The men, women, and children who lived in what would become the Cypress Freeway Replacement Project area could find accommodations in a variety of buildings during the final decades of the 19th century. By the 1880s and 1890s, working-class cottages, flats and apartments, Almost-polite houses, substantial middle-class homes, boardinghouses, lodging houses, and hotels filled out streets in a district where residential buildings usually were framed of wood and ranged in height from one to three stories. In this heterogeneous landscape, a person who preferred (or needed) to rent a room could find a place to stay in any of the dwellings just mentioned, with rooms available to rent from a brief to an extended period of time. While West Oakland may have been principally a neighborhood of family homes during the late 19th century, the fabric accommodated the housing needs of a variety of people (Groth 1997:85): the native-born boilermaker who rented a hotel room on Seventh Street; the widowed dressmaker who roomed with an Irish American family near the railroad yards; the African American couple who lodged in a flat, rented by another couple of color from a single, middle-aged, Irish woman; and the young German saloonkeeper who boarded with the owner of a local brewery, also a German immigrant. The presence of this rental-housing culture in West Oakland added to the social diversity of the neighborhood—a diversity that echoed the heterogeneity of the district’s residential architecture, where incremental construction (lot-by-lot development) and mixed uses were common.

This essay examines room-renting in West Oakland between 1880 and 1900, directing attention to the gender and material culture of room-renters at select sites during a period of transition and change. The terms “room-renting” and “room-renters” encompass the extent of rental-housing culture for men and women in West Oakland, where room-renters included boarders—who rent generally included meals—and roomers, who purchased meals separately from housing (and could also be known as lodgers). During the period under study, great changes occurred with respect to this aspect of rental-housing culture in the United States, as boarding fell out of favor and rooming became the preferred practice among many tenants across the nation (Groth 1997:90). Although Eva Carlin, one of the reformers who visited West Oakland around 1900, missed this aspect of housing culture in the neighborhood (Carlin 1900a, 1900b), reformers elsewhere in the country bemoaned the rapid development of lodging districts in the nation’s cities and complained about the manner of inhabitation and its contribution to the perceived dissolution of family and civic life (Wolfe 1906, 1907; Woods 1907; Zorbaugh 1929). More recently, historians have taken issue with reform proscriptions, finding architectural, economic, and social merit in downtown rooming-house districts (Groth 1986, 1994; Meyerowitz 1988; Peel 1986).

The Cypress Project offers the opportunity to examine the gender and material culture of boarders and roomers at this time of transition, by comparing the artifacts used by hotel residents with those from family settings, where room-renting took place. The surveys of boarding and rooming, undertaken for the Cypress Project before the excavation reports were written, focused on
commercial establishments that were built before, during, and after the transition to rooming (Groth 1997; Woods 1994). Aicha Woods and Paul Groth detailed the development of a third-class hotel (or lodging) district along Seventh Street, which Groth showed continued to be inhabited until the 1950s (Figure 9.1). Groth and Woods explored the historical reasons for the development of the spine of commercial hotels in West Oakland: the transcontinental railroad, which ran along Seventh Street, attracted skilled and unskilled workers to the neighborhood, starting in the 1870s. At the end of the 19th century, the string of Seventh Street hotels, which ranged in size from modest buildings to grand structures, three stories high, and 75 feet wide, catered almost exclusively to single, white, working-class men, most of whom worked for the railroad. The “unattached” persons—the term used by reformers in the 20th century to describe single non-family men and women who lived in inexpensive hotels and lodging houses (Rose 1947)—relied on commercial services to meet their needs for food, clothing, and entertainment. In West Oakland, entrepreneurs opened restaurants, saloons, laundries, and so forth to meet the needs of hotel residents (and others) who frequented Seventh Street, with most of the establishments concentrated at the western end of the street, near the railroad yards. Often, the owner of an upstairs rooming house opened a saloon on the ground floor of the establishment (Figure 9.2). Rental rooms were located upstairs.

Since Groth and Woods scrutinized the development of this landscape of lodging in West Oakland, the excavation reports have brought to light the extent of boarding and rooming in family households across the Cypress Project—outlined in earlier studies, but not researched in depth. Now that historical associations have been established for archaeological features, it is possible to integrate women, as housing providers and renters of rooms, into the district’s lodging landscapes, more than was possible in prior studies. With respect to this aspect of rental-housing culture, the residential fabric of West Oakland resembled immigrant, working-class districts in many other American cities, where women—mothers for the most part—took boarders and roomers into their homes to earn a living or to augment the meager wages of their husbands, sons, and daughters (Degler 1980:131-138; Kessler-Harris 1982:124-125; Mintz and Kellogg 1988:87-93). While some social critics recognized the need for (and even the merits of) this kind of employment for single and married women (Byington 1910; Woods 1907), many housing reformers condemned the practice, arguing that overcrowded households held deleterious consequences for morality, family life, public health, and the Americanization of immigrants.
The most extreme critics called the practice “lodger evil” (Breckinridge and Abbott 1910-1912, 1911; Veiller 1912), conflating deeply held middle-class convictions about morality and the shape of the urban environment with housing choices and economic need (Boyer 1978; Groth 1994). These critics had in mind, however, far denser, more homogeneous residential neighborhoods than existed in West Oakland between 1880 and 1900, when the number of room-renters in family settings was small—usually one or two people per house, sometimes as many as three or four, if a family rented space. Moreover, in West Oakland, the practice of renting rooms to relatives and other people persisted in middle-class households, although it declined in many other cities across the nation (Blumin 1989; Degler 1980:393). With the heterogeneous neighborhood in a state of flux in California, middle-class boarders could live on the same street or city block as their working-class counterparts.

Many studies have pointed to the extent and importance of room-renting among working-class families in industrializing U.S. cities. Written principally by social historians, the studies emphasize the important contribution that woman make to the economy of working-class families by letting and maintaining rooms for rent in their homes (Groneman 1977; Jensen 1980; Kleinberg 1996; Yans-McLaughlin 1982). The research also makes clear the arduous demands boarding and rooming placed on the female sex, usually mothers, older girls, and widows. They cooked, cleaned house, and washed laundry for tenants, as well as for their own family members (Bodnar 1982; Cowan 1981; Strasser 1982), and found themselves pressed for sexual favors (Davidoff 1979). Yet, historians’ analyses of room-renters and family life appear to have not been integrated with material culture studies by historical archaeologists, who have included boarders in their investigations. Best-known is the excavation of the Boot Mills complex in Lowell, Massachusetts, directed by Mary Beaudry and Stephen Mrozowski, who examined ideology in concert with the practices of everyday life, as revealed through material culture. The data uncovered led Beaudry and Mrozowski to question the power and efficacy of corporate ideology, especially the capability of factory owners to regulate every aspect of the daily lives of immigrant textile workers who lived in company-owned boardinghouses (Beaudry 1989, 1993; Mrozowski and Beaudry 1990; Mrozowski, Ziesing, and Beaudry 1996). The conclusions are startling. Men and women lived in the boardinghouses, once assumed to be sex segregated, and tenants consumed alcohol, contrary to all published rules. As illuminating as the Lowell study is, it focuses on the material culture of working-class tenants in purpose-built boardinghouses. The study area did not include room-renters in informal settings (present in other Lowell neighborhoods).
In West Oakland, comparing the material culture of room-renters who lived in informal and formal sites has its difficulties, with evidence scattered unevenly across study sites. Census data, however, suggest that boarding and rooming existed side by side during this period of transition, adding clout to Paul Groth’s argument that housing definitions depend on the place (site) of dining as well as the kind and character of sleeping rooms (Groth 1997:85). In West Oakland, room-renters were scattered throughout the Cypress Project area, taking rooms in hotels along Seventh Street and finding space in other dwellings to the south and north of the district’s major commercial street. Most of the archaeological deposits in West Oakland date between 1880 and 1900, when relatively few people rented rooms in family settings. After 1900 tenants increased (many single-family homes were converted to rooming houses), but few useful deposits of this time period were found. These circumstances make it difficult to discern the precise effect of room-renting on the material culture of family households, where boarders or roomers were present. The artifacts do not indicate the gender of roomers or other social complexities of these households, as revealed by the decennial census, city directories, voting registers, and other archival sources. Nonetheless, even though the material evidence is sparse, room-renters seem to have used the same items and eaten the same food as other members of the household in family settings. Such a finding is consistent with practices associated with boarding, where boarders in a family setting and in purpose-built boardinghouses were treated more or less like other members of the extended household (Groth 1994; Modell and Hareven 1973; Peel 1986). A very different situation existed in the commercial establishments along Seventh Street, where deposits give a clear sense of the material culture of hotel residents, who were in the main, white, working-class men.

RENTING A ROOM OFF SEVENTH STREET

In West Oakland, men and women who traversed city streets looking for a room to rent found many possibilities off Seventh Street, where the scale and type of residential architecture varied greatly toward the end of the 19th century. In this neighborhood of family homes, the sign, “room for rent,” could be posted in the window of a side-street dwelling, just as readily as it could be hung outside a Seventh Street hotel. On side streets, rooms were available for rent within many family homes and in upstairs rooming houses, which were usually built in concert with corner saloons. Close to the railroad yards, the density of the latter buildings contributed to reform concern about the prevalence of saloons in West Oakland and their proximity to family houses (Carlin 1900a, 1900b; Gutman 1999, 2000). Often, several establishments could stand on one city block. For example, in the late 1880s, four rooming houses stood on Fifth Street between Henry and Peralta streets, with each corner building standing above a saloon or grocery store, which were commonly used as informal saloons in the late 19th century (Rosenzweig 1983). James Davidson, a carpenter and speculator, built an especially impressive establishment at the southwest corner of Fifth and Peralta; he hired an immigrant woman (called a housekeeper on the census) to manage the upstairs rooming house for him, and probably ran the saloon himself (Gutman 1997b, 2000). West Oakland also contained several purpose-built boardinghouses, such as the Scott House on Market Street and the sanitarium at the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets (Groth 1997:90, 100).

Gender entered the geography of rental-housing culture in West Oakland, shaping the housing choices of single men and women, and of families as well. The relationship between people and property in Davidson’s lodging house was the most typical: male property-owner,
ANNE PATTERSON’S ROOMING HOUSE

Marta Gutman

The Davidson/Patterson Rooming House still stands at the corner of Peralta and Fifth streets. (Photo credit: Paul Groth)

When Annie Mae Dugger Patterson arrived in West Oakland in 1938, she and her family moved into a rooming house that had stood at the corner of Peralta and Fifth streets for about 50 years. In its architectural form and through its mixed social uses, the aging, two-story building suited the immediate needs of this African American family, providing work and shelter at one and the same time. Quite soon after she arrived in the city, Mrs. Patterson found a job running the rooming house for its elderly, white, male owner. Auspiciously, the position came with housing: a large, ground-floor room that the entire family would use as its home for many years. Mrs. Patterson likely considered herself fortunate to have found a place to live, with the housing shortage growing day by day in West Oakland as migrants streamed into the city. Although her landlord previously used the one-room apartment as a storeroom for his grocery store (also on the ground floor), a dedicated entry offered the Patterson family a modicum of privacy, shielding children from the grocery-store customers and tenants who lived upstairs. Plus, Prescott School, a public elementary school, was within walking distance; the New Century Recreation Center and playground was across the street; and rooming-house managers usually lived rent-free in the establishments where they worked (Groth 1994; Gutman 1999; Patterson 1995a).

Annie Patterson participated in a social process that historians call the Great Migration: the diasporic movement of a disenfranchised people north “to reap,” what one historian calls, “the fruits of liberty” (Venkatesh 2000:5). Like many African Americans who moved to Oakland as the Great Depression spread across the land, Mrs. Patterson’s journey started in a farmhouse outside of a small southern town, in Arkansas in her case. The starting point would be a familiar one for people of color who came to the San Francisco Bay Area during this time of economic hardship. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Patterson took the lead in making the decision for the family to leave the Deep South. She had been a school teacher in Mississippi before marrying a sharecropper, and she, especially, did not want her children to grow up in an “environment as hopeless as Arkansas” was for black people in the 1930s (Patterson 1995b).

The move north did not eradicate racial discrimination from the Pattersons’ lives. Mrs. Patterson did not seek employment as a school teacher excluded from this profession by virtue of her marital status and her race (Albrier 1979; Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:19; Pittman 1974:33). Plus, parts of the California city were as racially segregated as the towns the family knew in Arkansas, and it can be argued that the family’s standard of living decreased, at
least to begin with. Three generations crowded into one room behind a grocery store was a far cry from living in a shotgun house in Arkansas (Patterson 1995b).

Yet, Mrs. Patterson’s story brings to light the means by which married women of color extracted economic opportunity from West Oakland’s mixed-use landscape in the interwar years. Her strategies differed from those employed by women of color who arrived in Oakland during World War II, ready to challenge gender conventions by working for wages in shipyards and factories (Johnson 1993; Lemke-Santangelo 1996). Like women who made the trek north during World War II, Mrs. Patterson found a job easily enough in West Oakland, but in her case the work (rooming-house manager) was conventional for members of her sex, race, and class. She washed, ironed, cooked, cleaned, and, one suspects, interviewed applicants for rooms that cost about $10.50 a month to rent (Oakland Real Property Survey 1936). For the most part, single African American men employed in the railroad yards or in war-related work knocked on her door looking for a place to live, although on occasion a woman would also rent a room in the boardinghouse (Patterson 1995a, 1995b).

The Pattersons lived in a building that resembled many other corner rooming houses in the community: built toward the end of the 19th century, with a large grocery store (formerly a saloon) and storage room on the ground floor, and a kitchen, two bathrooms (one for the family, one for tenants), and individual bedrooms for rent upstairs. James Davidson constructed this establishment in the late 1880s, straddling the southeast corner of Peralta and Fifth streets. It was one in a string of five residential buildings that the carpenter, who also called himself a capitalist, erected to improve his properties (Gutman 1997b). For the most part, these were plain, wood-frame buildings. The carpenter-cum-capitalist, however, added to the façade of the rooming house a grand, cantilevered bay window that projected over the street corner to catch the attention of passers-by. After Davidson’s death, the rooming house changed hands several times; John Fretas probably owned it in the late 1930s when Mrs. Patterson, her husband, their children, and, eventually, her father moved in (Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey 1992a; Patterson 1995a, 1995b).

The family economy prevailed in the Patterson household, as it did in other working-class households associated with the Cypress Project blocks. Mrs. Patterson worked for wages; her husband, James, held various jobs, and so did their children, who worked after school and during summers. In due course, and as times improved, the Patterson family would put as much income as possible into savings and toward the purchase of property (Patterson 1995a, 1995b). Room-renting, as a means for women to accumulate capital and come to own homes, had an established place in West Oakland’s housing culture—a place that stands out in the archival material uncovered through the Cypress excavations and in oral histories (Bargiacchi and King 1981; Cumbelich and Cumbelich 1996; Ericsson 1981; Kosmos 1995; Mousalimas and
Mousalimas 1996; Santee 1981). This material helps us to discern that, with respect to the structure of her work, her living arrangements, and her relationship to the family economy, Annie Patterson’s urban experience bore some resemblance to that of working-class women in white immigrant families who preceded her to West Oakland. Yet, her material living conditions were much worse, with her race intensifying her experience of social and spatial inequalities. Seen from that perspective, her story closely resembles that of other working-class women of color who lived on project blocks or who migrated to other northern cities during this period (Hine 1991).

The 1940s and 1950s were difficult times for the Patterson family as they struggled to establish themselves in a new community and conserve their resources. Yet the Pattersons, taking advantage of relatively depressed property values, accumulated a fair amount of residential real estate. By 1945 they had purchased the boarding house and, over time, they came to own the five buildings constructed by James Davidson and four other adjacent lots on Fifth and Lewis streets, vacant at the time of purchase (Gutman 1997b). Without doubt, property ownership gave the Pattersons a much-needed emotional and financial anchor in West Oakland. As might be expected, Annie Patterson assumed the brunt of the property management work, especially with respect to the boarding house. Her son, Arthur Patterson, recalls that she consistently worked 12-hour days, rising at four o’clock in the morning to make breakfast for the roomers (the meal was included in the rent) and then take care of her own family. Mrs. Patterson also cleaned the building, washed her tenants’ clothes, and even ironed them (for an extra fee). Despite the strict divide between family and business life, sometimes roomers helped by cleaning their bedrooms and the shared bathroom (Patterson 1995b).

The experience of this African American family, which embraced rental-housing culture as a means to homeownership, counters prevailing images of West Oakland as a neighborhood in decline during the middle decades of the 20th century. It also counters the assertion, made by the city’s long-term, middle-class, African American residents, that migrants to West Oakland from the Deep South needed assistance and guidance to help them accommodate to northern urban life and customs. We must “help our new neighbors, to overcome restrictions and handicaps imbedded in them from the Southern way of living, Social and Political,” one woman insisted (Armstrong, Huson, and Nottage 1945; Gutman 2002c). Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo has disputed this characterization of female migrant life (and questioned the scholarship that substantiates it); her analysis holds for earlier arrivals as well for women who went to work in the shipyards (Lemann 1991; Lemke-Santangelo 1996). The practice of boarding and rooming in West Oakland, which continued well into the 20th century, allowed migrant women of color to extract economic opportunity from an incrementally built, heterogeneous landscape as they sought to create some measure of liberty in their new northern lives.
male lodgers, and immigrant female manager of the establishment. A woman who lived on her own usually elected to board or room with a family and was therefore more likely to live in a side-street house than in a corner lodging house or in a hotel on the district’s main commercial thoroughfare. If a woman (or a family for that matter) chose to rent space in a purpose-built hotel, there was either the genteel Centennial House or the well-regarded Railroad Exchange Hotel (Figure 9.3); women rarely sought lodging at the neighborhood’s rougher establishments (Woods 1994:146). In the final decades of the 19th century, West Oakland did not yet contain commercial or philanthropic hotels intended to house single women who worked for wages. They were located elsewhere, with the Chabot Woman’s Sheltering and Protection Home run by the YWCA in downtown Oakland being one prominent local example (Clark 1939:62). Like working girls, women and girls in West Oakland entered the housing market as room-renters at specific points in their life cycles, although they were probably older or younger than the working girls who lived in downtown Oakland or San Francisco. Very often, the adolescent girls who boarded or roomed with families were servants who faced grueling tasks and other arduous demands associated with their occupation. Young married women frequently boarded or roomed (with their husbands) in order to accumulate capital, usually for a down payment on a house of their own. Later in life, inadequate income prompted women, especially those who did not own residential property, to become room-renters. Such women might be single, widowed, or divorced, with or without children living at home.

In this rental-housing landscape, middle- and working-class women found opportunities for employment, although the description “landlady” could be as injurious to a woman’s reputation as “lodger” or “servant” (Davidoff 1979). In West Oakland, Jane Dutton, a well-off, single woman who, at end of her life, lived in a small cottage at 914 Fifth Street, had run a boardinghouse in San Francisco during the Gold Rush; she invested her considerable earnings in real estate, becoming quite wealthy in the process (Figure 9.4) (Pit 3137). More common was the married woman or widow who contributed to the family economy by becoming the proprietor of a boarding- or rooming house or by taking room-renters into her home. The Cypress Project blocks are full of examples of middle- and working-class women who made their livelihood in this manner (Gutman 2002b). For the most part, the middle-class women who took boarders or roomers into family homes in West Oakland lived in dwellings large enough to accommodate extra residents without much crowding. Ethnic and racial ties remained
strong within artisan and middle-class households in the racially integrated neighborhood. In 1880 Lucinda Tilghman, a widowed African American mother, rented a cottage at 662 Fifth Street; her boarders included Abraham Holland, an African American railroad porter who also widowed, and a servant (Privy 933/1112). On the same city block and in the same year, two German immigrants boarded at the Bredhoff residence, at 663 Sixth Street (Privy 985). The young woman may have been the Bredhoff’s servant; the young man was a saloonkeeper and may have been employed at the Bredhoff brewery. The traditions associated with apprenticeship persisted in this middle-class household, where an employer offered housing to a young employee (Katz 1975, for comparison).

The history of the two-story house at 1708 William Street is especially telling because it reveals the persistent effect of gender and life-cycle needs on room-renting, as lodging replaced boarding (Privy 100, Privy 101). In 1880 John and Ellen Stryker, a young married couple (a mill machinist and a dressmaker, respectively) roomed with Elizabeth Huddleston, a 60-year-old widow, and her adult son, Frederick, who worked as a coffee miller in San Francisco. The Strykers may have been saving for a down payment on a house; Elizabeth Huddleston needed to augment her income and reduce housing costs after her husband died. In 1880 she rented out the house on William Street and, in 1881, moved across the street; by the 1890s, she let furnished rooms at 1787 Seventh Street. In the meantime, the Strykers had moved, and Henry and Elizabeth King (a carpenter and his wife) became tenants at 1708 William Street, renting the 1,140-square-foot building from 1881 to 1905. At some point, the Kings benefited from the construction of a kitchen addition and a handsome new bay window. The Kings took in boarders; in 1900, a divorced mother, working as a bookkeeper, and her school-age daughter lived with the Kings, who may have been her parents. In 1905 Ellen Brown, a widowed Irish immigrant, purchased the house; in 1910, she headed a household of four male lodgers, one of whom was her nephew. All the men were Irish laborers, who worked building streets or for the railroad.

The collection from the privy at 1708 William Street offers only a few clues about the renters who lived in this setting in 1880, when the Huddleston and Stryker families shared the house. The five pairs of shoes, well-worn and in various sizes (including that of a child), indicate that men, women, and children lived in the house on William Street; the fabric and dressmaker’s tools suggest that Ellen Stryker worked at home.

At the other end of the project area, boarders lived in several of the dwellings that Joseph Fogg, a carpenter, built near the corner of Market and Fifth streets in the 1860s. In 1870 Fogg lived in one of the houses with his wife, their child, a Chinese servant, and multiple tenants. The tenants included Charles Lufkin, a police inspector with a law degree, who moved into one of

Figure 9.4. The Dutton tract for sale. Jane Dutton’s San Leandro ranch was put up for auction in 1889, after her death.
the Fogg houses in 1869. Lufkin seems to have settled at 817 Market Street, a large, two-story house (2,300 square feet); in 1880 he lived there or possibly next door at 819 Market Street, another Fogg property, with his wife, Elizabeth, their young children, a 15-year-old adopted daughter, and a boarder, Grace Ellis, a dressmaker. According to the Oakland city directory, 817 Market Street was used as a boardinghouse in 1879-1880. The rambling building, with extensive rear additions, could have accommodated the Lufkin family, their boarder, and the five men listed in the directory as residents: Michael Kelleher, a salesman with Strange & Hink; August Legler; Gustave Legler, confectioner; Henry T. Legler, physician and surgeon, and member of the Board of Health; and Harvey Lovejoy, carpenter. All of the men moved within the year.

The deposit in the backyard of 817 Market Street may date from 1875, but it offers a sense of daily life for the boarders who lived in the dwelling in 1880, a middle-class home by most standards (Pit 3382). With income from boarders augmenting her husband’s relatively high salary, Elizabeth Lufkin could afford to pay attention to presentation at her dining table, following the precepts of the time (Ames 1992; Grover 1987). She used an elegant molded porcelain soup tureen, as well as plainer porcelain and earthenware serving dishes. Porcelain figurines and a fruit basket also decorated the parlor (Figure 9.5). The deposits make it clear that women in this household also worked for wages. Grace Ellis, and perhaps other dressmakers who boarded with the Lufkins, left direct evidence in this house of their trade—many beads of several varieties, a darning egg, and straight pins.

Figure 9.5. Signs of elegant living. Elizabeth Lufkin could afford to indulge in some of the trappings of gentility, such as this soup tureen (left) and fruit basket and figurines (right); these artifacts were excavated from a refuse pit in her backyard on Market Street (Pit 3382).

In West Oakland’s working-class households, room-renters contributed to the family economy, where the need to pay bills, save for a house down payment, and provide for security in old age compelled men and women to make space for boarders and roomers in very small houses. Not surprisingly, many, although not all, room-renters in working-class houses lived in more cramped housing than their middle-class counterparts. In these households, ethnic and racial ties persisted in tenant selection, although a few landlords displayed some tolerance of social difference. In 1880 Frederick Leonhard, a German cooper, and his wife, Louise, rented 1821 William Street from Kate McNamara, an Irish immigrant widow who recently inherited the property from her husband. Two single men both German carpenters, boarded with the Leonhard family; four adults and two children lived in the 500-square-foot dwelling (Privy 6260). Similarly, single working-class women—often relatively elderly, Irish immigrants—turned to
room-renting to pay bills, both as tenants and as landladies. Mary Kinsella, who owned her house at 806 Brush Street, had separated from her husband by 1900 when she lived with her sister and one boarder, an elderly Irish widower, in the small one-story building (Pit 1317). Kate Tierney, who lived down the street at 812 Brush Street, was a domestic servant who owned her house. She remodeled the building into two stories around 1900, creating two flats (720 square feet each). Tierney lived in one apartment and rented the other to an African American couple, who took in lodgers—another couple, plus a single man (Pit 1469).

Once again, the artifacts associated with working-class households where roomers lived suggest that tenants and landlords used the same objects and ate the same food. The clearest example comes from artifacts uncovered in the backyard of 881 Cedar Street where the McLaughlin family and boarders (some of whom were family members) lived in what was initially a 1,120 square feet one-and-one-half story house (Pit 2870, Pit 2880, Pit 2800, Privy 2822, Pit 2812, Pit 2809). In 1870 four Irish carpenters boarded with Michael and Mary McLaughlin and their four young children; Michael’s brother, Thomas, lived there as well. The McLaughlin brothers were laborers who profited from the building boom spawned by the arrival of the transcontinental railroad. By 1880 sickness and death visited this family: Edward Murphy, Mary’s brother, who boarded with the McLaughlin family in the late 1870s, had died, as had his sister. In the housecleaning episode that followed the two deaths, members of the McLaughlin family tossed out simple, serviceable tableware, not so different from that found in local hotels and saloons (Figure 9.6). The family and its tenants may have used items procured for the saloon and restaurant that operated out of one of the buildings that Murphy owned on Seventh Street. Few serving platters were found—surprising, given the number of people who lived in this household. Evidence of Murphy’s trade as a professional butcher, however, is plentiful and informative. The patterns of butcher marks on the extensive specimens of meat indicate that residents were not served individualized portions of meat. This was often the case in boardinghouses, where family-style meals were common.

**LODGING ON SEVENTH STREET**

Gender relations also helped to construct the material culture of the men and women who lived and worked in Seventh Street hotels. Even though men dominated West Oakland’s hotel landscape at the turn of the century, the commercial landscape on Seventh Street was not divided into spheres strictly separated by sex. While reformers (and some immigrant men) may have feared the dangers Seventh Street posed to girls and women (Carlin 1900a, 1900b), members of the female sex frequented the street and entered the hotel landscape as workers, tenants, and even owners. Women were hotel proprietors (renting establishments from male owners); they found employment as hired help (cooks, servants, and laundresses); they rented rooms; and even, on occasion, co-owned establishments with their husbands. The one or two houses of prostitution in West
Oakland (called “female lodging houses” on fire insurance maps) were located at this time on side streets, near the railroad yards, not on or close to Seventh Street (Solari 1997).

In fact, some of the upstairs rooming houses on Seventh Street offered men and women an “inexpensive compromise on respectability,” as Aicha Woods has asserted, citing arguments made by Paul Groth and drawing on her studies of architecture, land use, and social geography along the street (Woods 1994:141). As both authors have described, the variety of working-class hotels that lined Seventh Street at the turn of the century ranged from the “plain and rough” Charter Oak Hotel (Groth 1997:93), a fourth-class hotel, to more prestigious third-class establishments. According to Groth, the most expensive third-class hotels in American cities had a dedicated entry, with a recessed door, and perhaps a lobby, whereas tenants usually entered a fourth-class hotel through a saloon or an inexpensive restaurant. In West Oakland, the Railroad Exchange Hotel (Well 4600) and the Pullman Hotel (Well 559) were third-class hotels with lobbies and offices on the ground floor, as well as saloons with separate entries. The material residue of hotel life in these two establishments bears out the point about working-class respectability being possible in third-class hotels. This would have been the case for male tenants, who rented most of the rooms in these hotels, although women also did so, on occasion. The architectural resolution of the entry sequence to the Railroad Exchange Hotel and the Pullman Hotel made it possible for a respectable woman to enter the establishments without compromising her reputation. In late-19th-century American cities, saloons were almost exclusively male preserves (Figure 9.7), and a woman who walked into a drinking establishment on her own was aware she could be taken for a prostitute (Deutsch 2000; Gilfoyle 1992; Rosenzweig 1983).

In 1865 John Frese opened one of the first hotels in West Oakland, the Railroad Exchange Hotel, located at the corner of Seventh and Bay streets. The German immigrant selected a fortuitous location—four large lots near what would become the vast yards of the Central Pacific Railroad—and elected to manage his own property, unlike most hotel owners who leased their property to proprietors. Shortly after the Railroad Exchange Hotel opened, Frese took out an advertisement in the Oakland city directory, which read, “This Pioneer Establishment is a First Mechanic’s Hotel” (Woods 1994:143, citing Oakland city directory 1869). The claim proved to be accurate. In short order, skilled working-class men, many of them pile drivers who built and repaired bridges, wharves, and docks for the railroad, came to reside in Frese’s establishment. “All of the bridges, stations, wharves, and culverts were made of wood in those days and it kept quite a gang of men busy rebuilding these wooden structures,” one West Oakland resident recalled, remembering these workers preferred to live in the “Frese building” (Woods 1994:144, citing West of Market Boys’ Journal, February 1937). Frese and his family lived next door to the hotel (his wife, Margaret, also emigrated from
Germany), and in 1887, a few years after Margaret’s death, he decided to sell the property to Olaf and Johanna Anderson, two Scandinavian immigrants. They remodeled the house and other buildings on the property in 1890, thereby doubling the size of the establishment (see Figure 9.3). The appearance of the two wood-framed buildings offered no clues that they shared an owner and a common purpose—the initial hotel being a sober, two-and-one-half story building with a gable-roof, and a handsome front porch; the second structure was graced with elegant bay windows and a false front that made the building seem to be three stories tall. The Andersons lived in one of the small buildings on the property and managed the hotel, as John Frese had done beforehand. They hired a servant, Mary Peterson (a single German immigrant), to take care of chores.

The materials found in the abandoned well in the backyard of the hotel come from this time of transition, having been deposited in two phases, probably in the late 1880s after the Andersons purchased the property, and again in the early 1890s after they expanded the hotel complex. In 1894, 27 men lived at the newly refurbished hotel; half of them were born in the United States and the rest had emigrated from Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. They worked as carpenters, seamen, blacksmiths, laborers, and painters, and evidently appreciated the quality of service as some patrons stayed for quite a long time. Henry Mead, a painter for the Central Pacific Railroad, lived in the hotel for 4 years; Denis Strain, an Irish blacksmith, for 10 years; and Edward Powers, an Irish carpenter, lived in the Railroad Exchange Hotel for more than 15 years. The tenants of other hotels and boardinghouses changed residences far more frequently.

Coupled with the archival data, the materials recovered from the well suggest that a manly culture of fashionable working-class respectability prevailed in the Railroad Exchange Hotel. The garments, used by men who called the hotel home during the 1880s and 1890s, make this point especially clear (Figure 9.8). Other artifacts suggest that male residents probably enjoyed a drink and a smoke in the hotel’s saloon after work (Figure 9.9).

Without doubt, the accoutrements of manly culture—felt hats, checked jackets, clay pipes, and Cuban cigars—appealed to the respectable working-class men who

![Figure 9.8. The uniform of the Seventh Street working man. This hat and jacket were excavated from the abandoned well behind the Railroad Exchange Hotel. We can see the “uniform” of the average 1880s working man as he marches off to the work in his matching jacket and trousers, a buttoned vest, white shirt, and ever-present hat. For dress, he might have worn another jacket, possibly checkered, or pinstriped trousers. After a long day of work, he relaxed in his more comfortable slide-on slippers before retiring in a basic nightshirt (Well 4600).]

![Figure 9.9. Taking tobacco. Numerous items associated with smoking were found in the abandoned well behind the Railroad Exchange Hotel. Pictured here are snuff bottles, remnants of a cigar box, clay pipe fragments, and abundant matches (Well 4600).]
dominated the public and private spaces of this hotel in the late 19th century. We can even imagine that their attire and other aspects of their material culture demonstrated the power of working-class manhood in the early 1890s. It was a time of great political strife in the neighborhood, although the Railroad Exchange Hotel was not particularly associated with union organizing (as some other hotels were). The establishment was also not gender-segregated or removed from family life. The archival records indicate that the Frese and the Anderson families lived on the site; thus, it is not surprising that children’s shoes were recovered from the well. The Andersons’ tenants also included women: in 1894 Sophia Hansen lived at the hotel; in 1900 Phillippina Rothenbusch stayed at the hotel with her son, August. The women who lived at the establishment were not impoverished; like their male counterparts, they dressed in stylish clothes and paid attention to grooming, using perfume, other scents, toothbrushes, and combs.

Given prevailing cultural norms and the fact that the Frese family lived on the hotel property, it makes sense that the Railroad Exchange Hotel seems to have been run as a boardinghouse during the Frese proprietorship. The Freses selected plain, white “hotelware” for the dining room (Figure 9.10), probably purchasing the sturdy utilitarian dishes in the 1860s when the hotel opened. The dishes were gradually discarded over the years; a large number of them were tossed out during Anderson’s renovation. Tenants ate well and seem to have been served family-style meals. The kitchen served fresh fruit and vegetables, along with more exotic imported items: peach, grape, apricot, plum, squash, cherry, blackberry/raspberry, peanut, watermelon, strawberry, tomato, walnut, almond, Brazil nut, and coconut. The cooks liberally used peppersauce, Worcestershire sauce, and kitchen oils on cuts of beef and mutton. High- and moderate-priced cuts of meat, equally divided between steak and roast cuts, were secondarily buttered and served at the hotel. Also served at the hotel were domestic and wild fowl, as well as

Figure 9.10. Hotelware. This heavy, functional china and glassware from the abandoned Railroad Exchange Hotel well was selected for their boarders by the Frese family, who ran the establishment between 1865 and 1887 (Well 4600).

Figure 9.11. The Pullman Hotel around 1912. The hotel can be seen in the background, across Seventh Street; the Mint Saloon operated out of the ground floor. The Buhsen Hotel is in the foreground. (Photo reproduced with permission from Vernon J. Sappers)
domestic and imported fish—white hake, sturgeon, cod, Chinook salmon, and salted Atlantic mackerel.

After 1900 a very different situation existed at the Pullman Hotel, one of the other more expensive “third rank” hotels in West Oakland (Figure 9.11). This establishment, which had opened by 1870, was located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Pine and Seventh streets—the last stop the train made before it reached the yards. By 1878 John Levaggi purchased the establishment; he leased the saloon to several proprietors—including Dan Loud, who ran the Mint Saloon (see Figures 9.2 and 9.7)—and the hotel to a succession of male and female proprietors. In the 1880s and 1890s, the price of a room probably included a meal, given that the proprietors hired a cook and several servants. The ground floor contained a kitchen and a dining room that were entered from within the establishment (not from the street). Most of the clients were American-born railroad workers or associated with the railroad (Woods 1994:149-150).

After the turn of the century, the hotel management changed the services it offered to patrons, a decision that precipitated interior alterations. In 1904 the hotel advertised “furnished rooms,” a good indication that a tenant’s rent no longer included meals. Architectural change accompanied this shift—the dining room and kitchen were entered directly from Pine Street, rather than through the hotel lobby, as had been the case previously. This transition from boarding to rooming is born out by the archaeological deposit found in the hotel backyard (Figure 9.12).
Dating from 1900 to 1915, a great number of dishes were discarded in the abandoned well, giving some sense of the number of people who ate at the restaurant over the years; many of the vessels had been in use for nearly 20 years before being thrown away. In contrast to the plain, white hotelware used by the boarders at the Railroad Exchange Hotel, diners at the Pullman Hotel had eaten from plates decorated with gilded, handpainted, or transfer-print designs; their meals were not served on the least-expensive utilitarian dishware available. They also used glassware with etched or pressed decorations. Moreover, the cuts of meat indicate that the dining room served individual portions, that is, portions prepared according to a patron’s request. Family-style meals were no longer the norm. In addition, the social landscape of the hotel changed when Melanie Savy (a French widow) became the hotel proprietor from 1907 to 1915. Mrs. Savy, who lived at the hotel with her four children, ran an establishment integrated by race and sex. In 1910 her lodgers included 12 biracial men and women (called mulattoes on the census), 3 African American men, and 10 white men (immigrants and native born). The tolerance of social difference had ended by 1920, when the census shows that the new proprietors, also of French descent, did not accept African American lodgers or hire black employees (Groth 1997:94-95; Woods 1994:150). As was the case elsewhere in Oakland, racial segregation intensified as the Great Migration began (Gutman 2002a, 2002c).

Statistical analysis of faunal data found significant differences between the hotels and the other residences within the Cypress Project area (see Appendix F). Hotels had significantly higher percentages of beef than did other dwellings. Hotels also had lower percentages of low-priced cuts than Almost-polite houses and Informal workers’ cottages. People eating at hotels, seemed to have consumed different meats (more beef, less mutton and pork), and better cuts (especially avoiding the low-cost ones) than did people eating in family homes. Statistical analysis of glass bottle data indicated that hotels recycled less than residential households and had relatively higher proportions of hard-liquor bottles in their refuse (see Appendix G). These findings, however, did not rise to statistical significance, possibly because the delvings of bottle collectors had compromised the Pullman Hotel well deposit prior to our excavation.

HETEROGENEITY IN LANDSCAPE AND PRACTICE

The material residue of rental-housing culture in West Oakland directs us to recognize the importance of third-class hotel districts in working-class neighborhoods across the United States. The tangible evidence uncovered through the Cypress Project excavations makes us aware of an important piece of urban life that has now largely disappeared from the U.S. urban landscape (Woods 1994:139) and counters critique by reformers of this (most) reasonable approach to urban living. Reformers advocated homogeneity in urban life, taking the middle-class family (Katz 1975; Peel 1986) and single-use districts (Groth 1997:86-88) as the preferred model for modern city living. Clearly, other alternatives existed. The artifacts uncovered in West Oakland also bring to life the importance of the transition from boarding to rooming, which held great consequences for the physical fabric of cities and the social lives of “unattached persons,” whether male or female, and for families as well. The proliferation of commercial services in districts like West Oakland—public dining, public laundry, public cleaning—proved to be a harbinger of great changes to come, as middle-class women entered the labor force in greater and greater numbers and thus depended on commercial services to meet family needs (Hayden 1981).
At the same time, we need to exercise a certain caution and not simplify the story of rental-housing culture by focusing on single-use settings, like hotels, where we can discern clear ties between material culture, social life, and residential architecture. We must not be swayed by the power of artifacts to think in single-use (or single-sex) terms, just because the material evidence of one approach to (or user of) urban housing is present and others are harder to find. That it is hard to find artifacts specifically assigned to the women and men who roomed and boarded in houses is due in part to changing circumstances of urban life, in this case, the delivery of urban infrastructure (and other municipal services). It is difficult to examine artifacts associated with the transition from boarding to rooming in private homes since most dwellings were turned into full-fledged rooming houses only after municipal services were put in place in West Oakland’s neighborhoods. With collective garbage collection possible, tenants and homeowners no longer needed to toss their trash into the backyard. The absence of artifacts also speaks to the fluid state of the city in the 1880s and 1890s—to a time when middle-class and working-class families swelled to accommodate a boarder or roomer at a time of economic or social need and shrunk back down again, as needs changed.

Just as important, we need to recognize that the story of boarding and rooming in West Oakland continued in its gendered dimensions well into the 20th century. As the social composition of West Oakland changed, new migrants to the community—who included African Americans and immigrants from southeastern Europe, Mexico, and Central America—found advantage in the practice of rooming; as tenants and landlords, they used existing sites and sought new ones (Cumbelich and Cumbelich 1996:27-28; Patterson 1995b:25-29). Paul Groth has traced the effects of the persistence of room-renting largely with respect to single men—the workers who found housing in the upstairs rooming houses on Seventh Street and elsewhere in the neighborhood through the 1950s. Room-renting also offered advantages to working-class women, as well as to their husbands, sons, fathers, brothers, and other male relations. At least until the 1950s and probably afterwards, women worked in and managed side-street lodging houses in West Oakland, using the proceeds of their labor to purchase property and garner economic benefits for themselves and their extended families (Gutman 1997b). They likely took room-renters into their homes, as well.

I conclude by emphasizing that the practice of room-renting counters prevailing characterizations of West Oakland as a neighborhood in decline. After World War II, the pattern of female property ownership and entrepreneurship persisted in parts of West Oakland, untouched by urban renewal. The incrementally built, heterogeneous landscape, a tolerance of land-use mixture, and a variety of malleable, wood-framed buildings (including many corner rooming houses), allowed women to take in lodgers and thereby meet human needs. As had been the case historically, room-renting proved to be a reasonable solution to the housing and employment needs of men and women, at one and the same time.