

A MESSAGE FROM



Friends of the Piedmont Avenue Library

HOOT

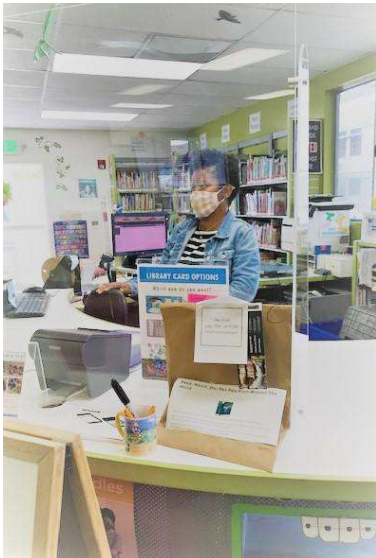
ALL THE NEWS THAT'S  
FIT TO HOOT!

[www.FriendsofPAL.org](http://www.FriendsofPAL.org)

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***The only thing  
that you absolutely have to know,  
is the location of the library.***

—Albert Einstein



### **In the Library**

From our Branch Manager, Leni Matthews

In the library, we've been working hard cleaning books and checking for any damage. We've rearranged the placement of a few book genres. For example:

The Short Stories are now on the shelf near the Large Print books for adults.

We now have a Children's Bilingual - Foreign Language Section.

Children's media are shelved near one another (books on CD, DVDs, CDs).

Unfortunately, there will be no in-person programs at the library until we receive notification to restart them.

We are happy to have the community back in the library!

### **A Cherry Tree and the Hume Family Some History**

During the Friends of PAL's clean-up day at the library, I noticed a cherry tree and wondered why it would be on school grounds. Here is the story.

In the late 1880s, the cherry tree was on land that belonged to the Hume family. The plots today bounded by Piedmont Avenue, Echo and Glen Streets and the fence that follows the school's driveway. At that time, only Piedmont Avenue existed, and a creek ran through what is now the school yard.

Mr. Hume had been a commercial fisherman on the East Coast and when the fish back there started thinning out, he came west. He built a house at what is now the end of Glen Eden for his family — his wife, their three children and his wife's sister - and brought them out here. The sister was a teacher and she set

up a schoolroom for the children in the dining room.

Neighbors heard about it and began sending their children for lessons. One boy rode a horse and let it graze during class time. Before long, the number of children outgrew the space. The Humes said, "We'll donate that corner lot – the one with the big tree on it – if the county will build a schoolhouse on it." So, a big wooden school was built on the corner lot. It was a perfect site because the Key System streetcar ran down Piedmont Avenue, making it easy for kids to get to school.

In 1937 that building was destroyed by fire, disrupting the lives of all those students and their families. This was the Depression and there was the WPA -- the Works Progress Administration (WPA) created by President Roosevelt in 1935. As a WPA project, workers built a new school building. The WPA imprint, in the sidewalk outside the school, is still in there. The creek that used to run through the playground is covered up, but the school is still there.

That large area donated by Hume has, over the years, had several buildings erected on it: the school, the now abandoned Child Development Center, and the current modular building that houses the Piedmont Avenue Library.

Note: it is the abandoned Child Development Center that many in the Piedmont Avenue neighborhood believe would make an ideal permanent home for the library. The library has one of the highest circulations in the Oakland Public Library system, but it is now cramped into the smallest housing in the system. Watch this space for progress reports on that effort.



*By Ruby Long, a neighbor whose work has appeared in local and national publications.*

## More History

Are you interested in the history of this neighborhood, our city, the Bay Area, or the state of California? Here are a few resources that you might find helpful.

The Oakland Public Library [website](#) provides access to Calisphere, where you will find over 2,000,000 images, texts, and recordings from California libraries and museums, and archives. Check it out [here](#).

Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Center located on the second floor of the Main Library is another invaluable resource for information about the East Bay. [Here](#) is it's website. The ever-helpful head librarian Dorothy Lazard has been described by KQED's Pendarvis Harshaw as the "gatekeeper" to a long list of books, periodicals, photos, and other documents that tell the story of this city. Many of these items would be difficult to find anywhere else. There is, for example, "Blacks in Oakland 1852-1987", written by Donald E. Hausler. This important piece of history documents a century's worth of African American life in this major American city, and I wouldn't have found the book without the help of Lazard."

And then there's the African American Museum and Library (AAMLO), an integral part of the OPL system that is "dedicated to the discovery, preservation, interpretation, and sharing of historical and cultural experiences of African Americans in California and the West for present and future generations." (Ref: OPL.org ) More information is available at their [website](#).

Our final suggestion: In 1990, the Oakland Heritage Alliance published an article about the history of the Piedmont Avenue neighborhood that's a very interesting read. You can find a copy posted on the [website](#) of PANIL -- Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League.

Enjoy!

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## **Birds of Lake Merritt**

### **A Birding Guide**

*Birds of Lake Merritt* is a richly illustrated, full-color field guide that introduces us to fifteen waterbirds easily found at Lake Merritt in Oakland, the nation's first official urban wildlife refuge.



In his introduction, author-illustrator Alex Harris includes a history of the lake, providing context for a place that is alluring to humans and shorebirds alike. Harris, born and raised in Berkeley, is now an Oakland resident who brings his art into the service of the natural world.

The profile of each species of the lake's feathered residents is accompanied by a beautiful, detailed watercolor that captures the bird's distinctive coloring and sinuous physicality. The black-crowned night heron, Oakland's official city bird, stares with its startling orange eyes, while the American coot flexes its fancy flared feet.

Along with straightforward notes on the identification of each bird, Harris features the voices of Oakland community members, sharing moments of delight from the birds' most dedicated observers. A celebration of avian life and the human pleasure of witnessing it, *Birds of Lake Merritt* is an essential guide to the natural world in the heart of the city.

Harris will give a virtual presentation about the book, sponsored by the Oakland Public Library, Wednesday August 4, 6pm – 7:30pm. Register [here](#) for the link to access the presentation live on Zoom.

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### **Be A Friend Of PAL**

**Attend our meeting in person Tuesday, July 20th at 6:30 pm - at the library!**  
**It will be wonderful to see you all again as we work to support our library.**

**The Friends are seeking to fill two volunteer positions on the Board - Social Media Coordinator and Treasurer. To learn more please email [friendsofpal.org](mailto:friendsofpal.org)**



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### **The Avid Reader by Louis Segal**

I've been an avid reader since I could read. In high school I used to cut school to read in the Berkeley Public Library. I'm writing this column to share some of the books I love. I hope, perhaps, you might grow to love a few of them.

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### **Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s [1979, re-issued 2004] by Donald Worster**

When I was a kid, the Great Depression made a big impression on me because it had made a far greater impression on my parents who lived through it. They told stories of penury, shame, hunger, hope and redemption. Their burden became my burden. Over the years, I read deeply about the Depression, and I've developed my narrative arc of it, its travails, heroes, and villains.

Then there were the contemporaneous dust storms that swept through the land, carrying countless tons of topsoil on the wind, sweeping from Colorado and New Mexico to the east coast. What caused these fearsome dark storms, darkening landscapes at noon throughout the 1930s, that amplified the Depression and caused massive migratory flows to the west. Were they “Acts of God”? Or did they, too, have a narrative arc that history could divine? Watching Ken Burn’s 2012 Dust Bowl I realized that there were causal links to both events; that human beings, sod-busting and looking for a quick market driven “killing,” and reinforced by the cultural imperatives of capitalism, created massive monocultural wheat cultivation that were major contributors to the catastrophic decade.

A colleague suggested I read Worster’s Dust Bowl. It is a revelation, by turns lyrical and polemical. In 1979 Worster was a lonely voice, a pioneer in the nascent field of environmental history. He took the long geological view of the grasslands in the plains and synthesized the scientific and historical factors at play in the southern plains [Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico]. Well researched, he makes local case studies of two counties in the plains [Cimarron, Oklahoma and Haskell, Kansas]. His thesis remains cogent, prescient, and convincing. He argues that aggressive, profit driven, absentee farmers were major factors in both the Depression and the Dust Bowl. They led to the economic collapse and the degradation of the grass lands in the semi-arid southern plains and the destruction of diversified agriculture. Worster maintains we, as a people and a culture, never took to heart the lessons of the era and that government reforms consolidated the same root problems that caused both the Depression and the Dust Bowl. We can no longer depend on reckless profit driven commercial agriculture and its reliance on petroleum-based machinery and fertilizers, and the draining of the finite aquifers. We need to rethink the ideas of dominion over nature and respect the ecology of the grasslands. Writ large, we need to learn humility from the land and not bludgeon it in our restless search for private wealth.

Worster’s words resonate today. Man-made climate change is no longer disputed by reasonable men and women. Fires, drought, desertification, the rising of the ocean waters, the melting of the ice caps and glaciers, immigrants seeking higher ground, all appear in the day’s news and the trending goes from bad to worse. I commend you to this book for insight into the ideas we need to escape our dystopian present.

### **What's Happening at the Library**

**Do to Covid restrictions there are currently no programs at the library.**

The Friends of Pal will have a table at the John Street Jumble (giant garage sale), Sunday August 15th, 9am to 2pm at 4288 Montgomery near John St. We'll be promoting our library with buttons and stickers and more. Please visit us there.