

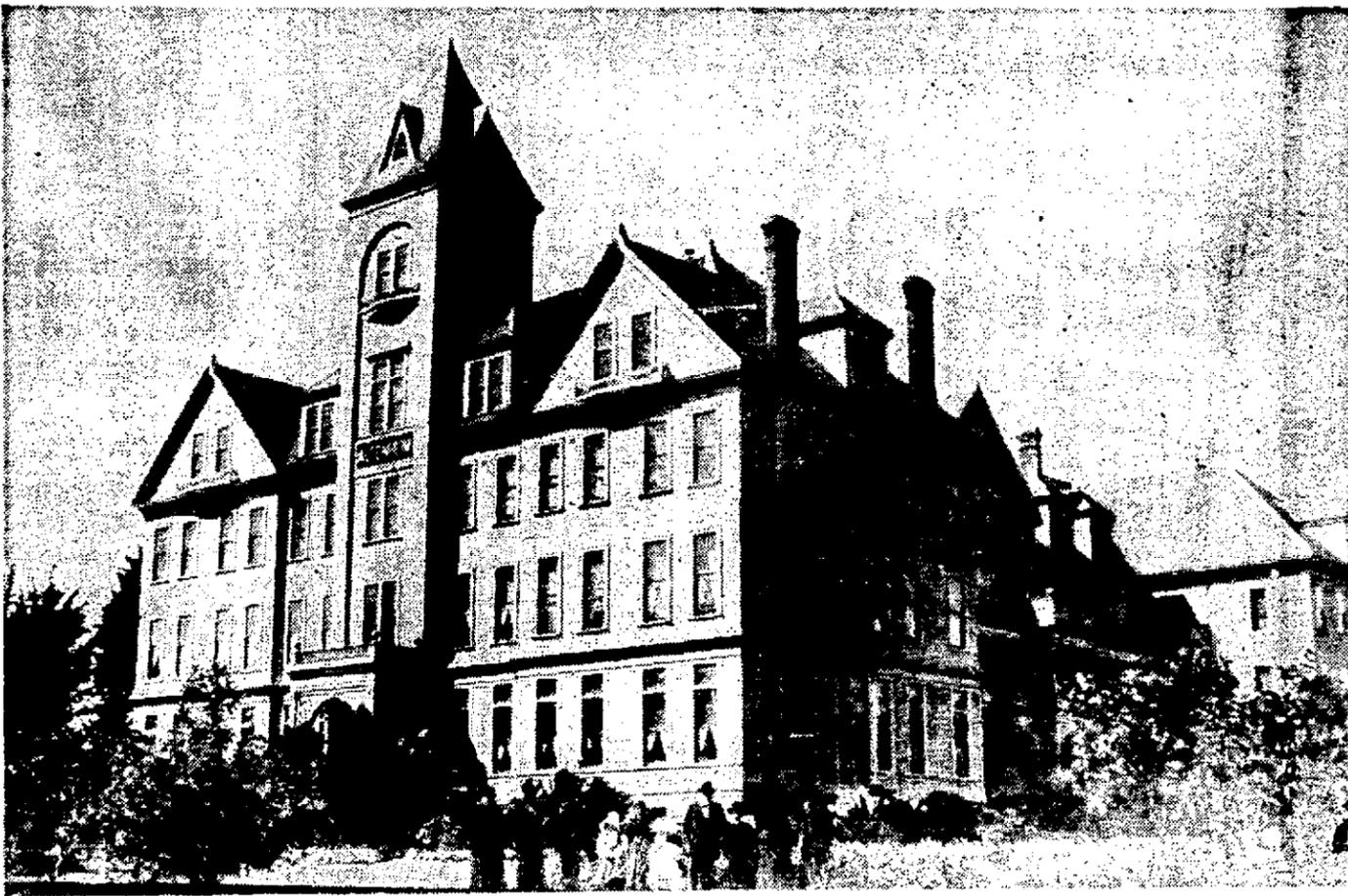
K N A V E

It Was Climate They Were After

FRUITVALE'S ideal climate accounts for two of the Diamond District's oldest landmarks — one dedicated to the very young, and the other dignifying senior citizens. They were founded but one year apart—The Altemheim for the elderly in 1890, and the Fred Finch Children's Home in 1891.

The Altemheim history actually dates back to 1875 when the idea of founding a German Old People's Home was proposed by Charles Meinecke, then president of the German Benevolent Society of San Francisco.

Plans for the home were well advanced when fire leveled the society's German Hospital on San Francisco's Brannan Street. By the



From the photo collection of Louis Reinthaler

The Altemheim as it appeared in 1897 until it was leveled by fire in July of 1908



time Meinecke and his colleagues worked their way out from that disaster 11 years had gone by. In December 1886 F. R. Rosenbaum of the society remembered the Altemheim idea and enlisted a special committee to help make it a reality.

First meeting of the new Altemheim Society took place on May 6, 1887. A constitution and by-laws were adopted, and on March 31, 1890, the society was incorporated. To raise money for the project a bazaar was staged in the old Mechanic's Pavilion at Market and Larkin Streets in San Francisco. It must have been a great event. For five evenings untold thousands filled the pavilion, netting the society a profit of \$39,880 — an impressive sum for the 1880s.

The next step was to find property for the proposed home. Two

sites were proposed — one near Sutro Heights in San Francisco offered by Adolph Sutro as a gift, and the present site in Dimond near the foothills of the Fruitvale region.

Fruitvale's climate won out. Dimond's salubrious atmosphere was the unanimous choice, even to the tune of \$6,000 for the land.

THE LAND the German-American folk bought for their planned home was atop a hill looking down on the cluster of beer gardens and small business houses in the vicinity of Sausel Creek and the dusty streets called Hopkins and Fruitvale — the very heart of the Dimond District.

It would be some time before construction of the home would get under way so the happy and ambitious group decided they would hold a picnic on their new estate and perhaps pick up more money necessary for completion of their project. The picnic took place on May 17, 1891, and there has been a May Festival at The Altemheim every year since.

Actual construction didn't get under way until February 1893. Three years later—Dec. 31, 1896—two residents and a matron moved into the new institution. The Altemheim was at once alive, vigorous and effective. By 1898 there were 30 residents. Today the home takes care of an average of 200 residents every month. And no longer is membership restrictive to those of

German ancestry, President Louis Reinthaler points out.

The picture of its formative years isn't complete, however. Misfortune would strike again . . . and again it would be fire. Flames swept the big frame building in July 1908 and practically leveled it to the ground. The dream of the Bay Area German-Americans was one great mass of charred ruins in spite of efforts of a tiny gasoline engine from the Dimond Firehouse that labored with very little effect. Early-day equipment from the distant 13th Avenue fire station and the Hopkins Street fire wagons also responded, but the grades were steep and by the time they arrived the fire had made such a start that the buildings were already demolished.

What was left was torn down, and the new structure which we are familiar with today was erected.

A good time to visit The Altemheim is on one of its birthday anniversaries, or the May Festival when its Kuchen and Weiner Kaffee time and old-world gaiety takes over.

ANOTHER landmark of almost 80 years is the Fred Finch Children's Home on Coolidge Avenue. It was founded as an orphanage on August 31, 1891, when Coolidge Avenue was known to early settlers of Dimond and Fruitvale as Peralta Avenue. Antonio Peralta, who at an ear-

lier period owned all of East Oakland, had made his home in the neighborhood until he died in 1879. Not until June 1928 was the name Peralta Avenue changed to Coolidge.

The rolling hills and Fruitvale's balmy climate that Capt. Duncan Blair Finch and his wife Eunice encountered during an autumn visit in 1886 resulted in Finch buying 5½ acres the following year. It was this property that they decided to Presiding Elder Robert H. Bentley of the Methodist Church on August 13, 1891, with the provision that the land be used "For the purpose of erecting, establishing and maintaining thereon an orphans' home under management of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

A few weeks later (Sept. 12, 1891) the Fred Finch Home was established. On Jan. 6, 1892, Robert Bentley deeded the property to the Fred Finch Orphanage.

On Jan. 1, 1892, the doors of the orphanage were open. One child was enrolled.

It is interesting to note the near parallel with The Altemheim.

THE MAN credited with founding the Fred Finch Children's Home — Capt. Duncan Blair Finch — named it in memory of his son Frederick D. Finch, known as Fred.

Captain Finch came around The Horn in 1849 from his native New