

Annalee Allen: Legendary Locals of Oakland, a new addition to Oakland lore

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I am excited about a new book out, just in time for the holidays. The title is "Legendary Locals of Oakland," written by local historian and blogger Gene Anderson. The book is one in a new series by Arcadia Publishing, a national publisher specializing in local and regional histories. Previous Oakland-related titles from Arcadia include "Oakland's Chinatown," "Oakland Hills" and "Black Artists in Oakland."

Anderson has organized his book into seven chapters, starting with "Footsteps in the Past." Chapter five includes athletes of note, such as professional baseball player Curt Flood, who is remembered for bringing free agency to sports, and chapter six — "Artists, Builders, and Makers" — profiles writers Jack London, Gertrude Stein and Joaquin Miller and architect Julia Morgan. Richard Frank Oznowicz, better known as Frank Oz, co-collaborator of the Muppets and a lifelong Oaklander, is also mentioned.

Altogether, 180 Oakland individuals from all walks of life and backgrounds are included.

Gene and I met to look over the book together. I asked him what were the influences that led him to develop an interest in local history. He spoke of his blog, OurOakland.net (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160302111750/http://ouroakland.net/>), which he has been posting on for the past several years. "A reader asked about the sign for a former business, and I found tracking down the story behind it to be fun and challenging. There is always more to learn about Oakland's history," he said.

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Anderson moved from Berkeley to Oakland two decades ago. "Although I did not grow up in Oakland, my great grandparents lived in West Oakland and my great grandfather worked on the Southern Pacific ferryboat 'Piedmont' in the 1890s. My grandfather worked for the Sacramento Northern Railway in their machine shops at 40th and Shafter, so I knew I had family connections."

In the book's acknowledgments, the author readily admits that the biggest challenge was deciding who to include and who to leave out. "There are so many interesting people who have shaped and are shaping Oakland that I could fill several books," he writes. "I talked with authors, historians, politicians, business owners, friends, and family, and the more Oaklanders I talked to, the longer the list became."

On the cover is one of my favorite images, the William T. Shorey family. William Shorey was a 19th century whaling ship captain known to his crews as the "Black Ahab." He was the only black captain on the West Coast at the time. He is pictured with his wife, Julia Ann and their children, who the history files say, sometimes accompanied Shorey on his voyages. Shorey was active in Oakland city affairs and once hosted a dinner for Booker T. Washington. His family's home is a landmark and is still standing in West Oakland.

Copies of *Legendary Locals of Oakland* will be available at an upcoming Dec. 12 walk sponsored by Oakland Urban Paths, with Gene Anderson leading the way. The tour will meet at the corner of Perkins Street and Bellevue Avenue in Lakeside Park. On the walk, Gene will be highlighting a number of his "legends" who have connections to the tour route, including Hannah Jayne -- Oakland's first schoolteacher; Edson Adams, her husband and the owner of all the land now known as Adams Point; and Earl Warren, former Supreme Court Justice (who was a longtime resident of the Adams Point neighborhood). The OUP website contains archived narratives and photos from past walks. The monthly tours are free and they are researched and led by volunteers.