Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

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EDITOR: Woody LaBounty

CONTRIBUTORS: Paul Judge, Nicole Meldahl.

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Western Neighborhoods Project
1617 Balboa Street
San Francisco, CA 94121
Tel: 415/661-1000
Email: wnpoffice@outsidelands.org
Website: www.outsidelands.org
facebook.com/outsidelands
twitter.com/outsidelandz
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Cover: Entrance to Argonne School, 1920.
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Thanks to our 2019 volunteers and interns

Barbara Cannella
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We're entering 2020 with some familiar friends, new faces, and exciting opportunities. But first, a moment to reflect on the year we just tucked behind us.

In this issue you'll find a list of all the people who supported Western Neighborhoods Project (WNP) in 2019. That includes our own **Woody LaBounty,** who is doing phenomenal work at San Francisco Heritage and recently received a commendation for his work with WNP from the Board of Supervisors, courtesy of District 1 Supervisor **Sandra Lee Fewer.** He's been a mentor to me, an inspiration to many in our field, and we're so proud of him. Here's to a new year in which our organizations find new ways to work together (and **David Gallagher** finally learns to love the It's-it®).

Speaking of the supervisor, we are so grateful that she secured funding from the Office of Economic and Workforce Development for us to provide affordable programming and move forward with "Chinese in the Richmond," an exciting collaboration with the **Chinese Historical Society of America** (CHSA). And what's that you heard about San Francisco History Days? Supervisor Fewer also found funding for that and we're working with friends from the **San Francisco Department of Memory** to bring you a refreshed community history event this year. All of this is on top of OpenSFHistory going strong (46,000 images online and counting!), and our education and exhibition programs in full swing.

Now that I'm in the Executive Director's seat full-time, my new friend **Josie** waves at me when she walks home from Argonne Elementary School most evenings and it's the highlight of my day. I queried her on what she wants me to include as we refine our curriculum based on local history, and she confirmed that coloring, word search, and maker activities are high priorities for west side kindergartners. Coming right up, Josie.

While we work on that, I encourage you to read about the first of four 2020 shows in our magazine's new "Exhibition Spotlight" section. If you stop by to see it in person, I might even share my Cheez-its® with you.

We truly love when people visit because people are at the heart of everything we do here at WNP. People like **Charlotte Estes,** the West Portal School principal who stole my heart in our *Outside Lands San Francisco* podcast #287. We've been searching for a photograph of Charlotte since I wrote a piece on her desecrated memorial sundial for the Summer 2018 issue of *Outside Lands,* and I'm thrilled we were finally able to track one down thanks to **Christina Moretta** at the San Francisco History Center at the San Francisco Public Library, wouldn't you know, just in time for the reinstallation of her refurbished sundial in the playground this year.

I'm very excited to tackle this line-up (and more!) with our exceptional Board of Directors which, by the way, has two new members this year. **Matt Nichols** and **Denise LaPointe** hit the ground running after their election in November, with Matt assisting our exhibitions expert, **Harvey Newman,** in building our display galleries, and Denise starting our 2020 gala planning. **Save the date now:** it will be **May 17, 2020** at the Clubhouse at Presidio Golf Course. WNP is turning the legal-drinking age of 21 and we hope you'll join us for a toast. We'll provide dinner and a show while you catch up with old friends and leave with new ones.



Welcome to the WNP family, Matt and Denise, and welcome to a new decade, WNPers. We'll see you in the outside lands soon.



West Portal principal Charlotte Estes (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library).

Where in West S.F.?

Last issue's mystery photograph (at right) drew many incorrect guesses and some general frustration, but **Bruce Moore** knew exactly where we were when he saw it:

"This photo looks like others I have collected of workmen building the road originally called Stanley Drive, now known as Brotherhood Way. I think that they are all from the early or mid 1930s. The two concrete streets going up the hill are Sargent (right) and Shields (left). The crest of the hill is now topped with Brooks Park. The homes built along Sargent, Byxbee, Beverly, and Ralston Streets were all built by 1929. The major road below the homes is Junipero Serra [Boulevard].

"I always assumed that this project as well as the construction of Lake Merced Blvd in the '30s was a WPA [Works Progress Administration] program. The trees and crest of the hill above the workmen would have been part of the Ingleside Golf Club at that time, and soon to become the Parkmerced housing development.

"I can't tell from the photo posted in the newsletter, but it looks like the Mt. Davidson Cross might be seen just above the top of the ridge. That cross was wooden until 1931, and the current concrete cross was built and finished in 1934. I have not seen photos of the wooden cross, but if it was much smaller than current, then the date of the photos would be 1934 or later."



View east along gully to eastern prominence of Merced Heights, March 19, 1935. Workers creating Brotherhood Way as part of Lake Merced Boulevard project. (Detail of Department of Public works photograph A-4503; WNP Collection, wnp4.1669)

Well done, Bruce! There's not much for us to add. Other correct guessers for last issue's mystery image were **Margaret Ostermann** (and **Charlie** the dog), **Barbara Smith,** and **Pete Tannen.**



Time for another, easier, round. Tell us the location, date, and any other interesting fact or anecdote about the image at left. Mystery photographs with streetcars are usually very get-able!

Answers can be sent in multiple ways, even by United States Postal Service. (We love getting postcards from odd locales.) Our contact information is all on the inside cover.

Good luck!

Exhibition Spotlight

by Nicole Meldahl

San Francisco Ice Arena: Photographs by Darcie Westerlund

Thanks to funds raised at our 2019 Gala, we were able to launch a formal exhibition program last year with the opening of *San Francisco Ice Arena: Photographs by Darcie Westerlund* on December 7, 2019. On view through March 21, 2020, this exhibition showcases Westerlund's senior thesis while a photography student at the San Francisco Art Institute and offers a rare glimpse at one of the Sunset District's beloved businesses of yesteryear.

When it was demolished in 1991, the dilapidated but endearing ice rink on 48th Avenue near Kirkham Street was the oldest operating ice arena in the United States, opening in 1926. It was run by the Thurstons for decades, a true family affair, and generation after generation learned to slice the ice with flair from bona fide Ice Follies stars in this faux Swiss chalet. Unfortunately, the neighborhood gem wasn't profitable (more a labor of love) and the building was rapidly deteriorating by the end of the 1980s. The roof leaked, it wasn't seismically sound, and the arena no longer carried liability insurance—a reality patrons were warned about by a large sign at the entrance. Even though neighbors rallied to save it and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors investigated how they could cover the $3.5 million needed for upgrades, the writing was on the wall.

With the specter of demolition hanging over them, the Thurstons gave Darcie Westerlund unlimited access to the facility and she took advantage, climbing up into the rafters and exploring the brine room below. The work this journey produced is at once art and artifact, as much a thing of beauty as it is a remarkable historical record. This exhibition is a moment frozen in time. Her thoughtful compositions allow us to visit the ice rink one last time, evoking adolescent memories of watching from the sidelines before jumping onto the ice, seeing fellow skaters suspended in blurred animation at the edge, and savoring a post-skate cup of hot chocolate with your best friend or crush of the month.

Prior to the discovery of her work, we'd seen very few photos of the Ice Arena and we're so grateful we could feature it at our "Home for History." Darcie worked incredibly hard to curate this exhibition, producing souvenir catalogs and photo cubes that you can buy, along with the pieces on display. If you want to learn more about the San Francisco Ice Arena's surprising past, listen to *Outside Lands San Francisco Podcast* #331 or read an expanded article featuring photographs from the exhibition—both available on our website, Outsidelands.org.

Interested in sponsoring our next exhibition in honor of Golden Gate Park's 150th anniversary? Please email nicole@outsidelands.org for more details.



Lights Out, 20" x 24" color photographic print.



Hanging On!, 40" x 40" color photographic print.

Standard Oil Station 296

by Paul Judge

MEMORIES

Growing up in the Outer Richmond in the 1950s, there were a number of landmarks that etched lasting impressions on my childhood memories.

Stripped bare at the time of their spars and sails, the relic towers of the Murphy and Dutch windmills stood as sentries at the foot of Golden Gate Park. The pinnacle monuments to centuries of wind-powered labor stood forlorn, defying the elements of fog, wind, and rain blowing in from the Pacific Ocean.

Nearby the ship *Gjoa,* beached in its dry moat, rested in silent tribute to Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen's successful 1911 navigation across the Arctic.

Northward, beyond the abandoned U.S. Life Saving Station from Fulton Street to the base of Sutro Heights, spread Playland at the Beach. Playland, an amalgamation of amusement park rides, games of chance, cafes, pie shops, and popular eateries, drew and tantalized generations of patrons with all the robust sights, sounds, and smells of a seaside amusement park.

Continuing uphill along Point Lobos Avenue, and prominently holding court, were the sophisticated Cliff House overlooking the Pacific and, around the curve, the intriguing worn-and-torn vastness of Sutro Baths. Both buildings, carry-overs of elegance from the nineteenth century, presented the distinct gravitas of family elders. Overlooking them was Sutro Heights Park, once the grounds of Adolph Sutro's home, library, and highly manicured landscapes. After the death of his eldest daughter Dr. Emma Sutro Merritt, the property went to the city for public use and enjoyment.

These architectural edifices came into existence late in the age of horse-powered transportation and during development of rail and streetcar lines which brought visitors and eventually new neighborhoods to the Outside Lands. But with the advent of the automobile the luxury of private transportation tempted change upon the landscape. In place of livery stables, carriage providers, and wheelwrights came the advent of fueling stations, and one of these stations intrigued my childhood curiosity as much as any of the other Ocean Beach landmarks.

Inspired by nascent designs for the 1939-1940 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island, a unique



The cover of the *Standard Chevron* magazine's July-August 1954 issue featured "picturesque #296" in a painting by city artist Louis Macouillard (Courtesy of Chevron Corporation Archives).

Standard Oil service station opened with fanfare on at the northeast corner of 48th Avenue at the intersection of El Camino del Mar and Point Lobos Avenue on January 29, 1938. Strategically located on the newly dedicated route of San Francisco's 49 Mile Scenic Drive, the station paid totem tribute to its seaside location using a lighthouse motif with a blue florescent globe atop a 191-foot tower.

While the tower paid maritime tribute with its prominent ocean-facing location, in all manner of function Stand Oil station #296 was a full service station with multiple fuel pumps, lubricant racks, station manager's office, a mechanical bay, and lift to provide customers a full complement of automotive services.

Some of my family had maritime jobs and I was precociously interested in all matters pertaining to the ocean. From my bedroom window I listened to the cacophony from foghorns, bell buoys, ship's whistles, ocean waves, and barking sea lions on Seal Rocks.

I had been told the reason that our parish church, St. Thomas the Apostle at 40th Avenue and Balboa Street, hadn't installed church bells in its steeple, unlike that of St. Monica's at 24th Avenue and Geary Boulevard, was because bell chimes might confuse mariners with the hammering clang of the bell buoys marking the entrance to the Golden Gate.

I was greatly amused by the service station, but Mile Rock Lighthouse, which stood nearby offshore, it definitely was not. Standard Oil's company publication, *Standard Chevron,* touted that its blue florescent globe could be seen for many miles at sea. My kid logic bubbled in alarm that the station's beacon could confuse mariners and contribute to a ship plowing ashore at Lands End, as many historic wrecks attested.



Detail of an aerial photograph taken by Harrison Ryker in 1938 shows Standard Oil station #296 surrounded by undeveloped blocks at 48th Avenue and Point Lobos Avenue. (David Rumsey Historical Map Collection).

I would ply my dad and uncles with questions about if the service station's tower and lamp might confuse mariners attempting to traverse the Golden Gate. I had to be satisfied with their explanations that larger vessels had radar to aid their navigation and that local fishing boat operators were too smart to be confused by the station's anemic blue lamp. "Son, that tower is so high on most foggy nights it's shrouded from sight."

I don't recall that my family were customers at that station. I was too young too drive and my parents customarily filled the family car at the "Flying A" at 33rd Avenue and Geary Boulevard, owned by a pal of my dad's from his pre-World War II days as a service station attendant. Mid-century, convenience and appeal played a role in customer loyalty.

According to WNP member and local historian John Freeman, in the 1950s the Richmond District from Masonic Avenue to the Great Highway had 48 service stations. Competition must have been keen. Customers of that period recall that when pulling in to a service station, attendants not only put fuel in the gas tank, they also cleaned windshields and side windows, checked the water level of the radiator and battery cells, measured the engine oil level and tire air pressure—all free of charge. Price also played a role where customers gassed up. Through the 1950s, fuel prices ranged from 21 to 29 cents per gallon. When word got around that a station operator had dropped prices to wage a "gas war" with neighboring competitors, you could bet that lines of cars formed with customers waiting to "top off."

"Gas station were nearly as plentiful as bars along Geary Boulevard," local Jim Gallagher remembered. "I do remember that Standard Oil had a particularly high standard of dress: clean white pressed uniforms with bow ties on their service (remember that) attendants. They always addressed each client with a clearly designed greeting that included the product name several times while offering to check your oil, battery, and air pressure."

Service station operators also lured economically-minded customers with savings stamps, dishware, free road maps, and candy and balloons for kids.

With all this in mind, Standard Oil may have bet that a uniquely designed station would give them a small edge.

Recalled

A school chum's memories: "I was with my dad going to the beach to surf fish. We drove around the backside of Lands End before the 1957 earthquake finally closed El Camino del Mar. After passing by the memorial to the cruiser *USS San Francisco,* we approached that lighthouse service station.

It was brightly reflecting the late-day sun. To me it seemed as beautiful as the City of Oz. It's a photographic impression that has stayed with me."

Many a neighborhood kid remembers riding their bicycles to the station to fill air in their tires or skateboarding past on their descent towards Kelly's Cove. One kid said he tried passing a counterfeit bill he was rooked for at Playland for coin change at the station, but chickened out.

Ray Shanahan writes that sometimes on his early morning newspaper delivery route he'd stop by before the station opened and help himself to a bottle of soda pop. "It was easily liberated from a cabinet top vending machine set outside the office doorway." No doubt Ray later confessed his trespasses during confession at St. Thomas.



Standard Oil service station #296 in *Standard Chevron* magazine April 1940 issue. (Courtesy of Chevron Corporation Archives).

Monterey Morrissey lived nearby with his family at the Marine Exchange Lookout at Lands End. "When I was hanging around, the Standard Oil service station was run by a gentleman named Ken Cooey. He'd let me come in early mornings and refill all the quart glass bottles of 20-, 30-, and 40-weight motor oil, then put them out in the racks on the islands between the pumps. I did get to pump gas a few times, but since that was somebody's full time job back in the days of full service, it was only to lend a hand when they were really busy in the garage end of the business and the mechanic couldn't.

"By the way, the light really did work up on top and it was one hell of a ladder climb, trailing a sack on a tether holding the new bulb and going rung after rung in a pitch-black narrow tube to the fixture at the top—a very fond memory growing up. They also had a water spigot at the back of the building which was a favorite with kids during the annual Seal Rock Drive water balloon fights we had where we invented a game of 'water balloon heats.'

> **"…the light really did work up on top and it was one hell of a ladder climb…"**

"Oh yeah, that Coke machine, which I also got to refill from time to time, was one of those that the bottles hung on a rack by the neck and sat in a basin of ice-cold water. It also had grape Nehi and Fanta! A side note was that the infamous Rich Goldy lived next door, first house on Point Lobos, who was Mr. Corvette! He used to race for "pinks" on the Great Highway, Brotherhood Way, anywhere with a straight-away. After the Standard Station closed, the neighborhood's 'gearhead' business all migrated up to Jim and Moe's Mobil station at 39th and Geary."

Another storied neighborhood figure writes that he, and sometimes a pal or two, would "jaw with" station employees when business was slow and wager games of chance. He also created mischief, climbing inside to the top of the tower to echo down cat-calls and harass employees and customers. "They had a hell of a time trying to get me to come down!"

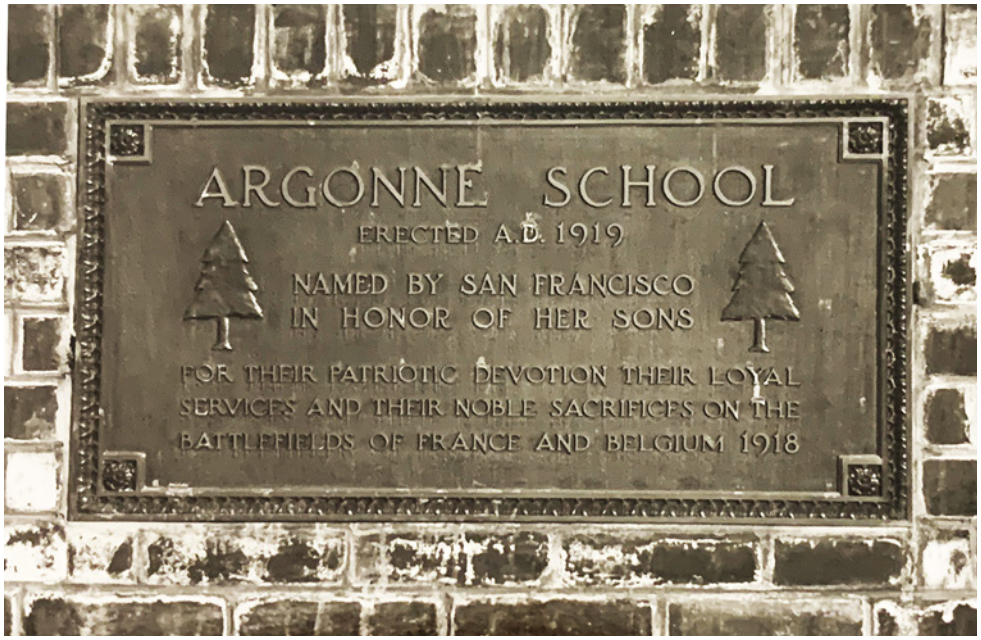
Photos through time of this service station portray changes in the immediate area. No other buildings surround the station in the late 1930s. But by the late 1940s and '50s, houses had been built and Seal Rock Drive connected Clement Street at 46th Avenue to El Camino del Mar. The front cover of the July-August 1954 *Standard Chevron* magazine shows a reproduction from an original painting by San Francisco artist Louis Macouillard of "Lighthouse Station #296" when it was manned by Station Manager H. R. Christensen, Assistant J. B Selph, and salesmen C. A. Carlson and S. Ekstrand.

The following year, a photo and caption in the *Standard Chevron* of May-June 1955 showed that seventeen years of salt air, sun, and storms took their toll. The steel and glass housing of the "lighthouse" was repaired and lowered back in place atop the tower. Time and changing economics finally ended the station in the mid 1960s when Standard sold the property. Apartments replaced the station and still stand today.

Argonne Elementary School Celebrates a Century

by Nicole Meldahl

This year we mark the 100th anniversary of Argonne Elementary at 680 18th Avenue between Balboa and Cabrillo Streets, just around the corner from our "Home for History" at 1617 Balboa Street. We're assisting the Argonne Parent-Teacher Organization (P.T.O.) as the school celebrates its past this year. Keep an eye on OutsideLands.org, as well as our social media channels (@outsidelandz or @outsidelands) for the latest lineup of events. But first, we'll go back, way back, to 1919…



Dedicatory plaque, now embedded near the flagpole in the school playground. "Argonne School, Erected A.D. 1919. Named by San Francisco in Honor of Her Sons. For Their Patriotic Devotion, Their Loyal Services, and Their Noble Sacrifices on the Battlefield of France and Belgium, 1918." (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, AAD-3511.)

Why Argonne?

As the second decade of the twentieth-century came to a close, San Francisco was modernizing its aging schools thanks to a 1918 bond measure, and the world was recovering from a war unlike any other. "San Francisco's Own," dough boys with the 363rd Infantry and the 347th Field Artillery Regiments, were returning home for good and it was in this atmosphere of anticipation mixed with sorrow that a school in the Richmond District was named for a battlefield forest in France.

In April 1919, the Board of Education passed a resolution to name the first school slated for construction after the signing of the Armistice in honor of the San Franciscans who served. The thoroughly modern Argonne School was built quickly by the Board of Public Works. Designed by John Reid, Jr., the structure was fireproof, featuring a brick veneer exterior and a terra cotta Spanish tiled roof that framed 18 classrooms, a 300-seat auditorium with a "motion picture lamphouse," a nurse's room that could handle medical and dental exams, and other rooms for staff.[1] Particular attention was paid to a model kindergarten which had a southern exposure with clear access to sand boxes in the school's large and well-landscaped playground.[2]

A dedication ceremony held on February 22, 1920, George Washington's Birthday, included speakers from the Boards of Education and Supervisors, the Park-Presidio Improvement Association, and the 363rd Infantry Regiment Association with music provided by soloist Alice Bradley, accompanied on piano by Lillian Slinkey Durini. The main event was the raising of two flags gifted to the school by Mrs. Cynthia M. Shaw in honor of her son, Corporal Chauncey R. Frank, a casualty of the Argonne drive. Presented by Major Edward J. Mitchell, one flag honored the 363rd Infantry while the other was a silk banner with a staff bearing a silver plaque engraved: "In Memory of Our Beloved Son, Corporal Chauncey R. Frank, Argonne Battle, October 4, 1918."

The flags were unfurled and raised by members of the Polytechnic and Lowell High School R.O.T.C. as the "Star Spangled Banner" played. Major Mitchell paid tribute to his fallen comrade and their shared experiences in France: "This school will be a memorial, at once the source of perpetuation of an achievement which will not only record the heroism of the men of the 363rd Infantry and that of Corporal Frank, but will pass the story from generation to generation."[3] This sentiment was reflected in a plaque that graced the main staircase into the school until the early 1970s.

Room to Play, Space to Grow

A fitting tribute to San Francisco's sons, the school was a gift to the city's children as a welcome relief to overcrowding and its solution: unpopular half-day classes that plagued the Board of Education for decades. But by 1922, Argonne was also impacted and forced to construct five portable buildings on the playground. While necessary, this response elicited immediate criticism and calls for expansion. Things came to a head in 1925 as the school was struggling to accommodate 1,400 students and parents were fed up with half-day sessions, complaining that the alternative schedule disrupted family life and left children too tired to do homework after coming home late.[4]

Nearly 100 citizens came to the Board of Education's March meeting, demanding a solution. The Board was severely criticized by Acting Mayor

Ralph McLeran (whose sister was Argonne's principal) for its delay in addressing congestion, fueled by a report that found a lack of room to play had caused "inferior sanitation" promoting the spread of disease. In a dramatic turn, the report was confirmed by a private investigator hired by new board member, Ira W. Coburn, to look into allegations of overcrowding. Coburn sponsored a resolution to build an emergency school before the end of summer 1926 that was immediately adopted, and the City Architect was ordered the next day to expedite construction on a 15-room temporary building for overflow at 24th Avenue between Balboa and Cabrillo Streets.

A key facet of the overcrowding debate was adequate space to play, aligning with a larger movement that sought to turn all vacant city lots and school land into playgrounds that would stay open beyond school terms. In November 1925, the Argonne P.T.A. secured a tract from the Board of Education for a playground that ran almost to 17th Avenue. Then, the Argonne P.T.A. petitioned the Recreation Department to use Argonne's school yard as a public playground during vacation months in June 1927. The next month the Recreation Department made funds available to hire a playground director and install additional equipment for younger and older children. Initially tried as an experiment, the program was incredibly popular and a permanent supervisor was engaged for the yard which underwent various upgrades over the years. Argonne paved the way for better play, and the yard remains open on weekends for children in the neighborhood to this day.



Participants in a "Captain Fortune" drawing contest gathered at Argonne Playground on July 31, 1956. (San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, AAE-0020.)

Student Life Over Time

Argonne often found itself gracing the pages of local newspapers and this coverage gives us a taste of student life over time. From the school's founding through (we think) the 1940s, Argonne students competed in the citywide Children's Pet Exhibit—a holdover event from the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915.

As "a feature" of the physical education program, annual Halloween festivals and patriotic pageants were held with parades and dancing, usually supported by the school's orchestra or the Municipal Band.[5] These events often commemorated the nation's complicated past even as they utilized cutting-edge technology of the day. In January 1925, the pageant focused on historical episodes, highlighting world events such as the Crusades and an array of figures, from William the Conquerer to Eli Whitney to Betsy Ross. Students researched and wrote their scenes, created their own costumes, and captured the day with 100 distributed cameras; part of the exercise was to master the new photographic art of the "snapshot."



Students preparing for the Children's Pet Exhibit at Argonne Playground, 1940s. (WNP Collection; wnp26.1565)

In 1927, students felt "they should have an extra special celebration of Armistice day because of their school name," and a Pageant of All Nations came to life as each class was assigned a nationality. The "My Own United States" pageant in October 1933 also presented successive periods of American history, "from the time of Indian domination to the modern era," and students dressed as World War I soldiers and Red Cross workers but also as Indians and "Dixie folks of the Old South" complete with children in black face—cultural appropriation that would never be tolerated today. Although not useful to judge people of the past with twenty-first century standards, moments like these are welcome reminders of how far we've come and how far we have still to go.[6]

Articles also highlight the warm relationship Argonne children had with members of the surrounding community, like the mounted policemen who acted as crossing guards from the 1940s

through the 1960s. From 1947 to 1950, Officer Emmett Hanley and his horse, Snippy, were assigned to Argonne's intersection at 17th Avenue and Balboa Street. Snippy took students on short rides through the neighborhood, and the pair was so beloved that Snippy is the only horse to be awarded a diploma, which he received during 6th grade graduation ceremonies in 1948. When Snippy hit the ripe old age of 18 in 1950, Argonne students threw him a retirement party that March. They held a parade and presented him with carrots and apples, handwritten notes and crayon drawings—bringing a tear to Officer Hanley's eye.

Beginning around 1952, Officer Edward Lawson was assigned to the school with his horse, Tom. When he was critically concussed after falling from his horse while chasing a bicycle thief through Golden Gate Park in June 1965, the students raised $180 to purchase a television set, and marched more than four and a half miles from the school to the Lawson home at 2558 38th Avenue to present it to him along with a "deluge of get-well cards." They sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" when they reached their destination, which caused the good officer to weep.[7] If you're keeping track, the kids are 2-for-2 in making grown men cry from joy. For this act of kindness, the San Francisco Giants treated all kids involved to a game at Candlestick Park.



Officer Emmett Hanley and "Snippy" at the horse's retirement on March 25, 1950. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.)



For many years, the school made do with a combination of temporary structures before funding was acquired for the Argonne's current iteration. (San Francisco Unified School District collection, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, AAD-3505.

Argonne Looks Pretty Good for 100

In February 1971, the San Fernando earthquake in Southern California prompted the State Legislature to refocus on compliance with the Field Act of 1933. This meant all schools in the State had to be brought seismically up to code by January 1975. The Board of Education met that April to discuss structural inadequacies in school buildings following a report by City Architect Charles Griffith, who identified Argonne's exterior brick veneer walls, once hailed for their fireproof properties, as hazardous. Since they couldn't be removed without completely reconstructing the buildings, the school's days were numbered. In total, six schools were ordered shut.

Argonne officially closed its doors on May 11, 1971, and was declared not worth fixing by structural engineer Henry J. Degenkolb a month later. By late July the *San Francisco Examiner* ran a call for bids to raze Argonne, and materials were sold for scrap under an advertised headline of "NOW Wrecking Argonne School" in September 1971. Students were bussed to the Sunset District's Francis Scott Key School in the afternoons, with classes going until 5:00 p.m., and Kindergarten classes were sent to the nearby Sutro School Annex.

Teachers were anxious about the lack of information on the school's future, parents were concerned about the stress of double sessions, but the students weathered it well (as long as they were able to keep their teachers). As always, children are resilient. Sometimes supplies were hard to come by, but everyone adjusted and Francis Scott Key even had a cake awaiting the new arrivals.

After reopening in 1976, Argonne became a local pioneer for year-round education. The modern "pod" structure classrooms enabled maximum flexibility, and it was hoped the new program would allow children to advance at their own pace. In 1994, San Francisco voters approved Proposition A, a $95 million bond package that paid for construction and renovation projects in the city's public schools, enabling Argonne to replace portable bungalows with a new building constructed in 1997. This is the Argonne we see today.

We Remember When

The *Richmond ReView* interviewed alumnae when Argonne celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1995, and Robert Troppmann remembered the school as a "home away from home," particularly the playground where neighborhood kids would spend their free time long after graduating.[8] Memories of pivotal shared moments, like the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and unforgettable staff like the school's janitor, Mr. Sanguinetti, who lived next door and was a father figure to students, also found space in the article.

As the school celebrates its centennial this year, we encourage you to share your memories of Argonne. Tell us your stories, send us your photographs. The things you remember might feel trivial, maybe even unimportant, but each story is a thread in the woven tapestry of our community history. We hope to hear from you soon.

Notes

1. "U.S. Tributes to Washington," *San Francisco Examiner,* February 22, 1920.

2. "New School to be Dedicated," *San Francisco Examiner,* February 8, 1920.

3. "Banners Given to New School at Dedication," *San Francisco Chronicle,* February 23, 1920.

4. "Half-Day Plan of School Hit," *San Francisco Chronicle,* February 4, 1925.

5. "Argonne School Pupils Take Part in Annual Holiday Party," *San Francisco Chronicle,* October 30, 1926.

6. "Pupils Appear in Pageant of U.S. History," *San Francisco Chronicle,* October 29, 1933; "History Told in Dances," *San Francisco Chronicle,* October 29, 1933.

7. "Policeman's Friends Take In Ball Game," *San Francisco Chronicle,* August 18, 1965.

8. "Argonne Elementary celebrates 75th anniversary," *Richmond ReView,* December 1994



Argonne Alternative School under construction, January 23, 1997. Photo by Jason Doly, Richmond Review Newspaper Collection courtesy of Paul Kozakiewicz; wnp07.00200.)

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Historical Happenings

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Mountain Lake to Lobos Creek Walk

February 15, 2020 (Saturday) 10:30 AM–12:00 NOON

John Martini will lead a Presidio walk along the edge of the Richmond District. Join us to learn about lake and creek natural history, a Spanish colonialist campground, a little-known cemetery and hospital, and a balloon-launching site. Nearby MUNI routes include the 1-California and 28-19th Avenue buses. $5 reservation fee to attend and there is a maximum capacity of 30 people. We will confirm reservations with the walk's starting point.

OpenSFHistory All-Stars

February 28, 2020 (Friday) 7:00 PM–8:30 PM
WNP Home for History, 1617 Balboa Street at 17th Avenue
$10 for member, $20 for non-members

David Gallagher, Nicole Meldahl, and special all-star guests will give a rundown of intriguing favorites from our ever-expanding OpenSFHistory archive. You never know who may show up or what astounding mysteries their photographs will uncover. This will be peak history-nerd fun, and it will sell out, so get your tickets soon.

Ice Skating in San Francisco

March 12, 2020 (Thursday) 7:00 PM–8:00 PM
WNP Home for History, 1617 Balboa Street at 17th Avenue
$10 for member, $20 for non-members

In support of our current exhibition, *San Francisco Ice Arena: Photographs by Darcie Westerlund,* Nicole Meldahl will chronicle the ice skating craze that first arrived in San Francisco with the Techau Ice Palace in 1916. When the Sunset's beloved rink on 48th and Kirkham was demolished in 1991, it was the oldest operating ice arena in the United States—outlasting other San Francisco favorites like Leggs, Winterland, and Sutro's at the beach. Bring your memories and leave with things you learn. Light snacks and refreshments provided.

Sunset Branch Library Open House

March 21, 2020 (Saturday) 1:00 PM–5:00 PM
Sunset Branch Library, 1305 18th Avenue
Free to the public

Western Neighborhoods Project will offer local history to Sunset District visitors and residents alike. Last year featured book and prize giveaways, fun activities, and snacks, as well as a speaker series.

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Our thanks to the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development for its support of select events

Monumental Golden Gate Park Reception

March 28, 2020 (Saturday) 5:00 PM–8:00 PM
WNP Home for History, 1617 Balboa Street—Free

Join us at the opening reception for *Monumental Golden Gate Park,* co-curated by San Francisco Recreation and Park Historian in Residence, Christopher Pollock, and showcasing artwork by Richmond District resident Patrick Mahar. Refreshments and light snacks provided.

Golden Gate Park, known for its natural beauty, is also home to a remarkable collection of public art with monuments and memorials. Our second exhibition of the year explores the history of the park's cultural landscape features by placing selections from the OpenSFHistory collection and rare artifacts in dialogue with watercolors and illustrations.

NightLife at the Academy

April 2, 2020 (Thursday) 6:00 PM–10:00 PM
California Academy of Sciences, Golden Gate Park

Enjoy music, creatures, and cocktails around the theme of "Hella NightLife," a celebration of all things uniquely San Francisco Bay Area. Visit the Western Neighborhoods Project table to see a display of cool facts and photos, and attend a talk on Golden Gate Park history by Woody LaBounty in the Planetarium. For adults 21+ with ID. Tickets are around $15 (depending on how early you snag them) and must be purchased through the California Academy of Sciences.

Golden Gate Park 150 Community Day

April 4, 2020 (Saturday)
Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park is celebrating its 150th anniversary, and Western Neighborhoods Project is a community partner of the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department for a year of commemorative events. This all kicks off with an April 4th Community Day in the park that will include special activities like a much-anticipated 150-foot observation wheel, entertainment, food offerings, and more. Details are still in the works but mark you calendars now for a day of fun.

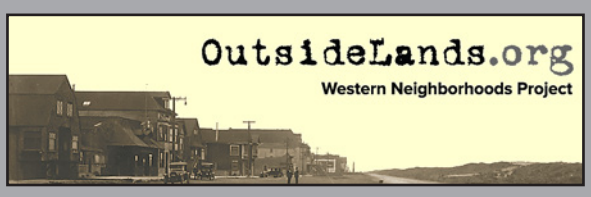
The Last Word



People are at the heart of everything we do at WNP and that's because people are at the heart of history. One of our biggest challenges as public historians is to make our field relevant, and explain to those outside our amazing community of fellow history enthusiasts why events or places of the past should matter to them. It may be hard to connect with stiff portraits and unfamiliar landscapes frozen in black-and-white. But photographs, particularly amateur snapshots, are a remarkable way to access the past.

This image from OpenSFHistory's Marilyn Blaisdell Collection (wnp70.0819) courtesy of her daughter, Molly, shows four women strolling through Chinatown around 1900. Their clothes are different, the dirt road long since paved, but spending an afternoon running errands with friends still looks exactly the same. Packages in hand, holding onto your hat while dodging obstacles on a bustling city street, nevertheless deep in conversation with your three companions—that is San Francisco, yesterday and today, and finding universal humanity throughout time is what makes history worth hearing.

—Nicole Meldahl



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.