

Orinda Historical Society Newsletter

April 2006

P. O. BOX 82, ORINDA, CA 94563

(925) 254-1353

Museum Location

Lower Level of
Orinda Library
24 Orinda Way

Museum Hours of Operation

Monday, Wednesday,
& Friday 3-5 p.m.
Also by Appointment
24 Hour Answering Machine
925-254-1353
www.orindahistory.org

Rarely Seen 1906 Earthquake Photos



San Francisco City Hall
1906.

Photo courtesy of Suzanne
Schwartz

Now on display at the Orinda Historical Society Museum is a special exhibit of photographs showing the 1906 earthquake damage in San Francisco. These photos have never been publicly displayed before.

In May 1906, Frank Housken, an attorney from Tracy, took his camera and rode the train from Tracy to San Francisco to document the city's earthquake damage. His photographs include the San Francisco City Hall, Palace Hotel, Hall of Justice, and the Monadnock, Flood, Call, and Hale buildings. He also photographed a major wreckage in Tracy of a collapsed water tank.

When Frank passed away, these photos were given to Frank's wife's younger brother, Earle Williams, who had lived with the couple in Tracy. Earle, a history buff, tucked these photos safely into an album and added his own historical comments; he is responsible for the typed text that accompany the photos. Earle was always fascinated by these photos of the quake damage; he was only eight years old when the earthquake happened. In 1906, he was living in Woodside with his family in a boarding house. On the morning of April 18th, the earthquake caused Earle's bed to slide across the floor. He told his granddaughter that he remembered coming out of the boarding house that morning and seeing a woman holding up a lantern. The three-story boarding house behind her had collapsed, and it was now shorter than the top of her lantern.

Earle Williams went on to become a civic leader and mayor of Tracy, and he was active in the Tracy Historical Society. At age eighty, he wrote a book about local Tracy history called *Carrel of Corral Hollow*. When Earle died in 1983, these photographs were passed on to his granddaughter, Orinda resident Suzanne Schwartz. She recently found them tucked away in her bottom bureau drawer and has generously allowed the Orinda Historical Society to put them on public display.

Upcoming Events

- **Next Board Meeting**
Wednesday, April 19, from
3 to 5 pm at the
OHS Museum
- **Work Party**
Thursday, April 20, 7 to 9 pm
- **Board Meeting**
Wednesday, May 17 from
3 to 5 pm
at the OHS Museum
- **Annual Meeting**
Wednesday, May 31 from 7
to 9 pm at the Orinda Com-
munity Church. **Speaker**
**will be Orinda City Man-
ager Janet Keeter**

*Don't miss a celebration
of 40 years of
WomenSing now on dis-
play in the window of
the OHS Museum!*

Community Groups Talk at OHS General Meeting

The Orinda Historical Society held its general meeting on March 15th. The audience was treated to four guest speakers from long time local community groups: WomenSing (started in 1965), the Orinda Association (1946), and the Orinda Arts Council (1950).

Gloria Kubitschek and Genia Simpson gave a slide show and spoke about WomenSing trips and its history. Kate Wiley, President of the Orinda Association, talked about her organization's beginnings. Nancy Daniels, from the Orinda Arts Council, announced several new events including Orinda Idol and Orinda's first annual public art extravaganza, the BirdHaus project. Look for artistic birdhouses to crop up all around Orinda this summer from July 4th to September.



Gloria Kubitschek (left)
and Genia Simpson (right)
from WomenSing

How did Orinda Get it's Name?



Portrait of Poet Katherine Philips.

According to Dr. Galen M. Fisher in an article that he wrote in 1947 for the *Orinda Roads* booklet, "There are two respectable theories as to how our village got its name." One theory is that Orinda got its name from Martin Orinda, a famous Spanish architect of the seventeenth century. The more commonly accepted opinion is that Orinda got its name courtesy of Alice Marsh Cameron, daughter of one of the pioneer settlers John Marsh, and wife of William Cameron. This theory is mentioned in Muir Sorrick's *History of Orinda*.

It is believed that in 1876 Alice named a tract of land her husband owned after a seventeenth century English poet, Katherine Phillips, whom Alice admired. Ms. Phillips was an English poet in the commonwealth time, and she lived from 1631 to 1666. Her circle of literary peers gave themselves fanciful names. Katherine gave herself the pseudonym Orinda, and her friends called her "The Matchless Orinda," because her poetry was so wonderful. Notice the name "Orinda" in the portrait of Katherine Philips. This engraving appears in her 1667 posthumously published works: *Poems by the most deservedly admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the matchless Orinda*.

The tract of land, including most of what is now Orinda, was named Orinda Park; but the "Park" part was subsequently dropped, while the name Orinda endured.

Looking For Houses in Orinda by Architect Frederick L. Confer

Maybe you can help? Piedmont resident Paul Faberman has asked the Orinda Historical Society for help finding homes in Orinda that were designed by architect Frederick L. Confer (1903 -1970). This is the same architect who designed Eugene O'Neill's "Tao House" in Danville in 1937. He also designed many homes in the Piedmont, Oakland, Berkeley, and Orinda areas during the 1930s and '40s, including Mr. Faberman's own home. Mr. Faberman is putting together a directory of the architect's work, and he would like to include street address identification and perhaps photos of the Orinda houses. In several old architectural magazines, articles describe four Orinda homes that Confer designed. Those articles included the name of the original home owner, but did not provide a street address. If you know the location/address or current owner of a Confer-designed Orinda house, please call Paul Faberman at 510 530-4455 or email him at pfaberman@aol.com



Confer Designed Homes in Orinda

1937: Home for E. L. Mathey

1937: Home for Cyrus B. Johnson (3 articles about this Award winner!)

1938: Home for Orton Lucas (4 articles about this house!)

1944: Home for T. C. Ingersoll

If you are interested in taking a tour of Eugene O'Neill's Tao House in Danville, call OHS Board member John Holmgren at 254-5677. He will set up a tour for OHS members if we get enough interest.

Please remember to renew your OHS membership for 2006 !!