Outside Lands

San Francisco History from the Western Neighborhoods Project

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History from the Western Neighborhoods Project
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Cover:
Dancers at free Jefferson Starship concert in Golden Gate Park's Lindley Meadow on May 30, 1975. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

Opposite:
On July 20, 2017, WNP went east to present Haight Ashbury and Cole Valley history at the Booksmith's new venue, The Bindery, 1727 Haight Street. Visit our OpenSFHistory gallery of local images on display at The Bindery until September.

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We lost **Paul Rosenberg** in June. Paul was a former member of the WNP Board of Directors, but probably a dozen other community groups could say the same. He was a great friend to many organizations: the Planning Association of the Richmond, the Market Street Railway, the San Francisco History Association, the Irish-Israeli-Italian Society, and more. Civic-minded, with an encyclopedic memory, gentle good humor, and an anecdote for every occasion, Paul was a real pleasure to know.

We're really going to miss Paul's expertise on the city's political history. He was particularly fond of the verbal misadventures of Supervisor James McSheehy. One of the classics: "I have here some information which I want you to take home in your heads, which I know are concrete."



Paul Rosenberg

The best story? Paul was a real San Franciscan, loved the city so much that he rarely traveled outside of it. He often told people that he went to college "back east." Then he'd add, after a suitable pause, "UC Berkeley."

Thanks to WNP members, **Canice Flanagan, John Freeman, Vivian Imperiale,** and **Mary-Ann Orr,** who donated to us in Paul's memory, which we are going to use in support of one of Paul's favorite places, the message boards on outsidelands.org.

How to keep up with WNP

One used to be able to know when Western Neighborhoods Project walks, talks, or other events were happening by reading this quarterly magazine. But we are so busy and adding events in short time frames, that presentations are often planned, executed, and over with in just a couple of weeks.

So how to follow what great local history event we have coming up? First, make sure you're subscribed to our email list. (Fear not, we only send one out once or twice a month.) Go to the front page of outsidelands.org to sign up.

Second, follow us through the social media you use. We post event news, images, and fun facts almost every day:

Facebook
facebook.com/outsidelands

Twitter
@outsidelandz

Instagram
instagram.com/westernneighborhoods

Recording history

Speaking of social media, we had a successful fund raiser through Facebook to purchase recording equipment so that we can post online many of the events we're doing. Great thanks to all who contributed. Our plan is to reach an even broader audience by posting our talks on outsidelands.org or on our YouTube channel (youtube.com/user/OutsidelandsVideos). Look for more video this year!

WNP Gala on November 4

Every eleven years or so we have a gala dinner, and this decade will be no exception. (The last one was in 2006!)

Save the date for Saturday evening **November 4, 2017**. We will be at the clubhouse of the Harding Park golf course beside beautiful Lake Merced.

There are opportunities for local business sponsorship, a silent auction, program full of old articles and photos, food and drink—just a really fun night of local history to support the work of WNP. Invitations are coming soon.

OpenSFHistory

This year we've scanned and put online about 7,000 San Francisco historical images, and we will be doubling that number before 2017 ends. Check our program website, opensfhistory.org, to see the "new" old photographs that go



up each week. There you can also read blog posts that take a closer look at stories behind the images.

Thanks to our volunteers

How are we able to keep up with all this? In addition to the hard work of David Gallagher and Dave Lucas, dedicated individuals come in each week to donate their time and expertise. **Jaime Borschuk, Barbara Cannella, Emiliano Echeverria, Judi Leff,** and **John Martini** put in many hours identifying and transcribing descriptions. **Greg Gaar, Steven Pitsenbarger,** and **Linda Pomerantz** keep a second scanning station humming. We have volunteer mappers working from home situating our scans in the right locations for our online map. With each new batch upload, experts review each image and send us identifications, clarifications, and corrections to our captions. **Beth McLaughlin** comes in to do our books, and **Greer Montgomery,** an intern from the University of San Francisco's Museum Studies program, has been invaluable in helping our grant-writing. Our great thanks to all of you!

Talk to Us

In this year of growth and change for the organization we're moving fast and doing anything and everything that sounds right for our mission. In the tumult, we want to make sure we listen to our friends and supporters

Please share your ideas, your musings, and your opinions on what you like and what you don't. Drop us a line in the mail, give us a call, or email me at woody@outsidelands.org.

Where in West S. F.?



A note from David Volansky: "Disclosure: I'm addicted to Where in West SF. With too much anticipation for the next issue of *Outside Lands,* I'd been refreshing the publication page on outsidelands.org looking for a new issue to be posted even before an email was sent."

OK, David, here's a new one. Check out the castle on the west side of town. We know where this is, do you? Tell us the where and when of the image above and feel free to add a memory or anecdote when sending your guess. Email woody@outsidelands.org, or use the WNP contact information on the inside cover. Good luck!

Mary Rose Cassa wrote that her San Francisco native husband George Wilhelmsen knew instantly where last issue's image was: "It was taken from a place he visits at least twice a year—near our dentist, Dr. Michael Stricker. The photo is along Judah, from about 30th Avenue, looking east toward UC Hospital. The awning on the right side of the street is still there. From the cars in the photo it appears to be about the 1970s."

Historic Muni streetcar #1 took a fan trip out Judah Street in March 1978.

Alan Thomas figured out the time frame by the Arco Station at 2800 Judah Street. "I used to buy gasoline there for my Mustang and previous Fords when I lived in my parents' home at 27th and Moraga. A 4x magnifying glass shows gas prices at .61 for regular and .67 for what may have then been called Ethyl. A check on the web quotes those prices in general for 1977."

Other correct guessers last issue were Mike Dadaos, David W. Lange, David Volansky, and Loren Wilson (with help from Joe Dellert and Larry Bernard).

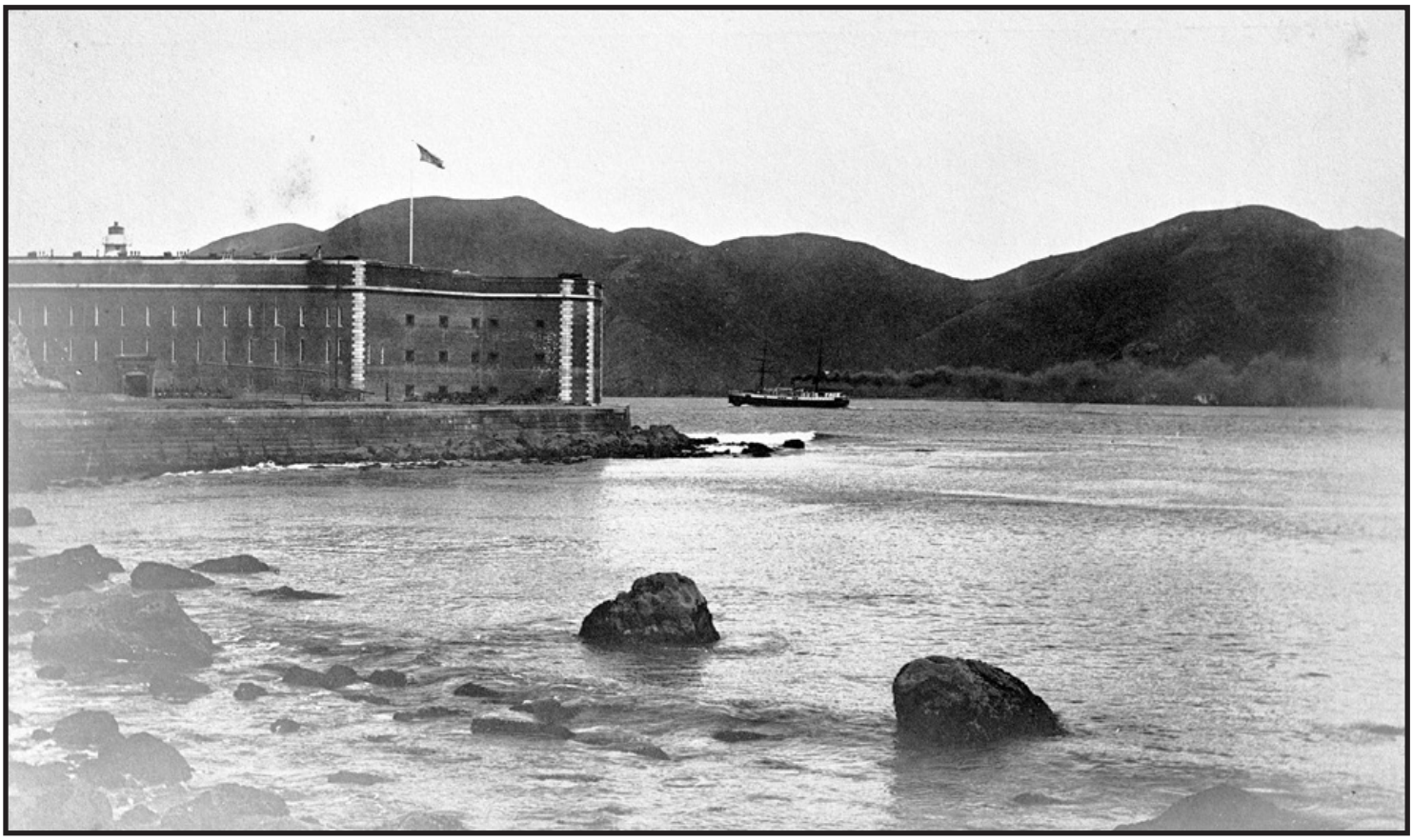
Good luck this time, David! (And everyone else as well.)



Looking east on Judah Street from 29th Avenue, March 1978. Muni Car #1 and N-Judah car #1138, March 1978.(WNP Collection, wnp25.2337)

Soldiers of Fort Point

by John Martini



Fort Point and the Golden Gate, c. 1885.
(WNP Collection, wnp37.00342)

Retired National Park Service ranger and WNP member John Martini is a volunteer helping us process our collection of historical San Francisco images. Visit **opensfhistory.org** *to learn more and see thousands more photos.*

Fort Point must have been photographed thousands of times before the Golden Gate Bridge was constructed. Beginning in the 1860s, the fort's squat silhouette dominated the harbor entrance, and virtually every photograph taken of the legendary Golden Gate included by accident or intent some view of Fort Point.

Although the army considered the fort to be outmoded shortly after the Civil War ended, its rugged design, scenic location, and impressive (albeit obsolete) armament continued to draw professional photographers and, eventually, amateur shutterbugs. Among the former were some of the West's best-known nineteenth century photographers: Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Watkins, Isaiah West Taber, and William Billington.

An important feature of Fort Point that no one captured, though, was a photograph of the soldiers who actually manned the fort, or in military terminology, its garrison.

This lack of photos of military activity at the fort has been frustrating to researchers. Several hundred soldiers garrisoned the fort during the Civil War, and you'd think that an enterprising commercial photographer would have taken photographs of troops manning the cannon on the rooftop barbette tier or lined up in the parade ground. Dozens of photographs like these were taken on Alcatraz Island and at the Presidio, so why not Fort Point?

We believe there's a two-part answer to this mystery.

First, Fort Point was only garrisoned by a full complement of soldiers from 1861 until 1868, when the Army pulled the troops out and put the fort into a mothballed status. Although the cannon remained in place for twenty more years, troops generally only returned to the fort for target practice. As a result, there was only a seven-year window when photographers might have visited the fort to take pictures of its troops.

Second, a scandal had taken place on Alcatraz Island in 1864, when the commercial photography firm of Bradley & Rulofson had been allowed to take stereoview photos of the troops, cannon, and buildings at the fort on the island.

When news of this massive security breach reached Washington, D.C., the Secretary of War personally ordered all copies of the photographs seized and the negatives destroyed. The commanding officer on Alcatraz, who had given permission to allow the photographs to be taken, barely

escaped a court martial.

In light of the Alcatraz kerfuffle, it's likely that none of Fort Point's officers were going to allow a camera anywhere near the fort. If any photos actually were taken during the fort's active years, they must have been suppressed, destroyed, or lost to the ages.

As a result, the quest for images of garrison life at Fort Point has become something of a Holy Grail for military researchers like myself.

(There was a flurry of excitement in the 1980s when several photos turned up at the Sacramento History Center showing Civil War soldiers manning cannon at a masonry fort on San Francisco Bay. At first believed to be Fort Point, additional research soon revealed they were part of the long-suppressed 1864 Alcatraz photographs mentioned previously. While frustrating for Fort Point historians, their discovery was a treasure trove for Alcatraz researchers.)

The first photos known to have been taken inside Fort Point were made in 1869, when the Army allowed Eadweard Muybridge to shoot a series of views of the vacant fort. Muybridge had just done some extensive photo documentation for the government of newly acquired Alaska, and in return the War Department apparently gave him exclusive access to photograph the military posts around San Francisco Bay including the Presidio, Fort Mason, Alcatraz, and Fort Point.

Most of Muybridge's photos of Fort Point showed the exterior from vantage points that emphasized the fort's scenic location on the Golden Gate straits. However, he also shot a number of images atop the fort's roof showing cannon mounted on its barbette tier. A solitary individual appears in many of these photos who may have been a soldier assigned to guard duty at the fort. Or perhaps he was Muybridge's escort for the day. The man's face is never clearly seen, and no military insignia are visible on his clothes, so some historians have speculated he might have been a civilian caretaker assigned to Fort Point, or perhaps the fort's lighthouse keeper. At any rate, the lone figure certainly didn't comprise a garrison manning the fortress.



Soldier/caretaker next to cannon atop Fort Point, 1869, by Eadweard Muybridge. (Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley)

This is all prelude to my recent fortuitous discovery of a photograph in WNP's OpenSFHistory collection showing troops lined up at Fort Point. It's not the clearest photo, but I'm a world-class nerd when it comes to deciphering historic photos of San Francisco, especially its military sites. And there were lots of clues in the amazing photo, seen on the previous page.

Taken from the approach road to the south of the fort, what initially struck me about the image were the cannon, visible in profile, mounted atop the fort. This dated the photograph to before 1888, when all the barbette guns were removed. Another indicator of the date was visible on the Marin Country shore opposite the fort, where a knob-like hump can be seen atop the hill at extreme right. This was actually a man-made earthen magazine constructed by the Army around 1873 as part of their fortifications at the future Fort Baker.

The fort's tiny lighthouse was painted solid white, a characteristic that would change to a black tower over a white base in 1888. So, the time period narrowed to a fifteen-year period between 1873 and 1888. That was as precise as I was going to get.

Significantly, there was a flag flying from the fort's flagstaff. This only occurred when soldiers were actually occupying the fort. Most important, the fort's huge doors were standing open. In virtually every other photo taken during this post-Civil War period, the fort is buttoned up tight.

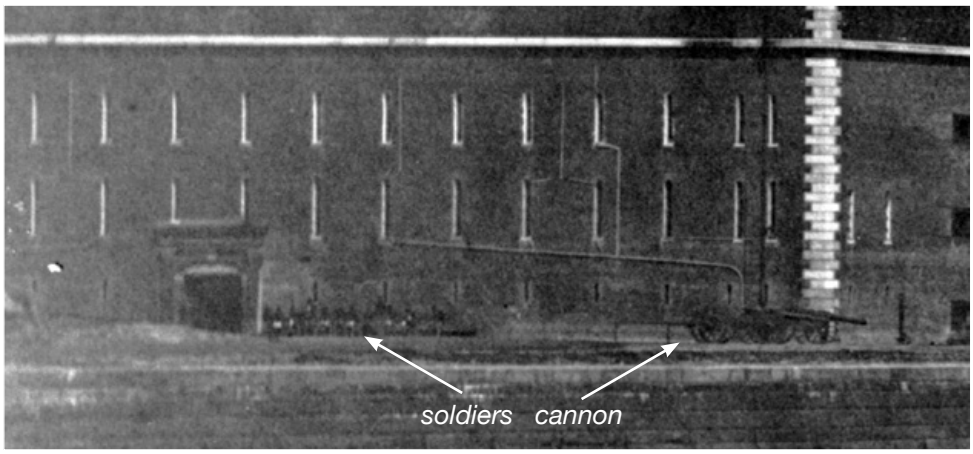
I enlarged the area next to the sallyport doorway and spotted several cannon parked near the corner of the fort, recognizable by their big-wheeled field carriages and downward-pointing muzzles. These guns weren't positioned for defense, they were in storage.

Immediately to the right of the fort's open doors stood a dark grouping of what might have been mistaken for a stand of seedling trees—except the "trees" were all wearing white gloves. It was a group of soldiers (maybe a dozen? Hard to tell from enlargement) lined up outside the fort and waiting for orders.

This photograph, for all its grainy shortcomings, predates the next known photo of Fort Point soldiers by a good twenty years.

More questions arise at this point. Why were there soldiers at the fort? Were they there to train on the big guns still mounted inside its walls? Or were they the gun crews of the field guns parked nearby? We know the Presidio sometimes used the damp, aging and empty fort for housing troops when the regular barracks were full. Maybe these soldiers were living in the fort as part of a housing crunch?

Also, why the gloves? During this period, soldiers usually wore white gloves only for formal events like inspections



Detail of image from page 3. Left to right, sallyport doorway, soldiers lined up, and wheeled cannon.

or parades, or when going on guard duty, but not for routine duties around their post. Were they awaiting a special visitor coming to the fort to inspect its defenses?

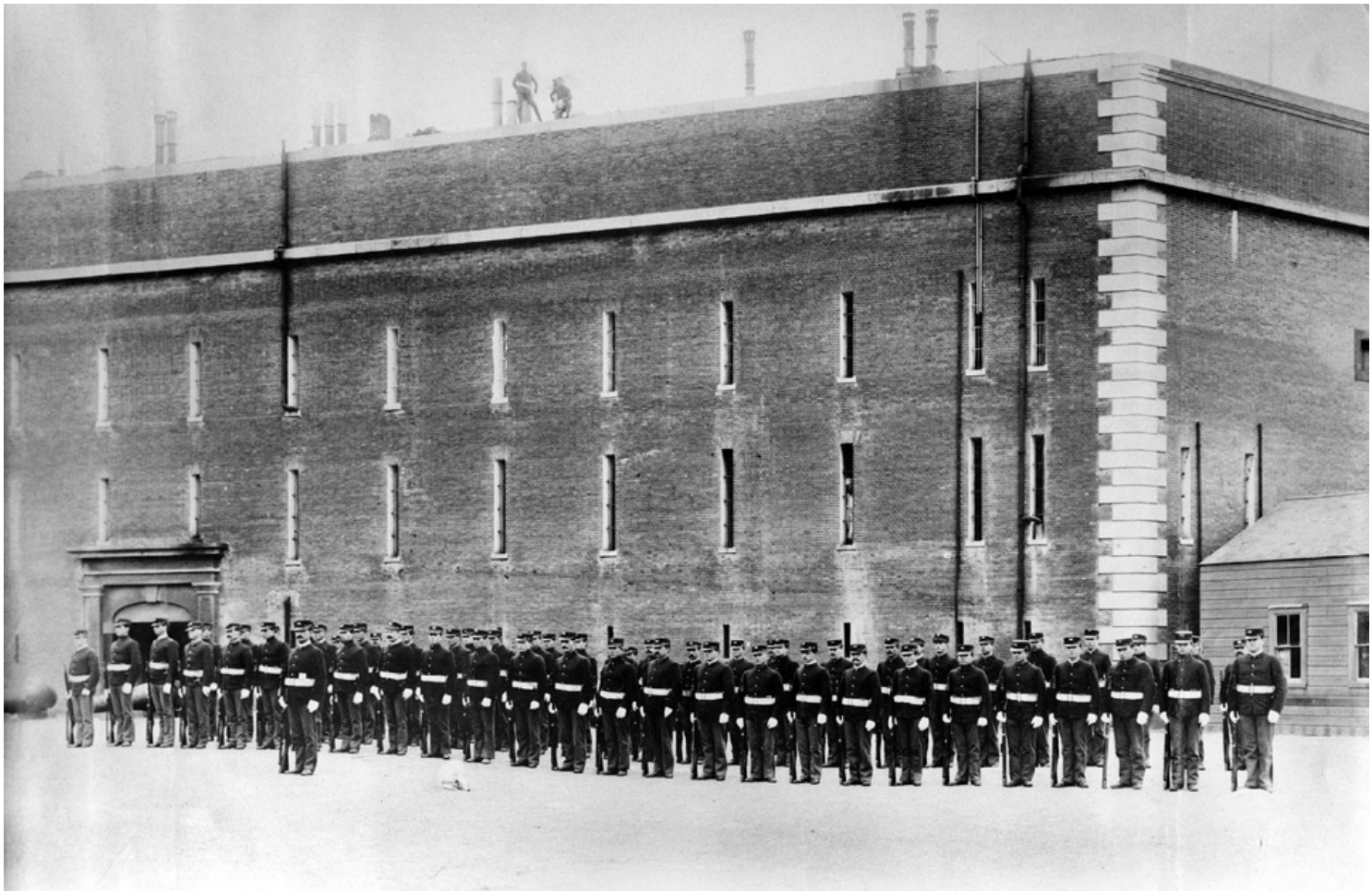
The next earliest photo at Fort Point—and until now believed to be the earliest—is in the collection of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area archives in the Presidio. That image, displayed below, shows Coast Artillery troops about 1905. They are lined up in the same location outside the fort's south wall as their 1880s predecessors.

We definitely know these soldiers are living in the fort because their company cook can be seen standing in a second floor window slit, looking down on the formation. Interestingly, these soldiers too are wearing white gloves.

The search continues for more photos of troop activity at Fort Point. Just as the Sacramento History Center yielded up a cache of long-lost Alcatraz photographs, perhaps there are undiscovered troves of San Francisco photos that may contain heretofore unseen pictures of soldier life at Fort Point.

It could happen.

View more Fort Point images in a gallery created by John at opensfhistory.org/Photoset/Fort_Point



Coast Artillery troops at Fort Point, circa 1905. (Golden Gate National Recreation Area Archives, GOGA 35339.438)

The Summer of Love in the Western Neighborhoods

Memories from some San Francisco natives

The following is a version of the display Western Neighborhoods Project presented at San Francisco History Days on March 4-5, 2017. WNP Board member Jamie O'Keefe curated the exhibit and explains the twist she added to our commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love.

"I had never seen anything from the perspective of the locals who were already here when everyone else arrived. As the world focused on the Haight Ashbury District, I wondered what was going on in the Avenues at that same time. I interviewed my parents and their friends, all WNP members who grew up in the Avenues. Though each person's experience is his or her own, it was interesting to get a feel of what it was like to have been a young person at that time—the same age as many of the people who left their hometowns to come to ours." —Jamie O'Keefe

Reactions



Tourists in Golden Gate Park, c. 1967. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

My family didn't understand any of it, never cared for the long hair and beard I started to grow around the same time as everyone else. I was far from being a **flower child** and didn't appreciate the protesters at Berkeley or SF State, and you know none of that stuff was going on at USF.—Ed

Hippies just weren't part of our lives. When we went out to the Haight from the Sunset, they called us **"bubblegummers!"**—Jimmy



The Cockettes in Golden Gate Park, c. 1969. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

Most of my friends were the same as me in 1967, enjoying going to the beach and the music concerts, taking in the scene, but then going home to dinner with our families and doing our homework.—Ann

Ocean Beach, Skateland, and Playland at the Beach



Group in front of Skateland, Ocean Beach, c.1967. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

My father would take all of us to the old Hot House [restaurant] on the Great Highway at Playland by the Beach… As we were waiting for seating, my siblings were whispering, 'Hey that's **Marty Balin** [lead singer of Jefferson Airplane] paying his check.' […] I was 11 years old at the time and I gave him a great big 'Hiii!' Gives me chills to think about it.—Lourdes

We didn't really see hippies at **Playland** because they didn't go out that far.—Julie







The Family Dog put on their first concert at the Longshoreman's Hall near Fisherman's Wharf and eventually relocated to the historic Ocean Beach Pavilion building across from Kelly's Cove, where it became the Family Dog on the Great Highway. —Dennis



The Family Dog on the Great Highway, c. 1969. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

The Vietnam War

Everyone was trying to take a full load of classes in college to **avoid the draft.** Everyone we knew was getting drafted.—Julie

I missed the Summer of Love in my own City!—Jimmy

The Vietnam War was definitely **a cloud** over everything at that time. The fear of the draft, and the feeling of the war being a senseless cost of so many lives. I remember it was the main focus of protests. —Ann



Friends back home kept in contact with San Franciscans serving in Vietnam by sending them letters and photos. In 1968, Jimmy was in the Navy when his friend sent him a personal note on a Fillmore Auditorium postcard featuring one of the most iconic Fillmore designs of all time.



Rick Griffin, Jimi Hendrix Experience, Fillmore Auditorium postcard, 1968. Courtesy of Jimmy O'Keefe.



On April 24, 1971, over 150,000 people in San Francisco marched in protest of the Vietnam War. The march started at the Civic Center, came west on Geary Boulevard, and then south on 30th Avenue where it entered Golden Gate Park and finished at the Polo Field. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)





Buttons throughout from collection of Jimmy O'Keefe, photographed by Randy Dodson.

Looking Back



Julie Norris and Jimmy O'Keefe.



Detail of concert in Golden Gate Park. (Dennis O'Rorke photo.)

I have no photos and I don't remember anyone I know who even had a camera. I was happy to be from San Francisco, didn't feel the need to travel somewhere to join a group of young people for the summer. I thought that most of them coming here must have a break from school. **It was a good time to be young and in San Francisco** […] But in and around the Haight was where it was all happening. I have no recollection of anything else changing in any of the other neighborhoods until a couple years or so after and then you'd see more long hair, more posters in apartments, more and more hip looking people until that became the norm of the City.—Ed

So, I think for a lot of kids who lived in SF, the hippie scene, the music, the political protests, the whole energy of the movement did not begin or end with the summer of '67, but was just part of our lives at the time. **We weren't summer visitors, and only in looking back, did we see the significance of that special time in San Francisco.**— Ann



Ann Wilderson

Stories courtesy of:
Lourdes Livingston, 12 years old in 1967; grew up in Sea Cliff neighborhood, attended St. Monica's School.
Julie Norris, 18 years old in 1967; Richmond District native, graduated from Presentation High School in '67.
Jimmy O'Keefe, 20 years old in 1967; Sunset District native, served in the Navy during Vietnam 1966-1968.
Dennis O'Rorke, 26 years old in 1967; Richmond District native, postal employee and photographer.
Ed Riggins, 23 years old in 1967; San Francisco native, Richmond District resident, law student at the University of San Francisco (USF).
Ann Wilderson,16 years old in 1967; Richmond District native, attended Star of the Sea High School.



Lourdes Livingston, 1967

The 1967 Summer of Love: I Was There (sort of)

by Alan Thomas

The actual date of the start of the Summer of Love is vague, but most accounts seem to place the start of the movement around late 1966. A date and I ended up for a snack at The Drug Store, a former pharmacy at the northeast corner of Haight Street and Masonic Avenue shortly after Christmas of 1966. Already there was a counterculture energy there, complete with customers in hippie garb and vibrantly colored posters that advertised upcoming musical events in the area.

Around the same time I was playing the piano at a party and met a singer named Maria and her roommate Sue. I recall Maria had the music for *Eleanor Rigby,* a song newly released by the Beatles. She and I muddled through it. I recall she was surprised at the very high note at the phrase: "Where DO they all come from?"



Alan Thomas as a faux hippie on Maria's rooftop, June 1967.

Maria and Sue and I hit it off and I helped them paint their newly-rented apartment on lower Russian Hill. In those days, when one either helped someone move or paint—in this case it was paint—you were rewarded with fried chicken or spaghetti.

In the three months that they lived there, give or take one or two, they had unusual and assorted drop-in guests, two of whom I still recall. One I will call Tabla, as he carried an ever-present tabla drum, kind of an appendage or at least a frequently pummeled companion; the other was "Bright," a taciturn person who was totally devoid of either masculine or feminine characteristics.

Around March of 1967, Maria and Sue moved from this apartment to another on Belvedere Street, about four or five residences south of the corner of Belvedere and Haight Street.

Talk about a ringside seat!

The counterculture movement was rapidly gaining momentum at this time with thousands of young people moving to San Francisco with no plan except to be part of the scene. By this time the infamous Be-Ins had already been held and the hippie scene was receiving much publicity locally in both good and bad ways. By early summer, the formerly quiet and sedate Haight Ashbury District was bursting at the seams with thousands of young people joining the mega-carnival that was now world-famous.

At that time, I was an employee of the Federal Government and an Army reservist, complete with short hair and conservative clothing. But not to worry! The hippies who I met were not judgmental and were not put off either by my employment, lifestyle, or conservative appearance.

In early May of 1967, we experienced one of those surprisingly warm mid-spring days.

I gathered with others at Maria and Sue's apartment in the early evening and we all went up on the roof. The temperature was still in the high 70s and there was an audible energy that emanated from the neighborhood. As we reveled in the joy of the warm night, purring yet penetrating sounds of an alto saxophone filled the night. A saxophonist of very good quality was playing in the foyer of the Haight (then called "Straight") Theatre. This scene was one of the biggest highs of my life and the nostalgia of that moment still fills me with awe although fifty years have elapsed.

The Summer of Love was short-lived with most vestiges of it over by 1968. People recall the 1960s as a turbulent, tragedy-ridden era, as it was. While I was not an active participant in the movement, I am glad for the kaleidoscopic carnival that occurred in the summer of 1967 and for the memories that it left. Drums, guitars, horns, patchouli oil, incense, colors, and other ingredients came into play. Even by late 1967 the party was pretty much over, but the memories still linger on. I wonder what happened to the people whom I encountered at that time.



Alan Thomas at Fort Ord, July 1967.

Lake Merced History: Part Two

Farms and Roadhouses

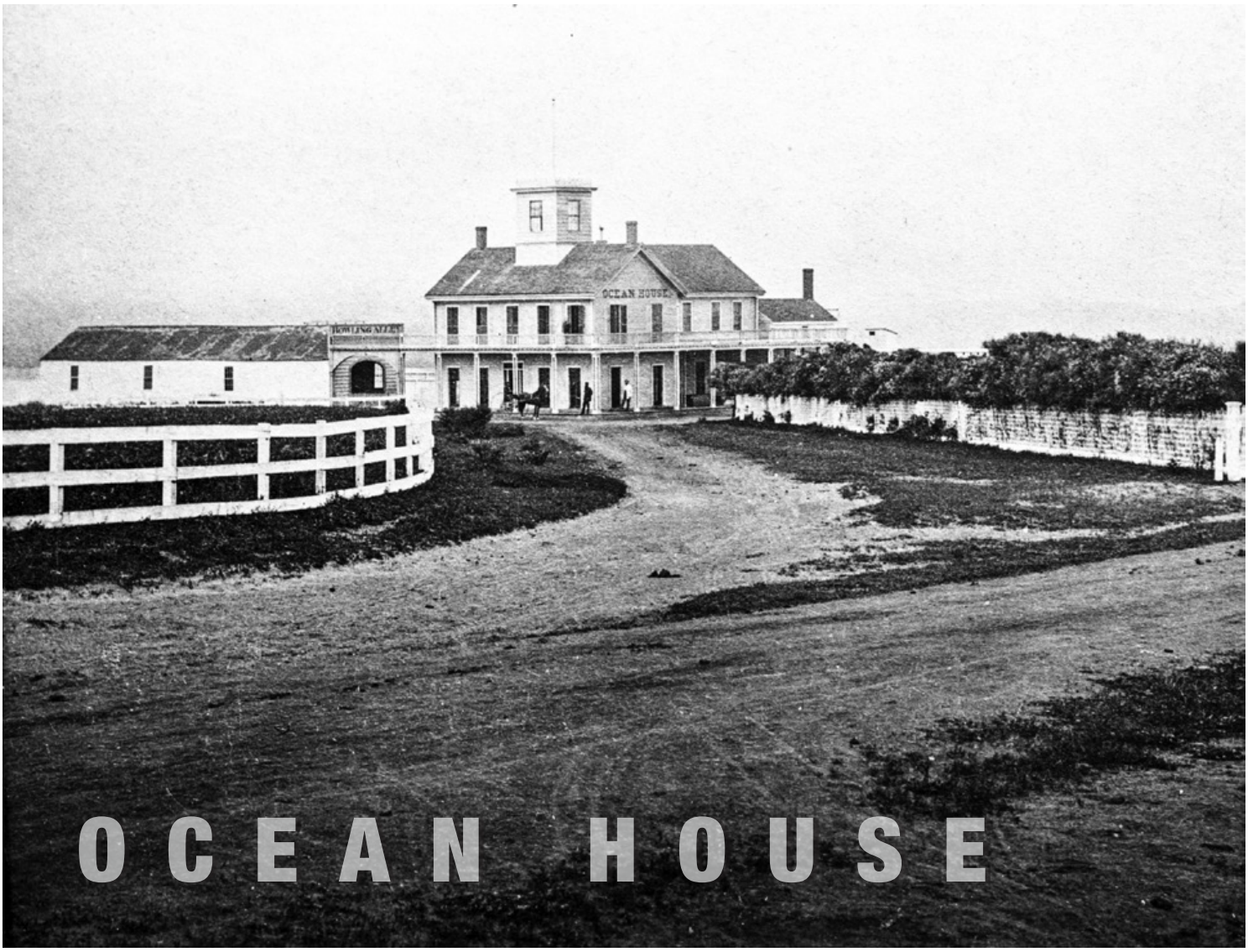
by Woody LaBounty

Thanks to a grant from the Schwemm Family Foundation WNP is sharing the natural and cultural history of Lake Merced all summer. Part One appeared in the last issue.

SCHWEMM FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Mexican-American War ended in 1848. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the property rights of Mexican citizens living in the newly conquered territory were guaranteed, at least on paper.

As historian J. S. Hittell noted in 1878, the "plain principles of justice and reason were utterly disregarded by congress and the politicians. No provision was made for confirming claims held under mere color of right; those which had been held in notorious possession for generations, as well as those of the most suspicious character, were alike subjected to a hostile, costly and tedious investigation, a large part of the cost being thrown upon the owners." As a result, many *Californios* were "virtually deprived of the bulk of their wealth, and then compelled to raise money to defend them-

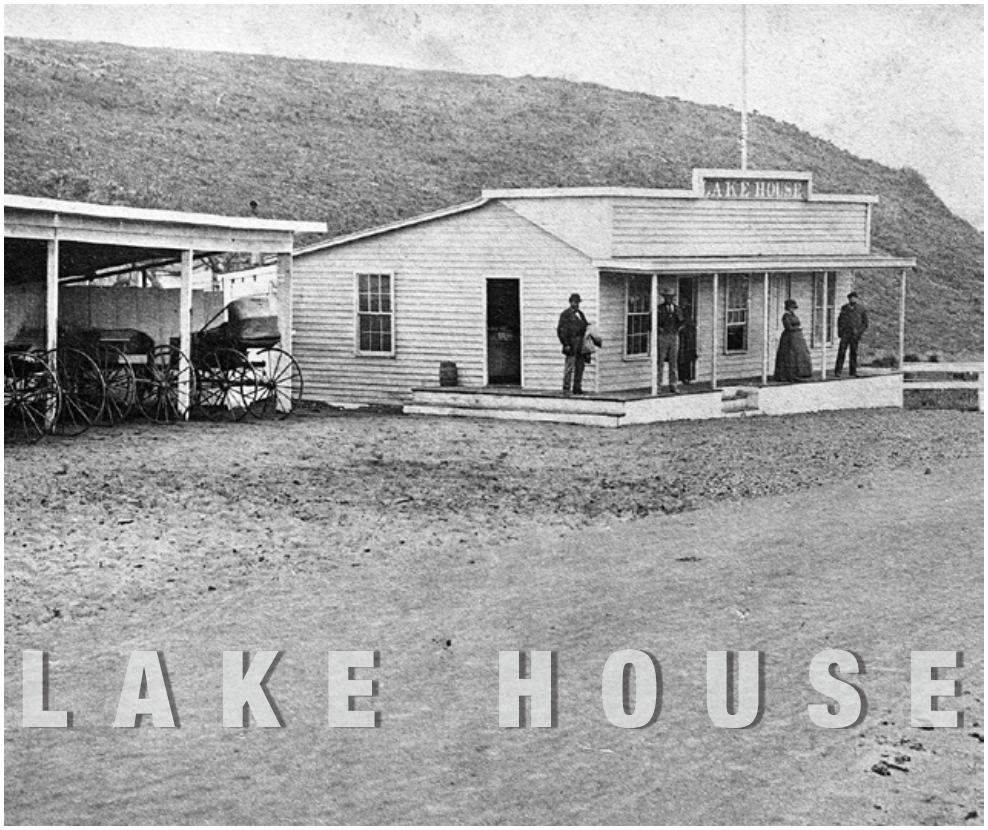


Driveway up to the Ocean House from the old Ocean Road, about 1870. (Photograph by Carleton Watkins, WNP Collection, wnp37.00812)

selves against complete spoliation by the government."[1]

Francisco de Haro, the owner of the Rancho Laguna de la Merced, died in 1849, just as the discovery of gold in the Sierra had begun a mad influx of tens of thousands of fortune hunters to San Francisco Bay.

As Hittell described, de Haro's heirs faced the trial of proving their rightful ownership to thousands of acres of land from Lake Merced to Potrero Hill, validation they wouldn't get from the courts for another fifteen years. To raise money for the legal fight, de Haro's son-in-law, Charles Brown, sold land from the holdings. Several large parcels on the northern part of the Rancho Laguna de la Merced went to members of the Green family.



Second Lake House on the Ocean House road at the northwest edge of Lake Merced. (Photograph by Carleton Watkins, WNP Collection, wnp37.00829)

The Greens

Alfred Green had come to California as a member of Colonel Stevenson's New York Volunteers during the war. He served as a city alderman, married a local Californian woman, Dolores Leyoreita, and opened a racetrack and roadhouse in the Mission District in 1851. The next year, 1852, Alfred and several of his seven brothers settled north of Lake Merced just west of today's 19th Avenue. Their basis for title was through settler's preemption, a practice of claiming land whose title was contested or uncertain. In essence, the Greens signed a deal with de Haro's son-in-law for the land, with the right of first refusal to purchase if the government decided later de Haro wasn't the legal owner.

An often ill-tempered, litigious, and cantankerous bunch (in an era full of similar men), the Greens defended their land in the face of numerous challenges and claims that they were squatting on land to which other men asserted ownership.

In 1856, when Alfred Green purported to have old pueblo papers that would invalidate the land claims of many powerful men across the city, he was abducted from his bed and imprisoned by the Vigilance Committee, the citizen mob who took it upon itself to clean up the city with a series of extra judicial imprisonments and public lynchings. Green promised to turn over the papers, which he said he had hidden in a mine. On that promise, he was released. When he returned to his farm, he found that the whole house had been ransacked and his mother and wife were in tears fearing he had been hanged.

When Green did produce some land papers for a ransom of coin, a Deputy Sheriff and constable tried to wrest the money out of his hand the minute he exited the bank house. A semi-comic walk back to the sheriff's office ensued, with all parties holding on to the bag at the same time. Alfred went into voluntary exile to Mexico for a time, but did return, and died in San Francisco on March 1899. Green heirs owned land in the Lake Merced area into the 1930s, when the last parcel was purchased to create the public park of Stern Grove.

Roadhouses

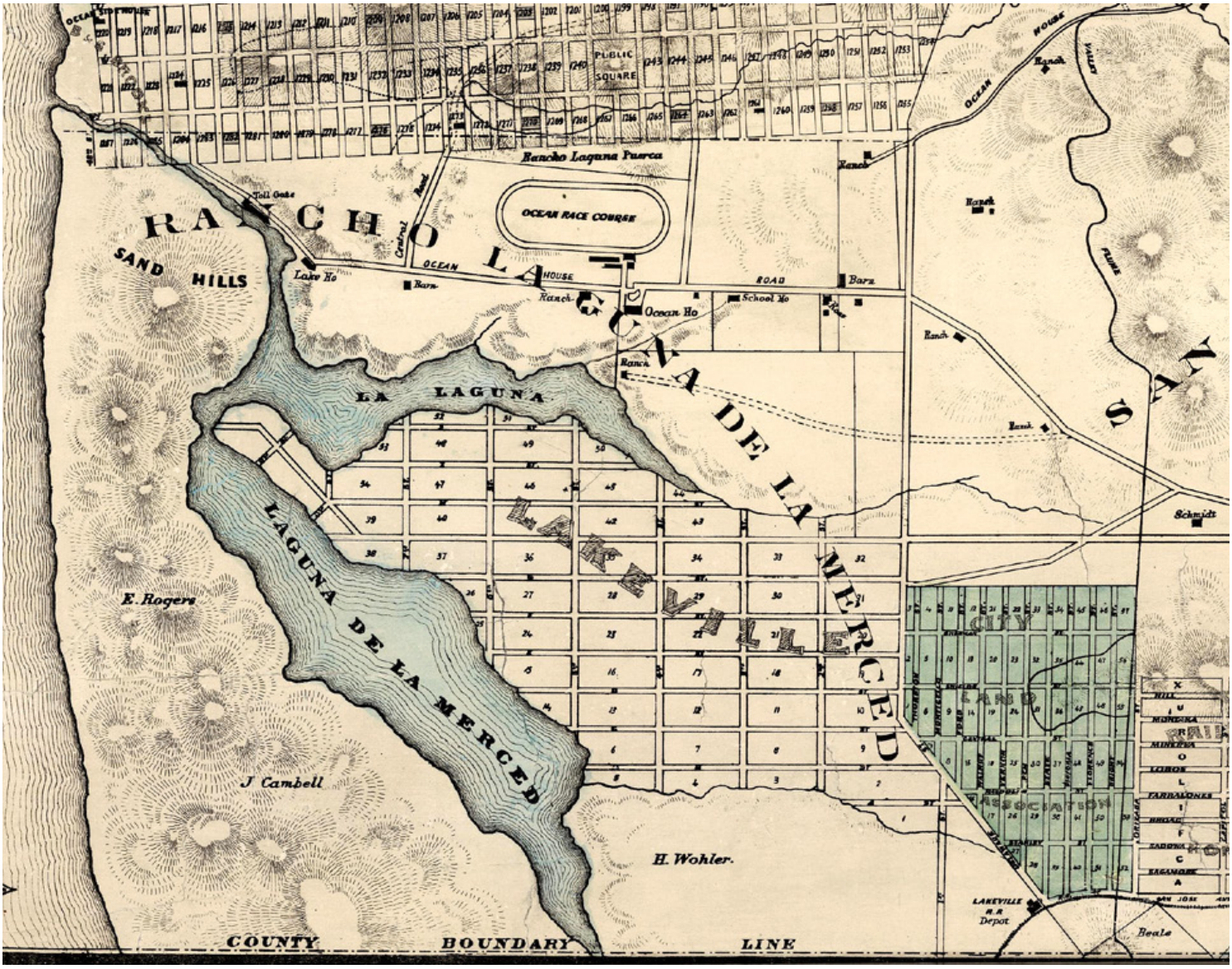
Green family members not only farmed along the old Ocean Road, which lay along the northern edge of the lake, but ran roadhouses to serve pleasure seekers out on jaunts to the lake and beach. They were not alone.

The earliest of the lake roadhouses was the Lake House, a one-story shanty with a kitchen and bar. Charles Brown had moved it in 1853 from another part of the de Haro property to the eastern pinch where the two large arms of the lake came together.

In early 1854, P. L. White leased the Lake House, expanding and renovating the building, determined (as one newspaper claimed) "to afford our citizens a resort second to none of the kind in the Atlantic States."[2]

The attractions of the Lake House meant to entice people to travel many miles out of the city were described by the *Daily Alta California* in 1855: "Here you will find a lake, and in the lake a boat, and in them both at once you may sail to your heart's content. You may also roll at ten-pins and pitch quoits till you are tired, or sway in the swing till you get rested." The purveyor of the house "will furnish you the finest dinner that is possible to provide in California."[3]

In 1854, the same year the Lake



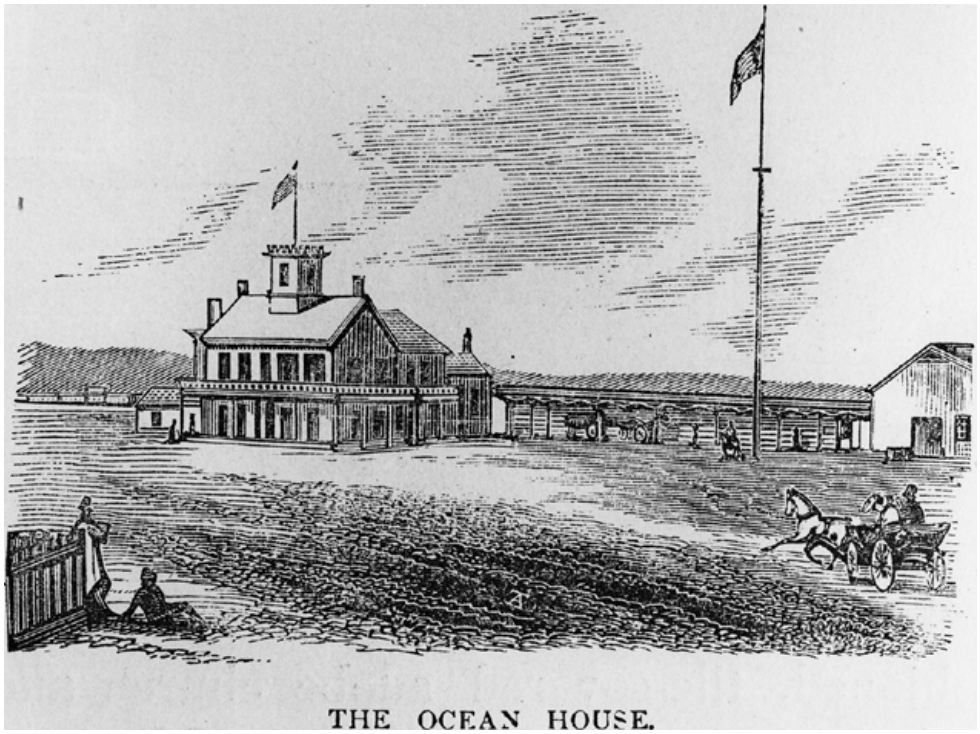
Detail from an 1869 map by George Goddard shows the connection Lake Merced sometimes had with the Pacific Ocean. The Lake House, Ocean House, and Ocean Race Course are all identified on the north, and the projected Lakeville suburb on the lake's east side. (Courtesy of David Rumsey Collection, davidrumsey.com)

House opened to such high praise, another roadhouse opened on the north side of the lake beside one of the Green brothers' ranches. Proprietor Joseph W. Leavitt called his place "Ocean House," and built a grand structure for the era and location. The Ocean House had dining rooms, parlors, and a billiard salon. The second story had open balconies to appreciate the lake and ocean. Surmounting both was an enclosed view tower. Around the grounds were various out buildings, cottages, stabling for a hundred horses, and even a bowling alley. For thirty years, until it burned down in the early 1880s, the Ocean House was a local landmark. It's location just south of the Ocean Road is about where Lowell High School today.

While the Lake House and Ocean House advertised themselves as fine countryside resorts, suitable for family outings, wealthy traveling parties, and "invalids desiring to derive the benefit of the sea air,"[4] their clientele was mostly made up of single men looking for a good time. Men that newspaper articles called "fancy men," "sports," and "fast drivers" came out to race, drink, and even duel. (The parties in the famous 1859 duel between United States Senator David Broderick and former California Supreme Court Chief Justice David Terry gathered together at the Lake House to pick the nearby duel location.)

Often when a swindle or robbery happened downtown, the authorities caught up with the miscreants drinking at the Ocean House. Women did occasionally visit the Lake Merced roadhouses, but many were characterized as of a disreputable reputation. In 1857, the *Daily Globe* called the Ocean House "an assignation house on a large scale" with the servants there trained to "favor infamous enterprises."[5]

Smaller roadhouses along the Ocean Road didn't bother to aspire to the level of "resort." The Rockaway House, the Beach House, and a scat-



Woodcut of the Ocean House from the 1870s.

tering of other nameless establishments were little more than one-room bars. The entire bill of fare usually consisted of no more than whiskey or rye in a glass.

In 1864, land auctioneer and speculator John Middleton tried to sell 160-by-200 foot lots on the eastern side of the lake for a new suburb he called "Lakeville." The venture was a colossal failure, and Lakeville never became a reality beyond its persistent existence on maps for the next twenty years.

For all the bucolic amenities of the area, the lake roadhouses both grand and humble were little more successful than Lakeville had been. Fresh lessees and hosts arrived almost every spring touting new renovations, improvements, and sumptuous menus to perk up business. But the remoteness, the weather, and competition from newer and more convenient public gardens and pleasure resorts conspired against steady profits.

A new Lake House was built on the Ocean Road and the old building was moved downtown to an empty lot on Mission Street near 2nd Street, and later moved again to 7th and Bryant Streets, an object of story-telling for old-timers as early as the late 1880s.[6]

The Ocean House had a racetrack built next to it in 1865, which opened with great promise when 8,000 people traveled out to see a race between a couple of Kentucky thoroughbreds.

Mark Twain wrote about his attempt to see the contest: "...it became apparent to me that the forthcoming race between *Norfolk* and *Lodi* was awakening extraordinary attention all over the Pacific coast, and even far away in the Atlantic States. I saw that if I failed to see this race I might live a century, perhaps, without ever having an opportunity to see its equal." Twain inquired about hiring a horse to go to the track, but could only find "part of a horse—they said part of a horse because a good deal of him was gone" for a $240 rental. He "resisted the yearning to hire this unique establishment."[7]

Attendance mostly dried up at the track in the years after that. The Ocean Course had a last hurrah in November 1873 with the "Great Race" between the California horse, *Thaddeus Stevens,* and a couple of Eastern thoroughbreds. The purse was $20,000, and some $150,000 in bets had been laid on the race around town.

Tens of thousands of people made the journey out. "Old Thad" won, and the day was a boon to all the businesses between the lake and town.

Fifty years after the race, a writer who was a young man in attendance remembered: "Hats were flung high in the air, men yelled with delight and thumped absolute strangers on the back in their jubilance. Everybody was inviting everybody else to Stagg's or Barney Farley's or any other place where they could quickly and properly celebrate. Ladies were squealing with delight. Everybody was in a delirium of happiness as the crowds melted off the surrounding hills and poured through the gates of the race-course—40,000 at the end of a perfect day."[8]

After another small race the following spring, the track closed. Horse racing would not return to the area until the Ingleside Racetrack was built in 1895 on the location of today's Ingleside Terraces neighborhood.

By 1875, after land schemes, roadhouses, and racetracks, the best business around Lake Merced had proven to be growing potatoes. That is, until an enterprising company showed up to harvest the lake itself.

Sources:

1. John S. Hittell, "A History of the City of San Francisco and Incidentally of the State of California," (Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000), pg. 180. (Reprint of original work, published by the Bancroft Co., San Francisco, 1878).

2. "The New Lake House," *Daily Placer Times and Transcript,* April 27, 1854, pg. 2.

3. "Suburban," *Daily Alta California,* June 8, 1855, pg. 2.

4. "The Ocean House," *Placer Times and Transcript,* June 16, 1855, pg. 2.

5. "A Heartless Piece of Villainy," *Daily Globe,* March 7, 1857, pg. 2.

6. "Lake Merced, Its Many Historical Associations," *San Francisco Chronicle,* December 15, 1889, pg. 8.

7. "How I Went to the Great Race Between Norfolk and Lodi," *Californian,* May 27, 1865.

8. Luke Fay, "Lake Merced's Classic Race, *San Francisco Water,* October 1928, pg. 16.

Nature Boy

by Ken Lewetzow

He regularly walked up 6th Avenue from Geary Street, then took a left on Clement Street and went up the stairs to the pool hall on the second floor above the Pali Club and Schubert's Bakery. I worked at Lincoln Bowl (319 6th Avenue), bowled a lot, and hung out with friends there, so I had the opportunity to see him once in a while.

An eye-catching sight: he was a big husky guy wearing blue denim bib-overalls, a checkered plaid long sleeve shirt, long straggly below-the-shoulder length hair and full beard. And he was bare-footed—no shoes. His walking gait was similar to that of a farmer behind a plow horse. Every one called him Nature Boy, and the word had it that he lived in Golden Gate Park. He looked like a hippie, fifteen years before the hippie movement.

In October 1952, I had my 21st birthday and two of my friends said "Come-on, let's go around to the Pali and get you a real drink." (The lunch counter at Lincoln only served beer). As I seated myself at the bar next to another fellow, I noticed that his head was covered with a very large bandage, and his arms were covered with band-aids. He said, "You're lucky you weren't here yesterday." I asked "why? He said, "There was a hellava bang, and then the ceiling fell on me!" He pointed straight up, and sure enough, about a five-foot square section of plaster was gone, and just bare lathes remained. The bartender was plying him with drinks and he seemed content. (Nowadays it would be a $50,000 law suit.)

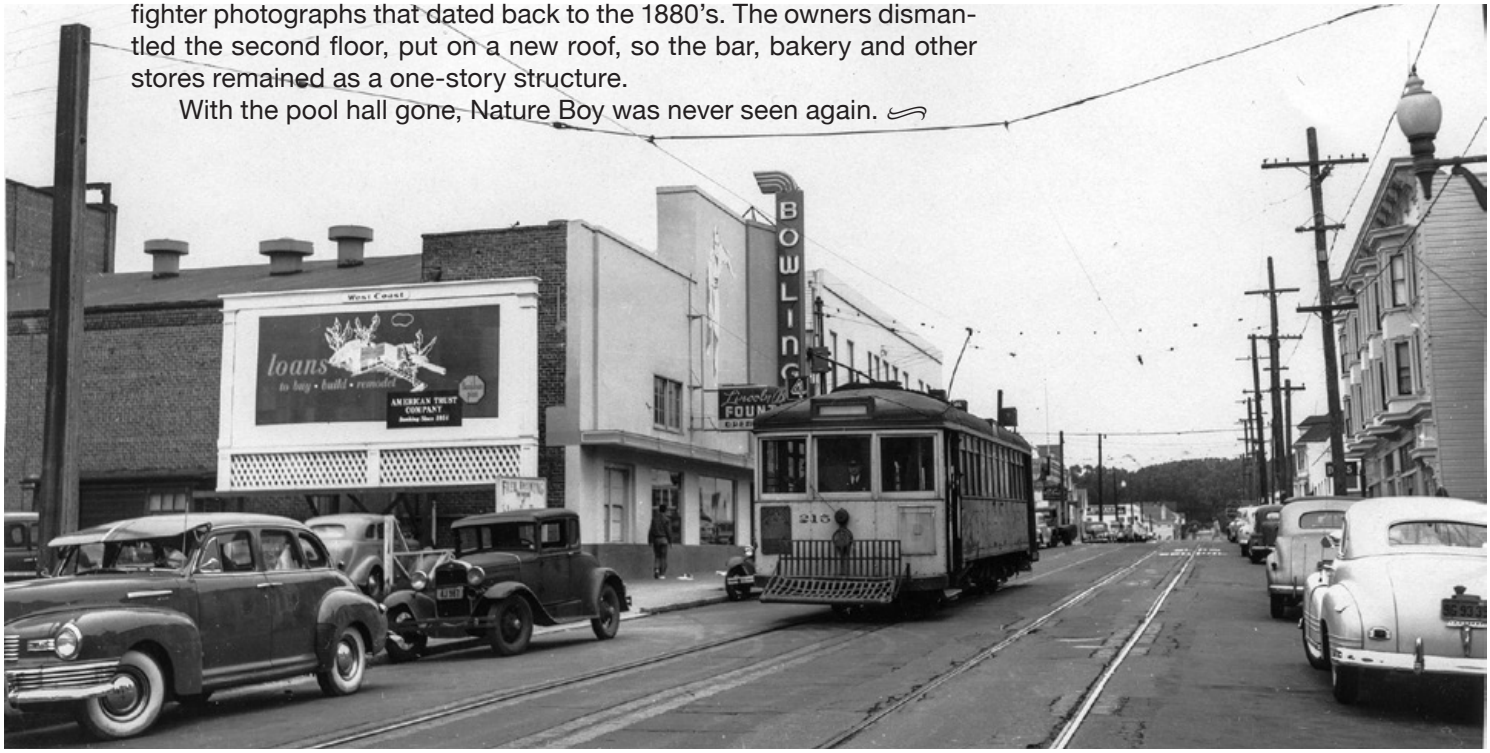
He explained that Nature Boy was playing pool upstairs. The 9-ball hung-up in front of the corner pocket and would not fall. Irked, he lifted his end of the table a couple of feet, draining the offending ball, and then dropped the table! (A force of forty sledge-hammer blows at the same time! Those old slate-slab topped pool tables probably weighed more than 500 pounds.) That's what caused the chaos down below.

In late February 1953, the pool hall had a severe fire that consumed the roof and portions of exterior walls. It was a historical disaster. The interior and entry stairway walls were covered with autographed prize-fighter photographs that dated back to the 1880's. The owners dismantled the second floor, put on a new roof, so the bar, bakery and other stores remained as a one-story structure.

With the pool hall gone, Nature Boy was never seen again.



Firemen cleaning up at scene of fire on Clement Street between 6th and 7th Avenues, February 24, 1953. (Image AAB-3360, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.)



Lincoln Bowl and 4-Line streetcar #215 on 6th Avenue between Geary and Clement, c. 1948. (WNP Collection, wnp27.4036)

Historical Happenings

Thanks to a grant from the Schwemm Family Foundation, WNP has given a series of free walks and talks on Lake Merced this summer. Two walks remain.

Lake Merced History Walk - South Side

August 5, 2017 (Saturday) 10:00 AM–11:30 AM

This "guns, golf, and grebes" walk will examine Lake Merced's history as a wetland, reservoir, recreational spot, and site of California's most infamous duel. Meet at the "Penguin's Prayer" statue in the parking lot along Lake Merced Boulevard just south of Brotherhood Way on the east side of the lake.

Lake Merced History Walk - North Side

August 20 (Sunday) 10:00 AM–11:30 AM

Lake Merced is the largest expanse of wetland habitat in San Francisco. Come hear about the natural history of the lake and its use by native peoples, Spanish colonizers, roadhouse operators, and real estate developers. Meet at the statue of Juan Bautista de Anza in the northern parking lot where Sunset and Lake Merced Boulevards meet.

Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival

August 11–13, 2017 (Friday–Sunday) 10:00 AM–8:00 PM
Golden Gate Park

Coming to the big music festival? Drop by the WNP tent for local history between hearing the bands and seeing the sites. Free gift for WNP members.

Mountain Lake History and Habitat

September 7, 2017 (Thursday) 6:00 PM–7:00 PM
Presidio Officers' Club, Presidio of San Francisco

Join us for a conversation on the past and future of Mountain Lake. With photographs, maps, and personal memories, we will highlight the history, human use, recent restoration, and borderland status of the lake nestled between the Richmond District and the Presidio.

Free of charge. Part of the Presidio Dialogues event series. Advanced registration and more information at:
www.presidio.gov/events

OpenSFHistory: Richmond District

October 10, 2017 (Tuesday) 7:30 PM–9:00 PM
Roosevelt Middle School, 460 Arguello Boulevard

Western Neighborhoods Project partners with the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society to share the stories behind historical images of the Richmond District. Historians and locals will show images from the past to tell tales of cemeteries, car dealerships, theaters, and day-to-day life in one of the city's most interesting neighborhoods.

Event is free to SFMHS members, $10 to the public/$5 to seniors, students, K-12 teachers, and people with disabilities. On the 38 Geary bus line and parking is available in the school lot accessible on Palm Avenue.



Richmond District

West Side Stories: the 2nd WNP Gala

November 4, 2017 (Saturday) 6:00 PM–10:00 PM
Harding Park Clubhouse, 99 Harding Road, Lake Merced

Save the date! Western Neighborhoods Project will throw its second gala, "West Side Stories," on November 4. The party will have music, food and drink, good conversation, special guest stars, and, of course, lots of local history.

More information, sponsorship opportunities, and ticket reservations are on the way in the next month, but save the date now to spend time with your favorite San Francisco history crowd.



We plan to have as much fun at West Side Stories as these folks did at the Parilia Ball on February 25, 1938. (WNP Collection, wnp14.3132)

OpenSFHistory: Inner Sunset

November 27, 2017 (Monday) 7:00 PM–8:00 PM
1736 Ninth Avenue (between Moraga and Noriega)

Woody LaBounty will appear at the monthly meeting of the Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People (SHARP) to give an illustrated history of the Inner Sunset District over the last 100 years using images from the OpenSFHistory collection. Free to the public, but space is limited, so get there early.

The Last Word



Neil Ballard tells the story of the Geneva Car Barn and Powerhouse to an audience of almost a hundred people crowded in the lobby of the old El Rey Theater on June 11, 2017.

On June 11, 2017, we hosted an OpenSFHistory: Ocean Avenue event with the Ocean Avenue Association in the lobby of the old El Rey Theater. Neil Ballard is shown at left giving a short history of the Geneva Car Barn and Powerhouse, which stands at the corner of Geneva Avenue and San Jose Avenue.

Both the El Rey Theater building and the Geneva Car Barn and Powerhouse have hit important milestones related to their future since that event in June. The El Rey Theater was granted status as a San Francisco city landmark by the Board of Supervisors on July 18, 2017, giving its Timothy Pflueger-designed Art Deco style some protection while its future use is being decided upon with new ownership.

Meanwhile, the Friends of the Geneva Car Barn organization has been working for twenty years to restore the 116-year-old brick building and make it a neighborhood arts center for youth. On July 3, 2017, the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department announced it had received enough state funding to begin the first phase of restoration of the site.

These two landmark buildings in the OMI (Ocean View-Merced Heights-Ingleside) neighborhood have languished for decades. We are delighted that some progress is finally being made to protect and restore them, and hopefully, make them once more vibrant centers of the community. Congratulations especially to all the neighbors along Ocean and Geneva Avenues who have worked so hard on these projects.



Not a WNP Member?

Outside Lands magazine is just one of the benefits of giving to Western Neighborhoods Project. Members receive special publications as well as exclusive invitations to history walks, talks, and other events. If you like what you've read, please join hundreds of other west side fans as a member. Visit our website at **outsidelands.org,** and click on the "Become a Member" link at the top of any page.