Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

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History from Western Neighborhoods Project
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Cover: Jack Anderson, 1950s. (Courtesy of the Anderson Family Collection.)

Right: David Gallagher, Nicole Meldahl, Woody LaBounty, and Kyrie Whitsett toasting Western Neighborhood Project's bright future. (Cammy Blackstone photograph.)

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Dear Western Neighborhoods Project Community:

It saddens me to share the news that our Executive Director, **Woody LaBounty,** has left Western Neighborhoods Project for a new opportunity. Alongside **David Gallagher** and **Arnold Woods,** Woody founded WNP twenty years ago to highlight the history and community of San Francisco's west side. Since then, his vision has been a crucial driving force in WNP's growth. Fortunately, the local history community is not losing him entirely!

Woody will act as the new Vice President of Advocacy and Programs at San Francisco Heritage. We wish him the best of luck in his new position, and hope to collaborate with San Francisco Heritage in the future. Woody will always be part of the WNP family, and we look forward to seeing him and his famous hat at our Balboa Street home.

Rest assured that WNP remains in good hands. I am incredibly pleased to announce that our very own **Nicole Meldahl** has stepped into the role of Executive Director part-time, moving to full-time in January 2020. Nicole started with us as a volunteer collections manager in 2012, and is now a dedicated WNP board member and familiar presence at our events, in our magazine, and on our podcast. She has already made a significant impact with the organization, and has many exciting plans for the road ahead.

I hope you join me in looking forward to Western Neighborhoods Project's next chapter.

Chelsea Sellin
President, Board of Directors

A Message from Woody

Chelsea joked that her first draft of the above announcement sounded like a eulogy, and it is difficult to talk about such a change without sounding as if something has been lost.

But this change is a wonderful opportunity for San Francisco Heritage, Western Neighborhoods Project, and, I believe, history work in the city overall.

I am very excited to join an organization that I have long respected and which has a mission that I passionately believe in. San Francisco is still in the middle of one of its hyper-transitional eras. Defending and sharing what makes the city special is a cause and a challenge that I believe is too important to ignore. This new position gives me a broader field of important issues to address in the city. I will work for partnerships and unity in the history and preservation communities overall, and between these two organizations specifically. We all share a strong dedication to the City of San Francisco.

That said, I wouldn't consider leaving my dearly-loved Western Neighborhoods Project if we didn't have an engaged Board of Directors and an eminently qualified and dynamic individual to chart the course forward.

Nicole is a creative, thoughtful, idea-generating person after my own heart. She has already begun building out a new exhibitions program for WNP, making innovative connections between the fields of art and history. She speaks confidently and passionately on local history and its relevance to the present. She fearlessly began co-hosting the podcast with me and David Gallagher (who is still here, don't forget), and positively stepped up to catalog a massive photo collection that many larger institutions would have been too frightened to accept.

Brave, imaginative, a consensus-builder, Nicole Meldahl is the perfect leader for WNP.

And, to quote a line from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail,* "I'm not dead yet." I still plan to be a part of the podcast, write some history now and then, and support this organization with my volunteer time and pocketbook.



What inspired the creation of the Western Neighborhoods Project in 1999—the imperative to highlight often-overlooked history of the Richmond, Sunset, West of Twin Peaks, OMI, and Lake Merced neighborhoods—is still with us. And the joyful fight will continue with your great support.

Woody LaBounty

Where in West S.F.?



Fire station at 441 12th Avenue with the crew posing on apparatus around empty lots, circa 1915. (San Francisco Fire Department / Courtesy of Guardians of the City; wnp69.50012.) Below, the station is decorated in 1948 with "Merry Christmas" spelled out inside Stars of David above the main doors. (Courtesy of Robert & Marilyn Katzman.)



Fire Station No. 31 in the Richmond District stood in as last issue's mystery photograph, back when it was the home of Truck Co. No. 15 and Engine Co. No. 46. The handsome building on the west side of 12th Avenue was erected in 1913, and looks mostly the same today.

In 1912, a spate of fires in the growing Richmond District, with water mains only running and accessible on Geary Street, spurred the city to act, as the *San Francisco Call* of June 7, 1912, reported and approved:

"The fire commission and the supervisors have provided for a new engine house in Twelfth avenue near Geary street, and it is the intention of Chief Murphy to install there one of the new automobile engines. Provision has been made for the organization of the new company beginning with the first of next year.

"It is a serious matter that the Richmond District must wait until January for that contribution to its fire fighting apparatus. But the wisdom of the chief in deciding to install a motor power engine [instead of relying on horses] can not but be commended. […] The districts north and south of Golden Gate Park are the districts of San Francisco's legitimate growth. They must be protected."

The station at 441 12th Avenue cost $35,247 to construct and the crew moved in on June 24, 1913. In the early 1970s, with stations closing around the city, Engine Co. No. 46 was renumbered to Engine Co. No. 31.

John Freeman wrote in: "I don't often join in the *Where in West SF?* solution, figuring as a native and life-long resident of the west side of town I have an unfair advantage. But this time I just had to add my response.

"The Jul–Sept issue brings an old friend of mine forward. I know 441 12th Avenue, Engine No. 46, quite well. I passed it frequently in my youth, and admired its decorations for the three years (1948–1950) when firemen decorated their firehouse facades with holiday themes. No. 46 has been my voting site for probably 25 years.

"The 1915 picture shows no neighboring building, but I can remember when the parcel was much larger, since the city set aside more land on the south side of the station, that covered another 100 feet. That property was sold to developers and the city only retained the lot on the Funston side as a parking lot for the fire

station crew. The excess lots were sold in the 1950s, for flats built on both 12th and Funston Avenues.

"Always nice to see a historic picture of an 'old friend' in *Outside Lands* and online."

Woody LaBounty: "Like John, I have good memories associated with 441 12th Avenue. I visiting with my Cub Scout pack (Troop #121) in the 1970s and got a chance to slide down the brass pole!"

Other correct guessers included Matthew Ayotte, Vincent Chan (and 6-year-old Hayzen Chan, a champion "guess-where-er"), plus Joan Cinquini, Mike Dadaos, Sam Dederian, Charlie Figone, Joe Flanders, Margaret Ostermann, and Margie Whitnah. Oh, and we can't forget Charlie the Dog!

> **"Always nice to see a historic picture of an 'old friend' in *Outside Lands*"**

Time to play again. Take a look at the photo below. Where and when on the west side of San Francisco do you think this is? What's the project underway in that gully?

Send your great guesses, pedantic proposals, or any wild wool-gathering thoughts to woody@outsidelands.org, or use the contact information on the inside front cover.



Many working men in a ravine and a few new houses on a mostly bare hillside in the background. What is going on? When is it going on? Where is it going on? Send in your guesses, ideas, stories, and fabulisms to woody@outsidelands.org.

Sky Tram, 1955–1966

WNP member John Martini is a retired National Park Service ranger helping us process our OpenSFHistory collection. To see thousands more historical images, visit opensfhistory.org.

The Sky Tram is one of those vanished San Francisco attractions that seemingly becomes more nostalgic the further we get away from its demise. The files of OpenSFHistory contain many photos of the Tram in operation, bringing back a flood of memories for kids like me who grew up during the 1950s in the Outside Lands.

The Tram barely operated eleven years, but seems to have embedded itself in the memory of everyone who ever rode it.

The Sky Tram was the brainchild of George Whitney, "The P. T. Barnum of the Pacific Coast," whose seaside empire at its zenith included Playland at the Beach, the Cliff House, and Sutro Baths. In January 1954, according to the *San Francisco Examiner,* Whitney and nine other businessmen formed the $100,000 venture titled "Cliff House to Point Lobos Sky Tram, Inc." to construct an aerial tram across the cove north of the Cliff House.

Simply put, the Tram would be a self-powered, enclosed car suspended from a pair of overhead cables. Traveling from the Cliff House to a station at the tip of Point Lobos, the 12-minute trip would pass close by the towering windows of Sutro Baths, but the real attraction would be the view west towards Seal Rocks and the Pacific Ocean. Upon arriving at Point Lobos, visitors could explore the tunnels through the point and take in the views of the Marin Headlands, then walk back to the Cliff House via a yet-to-be-constructed scenic path east of the Baths. Cost would be 25¢ each way. "But once they take the ride across," Whitney exulted, "I'm sure they'll want to come back the same way."

Unlike a ski lift, which has winding gears at each end hauling unpowered chairs or cars, the Sky Tram would be unique in that it carried its own gas engines for propulsion and an onboard operator who "drove" the Tram along its 800-foot journey. The article also noted the Sky Tram car and cabling would be constructed by Roebling & Sons (the firm that installed the Golden Gate Bridge cables), and that it would be in operation by June 1, 1954.[1]

Whitney, it turned out, was overly optimistic. The Tram's first run didn't take place until May 3, 1955.



Sky Tram approaching Point Lobos in 1960. (WNP Collection; wnp25.0973)

Although I can't find solid documentation, it appears the inspiration for the Sky Tram was Disneyland, then under development in Anaheim. Walt Disney and George Whitney were kindred spirits, according to George Whitney Jr., and during the earliest days of Walt's envisioning Disneyland the pair met several times and shared ideas about carnivals, rides, and amusement parks.

In 1953, George Jr. was actually hired by Walt to help develop Disneyland and became employee #7 at the park. In his oral history interview, he described how he advised Walt's designers on the nuts-and-bolts aspects of running an amusement park, maximizing passenger carrying capacities, and crowd management. In turn, ideas from the Anaheim park percolated back to San Francisco. Two examples described by George Jr. were remodeling the Camera Obscura to make it look like a Kodak Brownie and rechristening it "The Giant Camera," and constructing "Fun Tier Town" adjacent to Playland. The latter was a western-themed kiddie town complete with a miniature train—a direct lift from Disneyland.[2]

It's very likely the Sky Tram was also influenced by Disneyland, especially the Tomorrowland portion of the amusement park, which featured sleek, mid-century architecture and an overhead tram ride. The time periods also coincide. Planning for Disneyland began in earnest in 1953, and it opened in July 1957. Whitney's Sky Tram was announced in January 1954, and opened in May 1955.

A preview of the Tram was offered to selected dignitaries on March 31, 1955, but Whitney declared the ride wouldn't go into full operation until May due to "landscaping work and paving" taking place at Point Lobos.[3] "It is a gleaming cabin, like a brightly designed modern streetcar," reported



Visitors watch the approach of the Sky Tram from walkway at Point Lobos, 1956.
(WNP Collection; wnp4.0255).

the *San Francisco Chronicle,* "with two comfortable seats for ten passengers each running through it. Both seats face outward to the Pacific and the magnificent view of Seal Rocks that is revealed from the tramway."[4]

Whitney even touted the advantages of riding the Tram in bad weather. "On windy days, at high tide," Whitney said, "the ocean spray will break across the windows of the car."[5] This was supposed to be reassuring.

The Sky Tram was formally dedicated in its station behind the Cliff House on May 3, 1955, and the local media were out in force to record its first official run. However, a press ride that day included an unintended bit of drama for the reporters aboard. Partway to Point Lobos, a hydraulic brake line malfunctioned and stalled the car in mid air. Unable to go forward or back, the operator had no choice but to climb outside the Tram, scramble to the roof, manually release the brake, and ride atop the car all the way into the station.[6] One departing reporter stated, "The ten minutes the car swung in the middle of the span felt like a lifetime."[7]

Once the Tram reached its terminal at Point Lobos, visitors had no choice but to ride the car back to the Cliff House; it seems George Whitney hadn't yet completed the promised foot trail as an optional return route. And he never would. The fare would remain 50¢ round-trip for its entire operation. (That's about $4.80 in 2019, adjusted for inflation.)

I rode the Tram several times, first as an eager four-year-old shortly after the ride went into operation, then later as a jaded teenager just before it closed down. The ride began at a small station located on the rear terrace of the Cliff House, in a flat-roofed redwood building emblazoned with big white letters: "SKY TRAM." As you entered, the Tram itself dominated the interior of the room, its polished exterior and big windows reflecting overhead lights, looking something like a huge Airstream trailer. (Contemporary historian Nicole Meldahl has a slightly different take on the Tram's design, likening it to an "art deco toaster on cables.")

While you waited to purchase your tickets, you could look at historic photographs of various steamships that had wrecked at Point Lobos over the years. In a stroke of showmanship, large signs heralded a "Ride over the surf to Shipwreck Point!" essentially promising that you'd soon be seeing the bones of the wrecked ships. Nope.

As you boarded the Tram, it bounced. The car was suspended from its cables while in the station, not in contact with the ground, and rested over a trough about four feet deep. As soon as people started to get on, it gently undulated up and down with their footsteps, slightly unnerving first time passengers. Once everyone was aboard, the operator shut the doors, started up the engine, and eased the Tram out of the station. As the cables stretched slightly, the car briefly dipped nose-first towards the surf about fifty feet below. Again, a tad unnerving. If I remember correctly, my mother took one rueful look at the bouncing car as it entered the station and elected to let my father and me take the ride while she waited in the Cliff House.

My memory of the actual trip to Point Lobos was that it was s-l-o-w. A few quick calculations reveal that if the Tram trip took 12 minutes as advertised, it traveled at a breakneck speed of ¾ MPH. You could have walked from the Cliff House to Point Lobos and back—twice.

As advertised, the two tiers of upholstered seats faced west and gave a great view of the ocean and Seal Rocks, but many passengers like myself craned their necks around to catch a close-up glimpse of the Sutro Baths, which we were passing only a few feet away.

When the Tram neared the station at Point Lobos, it ascended at a slight inclined angle, the opposite of the



The San Francisco News

SECOND SECTION SAN FRANCISCO, TUESDAY, MAY 3, 1955 Page 13

Sky Tram Stalls in the Clouds

PIGGY BACK—This exclusive photograph by The News Photographer Robert J. Warren caught a dramatic scene at Ocean Beach yesterday as Bob Gilman (arrow) engineer for George Whitney's new Sky Tram, "rides" the car into its Pt. Lobos landing dock after having clambered to its top to release a hydraulic brake pressure line that had "frozen" the car in mid-voyage.

San Francisco News story on the Sky Tram malfunction on opening day, May 3, 1955.

nose plunge we'd experienced earlier. But the Point Lobos station offered an extra attraction: a waterfall poured from the black mouth of the station's opening, and it seemed as if the car was going to plunge headfirst into the surging water. Instead, the Tram rose and just cleared the flow, then leveled out and came to rest inside a covered waiting room smaller than the one behind the Cliff House. A distinct childhood memory is the roar of the water surging beneath the Tram as we disembarked. Directly across from the station, another waterfall descended the cliff, plummeting from the ridge overhead. As you approached it, a salty mist filled the air.

As it turns out, the two falls were more of Whitney's landscaping ideas. They were actually saltwater, pumped up from the ocean to the ridge and allowed to cascade down the cliffs. At some point, Whitney reportedly had the chutzpah to advertise them as the "tallest saltwater waterfalls in the world."

Frankly, I was disappointed with Shipwreck Point. No shipwrecks could be seen (they'd all been beaten to scrap metal by the surf decades ago), and there were no trails to follow back to the Cliff House. We'd have to wait for the next Tram, which would be at least a half an hour away. But there were other mysteries to explore that had nothing to do with shipwrecks or trams: the tunnels dug deep into Point Lobos by Adolph Sutro's engineers as part of Sutro Baths.

There were two tunnels visitors could enter. The first was a large, cavern-like tunnel running clear through Point Lobos that had originally served as a quarry tunnel for excavating rock used in constructing the Baths. It's still accessible to visitors today.

The second tunnel, now sealed to the public, scared the daylights out of me. It descended deep into the heart of Point Lobos, its interior lit only by a few scattered light bulbs. At its far end we emerged into a large rock room that featured a huge, sealed pipe emerging from one wall. On the other side of the closed pipe I could hear pounding surf. I was sure the waves would break through at any moment and I was going to drown in this terrible, subterranean chamber. Years later I learned that the room had once held a backup pump for suctioning water directly from the ocean to fill the pools in Sutro's.[8]

After a flurry of news articles covering the Tram's opening, the local newspapers were pretty mum on the Sky Tram. Occasionally it received a mention when a local celebrity visited, and then again during a 1965 promotion to celebrate the re-opening of the Cliff Chalet when owner Dan Hountalas offered free Tram rides along with meals.[9]

As with most vanished attractions and landmarks, economics were the eventual undoing of the Sky Tram. It took two people to run the operation: a cashier selling tickets and an onboard operator. Since the Tram only held 20 people, a round trip to Point Lobos grossed only $10 tops. With a 12-minute transit time, the Tram could make only two round trips per hour, thus the maximum possible take was $20 per hour—if every seat was filled on every trip.

George Whitney Jr. somewhat gleefully recounted the ensuing financial quandary:

> My dad thought it would generate traffic out to the far point. And I look at that as his biggest mistake in his entire life, because he completely neglected the fact that the capacity or the earning capacity would not produce enough to pay for the attendant on there.
>
> Because it cost more to run the damn thing over than it could earn. It just couldn't earn enough money. You'd have to charge—oh, what did it carry; 10, 15, 20 people? You'd have to charge $3 or $4 dollars a head [to make a profit]. It wasn't that good a ride. It wasn't worth that. Who the hell's going to pay that when they can stand here and look over there, or walk around here and get there?[10]

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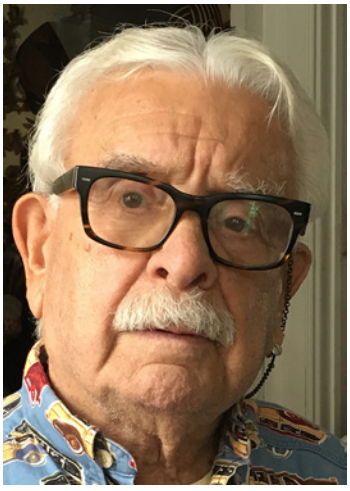
Postcard view of Sky Tram station and Point Lobos waterfalls, circa 1955. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection/Courtesy of Molly Blaisdell, wnp70.0566)

MEMORIES

Jack Anderson



Jack Edwin Anderson, the son of Edwin Cooper and Irene (Schlesinger) Anderson, was born February 19, 1931, at Children's Hospital in San Francisco. His maternal grandmother, Lillian Mish, was from a prominent and well-to-do family and their former house at 1152 Oak Street is City Landmark #62. Jack grew up at 120 7th Avenue and still lives in the Richmond District, where his mother and sisters, Jean and Lenore, owned the Anderson Sisters School of Dance on 6th Avenue for decades. Jack served for many years as a teacher at Lowell High School, ran the innovative Open Theater Cafe on Clement Street, and is one of the founders of San Francisco Comedy Day and the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame of Northern California. These excerpts are from an interview with Jack on December 4, 2018.

My father had been a South of Market boy, and I guess at that time—this was right after World War I—the Richmond was the place to reestablish yourself if you're going to try and raise a family.

So 120 7th Avenue is where they ended up. My sainted father had to put up with his amazingly active wife and we had an aunt living with us and I had two sisters. I am junior to my sister, Jean, by eleven years and she was two years younger than my sister, Lenore. So, my father had to deal with these ladies going in many different directions for a long time.

He had been a silversmith with the Shreve Company in San Francisco and then he worked for the Western Union for many years. He was really a sort of Victorian type gentleman, very proper, always immaculately groomed and the opposite



Staff, including Edwin C. Anderson, in front of Western Union Telegraph and Cable Office, 387 Pine Street, circa 1910. (Jack Anderson collection).

of my flamboyant mother and grandmother, who were deep into the arts and very busy doing creative things. My mother composed music. I have songs of hers that I would love to see get out in the community because during World War II we had a USO troupe that entertained the veterans.

My father would come home after a hard day fixing machinery at Western Union and my mother would insist that he spend some time gluing petals on a big flower because they were in the decorative novelty business.

My mother was Irene Schlesinger and her mother was Lillie Mish. During the Depression, my father was not making a huge salary [but] my mother and her mother were able to—pretty much—do well because the people with money during the Depression continued to have parties and continued to need decorations. I think my mother and her mother did something like three hundred paper maché trees for an event at Civic Center in those days.

My mother grew up in a twenty-one-room Victorian [1140 Oak Street]. Of course, I was not born, but they said that they had performance space in the basement and neighbors would come and people would do their singing or dancing or whatever. They were always involved in the community. One of the things that I'm trying to impress upon my son is he always is a little concerned because at my age, which is eighty-seven, he doesn't like to see me do a lot of dinners, entertaining, and make those kinds of efforts. But that's the way I was raised. I never could remember any kind of weekend when my mother wouldn't have at least fifteen, sixteen, twenty people over. She just loved people.

And that was carried on when my two sisters had the Anderson Sisters Dancing School right off Clement [Street] on 6th [Avenue].

Anderson Sisters School of Dance

It operated for many years [1935–2003] and there were probably hundreds—I don't think thousands, but maybe hundreds—of young people growing up in the Richmond District who participated with the Anderson Sisters School of Dance. Every time I am out socially, somebody says, "Oh, I remember your sister. I used to be a Bumblebee."



Anderson Sisters School of Dance at 276 6th Avenue, 1970s. (Dennis O'Rorke photograph).



Jean and Lenore Anderson, 1940s. (Jack Anderson collection).

It was interesting. Because her mother had been well-to-do and lost everything, and they had to start from scratch, my mother was convinced that nobody should be kept out of the arts because of money. So, the dancing school for years charged fifty cents a lesson and when everyone passed I would find jars and envelopes full of checks and twenty-five cent pieces.

My mother had two talented girls, Lenore and Jean, and she started them at a very early age with a lot of dance instruction and a lot of effort to be involved in the entertainment industry. My sister was a great composer of music. In those days, it was important, at least for my mother, that they have a good grounding in ballet, but also tap. They specialized in Hawaiian dance and things that meant that they could go to entertain at the numerous veterans' lodges—you could always have a Hawaiian dancer and a ballet person, some tap dancers. So, they were well trained in dance.

The first Anderson Sisters Dancing School was on the corner of Clement and Arguello [former Masonic Hall on southwest corner, which in 2019 is occupied by a gym]. Then they bought the place on 6th Avenue.

I was always involved performing. I didn't think I was that good a tap dancer, but I tapped, you know. I was a master of ceremonies at the Hall of the Western States for the '39 World's Fair [the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island], and it's really frightening for a little kid to have to walk out on a stage that had a seating of, I don't know, eight thousand or something ridiculous. I really didn't want to do it, but I was far more afraid of my mother, who was standing in the wings, so I really didn't have a choice.

The dancing school was the basis for May Day in Golden Gate Park and the dancers would perform at the band shell and then also at Kezar Stadium. It was a civic event—mayors, Board of Supervisors—everyone used it as a political reward. I think the Anderson Sisters were the only dancing school in this neighborhood, but there were others, such as Carol Beale's School of Dance at 23rd and Clement Street [that participated] throughout the city.

My mother was very active at Sherith Israel on California and Webster [Streets]. She came from a family of Reformed Jews and the Jewish population, at least that I knew, were very assimilated. My mother always had one of the biggest Christmas trees and the most Christmas ornaments because she was doing annual free concerts for the orphanages and the Anderson dancing academy would take their performers to Christmas performances at Norse Auditorium on Van Ness Avenue.

The dancing studio produced a lot of people who got their start there and then went on to become fairly well-known. The Christmas shows that my family did at the Norse Auditorium had two accompanists. One was a woman whose name is May Schweitzer and the other was Peter Mintun, who went on to become a well-known person celebrating the '30's. He always had a 1930s automobile, dressed from the period, and performed around town. He is now in New York and comes to San Francisco once in a while.

The Richmond at that time was pretty much German, French and Irish—very few minorities—and my sisters' dancing school was the first really integrated dancing school in San Francisco. I know that my mother was very adamant about the costumes for May Day. Everyone was in a white tutu and I think it was just to remind people that the darker-skinned kids were involved.



Jack, with sister Jean behind him, selling war bonds through performance (*San Francisco Chronicle,* May 23, 1943). Below, the Anderson Sisters contingent at May Day festivities in Golden Gate Park in the 1950s, and, on opposite page, Jean Anderson teaching in the 1980s (Jack Anderson collection).





[My sisters] were very different from each other. Jean was physically smaller and my sister Lenore, who was two years her elder, was more business-like. She got a degree in business from City College. She married Irving Fineman, who was an accountant with a place on 6th and California [Street]. He was the accountant, at one time, for Herb Caen, so he would always be mentioned in Herb Caen's famous column. Jean was more involved in the arts. She kept teaching dance at the dancing studio into her eighties and encouraged older people to come and dance and she had a group of women—they had to be, certainly, in their eighties, maybe older—who were tap dancing.

They both graduated from Galileo [High School]. In those days the high schools sort of had a specialty. Galileo was known for science, of course. Washington was a new school in this area. I attended Lowell. I'm still active with the Lowell Alumni Association.

The Open Theater

Most San Franciscans, if they were involved in the arts, envisioned themselves at the door, welcoming somebody to their bar or restaurant. I grew up when I could go over to North Beach and go into the El Matador and see celebrities and not spend a fortune. I experienced first hand, the beatnik era, the hippie era…I was in the hungry i when some young guys named The Kingston Trio came in to audition. When you're active and involved in arts, you see things and think "Gee, that'd be nice to be able to do in my own place."

Well, I converted Haig's old delicatessen on Clement between 5th and 6th [Avenues] into something called the Open Theater Cafe. I was a friend of Haig and I knew that he was going to move to the 600 block of Clement. There I did everything that I would love to have been able to move to Broadway. I had a lot of fun with the combination of theater and food and refreshments for about thirteen years.

Robin Williams performed there. I did a hit show called *Indians,* by Arthur Kopit. Lee Sankowich, who had been a drama student of mine at Lowell High School, directed. He was just coming off his long run of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* which ran for a record at The Little Fox theatre [1970–1975, with more than 500,000 tickets sold— a city record at the time.] We also did *Moon Children.*

At the Open Theater I did a show bringing a woman, Kres Mersky, up from Los Angeles who did a one-woman Isadora Duncan show. I had the street closed and I had 1930s cars parked outside. I acquired a whole storeroom of newspapers from the era, so people were encouraged to come in and read what was going on, and then Isadora Duncan would appear. I think Mayor Feinstein actually came to the opening performance and said, "you're the Woman of the Year in San Francisco" and so forth.

Interestingly enough, the Coliseum [movie] Theatre actually had a caretaker, Bob, and I would run into him at what then was the Hamburger Haven. And, I said, "Gee, I've got a great idea. I have a group of performers at my Open Theater called "The Magic Carpet," and I think we should put this group in the Coliseum and then let kids come and have a live theatre experience. So, the guy went along with it and I brought in spotlights and The Magic Carpet had three performances there before the union found out and once the stagehands and musicians found out, that was the end of the live performances at the Coliseum.

I also had a group of people who were devotees of Playland at the Beach and they were doing a show at the Open Theater and we advertised it, but, I guess a lot of time had passed since Playland was hot, so we didn't get any audiences. I said, "Well, you know, we gotta close the show. Nobody is coming." Their response was to march outside with picket signs: "Jack Anderson Hates Laughin' Sal."

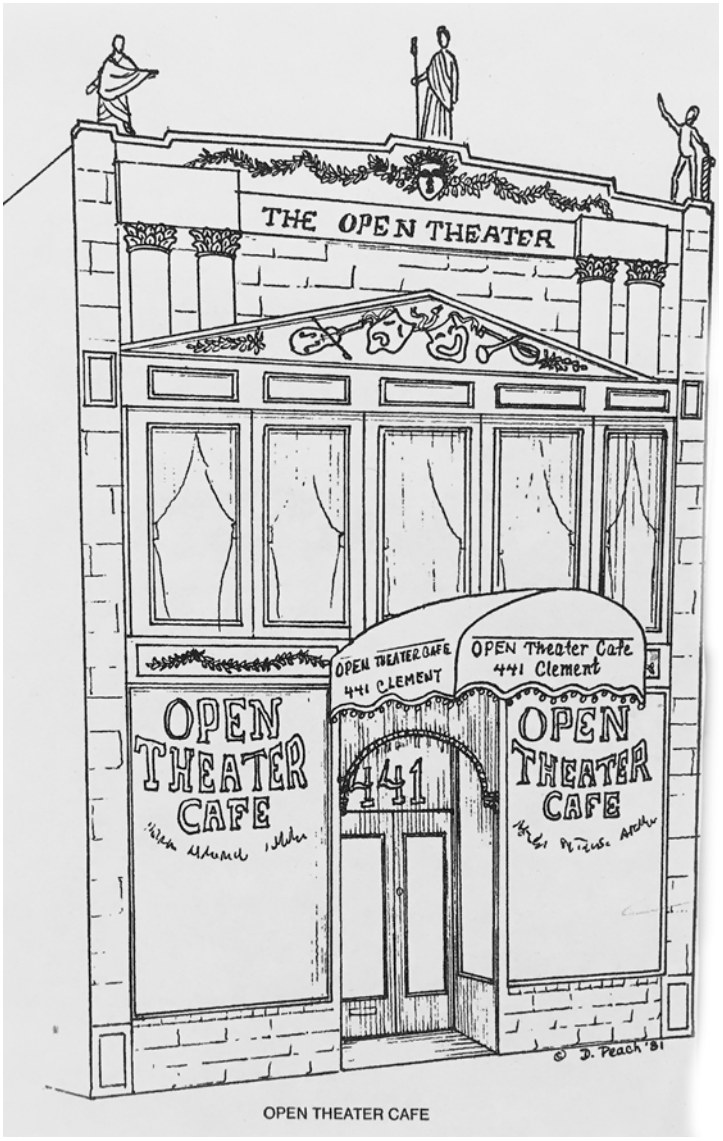
When the lease ran out after thirteen years, the rent went from six hundred to four thousand [a month], which meant that it wasn't really viable.

Comedy Day & Jewish Sports Hall of Fame

Jose Simone was my bartender at The Open Theater and we had the idea of doing a free concert for the comedy community. I went to a meeting and they said, "Well, the *[San Francisco] Chronicle* is supporting Comedy Day because it's expensive to do." It cost about $30,000 to rent the privies, to get police and so forth. So, the *Chronicle* sponsors Comedy Day and, by the way, they tell me "you're now president," which I hadn't expected. As soon as I became president, the *Chronicle* decided to no longer sponsor Comedy Day.

I was lucky enough to turn it over, pretty much, to Debbie Durst and Will Durst. Debbie, you know, is a force of nature and I'm still Chairman of the Board, but I am not getting up at five in the morning to go and make sure that they're not breaking into any of the water lines in Sharon Meadow, which is now Robin Williams Meadow. So, I'm pleased that somebody was able to take it over and keep it going. This last year was our thirty-fifth year.

I was Western Intercollegiate Fencing Champion at SF State. Fencing was big at that time. So was wrestling and boxing at the university level and State was in a league with Cal and Stanford, Air Force Academy, a couple of others. So, I won the Western Intercollegiate Fencing Championship in the foil. Now, time goes by and I get a phone call from a lawyer who says there are fourteen Jewish Sports Halls of Fame throughout the country, but there's nothing in the Bay Area. And he said, "Gee, that's odd because we have so many prominent Jews who've done so much through sports for the community."



Open Theater Cafe, drawn by Denise Peach for *Front Row Center: A Guide to Northern California Theatres* by Jack Brooks (101 Productions, San Francisco, 1981).

So, I went to a meeting in a restaurant down in the Embarcadero and everyone thought there should be a Jewish Sports Hall of Fame. I wrote a mission statement. I went to former students at Lowell active in sports, tried to get them involved. We've really been blessed because we pay our bills, we don't owe anything. We're able to give scholarships not only to Jewish high school athletes, but we give "mensch awards" to non-Jews. If you're a "mensch" in the Jewish culture, you're a really good person.

One of the things I'm proudest about is that when we have our induction dinners, the inductors are videotaped. We have the only, as far as I know, interactive television screen down at the Taube Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto. You can press a button and everybody that has ever been inducted comes up—their biography, what they do, all

the scholarships for kids. And we're involved in concussion prevention now, working with UCSF [University of California, San Francisco].

San Francisco Teacher

When I was at Lowell, there was a track coach who had been a very active athletic coach at Balboa and Commerce [High Schools] and his name was George C. Lorbeer. When he found out that I had a background in the arts because, you know, it was pretty evident, he said, "You're in the speech team," and I said, "Well, whatever you say." In those days, they had forensic competition hosted by various colleges, so, say, USF [University of San Francisco] would have a forensic tournament. They had a national organization called the National Forensic League.

I won several contests at San Francisco State and a wonderful professor, Wayne Britton, sort of recruited me, and said, "Look, you won after-dinner speaking and oratory. Don't you think it would be good if you got a teaching degree and helped other people?" And, I said, "No, I'm going to go into educational television." And, he said, "No. I really think you should reconsider."

When I was young, my mother needed some help when she was doing her art and raising her family, and she was joined by a sainted woman, Edna Calhoun—hardly a Jewish name. Edna Calhoun was my beloved aunt and took care of me growing up. She was also one of the first women to get a teaching degree from San Francisco State, then called San Francisco State College. I asked Edna about getting a teaching degree and she said to me "Oh, teaching is wonderful. You should really consider it." So I said, "Okay, I'll just try it."

I went for my student teaching year to Lowell and, just after I arrived, George Lorbeer, the famous speech coach, had a heart attack. The principal, whose name was Edith Pence, said, "Well, you have some background in public speaking. You're the new speech coach."

And, that's how it happened. I started San Francisco Unified School District's first visual and performing arts program at Lowell. A lot of teachers leave teaching, but I was so lucky to be at a school where the emphasis was the best and brightest kids. It was great to be able to coach in his senior year a future Supreme Court Justice, Stephen Breyer, and his younger brother, Chuck Breyer, who is now San Francisco Senior District Judge. I mean, these people really are products of the public school system and I hope that we continue to maybe remind ourselves how important the public schools are.

Anderson Sisters School of Dance Retrospective

Sunday, October 27, 2019
Presidio Golf Concordia Club
8 Presidio Terrace
San Francisco, CA
2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Free to the Public



Did you take lessons at the Anderson Sisters School of Dance? Were you ever part of the city May Day pageants in Golden Gate Park? Do you just want to see and learn more about one family's influence, interaction, and intersections with San Francisco's Richmond District over the last century?

The Anderson Family and Western Neighborhoods Project will host a free day of conversation, and memories about the Anderson Sisters School of Dance. With live performance, rare video, and archival images, we will celebrate the impact of one family on the culture and sociology of the Richmond District.

History buffs, school alumni, dance and performing arts fans, please join us for this special event with district notables.

Register online:
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/anderson-sisters-school-of-dance-retrospective-tickets-67711736627

Share your memories on Facebook as well:
https://www.facebook.com/AndersonSistersSchool

Trocadero Bears



Postcard view of the Trocadero in today's Stern Grove, circa 1910. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; wnp37.03678)

The Trocadero Inn in Stern Grove has been the site of weddings, swindles, suffragist lectures, late-night revels, and the arrest of corrupt San Francisco city government boss Abe Ruef in 1907. Here are two Trocadero incidents that "bear" repeating.

Chasing a Bear with a Bull Dog
San Francisco Examiner, Dec. 11, 1896:

The bear had been chained to a tree in Ernest Doelter's back yard, and was perforce docile to the limit of his chain. He amused Mr. Doelter's guests idling their hours at Mr. Doelter's tavern, euphoniously familiar to Ingleside tourists as the Trocadero, and until yesterday afternoon was regarded with favor by all with whom he attempted to come in contact.

Yesterday afternoon the bear broke his chain. Recovering from the surprise incident to this sudden change in his circumstances, the animal waddled complacently to the cottage occupied by the Doelter family, and finding no obstacle to his entrance took possession of the best bedroom. There is no evidence that he was in a destructive mood at this time, but he treated himself to the unaccustomed luxury of a nap in the big bed with which the room was furnished.

While the bear slept Doelter's three children, Carl, Ernest and Veera, were playing in the front yard. When the bear awoke the children were still at their games. They were so absorbed that they did not notice the approach of the bear, lumbering awkwardly towards them. That he was in a good humor and only desired sport with the children may be regarded as the bear's plea in self-defense in what happened; but the fact that he joined the little group in a boisterous and violent manner was sufficient to discourage further romping on the part of the children. The bear's attempt to play "tag" with little Carl resulted in a mixture of boy and bear, and the latter's motion at "prisoner's base" with Ernest was protested by a chorus of screams that frightened the bear and brought the father on the scene.

Mr. Doelter was accompanied by a bulldog and armed with a "sawed-off" shotgun, and the chase began without further preliminary. The bear hurried concernedly towards a grove of eucalyptus on the hillside overlooking the Ingleside track [a racetrack where Ingleside Terraces is today] and the bulldog fastened upon the fugitive's haunch as he entered the grove, and he released his hold, yelping dismally in response to a south-paw uppercut from the bear.

As the dog was acrobating towards Ocean View, Doelter came up with his shotgun and poured the contents of both barrels into his ear. It is not likely that the bear heard the report of the gun, for he died immediately; and thus ended the last bear-hunt in the wilds of Ingleside.

Not only was the Examiner incorrect about the last bear-hunt in the area, it didn't take more than a few weeks, and had a happier end for the bruin.

A Fierce Ursa Minor
San Francisco Call, January 4, 1897:

Last night the vegetable garden colony around Trocadero barricaded their doors and lay in their houses with bated breath. Not a turnip was turned-up out of the ground and not a cabbage-head stirred from its natal bed, and all because a fierce four-month-old bear—an Ursus furioso—was adrift on the hills.

Even the policemen, who, of course, would not forsake their lamp-post where the electric flame broke up the gloom for a few feet around, showed a tendency to take to the trees at the movement of every shadow. It was a night of terror in large type.

Last Saturday M. Schneider, a saloon-keeper near the Ingleside racetrack, accompanied by several friends, went down to the Trocadero for a visit, and took his cub bear along. The juvenile cinnamon is as jovial as a kitten and he highly amused his companions with his antics until the beer which they gave him made him dull.

Then he was tied out in the backyard, where the "steam" he had quaffed could evaporate.

He evidently evaporated with it, for when Ernest Doelter, proprietor of the Trocadero, went out to attend to his four-footed guest the chewed end of a rope was all that indicated a bear had ever been there.

Then there was mounting in hot haste and a chase through the gum-groves was begun. All Saturday night they hunted bear without success. Yesterday morning the search was recommenced. All of the ex-grizzly trappers, Indian fighters and path-finders generally assembled at the Trocadero and gave personal histories of their adventures among the fierce carnivera of the wilds.

They brought dogs of assorted sizes, from the rat-terrier to the Great Dane, more or less loaded for bear.

A policeman in citizen's dress—he left his official gear at home, he said, fearing that the cub would shy into the woods at the sight of his star—was bitten by a bull-terrier which somehow associated him with the bear.



General James and Colonel Chadbourne arrived with the crowd and it looked as though the days of liberty of that ursus were numbered. General James had a combination dog—a sort of composite canine—that boasted of an ancestry of bear-killers running back to Noah's floating menagerie.

While the hunters were modestly dilating on the prowess of their respective dogs the general's descendant of the bear-killers went out to snuff up a passing acquaintance with Doelter's pet coon, and got his nose chewed off.

The agonizing yelps of the dog brought out the whole company to his rescue, and when the coon was persuaded to retire to his corner the general's pet took a beeline for town, giving off a howl at every jump.

Colonel Chadbourne had a huge mastiff that was not a fighter, he said, but could track a gull through a fogbank. All that was needed was to show the sagacious animal something the bear had worn and that dog would be off on the scent as unerring as a bloodhound.

The only thing they could find was the hole the cub had worn through the rustic fence while wiggling through to freedom, but that was enough and the dog was shown the place. He smelt of the locality and then slunk under the house and no persuasive calling could induce him to leave his retreat.

All day the hunters beat up the jungle, but no bear was found, and when their flasks were dry they returned to Doelter's satisfied that the bear had made his way south and was well toward the Mexican line.

Bruin Returns
San Francisco Examiner
January 6, 1897:

Schneider's brown bear, which has been at large in the fields back of Ingleside since Saturday evening, has returned to Ernest Doelter's Trocadero House. Bruin came back unannounced. He eluded the hunters and trotted up about four o'clock yesterday afternoon to Doelter's place. The bear was hungry. He stood on his hind legs and turned several somersaults in anticipation of being fed. He offered no resistance when Charles Hoelman, one of the employees of the hotel, caught him by the collar and led him to a tree where he had been tied.

Bruin drinks whiskey since his return. The nights were cold during the time he was wandering about the hills and he appreciated the inward warmth of the liquor that was supplied by his host, from all of which it would appear that he is a tame bear with civilized propensities.

continued from page 7

The last time I rode the Sky Tram was sometime in 1964 or '65, and it was a sad affair. The once-gleaming car was grungy and rust streaked, and the station's windows clouded with salt deposits. To save money, staff had been reduced to a single employee who both sold tickets and then ran the Tram over to Point Lobos and back. My buddy and I were the only passengers on the run, and we noted how the operator took the cash box with him from the ticket booth before departing. On the way over he griped to us about thieves stealing the receipts no matter what kind of cash register or door lock they installed. He also grumbled that almost no one paid to ride on the Tram anymore; every kid in San Francisco knew there was a hole in the cyclone fence encircling Point Lobos and you could climb through for free.

As I remember, that's the route we took back that day, despite the fact we'd pre-paid for a return trip.

No one recorded the last day's operation of the Sky Tram, but it must have been in the winter of 1965-1966. On November 21, 1965, the *San Francisco Examiner* suggested riding the Tram as part of a budget tour of San Francisco. Four months later in March 1966, a press photo was taken ostensibly showing the west side of Sutro Baths. The view also included the empty Sky Tram shed at the tip of Point Lobos. No Tram was to be seen, no water was cascading down the waterfalls, and no cables stretched across the cove. Sky Tram had vanished without a trace.

I've done numerous online searches trying to learn the fate of the Tram, wondering if perhaps it found a second life at another venue, maybe some obscure ski lodge. No luck, though. Not even George Whitney Jr. knew what happened to it. The sad fact seems to be the Tram was simply scrapped. It would have taken a Herculean effort to move the Sky Tram intact from behind the Cliff House, so it was most likely cut up with torches and its stainless steel carcass hauled away.

Following the Tram's demise, George Whitney Jr. briefly re-purposed the station behind the Cliff House into an overflow area for displaying Musée Mécanique-type attractions. Then, in 1978, the National Park Service converted the empty shed into a Cliff House Visitor Center, a role it fulfilled until 2003, when it was demolished during the most recent renovation of the Cliff House.

If you ever visited the old Visitor Center, you may have noticed how one area of the floor sounded distinctly hollow as you walked over it. You were actually standing over the landing trough of the Sky Tram.

Notes:

1.) "Cliff House, Pt. Lobos Air Tram Planned," *San Francisco Examiner,* January 26, 1954.

2.) George Whitney, Jr., oral history interview with John A. Martini, Friday Harbor, Washington, 2002.

3.) "Tramway Car In Operation," *San Francisco Examiner,* March 31, 1955.

4.) James Benet, "Aerial Coach Holds 20; A Ride Costs 25 Cents," *San Francisco Chronicle,* March 31, 1955.

5.) "Aerial Cable Car Operation to Start on May 3," *Oakland Tribune,* March 31, 1955.

6.) "Sky Tram Stalls in the Clouds," *San Francisco News,* May 3, 1955.

7.) "Thrill Ride," United Press Photo caption, May 7, 1955.

8.) John A. Martini, *Sutro's Glass Palace: The Story of Sutro Baths* (Bodega Bay, CA: Hole-In-The-Head Press, 2012).

9.) Advertisement, "FREE! Breathtaking, exciting Round Trip Ride on the world famous Sky Tram," *San Francisco Chronicle,* March 21, 1964.

10.) George Whitney, Jr., oral history interview.



Exterior of National Park Service's Cliff House Visitor Center, circa 2002. (Courtesy of National Park Service)

Historical Happenings

outsidelands.org/events.php

31st San Francisco Old Car Picnic

October 19, 2019 (Saturday) 7:00 AM–4:00 PM
Historic Speedway Meadow, Golden Gate Park
Free for spectators, $40 for cars and trucks, $20 for motorcycle, $10 for bicycles. (Vehicles must be 1994 or older and not larger than a 3/4 ton pickup truck.)

The San Francisco Old Car Picnic, previously known as Jimmy's Picnic, was started in 1988 by Golden Gate Park gardener and Sunset District native Jimmy O'Keefe as a birthday party with his classic car-loving friends. The Picnic has grown over the years to become a tradition in the park, drawing people from every district in the city and throughout California. Visitors will see a mix of vehicles (and spectators) not typically seen at car shows, with clunkers and customs, muscle cars and museum quality restorations, all parked alongside each other. The Picnic has always been a benefit for programs that serve the developmentally disabled in San Francisco, and is produced by a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. This reunion is a unique event and shouldn't be missed!

Anderson Sisters School of Dance Retrospective

October 27, 2019 (Sunday) 2:00 PM–5:00 PM
Presidio Golf Concordia Club
8 Presidio Terrace, Free!

One family's influence, interactions, and intersections with San Francisco's Richmond District. History, memories, images, and more. See page 13 for more details.

Donations in Tribute

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by Tony and Perrin Belway

Our SF Family Legacy
by Carolyn Miller

In Memory

Jane Doelger
by Leslie LaManna

George and Inez Holland
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Mike Williston
by Katherine Straznickas

We add events frequently and sometimes things come together quickly, so not every listing finds its way into the Outside Lands magazine schedule. For the most accurate and events calendar, visit outsidelands.org/events.php.

More good ideas for staying up to date: follow our social media channels (listed on inside front cover) and be sure you are on our email news list by entering your address in the box at the bottom of the front page of outsidelands.org

Greetings from Camp Merritt

November 7, 2019 (Thursday) 7:00 PM–8:00 PM
Western Neighborhoods Project, 1617 Balboa Street

Thousands of volunteers came from all over the country to train at the Presidio of San Francisco during the Spanish-American War in 1898. These troops spilled into the Richmond District on land owned by the Crocker Estate Company, which offered up the area between today's Geary Boulevard, Fulton Street, Arguello Street and Sixth Avenue for what came to be known as Camp Merritt.

In honor of Veterans Day, come see rare photographs as Amanda Williford, Curator at the Park Archives and Records Center in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), and Nicole Meldahl discuss the history of this Outside Lands Army encampment, as well as WNP's recent collaboration with the GGNRA on OpenSFHistory. Admission is $20 for the general public, and $10 for WNP members. Light snacks and drinks provided.

Holiday Open House

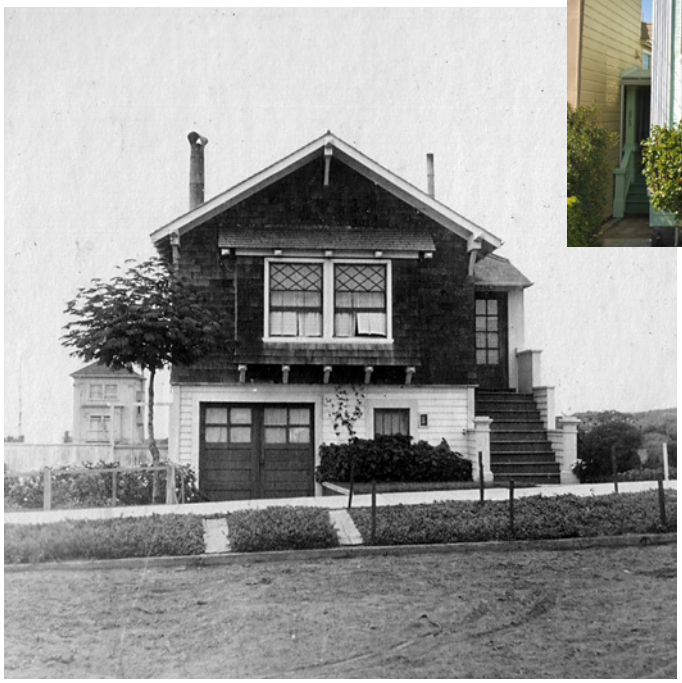
December 7, 2019 (Saturday) 11:00 PM–2:00 PM
Western Neighborhoods Project, 1617 Balboa Street

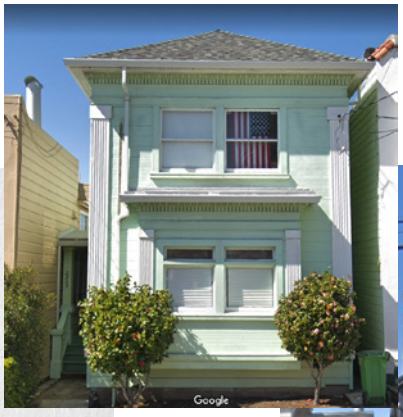
Kick off the holiday season at our Home for History! There will be festive decor, gifts to purchase for your seasonal shopping needs, and a crowd of fun-loving history folks in attendance. And back by popular demand, we'll have a grilled-cheese station as well as other snacks and beverages. This event is free as a thank you to our WNP community, so stop by and say hello.

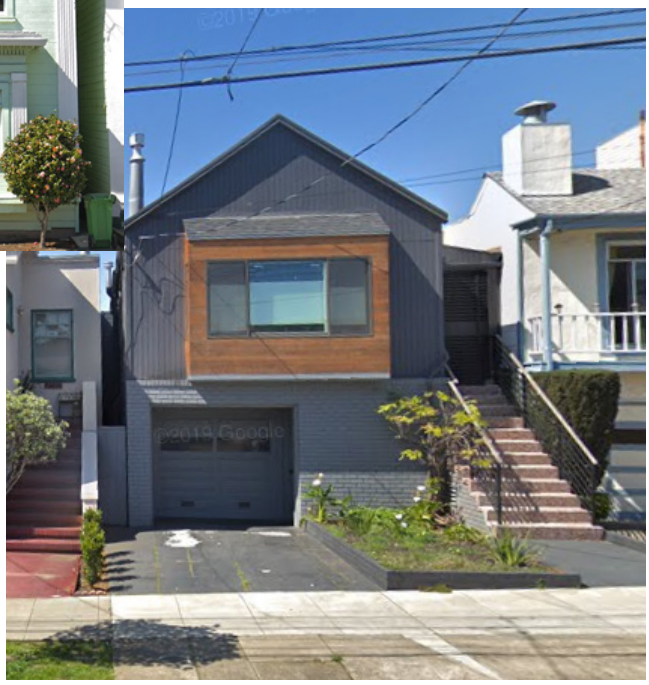
SAN FRANCISCO
Office of Economic and Workforce Development

Our thanks to the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development for its support of our October and November events!

The Last Word







2363 32nd Avenue, between Taraval and Santiago Streets, was built in 1916. In the left background is 2363 33rd Avenue, an unusual house built in 1913.

2363 32nd Avenue as it appears in 2019. Inset above center is 2363 33rd Avenue today.

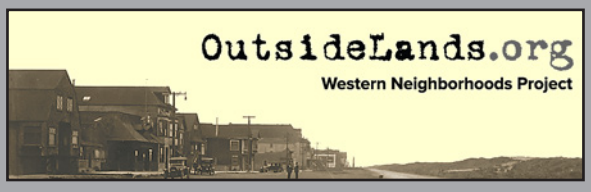
Change is a constant in the City of San Francisco, and even when a house survives a century in the Parkside fog, it can take on a robe of renovation that almost disguises it to modern eyes.

The photograph above on the left came from descendants of Gene Williams, who had the first grocery in the area on the corner of Taraval Street and 32nd Avenue, just half a block south of this tidy Arts & Crafts cottage at 2363 32nd Avenue. Constructed in 1916, its first owners may have been George and Mayme McKenna, and this image likely dates not too long after they moved in.

Above on the right is a 2019 view from the same spot. 2363 32nd Avenue has taken on modern aesthetics, painted a grayish charcoal except for its bay window clad in horizontal board stained a natural tan. (Home builders and renovators: This recent fad looks good for about one year before the stain unattractively peels. Please move on to your next idea!) The front windows, which once had nice diamond leading, are now sliding aluminum. Gone are the brackets, shingles, ground floor window, and likely the front door— if we could only see behind the prison-like porch gate.

In the background of the archival photo is one of the most unusual houses in the Parkside, 2363 33rd Avenue. Devoid of garage, it has classical features including tall pilaster columns, and deserves a drive-by! Architect Christopher M. Cook may have designed it, as he lived there shortly after he had legal trouble in the East Bay. Cook drew up cottages and apartments in Berkeley, Alameda, and Oakland, but was accused at different times of incompetency, fraud, forgery, and theft.

Perhaps the lonely dunes and scrub of 1910s western San Francisco was a good place to start over.



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.