



Self-Guided Historical “Mini-Tour” of the Dimond District

Oakland, California

Produced by the Dimond Improvement Association



1.

Start your tour at 1720 MacArthur Blvd., the **ALTENHEIM**. In about 1890, the hilltop land was purchased for \$6,000 by the German Benevolent Society of San Francisco for a retirement home for German settlers in the Bay Area. The original Queen Anne-style building opened in 1896, but burned down in 1908. It was rebuilt in the Colonial Revival style we see today with \$70,000 raised from wealthy donors in the German community. Much of the structure and common areas were restored during its recent renovation and reopening as affordable housing for the elderly. After you admire the entrance and foyer, walk around to the back, through the gardens, to the rear entrance and exit onto Excelsior Street.

2.

Walk downhill to 2030 MacArthur (between Canon and Dimond aves.). Stroll down the adjacent driveway and you’ll see an older, 2-story building. This was the hotel of Charlie **TEPPER’S BEER GARDEN & HOTEL**, built in 1896 on land purchased from Hugh Dimond. (You’ll learn about Hugh later in the tour.) Tepper’s was a popular destination for city people coming out to “the country” to enjoy a beer, a meal, the good weather, and the company of friends. By 1923, Prohibition had taken its toll on Tepper’s income. In order to stay in business, he constructed the three adjoining shops along MacArthur, on what had been the shaded gardens. The stores were remodelled in 1933 and have housed a variety of businesses, including beauty shop, paint store, grill, shoe store, caterer, and florist.

3.

Look across the street to 2039-45, to the building with La Hacienda restaurant. Originally known as **DIMOND HALL**, it was erected by the Progressive Dimond Club in 1923, using the “thermo-wall steel system process” involving adjustable steel forms. Stores occupied the ground floor, and clubrooms and banquet hall the upper floor. In 1943, it was converted to wartime housing by the National Housing Authority and the upper floor remains apartments today.

4.

Continue down MacArthur to Dimond Avenue. Turn left and walk toward Dimond Park. This was the drive approaching the carriage entrance to Hugh Dimond's house, which stood just beyond today's redwood picnic area in the park. Hugh Dimond, born in Ireland, made his fortune in the goldfields, banking, and liquor wholesaling. In 1867, he bought 267 acres along Sausal Creek, renovating and enlarging the home of the previous owner, Henderson Luelling. In 1877, his family moved into the large, two-story white house encircled with a veranda. The house burned down in 1913.

Walk into the park and over to the **SCOUT HUT** (near the bathrooms). In 1896, Dimond's son Dennis built a cottage here using adobe bricks he collected from the nearby Peralta Hacienda (at what is now Coolidge and Paxton aves.). From 1924 to 1954, the cottage was the headquarters of Boy Scout Troop No. 10. Fire destroyed most of the building in 1954, but you'll see that part of the adobe wall still stands. The massive oak stump next to the building is what's left of the Champagne Oak, recently felled due to old age and estimated to have been more than 150 years old. Dennis Dimond hid a few bottles of champagne in a hole in the tree—thus the name.

5.

Continue your tour along Whittle Avenue to the **RHODA HOUSE** at #3893. Frederich Rhoda came to this area from Germany in 1859. He bought 217 acres, planted cherry trees, and built this Italianate-style home. In 1869, he shipped the first Royal Ann cherries east to New York on the newly completed Transcontinental Railroad and priced them at \$5.00 a pound. (Rhoda built a second home on the hill at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and MacArthur, where the infamous Hillcrest Motel stood until recently replaced by Lincoln Court. Lincoln Avenue was named for one of Frederich's sons, who died at age 22.)

6.

Return to Fruitvale Avenue and walk across MacArthur to the Farmer Joe's parking lot. The Farmer Joe's building was originally the **DIMOND THEATER**, built in 1925. The high-rise section at the back of the building accommodated the raising and lowering of stage scenery and curtains. The theater featured vaudeville shows and then motion pictures until it closed in 1953, to be converted to a Lucky's store.

