

Dimond Park is named for a gold-rusher

by Erika Mailman, from the Montclarion, May 2, 2000

First of all, Dimond Park, and the entire Dimond district for that matter, is named for Hugh Dimond. He arrived in California a young 20-year old with three children, as yet another Gold Rusher. In 1867, he purchased the acreage that included the area now called Dimond Park.

However, he was not the first European to own the land. The 12-acre park was part of the Peralta family's ranch, back in the days of the Spanish land grants. The family's 1821 adobe, described in a book called "Oakland Park and Playgrounds" as the "first substantial house built in Oakland," stood for many years until it burned in the 1950s.

The Peraltas passed the land to Henderson Lewelling, who planted many fruit trees and named the plot Fruitvale. I guess we should be glad today's district is called Fruitvale rather than the difficult-to-spell Lewelling.

When one visits the park today, there is a small, difficult-to-read plaque that sets forth a bit of local history. According to the plaque, the utility building across from the restrooms has incorporated adobe bricks from the 1897 Dimond cottage, described as a "playhouse" for the Dimond children, although a brief history on an Oakland Parks Department map references the adobe bricks as being from the Peralta home.

Regardless, it's interesting to look at the old bricks that encircle the door, set aside from the rest of the blank wall of the building. Next to the building is the Dimond Oak, a sturdy, gnarled tree that dates back 200 years.

Adjacent to the plaque is an 1896 bell, which originally hung in a streetcar barn, which later became the volunteer headquarters for the Dimond Volunteer Fire Department.

In 1917, the city purchased 12 acres at Fruitvale and Lyman streets from the Dimond estate for \$24,000--today's present park.

The Oakland Park Department set out wide fireplaces to encourage picnicking, and according to the same park book, Sausal Creek was so clean that "breathless children leave their games to quench their thirsts at clear, cool springs."

Dimond Park has been a green stronghold for local children since the early part of the century...but at one time plans were afoot to connect it to the already-existing Joaquin Miller Park, making one enormous park. The park was to feature a lake that would be twice the size of Lake Temescal!

According to a 1946 article in the Post-Enquirer, plans called for construction of a dam above Leimert Bridge which would create "Inspiration Lake," a sandy-shored lake with six acres of water surface. The plan included space for stores and a theater. "Thanks to the 20-year park improvement plan of William Penn Mott, Jr., Oakland's curves and contours are to be corseted and girdled to make her the most theatrical and glamorous park city in the world," said the Post-Enquirer.

The area planners hoped would be the site of the lake is today the Montclair golf course and driving range.

The Post-Enquirer raved "Oakland's great mountain park-to-be [would] dwarf in size and scope San Francisco's Golden Gate."