

Live Oak to Tamalpais Walk

This walk was led by Susan Schwartz on 12 September 1998.

When Europeans arrived, the Berkeley area was occupied by Costanoan or Ohlone Native Americans, who are believed to have arrived sometime before 500 AD, displacing earlier inhabitants. They usually had villages near the bay shore; one of the largest was at Shellmound, in Emeryville. Inland were seasonal camps for hunting and gathering acorns, in places like Mortar Rock, named for the holes made by women grinding acorns and other seeds. Codornices -- the name, meaning "quail," was given by the Peraltas -- was a sizable creek with abundant game, trout, and steelhead (trout still live in the creek; steelhead have been seen in the lower reaches, and efforts to restore a run are underway). Labeled plants in Codornices Creek Community Garden give an idea of the characteristic vegetation -- in what is now Berkeley, redwood or oak-bay mixtures dominated, with some bare, flower-filled meadows and dryer hillsides. Under the Spanish and later the Mexicans, Berkeley was part of 48,000 acre Rancho San Antonio. This vast ranch, from San Leandro Creek to El Cerrito, was granted to Luis Maria Peralta, who had arrived in the Bay Area at age 17 with the De Anza expedition, and who later served in the Spanish army and various California colonial posts. Peralta left Rancho San Antonio to his sons. When the Gold Rush broke out, Berkeley's population was 12, probably all ranch employees. But with the US conquest and the Gold Rush, the Peraltas sold some land and were quickly cheated or robbed of the rest. Domingo Peralta, who inherited the Berkeley portion, hung on only to his home on Codornices Creek (near today's Albina St.) until his death in 1865. In the 1860s, Napoleon Bonaparte Byrne bought 1827 acres, from Wildcat Canyon to today's Josephine St., and today's Cedar to Eunice. A wealthy Southerner looking for better health, Byrne came first by steamer from Panama, returned, and then crossed the plains in a covered wagon in 1859, with his wife, her mother and sister, four children, and two freed slaves, Berkeley's first African American residents. Byrne planned to settle in San Jose, where there was good farmland. But his wife, who loved beauty and nature, persuaded him to stay in Berkeley. The Byrne's built an elaborate Italianate villa on Codornices Creek (the name means "quails") in 1868, at what is now 1301 Oxford -- the former East Bay Chinese Alliance Church, present Codornices Creek Community Garden, and future Congregation Beth El. A drive stretched down to today's Walnut Street; one of the gate supports remains in the park. (The house lasted to become the oldest house in Berkeley, but was torn down in the 1980s after two arson fires.) With fields, a corral was north of the creek, and an orchard south of the house, by Byrnes launched Berkeley's first farm. But the land was not rich. In the 1870s, the Byrnes moved to a marshy delta island near Stockton, and began selling the Berkeley land piece by piece to pay to levee and drain it. Success eluded Byrne again; his wife died of fever; and he returned to Berkeley and started a fuel-oil business, which also failed, apparently because he wouldn't dun people to pay their bills. The town eventually gave him a secure living by making him postmaster.

Berryman brings the commuters

Most of Byrne's land was bought by Henry Berryman, who moved into the house and probably planted the Monterey cypresses along the south border (they may have been planted by Mrs. Byrne, who also may have planted the huge eucalyptus just north of the creek at Oxford.). Berryman was an aggressive developer who founded Berkeley Water Works, damming Codornices Creek at the marshy earthquake sag above Euclid (today's Codornices Park) to create Berryman Reservoir. He also persuaded the Southern Pacific to extend its steam-train tracks to Berryman Station at Oxford and Rose. (The station is the reason for the curious extra lanes on Shattuck at Long's Drugs). He also gave his name to Berryman and Henry Streets. Berkeley was incorporated in 1878 with a boundary just north of Eunice (then Durant Street, although the other Durant already existed). Because of the station, the area grew faster than the rest of Berkeley during the 1880s. Near Berryman Station were a hotel, various stores, a coal yard, and a volunteer fire company that used the old well at Safeway. The four-room Rose Street School was built on Rose near Milvia; this probably gave the

name to Schoolhouse Creek, which ran north of Vine. (A bit of Schoolhouse Creek is visible at 1443 Hawthorne; below that it is culverted most of the way to the Bay. But below Spring Way basements have reminders of the springs that once flowed from this small scarp.) North and east of the station became an area of fairly large homes and tracts belonging to doctors, business owners, ship captains, and the like. The main meadow of Live Oak Park held a 14 room home belonging to Dr. Michael O'Toole; the present recreation center area had a large brown shingle house that was bought by R.S. Penniman, owner of a West Berkeley manufacturing business, who was later important in persuading the city to buy the land as a park. A 20-room tower-decorated Victorian on Vine just above Arch, called the Castle, was torn down to accommodate the Temple Beth El school. The Victorian at 1431 Arch is the sole survivor of a group of 1880s "view homes" in similar style (it has redwood framing and hand-made nails). Behind these Arch Street houses were orchards, and in level pockets above these farms -- others succeeded where Byrne failed. Today's Greenwood Terrace was Captain Thomas's farm, with orchard and grain fields; and the glen bounded by Tamalpais and Shasta was a dairy farm. There also were more modest cottages. The cottages behind 1407 and 1413 Arch date back to as early as 1896. Some belonged to working people; others were summer houses used by vacationers from San Francisco, as indicated by the name Summer Street (where houses back onto a creek).

Berkeley's growth spurt

Between 1900 and 1910, when Berkeley changed from town to city government, its population soared from 13,000 to over 40,000. There were two main reasons: the Key Route railway began offering a 30 minute commute to San Francisco from the Berkeley Pier in 1903, and the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 sent people fleeing to what seemed more stable ground. The new houses were still often large, belonging to prominent people and often built by prominent architects, e.g. 2204 Glen (Dempster house, 1908), 1317 Arch (Admiral William Whiting house, 1905), 1320 Arch (Julia Morgan 1906), 1324 Arch (Julia Morgan 1910), 1325 Arch (Maybeck 1906) 1345 Arch (1909), 1425 Arch (Julia Morgan 1910). Development began moving uphill with houses like 1418 Spring (later Scenic, 1909), 1446 Scenic (1908), 1452 Scenic (1908), and 1404 Hawthorne (Julia Morgan 1911) (1408 Hawthorne is a later, 1921, Maybeck). Today's La Loma Park was quarried for building materials (hence Quarry Rd.); La Loma Park was the generic name for the neighborhood. Between 1908 and 1911, the Solano Tunnel was built, and the dirt was used to fill the trestle along today's Henry Street and what had been a Codornices Creek swimming hole (now School of the Madeleine). The Northbrae addition north of Eunice, still outside city limits, started to be developed, Oxford School opened, and Oxford Street was continued north across Codornices Creek to join what had been Pine Street. At the Byrne mansion, the new stretch of Oxford was curved to mollify the owners, who lost most of their front yard and their elegant drive. Neighbors protested, however, when the city proposed extending Berryman east to Spruce to create the street shown on early plat maps, so Berryman between Shattuck and Spruce remained a foot path. (History seems destined to repeat itself; Temple Beth El's preliminary plans propose a drive-through paralleling Berryman Path, which neighbors oppose.)

The Hillside Club embraces nature

The first development in Berkeley to build "with nature" was Peralta Park, in what is now the St. Mary's High School area. In the 1880s, Caspar Hopkins had it laid out following "English landscape gardening" ideas, with curved streets following contours, and emphasis on Codornices Creek. Its high point, literally and figuratively, was a hotel on the rise now occupied by the high school. But the movement to design with nature really caught on after 1901, as the international Arts and Crafts style, shingle style, City Beautiful movement, and Asian influences were taken up by local artists and architects. Women could not vote, but they could influence; in 1898 a group of women formed the Hillside Club, advocating simple design, building with nature, streets that followed contours of the land, and paths for walking. The straight grid of older streets like Spruce and Arch was replaced by curves that followed contours; pedestrian paths were required. Other influential voices (some of them in the club) included Joseph Worcester, architect who was influential in starting the local shingle style and praising "building with nature" (he may have influenced design of his

niece's house at 1307 Bay View Place), landscape painter William Keith (for whom Keith Street is named), Charles Keeler, John Galen Howard (who designed the houses at 1459 and 1486 Greenwood and 1401 Le Roy) , Ernest Coxhead (English architect who designed the 1915 school building that is now the Berkeley-Richmond Jewish Community Center), and of course Bernard Maybeck, who designed the simple wooden houses at 1200, 1208, and 1210 Shattuck, and at 1476 Greenwood. The style they created is called the First Bay Area Tradition (the second one flourished in the late 1930s and early 1940s.) The "Swiss Chalet" apartment building at 1354-64 Scenic was built in 1907 by architect Paul Needham, who was a somewhat controversial figure, Berkeley style. The previous year, the Hillside Club had considered asking Needham and his wife to resign from the Hillside Club because Needham had set up portable houses in the Hillside District as a way to let poor people "live in choice localities." The apartment generated rumblings, too, but its arts-and-crafts style mollified critics. Much of what the Hillside Club group had created was destroyed in 1923, when fire roared out of Wildcat Canyon and down "Nut Hill," just north of the University. Some 4000 people in Northeast Berkeley were displaced. Among the homes destroyed was Maybeck's on Buena Vista -- a stucco house he designed across the street, at 2704, survived, and after 1923 stucco was more popular than brown shingle in Berkeley. The Hillside Club, however, did not give up. They raised money to rebuild Rose Walk (originally designed by Maybeck in 1913) . (The cottages along the walk were designed by Henry Gutterson after the fire. Gutterson also designed 1311 Bay View Place.) The club's headquarters at the south end of Arch today is a popular site for wedding receptions, parties, and performances. (Next week is the 75th Anniversary of the 1923 fire; an exhibit, "Berkeley Burning," opens Sept. 17 at 7 PM at the Berkeley Historical Society Museum in the Veterans Building; the opening features a rare film on the fire and videotaped interviews of survivors. Poet-playwright James Schevill, a survivor of both Berkeley fires, who lives in this neighborhood, will give a poetry reading and writing workshop, "On Fire," at the museum 10 am September 19.)

"Nature Parks"

Berkeley was slow to create parks. Several commissions warned that lack of recreation was leading to delinquency, but voters refused to approve funds. There were a few playgrounds, but the city's first "nature park," planned to preserve greenery and open space, was Live Oak Park, purchased in 1914 from the O'Toole and Penniman families. The lush creek canyon made a pleasant contrast to the bare, treeless hills, and anyone could easily reach the area with 6 cent carfare. One of the first improvements was the present Walnut Street Bridge, designed in 1915. In 1916 the North Branch of the Berkeley Public Library moved to the old Penniman house, which became the park clubhouse. (It burned in 1951; the huge wisteria west of the present Recreation Center is a remnant.) Live Oak Park's large stone fireplace beside the creek was completed in 1917. The first such gathering place in the city, it was a vital part of community life in those days before radio, television, or widespread individual ownership of automobiles. Other parks followed: Codornices Park was leased from the water company as a playground in 1915; John Hinkel gave Hinkel Park and its clubhouse to the city in 1919. The city built large stone fireplaces in both, testifying to the popularity of such gathering places. Grotto, Mortar, and Indian Rock Parks were acquired from Northbrae's developers in 1920, when Berkeley annexed the area. But Live Oak remained Berkeley's most heavily used park, with the large fireplace hosting more than 10,000 people and 300 gatherings a year.

Further Information

Here's a [list of Berkeley parks](#) and here's a [descriptive map](#).