

# Emeryville COOL Fun Facts

ISSUE 5

MAY 22, 2020



This issue is brought to you by an intrepid reader's interest in the buildings at 4701 Doyle Street (I was "Head Over Heels" at the suggestion!). It's been a while since my wanderings took me down Spur Alley, so I accepted this challenge as an opportunity to revisit this path. PLEASE TAKE A LOOK.

First of all, I'm always in favor of people getting out into the streets. I love the current Doyle Street closure AND I LOVE WALKING IN A RAIL SPUR (side note: prior to living in Emeryville had you heard of a rail spur? I'm coming out today as someone who did not!!!). It reminds me of the many secret passageways of my childhood, but even better because it was once for TRAINS.

It's true, there are many totally sick buildings in this alley. Like the one that resembles a former stable with the



text "SHIREY" on the western side of the alley approaching 45th Street (please HMU if you have the scoop!). I hope it's a leftover building from the days of the Oakland Trotting Park.

Richmond-based artist John Wehrle paid tribute to this and other aspects of Emeryville's racing history (cars, horses, AND planes!) in *Ghost Horses*, located at 1250 53rd St. According to the Emeryville Public Art Walking Guide from 2012, this work is "a striking achievement by an artist whose work combines elements of allegory, myth, and history into monumental and whimsical narratives that engage the viewer's peripheral vision." (P.S. I REALLY WOULD HAVE ENJOYED A PLACARD WITH ANY INFORMATION WHATSOEVER ONSITE, but luckily the internet came through)

In pre-times, I'd cherish this opportunity to visit our local library (AKA the Oakland Public Library [since we do not have our own library system in Emeryville, which is okay with me as I'm a BIG FAN of the OPL!!!]). I'd be the first to run down to the room full of microfilm to read 100-year-old newspapers and look up address records. But currently I'm left with the good ol' *Polk-Husted Directory* courtesy of Google Books and a selection of old maps from David Rumsey's map collection at Stanford (if you have never looked up a picture of David Rumsey, spoiler alert he is definitely an "old maps guy").

I really dug deep here as I always appreciate an opportunity to do some investigative journalism. For several hours last weekend, I was committed to the cause. Sad to say, the facts are pretty shallow and full of conjecture.

Google Earth (gotta keep the research in the same product family) gave me a pretty cool "birds-eye view" of the building, where I noticed the sawtooth style architecture evocative of bygone buildings of industry (like CANNERIES). If you are a fan of the 'tooth, you can see an easily-accessible example at 6100 Hollis (known as Green St. back in

the days), the former location of Westinghouse High Voltage Insulation.

Soon I began to develop the theory that the extension of Doyle Street to the 4700 block is a more recent invention. Rumsey's maps, along with my new favorite website "Oldmapsonline.org", helped support the hypothesis: this stretch is absent on a 1938 Thomas Brothers map, and may have appeared some time between 1938 and 1949 or 1956 (I'm not forgetting how maps aren't "real" and totally a social construct used for political maneuvering!). After comparing this area to the present day I began to wonder why even in the pre-Doyle addition, 47th stopped short instead of continuing on to link up with Hollis. Well, here is my totally unsubstantiated theory: it stopped at the boundary of the aforementioned OAKLAND TROTTING PARK.

This was cool to think about how a now-demolished race track may have defined our present built environment (sounds haphazard! also don't forget how a lot of streets are named after where rich people "owned" land), though I'm disappointed in the lack of a definitive conclusion. If you need a little cheer up after that let-down, enjoy this 2018 expose from a local blog, *The Emeryville Tattler*. It critiques the city's follow-through on using Spur Alley as a bike path: <http://emeryvilletattler.blogspot.com/2018/02/spur-alley-bike-path-betrays.html>



## READER-GO-ROUND

Reader Maxine called to elucidate additional info on trains: Maxine thinks the house at the corner of 47th and Adeline may have been a turning station for Key System trains! Maxine's landlord (who recently passed away in his 90's) shared memories of the train line running through this area. Maxine also gives a shout-out to the beautiful walks we Emeryville residents enjoy (agree, and I'm giving Maxine a huge thanks for leaving such a delightful message!)

Do you have info about the buildings of Spur Alley? Hot tips on the social constructs known as maps? Ideas for future issues?

Leave a message at (510) 519-7283