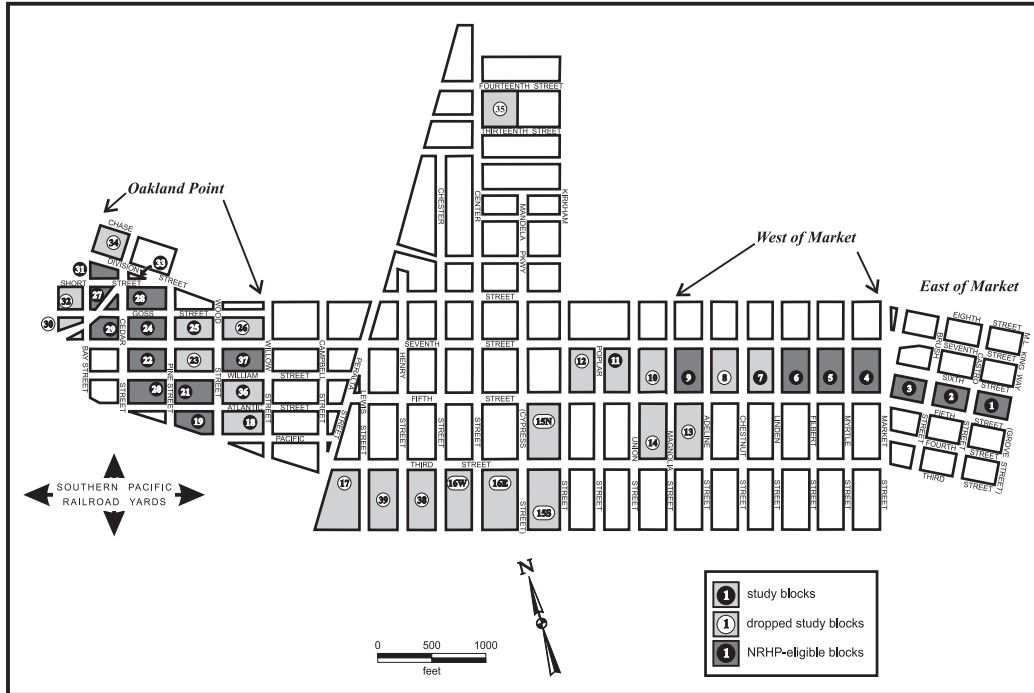
## What is the Cypress Project?

Just as the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's were taking the field to play the third game of the World Series, a 6.4-magnitude earthquake shook the San Francisco Bay area. It was 5:04 p.m. on 17 October 1989.

The quake destroyed over 1.25 miles of the double-decker Cypress Freeway, which funneled traffic through West Oakland to the San Francisco Bay Bridge and north to Berkeley. With vehicles and their passengers sandwiched between the collapsed roadways, local people came out of their homes to search the debris and lower survivors to safety.

Later, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) worked with local officials to rebuild on a different alignment, reuniting a neighborhood that had been split when the original freeway was built in the 1950s. Approval of this new route planted the seed of the Cypress Archaeology Project.

As federal funds were used in the \$1-billion freeway construction project, Caltrans had to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This law required the agency to identify any important archaeological remains that would be destroyed by construction and to preserve the information they contained. This booklet is the last of several technical and popular products created by Caltrans to tell the story of how this public agency, together with archaeologists from Sonoma State University, came to study the 48 city blocks slated for construction, and what they found there.



*CYPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY Project blocks, West Oakland. In 72 weeks of fieldwork (between April 1994 and May 1996), archaeologists excavated over 2,500 archaeological features dating between 1853 and 1911 from the path of the reconstructed Cypress freeway. Nearly one-half million artifacts were found. Historical research enabled the archaeologists to link these items to specific West Oakland families who used and discarded them. Cypress was one of the largest urban archaeology projects ever accomplished on the West Coast.*



*PLANNING THE CYPRESS FIELDWORK. Janet Pape, Caltrans Archaeology Project Manager, and Jack Mc Ilroy, Sonoma State University's Field Director, look over plans for the new freeway in the archaeology field office. Barely keeping in front of construction, the archaeology team had to work quickly, maintaining their schedule to ensure that the much-needed freeway was not slowed down on their account. (Courtesy of Caltrans)*

## All about this Booklet

The new freeway route crossed Oakland's historic core, giving archaeologists access to a wealth of remains during their 1994-1996 fieldwork: more than 2,500 archaeological features containing nearly 500,000 artifacts were uncovered. These were objects used by families attracted by the promise of California from throughout the United States and a dozen foreign countries.

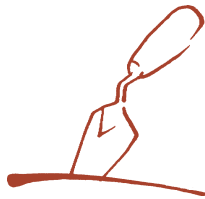
We present this booklet to make some of our findings available to Californians in general and the people of West Oakland in particular. Their predecessors are the people described here, and the story we tell is of their neighborhood.

This booklet features 12 diverse themes that run the gamut from the Chinese laundry on Seventh Street to the bric-a-brac that graced the mantelpieces of railroad porters. Each



presentation is designed to be self-contained—there is no need to read them in sequence or to plow dutifully from cover to cover. Each theme takes up exactly two facing pages, so that the reader can open this pamphlet at random and explore a single topic...or several.

For those who want to dig deeper, the concluding section of the booklet lists the technical reports in which these themes are described and interpreted.



*LARGE-SCALE ARCHAEOLOGY on Seventh Street. Archaeologists used a backhoe-loader to expose the surface of a large portion of this city block adjacent to the elevated BART tracks and close to the U.S. Postal Service facility. Here they uncovered building remains, wells, and other features from West Oakland's past.*

## The Jack London Connection

Jack London (1876-1916) may be West Oakland's most famous son.

Born across the bay in San Francisco, he grew up in a series of rented houses in Oakland, including one long-demolished building at 807 Pine Street, whose site became part of the Cypress Archaeology Project area. The spot was thoroughly examined by archaeologists but, alas, nothing remained that could be linked to its illustrious former resident. Many of the artifacts shown in this booklet were used in the 1880s and 1890s when London's family lived in Oakland.

London is one of the most widely read authors of all time. Best known today for his fiction, such as "Call of the Wild," London also wrote about the atrocious social conditions in turn-of-the-century industrial cities. His effect on Americans' perception of these problems was enormous; some have compared his clout to that of Charles Dickens half a century before.

Jack London's intense dislike of his hometown is not frequently mentioned in Oakland. A far from affluent boyhood and the poverty he saw around him molded the attitudes that filled his work and came to influence the opinions of a nation.

Conditions in turn-of-the-century industrial cities were harsh. And writing from first-hand experience, Jack London was hardly a disinterested observer. A vigorous socialist, London wanted to expose the flaws of capitalism to bring on what he believed would be the inevitable revolution. His influential writings still have the power to mold opinion. Historical archaeology, however, tells a subtly different story of life in West Oakland from Jack London's account with its ideological and psychological baggage.



*JACK LONDON, one of West Oakland's most famous residents. Shown here in 1893 at the age of 17, Jack was itching to leave Oakland. Before becoming famous as a writer, Jack was a cannery worker, hobo, and journalist. He was jailed for vagrancy, sailed to Japan and Korea, slogged up the steep Chilkoot Pass in the Klondike gold rush, and eventually settled in rural northern California. An outspoken socialist who ruled over his ranch workers like a monarch, Jack London was an idiosyncratic character and very much a man of his era. (Courtesy of California Department of Parks and Recreation)*



*A SAN FRANCISCAN by birth, Jack London as a child lived here at 807 Pine Street, immediately adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railyards and within one of the Cypress Archaeology Project blocks. To make ends meet, Jack's mother, Flora, worked as a seamstress and took in boarders. Young Jack contributed to the household upkeep through a variety of jobs, from setting up pins in a bowling alley and sweeping saloon floors, to stealing oysters from growers in the San Francisco Bay. (Courtesy of California Department of Parks and Recreation)*

What were living conditions like for the people of West Oakland? Did laboring families eat so much worse than middle-class people? Indeed, were working-class people so very different from their wealthier neighbors? What did people have in their houses? What did poor people do if they became sick? Were ethnic groups firmly separated? These are some of the questions we seek to answer.

### **What is Archaeology?**

*Archaeo* means “old” and *logos* means “study,” so the word archaeology literally means “the study of old things.” But the origin of the word hardly scratches the surface of what modern archaeology is all about.

Archaeologists study the human past through the artifacts that people left behind them. And most importantly, they study these objects in relation to each other as part of the archaeological sites where they were discovered. At its most basic, an archaeological site is simply a place where artifacts are found in their original context. But more than that: sites contain evidence of how people lived, of what their daily lives were like, how they interacted with the world around them, and how all this changed over time.

Most California archaeologists are specialists in either prehistory—the Native American past—or historical archaeology, which covers the more recent era for which there are written records. Historical archaeologists put these documentary sources together with the actual remains (the artifacts people used) to create a more rounded picture of life at this place in the past.

These discoveries are not mere tales of a dead past. Because we understand the present day through what has gone before, archaeology teaches important lessons for California’s future.

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## And what is Historical Archaeology?

The Cypress Project is a case study in historical archaeology.

The artifacts and major happenings of the recent past are familiar to us, but there is still much to learn. Historic records provide us with a rich source of information, but these accounts are incomplete. The stories of ordinary people, both native-born and immigrant, and how they adjusted to life in the urban West are still to be told.

Although historical archaeology focuses on the material world, it isn't just the study of artifacts. Its method is to bring together evidence from historic documents, artifacts, oral history, and even surviving architecture to create a more complete and rounded image than is possible by using any of these sources alone.

There's no need to dig in the ground to confirm that the terminus of the transcontinental railroad was built in Oakland in 1869, but the pages of this booklet show how archaeology helps us understand how this event affected people's lives. It is history written "from the bottom up."



*DIGGING A WELL—from the outside in. Until quite late in the 19th century, West Oaklanders had to get their water from backyard wells. This well at 812 Castro Street was filled with household refuse by the Brady family after the arrival of piped water in the 1880s. More than 15 feet deep, it would have been dangerous to excavate from the inside. The solution was to dig it in 5-foot sections within a safety trench exposed by a backhoe, working from the outside in and exposing the well like a chimney. The well yielded more than 1,100 artifacts ranging from food bones from the family's dinner to the tableware from England on which it had been served, as well as objects of cloth and wood that had been preserved by the wet environment. These photos show the exposure and excavation of a well, clockwise from the lower left.*

# A FOUL AND PRIVATE PLACE:

## *How outhouses became time capsules*

*“It was a greasy, filthy sink. A smell came up from the outlet. He took no notice of it.”*

Jack London, *The Apostate*, 1906

**Many** of the important groups of artifacts found by Cypress Project archaeologists came from abandoned backyard outhouses. Thrown out as the trash of daily life, these food bones, broken parlor ornaments, and all the rest, are our window into past lives.

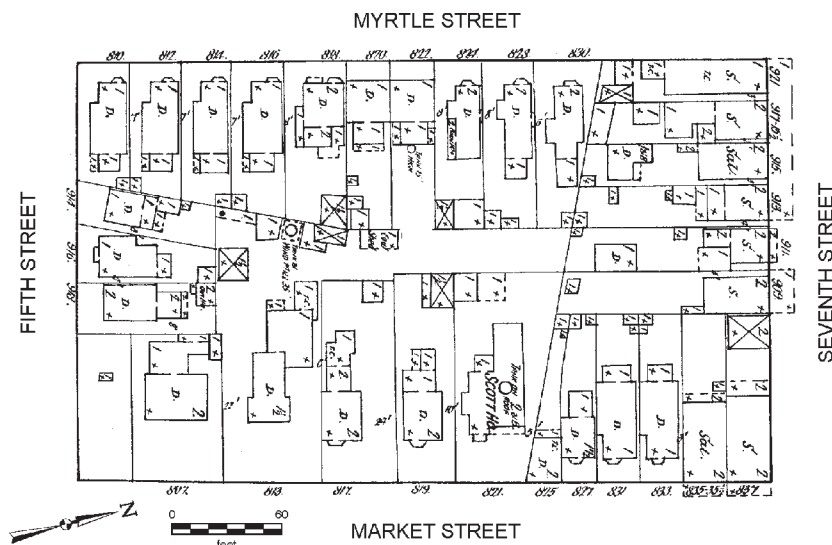
But how did all these things end up in the ground? And when did these outhouses go out of use?

Before the familiar flush toilet came into being, there was the chamber pot. Found even on 17th-century archaeological sites in New England, this useful container was employed (as needed) mainly at night. It was emptied the next morning into what early Americans called the “necessary”: a hole in the ground, a few feet deep, surmounted by a seat and concealed in an unassuming wooden building. Some privies were lined so that they could be cleaned out; alternatively one could dig a new hole and scoot the outhouse over to its new place.

To excavate a new privy hole was easy work in the sandy soil of West Oakland—as was digging a well. Unfortunately, both tasks were often done within a



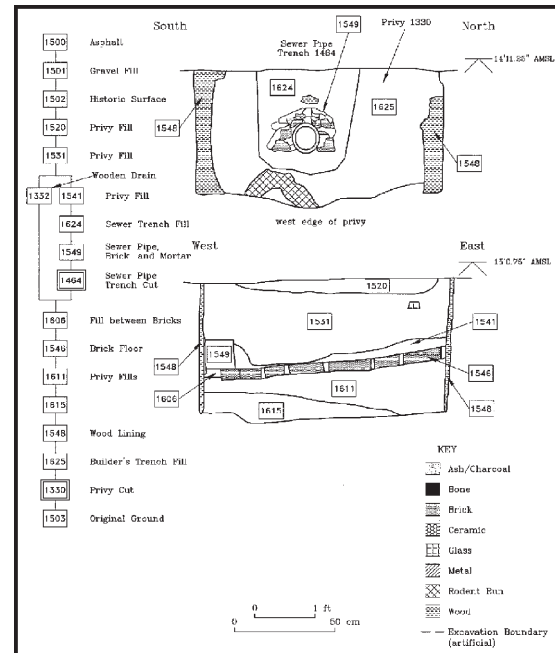
few feet of each other with predictable consequences for public health. Before about 1880, most people in West Oakland were connected to neither the municipal sewer nor the public water system. Earth privies and wells were the order of the day, and Oakland Point and the East/West of Market neighborhoods in West Oakland were the least sanitary in the city. The link between sanitation (or the lack of it), health, and abandoning the privy is particularly striking on the block bounded by Market/5th/7th/Myrtle streets. Here the proximity of livestock, backyard privies, and wells coincided with many deaths from typhoid fever around 1880.



The new scientific view that diseases like typhoid were spread through microscopic organisms was taking hold, and Oakland's crusading Health Officer, Dr. Woolsey, was determined to stamp out the twin evils of privy and private well. That the new City sewers dumped raw effluent into Lake Merritt and San Francisco Bay was a problem to be solved later and by others. First things first.

Dr. Woolsey's campaign was a resounding success. Archaeology shows that homeowners quickly abandoned their wells and replaced the much-hated privies with toilets that flushed clean and odor-free—leaving backyard holes that needed filling. With municipal refuse collection still some years away, these were ideal places for both the trash of everyday life and the kind of housecleaning that accompanies major transitions, such as moving or a death in the family.

And this is why so many of our Cypress Project collections date to the 1880s. It was during this brief period when the ability of people to buy so many new durable objects (brought on by new mass production and marketing techniques) coincided with a need to dispose of their old ones. In a sense, this kind of urban archaeology has a terminal quality: since these conditions occurred only once, Oakland's archaeological record is limited in time as well as the number of collections that were created. With the arrival of citywide refuse collection the moment passed, mourned only by archaeologists.



ABOVE: Digging a feature correctly means being sure to keep artifacts together that were found in the same layer of soil. Here, a pit is being cross-sectioned. Half of the fill is excavated so that the sliced-through layers of soil and artifacts in the portion that remains can be examined and drawn. Each white tag on the cut face shows a different layer. In this way, archaeologists can work out how the pit was filled, how long it took, and whether it happened quickly or over a long period of time.

TOP RIGHT: This pit, finally backfilled in the 1880s, contained eight layers of fill. The cross-section drawings (taken north-south and east-west) show how this backyard pit was converted from a standard hole-in-the-ground privy to a water closet connected by sewer pipe. The relationships between the various layers of soil and construction phases are shown in the matrix on the left.

FACING PAGE UPPER RIGHT: Chamber pots were a fact of life before the era of flush toilets. The nighttime walk to the privy was a dreaded experience, particularly for children, so each family member would be equipped with their own chamber pot to be used in time of need. These three vessels were discarded whole in the disused privy at 1820 Atlantic Street. With their dissimilar sizes and styles—one plain, one with a molded handle, and one of annular ware—these pots would have been easily recognized by their respective owners.

FACING PAGE LOWER CENTER: Running along rear lot lines on this 1889 map are the small buildings that covered backyard privies. By this time, with the arrival of City sewers, most were abandoned and became perfect places to dump unwanted household refuse. The Sanborn Company mapped West Oakland's homes and businesses for insurance companies that, as today, assess premiums on the basis of risk: the owner of a wooden house next to a dynamite factory should expect his rate to be high.

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## REPAIR, REUSE, RECYCLE: *Making do in West Oakland*

*“I could even make a junk man weep when I had dealings with him. Other boys called me in to sell for them their collections of bottles, rags, old iron...”*

Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, 1913

**Oakland’s** New Century Club opened its “salvage bureau” just before the 19th century turned to the 20th. The Club’s charitable ladies would collect donations from more affluent neighborhoods—everything from buckets and baskets to dishes, lamps, and clothes—and repair and resell them at nominal prices to West Oakland’s poor.

But the Club had competition in the form of local dealers in secondhand goods who would roam the neighborhood in horse and wagon buying rags, old clothes, newspaper, bottles, and anything else that could be re-sold at a profit. In the mid-19th century, there had been no disgrace in wearing quality secondhand clothes and since California’s factories could not keep up with the demand for new goods, the trade in “junk” flourished. Jack London described how neighborhood boys, as well as adults who simply needed the money, would scavenge for things to sell to the junk man.

But how much did people actually recycle to the secondhand dealer? And were poorer people (who needed the money more) especially careful about what valuable items they threw out? Did people reuse and repair artifacts? Since archaeology can reveal what people actually did rather than what others *said* about them, the household trash pit is the place to look for answers to these questions.

Manufactured clothes were expensive, so alterations and repairs were done at home. Archaeologists found objects from the sewing basket—needles, thimbles, thread spools, and the rest—in the household refuse of homes at all ethnicities and all levels of wealth. Sewing was an important symbol as well as a practical skill: Repairing the hem of a sheet or darning a sock showed a woman’s commitment to the Victorian values of thrift and industriousness, and added to

her family’s respectability in the eyes of the neighbors.

There are many archaeological examples of West Oakland families reusing artifacts made for other purposes. The Finley family from Oakland Point had a huge barrel-shaped jar from southern China that, at one time, probably held imported sugar. The Finleys may have used this versatile pot to capture rainwater, cure pickles, or store flour. At 1768 Atlantic Street, housepainter John Weisheimer used a motley assemblage of glass bottles to store paint pigment, but threw out over 70 other whole bottles.

With money to be made from a small effort, we’d expect West Oaklanders like the Weisheimers to have been enthusiastic re-sellers of glass bottles, and to a degree this was true: in general, the refuse of poorer people contained fewer whole (and therefore salable) bottles than their wealthier neighbors. But many whole bottles were simply thrown out in the trash by working who surely could have made good use of the cash. Hotels were even more inclined to ignore this potential source of income: institutions such as the Railroad Exchange Hotel on Seventh Street threw out whole bottles at more than twice the rate of residences.

As the 19th century drew to a close, manufactured goods that had been hard to come by and expensive only a few years earlier were becoming plentiful. Objects that the thrifty of a previous generation had hoarded were now candidates for the trash. As new ready-made clothes became affordable to almost all, the symbolic meaning of sewing and repair work began to change. For a woman, to make her clothes for herself and her children was still a mark of “true womanhood.” But to buy ready-made goods was to show that she could afford the alternative.



LEFT: Toys from a Pine Street cottage. Among the dolls, tea sets, marbles, and other reminders of childhood are two boats with wooden masts, which had been fabricated from old cigar boxes.

RIGHT: Young seamstresses at Oakland's New Century Club. After a girl had completed the nine "grades" of the basic sewing class, she would graduate to the garment class pictured here. At this point she could make an item of clothing for herself for as little as 10 to 15 cents. (New Century Club 1901)



ABOVE: Carpenter Thomas Stevens built three nearly identical houses at 1813, 1815, and 1817 Short Street in the mid-1880s. His family made their home at 1817 Short Street, shown here, through 1915. Like many small West Oakland houses built on relatively large lots, this home was remodeled and enlarged with rear additions over the years, as families adapted it to their needs. Some architectural historians call this an Almost Polite house, as its floor plan reflects the formal layout of larger Victorian homes. The building was moved by Caltrans before the construction of the new Cypress Freeway—another example of re-use.

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## HOPE IN A BOTTLE:

### *Sickness, health, and finding a cure for what ails you*

*“Their grasp on life is indeed precarious, their mortality excessive, their infant death rate appalling.”*

Jack London, *Wanted: A New Law of Development*, 1901

**Tuberculosis.** Its symptoms—fever, loss of appetite, coughing up blood—were dreaded, for everyone knew that the outcome was usually a wasting decline that led to death.

Largely treatable in modern North America, 150 years ago “consumption” (as TB was known at the time) was one of the most feared diseases. Since Oakland lacked the tightly packed living situations of the major industrial cities of the time, the infection rate was low: half the rate of New York and one-third of Paris. Yet TB was still the most common cause of death in late-19th-century Oakland and “cures” abounded, for a price.

After a German scientist announced that TB was an infection, not a hereditary illness, proprietary medicines multiplied rapidly. For if the germ that caused consumption could be caught, it could (presumably) be killed. Self-medication provided hope, but not much else. It’s clear that these nostrums were widely popular, but how particular TB sufferers used them and in what combinations is largely unknown. Through archaeology we have been able to document the sad case of Michael O’Brien and his attempts to ward off the disease.

Historical records show that O’Brien, a railroad engineer, lived with his family at 881 Cedar Street



until death ended his 19-month-long illness in May 1900. The O’Brien family’s refuse contains consumption cures as well other tonics that Michael may have taken to counteract the side-effects of the patchwork of over-the-counter drugs: Pitcher’s Castoria, Citrate of Magnesia, Ayer’s Pills, Kelly’s Bitters, Jamaica Ginger, Joy’s Sarsaparilla, and Jayne’s Tonic Vermifuge.

But Michael O’Brien put his hope in Shiloh’s Cure, the leading anti-consumptive potion of the era. The product’s money-back guarantee, however, was a painful irony, for many of its ingredients were as threatening to Michael’s health as the disease itself.





While the chloroform and morphine would have quelled his nagging cough and helped him sleep, they also hastened his death. Hydrocyanic acid also helped with his cough—but it is a toxic chemical that can be fatal at a high dose. Even “natural” ingredients such as lobelia could have had harmful effects: taken in excess (and no physician monitored the use of these potions), it had serious side-effects, even death.

But drugs were not only used to treat the sick. In the 19th century, as today, standards of physical beauty included an ideal body weight. Lillian Russell and other well-rounded American beauties were becoming outmoded. The new woman was slender, like Lillie Langtry and the Gibson Girl. How could the overweight achieve that willowy profile?

Allan’s Anti-Fat was a classic cure-all sold in North America and Great Britain. Touted for various health

benefits, its principal claim was to help with weight loss: “Taken according to directions, it will reduce a fat person from 2 to 5 pounds per week,” or so it was claimed in advertisements. These newspaper ads evidently influenced one member of the German-born Frank household of 818 Magnolia Street: their refuse contained 13 embossed bottles that had once held this concoction. Fortunately for the health of the patient, most of this remedy was inert. One ingredient, the extract of bladderwrack seaweed, was a popular (if ineffective) obesity remedy of the era.

To say that Shiloh’s Cure, Dr. King’s, and Allan’s Anti-Fat offered no benefit may be too simplistic. For aside from their sometime dubious analgesic qualities, they offered hope through the power of suggestion.

FACING PAGE UPPER RIGHT: *Dr. McMunn’s Elixir of Opium was a common treatment for a variety of ailments, both mundane and life-threatening. Archaeologists found 14 bottles of this nostrum among the refuse at 881 Cedar Street, where Edward Murphy, a prosperous butcher, died in 1879 after an attack of typhoid fever. Opiates were quite legal at the time and were the active ingredients in a variety of medicines whose side effects were often worse than the illnesses they claimed to cure.*

FACING PAGE LOWER CENTER: *Tuberculosis was a killer in West Oakland. All too often, the harsh cough was the prelude to an early death. Dr. King’s and Shiloh’s Consumptive Cure were popular tonics containing, among other things, morphine, peppermint, chloroform, and alcohol. The “Cure” was not well-named. Yet patients took comfort where they could find it, trying to endure what they could not cure.*

TOP RIGHT: *Allan’s Anti-Fat was a very popular nostrum throughout the English-speaking world. While its ingredients (mostly water and vegetable extracts) would have been ineffective, the reportedly foul taste of this potion may have functioned as an appetite suppressant. Given the carbohydrate-heavy diet of 19th-century Americans, the effort to reduce was often a losing battle.*



BOTTOM RIGHT: *The Gibson Girl’s willowy form set the standard for feminine beauty in late-19th-century America. Gone was the voluptuous shape of earlier eras; thin was now in. Corsets and dieting were the only ways to achieve this ideal.*

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## HUNTIN' AND FISHIN': *Food from the bay and the hills*

“Everything was free. . . . Small boys fished with poles from the rocks with no one to drive them away, gathering mussels from the rocks at the water, cooking them by placing them among the coals on a fire. . . . They tasted particularly good.”

Jack London, *Valley of Moon*, 1913

### Where did people get their food?

Mid-19th-century West Oakland was quite a rural place. Sitting on the edge of the bay, it had many tree-filled parcels that had not yet been cleared for homes and industry. Before the arrival of the Central Pacific Railroad, there were ample opportunities for gathering shellfish, gleaning seasonal fruits and berries from the unfenced land, and hunting waterfowl.

Guns were far less common in mid- and late-19th-century America than they are today. Yet nearly half of the refuse features from the Cypress Project contained ammunition (a shell case or a cartridge) or a firearm. A member of the relatively well-off Morgan/Mullen household at 819 Market Street may have used their guns for hunting; the remains of four game birds were found in their disused privy: two

large ducks, a marsh or dabbling duck, and a merganser.

Deer or elk remains showed up in the refuse of eight households, including two African American families who had fled the South before the Civil War. It is not widely known that many enslaved people on southern plantations provided themselves with meat by hunting. We can't know whether these Oakland families continued this tradition or bought this meat from a butcher . . . but they clearly had a preference for wild game.

One of the earliest collections of artifacts from the Cypress project is from the Gohsen family in the early 1870s. Charles Gohsen, a prosperous merchant, and his wife, Madeline, lived in a large house on Seventh Street not far from the bayshore. While the family ate beef and domestic poultry (which they



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ABOVE RIGHT: *Canning jars were essential in the era before refrigeration. But more than just a practical necessity, canning was seen as a duty. Every respectable housewife was expected to process fruits and vegetables as they came in season for her family's use. This assortment of jars and lids, which were left by the Weisheimer family of 1768 Atlantic Street, represents some of the biggest names in the canning business: Mason, Consolidated Fruit Jar, and Hemingray Glass.*



BELOW RIGHT: *West from Cedar Street towards Bay Street in 1925. The first two-story building on the right is the former Gohsen residence. The next building is an extension of the Railroad Exchange Hotel built in 1890, while the peaked roof of John Frese's original rooming house for railroad workers is visible at the end of the block. (Courtesy of Vernon J. Sappers)*



ACING PAGE: *This 1857 map shows early West Oakland as semi-rural. The area of large tree-filled and undeveloped parcels of land, good for gleaning roadside fruits, was just a short walk to the shellfish, fish, and waterfowl of the San Francisco Bay. Well into the 20th century, families continued to use their backyards to raise small animals for food—remains of chickens and even the occasional cow were found by Cypress Project archaeologists.*

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may have raised themselves), they also enjoyed wild birds, whose bones filled their refuse: goose, duck, scoter, coot, wood duck, diving duck, pheasant, quail, pigeon, seagull, loon, cormorant, plovers/surfbirds, and sandpipers. No other collection contained this huge variety, which probably reflects the early date. Twenty years later, hopeful hunters had to venture much further afield. With the arrival of industry and Oakland's huge population increase, the conditions for hunting declined rapidly.

Oldtimers also recalled that fishing with rod and line was an affordable pastime that became an important source of food during tough times. Smelt and perch were said to be plentiful and a "*favorite amusement of clerks and others who cannot go to the salmon rivers of the north.*" Among the refuse of Henry Hansen, a professional fisherman who lived on William Street in the early 1880s, were the remains of more than 30 fish, including several species that could have been taken from one of the many West

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Oakland piers: tomcod, jacksmelt, white croaker, black surfperch, and starry flounder.

Silt that washed down from Sierra gold mines, industrial pollution, contamination from sewers—all these degraded the habit of birds and fish, but native mollusks were hit hardest by the worsening water quality. West Oaklanders' refuse deposits show the decline of the native Pacific oyster and bay mussel, which had been plentiful in the San Francisco Bay. Mollusks easily became contaminated by the sewage that emptied directly onto the mudflats below the Southern Pacific pier. Bay clams, wrote Jack London, were "*death and destruction.*" They were one cause of the 1893 typhoid epidemic that sickened more than 4,000 Oaklanders, killing 42.

In spite of the danger, fishing and gathering shellfish were popular activities well into the 20th century, for poor adults as well as enterprising boys who sold their catch to unsuspecting local housewives.

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## LIVING IT UP: *Alcohol in wine, beer, and “medicine”*

*“Men still congregated in saloons. They were the poor man’s clubs and they were the only clubs to which I had access.”*

Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, 1913

**To** judge by their artifacts, drinking alcohol was chief among West Oaklanders’ pleasures.

Jack London may have expressed the thoughts of many when he described drinking as both his favorite pastime and the cause of his worst suffering. Advocates of temperance, never strong in West Oakland, were part of the same group of social reformers that established Oakland’s New Century Club to break immigrants and the working class of their undesirable habits. The workers, however, had other ideas.

Although temperance was never completely embraced, alcohol (like tobacco) was largely off-limits to women who aspired to middle-class respectability. The acceptable alternative was a “temperance tonic,” including the concoction known as bitters. This brew of herbs and spices was consumed in prodigious quantities as a cure-all—as well as for the 44 percent alcohol it contained.

As for a man, an Oaklander’s social class affected his drinking habits. Middle-class people, such as the Mann family of 654 Fifth Street, bought larger quantities of wine and champagne than their working-class neighbors. Other artifacts from the Manns’ 1880s refuse are evidence of the family’s large and complex table setting, which included a variety of differently shaped glasses for wine and other drinks. For a respectable family like the Manns to maintain their social standing, it would have been important to entertain in the appropriate style. Serving champagne, wines, spirits, and cordials in just the right kind of glasses showed their guests that, although the family was not as wealthy as in former days, they had maintained the expected standards.

Although John Quinn of Filbert Street held a decent job as railroad fireman, he would not have been considered the social equal of the Manns. Bottles from the Quinn family’s refuse show that they too

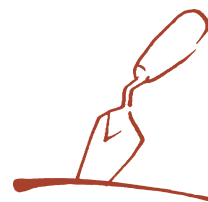
enjoyed wine, as well as ale imported from Great Britain in special ceramic bottles. There is no evidence, however, that the Irish-born Quinns’ ale was favored primarily by immigrants from the British Isles.

The Polish-Jewish Barnet/Jacobs household threw out literally dozens of these distinctive ale containers; and even the Chinese workers at the Seventh Street laundry seem to have enjoyed the beer, which would have been several times more expensive than locally brewed lager drawn from the keg in one of West Oakland’s numerous saloons.

Despite the reformers’ best efforts, immigrants brought their traditional preferences to West Oakland, including a partiality for familiar drinks. The Chinese launderers’ taste, while extending to tonic bitters and British ale, included Chinese rice wine. This brandy-like drink, known as Ng Ka Py, was brought from China in globular ceramic bottles and contained as much as 49 percent alcohol.

Some Italian and Greek families, not satisfied with merely drinking, reestablished the familiar practice of their homelands and made wine at home. Archaeologists working in what had been the backyard of 718 Fifth Street found three shallow pits that had been entirely filled with grape seeds, both crushed and whole. This unique discovery represents over 3,000 pounds of grapes, enough to make two to three barrels of wine.

Salut!





*ABOVE: The Mint Saloon, at Seventh and Pine streets, was popular with the residents of the adjacent Pullman Hotel. The owner of an upstairs rooming house—of which West Oakland had many—would often run a saloon on the ground floor of his building. As Jack London details in his book *John Barleycorn: Alcoholic Memories*, the saloon was social club and family, a complete way of life to the multitudes of single men who moved west in the late 19th century to find work on the railroad.*



*ABOVE: Hostettler's Bitters was a curious blend of alcohol and herbs. Although it was marketed as a general aid to good health, it can be thought of as a pre-mixed cocktail. Respectable 19th-century women who supported the temperance movement were particularly fond of this concoction, for they could enjoy the 44 percent alcohol under cover of its claim to mitigate various "female maladies." Hostettler's bottles were found in the archaeological collections of many West Oakland families.*



*ABOVE: Chinese rice wine has been shipped and served in these brown-glazed stoneware bottles for centuries. This beverage can still be bought in very similar containers in Oakland stores that cater to ethnic Chinese. Made in factories in southern China, each bottle was assembled from three separate parts and glazed before it was kiln-fired.*

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## BRIC-A-BRAC: *Ornamenting the West Oakland Home*

*“The poor . . . having offered to them only the inferior grades [of art] . . . live unlovely lives.”*

Jack London, *What Communities Lose by the Competitive System*, 1900

**The** figure of a capped, dignified woman sitting astride her chamber pot was an unexpected find in the possessions of a 19th-century family. Or was it?

In fact, two porcelain statuettes engaged in this basic act were discovered in household refuse dumped by the family of paperhanger Harry Chapman in the back yard of their Myrtle Street house in the early 1890s.

Archaeologists found nearly 1,500 pieces of bric-a-brac like these ‘humorous’ figures on the Cypress Project. Vases and ornamental plates, molded boxes and figurines of glass or pottery, and other objets d’art, these decorative items graced our West Oakland families’ homes. In this era, most families who could afford it set aside a room, the parlor, or part of one as public space where the family’s values and social aspirations were put on display. One West Oakland resident remembered that her mother’s parlor was used only on special occasions; in its somber atmosphere and clutter of artifacts, the room was “*like a museum*” she recalled.

A black-glazed statue of Abraham Lincoln would have had pride of place in the Linden Street parlor of Ireland-born Patrick and Ellen Berry in the 1880s. Although fragmentary, it is clear that the piece was of Lincoln alone. Without the familiar freed slave at the president’s feet, the object emphasizes Lincoln’s role as the preserver of the Union, rather than as emancipator of the enslaved. In the East, Irish immigrants were known for their hostility toward African Americans. Yet in West Oakland—certainly no haven of equality—the two groups were able to coexist.

Unique and exotic natural objects were valued in the parlor as curiosities. On a shelf might have sat seashells and fragments of coral. Under a glass dome, stuffed birds were fixed forever to their perch. To



the modern eye, the scene has a dismal, faintly sinister, air. Yet to West Oaklanders, these objectively dead bits and pieces of nature were artful reminders of the forces of nature that the 19th century had battled with and forced into submission.

Among the defeated were California Indians. California’s 1870s Modoc War was long over. Indians, no longer a threat and largely invisible to urban Californians, were sinking into legend. Their artifacts were now novelties suitable for display; exotica from a time before time. The children of John and Katie Taylor of 768 Fifth Street may have collected their nine carefully shaped stone net weights from one of the prehistoric sites that ring the San Francisco Bay. Although we do not know for sure if the stones were displayed, they would have fitted in well with the mixture of found natural objects and factory made knick-knacks that sat in splendor in a thousand West Oakland parlors.

Other exotic goods suitable for display included a Chinese-made ginger jar, found at the bottom of Annie Brady’s well at 812 Castro Street. Turn-of-

the-century taste-makers encouraged the display of this sort of object as an antidote to the crude, mass-produced items that poured from kilns into the parlors of America. The piece evoked “the Orient” and its mystery, splendor, and sensuality. It did not, apparently, evoke negative images of its makers’ kinsmen, Chinese Oaklanders.

Harry Chapman’s dignified chamber-pot figures are in curious contrast to the unsanitary conditions in his Myrtle Street backyard, where an open privy pit attracted rats that gnawed on the refuse. This was the era when these facilities were giving way to flush toilets. With the demise of the familiar trip to the outhouse, the family could afford to laugh at the old-fashioned practice represented by the chamber pot.

*FACING PAGE: Enthroned on their chamber pots, these figurines represent a practice that was decidedly out of step with the early 1890s, when they were discarded by someone in Harry Chapman’s family. Toilet humor, though we might not expect it in Victorian America, was hardly new: a 17th-century chamber pot found by archaeologists in New England reminded the user to “Treat me nice, keep me clean, and I’ll not tell what I have seen.”*

*TOP LEFT: The Lufkin family discarded these decorative pieces into a pit at the rear of their rental home at 817 Market Street in about 1875. The figurines and vases may have been displayed in the family’s parlor mantel while the elegant basket would have held fresh fruit. These expensive porcelain items, imported from Europe, show the purchasing power and respectable taste of Charles Lufkin, an Oakland police inspector with a degree in Law.*

*BOTTOM LEFT: Bud vases, as their name implies, were used to hold individual rose buds. We may speculate that this pair was displayed in the parlor. They were not, however, the possessions of some wealthy and stylish family but were among the items thrown out as refuse from a working-class household. This mixed group of African Americans and Irish lived at 1774 Atlantic Street, close to the railroad yards where most worked.*

*BELOW: Nine Native American net weights may have been collected by the Taylor children of 768 Fifth Street while exploring Shellmound Park in nearby Emeryville. The San Francisco Bay is ringed with sites that contain evidence of thousands of years of occupation by Native peoples who used artifacts like these to catch water birds as well as fish.*



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## REBEKAH-AT-THE-WELL: A 19th-century icon

*“While Barry gulped 25-cent tea from a large and heavy mug, Mercedes sipped \$3 tea from a fine cup of Belleek, rose-tinted, fragile as all egg-shell.”*

Jack London, *Valley of the Moon*, 1913

**What** was the most commonly found artifact from the Cypress excavations?

Surprisingly, it was the Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot.

Archaeologists discovered over 120 collections of everyday artifacts during the Cypress Project—nearly one-half million objects. These artifacts represent dozens of West Oakland families of many ethnicities and nationalities, ranging from unemployed immigrant laborers to the well-to-do. Yet the lone object that more than one-quarter of this diverse group had in common was this inexpensive teapot.

The biblical story of Rebekah is not necessarily well-known today, but in 19th-century America it would have been almost universally familiar: The tale begins with the quest of Abraham’s servant for a suitable wife for Isaac, his master’s son. The mission leads him to a distant village where Rebekah obligingly offers to draw water from the well for both the servant and his camels. The servant knows immediately that this is the right girl and Rebekah’s hospitality is rewarded, initially with valuable gifts and, later, with marriage to an eligible kinsman, Isaac.

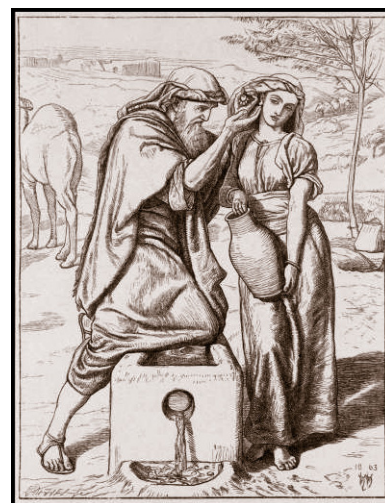
Although they were made at several different potteries, every Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot depicts the same scene: a modestly gowned young woman stands at a stone well with her bucket at the ready; sometimes a palm tree frames the scene to emphasize the original story’s exotic locale. Almost invariably, the teapots are of Rockingham-type earthenware, an inexpensive, yellow-bodied pottery covered with a variegated, yellow-brown glaze.

To many 19th-century Americans, Rebekah was the ideal woman. Kind and thoughtful, she was also an obedient and hospitable daughter, who carried out what she believed was God’s plan for her future without hesitation. A model of womanly virtue,

Rebekah was also the name of a society for the wives and daughters of members of the Order of Odd Fellows, an international fraternal group (with an Oakland chapter) devoted to charity and self-help.

In Victorian America, the Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot was a familiar, cozy item. Its place was deep in the private center of the family’s sacred space, the kitchen. This was the item used at family mealtimes. And for those with only one set of serving dishes, this was the pot brought out when friends and neighbors came to call.

Almost everyone knew that the image represented hospitality and Christian respectability wherever it was used. And archaeology shows that it was used in almost every section of society: They were owned by people from Canada, Ireland, Germany, Scotland, and England, as well as native-born Americans (half the African American households had one); the families of railroad laborers, a brakeman, porters, and a fireman had one, as did a plumber, paperhanger, carpenter, cooper, butcher, bridgebuilder, and dressmaker.







ABOVE: *Rebekah-at-the-Well* teapot, the most common type of artifact found during the Cypress Archaeology Project. From poor European immigrants to comfortably situated professionals, almost everyone it seems had to have one of these. The biblical Rebekah was understood by everyone as a symbol of wifely duty and hospitality.

RIGHT: *A Chinese Rebekah?* In this imitation of the well-known scene, a man in distinctively Chinese clothing takes the place of the biblical Rebekah at her well. Like the original, this one has the dark, variegated Rockingham-type glaze and is either an English or American product. Once used by the McLaughlin family of Cedar Street, this unique teapot reflects the popular late-19th-century interest in exotic scenes and artifacts by white Americans.



LEFT: Tea was served from the pot into elegant sets like this one, the property of John and Emma Weisheimer of 1768 Atlantic Street. This transfer-printed set in the *India Tree* design was made by W.T. Copeland and Sons in the pottery-making center of Staffordshire, England. Although American-made services were far less expensive, English products still had strong appeal for the consumer. They symbolized social superiority and good taste, qualities that Victorian America wished to express to their guests in important rituals like tea drinking.

FACING PAGE: "Rebekah at the Well" (1863) by William Holman Hunt. Rebekah was an icon of womanly duty, obedience, and hospitality in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century North America and Europe.

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# THOSE OLD-TIME RELIGIONS:

## *Witch bottles and rosaries in West Oakland*

*“Love of the right, desire for the right, unhappiness with anything less than the right—in short, right conduct is the prime factor of religion.”*

Jack London, *The Iron Heel*, 1908

**Almost** from the beginning, California was a state where an array of traditional and unconventional religions existed side by side. By 1906, a time when most of the United States conscientiously shut down every Sunday, over 60 percent of Californians belonged to no organized religious group at all.

Although most Californians who did affiliate were either Roman Catholic or Protestant, ethnic groups from the American South and throughout the world brought their religions to West Oakland. These ranged from Buddhism and Greek Orthodox Catholicism to Spiritualism (the religion of Jack London’s mother), as well as some folk practices that would have been frowned upon by mainstream religions.

It was in the late 19th century that Pope Leo XII spearheaded a new devotion to praying the rosary, and the heavily Irish population of West Oakland left several objects that testify to the success of his campaign. A rosary with a chain and bead were found in the refuse left by the O’Brien family of Goss Street, while a rosary medallion is among the artifacts from the household of James Carter, an African American porter. A rosary would not have been lightly discarded in the trash by any observant Catholic; these fragments were, presumably, from sets whose chains had broken.

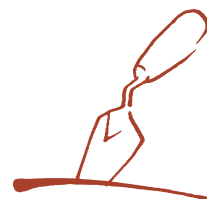
Some religious objects were made specifically for use in home devotion, which was enthusiastically encouraged by Protestant churches. An ornate pressed-glass bread plate used by the renters of 812 Brush Street quoted the Lord’s Prayer in its message, “GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.” The Lewis family of 883 Cedar Street had a decorated plate containing a quote from the gospel of John 4:15. The verses recount the story of Jesus at Jacob’s well, who tells a woman he meets that

*“whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give will never be thirsty again.”* These plates, along with other artifacts now long gone, mutely reinforced each day these families’ Christian identity and moral values.

Of the nearly one-half million artifacts found during the Cypress Project, witch balls and witch bottles are some of the most unusual. These small glass globes were hung in a window or kept on a stand to ward off evil and protect the family from disease. Wiping the ball clean each day symbolically “cleaned” the home of bad influences that were attracted to the object.

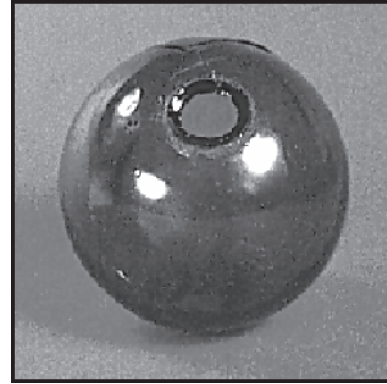
Witch balls were found in refuse from the Stewarts, an African American family who lived at 713 Sixth Street, as well as from the Irving home on the adjacent block of Sixth; perhaps significantly, the Irving collection also contains a crucifix. A tiny bottle containing iron nails and a heart-shaped piece of cloth is associated with the Weisheimer family of 1768 Atlantic Street. This may be a witch bottle, a device used to protect against witchcraft by deflecting spells back to those who cast them.

These witch bottles and balls are folk artifacts whose use was passed down within families and communities. They represent the largely unrecorded beliefs and practices brought to West Oakland by people from traditional societies both in North America and Europe.

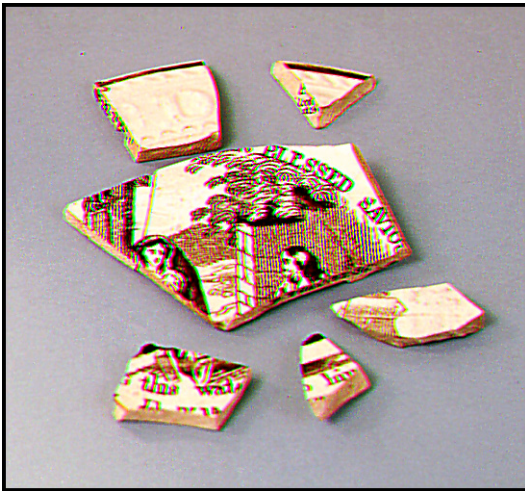




ABOVE: Irish bog oak jewelry and ornaments were popular in the 19th century. Made from fragments of wood darkened almost to black by burial in the peat bogs of western Ireland, bog oak was often worn as memento mori, to commemorate a death—an event that occurred with frequency to the cross’s owner, a member of the Mann family. The metal rosary cross and bead may have belonged to one of the O’Briens, Irish Catholics, who lived at 1817 Goss Street from the 1860s until 1924.



ABOVE: A witch ball was a charm against bad luck and evil influences. This example probably belonged to the Stewart family. Barbers and hairdressers, they owned a large house on Sixth Street from the 1880s.



ABOVE: Christian values were expressed by the Lewis family of Cedar Street in this plate with its brown printed scene and biblical allusion, “Our Blessed Savior... This Water...” John 4:15. This is a reference to Jesus’ meeting with a Samaritan woman at a well to whom he famously said “Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give will never be thirsty again.”



ABOVE: This witch bottle, containing iron needles and what appears to be a heart-shaped piece of cloth, may have been intended to ward off the malevolent influences of neighborhood witches. Discovered with its cork stopper intact, the Cypress Archaeology lab team chose not to tamper with the contents...

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## CHINESE OAKLAND: *Of bluing balls and pork bones*

*“In the laundry the air was sizzling. The huge stove roared red hot and white, while the irons, moving over the damp cloth, sent up clouds of steam . . . the two laundrymen sweated on fancy starch till midnight, till one, till two. . . .”*

Jack London, *Martin Eden*, 1909



**Uncovering** the first of hundreds of small blue spheres, archaeologists digging at 1813 Seventh Street knew that this site was different. These bluing balls—used to give the illusion of a whiter wash—showed that at least some evidence had survived of the Chinese-run laundry that operated there in the 1880s and ’90s. Fragments of distinctive blue and white pottery made in southern China confirmed the discovery. These artifacts and many others were discovered in a filled-in trench in what would have been the laundry’s backyard.

Historic records have little to say about this place. The earliest reference to the business was an 1889 map that showed a one-story, ironclad laundry building, with a porch and backyard stable. The laundry workers were not listed on the US Census of either 1900 or 1910. By 1912 the building was vacant.

In the years following the Gold Rush, Chinese immigrants carved out a niche cooking and cleaning for the primarily male mining population. By the mid-1880s, when the Seventh Street laundry was established, there were over 60 Chinese-run laundries in Oakland. Although in China laundering was seen as low-status work, its attractions—small cash investment and minimal training—attracted many. Furthermore, laundry work was one of the few businesses open to Chinese that could attract non-Chinese customers.

As the booming labor market of the Gold Rush cooled, many turned against Chinese in general and laundrymen in particular, charging that they took work from Americans. “Anti-coolie” clubs sprang up, Chinatowns were razed by arson and riot, and many cities—including Oakland—passed ordinances

designed to force the laundrymen out of town. Chinese laundries were an easy target for gangs of Oakland youths, who would pelt the shop fronts with rocks and cruelly harass lone Chinese men. With few exceptions, such as West Oakland’s beloved Father McNalley, newspaper editors and other opinion makers winked at this abuse when not actively encouraging it.

While many contemporary accounts either exclude the laundrymen or seek to dehumanize them, the archaeological remains survive as unedited testimony to these uncelebrated people. Many artifacts were imported from southern China. Several tableware sherds—fragments of bowls, plates, and cups—are decorated in four classic Chinese designs: Double Happiness (a traditional wedding motif), Four Flowers (each representing a season), the highly stylized Bamboo pattern, and pale green Celadon glaze. Dozens of brown-glazed stoneware fragments are the remains of food containers: soy sauce, black vinegar, peanut oil, preserved tofu, bean paste, pickled vegetables, salty duck eggs, or sugar.

But the laundry workers were not entirely separated from white society: they used the same types of fashionable English ceramics that could be found in their neighbors’ homes, while marks from standard American-style butchering on the bones of cow, sheep, and pig show that they purchased meat from local markets, not Chinatown butchers.

Significantly, some of these food bones bear scrape marks that show how the Chinese cook converted cuts designed as American-style steaks and roasts into the small chunks used in Chinese cooking.

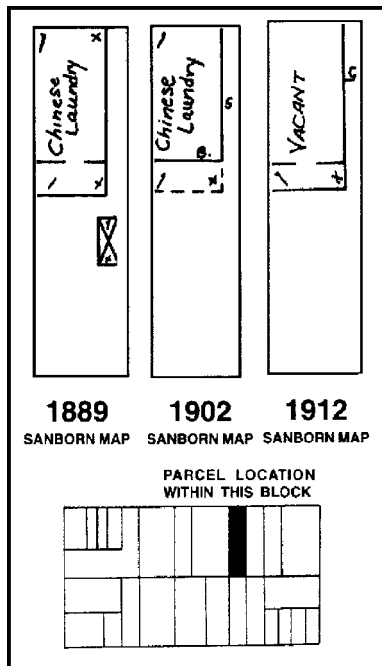
The opinion-makers of the era created the myth, still prevalent today, that these 19th-century Chinese

immigrants were all illiterate laborers. A Chinese inkstone (on which slabs of ink were ground), a handful of abacus beads, and slate pencils found in the backyard trench emphasize that the laundry was a business that required careful management, and that it was carried out in a distinctively Chinese way.

Chinese laundrymen were a different kind of pioneer. Often educated and working with family members and fellow villagers, these hardy people ventured outside the relative safety of Chinatown to look for opportunity. Their artifacts, the pots and bones, show both the laundrymen's powerful links to tradition and an entrepreneurial willingness to innovate—on their own terms.



ABOVE: Huge Chinese jars, like this one from the Irving family home on Sixth Street, were used to ship traditional foods to Chinese living in California. Their size, water resistance, and rough beauty have made them candidates for reuse, both for storage and as decorative items, for over a century. Similar vessels can be purchased today in Oakland's Chinatown.



ABOVE: Mapping the Chinese laundry. Sanborn Company field agents, who made maps for insurance companies, were careful to note Chinese laundries: water boilers and hot irons were fire hazards. The building marked with an X behind the laundry was a stable; by 1902 it had disappeared, and by 1912 the building at 1813 Seventh Street was vacant.

FACING PAGE: This Chinese jar was found at the bottom of Annie Brady's abandoned well at 812 Castro Street. When shipped from China, it held preserved food, most likely ginger. But when displayed in the home of these Irish Americans, the jar spoke of their sophistication in rejecting the popular mass-produced commodities of the era.



ABOVE: Chin Mon Wah posed in his Buick in front of the family home on Eighth Street in about 1935. After establishing himself in New York, Chin sent for his wife, Ng Shee, and daughter from China. The family soon moved to Oakland, where descendants still live. The belief that Chinese invariably returned to their homeland was encouraged by racist elements who wished to stop Asian immigration. The history of many Oakland Chinese families disproves this notion. (Courtesy of Florence Chin Wong)

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## AFRICAN AMERICANS IN OAKLAND:

### *Creating respectable homes*

*“If the white man would lay himself out a bit to understand the workings of the black man’s mind, most of the messes would be avoided.”*

Jack London, *The Inevitable White Man*, 1910

**African** Americans have lived in West Oakland since the city began.

Pushed by discriminatory Jim Crow laws in the South and attracted by decent jobs on the railroad, the town’s black population grew from just under 600 in 1880 to more than 1,000 by the turn of the century. While most highly paid jobs were simply closed to non-whites, men who worked as porters on railroad sleeping cars emerged as an elite group within the black community. Porters published magazines and books; they organized literary groups, social societies, and labor unions. And as archaeology shows, this sophistication extended to their home life.

These families were by no means wealthy; today we might think of them as working class. Yet their artifacts confirm that this did not prevent them from living well. The 1880 U.S. Census recorded that Lucinda Tilghman lived at 662 Fifth Street. A widow with three children, she rented rooms to Abraham Holland—a Pullman porter—and his college-student son. These were prominent West Oakland families.

Lucinda Tilghman’s artifacts show that she set a formal Victorian table. At a time when the ability to entertain visitors in the right style was an important way of showing one’s status, Tilghman served high-priced meat and a variety of expensive fish, from barracuda to Chinook salmon. Several personal items found their way into the refuse, including an elegant toiletry set and a gold earring and pendant.

Some 20 years later and two doors down the street lived the family of James and Nellie Carter and their boarders, two of whom were porters. Again, the household’s refuse contained a large quantity of unique teawares and specialty drinking glasses in styles from plain to festive. Like the Tilghman family, the Carters lived in a grander style than we would have expected for people of their financial means.



Closer to the railroad yards, Irish widow Mary Heaney rented her new, fashionably styled house at 1774 Atlantic Street to several Pullman porter families. Among the artifacts from their refuse are food bones representing over 1,700 pounds of meat, most from medium-priced cuts. Furthermore, the house was decorated with the kind of bric-a-brac that graced the parlors of the American middle class—even the household’s spittoon (a common 19th-century household artifact) was of fancy porcelain.

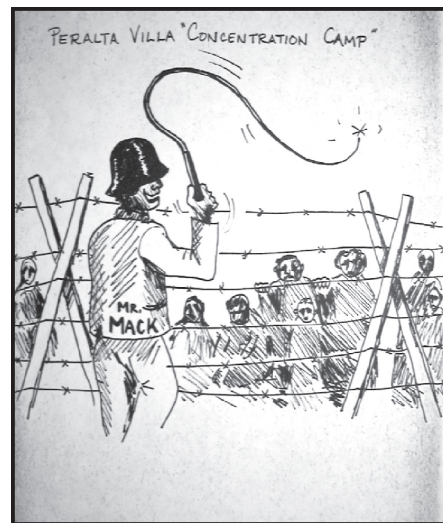
The Pullman Company’s sleeping cars were fitted out like sumptuously decorated Victorian homes and only black men were hired as porters. The effect was to recreate the feeling of the old South, where blacks served their white masters in stylish surroundings. West Oakland was a complicated place in the 19th century. Racism was built into everyday life, yet people managed to live and work together. The census records only a few multi-ethnic households; however, historians discovered several cases of Irish homeowners who rented the house next door to African Americans, and vice-versa.

Although paid as working people, porters chose to live well. While the larger world saw them as subservient, they pursued education and were civil-rights activists decades before the Black Power movement was born. For 19th-century porters, merely being well-dressed and furnishing ones home with genteel artifacts was a political statement, since it flew in the face of the era’s racist stereotypes. And in their West Oakland homes, these parlor ornaments and other fancy goods were far more than mere decoration. They were symbols of civility and personal dignity, qualities the families who used them had been striving for against the odds.

FACING PAGE: A porcelain spittoon, hand-painted and relatively costly, was found in an abandoned well at 1774 Atlantic Street. The Pullman porters and their families who lived here in the early 1890s decorated their home with genteel artifacts that in some ways mirrored the sumptuous surroundings of their workplace. Although not particularly well-paid by whites' standards, porters were respected as well-traveled and sophisticated men.



ABOVE: Charles Tilghman, Jr., was a West Oakland resident and publisher of the Colored Directory of the Leading Cities of Northern California (1916). A relative of Lucinda Tilghman (a Cypress Project area resident), Charles developed his business from a child's printing set in the family home on Thirteenth Street into the most prominent black press on the West Coast.



ABOVE: White racism was stern reality in the 19th century. Black Americans felt its sting most strongly in the South, where Jim Crow laws prevented them from achieving even a semblance of equality even after Emancipation. The result was a black westward migration, beginning during the California Gold Rush and heating up with the establishment of the Central Pacific Railroad and its West Oakland termination.

## Hold the Fort

We meet to-day in Free-dom's cause and raise our voi-ces high; We'll  
 join our hands in U-nion strong to bat-tle or to die.

**CHORUS:**  
 Hold the fort for we are com-ing U-nion men be strong.  
 Side by side we bat-tle on-ward, vic-to-ry will come.

Look my comrades, see the union  
 Banners waving high,  
 Reinforcements now appearing,  
 Victory is nigh. [chorus ]

See our numbers still increasing  
 Hear the bugles blow  
 By our union we shall triumph  
 Over every foe. [chorus ]

Fierce and long the battle rages,  
 But we will not fear  
 Help will come whene'er it's need needed,  
 Cheer, my comrades, cheer. [chorus ]

### "Hold the Fort"

The history of African Americans in West Oakland is permanently tied to railroading and the struggle to establish the union of black porters known as the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The Brotherhood's anthem was "Hold the Fort." Based upon a Civil War hymn, versions of this piece have been adopted by unionists, suffragettes, socialists, and prohibitionists the world over.

*Music and lyrics from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' anthem.*

## JEWISH OAKLAND: *Peddlers on the road to assimilation*

“[The poor] ascribe their homelessness to foreign immigration, especially of Polish and Russian Jews, who take their places at lower wages. . . .”

Jack London, *People of the Abyss*, 1903

**We** will probably never know whether the artifacts from Privy 1409 at 712 Fifth Street were discarded by the family of Isaac Barnett, Samuel Jacobs, or a combination of the two. Both these households were headed by German/Polish Jews who made their living peddling fruit.

To immigrant eastern European Jews, America was *die goldeneh medina*, ‘the golden land,’ where anything was possible. Although the entry fee was the abandonment of much traditional culture, many people were more than happy to pay the price. The archaeological remains from Fifth Street speak of this process and how California Jews participated in it.

Samuel Jacobs immigrated in 1879 and the following year’s census found him selling fruit in San Francisco. Peddler was a common occupation among new Jewish immigrants. Even the poorest could afford the rent of a cart by the day, either hawking their goods door to door or setting up in a street market.

By 1887 Jacobs and his wife, Rebecca, had taken over the house at 712 Fifth Street from Isaac Barnett, another Polish-born fruit peddler and his family; the Jacobs lived there until the mid-1890s.

In the system of Jewish dietary laws known as *kashrus*, ritually acceptable food is said to be *kosher*; all other food is *treyf* and not to be eaten. Among the prohibitions are those against eating certain mammals, including pig and rabbit, as well as all shellfish. In addition, the hindquarters of otherwise acceptable mammals must be purged of the sciatic nerve, a complex process that was rarely done; rather, the hindquarters of cattle and sheep were usually sold by the *kosher* butcher to non-kosher shops. Thus, hindquarters were effectively *treyf*.

The food remains from Privy 1409 show that the family’s table was thoroughly *treyf*. They appear to have enjoyed both oysters and scallops, and food bones show that nearly 40 percent of the meat represented was either from a *treyf* species or cut

Who lived at 712 fifth street in the mid-1880s?<sup>1</sup>

Year	Name	Born	Nativity	Occupation
1884	Barnett, Isaac	1848	Poland	Fruit peddler
	unknown (wife)	?	?	
	, Jennie (dau)	1875	Cal.	
	, Mark (son)	1876	Cal.	
	, Beatrice (dau)	1882	Cal.	
	, May (dau)	1886	Cal.	
	, Harry (son)	1884	Cal.	
	, Bear (son)	1884	Cal.	
	, Bertie (dau)	1886	Cal.	
1886	Barnett, David (bro)	?	?	Fruit dealer
1887	Jacobs, Samuel	1845	Germany <sup>2</sup>	Fruit peddler
	, Rebecca (wife)	1842	Germany	

<sup>1</sup> Data from city directories, leases, and U.S. Population Census.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs was probably from Posnan in Prussia.



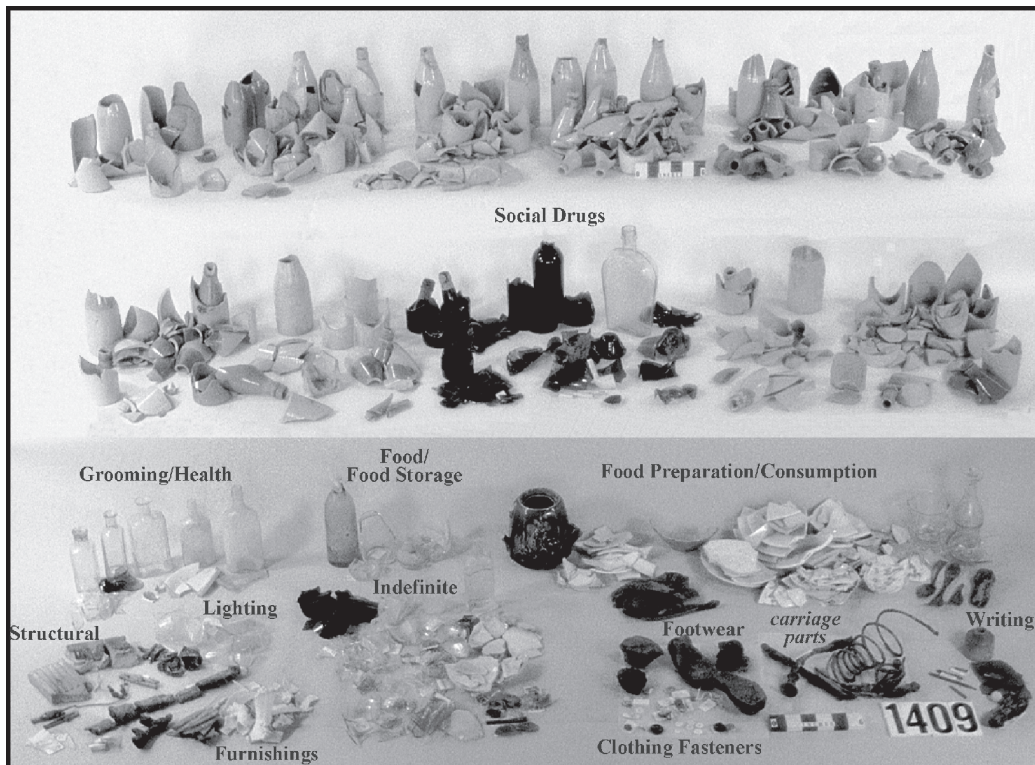
from the hindquarters. Comparing the Barnett/Jacobs household to the other skilled working-class households in our West Oakland sample is startling: the Jewish families consumed even more pork than their neighbors.

From a strictly religious perspective, pork was no worse than any other non-*kosher* meat. Yet it would have had great symbolic significance because pigs are especially despised in eastern European Jewish folk practice. More than merely a tradition, *kashrus* was (and is) a *mitzvah*, a commandment from God. However, *kashrus* was also a barrier to social acceptance—one that the Barnett/Jacobs families decided to break down.

A single deposit from one household is a glimpse of a moment frozen in time. We do not know how this story played out in succeeding generations. Our appetite is whetted for more information.



ABOVE: A corset fastener is a small thing and to find one would not usually be noteworthy. Here it is different, because this tiny item represents an unnamed woman in this household and the role she took in her family's transformation. To a woman from an eastern European Jewish village, the corset was more than just clothing. Physically constraining, it was psychologically and culturally liberating for it showed that its wearer was no greenhorn, but a sophisticated, stylish American.



ABOVE: Artifacts from the Barnett/Jacobs household (aside from over 400 food bones). Someone evidently enjoyed beer: most of the top two rows are fragments of 104 Scottish ale bottles. Several patent medicines are present, including bitters, Jamaica Ginger, and a “Medical Discovery” cure, as well as hair tonic and the ubiquitous Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot. Over 30,000 seeds were also found. Some represent food waste: blackberry, strawberry, apple, fig, grape, melon, peach, and tomato. Backyard plants—catch fly, cheese weed, chickweed, and knotweed—suggest a rather overgrown garden.

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## MATERIAL WELL-BEING:

### *The Revolution has been postponed*

*“Has Civilization bettered the lot of the average man?”*

Jack London, *People of the Abyss*, 1903

**The** vignettes in this little book have offered a peek into the lives of West Oaklanders. But what can we say of their overall well-being from the things they left behind?

By most measures, the McLaughlins would be considered an unexceptional working-class family, yet their household’s refuse from about 1880 shows that they did not lack for material comforts.

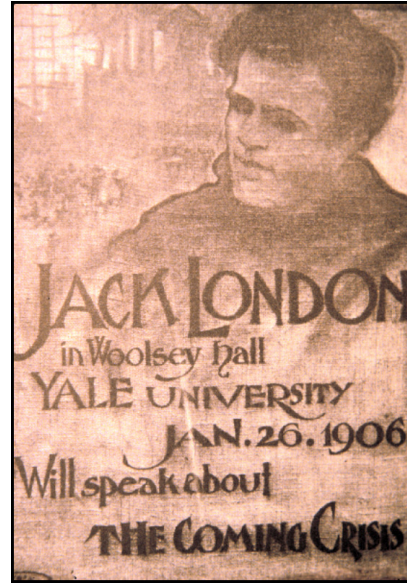
Michael McLaughlin, an Irish widower with five children, worked as a laborer. The family’s table setting was quite plain but contained some decorated items, such as the fashionable Corn and Oats pattern, as well as colorful, inexpensive pieces. Their glassware was attractively etched and molded. The younger McLaughlin children did not want for playthings, including a toy tea set, rubber ball, marbles, and several dolls. Fifty artifacts to do with grooming or health were found among their refuse, from medicine bottles and tooth brushes to chamber pots. The family threw out over 750 food bones, representing 668 pounds of meat, mostly mutton and beef. Like many of their neighbors, the family seems to have preferred steaks and stews in the moderate to high-priced range.

If we judge their well-being by the ability to buy a variety of goods and eat good food, we must conclude that ordinary West Oaklanders like the McLaughlins lived well. The quality and quantity of meat and the variety of other foods were far better than working class people experienced in other industrial cities. If factory-made goods were their desire, the supply was cheap and seemingly neverending.

This abundance was made possible by relatively secure, well-paid jobs. Working-class families, immigrants and the children of immigrants, the formerly enslaved—all found work in West Oakland. Homeownership was an achievable goal even for people of very modest incomes. By the late 19th century, the result was a stable working- and lower-middle class, a community with a strong web of social institutions that worked for the betterment of their city.

And there was a lot still to be achieved. Disease was rampant in West Oakland (though it was not as bad as other urban areas); discrimination against non-whites was accepted as natural and right, at least by those on the top; and labor demonstrations were met with lock-outs, black-listing, and violence.





ABOVE: This poster so shocked officials at Yale University that Jack London's 1906 speech about the inevitable revolution was nearly cancelled. Nevertheless, his oration was a huge success. After passionately ripping the capitalist system and predicting its imminent fall, London was carried from the stage on the shoulders of a crowd of cheering students. Up to his death only 10 years later, Jack London often signed letters, 'yours for the Revolution.' (Courtesy of California Department of Parks and Recreation)

TOP LEFT: A toy whistle of some white metal alloy represents the children of West Oakland. Infant mortality was high, but a boy or girl who lived to the age of five had a good chance of surviving to adulthood. Marbles, balls, dolls, and tiny tea sets were popular, as were children's plates and cups with religious motifs; there was even a toy gun. The variety, however, was not great. As Jack London wrote of his West Oakland childhood, hanging out on the streets, bay fishing, and days spent exploring won out over playing with toys.

BOTTOM LEFT: An elegant parian hand holds a flower. In the background are etched glasses, two of a large number of glasses of various sizes and functions discarded by the Mann family. Well-to-do in the 1870s, the family had bought many beautiful, expensive artifacts that would have made the parlor stylish and impressed dinner guests with their sophistication. Sickness and a declining family income had reduced the Manns' ability to keep up appearances when they discarded these artifacts.

FACING PAGE: Nearly 2,000 pounds of meat are represented by these bones. Discarded in the 1890s by a household made up mostly of African American railway porters, this and other collections from the Cypress Archaeology Project show that even working-class people ate well. Surprisingly, some of the poorest families seem to have bought the most expensive cuts of meat, whereas the middle class tended to be more frugal. While there is plenty of documentary evidence of poverty in 19th-century California, most West Oaklanders—regardless of their social class—seem to have been benefited from their town's growth.

Jack London and many others of his era were certain that the injustices created by the capitalist system that supplied all this bounty would soon lead to a workers' revolution. And yet for all its inevitability, the revolution didn't happen. Why? "*On the reefs of roast beef and apple pie,*" explained Werner Sombart in 1906, "*are socialist utopias of every sort sent to their doom.*" Archaeology suggests that Sombart may have been right: that the revolutionary tendencies of many working-class Americans became dulled by the high standard of living achieved by labor unions and buried under the vast storehouse of potential material possessions for which they yearned.

Disheartened, Jack London turned to his idyllic Sonoma County home. "*When the time comes,*" he told a reporter in 1914, "*I'm going to stay right on my ranch at Glen Ellen and let the revolution go to blazes.*"

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# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGY

## ***How do you know where to dig?***

Many archaeological sites are marked by artifacts on the ground's surface or by features, such as the remains of a brick wall or the depression left by a cellar. On the Cypress Project, we were led to these places by historic maps and other records that show the locations of houses and other buildings in the past.

## ***How deep do you dig?***

As deep as the site goes. Some archaeological sites are merely scatters of artifacts on the surface. Others may be made up of layers of soil from occupation, demolition, or filling that can be several feet deep. Some West Oakland wells were more than 12 feet in depth.

## ***Do you find any valuable artifacts or gold?***

It's quite unusual for historical archaeologists to find things that could be sold for much money. Most of the artifacts we uncover are pieces of broken pottery, glass, and food bones. Finding gold coins is very rare—people in the past were as careful with their money as modern folk. Archaeologists are more interested in what artifacts can tell us about the past than the objects themselves. We get more excited about a well-documented collection of pottery fragments or food bones than any number of whole artifacts whose history of use is unknown.

## ***Does the State government protect all archaeological sites?***

Sites on State land are protected by law. It is illegal to collect artifacts or to disturb archaeological remains on land owned by the State of California, such as in State parks or Caltrans right-of-way.

## ***What happens to the stuff that you dig up? Do you keep it?***

Archaeologists aren't treasure hunters; we keep *nothing* we find for ourselves. All the artifacts found on the Cypress Project belong to Caltrans and to all Californians because they were found on State land. These objects (nearly one-half million in all) were cleaned and analyzed, and are kept at Sonoma State University, where researchers can study them or borrow them for public displays.

## ***What if I find an archaeological site?***

First, try not to disturb it. Even innocent souvenir hunting can harm the research value of a site, so *leave the artifacts where they are*. On State or federal land, tell the agency's archaeologist (most have one) what you've found. If you come across a site on private land, the Office of Historic Preservation [<http://ohp.parks.ca.gov>] can help you file a "site record" on which you can record your discovery.

## ***How can I get involved in archaeology?***

Most universities and colleges offer courses in archaeology. The *Archaeological Institute of America* [<http://archaeology.org>] has membership chapters throughout North America that organize speakers, field visits, and other activities.

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# TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGY

These two excellent magazines about archaeology are available at newsstands:

- *Archaeology*. Glossy with many great pictures; an easy read with articles on worldwide topics; doesn't shy away from controversy.
- *Dig Archaeology*. A colorful grade-schoolers' version of *Archaeology*, with stories, games, and projects to do.

Here are some great books about archaeology:

- *Before California: An Archaeologist Looks at Our Earliest Inhabitants* by Brian Fagan (Rowman and Littlefield). The foremost writer of popular archaeology books looks at the prehistory of California, from the San Francisco Bay shellmounds to the rock art of the southern deserts.
- *Gifts of the Celestial Kingdom* by Thomas Layton (Stanford University Press). A very lively account of the archaeology of the *Frolic*, a 19th-century sailing ship that was wrecked off the California coast. Archaeology, historical fiction, and a great story.
- *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* by James Deetz (Anchor Books). A modern classic in historical archaeology. Frequently cited by professionals, yet written to be understood by all.

To find more information about California archaeology go to:

- <http://www.scanet.org> (the Society for California Archaeology)
- <http://ohp.parks.ca.gov> (the State Office of Historic Preservation)

For information about archaeology in North America and around the world try:

- <http://archnet.uconn.edu/> is a portal to a huge range of topics.
- <http://archaeology.about.com> may be the best site for beginners.
- <http://www.sha.org> will get you to the Society for Historical Archaeology.
- <http://www.archaeological.org> is the home of the Archaeological Institute of America, which has 101 local groups around the USA, offers tours, and fieldwork opportunities.
- <http://www.saa.org> is the Society for American Archaeology. It has a good resource page for teachers.



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# AND TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CYPRESS PROJECT

These websites have more information about the Caltrans Cypress Project:

- <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist4/> is the homepage of Caltrans District 4, which managed the Cypress Project.
- <http://www.oaklandtribune.com>. Article by Cecily Burt in the *Oakland Tribune* (3/17/04) describing plans to erect a memorial to the victims of the Cypress Freeway collapse.
- <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist4/archaeology/default>
- <http://www.sonoma.edu/asc>
- <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov> and follow links to environmental justice case #5.

The Cypress Archaeology Project created a series of Block Technical Reports, each focused on one or more project blocks, and “*Putting the ‘There’ There: Historical Archaeologies of West Oakland*,” a well-illustrated book. *Sights and Sounds* is a series of essays about West Oakland from ethnic history to architecture. A 28-minute videotape, “*Privy to the Past*,” is all about the Cypress Archaeology Project. All are available from:

- <http://Caltrans-opac.ca.gov/publicat.htm>



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# GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

**ARCHAEOLOGY:** The study of the human past using material remains, from the most ancient to the relatively modern.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION:** The systematic removal of archaeological **artifacts** and **features**. Excavation involves careful recording of both the artifacts and the layers of soil in which they are buried.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURE:** As distinct from an **artifact**, a feature is an element of an **archaeological site** that cannot be removed from the site without losing its physical integrity. Privy pits, walls, and stone hearths are all features.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE:** A place that contains the remains of past human activity. Examples of sites include a Bay Area shellmound, **artifact**-filled pits from 19th-century Oakland, and England's Stonehenge.

**ARTIFACT:** Something made or modified by humans. Artifacts can be as small and simple as a stone tool chipped out of a pebble or as huge and sophisticated as the stone heads of Easter Island. A collection of artifacts and/or **features** in one place is called an **archaeological site**.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT [CRM]:** Managing **archaeological sites** and **artifacts**, historic buildings, and culturally important places in the interest of the public, scholars, and others who value them. The Cypress Project is an example of CRM, in which the importance of the archaeological remains was seen as an added public benefit to the freeway construction project.

**FAUNAL REMAINS:** Any part of an animal that is discovered on an **archaeological site**. Many faunal remains are food bones from mammals, birds, and fish, although fish scales, shellfish shells, and even hair are sometimes found.

**HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY:** The branch of **archaeology** that deals with societies and periods for which written records exist. Historical archaeologists use written accounts to help understand the artifacts they uncover.

**HISTORICAL RESEARCH:** The process by which historians examine **primary** and **secondary sources** to find out about a historic place, person, or process. This often involves visits to public offices, libraries, and historical archives.

**MAKER'S MARK:** Stamped or printed mark on the base of a ceramic plate or other **artifact**. Manufacturers often used each mark for a limited period of time, making them valuable for working out the age of these objects.

**ORAL HISTORY:** A verbal account of a past event or process in the words of one who experienced it. Oral history is solicited through personal interview and is usually documented on tape and transcribed. It's an aspect of **historical research**.

**PRIMARY SOURCES:** Records such as Sanborn Company maps, tax assessments, diaries, **oral histories**, and other first-hand accounts and depictions of life in the past. Since primary sources were created by the individuals who actually witnessed the scenes they describe, these records are highly valued by historians.

**PRIVY:** An old-fashioned word for a pit toilet. Before flush toilets, people dug simple holes in the ground to dispose of human waste. When these holes were no longer needed, they were often filled with household refuse and other **artifacts**.

**SECONDARY SOURCES:** Records such as history books and articles that are based on primary sources but are not themselves first-hand accounts. Secondary sources often synthesize information from a variety of **primary** and other secondary sources.

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# THE CREDITS

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*This booklet tells how archaeologists came to study the new route of the Cypress Freeway in West Oakland, California, and what they discovered there.*

*Just as the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's were taking the field to play the third game of the World Series, a 6.4-magnitude earthquake shook the San Francisco Bay area. It was 5:04 p.m. on 17 October 1989.*

*The quake destroyed over 1.25 miles of the double-decker Cypress Freeway that funneled traffic through West Oakland to Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Bridge. At the sight of vehicles sandwiched between the collapsed roadways, Oaklanders came out of their homes to search the debris and lower survivors to safety. Later, the California Department of Transportation rebuilt the freeway on a different alignment, reuniting a neighborhood that had been split when the original road was built in the 1950s.*

*The new freeway route crossed Oakland's historic core, giving archaeologists access to a wealth of remains: nearly 500,000 artifacts that had been dumped in abandoned wells and buried in backyards between the 1860s and about 1910. These were objects used by people from throughout the USA and a dozen foreign countries who had been attracted by the promise of California and had made their homes in West Oakland.*

*The themes featured in this pamphlet run the gamut from the Chinese laundry on Seventh Street to the bric-a-brac that graced the mantelpieces of African American railroad porters. Each presentation is self-contained—there is no need to read them in sequence or to plow dutifully from cover to cover. Each theme takes up exactly two facing pages, so you can open this pamphlet at random and explore a single topic... or several. For those who want to dig deeper, the concluding section lists the technical reports that describe and interpret these discoveries.*