

# A Tale of Two Waterfronts: Oakland's Jack London Square Competes with San Francisco

"When I was fourteen my head filled with the tales of the old voyages, my vision with tropic isles and far sea rims, I was sailing a small centerboard skiff around San Francisco Bay and on the Oakland estuary. I wanted to go to sea. I wanted to get away from monotony and the commonplace. I was in the flower of my adolescence, a thrill with romance and adventure, dreaming a wild life in the wild man world."<sup>1</sup>

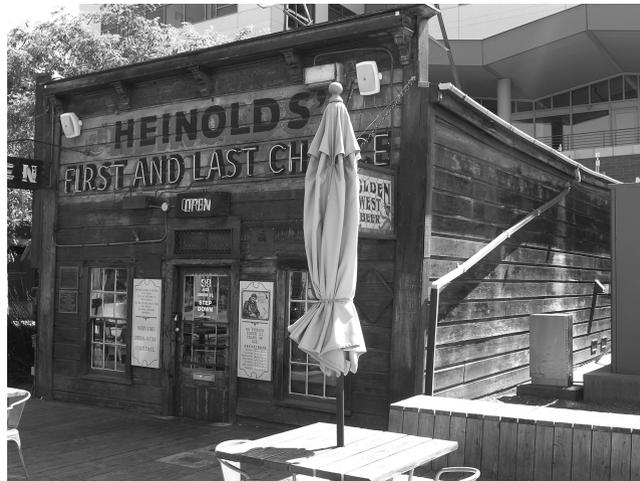
In *John Barleycorn* (1913), Jack London penned a portrait of raucous times along the Oakland waterfront toward the close of the nineteenth century, sailing the sloop *Razzle Dazzle*, pirating oysters, and capping the days in the company of those sailors, sealers, fishermen, oystermen, and hoboes who frequented Heinold's First and Last Chance saloon.<sup>2</sup> The semi-autobiographical novel brought alive the waterfront's ties to distant places; to the miners, gamblers, and working girls of the Alaskan gold camps; to the treasure hunters and fur traders plying the high seas of the Pacific and great rivers leading inland from it.<sup>3</sup> In the shadows of clipper-ship masts and steamship stacks, London elevated seafaring and seaside merriment into an epic that would come to influence the redevelopment of the city's downtown waterfront.

By the time of London's death in 1916, the rising volume of shipping tonnage and the increasing size of vessels were leading to the relocation of Oakland's port. Shipyards, ferry terminals, and maritime enterprises decamped for larger tracts of land both closer to the bay and further up the estuary. Over the next several decades, the waterfront alongside downtown declined. An idle ferry pier became a fishing spot. A storage shed was demolished and discarded railroad ties piled onto the site. In a sign of things to come, a warehouse was repurposed into a restaurant.

On May 1, 1951, the haphazard reuse of the downtown waterfront took a leap toward ordered redevelopment. Joseph Knowland, chairman of the Historical Landmarks Committee

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Heinold's First and Last Chance.

Photograph by author.

of the Native Sons of the Golden West, installed a bronze plaque reflecting the decision by the Oakland Board of Port Commissioners to name the four blocks surrounding the foot of Broadway “Jack London Square,” a dining and entertainment district.<sup>4</sup> The Port of Oakland, led by Clare Goodwin, president of the Board of Port Commissioners, and Arthur Abel, port manager and chief engineer, hoped that an association with the author might conjure the excitement of his seafaring adventures—“The Call of the Wild” acting as a call for customers.

One Oakland businessman had already experimented with themed restaurants. In 1937, after a trip to Tahiti, Vic Bergeron renamed Hinky Dinks, his dowdy bar at Sixty-fifth Street and San Pablo Avenue, Trader Vic's. He outfitted the joint with Polynesian decor, exotic drinks like mai tais, and refocused the meal from the table to the room and from the food at hand to its sources across the seas.<sup>5</sup> It was a coincidence that Bergeron, in 1951, opened a second location in San Francisco. But the San Francisco connection was not lost on the Oakland backers of Jack London Square, who from the start sought to rival a stretch of bayfront at Fisherman's Pier (later known as Fisherman's Wharf), a receiving dock for fish and seafood harvests that was morphing into a dining destination. “A neatly lettered green and white sign at the foot of Broadway, bearing the inscription *Jack London Square*,” wrote journalist Lawrence Davies in 1954, “is notice to the world that Oakland is in competition with San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf.”<sup>6</sup>

As I will examine in this study of waterfront redevelopment at Jack London Square, the business plans, architectural/landscaping designs, and historic memorabilia drummed up by Oakland civic, business, and port leaders, from 1951 to the early twenty-first century, repeatedly changed their focus as a result of cross-bay rivalry. The two cities had long competed for businesses and residents, using city planning to improve their transportation infrastructure and, later, their tourist draw.<sup>7</sup> From 1951 through the 1960s, themed restaurants in Jack London Square multiplied and the Port of Oakland cobbled together seafaring artifacts and Jack London memorabilia, in order to lend the district a historical and maritime atmosphere.

Starting in the 1970s, private businessmen and the Port took on grander retailing approaches that progressed from a woodsy maritime village to a shopping mall to an artisanal foods market.<sup>8</sup> Each time, Jack London Square was made over in light of events across the bay: the 1960s conversion of brick warehouses and factories into the retailing/restaurant venues of Ghirardelli Square and the Cannery; the late 1970s construction of a vast shopping and entertainment complex on Pier 39; and the early 2000s redevelopment of the Ferry Building, closer to downtown San Francisco, into a locavore food emporium. Yet each time, Oakland's attempts to compete with San Francisco fell short.<sup>9</sup>

In a city bereft of major tourist attractions, Jack London Square has not shared Fisherman's Wharf's fortuitous synergy: proximity to the neighborhoods of North Beach and Chinatown, rides on the cable cars, views of the Golden Gate Bridge. But did Oakland's competition with San Francisco cause its leaders to overlook the downtown waterfront's socio-economic weaknesses, overemphasize its regional draw, and neglect its local adjacencies? Did the Port of Oakland's penchant for responding to San Francisco neglect the lengthy span of time needed for successful waterfront redevelopment?<sup>10</sup> Might the shifts produced by the cross-bay rivalry as well as global container shipping have eventually directed Jack London Square's redevelopment away from projects specific to its waterfront and toward commercial ventures that might be located elsewhere in the metropolis?<sup>11</sup>

## THE PORT'S RISE AND RELOCATION

After 1848, the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills set off a land rush along the San Francisco Bay. Surveyors sought out sites for piers, wharves, and future cities. One of those landings, on the eastern side of the bay, along an estuary snaking a couple of miles inland and protected from its tides and squalls, became Oakland. In 1850, two years before the city's founding, ferry service to San Francisco was launched at the foot of Broadway; it was known as the "Creek Route," referring to San Antonio Creek, the original name for the estuary.

Compared to the meteoric rise of San Francisco harbor, Oakland's maritime economy developed slowly.<sup>12</sup> The estuary was not an ideal location for ship traffic. At low tide it had a depth of only a few feet; over the years, the channel has had to repeatedly be dredged of silt to provide sufficient draft (generally of a thirty-foot depth) for shipping. Turning points along the six-hundred-foot-wide channel were scant, and the construction of two drawbridges to Alameda eventually impeded the movement of boats and ships. Much of the land along the estuary was also held in limbo for decades due to a questionable deed granted to the city's first mayor, Horace Carpentier, and later inherited by the Southern Pacific Railroad.<sup>13</sup> Other sites in Oakland and Alameda contended successfully for cross-bay traffic; in 1868, the Central Pacific Railway acquired Oakland Point (two miles west of downtown) and, a year later, began running trains for the Transcontinental Railroad on a wharf extending into the bay.<sup>14</sup>

In 1927, the Oakland City Council approved a charter amendment creating the Port of Oakland, an effort to improve the oversight and growth of shipping in the city's harbor. Henceforth, a professional port manager ran the everyday operations of the Port, which constituted an independent department of the City of Oakland.<sup>15</sup> A five-member Board of Port Commissioners ratified strategic decisions involving business planning, modernization, and expansion.<sup>16</sup> The estuary was quickly readied for larger traffic, and the opening of the Posey



Seattle Steamer on the Estuary at the Foot of Broadway (1893).

Oakland Public Library, Photography Archive.

Tube to Alameda, in 1928, allowed for the demolition of the swinging drawbridges at Webster and Harrison Streets.<sup>17</sup> New Port of Oakland projects tended to be distant from downtown piers and docks, however. Growth in the size of vessels, and requirements for buildings and equipment for loading, unloading, storage, refinement, and transfer of goods led to the construction of new public break-bulk transit sheds upstream at Ninth Avenue, downstream at the foot of Grove and Market Streets, and further out along the bay toward the Oakland Mole, in what would later be known as the Outer Harbor, at Fourteenth Street.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, under executive director Ben Nutter, Oakland's port finally became a major shipping destination.<sup>19</sup> The reason had to do with containers—the intermodal storage unit that could be moved quickly between ships and trucks, reducing labor costs and time at port. The shift from break-bulk cargo to containerization required extra-wide berthing spaces, huge back-up areas, and inland transportation links (i.e., railroads and freeways).<sup>20</sup> The Port undertook the development of spacious facilities on landfill beyond its existing terminals, opening, in 1961, a deep-water chemical terminal at the new Seventh Street unit. A year later, a Sea Land Service vessel arrived from Port Elizabeth, New Jersey, bearing 474 thirty-five-foot-long sealed highway containers.<sup>21</sup> It was the first container ship to dock on the West Coast, and by 1968 Oakland boasted the second largest container port in the world.<sup>22</sup>

If containerization allowed Oakland's port to overtake San Francisco's, constrained by cramped finger piers, the container infrastructure contributed to the downtown waterfront's isolation.<sup>23</sup> A rail line had run within several hundred feet of the estuary since the mid-nineteenth century, interfering with the waterfront's connectivity to the surrounding mix of warehouses, machine shops, iron works, and maritime businesses.<sup>24</sup> Beginning in 1949, the entire waterfront and warehouse district was sliced off from the rest of downtown by the opening of the Eastshore Freeway, whose first segment (from Oak to Twenty-third Avenue) ran four blocks inland from the rail line at the Embarcadero.<sup>25</sup> The 1960s transformation of the estuary downstream of downtown for container operations severed the working port from Jack London Square. Not only was it physically cut off from downtown and the rest of the estuary, its small-scale, leisure-time businesses

contrasted with the Port of Oakland's primary operations—the container shipping terminals and international airport.

## RESTAURANTS AND RELICS

Across the bay in San Francisco redevelopment of the waterfront from maritime uses to leisure and tourism had been underway since the early twentieth century. A row of wooden shacks at the northern tip of San Francisco's Taylor Street began to house stalls for selling fish, crab, and shrimp from the fleet of over three hundred fishing boats that made their home in the adjoining inner lagoon.<sup>26</sup> In 1932, one stall, Alioto's, transformed from a fish stand to a counter selling crab and shrimp cocktails. Alioto's became a restaurant in 1938, joining Joe Dimaggio's Grotto, which had opened a couple of years earlier around the corner on Jefferson Street. Thus the business of catching fish and seafood advanced to their dockside sale and, in sight of piles of orange-shelled crabs, cauldrons with tall chimneys, and bobbing fishing-boat masts, the creation of dining areas for their preparation and consumption. As historian Dean MacCannell later described the seduction of the Wharf, it "may be symbolized by food to the tourist who, eating cracked crab and garlic bread at Fisherman's Wharf, believes he is capturing the flavor of the city."<sup>27</sup>

Fisherman's Wharf's success inspired Oakland entrepreneurs. Back in 1937, the Oakland Sea Food Grotto took over a warehouse overlooking the estuary, running a restaurant where customers could select crabs and other shellfish and then watch them be cooked to order in outdoor broilers. Unlike Fisherman's Wharf, the downtown Oakland waterfront did not host a fishing fleet; the catch of the day was trucked to the Sea Food Grotto. Instead of the San Francisco lure of dining while watching Dungeness crab loaded off Monterey Hull boats, the Sea Food Grotto and subsequent restaurants along the Oakland estuary would have to design their own compelling versions of a maritime/dining environment. In the late 1940s, the Sea Food Grotto modernized its plain stucco facade, adding several prominent neon signs.<sup>28</sup> The 1948 Planter's Dock restaurant (whose name was soon changed to the Bow & Bell) was styled in the manner of an English inn; it too was advertised via a large electric sign atop its gable roof.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after Jack London Square's dedication in 1951, the Oakland City Planning Commission called out against tastelessly ornamented buildings, garish advertisements, and electric signs, recommending that new development maintain the waterfront's picturesque, salty atmosphere of weathered wood, ropes, and riggings.<sup>30</sup> The Sea Wolf restaurant, completed the following year with assistance from the Port of Oakland, met the criteria. Its design eschewed neon signage, and showcased a dining experience in an architectural setting befitting its waterfront location.<sup>31</sup> Vertical wooden boards, a long sloping A-frame roof, and a small tower appeared, if one forgot the sharp modern angles, like an oversized maritime shed.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the Planning Commission's advocacy for continuing, architecturally speaking, a waterfront legacy, the actual maritime environs went unappreciated. Granted, compared to preservation efforts on San Francisco's waterfront that would build upon significant works of maritime architecture,<sup>33</sup> Oakland's built resources consisted of a firehouse, a tiny tavern, a few old warehouses, a couple of lumber yards, abandoned docks, deteriorating bulkheads,



Aerial of Restaurant Core (1950s). This image shows the Oakland Seafood Grotto at the upper left and the Sea Wolf Restaurant on the upper right, adjacent to the traffic circle at the terminus to Broadway.

Oakland Public Library, Photography Archive.

rusting barges, and corrugated steel sheds.<sup>34</sup> Yet neither the port nor the city implemented a policy to preserve and restore the best of those structures. In 1960, when the first small-craft marina for some three hundred boats was built, many “unsightly” piers and “decaying” wharves were removed.<sup>35</sup> As the marina and new bay cruises epitomized, leisure boats had supplanted working boats, and face-lifting operations trumped the maintenance of historic heritage.<sup>36</sup> In 1963, a barge, moored at the end of an abandoned pier just off Broadway, was developed into a six-room Floatel. A year later, innovating upon the notion of uncanny seaside lodging, the world’s first boat motel, The Boatel Motor Lodge, opened with seventy rooms grouped alongside four slips.<sup>37</sup> Jack London Square had its first one-of-a-kind attraction, geared to the bay and estuary’s growing traffic in leisure craft, and no doubt a savvy attempt to out-compete San Francisco’s tourist industry.

In 1961, the square's largest building, the four-story Haslett Warehouse, erected in 1926 at the corner of Embarcadero and Franklin Street, had a third of its bulk cut off to make way for the new Webster Tube to Alameda; the rest of the concrete warehouse was ignominiously clad in enameled aluminum and glass.<sup>38</sup> This architectural violation was followed, in 1966, by the replacement of the warehouse housing the Oakland Sea Food Grotto by a new building whose design followed the woodsy modernism of the Sea Wolf restaurant—a building dating to the downtown waterfront's maritime past sacrificed for a romantic simulation, influenced no doubt by London's writings. It was not until 1973, when practically all of Jack London Square's historic structures had been demolished or severely altered, that the city of Oakland began to designate individual landmarks and preservation districts.

During the square's formative years, history was represented primarily through impressionistic restaurant architecture that attempted to convey the flavor of the seas, including the use of several decommissioned ships that briefly doubled as floating dining locales—stand-ins for the square's picturesque, sea-weathered look.<sup>39</sup> Another effort, on the part of the Port Commissioners, was the use of artifacts and memorials associated with the author himself. At the foot of Webster Street, one former building was still standing and operating: Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon, a dark and cramped former oyster shack built from abandoned ship timbers in 1880.<sup>40</sup> In 1952, the original ship's bells from the *Snark* as well as a sculpted wooden plaque of Jack London's head, featuring quotations from his writings, were added to the Square's collection—though both were installed a couple blocks away near the center of Jack London Square.<sup>41</sup> Two years later, a bronze, life-sized bust of Jack London was placed at the northwest corner of Broadway and Water Street.<sup>42</sup> By far, the most ambitious undertaking was the purchase by the Port Commissioners of one-half of a tiny log cabin from Henderson Creek in Canada's Yukon Territory, where Jack London had wintered in 1897–98 during the Klondike Gold Rush.<sup>43</sup> In 1969, once a facsimile of the absent half was added, the ersatz/real cabin was situated adjacent to the First and Last Chance Saloon. Together, the two ramshackle structures exhibited the proclivity of a writer, whose adventures took him across the globe, to spend much of his time holed up tiny wooden sheds. They stood out from the predominant experience of the square's visitors—a restaurant seat in a spacious room furnished in contemporary decor and affording a gaze out expansive glass windows at the estuary—and epitomize the stark difference between a working waterfront and one devoted to leisure.

As if there wasn't enough "there there," the Port Commissioners kept adding other works to solidify Jack London Square's supposed maritime authenticity and tourist draw. In 1964, a three-thousand-pound anchor, taken from the World War II aircraft carrier USS *Oriskany*, was installed alongside the Haslett Warehouse.<sup>44</sup> The next year, a fifty-seven-foot-tall mast, retrieved from the light cruiser USS *Oakland*, was erected in front of the First and Last Chance Saloon at the foot of Webster Street.<sup>45</sup> In 1995 and 2002, two ships joined the collection—the USS *Potomac*, President Franklin Roosevelt's yacht, and the *Relief*, a coastguard lightship—and have since been docked together at the foot of Clay Street.<sup>46</sup>

Collectively, the museum ships and the maritime artifacts ranged from events of local relevance (e.g., Oakland's role in the Second World War) to attractions, like the USS *Potomac*, that had negligible connections to the Bay Area.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the relics and symbols of Jack

London and the themed restaurants, they created a many-sided representation of maritime history. On the one hand, the Port's approach to historic representation did without the structured linear trajectory of the theme park attraction where each successive part builds dramatically from an initial conflict to a climax and then a denouement. At Jack London Square, the signifiers were loosely related in a historical (or narrative) sense, and dispersed spatially, so that visitors were deprived of any possibility of any storyline. On the other hand, the Port's disregard for historic preservation meant that the square has lacked an authentic architectural or infrastructural backdrop against which to situate new additions, and thereby endow them with a context for creating lasting meaning. Compared to a historic district, where the predominant experience is one of buildings dating to a particular epoch and reinforcing collectively its spirit, Jack London Square has been a continually changing environment, a collage of newer buildings and businesses amidst older ships and historic artifacts. On a visit, one might encounter first Jack London's bust, referring to his halcyon days on the waterfront, next a ship's anchor, referring to the Second World War, then a restaurant interior filled with sports memorabilia, and finally a couple of ships that may or may not have sailed the waters of the estuary and bay.<sup>48</sup> As tastes changed and memories faded, some markers lost their place in the square: in 1999, the USS *Oakland* mast was removed to make way for a marina rebuilding project<sup>49</sup> and later relocated alongside the foot of Broadway without a plaque; in 2012, the USS *Oriskany* anchor was relocated to a new home at the USS *Hornet* museum in Alameda. (And as we shall see, later redevelopment plans also lost interest in the square's maritime collection.)

Finally, in contrast to the maritime motifs being tried out along the estuary, suburban modern might be the most appropriate architectural denominator for Jack London Square's landward side. The 1951 entry sign to the district resembled that of a small shopping center—a steel pole supporting a rectangular green sign with spare letters reading Jack-London-Square atop one another. Accessed largely by automobile, the half-dozen-or-so restaurants were surrounded by utilitarian surface parking lots, rows of trees, a grassy lawn in front of the *Sea Wolf*, and the gabled, glass front of Goodman Hall, a convention and banquet facility.<sup>50</sup> Finished in 1961, Goodman Hall also expressed the square's unanticipated civic role. Oakland was struggling to adapt to suburban and postindustrial conditions—the corrosive decline of downtown retailing and citywide manufacturing, and the economic devastation brought about by white flight—and eventually embarked on a time-consuming and only partly successful urban renewal project at City Center.<sup>51</sup> For a time, Jack London Square functioned as an alternative city center, hosting seasonal and community events, theater, art shows, and an ongoing rollout of symbolic gestures.<sup>52</sup>

## IMPORT TRADE

During Jack London Square's first two decades, San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf expanded its offerings. Seamlessly connected to the city grid and nearby tourist draws in Chinatown and North Beach, tourism flourished. Bay cruises on Red and White Fleet boats began in 1950. Restaurants multiplied in size, number, and stature; for example, in 1957, The Franciscan on Pier 42½ was remodeled in the shape of a glass-sided boat. Four motels opened between 1954 and 1963.<sup>53</sup> That latter year, a rundown grain mill was converted into



Aerial of environs (1960s)—This image shows the Boatel and Marina at the bottom center and left, an old fire station and restaurants at the foot of Broadway, the remodeled Haslett Warehouse at the right center and, above the parking lots and the railroad tracks, the produce/warehouse district and Nimitz Freeway.

Oakland Public Library, Photography Archive.

the Wax Museum at Fisherman’s Wharf, the first of many kitschy entertainments.<sup>54</sup> The city also purchased former fish canneries and warehouses that were made available for tourist use. Two projects had particular repercussions across the bay in Oakland, as well as across the nation.<sup>55</sup>

In 1964, a collection of red brick chocolate factory buildings facing Aquatic Park was renamed Ghirardelli Square, and converted, by architects Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, to selling specialty retail items. “The layout of the Square flies in the face of everything that shopping center developers hold dear,” commented architect Charles Moore on the numerous staircases and bridge crossings. “It is not just a matter of not being led inexorably past every shop in the place on the way to every other. There is high adventure in ever finding some of the upper floor enterprises.”<sup>56</sup> Three years later, another warehouse at Leavenworth and Beach Streets, the Cannery, was gutted and converted by architect Joseph Esherick into a similarly rambling marketplace, an interior version of an Italian hill town where views change at every landing and along each of the seven staircases.<sup>57</sup> The new complexes expanded the Wharf’s commercial scope, facilitating tourists to spend an entire day shopping, dining, and taking bay cruises.

Jack London Square responded. Advancing from its initial formula of “dining ala maritime,” the new equation featured journeys into fantasy and, more frequently, shopping for somewhat fantastical merchandise. The Historical Wax Museum opened in 1970 at 110 Broadway, combining fifty-five fictional and historical persons, including Scarlett O’Hara, Billy the Kid, and Betsy Ross.<sup>58</sup> Five years later, at a ceremony presided over by William Amthor, President of Cost Plus Imports, and Robert Mortenson, President of the Board of Port Commissioners, Cost Plus Imports opened a thirty-thousand-square-foot store in the former Canova Marble and Robbins Pipe & Supply warehouses at 101 Clay Street, a few

blocks from the core of Jack London Square.<sup>59</sup> Following the success of the original San Francisco store opened in 1958, Oaklanders and occasional tourists could now purchase unusual imported items like Scottish jams, German and Czech glassware, and Mexican colonial desks.<sup>60</sup> More than the estuary-side restaurants, Cost Plus Imports' foreign goods harkened to the waterfront's original appeal to Jack London as a window onto the wonders of the world. Only this time retailing trumped wholesaling and shipping played a negligible role in the transactions.

The same year the warehouse store opened yet another porthole set its merchandizing sights at the other end of the square. Like the Wax Museum and Cost Plus Imports, Jack London Village was a private, commercial endeavor, built by Signature Restaurants Corporation in 1975 on land somewhat distant from the historic core of Jack London Square: a 2.5-acre site abutting the estuary, between Harrison and Alice Streets, formerly occupied by a shipbuilder.<sup>61</sup> The shop-and-dine complex was clearly inspired by the success of the Fisherman's Wharf warehouse conversions. But owing to the lack of any remaining historic warehouses in the vicinity, Jack London Village was constructed anew, albeit with every intention of appearing as old as possible.

Architect Ted Cushman designed the sixty-thousand-square-foot specialty-shopping center in the mode of a bygone fishing hamlet. It reeked of nostalgia: large signs painted on a historic railcar and wooden water tower; an entry gate of iron scrollwork; even a weathered boat stranded in a small artificial lagoon and surrounded by rough-hewn beams, planks, and pilings. Inspired by the Cannery and Ghirardelli Square's labyrinthine circulation, Jack London Village featured two levels of shops arranged around a landscaped courtyard, and accessed via landings, staircases, and bridges.<sup>62</sup> A little over a decade after many of the waterfront's businesses and buildings had been converted to restaurants and parking lots, after its unsightly planks and pilings had been demolished for marinas and boat motels, maritime history made a dramatic, if staged and retail-centric, comeback.

Jack London Village's offerings consisted of a few restaurants and upwards of forty small shops, selling notions, curios, cutlery, books, and specialty foods of the jams-and-candles variety proliferated by Cost Plus Imports. The lineup included Zakopane Polish and European imports, El Girasol Latin American imports, Things Tagalog, Afritex African Imports, and the Gallery of Native American arts.<sup>63</sup> Instead of a warehouse presentation of a miscellany of imported ethnic goods, the intimate shops were devoted to specific items and run by local proprietors. The business model recalled the pre-modern age of workshops where handicrafts were made and sold, part of the foundation for the then-contemporary trend toward one-of-a-kind boutiques. Even if customers realized that the shops featured neither onsite production nor delivery by ship at adjacent wharves, the personal service and international products conveyed the spirit of foreign travel that had been once the exclusive domain of the high seas. In an age beginning to react to homogenous shopping experiences, Jack London Village's specialty boutiques allowed one to forget, however briefly, the ubiquity of jet aircraft, freeways, subdivisions and shopping malls.

Soon after the opening of Jack London Village, talk turned to expansion.<sup>64</sup> Yet by 1990, only twenty-four stores remained. The quaint, woodsy atmosphere had turned dark and dingy. In 2001, Jack London Village was demolished to make way for a major hotel (that never happened). Today, the site remains a weed-strewn lot. Why did it fail?

At the time, blame was placed on its out-of-the-way location at the far, eastern end of Jack London Square as well as poor promotion and complicated signage.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the success of any tourist or entertainment district depends on its ability to present the past as intriguing yet non-threatening. Earlier at the square, relics and representations of Jack London were used to convey, in what amounted to little more than seasonings, the spirit of his wild man world. Of course, the Port of Oakland never aimed to recreate the actual decay and danger of the waterfront as London experienced it during the 1890s. Nevertheless, through the 1980s and early 1990s, crime worsened throughout Oakland and its downtown. On the waterfront, the piecemeal development of Jack London Square was exacerbated by the separation of Jack London Village from it—both in terms of geography and management. Absent other new attractions, the district was disjointed and, given the large vacant spaces between Jack London Village and the square's restaurants, vulnerable to the threatening world of the declining city.<sup>66</sup>

Jack London Village was also a victim of changing business and technological practices. The kinds of foreign novelty and gourmet products sold there in the 1970s became widely available in both suburban shopping malls and urban neighborhood commercial streets a little over a decade later.<sup>67</sup> The intermodal nature of container shipping—from crane to truck to warehouse to store—contributed to such a thorough globalization of ordinary retailing that waterfronts no longer resonated as unique places of international exchange. From its inception through the mid-1980s, Jack London Square had depended upon the use of commercial symbols to convey formerly functional activities, eating seafood in themed restaurants and shopping in specialty stores for foreign items built upon the memory of catching the bounty of the sea and off-loading goods from sea-going ships. Henceforth, dining and retailing schemes for the downtown Oakland waterfront turned increasingly away from its maritime past, seeking their inspiration elsewhere.

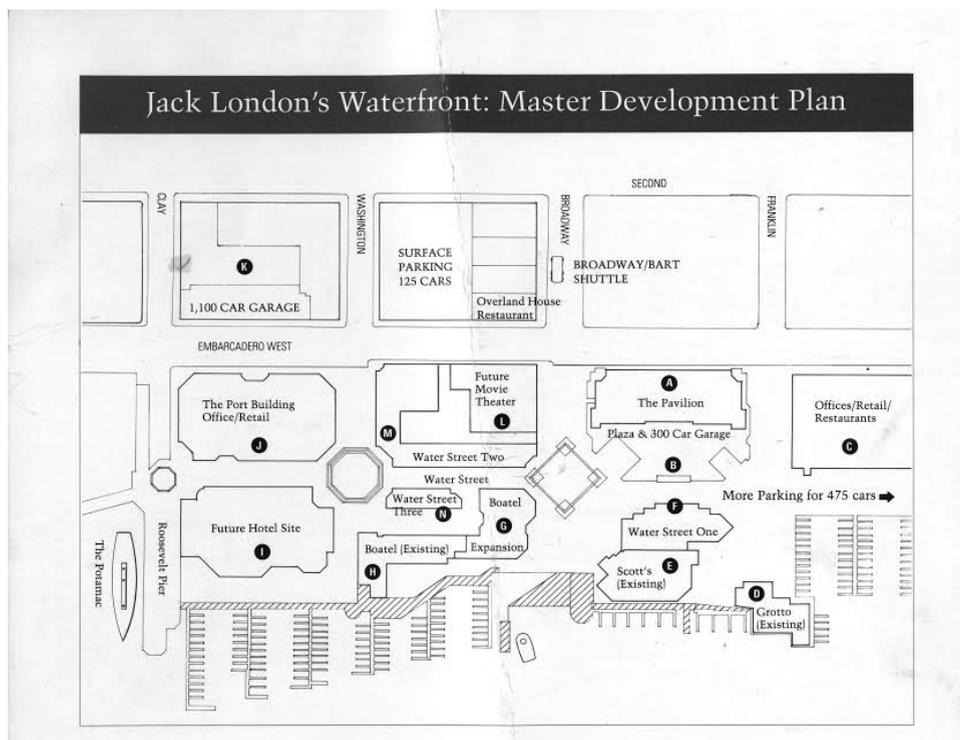
## REGIONAL SHOPPING

Oaklanders had only to look across the bay to witness how a sanitized and suburbanized tourist district was taking shape. San Francisco fishing fleets' crab and herring hauls were now overshadowed by the more than twelve million tourists a year fishing for plastic trinkets and tee-shirts—outside of Disneyland, the most popular tourist destination in California.<sup>68</sup> In 1978, hyper-tourism intensified. At Pier 39, an old transit shed and bulkhead building was demolished. In its place rose a festival complex, designed by Walker & Moody, consisting of 105 shops, twenty-three food vendors, a five-acre park, a 350-berth marina, and a large parking structure across the Embarcadero.<sup>69</sup> The commercialized Pier 39 was a larger and far more successful version of Jack London Village. As in Jack London Village, staircases climbed to a second level, wrapped around stores and, at one dramatic point, crossed the main axis as a bridge. So too, roof profiles and wooden surfaces were intentionally varied so as to create the impression of a longstanding fishing village by the sea. Instead of a beached boat, there was a merry-go-round. Allan Temko, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* architectural critic, slammed the vulgar vaudeville as a chef d'oeuvre of hallucinatory clichés.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, Pier 39 raked in the dollars, benefiting from the developing synergies of Fisherman's Wharf tourism: the remaining fishing fleet, proliferating restaurants and motels, multiple wax museums, warehouse shopping, and other diversions.

Through the 1980s, the Port of Oakland sought a formula by which to brew a comparable commercial energy. Up until then, three decades of waterfront redevelopment at Jack London Square had eliminated its entire, older maritime infrastructure. Private entrepreneurs had built Jack London Village, Cost Plus Imports, and other attractions. Otherwise the square remained much as it had been since the early 1960s—a handful of restaurants flanked by the Boatel, parking lots, Haslett Warehouse, and assorted maritime relics.

Change was on the way. In 1983, the American Cities Corporation, a Rouse subsidiary, submitted a development plan to the Port of Oakland to expand commerce at the square, redeveloping its central twenty-one acres.<sup>71</sup> Over the next couple of years, the Port came up with a similarly ambitious proposal—Jack London’s Waterfront.<sup>72</sup> The idea was to retain most of the square’s existing uses and add between 90,000 and 145,000 square feet of new retail and restaurant space, some eighty to one hundred shops selling apparel, gifts, and home furnishings—not the kinds of tee-shirts and trinkets proliferating along Fisherman’s Wharf. Ground was broken in 1986.

Early into the project, financing went awry. The initial commercial development team had consisted of Portside Associates, run by local developers Bob Carey and Glenn Isaacson, and Salomon Brothers, the Wall Street investment bank. In 1988, Salomon Brothers dropped out. The Port of Oakland faced a critical decision: whether to assume responsibility of Salomon Brothers’ 75 percent stake or allow the project to languish as a series of holes in the



Jack London’s Waterfront—The Master Plan put together by Oakland Portside Associates in 1987, and only partially realized: neither the future hotel nor movie theater were built on these sites.

Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room.

ground. At the time, Executive Director Walter Abernathy (soon to be followed by Nolan Gimpel) headed the Port, and G. William Hunter was president of the Board of Port Commissioners. By now the Board also consisted of seven members, and Mayor Lionel Wilson had increased the Board's diversity, adding black and female members as well as a mix of attorneys, heads of companies, professors and academic administrators, and community leaders. Enamored by Portside Associates' vision of an upscale mix of boutique retailers and specialty shops, the Board of Port Commissioners decided to finance the project themselves instead of embarking on a lengthy search for new private developers.<sup>73</sup> The business plan appeared to make sense. Those same years, nearby Emeryville had embarked upon the construction of a twenty-five-store shopping center, Powell Street Plaza, and an office/commercial center, Emery Bay Marketplace, which included a Public Market of restaurant stalls. Opened in 1988, Powell Street leased quickly and became the first regional shopping center between Hayward and Richmond, a distance of twenty-six miles, with Emeryville (and Oakland) lying near the midpoint.

Construction of Jack London's Waterfront was largely completed a year later. Following the downtown Oakland Street grid, architect Robert Gianelli created Water Street as a two-block shopping axis from Washington to Franklin Street, largely defined by three new buildings—Water Street I, Water Street II, Water Street III—on either side of Broadway.<sup>74</sup> The Crystal Pavilion Marketplace, designed to hold over thirty food stalls occupied the eastern end and sat above a three-hundred-car parking garage. The western side was anchored by an expansion of the Boatel as well as an office building to house the Port of Oakland.<sup>75</sup> The new architecture followed the understated character of the surrounding warehouse and produce districts, notwithstanding its maritime colors of white and blue. For the first time, Jack London Square received a comprehensive landscaping plan intended to connect its pieces and facilitate pedestrian movement and estuary access. Satoru Nishita, of Lawrence Halprin & Associates, designed an open-air dining plaza in front of the Pavilion, and added a quarter-mile promenade (with observation piers) along the estuary, a tidal staircase to it, and a quartet of lighthouse columns around the central plaza at Broadway, two of which supported the square's new arched sign.

Some journalists compared the new outdoor mall to a Ghirardelli Square-type of festival marketplace, while others likened it more to Sausalito's brand of upscale seaside boutiques.<sup>76</sup> In point of fact, Jack London's Waterfront aimed at a more generic goal—a shopping center and food court akin to Powell Street Plaza and the Public Market in Emeryville, albeit more pedestrian friendly. It would come to be an Oakland saga of unfulfilled ambitions. The Port intended to open the complex in April 1990, once 70 percent of the retail space was leased and ready. The October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake postponed that goal. Further delays in leasing retail space led to a strange May 1991 opening, for soon afterward, reporter Martin Halstuk noted that "the project has the eerie look of a brand-new ghost town, with dozens of stores empty, its plaza and walkways deserted and its benches—which offer fine views of the estuary—occupied by gulls and pigeons."<sup>77</sup> The advertised national retailers never came. Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, and Ann Taylor expressed initial commitments, as did Trader Joe's. Their interest depended on other stores like Eddie Bauer and Talbot joining in. When that didn't happen quickly enough, Trader Joe's rescinded their commitment.<sup>78</sup> The other national retailers stayed away.

The only major retailer to sign on was a Barnes & Noble bookstore, which opened in 1992. It was a mixed outcome, however, for the space had been designed for the foods hall, which too had quickly unraveled. Another mixed success was the incorporation of the Boatel into the 144-room Waterfront Plaza Hotel in 1991.<sup>79</sup> Jack London Square now had a larger, more modern hotel. Even though part of the Boatel was incorporated into the new venue, the loss of the boat slips meant that the architectural significance of the world's first boat motel had been sacrificed.

What went wrong with the Port's attempt to remake the square from a low density, scattering of restaurants and maritime relics into a medium density shopping center?<sup>80</sup> For one thing, in order to attract its key customer base—affluent and educated white women—Jack London's Waterfront would have to overcome safety worries generated by Oakland's crime-ridden districts.<sup>81</sup> To that end, the design turned its back on downtown, fostering no linkages to Broadway and the nearby warehouse/produce district; the north side of its buildings consisted of loading docks, service doors, and blank walls. Still, without a critical mass of stores and, like Emeryville, the easy freeway access and plentiful free parking to attract their customers, the plan's goal to foster a pleasing and secure environment on Water Street could not succeed. The heart of the mall, scarred by vacant storefronts, remained unfinished and unappealing.<sup>82</sup>

If the mall could not attract enough local shoppers, might it draw tourists? An earlier market feasibility study acknowledged that, unlike Boston or San Francisco, Oakland was not a major tourist destination. Still the Port repeatedly evoked highly successful projects like Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace (1976), Baltimore's Harborplace (1980), and a series of San Francisco endeavors—Ghirardelli Square, Embarcadero Center, and Pier 39—with respect to the intended mix of uses—40 percent food and beverage, 60 percent retail.<sup>83</sup> Could these comparisons hold water?<sup>84</sup>

Boston was a longstanding tourist magnet whose particular draw was its pivotal role in early American history. Its Faneuil Hall Marketplace was housed in the former wholesale Quincy Market, dating to 1826, and behind Faneuil Hall, a meeting hall almost a century older. Developed by James Rouse, it boasted a fortuitous location, on the Freedom Trail and between the downtown office district and the harbor's other attractions such as the New England Aquarium (1969) and Waterfront Park, opened the same year as the marketplace.<sup>85</sup> By contrast, Jack London Square possessed neither the historic architecture nor the beneficial presence of nearby, active downtown areas. Nor did Jack London's Waterfront aim to be a festival marketplace composed principally of specialty shops. Rather, it strove for the kind of shops found at suburban malls, an idea that came about after the repeated failure, on the part of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency, to lure a regional shopping mall to the core of downtown. Perhaps the comparison with Baltimore was more apt. After all, Baltimore was a city more like Oakland, possessing a minimal tourist trade. And, as in Oakland, the redevelopment of the Inner Harbor of Baltimore preserved few historic structures. The difference between the two struggling industrial/port cities lay in the way that Harborplace, a two-pavilion Marketplace, was skillfully developed by James Rouse and designed by Benjamin Thompson to benefit from the synergies of an important historic vessel, the USS *Constellation*, located at the Baltimore harbor since 1963, and new major attractions like the Maryland Science Center (1976) and National Aquarium (1983).<sup>86</sup>

Neither a museum nor an aquarium was ever built at Jack London Square. Instead of learning from such national waterfront redevelopment exemplars as to the need for a cultural anchor to establish a tourist district, Jack London's Waterfront continued Oakland's habit of mimicking makeovers at Fisherman's Wharf, which were overwhelmingly based on commerce. Still, the kind of helter-skelter merchandising that worked in one of the nation's most visited cities could not succeed in the East Bay. Even before the demolition of Jack London Village in 2001, the name "Jack London's Waterfront" went out of currency. Eventually, assisted by John Aguilar, the Port's new Director of Commercial Real Estate, a few businesses opened alongside the failed mall: the nine-screen Jack London Cinema (1995) and some restaurants as well as Yoshi's Jazz Club and Beverages and More.<sup>87</sup> The Port of Oakland's first effort at comprehensive redevelopment for retail, restaurants, and entertainment resulted in a scattering of businesses around a hollow core.

## GOURMET MARKET

In 1999, a coalition of neighborhood activists, environmentalists, and port and city planners drafted the Estuary Policy Plan. Covering the estuary's entire length, the Policy Plan called for new and expanded parks, a longer waterfront trail, and, with respect to Jack London Square, infill development. Retail or entertainment anchors were to fill the numerous vacant sites. The square's problems were also blamed on inadequate urban design. Accordingly, distinctive visual landmarks were planned to frame the square's boundaries and lend it a distinctive sense of place.<sup>88</sup> In years to come, criticism expanded to the original constellation of restaurants, those not impacted by Jack London's Waterfront. The bulky structures, despite Nishita's landscaping plan, blocked views of the estuary, constricting, rather than defining, the open space between them.<sup>89</sup>

Once more the Port sought out developers to redesign the square and transform its many vacant or underutilized parcels.<sup>90</sup> In the late fall of 2001, not having attracted any good proposals and acting on the belief that commercial real estate was not its core mission, the Port of Oakland proposed selling four buildings and a few vacant lots to Jim Falaschi and Ellis Partners Inc., a private development group: these included the Crystal Pavilion housing the Barnes & Noble bookstore and the Haslett Warehouse.<sup>91</sup> Founded in 1993 by Hal Ellis and his son Jim, Ellis Partners was a relatively new venture, but Hal Ellis was a prominent Oakland commercial developer whose previous firm, Grubb & Ellis, had been one of the lead developers for the 1960s /1970s City Center Project. Falaschi had experience with industrial parks and residential housing, but not commercial development.

Questions were raised by citizens and city council members as to whether a public body, the Port of Oakland, should sell land to private developers and whether the price, \$17.2 million, was below market.<sup>92</sup> But led by President Phil Tagami, the Board of Port Commissioners went ahead and approved the sale in early 2002. By this point, Mayor Jerry Brown had appointed several new members of the Board of Port Commissioners. Both Tagami and John Protopappas were prominent local developers. It likely was the case that they, the other business interests on the Board of Port Commissioners, Port Executive Director Tay Yoshitani, Omar Benjamin,<sup>93</sup> the Port's Director of Commercial Real Estate and, last but not least, Mayor Brown, regarded private developers as more suited to the kind of tourist

and entertainment redevelopment the city wanted from Jack London Square. The Port's earlier misstep as the primary developer of the Jack London's Waterfront project led it to sell off buildings and land at a low price, paving way for a yet another grand makeover.

The San Francisco waterfront once again enticed Oakland leaders. This time it wasn't Fisherman's Wharf, but the spot where Market Street meets the bay in the Financial District. After the Loma Prieta earthquake, most double-decker freeways in Oakland and San Francisco, like the one running along the Embarcadero, were demolished.<sup>94</sup> For the first time in over three decades, downtown San Francisco wasn't walled off from the bay and the Ferry Building. By the fall of 2003, the former transit terminal had been renovated and reopened as the Ferry Marketplace, an upscale food market showcasing northern California's local food culture. Newly lit from above by two dramatic openings, the concourse hosted a few restaurants and a great many more retail shops selling small-batch olive oil, beef from grass-fed cows, and heirloom fruits. Connected to the weekly farmers market run by the nonprofit Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA), the Ferry Marketplace became a formidable bayside attraction striving to connect Californians and visitors alike to the Bay Area's hinterland: its emporia unified by the concept of *terroir*, the taste of place.<sup>95</sup>

Just as the Ferry Marketplace was opening, Falaschi and Ellis Partners announced plans for a marketplace at Jack London Square that would encompass regionally grown and produced food, locally sourced restaurants, and a cooking school. At 185,000 square feet, the six-story California Harvest Hall would double commercial space at the square and be three times the size of the refurbished Ferry Building, hosting up to seventy restaurants and food vendors on two levels (with offices above). Included in the plan were a 250-room hotel, a seven-screen cinema at Broadway/Embarcadero, a supermarket, more office space, and a garage for over one thousand vehicles.<sup>96</sup> This time, given the artisanal foods concept, comparisons also pointed to sites like Pike Place Market in Seattle and Granville market in Vancouver. Aware of the disappointment of Jack London's Waterfront, Hal Ellis and Jim Falaschi promised: "Harvest Hall would not compete with the 68,000 square-foot food hall in the Ferry Building across the bay but serve as an addition to it in an area where people are captivated by food."<sup>97</sup>

In a nod back to the original Planning Commission guidelines for Jack London Square, architects Robinson, Mills & Williams designed two retail/office buildings with maritime flourishes. For the California Harvest Hall, at the eastern side of the square, at the foot of Webster Street, they included an intermediate, undulating roofline to differentiate the office and retailing zones and recall nearby piers or ocean waves. For the Ferry Landing building, to the west between Washington and Clay Streets, they included a large, white overhang at roof edge, emulating a sail, and thin, white columns, that could be seen as boat masts. A higher-quality design approach extended to a restoration of the Haslett Warehouse to its original gray concrete skin and the square's second major landscaping effort. Landscape architect Rene Bihan, of the SWA Group, redesigned much of the expanded forty-acre site, inserting three soft-surface plazas, dominated by grids of palm trees, to serve as visual landmarks for the western, central, and eastern sections of the square.

Ground was broken in 2007 and the two principal buildings and parking garage were completed in 2009, just after the onset of the Great Recession.<sup>98</sup> In an eerie replay of events two decades earlier, nothing much happened. The hotel, cinema, and supermarket never

materialized. The California Harvest Hall, renamed Jack London Market, and Ferry Landing buildings eventually attracted office tenants, yet no retailers. This time there would be no grand opening.

Like the Port's earlier plan, the developer-led project aimed at a grand makeover in light of San Francisco developments—then Pier 39, now the Ferry Marketplace. In each instance, neither the square's retail/restaurant offerings nor customer base were seen as desirable. Jack London's Waterfront tried to retool from a homespun assemblage of small shops and local restaurants to a suburban-style mall lined with prestigious national chains. The Jack London Market plan intended a transformation of the square's character from a middle-class, family-oriented destination to a mecca for foodies. Its disavowal of mid-range shops and chain restaurants led the developers to not renew leases on The Old Spaghetti Factory, El Torito, and TGI Fridays as well as some small shops.<sup>99</sup> Yet by 2014, just four new restaurants had opened: three in the Haslett warehouse building and one in the Jack London Market structure.<sup>100</sup> Aside from a Sunday farmers market and occasional weekend festivals, an upscale crowd didn't make a noticeable landing. As reporter Renee Frojo noted in 2013, the developers have been searching for other options, like "leasing space to food manufacturers to produce and sell food in the space. But that hasn't happened yet, and Ellis Partners is staying pretty tight-lipped about the project until more materializes."<sup>101</sup>

In spite of the developers' initial optimism, the completed project lacked the foot traffic of workers, residents, or tourists that would make it comparable to San Francisco's Ferry Building Marketplace—situated in close proximity to the Financial District, the Embarcadero BART stop, and other transit lines. Jack London Square is located twelve blocks from the nearest BART stop, and far from either large concentrations of office buildings or tourist attractions.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, access could not have been Jack London Market's principal stumbling block. Nowadays, there are three large parking garages, a nearby Amtrak Station



Restored Haslett Warehouse—Alongside the 2009 landscaping plan, one of the recent restaurants is visible at the bottom left.

Photograph by author.

and Ferry Terminal (with connections to both the Ferry Marketplace and Fisherman's Wharf), and a free Broadway shuttle bus running to other parts of the downtown.

Might the problem also be traced to how Jack London Market was conceived: suburban style, an isolated attraction one drove to? Unlike the square's initial focus on fostering a walking corridor from the Sea Wolf and Bow & Bell Restaurants along Broadway to the north side of the Embarcadero, pedestrian linkages to the rest of Oakland were neglected. The Jack London Market plan strengthened the earlier Jack London's Waterfront emphasis on two east-west pedestrian axes along the estuary and Water Street that lead nowhere. Nor was either makeover coordinated with housing development along the estuary.<sup>103</sup> In 1976, the Portobello, a 200-unit development at the foot of Oak Street, arose adjacent to the Wilson Yacht Club.<sup>104</sup> It was followed, in 2001, by the 282-unit Landing at Jack London Square, located slightly closer to the square. Each housing development was conceived as an inwardly focused complex accessed by car.<sup>105</sup> And even though a narrow strip of parkland was provided between these developments and the estuary, that walking strip remains disconnected from Jack London Square. This omission has meant that the relatively large open spaces located just beyond the two housing complexes—Estuary Park, opened in 1972, and the Channel Park and Sculpture Garden, inaugurated in 1982, and containing works by Mark di Suvero and Michael Heizer—have had practically no interaction with the entertainment complex.

## CONCLUSION

The history of half-baked revitalizations at Jack London Square can best be explained by the Port of Oakland's tendency to imitate San Francisco waterfront projects without San Francisco's considerable tourist assets. From 1951 through the early 1980s, the inadequacy of this approach wasn't all that evident, largely because the nascent entertainment activities at the square needed inspiration and because their ambitions were modest. Jack London Square developed incrementally along a declining stretch of waterfront. Its restaurants, motels, and retail operations (like Cost Plus Imports and Jack London Village) were conceived and run independently, and served a fairly small clientele of East Bay residents. If early on the principal complaint about the square pointed to a lack of comprehensive planning and ambition, the lack of vision had its upside. A problem or change with any of the square's parts or pieces did not severely impact its functioning as a whole. Restaurants went out of business but were always replaced by new ones. Jack London himself was represented first by a bronze plaque, then a sculpted head on a wooden plaque, then a life-size bronze bust, and finally a full-body bronze sculpture. Because each addition, deletion, or change occurred on its own, none could either improve or degrade the overall commercial health or fuzzy identity of the square. The principal exception was the lack of planning to preserve the waterfront's historic architectural and infrastructural resources, a shortcoming that would weaken subsequent projects. For close to forty years, the square muddled along as a slow-growing, piecemeal assemblage of commercial enterprises and transplanted maritime artifacts.

This situation changed in the mid-1980s when the Board of Port Commissioners introduced a comprehensive master plan alongside a private-sector business plan for a

shopping mall.<sup>106</sup> The Port's Jack London's Waterfront (1989) and the later Falaschi/Ellis Partners' Jack London Market (2009) each aimed to remake the entirety of the square. Each inserted new buildings, structured parking garages (eliminating free surface parking), thoughtful landscape designs, and reconfigured circulation routes. Each increased the square's size and quantity of retail, service, and office space. Perhaps most important of all, each sought to remake Jack London Square's identity and removed (or neglected) many aspects of its previous incarnations—aside from the core group of seafood restaurants. Since the late 1980s, when those visions and ambitions were acted upon, the results have been uninspiring to say the least.

By constructing holistic commercial and symbolic environments, new pieces depended upon the workings of the whole. If key retailers didn't sign on, as happened with both plans, other businesses stayed away. As it turns out, compared to waterfront redevelopment in San Francisco and other sites around the country, the two comprehensive Oakland plans were not comprehensive enough. Both Jack London's Waterfront and Jack London Market employed a planning/development approach that fell into an irresolute middle ground between the square's earlier small-scale, organic evolution and the kind of visionary, large-scale, and politically savvy waterfront redevelopment in those other cities.

Much of the blame must be placed on the Port of Oakland. Jack London Square—encompassing shopping, tourism, and entertainment—was always a sideshow within its larger portfolio. Indeed, the Port's deep pockets gained from container shipping and commercial air traffic may have insulated it from prudent economic decisions at the square. In 1987, shortly before assuming ownership for the Jack London's Waterfront project, the Port had experienced an almost three-fold increase in annual revenues compared to a decade earlier. That financial cushion, coupled with the city's urgent desire for a regional shopping center, led the Port to get involved in a speculative, commercial



Water Street—Largely vacant storefronts in buildings completed in the 1989 plan, with Port of Oakland office building visible in the background.

Photograph by author.

development beyond its capabilities. In the early 2000s, the Port made a different, but equally costly mistake. Parts of Jack London Square were sold—likely below market value—to a private development group who built facilities that, once again, failed to attract retail and service tenants. One might argue that in the 1980s the composition of the Board of Port Commissioners was weighted less to business interests and more to civic and community representation, and was consequently less savvy as regards commercial redevelopment. Yet in the 2000s, a developer-heavy presence on the Board of Port Commissioners led Jack London Square redevelopment down an equally unsuccessful path.

The redevelopment missteps at Jack London Square over the past thirty years are attributable less to the changing composition of the Board than to the city's longstanding desperation to bring about a retailing renaissance. Because the downtown had once been the East Bay's retail center through the 1950s, and because it had utterly lost that role by the 1970s, Oakland leaders—from mayors to the city council to business interests to the Port itself—were easily seduced by projects that promised regional commercial appeal. At City Center and again at Jack London Square, they went forward with plans that lacked supporting factors such as adequate anchors or synergistic attractions; firm commitments from retailers, hotels, or other businesses; clear evidence of consumer demand; and, in the case of Jack London Square, sober awareness of the physical geography and transportation infrastructure that makes the Oakland waterfront visually appealing yet hard to access by either vehicle or foot. These missteps, as I have argued throughout this article, were heightened by Oakland's self-defeating tendency to look elsewhere for commercial models, and most of all to upscale San Francisco. Jack London's Waterfront aimed to be the largest shopping center in the inner East Bay. Jack London Market sought to be the East Bay's nexus for food culture and business. In mimicking the success of San Francisco's Pier 39 and, a couple of decades later, the Ferry Marketplace, both aimed too high and too far out of their historical and geographical context. Neither the Port nor Ellis Partners were able to land a major retail or entertainment anchor—national chain stores, a museum, an aquarium, cutting-edge food vendors—that could lure other businesses and turn the square into a regional attraction.<sup>107</sup> It was one thing for Jack London Square to follow commercial development on the San Francisco waterfront as it evolved from fishing to a modest collection of restaurants and stores. It was too ambitious to follow the San Francisco waterfront into either mass or high-concept retailing.

Oakland's quest to attain regional, as opposed to local, relevancy led the two grandiose plans to ignore or degrade Jack London Square's history of redevelopments and surrounding downtown improvements with respect to parks, housing, and commerce. The demise of Jack London Village can be attributed in part to the Port's long planning process for Jack London's Waterfront, which envisioned, over the years, a hotel and other uses on its site. Considerable housing was built near Jack London Square, but both major retailing plans for the square aimed at a regional (and not a neighboring) customer base. Despite considerable landscape design improvements at the square, it is a glaring oversight that a large portion of the downtown waterfront was never dedicated for open space; a significant park would have served the city far more than empty retail buildings. Finally, while both the Port of Oakland and Falaschi/Ellis Partners' plans preserved most relics that had been installed over the years, they shifted the commercial and symbolic orientation of the square away from its maritime past.

In the square's earlier days, constructing a maritime legacy had been a work in progress, often whimsical in its details and loose in its overall presentation. But by largely abandoning that lengthy set of efforts in the hopes of instant re-brandings, the "Jack London" in both Jack London's Waterfront and Jack London Market rang as hollow as their bright and shiny and empty buildings.

## NOTES

1. Jack London, *John Barleycorn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27.
2. Sam S. Baskett, "Jack London on the Oakland Waterfront," *American Literature* 27 (November 1955): 363–366.
3. *History of the Port of Oakland, 1850-1934*, ed., Dewitt Jones (Oakland: the State of Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 70–73.
4. Knowland was one of Oakland's most powerful business and civic leaders. Owner and publisher of the *Oakland Tribune*, he had been a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and later served as Chairman of the State Park Commission as well as President of the California Historical Society. "Jack London Square to be Dedicated at May 1 Rites," *Oakland Tribune*, April 25, 1951; "Jack London Square Dedicated by City, County Officials at Public Ceremony," *Oakland Tribune*, May 1, 1951; Board of Port Commissioners, *Port of Oakland* (Oakland, 1954), 16–17.
5. Instead of just eating and talking, diners were surrounded by displays of tribal art. An open kitchen with wood-fired Chinese ovens completed the illusion of eating at a South Seas luau. Gazing at the artifacts and cooks rushing about the oven, diners developed a newfound appreciation for a restaurant as both a gustatory and theatrical experience. Richard Carleton Hacker, "Trader Vic put mai tai on the lips of millions," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 11, 2004.
6. Lawrence E. Davies, "An Oakland Square for Jack London," *New York Times*, August 22, 1954.
7. During the 1930s, San Francisco promoted itself, in competition with Oakland, through the new giant bridges, a refurbished Chinatown, neighborhood festivals, and the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939–1940. Joseph Rodriguez, "Planning & Urban Rivalry in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1930s," *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 20 (Fall 2000): 66–68.
8. On similar retail ventures, see Jon Goss, "The 'Magic of the Mall': An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Contemporary Retail Built Environment," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83 (March 1993): 36.
9. For an analysis of successes and failures in waterfront redevelopment, in London, Boston, New York, and Toronto, see David Gordon, "Planning, Design and Managing Change in Urban Waterfront Redevelopment," *The Town Planning Review* 67, no. 3 (July 1996): 285–287.
10. For a comparison of worldwide efforts during these decades see Daniel Galland and Carsten Hansen, "The Roles of Planning in Waterfront Redevelopment: From Plan-led and Market-driven Styles to Hybrid Planning?" *Planning Practice and Research* 27, no. 2 (April 2012): 205–209; and *Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities*, ed., Richard Marshall (New York: Spon Press, 2001).
11. On the question of uniqueness with respect to waterfront redevelopment, see *City, Capital & Water*, ed. Patrick Malone (London: Routledge, 1996), 3–5; and Peter Hall, "Waterfronts: A New Urban Frontier," *Institute of Urban & Regional Development: Working Paper 53B* (Berkeley, May 1991), 7–16.
12. Oakland tended to handle cheaper bulk cargoes of grain, lumber, and other agricultural products. Tim Reagan, "The Restless Shore," *East Bay Express*, April 25, 1986: 8.
13. Board of Port Commissioners, *The Port of Oakland: Sixty Years: a Chronicle of Progress* (Oakland Public Affairs Department, Port of Oakland, 1987), 3. In 1906, the California Supreme Court settled the waterfront dispute in favor of the city, and against the Southern Pacific Railroad; the stranglehold ended by 1910.
14. Renamed Long Wharf in 1871, the pier eventually became the site, in 1879, for the Oakland Mole—the rail/ferry passenger connection to San Francisco. Gunther Paul Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 187.
15. In the early 1950s, the port manager position was renamed executive director.
16. Port commissioners are appointed by the Oakland City Council upon nomination by the mayor. Required to reside in Oakland for at least part of the year, they serve four-year renewable terms.
17. Board of Port Commissioners, *Port Progress: 125 Years of Oakland Waterfront Growth* (Oakland, 1977), 9–12. During the Great Depression, the Federal Works Project Administration removed most of "Rotten Row," a maritime graveyard of steam schooners, whalers, and sailing packets that had long impeded the estuary's capacity to accommodate large ships.
18. Private businesses, such as the Howard Terminal and Moore Drydock, were also founded on the periphery of the downtown waterfront. On how a port's land, sea, and transport criteria change over time, see Guido Weigend, "Some Elements in the Study of Port Geography," *Geographical Review* 48 (April 1958): 185–200.

Although the port traffic grew dramatically during the Second World War military buildup, it suffered a downturn after 1945. Hans Harms, *Changes on the Waterfront – Transforming Harbor Areas* (Berkeley: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, 2008), 9.

19. Woodruff Minor, *Pacific Gateway: An Illustrated History of the Port of Oakland* (Oakland: Port of Oakland, 2000), 47–57.
20. Peter Hendee Brown, *America's Waterfront Revival: Port Authorities and Urban Redevelopment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 133. Oakland already had the region's largest rail terminals and yards. During the 1940s and 1950s, the construction of the Eastshore (I-80) and Bayshore (I-880) Freeways provided excellent highway connections.
21. Port of Oakland, *Monthly Newsletter* (May 1962): 3–5.
22. Harold Gilliam, "San Francisco Bay: Mystique Versus Economics" in *Urban Waterfront Lands*, ed. National Research Council (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 1980), 108–111.
23. League of Women Voters Oakland, *The Waterfront* (Oakland, 1993), 26, 37. Instead of large terminal buildings, the gantry cranes and docks of container ports require acres of asphalt for storing containers and moving trucks. Nor do container ships, in port only for a day or two, facilitate a seamen's district of shipping and freight agent offices, union halls, bars, restaurants, and flophouses. Yehuda Hayuth, "The Port-Urban Interface: An Area in Transition," *Area* 14, no. 3 (1982): 219–220.
24. Donald Wood, "Renewing Urban Waterfronts," *Land Economics* 41 (May 1965): 141–142.
25. In 1958, the link to San Francisco, via the ferry at the foot of Broadway, was severed, victim to the popularity of the Bay Bridge.
26. Michael Corbett, *Port City: the History and Transformation of the Port of San Francisco, 1848–2010* (San Francisco: San Francisco Architectural Heritage, 2010), 179–180.
27. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 131.
28. After a fire in 1965, the Oakland Sea Food Grotto became the Grotto, and was remodeled along the wooden lines of the Sea Wolf. Closed in 1990, the building later reopened as Kincaid's.
29. Designed with board and batten siding on the exterior, the Bow and Bell's interior was filled with sports memorabilia. Closed in 1977 because of rotting piers, the site was later used for a hotel expansion.
30. Oakland City Planning Commission, *Shoreline Development* (Oakland, 1951), n.p.
31. Harry Bruno, "Jack London Square," *Yachtsman* (June 1986): 2–5.
32. Inside, customers dined amid Swedish modern decor. Harry Bruno, "Historic Jack London Square Sea Wolf Restaurant," *Architect & Engineer* 190 (July 1952): 22–23. In 1976, the Sea Wolf reopened in the same building as Scott's.
33. Yoshio Tsukio, "The Significance of Contemporary Waterfront Development," *Process: Architecture* 52 (November, 1984): 10–12.
34. Juan Vergara Hovey, "In at the Start, Grotto Battles to be seen," *Oakland Tribune*, June 29, 1974.
35. The waterfront edge, which in Jack London's day consisted of sand beaches, marshes, and numerous piers and wharves, gradually turned into a uniform jetty—a core of crushed stone and gravel faced by large boulders.
36. Elinor Hayes, "Ferries Gone but Substitute is Here," *Oakland Tribune*, August 10, 1958; "Small Boats Plan for London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, March 26, 1959.
37. "Board Oks Boatel Plan for Estuary," *Oakland Tribune*, February 7, 1961. Other motels, though not located on the water, were also added to serve the tourist needs of Jack London Square: in 1963, Jack London Inn, at Broadway and Embarcadero, and in 1964, the Oakland Thunderbird Lodge Motel, at Broadway and Third.
38. Port offices moved from the Grove Street Pier to the remodeled building, and two "exotic" restaurants, the Mikado and Castaway featured, respectively, Japanese cuisine and a Caribbean theme. Dave Hope, "Decision Due Next Week on Huge Oakland Port Project," *Oakland Tribune*, February 2, 1958.
39. In 1951, the *Petaluma*, an old sternwheeler, was converted into a double-decker restaurant and renamed the Showboat. Situated between the Bow & Bell and Sea Wolf restaurants, it burned and sank in 1956. Other ship-restaurants—the Charles Van Damme (1957) and the Mansion Belle (1961)—followed. As with the Showboat, the stacks and huge paddle wheels of these onetime sternwheelers may have evoked for some diners the history of ship commerce along the bay as well as the inland waterways of the delta leading to Stockton and Sacramento. Yet the sternwheelers were temporary novelties that eventually faded in popularity. "Ferryboat Begins Life Anew as Restaurant in Estuary," *Oakland Tribune*, November 21, 1957; "Floating Nightclub to Open," *Oakland Tribune*, October 13, 1961.
40. In 1951, when Jack London Square was named, the saloon was operated by George Heinold, son of Johnny Heinold, Jack London's benefactor. Board of Port Commissioners, *Port of Oakland* (Oakland, 1954), 17.
41. The ship Jack London used for his sailing adventures through the South Pacific in 1907. "Ship Bell, Plaque, Relics Given Jack London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, February 26, 1952.
42. "Daughters and Notables Attend Unveiling of Jack London Bust," *Oakland Tribune*, November 18, 1954.
43. "Jack London Cabin Coming Here," *Oakland Tribune*, February 18, 1969. Russ Kingman, hired the year before by the Port of Oakland to strengthen the links between the square and Jack London, located the cabin

- with the help of London's daughter, Joan London Miller. Clarice Stasz, *Jack London's Women* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 335.
44. "Ship Chandlery Unveils Anchor in London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, June 28, 1964.
  45. "Ship Mast an Oakland Monument," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 3, 1965.
  46. As a precursor of this idea, from 1926 to 1939, the USS *Bear*, a sail and steam-powered sealer, had been docked on the waterfront as a museum attraction.
  47. In 1995, a longstanding plan to bring the USS *Potomac*, Franklin Roosevelt's presidential yacht, was finally realized alongside the new ferry terminal at Clay Street. Built at the Manitowoc Ship Building Company on Lake Michigan, serving primarily on the Atlantic Ocean, owned for a time by Elvis Presley, the ship had no connection to Jack London, Oakland, or the San Francisco Bay. In 2002, the square became host to the Coast Guard lightship *Relief*, which was built at Rice Brothers Shipyard in Boothbay Harbor, Maine in 1951, but did later serve for a time off the California coast.
  48. This tradition of adding widely ranging symbols continued in 1999 with the erection of a granite slab to commemorate the Pony Express transport of mail via Oakland and then, in 2002, with the insertion of the International Cheemah Monument on Franklin and Water Streets. The bronze statue of a woman holding a torch in front of an eagle aims to assemble global imagery relating to strength and victory. In 2004, a bronze sculpture of a downcast wolf was placed alongside the Klondike cabin.
  49. Chip Johnson, "Battleship Memorial is Mothballed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 21, 1999.
  50. Other early building projects also made do with utility. In 1958, KTVU, Oakland's first television station, built a simple home at the foot of Washington Street.
  51. See Mitchell Schwarzer, "Oakland City Center: the Plan to Reposition Downtown within the Bay Region," *Journal of Planning History* 14 (2015).
  52. Beginning in 1953, a Christmas tree was placed annually at the foot of Broadway. "Giant Christmas Tree Sheds Glow on Jack London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, December 7, 1953. A couple of years later, a new theater company, the London Circle Players, opened at 399 Water Street in what had been a restaurant storeroom. "Historic Site for New Group," *Oakland Tribune*, November 6, 1955. Starting in 1962, art shows and the Jack London Art Festival became an annual event. Ed Salzman, "Expansion of Jack London Area Urged," *Oakland Tribune*, June 12, 1962. In 1966 and 1976, two enormous flagpoles were installed: one flying the flag of the United Nations, and the other, an American flag commemorating the bicentennial. The U.N. flag had been refused by the city of San Francisco. "The U.N. Flag is Raised – in Oakland," *Oakland Tribune*, March 26, 1966.
  53. Jasper Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950* (Chicago: Center for American Place at Columbia College, 2011), 67.
  54. Kale Williams, "Wax Museum at Fisherman's Wharf Closes Doors," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 2013.
  55. Onset of the festival marketplace.
  56. Charles Moore, "Ghirardelli Square," *Architectural Forum* 122 (June 1965): 54.
  57. Vivian Brown, "Factories Converted to Give San Francisco High Spots," *New York Times*, July 21, 1968.
  58. "Museum of Famed for London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, September 17, 1970.
  59. Earlier, in 1961, a warehouse on Franklin Street had been similarly converted, into the Worldwide Import Store. "Jack London Square to Get Import Store," *Oakland Tribune*, September 19, 1961.
  60. Jack London Square: History and Fine Foods, *Oakland Post*, November 30, 1975.
  61. In 1972, the Board of Port Commissioners approved the project in a 4–2 vote, part of the dissent coming from fears that the small shops might mimic the honkytonk atmosphere that was then becoming noticeable across the Bay at Fisherman's Wharf. "Estuary Village Shops Lease Ok'd," *Oakland Tribune*, August 17, 1972. On the opening, see Lou Carlston, "Summer Opening for Jack London Village," *Oakland Tribune*, May 2, 1975.
  62. "Jack London Square Adds Attraction," *Oakland Post*, November 5, 1975; "Jack London Village Scenes," *Oakland Tribune*, November 23, 1975.
  63. "On the Waterfront at Jack London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, December 12, 1976.
  64. Margot Patterson Doss, "Something's Afoot in Oakland," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 10, 1977.
  65. Jacqueline Cutler, "Discovering Oakland's Other Waterfront," *East Bay Guardian* (September 1990), 36–37.
  66. On the aesthetic, economic, and safety issues common to tourist districts, see Dennis Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble" in *The Tourist City*, eds., Dennis Judd, Susan Fainstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 37–38.
  67. K. K. Sharma, *New Dimensions in Tourism and Hotel Industry* (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 1998), 87–93.
  68. Wallace Turner, "Fisherman's Wharf: Plastic and Greed," *New York Times*, September 22, 1974; Timothy Egan, "Past and Future Collide on San Francisco's Waterfront," *New York Times*, February 8, 1995. In 1969, the city of San Francisco assumed control of the Port of San Francisco from the state. While the fishing fleet and maritime traditions on the portside were to be protected, on the landside, hotels, motels, restaurants, retail shopping, and office buildings were promoted. Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape*, 139–146, 209–212. It is worth adding that much of the fish and seafood now arrived by trucks and airfreight shippers. Robert Lindsey, "Magic Fading at Fisherman's Wharf," *New York Times*, May 9, 1987.

69. Les Ledbetter, "105 Shops Revitalizing San Francisco Pier," *New York Times*, December 12, 1978.
70. Allan Temko, "The Port's Architectural Fiasco – Pier 39," in *No Way to Build a Ballpark and Other Irreverent Essays on Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 175.
71. Regular Meeting of the Board of Port Commissioners of the City of Oakland, January 4, 1983, 9–10.
72. For background on the planning process that would culminate in the Jack London's Waterfront, see Port of Oakland, *Jack London Square Project Development Plans: Final Environmental Impact Reports* (Oakland: Port of Oakland Planning Division, 1983); Keyser Marston Associates, *Jack London Square Expansion: Market Feasibility Evaluation* (San Francisco, 1984); and CHNMB Associates, *Jack London Square: Urban Design Study and Development Guidelines* (San Francisco: CHNMB Associates, 1985).
73. William Langbein, "Port Buys Out Jack London," *Northern California Real Estate Journal* (July 31, 1990): 6.
74. The plan necessitated demolition of the KTVU building and the former longshoreman's hiring hall, which had been remodeled as the Elegant Farmer and then Gallagher's Restaurant. The construction of Water I also covered much of the northern elevation of Scott's, the former Sea Wolf restaurant. *Architecture California* 8 (November, 1986): 10–11.
75. The Port's offices relocated from the Haslett Warehouse. On Washington Street, north of the Embarcadero, a multi-story parking garage contained thirteen hundred parking spaces. *Northern California Real Estate Journal*, July 18, 1988.
76. Laura Evenson, "Waterfront Development – Upscale Firms for Oakland," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 1, 1989.
77. Martin Halstuk, "Jack London Square – Beautiful and Deserted," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 16, 1991.
78. Langbein, "Port Buys Out Jack London," 5.
79. Another three-hundred-room hotel proposed nearby at the foot of Washington Street was never built.
80. Office leasing was much more successful. See Bill O'Brien, "Jack London Neighborhood Residents & Merchants Fret as Port Seeks a Developer," *East Bay Express*, November 14, 1999.
81. Tyler & Associates, *Jack London Square Shoppers Survey*, conducted for Oakland Portside Associates (Corte Madera, CA, 1992), ES3–4.
82. Herb Childress, "On the Waterfront," *East Bay Express*, November 24, 1989.
83. Keyser Marsten Associates, *Jack London Square Expansion: Market Feasibility Study* (San Francisco, 1984), 1–4.
84. On comparable waterfront redevelopment, see Ann Breen and Dick Rigby, *Waterfronts: Cities Reclaim Their Edge* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), 18–24.
85. Harvey Rubenstein, *Pedestrian Malls, Streetscapes, and Urban Spaces* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1992), 235–237.
86. Martin Millspough, "The Inner Harbor Story: A Model of Urban Waterfront Development, Baltimore's Inner Harbor as Adventure in Downtown Revitalization," *Urban Land* 62 (April, 2003): 36–41.
87. Rick DelVecchio, "Oakland's Jack London Square Flirts with Success," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 1996.
88. City of Oakland and Port of Oakland, *Estuary Policy Plan* (Oakland, 1999), 53–60.
89. Trish Beall, "Oakland Reshapes its Waterfront," *Coast & Ocean* 20 (Winter 2004/2005).
90. Laura Counts, "Port Presents Vision for Jack London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, October 28, 1999.
91. Board of Port Commissioners, Port of Oakland, "Agenda Sheet," December 18, 2001.
92. "Oakland Port's Curious Deal," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 19, 2001; David Armstrong, "Oakland Port Defends Sale of Buildings," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, 2001.
93. Benjamin went on to become the Port of Oakland's executive director in 2007, but was forced to resign in 2012 amid a spending scandal involving the Port of Oakland paying the tab for a Texas strip club. Erin Ivie, "Port of Oakland Omar Benjamin Resigns Amid Spending Scandal," *San Jose Mercury News*, November 13, 2012.
94. The Embarcadero Freeway was demolished in 1991 and, by 1995, the Embarcadero had been rebuilt as a palm-lined boulevard. Restoration of the Ferry Building for conversion into a gourmet food marketplace began in 1999.
95. Amy Trubek, *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 122–129.
96. Environmental Science Associates, *Jack London Square Redevelopment: Environmental Impact Report*, Prepared for City of Oakland, Community and Economic Development Agency (San Francisco, 1993), IV–E.
97. Janine DeFao, "Huge Food Market Planned for Jack London Square," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 4, 2003.
98. George Raine, "Ground Broken for Huge Public Retail Market at Jack London Square," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 22, 2007.
99. John Birdsall and Robert Gammon, "Back to Square One," *East Bay Express*, August 8, 2007. In an unrelated development, the Barnes & Noble bookstore closed in 2009.
100. In 2014, in the space formerly occupied by the Barnes and Noble Bookstore, Plank opened as a combined bowling alley, bocce court, games parlor, and eating and drinking establishment.
101. Renee Frojo, "Has Jack London Square Made it?" *San Francisco Business Times*, February 1, 2013.

102. Angela Woodall, "New Plans for Oakland's Jack London Square," *Oakland Tribune*, December 3, 2010.
103. In 1963, a deluxe forty-block residential development was proposed from Broadway to Fallon, and from the Nimitz Freeway to the estuary. "Luxury Apartment Plan for Estuary," *Oakland Tribune*, October 6, 1963. Two years later, a luxury apartment and marina complex was announced for the foot of Alice Street. Neither were built.
104. "Portobello Complex: Occupancy Growing," *Oakland Tribune*, April 18, 1976.
105. In 2014, the Port of Oakland announced plans for the construction of two condominium towers within the confines of the square, reasoning that residents might jumpstart commercial development.
106. On this dichotomy, see Stephen McGovern, "Evolving Visions of Waterfront Development in Postindustrial Philadelphia: The Formative Role of Elite Ideologies," *Journal of Planning History* 7 (November 2008), 320.