

PREFACE

ON BECOMING A HISTORIC RESIDENT

When moving into a new home, most people think of renovation as a physical and structural process. This is not the case with Brock Winstead. After he and his wife moved into their Golden Gate home in 2011, he set out “to find out as much as I could about who had lived in this house and on this land before I got here. I started with the Native American people who lived here and worked my way up to the present day.” A writer, editor and audio producer with a master’s degree in urban planning, Brock is no stranger to deep research. With a penchant for following his curiosity, Brock embarked upon a year-long social and archeological excavation of his home. His research and musings first emerged as a series of blog posts where he raised personal questions about what it means to be a historic resident. Brock writes about the tangled question of who can claim original ownership of a home and in turn, a neighborhood.

I met Brock in 2014 during a neighborhood walking discussion, part of *Communities’ Crossing*, the precursor to this Commons Archive project. He told me about his new weekly podcast, *The Eastern Shore*, where he engages in conversations with locals about issues impacting Oakland and the East Bay. For about a year, Brock produced close to 50 episodes, interviewing thinkers, change-makers and creatives like comedian W. Kamau Bell, writer Ishmael Reed, bike advocate Dave Campbell, and food policy expert Esperanza Pallana. Brock sat down with me for one of his early episodes to talk about my work with local history as a public resource, and in fair turnaround, I interviewed Brock to be part of a growing collection of oral histories from the Golden Gate neighborhood. The full interview transcript is in *Golden Gate Conversations*, another Golden Gate Library Local Collection title that includes transcripts from conversations I had with new and longtime neighbors.

During our interview, Brock shared some of his backstory. Brock and his wife Heather, relative newcomers to the neighborhood, first moved in as renters in 2006. After a few years, the spot began to feel like home. When the market crashed in 2008-09, the spiraling economy allowed them to purchase a house not too far from where they had been renting. Brock confessed that “essentially through the collective suffering of lots of people around us, we were suddenly able to afford to buy a house, where before we never thought we would be.”

Writing about the history of his home and neighborhood was a cathartic process, a way to come to terms with what he calls the “blind luck” of now being a homeowner. His five-part blog posts parse history into decade-long chunks, starting with ‘Part 1: Native Americans to 1848’ and ending with ‘Part 6: 1930 -1970’, which is “on indefinite hold,” according to his website. To research the genesis of what he now calls home, Brock scoured publicly accessible records in Oakland Public Library’s Oakland History Room and the City’s planning department. *BOOM California*, the UC Press journal that publishes provocative think-pieces about social, political and cultural issues impacting California, picked up Brock’s writing. His essay, a compact version of his blog posts, is punctuated with curated maps illustrating the layered passing of people through this region. Believing in the importance of freely sharing this research, *BOOM*’s editors generously granted me permission to reprint Brock’s essay.

How **do** we define who is a historic resident? Brock candidly grapples with his responsibility and role in the changes that the Golden Gate neighborhood is experiencing with no clear answer emerging. Subsequent to the *BOOM* piece, Brock’s writing ran in *Slate*, an online magazine, receiving a much wider readership. Following his essay, hundreds of readers weighed in on the contested sources, meanings and complications of gentrification. These comments are included here, a critical corollary to the story of neighbors, neighborhoods and history.

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