

Victorian Preservation Center of Oakland



COHEN-BRAY

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XXV

SPRING/SUMMER 2022



This is the Sparks stove currently in use at the Cohen Bray House. It was refurbished in 2020

In our last newsletter we shared the photos and stories about the original French brick oven that we uncovered in July, 2022. After 1926, when the original oven was covered up, we assume there were earlier models of Spark stoves in the kitchen. The present stove was a model from the 1930's. It turns out that Emma Bray Cohen's brother, Howard Watson Bray actually started the company that produced Spark Stoves. Here is part of that story in Howard's own words. These are from a 'Reminiscence' that he wrote in 1958 at the age of 87.

East Fourteenth Street. Our home of three stories with four acres of gardens and lawns was considered one of the old show places of the county. It was across the street from where the Montgomery Ward store now stands.....

"I was born at Fruitvale, which is now a part of East Oakland. My father owned 200 acres there, the center of which would be Fruitvale Avenue and



As a young boy I was much interested in the steel and metal business and was offered a job in the shops of W. W. Montague & Co. at \$3.60 a week. This was one of the large wholesale companies in San Francisco, and I grew up with them. When I was eighteen, they gave me a short territory to sell different lines in Oakland, Alameda County and Marin County, up as far as Santa Rosa.



We found this milk pan under the house. It is not seamless so was probably made around 1889. There is no makers mark.

Marin County in early days had a large dairy production, and there was always a great demand for tin milk pans, which were manufactured by hand in different tin shops in San Francisco, and all seamed. About this time there was developed in the East a special milk pan which was stamped "Seamless". This was such an improvement on the old pan that the demand was enormous. I sold gross after gross of them in upper Marin County.

I made this trip to this section once a month in a one horse sulky, as there were no stages or other transportation at that time.....

Somewhat later George Hammer and I organized the firm of Eastern Stove and Range Co. in San Francisco, later changing the name to Hammer-Bray Company and manufactured Spark stoves, before the earthquake and fire of 1906.

(Continued page 2).

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"Our warehouse, all of our stoves, and our records were destroyed in the fire. As soon as communication East was established, I wired one of the foundries in Pennsylvania which supplied us with Eastern stoves. "We have lost all but our courage," and received an immediate reply that their foundry had 300 stoves in the types that we sold on the coast made up and in the warehouse and were shipped all to us as fast as the cars could be loaded. That was the spirit of 1906! All and all we bought and sold in San Francisco, immediately, after the fire, over thirty carloads of cast iron stoves and steel ranges and a very few gas ranges, as gas was a new product for the house wife, and there were very few in use. These were the first stoves brought into San Francisco from the East after the fire." -Howard Watson Bray 1958

From localwiki.org we found this information. "The **Hammer-Bray Company** manufactured stoves and other metal goods in Oakland. It was started by George Hammer and Howard Watson Bray, son of Watson A. Bray and brother of Emma Bray Cohen. The company began in 1902 manufacturing metal products including wood and coal stoves. They started manufacturing gas stoves in 1913. By 1920, they were so successful they had to enlarge their manufacturing plant on 26th Avenue at East 12th. They were best known for their **Spark Stoves**, and even created a cookbook for customers.

A Spark Lid-Top Gas Range was selling for \$98.50 in 1924.

Howard Bray retired from the business in 1937. George Hammer continued running the business until his death in 1941. The company continued making stoves at least into the 1950s, and the last ad for them in the *Oakland Tribune* was pre-1959."



COOKS your food...HEATS your home

The New
SPARK
TABLE TOP GAS RANGE

with the built-in
GAS
Circulating Heater

On this most modern of all gas stoves your kitchen heater is a constant source of joy instead of a constant source of work. It means no wood, no coal, no ashes, no soot, no grimy walls or ceilings, no waiting. At a turn of a valve you get an instant flood of clean, healthful, circulating heat in kitchen and breakfast room. And that is but one of many patented, exclusive features of this beautiful, modern Spark. By all means see the Spark before you buy ANY stove.

Nothing Down...3 Years to Pay

MULKEY'S
East 12th St. at 6th Ave.

Along with the story of the stoves, cookbooks are a part of the history of the house and we have many. This one is from 1909. The recipes are from readers of the Oregonian. It is full of hand written notes from several different cooks. If you are interested, come and help organize and catalog our cookbooks. By the way, let us know how these baking powder breads turned out.



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Baking Powder Breads

Popovers

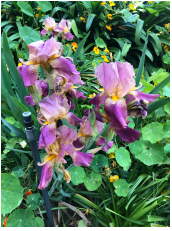
Sift together one cup of sifted flour, one-fourth teaspoon of salt; gradually beat in a cup of milk and an egg beaten until light. Beat two minutes with a Dover beater, and bake about half an hour in a gem pan, buttered, in fast oven. —Mrs E. A. Wadhams.

Batter Cakes

Beat thoroughly one teaspoon of soda with one and one-half pints of sour milk. Beat the yolks of three eggs and add to the milk, then stir in the flour and a little salt, making the batter of the consistency of cake. Then beat the whites to a stiff froth, fold in, not thoroughly. —Mrs J. L. Brenner, Dayton, O.

Breakfast Puffs

Boil a pint of milk with a quarter of a pound of butter. Stir in three-quarters of a pound of flour and let cool. Beat the whites and yolks of five eggs separately and add. Fill greased cups half full of the batter, and bake in a quick oven. Turn out on a hot plate and sprinkle with sugar.



Greetings and News from your Board President. Patty Donald

Since December there have been a lot of new things happening at the house, besides blooming flowers, and a slow opening. Many positives and a few inevitable occurrences that happen with an old house.

Your help has made all the difference in our thriving.

Recently, our focus has been in making sure that our future caretakers, Mark and Elizabeth St.Gauden's rooms are clean and ready for their arrival in the next month. More about them in the next newsletter.

In December, we finally got to dress-up the house for the well-attended holidays tours. Unfortunately we had to cancel the tea, so we missed the fun. We look forward to seeing you all at our **Mother's Day Tea and Tour May 8th**. The link to the tickets is also on our website or at <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/5409535>

Covid made it impossible to be open; nevertheless, our supporters continued to help us. Thank-you all so much for helping us monetarily and physically (masked) during that time. Our budget is looking far better than we expected, thanks to you all. One of our supporters generously gave us a check for \$10,000 from their "Still Standin Fund" to help with projects.

Luckily, we have many talented volunteers who donated their skills. Bob Gelb, Roberta O'Grady, Christina Castro, Katy Nix, Alison Heymon, Sienna and Kathy Contreras, Lucia Rodillo, Rosalind Kaye, Bob Prizzi, Paula Shadle, Mara Melandry, Maria Del Real, Andres Acosta and of course Patty Reidenbach. Recently, Alice La Pierre our new board member put UV film on the South/West facing windows in the Craftsman rooms, which will protect the furniture and wood from the sun. Member and tile expert, Riley Doty contributed his skills in cleaning and sealing the encaustic tiles in the library.

Unfortunately we lost six of the 28 windowpanes in the large sliding door on the porch. We are always working against time, gravity, and wood rot. Fortunately, John Kraft helped us safely remove the rest of the wavy glass and supported the door so it is usable. Check Facebook, Instagram(#cohenbrayhouse)and our web page to see more photos showing the volunteers and work done on the tiles, door and windows. Please like, share and review our pages.

Help us plan a Fundraising Party Let's work together to show this house is worth saving!

Help spread the word about our mission to save this unique historic time capsule. If you have ideas about people or corporations who could donate to raise the funds to repair the back porch door with the only restroom on the main floor, and get the back buildings ready to offer revenue generating workshops let us know. Our website has detailed information and pictures about all our Capital projects. Let us know your creative ideas, connections, and resources at cohenbrayhouse@gmail.com or leave a note on our website and join our fundraising committee.

Together, with your help and connections, we will move forward to save the past for the future.

Invest in our dream!



**Willcox & Gibbs Automatic Noiseless Sewing Machine
1880's**

We created some space in the attic and re discovered two sewing machines. Both are Wilcox & Gibbs Noiseless Sewing Machines . These are some of the very early home sewing machines. Emma saved the original instruction manuals. . Want to help clean and research these amazing machines? Come join us.



**The New Willcox & Gibbs Electric
Automatic Noiseless Sewing Machine
1925**

Encaustic Tiles have been cleaned and sealed by Riley Doty.

Renewed interest in Gothic decoration in the early 19th century stimulated a demand for medieval style inlaid tiles, which had been extensively employed in the floors of medieval monasteries. Around 1828 Herbert Minton began experiments in producing what came to be known as 'encaustic tiles'. They



Before cleaning

essentially were made by imbedding the color into the tile, not just a glaze on the surface. All the tiles on the fireplaces in the Cohen Bray House are Minton tiles. The library fireplace hearth tiles are encaustic. The tiles on the front of the fireplaces are glazed tiles.

The library fireplace tiles were stained and damaged by logs and coal rolling onto them over the 100+ years the fireplace was used. The brass fender prevented the logs from rolling on to the carpet.

Over a period of five days, Riley Doty (with Patty Donald's help) used water, sponges and five different gradients of diamond sanding blocks, coarse to fine. Then two applications of "Intensifier" sealer which brought out the color and will protect it for the future. This process should not be done by non professionals.



Riley and Patty carefully sanding these beautiful tiles



The cleaned and sealed corner tiles.



The newly polished brass fender. Thank you Bob Gelb and Patty Donald for your elbow grease and hard work.



The newly cleaned and polished library fireplace. You really must see the shiny andirons and fender when you come.

Coming Events.

Check our website for the latest information. www.cohenbrayhouse.org,

April No public tour this month 2 Private Parties

May 8th *Mother's Day Tour and Tea Sunday*

2 seatings. 1:00-2:30 and 3:00- 4:30. \$40/person. \$35/members \$20 students/children

Tickets at Brown Paper Tickets

<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/5409535>

May 22 Regular Monthly Tour

2-4 pm Sliding scale \$10-20

Tickets at Brown Paper Tickets

June 26

Regular Monthly Tour

2-4 pm Sliding scale \$10-20

Tickets at Brown Paper Tickets

If you have difficulty getting tickets send us an email cohenbrayhouse@gmail.com or call at 510 536 1703

Private Events

Plan your own private events. You can host a tea for friends, sponsor a tour, or arrange an evening in the 'Smoking Room' with a group of friends, listening to victrola records and playing canasta or charades.

Another possibility are Paranormal tours and more.

The linden tree is leafing out and the gardens will soon be full of flowers .The garden is a wonderful place to have tea after a tour of the house. So many choices

Let us help you plan your perfect event. Costs will vary depending on the details of the event.

cohenbrayhouse@gmail.com

There are so many ways you can help us.

Fundraising, publicity, cataloging, gardening, grant writing, leading paranormal events, helping at teas and events, helping us plan our workshops in our new classroom.

We need a Secretary to take minutes at our monthly board meetings. You must be familiar with using google docs. The board meets on the 4th Sunday of every month from 11-1:30.

We are entirely supported by YOU, our members. Thank you all for your generosity

Not a member yet? Go to our website www.cohenbrayhouse.org you can contribute at any level you are able.

If you bring in 10 new members at the \$60/year rate you can host a thank you event at the house.

If you are an Amazon user sign up for Amazonsmile and we get .5% of the purchase price donated to us.

Follow and Like us on Instagram and Facebook. We now have members from all over the US. .You help us by sharing with your friends.

HELP US SAVE THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

LEAVE A LEGACY

By including the Cohen-Bray House in your will or estate plans. Please remember the Cohen-Bray House- including the 138 years of remarkable California history it represents and preserves- with a generous gift in your will or trust. Your gift will support the conservation, preservation and 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 may 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

*Reserve a ticket on Brown Paper Tickets or contact us at
cohenbrayhouse@gmail.com*

Or give us a call 510 536-1703



Emelita Cohen Linoleum
Block cards. Cost Tower
Available at
www.cohenbrayhouse.org

*This Newsletter is edited by Nancy Donald , Vice President of the VPCO Board.
If you have any comments, questions or would like to help,
Please contact Nancy at cohenbrayhouse@gmail.com*

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