

PREFACE

GOLDEN GATE WALKING TOUR

“When the freeways started coming into the area, that’s when the jobs started leaving. That had a negative impact on businesses along the Avenue. There used to be movie theaters, hardware stores and groceries. You could get everything you needed.”

–Longtime Golden Gate neighbor

CA State Route 123, known as San Pablo Avenue, is one of the Bay Area’s oldest roads and part of the longest continuously used U.S. transit route. Less than eight miles long, this thoroughfare passes through six cities, stretching north to south from Richmond before terminating at Oakland’s City Hall. Its changing form and name reflect larger shifts in power. After taking land from the indigenous Ohlone, Spanish colonials named this already well-used trail Camino de la Contra Costa. It was later anglicized to Contra Costa Road. In 1852, it received its current name, as the route that connected Oakland to Rancho San Pablo to the north. Contained in its history is the evolution of transit from foot to horse to buggies, the streetcar, automobile and bus. In 1912, San Pablo Avenue became the final leg of the Lincoln Highway, one of the earliest transcontinental routes.

Today’s heavy auto use discourages impromptu interactions along San Pablo Avenue. Approximately 1.5 miles of the Avenue, from 53rd to 62nd Streets, passes through the Golden Gate neighborhood. Neighbors who grew up in the area in the 1940s, 50s and 60s fondly remember a robust business district that sustained the community. It was a safe street for walking, and residents could find everything they needed, all while chatting with neighbors. A second-generation resident remembered buying penny candy at the local pharmacy and in exchange, receiving a dollar voucher for Saturday cartoons at the nearby theater. That movie theater, at the corner of San Pablo and Stanford Avenues, now houses the Star Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. With nostalgia, another longtime neighbor recalled shopping at the Gateway, the local market at the corner of 59th and San Pablo that served the community for decades. On this site, Klinkner Hall was built in the late 1800s by the maverick entrepreneur and developer Charles Klinkner. The hall’s steeple clock, emblazoned with the words ‘Klinkner Time,’ was one of the region’s largest gathering spots. In the late 1940s, Klinkner Hall met its fate with the wrecking ball to make way for a food market, which became the new heart of the neighborhood. Everyone shopped at the

Gateway Market, where employees would “...name packages for you,” according to Crystal, a local resident. “Say I always came in, and each week, I ordered pork chops, some steak and chopped meat. Well, they would name this ‘the Crystal package.’ I could buy it, or anyone could buy it. They would put it together. It was listed on the board.”

Starting in the early 1960s, regional development diminished the vitality of Golden Gate commercial district. While the newly constructed Eastshore Parkway promised even faster passage from Oakland to Richmond, it diverted local traffic from San Pablo Avenue, reducing opportunities for casual shopping. But even more impactful was Emeryville’s construction of two large mixed-use commercial developments. With the opening of the East Bay Bridge Shopping Center in the early 1990s, the region’s first big-box retailers arrived. Smaller markets like the Gateway couldn’t compete with mega-markets like Pak ‘N Sav. Other national retailers—Home Depot, K-Mart and fast food restaurants—sapped the Golden Gate’s local businesses. Built on a nearly 3,000-year-old Ohlone shellmound, the Bay Street complex (2002), with its 65 stores, 10 restaurants and 400 residential units, has further complicated the area’s retail landscape.

As Golden Gate mom-and-pop businesses began to shutter, a new history group convened to research the many changes occurring where Emeryville, North Oakland and South Berkeley intersect. In 1988, this ad-hoc group of librarians, architects and history buffs was tasked with finding historic Emeryville photos for a local pub. Enjoying the assignment, the group officially became the Emeryville Historical Society (EHS) and began to meet monthly. One of the group’s earliest and most significant achievements was to photograph every major Emeryville building, including those lining San Pablo Avenue. They also rescued street signs, menus and other ephemera from transitioning businesses. Drawing on a massive archival photo collection and their research prowess, the Emeryville Historical Society began to stage annual exhibits at Oakland Public Library’s Oakland History Room. They also publish a quarterly journal for history nerds and Oakland aficionados, teasing out both esoteric and prominent moments in the area’s past. While the group’s membership has ebbed and flowed over the years, Don Hausler and Nancy Smith, both retired librarians, continue to anchor the group. As of this publishing, EHS has its own website, www.emeryvillehistorical.org, featuring photos and articles from their research trove.

In the 1990s, at the request of the Oakland Heritage Alliance, EHS organized several detailed guided tours of the Golden Gate’s transforming business district. Moving through time with photos and extensive research, these popular walking tours revealed many of the area’s changes. The tour printed here was repeated only once, and this paper guide has not been in local circulation.

Don and Nancy have proven incredibly generous in sharing their resources and knowledge with Commons Archive. Published here with the tour guide are traces of Don's copious research, including interviews with neighbors and proprietors as well as charts outlining the lineage of local businesses. I am also thankful that the Oakland Heritage Alliance has allowed me to reprint Don's companion essay to the walking tour that appeared in its newsletter.

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