



Cohen Bray House is Celebrating its 140th year

We have been opening drawers, closets and boxes to find wedding artifacts. In the process many treasures have been found. Enjoy the discoveries.

Emma's Wedding Dress

by Mara Melandry and Nancy Donald

In an exciting rediscovery, Emma's wedding dress was found in a box in the closet of the front bedroom, originally occupied by Alfred and Emma. The dress was worn on February 24, 1884 at her marriage to Alfred Henry Cohen. The dress was displayed at the celebration of the 140th anniversary of Alfred and Emma's occupation of their new home after the wedding.

The dress is in remarkable but not perfect condition: it has a few small tears in the fabric. The skirt has twelve gore-shaped panels to give the skirt a full look. They were not attached to the bodice when the dress was found.

Nancy and Karen Tierney, an expert in restoring vintage wedding gowns, examined the pattern of stains on the panels, no doubt from the reception, and figured out the order in which they were originally attached to the bodice. The dress is white: the custom

Up coming Events-

See website for all tickets and details

- **May 12th Mothers' Day Tea & Tour** 2 seatings 11:30am, 1:00 pm
- **Monthly Tours-** 4th Sunday of the month 2-4 pm
- **Schedule private teas** and events with friends and family to support our efforts.

September 29th- Restoration & Preservation Celebration.

We are in the planning stages and will have demonstrations, workshops and a chance to meet restoration professionals.

We will publish details, when we have them, by email, mail and on the website

www.cohenbrayhouse.org

News from the Patricia Donald, President

Here are some of the amazing things that have transpired since the last newsletter.

Events

February 28th- **140th wedding Anniversary Member Party!** 35 of you, our volunteers and supporters came, met new and old friends, and shared stories.

Appreciations to all, including our past board President Paul Roberts and Treasurer- Patty Reidenbach for their work. We introduced Jeremy Fukunaga who donated 360 degree videos of all the rooms in the house. This will allow us to share the house with no impact on the collection. A link will be up on the website soon.

We toasted to our continued progress, admired the wedding gifts such as: the hammered-silver pattern on Emma's flatware, her silver tea set, intricate embroidery, and other unique gifts. Karen Tierney shared her knowledge about Emma's wedding dress.



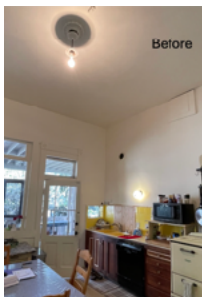
Patty Reidenbach
Treasurer and founding member of VPCO and Paul Roberts, Board President for many years were appreciated at the gathering.



You will find more information about our projects and surprises throughout the newsletter.

- Emma's Wedding Dress pg 1 +
- Revealing the Hidden Drawer pg 5
- Finding Edgar Cohen photos pg 6,7

Finished projects



Miranda Kurtulis, VPCO board member also installs light fixtures !



Patty rescued a captain's chair from the attic and clean and oiled it. It is now ready for new caning.



2021 kitchen before new floor and fresh paint



New hutch Mark St Gaudens made and placed in January, 2024.



Windows in the tower room are working and sealed. Thank you Mark and Elizabeth.

The shutters have been cleaned, oiled and replaced. Thank you Patty Donald.



Emma's wedding photo. She also saved the wedding veil and silk flowers.

of white wedding dresses was started by Queen Victoria at her marriage to Prince Albert in 1840.

The dress is made entirely of faille silk. It is machine-sewn (the first patent for mechanical sewing machines was filed in 1851 by Issac Singer). There is no indication of who made or designed the dress but according to Karen, it was expensive and made-to-order. It is typical of its era: it has long sleeves, a high neck, a full skirt, and a knife-pleated underskirt which was not in the box but which can be seen in Emma's formal wedding portrait. Knife pleats are sharp narrow pleats on a skirt in one direction which typically overlap each other.

It has the desirable profile of the time, with a full backside. Beautiful pearls adorn the end of the acute-angled sleeves. You can also see in the portrait that the dress possibly had a small jacket and other details. An elaborate silk panel with pleats and buttons covered with hand-crocheted lace is on the bodice. The panel, which extends below the waistline, is known as a stomacher.

Hooks and loops which alternate on the back of the dress can also be seen in the photographs. Emma probably used a bustle pad to hold the fabric in the desired shape. Bustles were traditionally filled with horsehair, cotton batting or other materials to maintain the bustles' shapes. They were sewn to the waistband of the dress.

Although none of the undergarments have been discovered, staff from Lacis Museum of Lace and Textiles in Berkeley provided information on the elaborate undergarments usually worn during this era. At the time of Emma's wedding, corsets shaped the body. Previously, corsets were shaped to fit the body. Corsets extended below the waistline. Emma's waist was 22 inches. Underneath the corset a woman wore a chemise, a full-length garment made of light-weight cotton. Its purpose was to prevent body sweat from reaching the outer and expensive dress. Petticoats also gave the dress its contours.

Emma would have worn a garter belt to hold up her stockings. In the 19th century complex underclothing made it practical for women to wear underpants with a permanent opening between the legs, so they would not have to reach under and pull them down when urinating. Such underpants were known as split drawers. They typically had fabric to the knees, similar to shorts but not form-fitting; they were often trimmed with ruffles. Because



Sleeve detail showing lining and pearls

From the back you can see the hook and eye fasteners and the beautiful bustle fabric.



photo by Donald Melandry

of the voluminous dresses, exposure was not a problem. Did Emma wear split drawers? We do not know.

The corset did not fall out of fashion for many decades. Indeed, it was not until the Roaring Twenties that corsets were finally and permanently replaced by comfortable bras, panties, slips and girdles.

We are very fortunate to have Emma's wedding dress: it adds to our understanding of the Cohens' lives. Besides, wedding dresses are just darn fun, fascinating and beautiful.

Many thanks to Karen Tierney at Studio Trousseau and Lacis Museum of Lace and Textiles for your help. The dress will be on display at the house for a few more months. There are more photos on the website. www.cohenbrayhouse.org



Miranda is installing the fixture in the middle hallway. We can now see the ceiling and wall papers. Beautiful



Original fixture



Our new fixtures have been donated by Jana Olson of Panache Lighting

One dark corner of the Craftsman room is now visible with a clean and working lamp.



Collection Adventures - A Hidden Drawer

by Ella Spandorf



Earlier this year on February 4th Nancy and I were looking for a project for me to do for my internship at SF State. We started by looking at the drawers of Emma's mirrored dresser in the front bedroom. We noticed the bottom drawer was sticking. We pulled it all the way out to figure out why, that's when we noticed a secret compartment underneath the drawer. The compartment was full of dusty objects. We were instantly overjoyed with this discovery and got to work vacuuming the dust carefully from the edges and then we started exploring.

We videoed the revealing of the objects.



The space is 21" x 46" x 5". We found 112 objects: Letters, photos, envelopes and pamphlets. A few special standouts are Emma's Mills Seminary Testimonial from 1876, and two packets of letters. One packet contains letters written by Emelita to Emma during Emelita's train trip to the East Coast in 1928. The second packet dated 1930 were responses to Emma's letter telling family and friends that Emelita was sick with pleurisy and in the hospital.

My personal favorites are a wax paper Blue Bird Potato Chip bag from 1928 and a collection of Child Life Magazine envelopes with intricate and colorful designs.

I've been working on researching and cataloging these findings as my internship project, all the while enjoying my time contemplating why Emma or Emelita chose to save and hide these specific mementos; these items give us an intimate glimpse into the families life.



You can view the 'hidden objects' at <https://hub.catalogit.app/search/Cohen%20Bray%20H> or use the QR code

If you don't have computer access and you have questions or comments about anything in the newsletter you can call us at 510-536-1703.

You can make an appointment to come and see items in our collections.

HUB



Seeking Edgar's Photos

by Kate McAnaney and Nancy Donald



View of SF waterfront April 1906 from the water

In January 2024 I embarked on a project to create a list of where the photographic works of Edgar A Cohen ended up. Edgar was a prolific early California photographer who was a younger brother of Alfred H. Cohen. Cohen Bray House owns some Edgar Cohen prints, most having been sent as Christmas cards from Edgar to Cohen family members. Some prints and plates are in the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley and some prints are held by private collectors. The bulk of Edgar Cohen's photographic work was in the collection of Pat Hathaway

of Monterey who made a business of collecting and reproducing historic photos. Pat Hathaway died unexpectedly in 2021 and I read online that after a legal battle his collection had been given to the Monterey County Historical Society (MCHS) for preservation. I made an appointment to visit the MCHS facility in Salinas to see if I could find details of Hathaway's acquisitions.

The curator was very helpful and on that first visit I was able to get a sense of the breadth of Edgar's work in the Hathaway collection by looking at binders with his original prints. He kept detailed notes about each photo; time of day, weather conditions and description of the photo and location.

On my second visit I was able to take a look at Hathaway's accession records for specific Edgar Cohen acquisitions. The accession file showed that Hathaway had purchased a large collection of photographic glass plate negatives in 1977 from a man in Monterey.

Applying methods I use when doing genealogy, I was able to find a man with the same name in a 1977 Monterey directory where he was listed as a photo engraver working for the local newspaper. He sounded like a promising lead! I followed him forward in online directories and was quite excited to find that he was alive at age 82 and was still living in the Monterey area. I wrote to what I hoped was a current address and he immediately emailed back!

He told me the story of how 50 years ago he had found a dusty old box in a storage room of the newspaper office where he worked. The box was full of glass plate negatives. Being a photographer himself he was quite intrigued. His boss had no idea where the box had come from and said he could have it. He carefully examined each

fragile plate and could not determine the location for most of the shots. However he did find that some were of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and of the 1915 Pan-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) He kept 19 of these plates and made himself prints. Years later, when he was moving, he decided to find someone who might be interested in the plates. He was pleased to find Pat Hathaway's historic photo business located in Pacific Grove, a city adjacent to Monterey. He sold the bulk of the box to Hathaway. He was astonished that when he was about to move again, he got a letter from me inquiring about Edgar Cohen.

The barber shop at Columbia Park where San Franciscans lived for months after the fires. May 5, 1906



have saved.

The plates are too fragile for frequent handling so Paul Roberts, a past Cohen Bray House board president and Edgar Cohen collector, graciously made prints of each plate so others can view the photos.

ed - This article has been edited for brevity. The full description of Kate's process of discovering these plates will be available on our website. We will also post the photos at HUB.catalogit.app/ Cohen bra House. The prints are also available to see at the Cohen Bray House. The glass plates are safely packed away in our photography collection.



Fire at Samson and California Streets after the earthquake

He insisted on giving me the plates he had kept out of the original box and the prints he had made for himself from some of the plates.

What an unexpected result. My simple quest to make a list led to the surprising find of an unknown batch of Edgar Cohen's original glass plates. Other Cohen family members are sharing the plates and prints that they

LEAVE A LEGACY

Please remember the Cohen Bray House, occupied since 1884, with a generous gift in your will or trust. It preserves and represents a unique part of California history . Your gift will support the conservation, preservation an educational programs of the Victorian Preservation Center of Oakland. If you have already included the Cohen Bray House in your plans, please let us know so that we can then acknowledge your gift to ensure that California's past will pass into its future. For further information on giving options, please contact us and always consult your financial advisor.

SUPPORT US NOW

The Victorian Preservation Center of Oakland is a 501c3 non profit organization Tax ID #94-3156522 dedicated to the preservation of the Cohen-Bray House and to the interpretations of Bay Area history and decorative arts as represented by the house and its gardens.



To make a reservation for our monthly tour please call

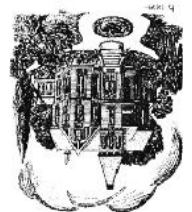
510 536-1703

or

info@cohenbrayhouse.org

*This newsletter is edited by Nancy Donald and Mara Melandry
If you have any comments, questions or would like to help,
Please contact Nancy at nancy@cohenbrayhouse.org*

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Victorian Preservation Center of Oakland