

Fernside After the Cohens

After Emilie Cohen died in 1924, the vast 100+ acre estate of Fernside was subdivided by her heirs into two residential neighborhoods, 'Fernside' and 'Windsor Tract'. An earlier subdivision called 'Waterside Terrace' was adjacent to Fernside.

For nearly 70 years the Cohen's property was operated as a home site for their massive mansion and as a family farm with orchards, vegetable gardens, grain fields, and cattle. All of the buildings on their property were for private use, there was no commercial or industrial development.

The property was originally intended to be an extension of the Town of Alameda laid out by William Chipman and Gideon Aughinbaugh who purchased the Alameda peninsula from Spanish land owner Don Antonio Peralta in 1851. However Chipman and Aughinbaugh's dreams of creating an East End township did not develop as planned while other parts of the island flourished. When AA Cohen purchased 102 acres of their holdings in 1856 that section was designated on some maps as 'Alameda extension'. This small detail may have contributed to dissension as the island community developed into a one-town concept and the Cohens owned a huge chunk of land for expansion. The visions of a growing community conflicted with the expectations of a private landholder. The Cohens contested every attempt by the City of Alameda to facilitate 'progress' that required taking a portion of their property, including water lines, street extensions, and a tidal canal.

Eventually even the Cohen children realized that maintaining a viable farm was not enough to generate enough income to pay property and income taxes and plans began to be made for subdividing. So when matriarch Emilie Cohen died in 1924, plans were already in place for creating a residential subdivision on the bulk of the estate.

The first subdivision became what is still called the 'Fernside neighborhood'. The second subdivision was not until 1936 when the 'Industrial Tract' fronting on the Tidal Canal was developed by Cohen heirs. After it was deemed not viable for industrial use, it became a residential subdivision referred to as the 'Windsor Tract' or Marina Terrace. [See FOLDER E at bottom of Box 44 for more details on Industrial Tract]

"Alfred A. and Emilie Gibbons Cohen's children chose an accomplished, experienced developer to subdivide their parents' estate. They sold Fernside to Fred T. Wood. In May 1925, Wood supervised the carving of Fernside's main street from Central Avenue to High Street and Fernside Boulevard as a curve. A small, grassy triangle at Central and Versailles avenues marks the spot where the subdivision was born. Wood then defined his development with a pair of curves that embraced this main street just where the estate's stately mansion stood before it had burned 28 years earlier. He named the main street Gibbons Drive after Emilie's family, and called the brace of intersecting streets Northwood and Southwood. Not coincidentally, Fred's family name was Wood. Not one street in the subdivision bore the name Cohen." [Dennis Evanovsky, *Alameda Post*, 13 Jun 2024]

WATERSIDE TERRACE

Subdivision by Henry Gibbons adjacent to Fernside

In 1858, Emilie Cohen's father, Henry Gibbons, MD acquired title to a pie-shaped parcel of marshland adjacent to the Cohen estate on the east side of High Street. When the Tidal Canal was created, dredgings were used to fill the marshland so it could be built upon. In 1912 a subdivision known as Waterside Terrace was laid out with 160 lots for homes. By the 1920's it was an established neighborhood.

"Waterside Terrace" by Woody Minor August 2013

This year's walk puts the focus on a groundbreaking 20th century tract. With its curving streets, concrete entrance pedestals, and shoreline access paths, Waterside Terrace introduced modern concepts of subdivision planning to the Island City. Situated across High Street from Fernside, this well-preserved neighborhood is an open-air museum of the single family residence as it evolved in the 1910s and 1920s, from Arts & Crafts to Period Revival. The extraordinary collection of Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Prairie designs to be found here is unlike anything else in Alameda. Laid out in 1912, Waterside Terrace was the first residential tract opened along the route of the Southern Pacific's new interurban line in the East End. The broad right-of-way, named Fernside Boulevard, curved along the shorelines of San Leandro Bay and the Tidal Canal, linking up with other lines to create a continuous loop in Alameda for the SP Red Trains. The tract's 25-acre site, mostly wetlands, had lain vacant since its purchase by the Gibbons family during the gold rush. Dredged material from the Tidal Canal was deposited on the property in the 1890s, in the hope of future development; now, with trains running down its center, that time had arrived. Shaped like a piece of pie rimmed by water, the

subdivision included 160 terraced lots fronting on High Street, Fernside Boulevard, and three new avenues, Bayo Vista, Fairview, and Monte Vista. Early ads touted the shoreline setting. “Property facing San Leandro Bay and the tidal canal will be able to have boat landings and all the features of aquatic life in their back yards,” proclaimed the Times-Star in a 1912 article which also praised a system of public walkways leading to the water (one shoreline-access path survives). Construction came in two big waves—around 65 houses went up in the first five years, followed by an equal number in the 1920s—imparting an architectural character evocative of the early 20th century. In a very real sense, Waterside Terrace was the sequel to Mastick Park, the 1907 subdivision covered on last year’s walk. Both tracts were created by the same Oakland developers, both were marketed by the same local realtor, and both were driven by similar modernist concerns. If Mastick Park attended the bungalow’s birth, inducing its emergence from Colonial Revival forms, Waterside Terrace nurtured its growth and development. The redoubtable Strang brothers designed and built around 20 bungalows in each tract, providing continuity. Radical change is represented by the marvelous group of Prairiestyle houses, whose origins are more mysterious. “We want to show you the finest opportunity in Alameda for acquiring a modern, up to date home,” wrote the realtor C. C. Adams in a 1914 ad for Waterside Terrace. He wasn’t kidding. After describing a sleek stucco-clad model with solarium and roof garden, he summed it up: “The architecture is known as the Frank Lloyd Wright type.”

FERNSIDE

The Famous Cohen Estate

offers you more than any other property in the East Bay district.

Enjoy a walk or drive through Fernside. See the beautiful streets and boulevards now being completed at a cost of over \$188,000; the splendid electrolier street lights; be inspired by the magnificent oaks and pines which made Fernside, the old Cohen Estate, famous for seventy years.

See the great building activity with over \$150,000 worth of homes now under construction. \$100,000 worth more will start at once. All streets will be parked.

Attractive Prices and Terms

Prices, considering location and advantages, are lower than any other East Bay property.

Terms—only twenty per cent down; five years to pay the balance.

Most lots have 50 to 60-foot frontages and depths of 100 to 150 feet.

See El Seville

You are invited to inspect El Seville, the "Bungalow Beautiful," at Grove and Santa Clara, Alameda; 2700 people have gone through this home during the past week.

See Fernside Today

Considering the tremendous development of Oakland and Alameda's water front and the construction of the Estuary Tube, Fernside offers you a wonderful investment.

EASY TO REACH—From Oakland, take Alameda (Santa Clara Ave.) car direct to tract, or Park Street car to Central Avenue, or bus at High and East Fourteenth Streets to High Street and Fernside Boulevard at tract. Or motor by way of Webster Street bridge to Central Avenue and east on Central Avenue to tract; or by way of High Street, south to Central Avenue, or follow arrows.

FRED T. WOOD

Exclusive Selling Agent

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Oakland Office: 417 15th St., near Franklin.

Telephone Lakeside 842

Write, phone, or call for illustrated folder, map and prices.