Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

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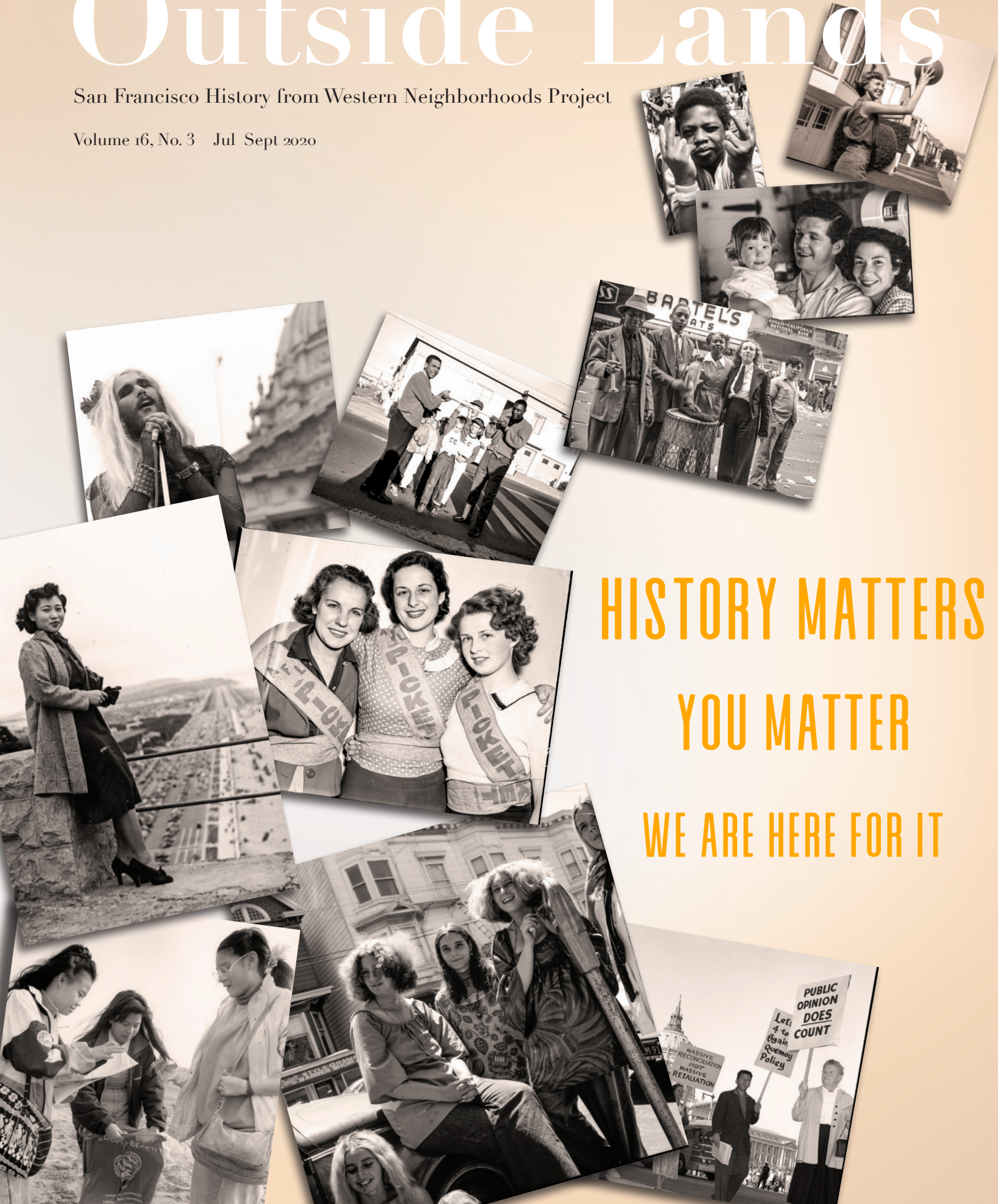
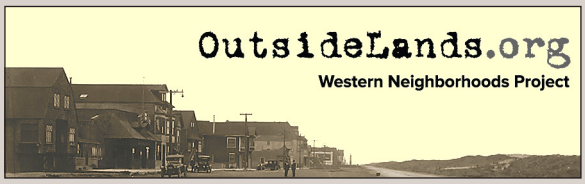


HISTORY MATTERS

YOU MATTER

WE ARE HERE FOR IT



Outside Lands

History from Western Neighborhoods Project
(Previously issued as SF West History)

July-Sept 2020: Volume 16, Number 3

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Inside the Outside Lands



There is one phrase I've uttered constantly since we were forced to shutter our Balboa Street *Home for History* in March: "What a time to be a historian!" Worldwide pandemic and social justice protests have landed on our doorstep. And what, exactly, should our role be as the friendly neighborhood history group?

We're here to bring the history: keeping it relevant and making it fun. Even though our gallery installations are paused for the duration of the year, we continue to research, write articles, and record podcasts that provide critical context for these complicated times. We relaunched our history videos with Richmond District filmmaker **Joey Yee**, and took our Education Initiative public, sponsored by the **Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People (SHARP),** by reading classic San Francisco tales on "WNP Story Time"—bringing the joy of history to kids of all ages in their living rooms.

But it's no fun if everything is online! In May, WNP turned the whole city into an outdoor museum with our "Guerrilla Historian" project that turned every photo on OpenSFHistory into a printable poster. Everyone can participate and it's a great way get outside and explore your neighborhood. We're also gearing up to bring you history walks in real life (pending any COVID-19 curveballs), as well as tons of virtual Zoom events through the end of year. These are courtesy of a generous grant from the **Office of Economic and Workforce Development** through the **Invest in Neighborhoods Program.**

We've been physically distanced for months but the beauty of history is the unity, the togetherness, it can inspire around a shared sense of place. The challenge of history, however, is that it often reflects the experiences of a privileged few. This is where we come in as neighborhood historians—presenting our shared past from the community's point of view. In the pages that follow, you'll hear **Sterling Sakai's** memories of growing up in the Richmond District across from Argonne Elementary in the 1950s and 1960s. His was the first personal history we inked this year and it has inspired me to do more. Especially now that we have **Brie Silva**, an incredible intern from the University of San Francisco's Museum Studies graduate program, transcribing and editing each history within days. Documenting the past from the community's point of view has always been an integral goal of WNP, and we're excited to keep doing this work while sheltered in place.

You'll also read about Emma Sutro Merritt, more commonly referred to as Adolph Sutro's daughter, who was one of the earliest female physicians in California and executrix of her father's complicated estate. Board President **Chelsea Sellin** has been researching Emma as a pioneering "Woman of the West Side" to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women earning the right to vote. Finally, our OpenSFHistory feature this quarter gives context to a powerful series of photographs that show the break-up of a peaceful 1963 protest at the Mel's Drive-In on Geary. This demonstration helped to launch a citywide movement focused on fair hiring practices, and it all started in our Outside Lands backyard.

It's hard to know the right thing to say in these historic times, so we'll let history and San Franciscans, past and present, do the talking. Because History matters, You matter, and We are Here for It. Here's to moving the past forward, together, as members of the WNP family.

-Nicole Meldahl, Executive Director



Joey Yee as our featured Guerilla Historian on KTVU Channel 2 News in May.
(Courtesy of and by Nicole Meldahl)



"Women of the West Side" on the Bob Sled Dipper Rollercoaster at Chutes at the Beach, circa 1920. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.02144)

WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

Our mystery photo from the last issue didn't generate too much buzz. Was it too easy? Was everyone too distracted by the unfolding pandemic? For those who guessed and kept it to yourselves, you were right! White Hat McCarthy is at the Polo Fields in Golden Gate Park, known at the time as the Golden Gate Park Stadium.



This photo is from one of two books titled "Album of San Francisco" created by Hamilton Henry Dobbin and permanently residing in the California History Room at the California State Library in Sacramento. Dobbin was a San Francisco Police Officer for 35 years and his photo collection captures people, places, and events in the city from 1838 through 1927. The distinctive handwritten notes connected to each photo in his collection are succinct, informative, and often showcase a wry sense of humor. Perhaps this is the projection of a 21st-century historian, but "made many fortunes died poor" displays a whiff of sardonic wit. Then again, it's more likely to be the quick and dirty shorthand of a seasoned policeman writing down the facts…and nothing but the facts.

Margaret Ostermann and her dog, **Charlie,** were inspired to follow in White Hat McCarthy's tracks. Charlie is our fluffiest Guerilla Historian and the pair are more well-traveled than many of us house-bound historians these days. Margaret not only guessed the location correctly, she went deep researching and reported her findings. After reading "The Man Who Won a Fortune: the life and times of Daniel 'Whitehat' McCarty" (September 2017) on local historian **Elizabeth Creely's** blog, Magaret and Charlie biked to Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma. Alas, they weren't able to find him and she's curious if anyone else had better luck?

Margaret went on to say "what a treat he was to find in old newspaper articles…My favourite, of course, being the *San Francisco Call* article of October 18, 1904 titled 'His White Hat Now A Memory.'" This article began: "The white hat of 'White Hat McCarthy' is no more. Vandals have sacrilegiously filled its depths with duck soup, mayonnaise, patte de fois gras and other foreign substances, which may nourish mortals but are fatal to millinery." Margaret "can't help but wonder if he owed those 'vandals' money."

White Hat McCarthy was photographed during an amateur harness race. The Golden Gate Park Stadium opened on July 4, 1906 with an Athletic Carnival that celebrated San Francisco's survival of the earthquake and fire. Horse racing was first held here on May 12, 1907 and, as **Angus Macfarlane** notes in his article "Speed Roads and Polo Fields" on Outsidelands.org, the Park Amateur Driving Association held Saturday light harness races on the track during the spring and summer. No professional (or women) drivers allowed and absolutely no betting. These races were so popular they inspired construction of a grandstand, donated by the Driving Club in 1909. Harness races happened on summer weekends for decades and opening of the season in 1915 brought 5,000 spectators to the Stadium.



Charlie with the Polo Field clocker's tower in the distance. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

You don't find harness races in the park anymore, or polo for that matter, but you can normally find a fair number of joggers and bicyclists circling the track—another historic use for this Golden Gate Park landmark.

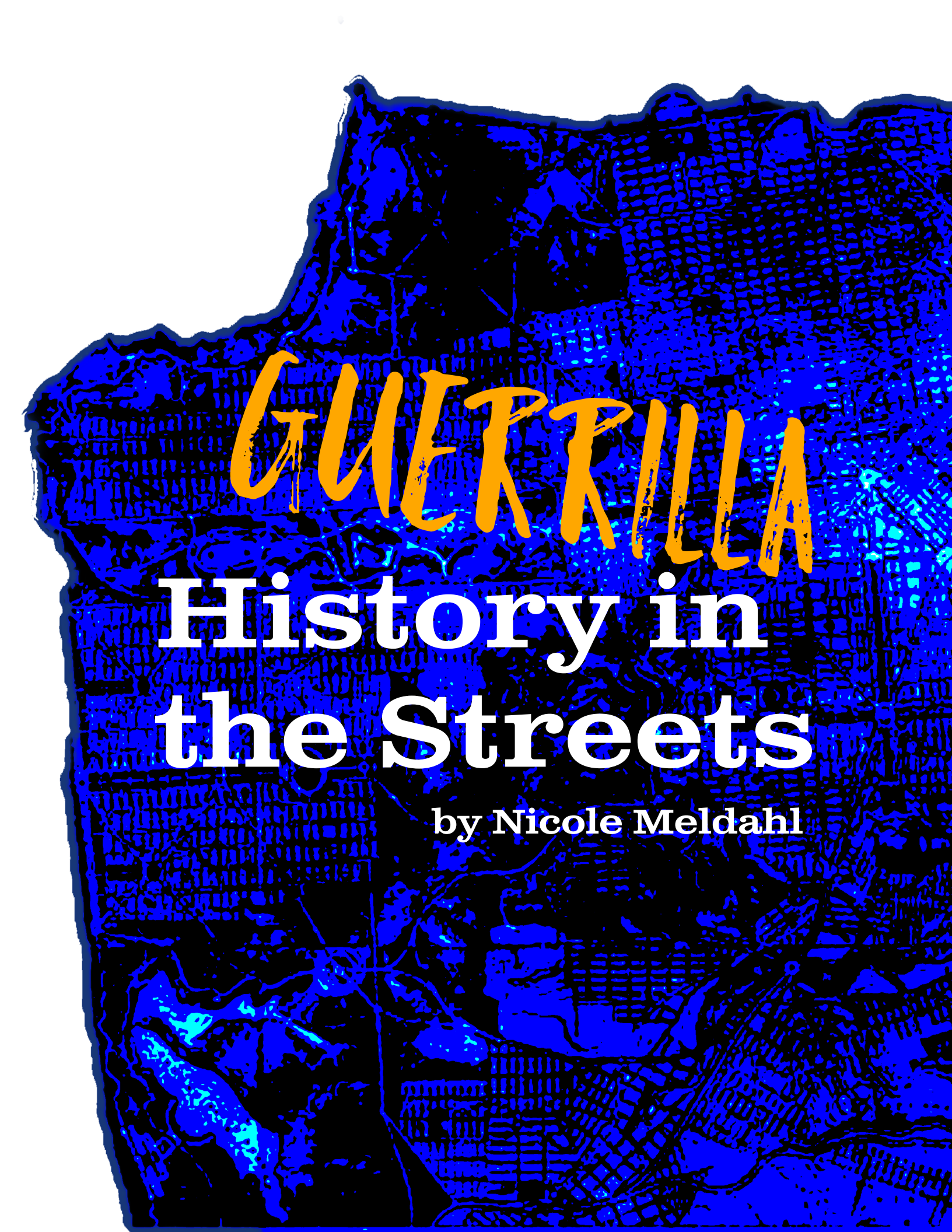
Time for the next round. Does this 1970s-era scene jog any memories for you? Send your guesses via email to nicole@outsidelands.org or any other contact listed in this magazine or on our website. Tell us where, the orientation, and anything else you can remember about the places featured in this photo. We can't wait to hear from you!



Harness race in progress at the Golden Gate Park Stadium, circa 1909.
(Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.03853)

Where, oh where, is Municipal Railway PCC streetcar #1122??




GUERRILLA
History in the Streets
by Nicole Meldahl



A mysterious Guerrilla Historian installing one of our OpenSFHistory posters out in the neighborhood. (Courtesy of David Gallagher)

From its launch in 2014, the purpose of our OpenSFHistory Program was to make San Francisco history easily accessible to people. This is why each image on the website features a prominent "Download" button to the right, allowing anyone to take watermarked photographs and use them on websites or social media free-of-charge. History often suffers from Gate Keeper Syndrome, with "experts" claiming exclusive territory over specific subjects, but we believe community history is a community project. We want our hard work highlighting our shared history out in the world, not under glass behind a locked door or a paywall.

Fast forward to 2020. As the shelter-in-place order went from March to April to May, we pushed more of our programming online but worried about those of you who weren't born-digital and aren't computer savvy. Then our friends at **San Francisco Heritage** began seeing our OpenSFHistory images printed and posted in windows and on telephone poles. This is what we'd been looking for: a family-friendly activity to get people away from their computer screens and out into the streets, sharing the joy of history with their neighbors.

In May, **David Gallagher** had the genius idea to turn over 50,000 photographs on OpenSFHistory.org into easily printable posters. Simply hitting the "Poster" button next to every image reformats the photograph with a shortened description and a QR code, linking people back to the website in case they want to learn more. We can't spread this joy alone so we asked you to join the WNP Street Team and become a Guerilla Historian. Goodness gracious, did you answer the call. We knew it was a neat idea but we were overwhelmed by all the attention it received. Posters began popping up all across the city and all over the internet. Your work caught the attention of local journalists **Peter Hartlaub**, who profiled the project in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article; **Amber Lee**, who featured us in a segment on KTVU Channel 2 News; and **Teresa Hammerl**, who wrote a great article on it for *Hoodline.*

Seeing the city's past in situ provides context and enables a richer understanding of how our neighborhoods came to be in the present. We may be physically distanced but at least we can gather around a shared sense of place, one poster at a time. Who knows how long this pandemic will last but we look forward to seeing you in the streets soon.

Sterling Sakai
Remembers

We connected with Sterling Sakai while helping Argonne Elementary School commemorate its 100th anniversary in February of this year. Growing up at 631 18th Avenue across the street from Argonne in the 1950s and 1960s, his memories bring the neighborhood just outside our 1617 Balboa Street office to life with incredible detail. In the excerpts you'll read below, Sterling remembers timeless places you can still visit, like Joe's Ice Cream and the 4-Star Theatre, as well as places that are long-gone or repurposed, like Alice's candy shop and the Alexandria Theatre. It was a joy to walk in his steps through a neighborhood that evokes so many memories for us all.



Alice's Fountain Lunch at 594 18th Avenue alongside Bob's Barber Shop and Shaddy Realty, 1951. (SF Assessors Office Negative Collection / wnp458.919)

Alice and Bob on Balboa

Close to home, on the corner of 18th Avenue and Balboa Street, was Alice's candy store. It was the best. As kids in the early 1950s, it was where we got most of our candy. A tiny store, you walked in the front door and came face-to-face with a glass case showing rows of 1-cent candies. Just great! Alice had two little round tables with three chairs each. There was a marble counter that had (I think) three stools. Between the counter and the candy case was her modest cash register counter. She made little things like ice cream cones, sandwiches, coffee, tea, soda from the fountain right behind the counter. There was a room behind the candy case with a bright colored curtain of some kind instead of a door. I remember Alice was a friendly little lady with flaming red hair, always smiling and wore colorful clothes. She was a pip!

Next door was Bob's Barber Shop where I got my haircuts. It's funny to remember that my Mom always wanted to save money by cutting my hair herself. She bought this awkwardly designed haircutter that worked by squeezing the handles together, making the teeth of the scissors come together to cut the hair. Problem was that instead of cutting hair it often just pulled hair. It hurt and because my Mom was not skillful but very determined, I ended up with gouges and clumps of hair making me look like a dog with a splotchy skin disease. Thankfully, she gave up and sent me to Bob's barbershop. I think I remember Mom giving me 25 cents for the haircut and 5 cents tip.

Bob was a quiet, serious yet friendly man who had two barber chairs but never had a partner (to my knowledge). His waiting area was a row of six metal chairs with pads attached as forearm rests against the wall, and there was a small table of raggedy old magazines. He had a small sink in the rear corner of the shop behind the chair he used to cut hair or shave faces, next to a wall that separated a small room Bob used for his stuff and a tiny bathroom with just a toilet. I think Bob loved his spirits as I often watched as he poured liquid from a small flask into his ever-full coffee cup. In the common wall between his shop and Alice's, they cut a small square opening to create a window for Alice to provide drinks & sandwiches to Bob and other men waiting for a haircut or just hanging out. These guys always seem to be there, smoking, talking, drinking "coffee."

Going Down Geary

Toward 17th Avenue on Geary Boulevard was Dave's Sporting Goods where I loved to look at equipment I could never afford. Later on, in the 1960s, I rented gear to go on Troop 12 Boy Scouting ski trips. On the corner of 17th and Geary was a bookstore possibly called Canterbury Books where I bought used books, school supplies, and was first introduced to Cliff Notes (hated by all my English teachers). A Russian deli called Tic Toc (I think) on Geary between 18th and 19th Avenues is where I was introduced to piroshkies and 5 cent dill pickles we picked out of a big wooden barrel filled with liquid brine, the smell of which I can still remember to this day. We got containers of ice cream from Joe's Ice Cream on the corner of 18th Avenue and Geary, and occasionally my Mom treated me to the hamburger special – hamburger, chips and a large shake for 50 cents. What a special treat!





Looking west on Geary near 18th Avenue, 1950. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.10021)



Concession staff, ushers, managers, and women in show girl costumes in the Alexandria Theatre lobby June 1960. (Jack Tillmany Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp67.0001)

The theatre itself had huge, thick curtains that magically opened and a gigantic chandelier that was darkened when the movie was about to start.

At the corner of 18th Avenue and Geary Boulevard, kiddie corner from Joe's Ice Cream, was the Alexandria Theatre where I saw my first movie, "Away All Boats" starring Jeff Chandler, with my sister in 1956. I think we got in for a dime each. We paid the lady who sat in a glass-paneled booth just outside the front doors. Mom gave us a nickel to buy a box of Jujubes because we thought they lasted longer than any other candy. In the big lobby was a huge glass counter with candy, popcorn, and soda. The lobby floor was covered with a thick carpet of blue, purple, green and other dark colors. I wonder if this was to hide the dirt or just what they used for theatres built in the 1920s and 1930s? The walls were covered with sweeping 1930s era paintings from floor to ceiling.

Uniformed young men with a flashlight helped you to your seat and made sure you didn't go up to the Loge section with much more comfortable seats unless you had a ticket (that cost extra). The theatre itself had huge, thick curtains that magically opened and a gigantic chandelier that was darkened when the movie was about to start.



The 4-Star Theatre on Clement Street and 23rd Avenue before its mid-century, false façade makeover, 1949. (Jack Tillmany Collection / wnp5.50916)



View east on Balboa from 38th Avenue showing the B-Line Streetcar, Balboa Theatre, and Sugar Bowl Bakery, 1956. (Photo by John Harder, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.50226)

In the Outer Avenues

We would go the 4 -tar Theatre for movies, still located on Clement Street at 23rd Avenue, and I remember it was a very small, narrow building with a tiny lobby and snack bar. It had a really steep slope the closer you got to the screen, but it felt really safe and comfortable. During the mid-1960s, one of the favorite eating spots for students at Washington High School was John's Pizza on Clement St around 20th Avenue, located very close to the 4-Star Theatre. John's pizza introduced me to real pizza (other than the Chef Boyardee package stuff my Mom swore was real pizza). It had a thick chewy crust, very fresh vegetables, lots of cheese and big pieces of meat or sausage. Just terrific! Also, across the street and down a block or two was a really popular burger spot called Bill's Place.

The feel of the 4-Star Theatre was similar to the Balboa Theater on Balboa Street between 37th and 38th Avenues, although it was bigger. I saw many films there but especially remember seeing the *Sound of Music* with my Mom & sisters – a special treat! We got to the theater by taking the 31 Balboa Muni bus, and there was a stop right in front of Alice's candy store. The end of the line was 33rd Ave, just a block beyond Washington High School where it turned around and went back east to downtown. Further west on Balboa St around 38th Ave or so was a non-descript bait and tackle store. The front of the store didn't look like anything but a tall wooden wall with a normal looking glass double door. The small store floor was packed with fishing stuff. *[This store is still there, called Gus' Discount Tackle.]* I also remember getting take-out food from the Hot House on Balboa around 40th Avenue as a youngster. I don't know if this was authentic, but it was my introduction to Mexican food, so I always thought it was for real. My favorite dishes were the chicken and beef enchiladas and Spanish rice. A little spicy for me but I remember the flavor was so good!



View of the main entrance to Sutro Baths from Point Lobos Avenue showing the Golden Gate Coffee Shop at left, August 1963. (Courtesy of a Private Collector, wnp25.4949)

Out at the Beach

Speaking of the outer Richmond District, I have to mention my times at Playland at the Beach with family and friends. Playland was an absolute hoot! I have very fond memories of the Fun House and Laughin' Sal, the mirrored puzzle entrance that I never mastered, the long wooden slide with gunny sacks, the big wooden record player that taught me the meaning of centrifugal force. Rides like the old wooden roller coaster (for the longest time I was too short to ride it), the single armed rocket ride, the bumper cars, the underwater diving bell, the very fast merry-go-round and, later in the 1960s, the self-propelled swing cages. I remember the building where my father played skee ball for hours, chain smoking and collecting tickets for prizes, like stuffed animals, for us kids. I learned how to play pinball but had a hard time because back then it was considered a game for thugs and street tough guys. I was always a little intimidated when I went into that building but I always enjoyed it. The little rectangular blocks of pink popcorn, French fries, It's-it and red candied apples were among my favorite snacks.



The Fun House at Playland at the Beach, circa 1955. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4.0951)



Detail of Laughin' Sal at the Fun House, 1950s. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4.0955)



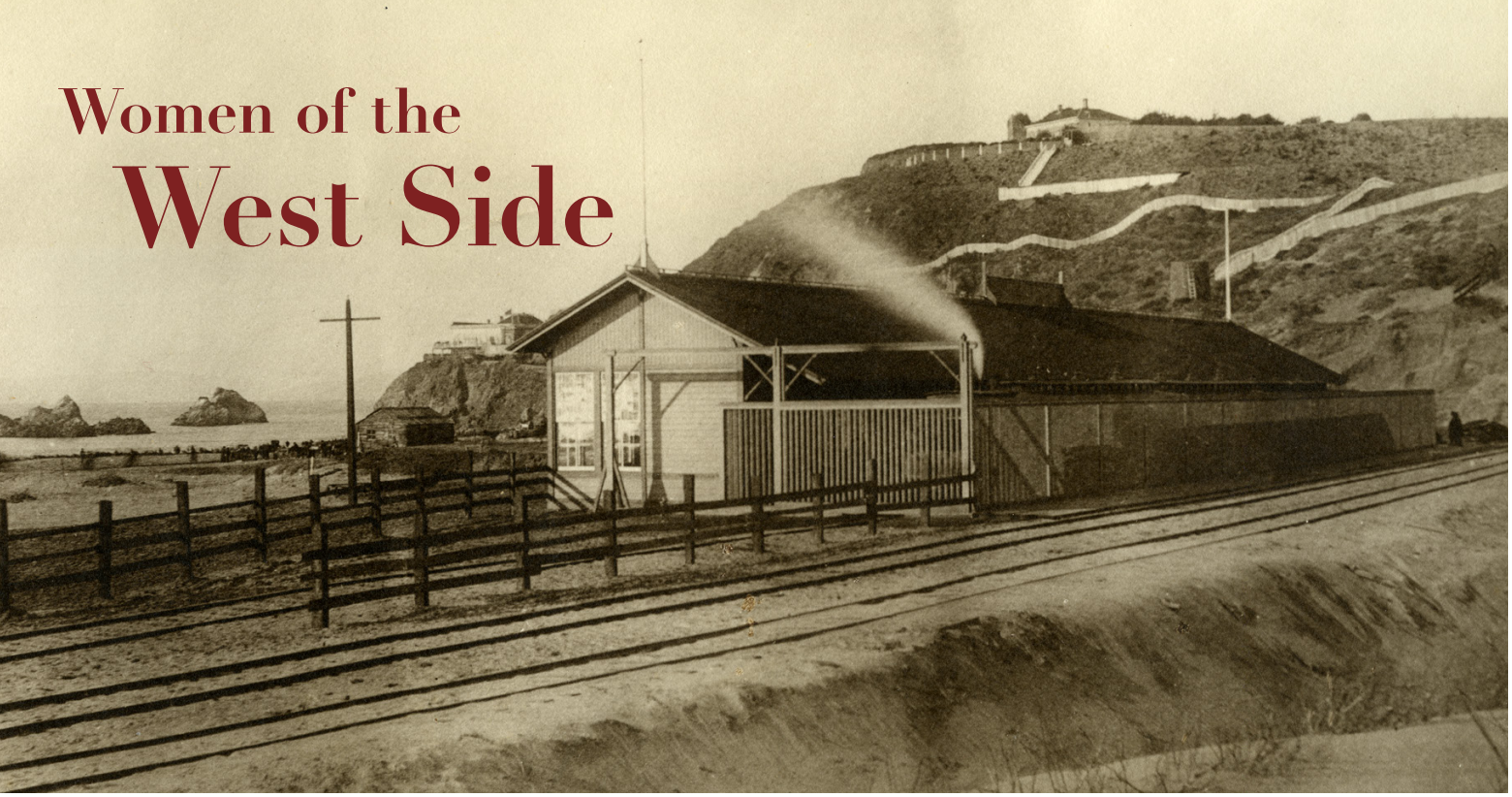
People fishing near the foot of Sloat Boulevard, Noveamber 1960. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.5301)

In the late 1950s, my sister and I often went to the Sutro Baths to ice skate. It was so much safer for children in those days and my mom allowed us to go by ourselves. We would pick up the 38 Geary Muni bus at 18th & Geary and take it all the way to the beach, or end of the line where it turned around to go back downtown. We made our way down a couple of floors to the ice rink. One of the floors we walked through housed Bill Harrah's antique car collection. I didn't think much of it at the time, but I remember there were a lot of old cars. When we got to the rink, we paid an admission fee and went to the counter to ask for speed or figure skates. The speed skates seemed "flatter" in design with longer blades and the figure skates had those characteristic teeth on the tip of the blades. Mom always gave us money to buy hot chocolate for the time-out when we had to clear the rink for the Zamboni to smooth out the ice. Ahh, the great times we had!

Thinking of the beach, I would go fishing with my father, who taught me how to surf fish, and then later with friends in the early 1960s. We always fished on the southern part of the beach near the old windmill, Fleishhacker Pool, and the zoo. We would usually go early in the morning, around 5:30-6:00am, and we would try to the catch the same 5 McAllister Muni bus, always in the back with our fishing equipment and snacks. This was during a period of time when stripe bass came from the south around Pacifica, often chasing big schools of anchovies. We would cut bait, anchovies and sardines, if we were just throwing in our lines hoping for lone stripe bass, salmon, perch or white fish. But if the stripers were running we would cast lures aiming into the middle of the swarming, feeding school. My favorite was a Hopkins lure that looked like an anchovy. When we caught stripe bass, we filleted and gave them to other Japanese American families who loved preparing it as sashimi (super fresh as just caught) or broiled in teriyaki sauce – hmm, so good!

We bet this piece will bring up some of your own memories as well. If so, we'd love to document them so future generations know what it was like to walk in your shoes! Working with Sterling renewed our focus on recording oral histories with past and present long-time residents of the western neighborhoods. If you want to be interviewed or know someone who should be, email nicole@outsidelands.org.

Women of the West Side



Emma Sutro Merritt

by Chelsea Sellin

August 18, 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of women earning the right to vote in the United States with passage of the 19th Amendment. Although, California was ahead of the curve, granting women this right in 1911 (not to brag or anything). This quarter, WNP is highlighting stories of exceptional and often overlooked women who have impacted the Outside Lands and the city beyond them as part of a deferred exhibition titled "Women of the West Side." Keep an eye on OutsideLands.org and the windows of our Home for History for introductions to other awesome ladies, but first…let's start with Emma Sutro Merritt.

Let's just get this out of the way from the jump. Emma Laura Sutro Merritt was not the first woman to earn a medical degree from the University of California, nor was she the first woman to receive a medical license from the state of California.

I'm sorry if this bursts your bubble. These "firsts" have become the cornerstone of the Emma Sutro Merritt story over time. However, the fact that she did not break these particular glass ceilings does not diminish her accomplishments, and it certainly does not mean that she never encountered obstacles. At a 1924 dinner given in honor of Dr. Lucy Wanzer (who was, in fact, the holder of the "first" titles so often associated with Dr. Merritt), Emma explained that "The struggle to practice medicine was only a branch of the great struggle for the general enfranchisement of women. To get even a higher education, with no thought of making use of it outside the home circle, was considered unwomanly."[1]

To be clear, Emma enjoyed social, economic, and racial advantages which eased her journey to overcoming the disadvantages imposed upon her gender. Born in San Francisco on December 15, 1856 to Adolph Sutro and Leah Harris, Emma's father was already making a name for himself in business circles and ascending the socio-economic ladder. She came of age as the Comstock Lode and the Sutro Tunnel thrust Adolph onto the national stage and made him a millionaire. Like any daughter from an upper-class family, Emma attended Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. While in college, she met the woman who inspired her to pursue a career in medicine: Dr. Alida Avery.

Hired by Matthew Vassar when his eponymous college opened in 1865, Alida Avery came from a family of

doctors. She was Vassar's resident physician and taught physiology, a required course for juniors and seniors. A longtime advocate for women's rights, Alida also fought for and won equal pay with the college's male professors. Perceived as stern and aloof by many students, she was also greatly admired by the young women who had a chance to get to know her when they were invited for tea. Alida resigned from Vassar in 1874; therefore her time in Poughkeepsie overlapped with Emma's only briefly. She must have made quite the impression – Emma later stated she was unaware that women could even be physicians. Emma and Alida crossed paths later in life, when Alida lived in the Bay Area around the turn of the century.

Emma graduated from Vassar in 1877 and returned west, picking up a $90-per-month teaching position at the Sutro Public School in Nevada that fall. History has shown Emma to be a woman of considerable intelligence and ability, but surely nepotism played a part in Emma earning a job in the town named after her father. Her parents probably anticipated that the position would keep their daughter occupied and close to home until she found a suitable husband and settled down.

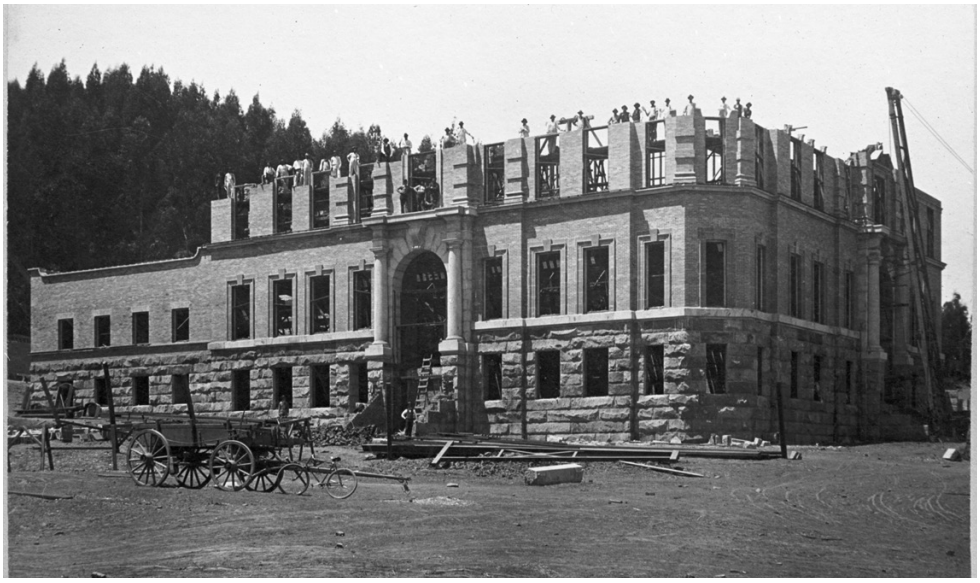
Imagine Adolph's shock when Emma announced shortly thereafter that she intended to become a doctor. As she later explained, "It wasn't done in those days. All a girl had to learn was to read and write to get herself a husband."[2] Newspapers across the country carried the story that Emma Sutro was leaving for Europe to study medicine. The historical record is thin regarding the early years of her medical education. Where and what she studied in Europe is unclear, and by 1879, she returned to America, continuing her studies at both New York Medical College and Jefferson College in Philadelphia, before returning to San Francisco.

Around this time, she also took a fateful buggy ride with her father in Golden Gate Park. Emma later recalled: "As we neared the ocean beach he pointed to a hill toward the north and said, 'I have been living in San Francisco since 1850 and have never been up there. Let's drive up and take a look.' Father was so much struck with the superb position of the hill that within 15 minutes after we began to admire the place he had made Samuel Tetlow an offer to purchase."[3] Emma was likely unaware at the time that her father's impulse purchase would later have a huge effect on her life.

Emma matriculated at the University of California and graduated with a medical degree in 1881. Before the University of California's medical school was known as UCSF, it was Toland Medical College. Established as a private institution in 1864, founder Hugh Toland deeded his school to the UC regents in 1873. Alongside a pharmaceutical college (and later, dental and nursing colleges), the various San Francisco-based medical schools were known as the Affiliated Colleges. Emma attended classes in a building on Stockton between Francisco and Chestnut, in North Beach, and received clinical instruction at San Francisco City and County Hospital on Potrero. Perhaps she felt that she had come full circle - as a child, her formal education began in North Beach, at Broadway (Girls') Grammar School.

> "It wasn't done in those days. All a girl had to learn was to read and write to get herself a husband."

Popular history remembers that Adolph did not approve of his daughter's



Top Left: Sutro Heights seen from La Playa & Balboa circa 1883, before the land was improved by Adolph Sutro. That's the Park and Ocean Railroad Terminal in the foreground. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.0014)

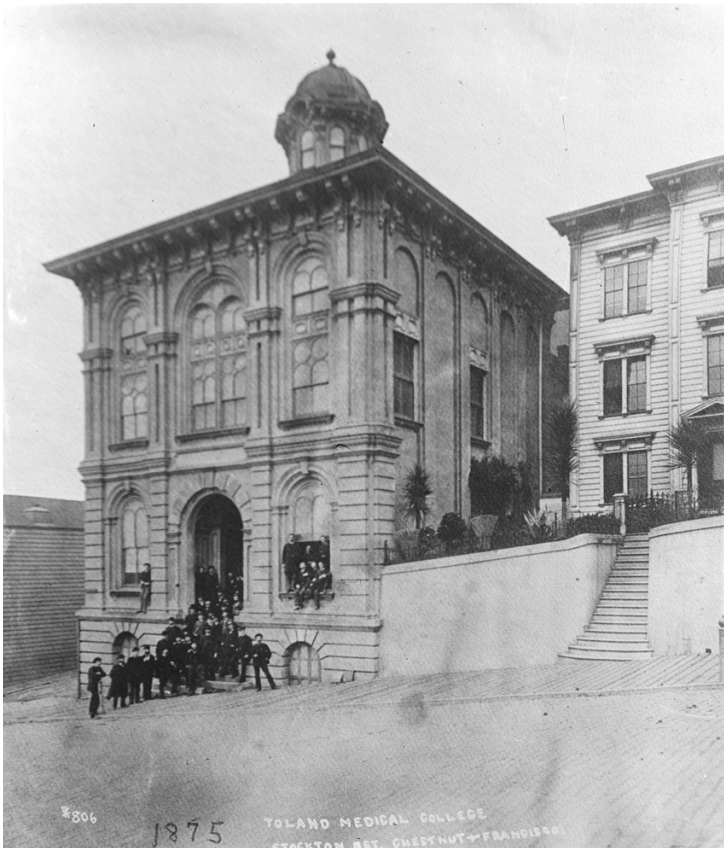
Right: Construction of the Affiliated Colleges buildings on Parnassus Avenue, July 6, 1897. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.02533)

chosen path. Such a career (any career, really) was not appropriate for a woman of her socio-economic standing. She could have – and was expected to – easily transition from being supported by her father to being supported by a husband, with her Vassar education as merely window dressing. She could have indulged her interests in medical care through philanthropic means. Aside from her assertion that "one should work," Emma did not, so far as we know, leave behind any writings that explain her personal reasons for defying societal norms and pursuing not only an advanced education, but a full-fledged career, in a field that was only barely beginning to accept women (Lucy Wanzer graduated from UC in 1876).[4] Since we know that working was not an economic imperative for Emma (and had it been, there were easier ways to make money), we can assume that she had a great deal of passion for medicine.

Adolph must have come around on Emma's choices, because *The Jewish Progress* reported that he threw his daughter a graduation dinner on November 5, 1881 at the Maison Dorée, a French restaurant on Kearny frequented by San Francisco's elite. Funnily enough, Emma did not attend, but sent an unnamed woman to represent her (all of the other guests were male). Your writer has a sneaking suspicion that it was not an Emma-approved guest list, despite the dinner ostensibly being in her honor. Hopefully Emma was better pleased in 1895 by her father's donation to the University of California of 13 acres on today's Parnassus Heights, for the construction of new facilities that would bring the Affiliated Colleges together in one location.

By 1883, Emma was bound for Europe again, this time in the company of a fellow UC medical graduate: George Washington Merritt. They were married in London on March 27. Born in Hawaii and raised in California, George earned his medical degree in 1882, and he and his new wife spent the next four years doing post-graduate work at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris. This was a natural choice for people of means – Paris was at the forefront of medical science at this time, and the Ecole de Médecine attracted many international female medical students. Parisians were taking medical study away from a strict adherence to textbooks and into the field, with an emphasis on practical clinical experience, dissection, and hospital-based teaching and research. Hugh Toland trained in Paris, and imported the Parisian instruction style to his college in San Francisco. As Toland alumni, Emma and George would have been familiar with the Ecole de Médecine method.

The Merritts returned to San Francisco in 1887, and on August 3, both Emma and George received their California medical licenses. Emma was issued license #2162, and George was issued license #2163. Although there is absolutely no proof of this, I like to imagine that George magnanimously and purposefully allowed his wife to go first. For a brief moment, there was only one Dr. Merritt licensed to practice medicine, and it was a woman. The couple each set up private practices in their newly purchased home on the northeast corner of Sutter and Mason, near Union Square. George was an eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist, and later ran the ophthalmology clinic at the University of California.



Students posed in front of the Toland Medical College campus on Stockton near Francisco, circa 1873. (Martin Behrman Collection, Courtesy of the Golden Gate NRA Park Archives / wnp71.0719)

Meanwhile, Emma embarked on a long association with Children's Hospital. Founded as a non-profit in 1875 by women, for women, Children's Hospital was dedicated not only to providing medical care to women and children, but also to training nurses and furthering the advancement of women in the medical field. One can hardly imagine a better fit for Emma. She was in charge of medical and surgical diseases of children, and like other staff members, took no pay. At the time Emma joined the hospital staff, the institution had just moved into a new building on California and Maple, replete with 25 private rooms, open wards, a cow barn, a chicken yard, and laundry facilities. In 1893, on behalf of the hospital, Emma established a laboratory in her home basement in order to treat cow's milk for bottle-feeding babies. Her father donated $250 to set up the laboratory.

Aside from her work at Children's Hospital, Emma lectured, published medical papers, and continued to advance



The Sutro home in disrepair, circa 1930. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp/14.12114)

the cause of women's rights. She was a member of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (today the American Association of University Women), which was founded by female college graduates to advance women's education and career opportunities. Among other things, Emma worked with the ACA to grant female students equal access to physical fitness classes, and to induce Johns Hopkins to accept women into their medical program. She also labored to get women placed on the San Francisco Board of Education. In 1895, she served on the Advisory Council for the second meeting of the Women's Congress Association of the Pacific Coast. Adolph Sutro, then mayor of San Francisco, gave the welcoming address. Susan B. Anthony was a featured speaker, and the meeting was used as a rallying point around an upcoming ballot measure to give women the right to vote in California. It did not pass; Emma waited until 1911 to finally exercise that right.

Between 1893 and 1900, Emma and George did not live in the Sutter and Mason house, but instead rented elsewhere and leased out their home as office space to fellow physicians. It was during this period that Emma lost both her parents, and her life's trajectory was forever altered. Leah Sutro suffered from diabetes, and increasing complications drove Emma (as her mother's doctor) to bring in consulting specialists in 1893. Leah died on December 9, naming Emma as one of the executors of her estate. Later that decade, Adolph's health declined, and in February 1898, a court declared him mentally incompetent and appointed Emma guardian of both her father and his vast estate. She was quickly elected to her father's seat as President of the Sutro Railroad Company. In May, Emma moved Adolph into her rented home at Sutter and Van Ness, in order to better care for him. The action seems obvious, coming from Adolph's daughter and legal guardian who just so happened to be a physician. But as the newspapers reported with relish, it stirred up a great deal of drama amongst the rest of the Sutro family, which continued well after Adolph's death on August 8, 1898. As the de facto head of the Sutro family enterprise, Emma continuously battled with her family as she endeavored to carry out her father's legacy.

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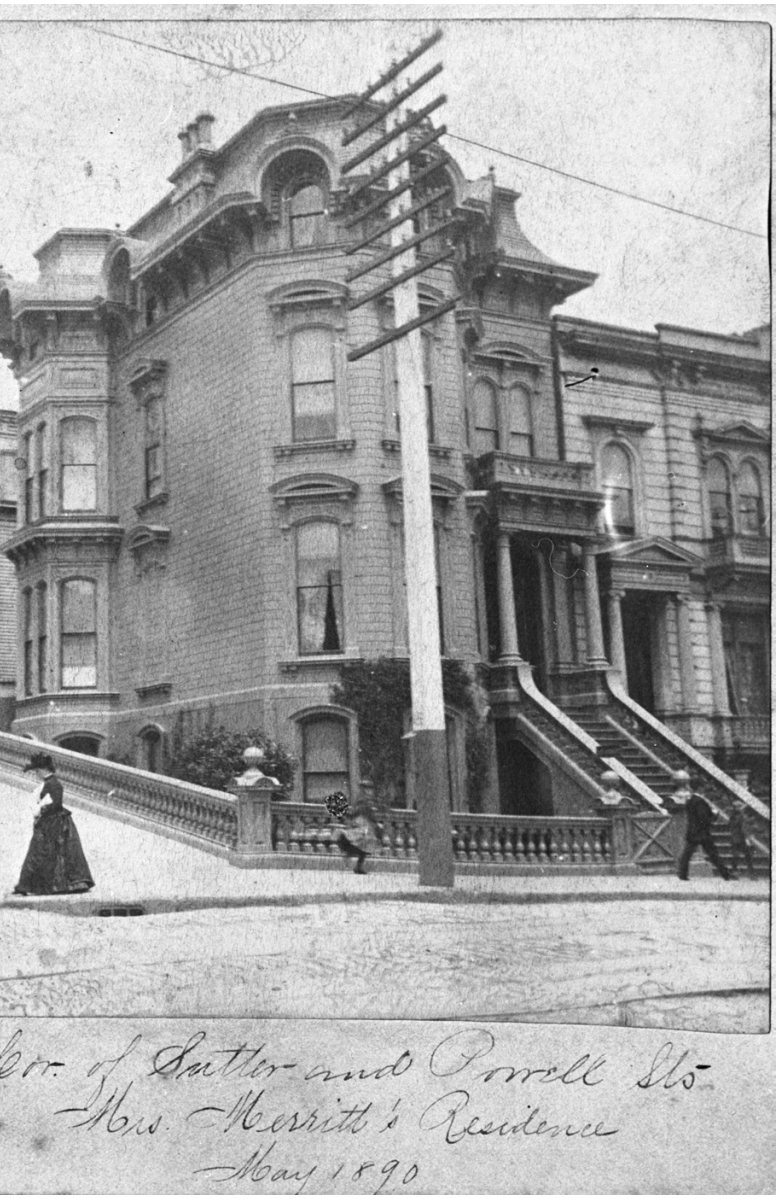


The home of Drs. Emma and George Merritt in its original location at Sutter and Mason, May 1890. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.02603)

Between 1893 and 1900, Emma and George did not live in the Sutter and Mason house, but instead rented elsewhere and leased out their home as office space to fellow physicians. It was during this period that Emma lost both her parents, and her life's trajectory was forever altered. Leah Sutro suffered from diabetes, and increasing complications drove Emma (as her mother's doctor) to bring in consulting specialists in 1893. Leah died on December 9, naming Emma as one of the executors of her estate. Later that decade, Adolph's health declined, and in February 1898, a court declared him mentally incompetent and appointed Emma guardian of both her father and his vast estate. She was quickly elected to her father's seat as President of the Sutro Railroad Company. In May, Emma moved Adolph into her rented home at Sutter and Van Ness, in order to better care for him. The action seems obvious, coming from Adolph's daughter and legal guardian who just so happened to be a physician. But as the newspapers reported with relish, it stirred up a great deal of drama amongst the rest of the Sutro family, which continued well after Adolph's death on August 8, 1898. As the de facto head of the Sutro family enterprise, Emma continuously battled with her family as she endeavored to carry out her father's legacy.

At 16 pages long and with 37 separate provisions, Adolph Sutro's will was a beast that promised to occupy Emma's time for years to come. She was one of two executors, and the only executor that was also a family member. However, the document is also a testament to the fact that whatever differences they may have had in the past, Adolph clearly cared for his daughter, and respected her abilities. He set aside $10,000 for the endowment of two scholarships at Vassar, and left Emma "all the books, papers, scrap books, manuscripts, and pictures contained in my library; also all my private papers, letters, accounts and account books, and all other written papers, whether contained in my desks, safes, or safe deposit vaults, or elsewhere." [5]

As the de facto head of the Sutro family enterprise, Emma continuously battled with her family as she endeavored to carry out her father's legacy.

As Emma settled into her new role as Sutro estate manager, the Merritts also decided to move their home – literally. Precisely why is unknown, although the increasing commercialization of Union Square may have been a factor. Nonetheless, in 1900, the entire building at Sutter and Mason was removed to the quieter locale of 2355 Washington Street, about a block from Lafayette Square (it still stands there today). George had a medical office building constructed on the now-empty Sutter and Mason site, where he kept his own office and again leased out space to other doctors. The relocation of the Merritt home was fortuitous, as it saved the 1870s building from the 1906 fire. Emma and George remained on Washington Street until around 1915, when they moved into Adolph's former home at Sutro Heights. Emma continued to maintain and oversee her father's vast tracts of land and tenants, despite inadequate cash flow. Eventually much of the Sutro estate was given over to the city. Emma also saw to the rebuilding of the Cliff House, and donated her father's library to the California State Library (with the provision that it remain within San Francisco). She took on additional responsibilities when her brother Edgar died in 1922, becoming guardian to his three minor children.

Emma Sutro Merritt died on October 17, 1938, outliving her husband by 10 years. With her passing, the Sutro Heights property passed to the city. She no doubt managed the Sutro estate to the best of her abilities, and played a key role in safeguarding a treasured piece of San Francisco heritage. However, by taking on her father's legacy, his projects, and his interests, she also somewhat relegated herself as a footnote to his story. Her personal and professional achievements are remarkable, and to her credit, she did not completely drop her medical career when she became the estate manager. Yet I can't help but wonder how much further she might have gone as a doctor and activist, if she had not been encumbered with the additional responsibilities inherited from Adolph. I could have written her story without any mention of her father or her work for the Sutro estate. It would not have been the whole story, but it would still stand as a testament to a pioneering woman who followed her passions without apology, and helped other women to do the same.

Citations:

1. "Address Delivered By Dr. Emma L. Merritt At A Banquet Given By Women Physicians, October 11, 1924, In Honor Of The Eighty-Third Birthday Of Dr. Lucy Maria Field Wanzer," *California and Western Medicine* 23, No. 5 (May 1925): 599-601, PubMed Central.
2. "Dr. Emma Sutro Merritt Observes 80th Birthday."
3. "Kin of Sutro Tells Tale of Heights' Sale," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 19, 1933. NewsBank.
4. "Dr. Emma Sutro Merritt Observes 80th Birthday."
5. Will of Adolph Sutro, San Francisco, 1882, Ancestry.com.



Police begin to forcibly remove protestors inside Mel's Drive-In as supporting picketers watch from outside on November 3, 1955. (Photo by Fred Pardini, San Francisco Examiner Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.3199)

The Sit-In at Mel's Drive-In

by Nicole Meldahl

Some have cautioned us that contemporary issues of social justice and civil rights, surfaced most recently by the Black Lives Matter Movement, have no relevance to west side history work. But it's always been our mission to uncover overlooked stories, and we're constantly reminded that history happens in the least likely of places. Case-in-point: Mel's Drive-In at 3355 Geary Boulevard near Beaumont on the edge of the Richmond District.

As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum in the South, the fight for Civil Rights in the San Francisco Bay Area found its way to a hamburger emporium in the Outside Lands. Local demonstrations targeted discriminatory hiring practices at local businesses, while protests in Alabama and Washington D.C. focused more on desegregation and voting rights. This is why student organizers targeted San Francisco and Berkeley locations of Mels' Drive-In, co-owned by Mel Weiss and San Francisco Mayoral Candidate Harold Dobbs, in the Fall of 1963.

Many of these protests were covered by *San Francisco Examiner* photographer Fred Pardini, who was present for a sit-in at Mel's Drive-In on November 3, 1963. While taking a closer look at a series of his negatives from that night featured on OpenSFHistory, we were astounded by the story that unfolded. Because what began as a peaceful protest to force Weiss and Dobbs to hire more African Americans to public-facing positions had a ripple effect—impacting the Mayoral election, daylighting systemic racism within organized labor throughout the City, and launching subsequent protests that forever changed the hospitality industry in San Francisco. We're featuring one part of that story here today, and hope you'll find rest on OutsideLands.org soon.

Arranging The Sit-In

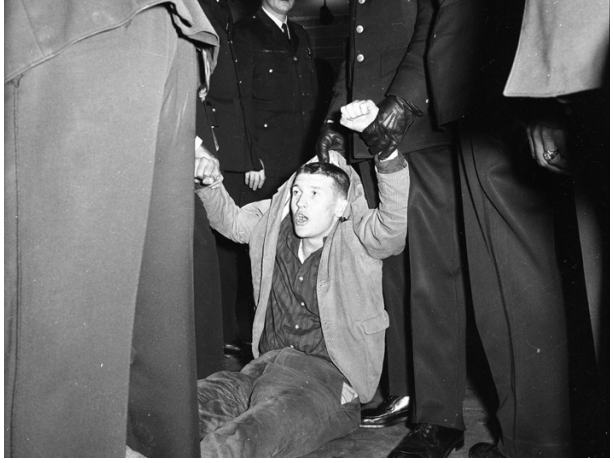
Picketing and sit-ins of Mel's Drive-In locations in San Francisco and Berkeley were coordinated by the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination in October 1963. This newly-formed group included members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Youth for Jobs, and the W.E.B. DuBois Club of San Francisco, which was loosely affiliated with the Communist Party. Almost all participants were young students from U.C. Berkeley and San Francisco State College, although a few self-identified housewives also joined their ranks.

Co-chairs for the demonstrations were 25-year-old Arthur Sheridan of San Francisco and 23-year-old Mike Myerson, former president of a U.C. Berkeley student organization founded in 1958 called SLATE. They began by recruiting participants, driving through the Fillmore District and announcing their plans by loudspeaker. Then, the picketing of restaurant locations coincided with protests outside the home of co-owner Harold Dobbs at 1601 Monterey Boulevard near St. Francis Wood on November 2, 1963.

November 3, 1963

The next day, a co-ed group filled all empty booths and counter stools in a peaceful sit-in that started at 4:15pm at the Mel's Drive-In location at 3355 Geary Boulevard. Demonstrators inside the diner sang "We Shall Overcome" while clapping and pounding on tabletops as picketers chanted outside. Manager Jack Everett went table-to-table asking each "customer" if they wanted to order, but, aside from one group that asked for a cup of tea and six straws, no one wanted a thing. Everett called the San Francisco Police Department.









Demonstrators inside the diner sang "We Shall Overcome" while clapping and pounding on tabletops as picketers chanted outside.

The police arrived with paddy wagons and Fred Pardini was in the middle of the action with his camera. One by one, officers arrested individual protesters who refused to budge. Using textbook nonviolent resistance tactics, they linked arms and let their bodies go limp as they continued to sing. It took a dozen officers more than half-an-hour to pry everyone apart and literally drag them out of the diner. And Pardini captures the paradox of race in America, as African American policemen remove white protestors who seem roughly the same age.

In particular, it took three officers to handle one 26-year-old law student named Terence Hallinan, who was there with his brothers. The Hallinan name might be familiar to San Franciscans and not only because Terence recently passed away on January 17, 2020. He was the son of attorney Vincent Hallinan who took on the Market Street Railway and defended labor leader Harry Bridges, among other notable (and infamous) achievements. Terence spent his early youth in-and-out of trouble and was known for frequent fistfights. But he seems to have turned over a new leaf as he became more politically engaged, joining the SNCC in 1963 and spending that summer working on Civil Rights issues in Mississippi.

When he returned to San Francisco he helped to organize the local W.E.B. DuBois Club and joined the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination shortly before the sit-ins began at Mel's Drive-In. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "several scuffles broke out" as officers forced demonstrators into paddy wagons.[1] Terence later explained he had lost his temper because the police were "unnecessarily rough" so he and his brethren had to be a little tougher in return.[2] But Hallinan wasn't roughed up simply because he was a known rabble rouser. Patricia Kouver, a 22-year-old housewife, said she had also been kicked and thrown against the steps of a paddy wagon. One of the arrested San Francisco State students, Anna Weills, said she didn't necessarily agree with this method of protest, but it just seemed like the only thing they could do.[3] She and the others arrested were taken to Richmond Station and booked on charges of disturbing the peace



and obstructing justice, thereafter transferred to City Prison and the Women's Prison—singing and chanting all the way. Charles Johnson was booked on an additional charge of defacing city property after scratching "Freedom Now" onto the wall of his jail cell. Another Hallinan, an attorney named Patrick and brother to Terence, announced he would post the $22-per-protester bail since he "should have been with them [but] wasn't."[4]

Jo Freeman, who was there, later recalled: "That night…the demonstrators held the first mass sit-in of the Bay Area civil rights movement."[5]

The End is the Beginning

This is a much larger story than what unfolds from the OpenSFHistory photographs featured here; a subject fit for multiple volumes that we'll try to quickly summarize. There was a brief pause in the protests to allow the mayoral election to proceed without disruption that November. Dobbs was defeated and, after facing criticism that the protests were politically motivated, Arthur Sheridan said, "Now that the election is over perhaps the real issue can come out. And that is simply Negroes in jobs."[6]

The protests resumed at 3355 Geary on November 6th, until Mel Weiss and Harold Dobbs agreed to negotiations. They reached an agreement on November 8th that set up a training school facilitating the promotion of African American employees at all 13 restaurants within the chain, paying them while they learned over a 30-day period.

The battle was won, but the war had just begun. This historic agreement would be contested by Union officials concerned about the sanctity of their negotiated contracts, and in response to complaints from waitresses at Mel's on Van Ness Avenue who planned to demand protection from "civil rights junk" at union headquarters.[7] David Rubenstein, attorney for the Golden Gate Restaurant Association, also blamed general unrest in the service industry on the Mel's agreement. The

Left-to-Right Clockwise: Unidentified woman being dragged out of Mel's Drive-In by numerous police officers on November 3, 1963. (Photo by Fred Pardini, San Francisco Examiner Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.3200)

Terence Hallinan being dragged out of Mel's Drive-In by numerous police officers on November 3, 1963. (Photo by Fred Pardini, San Francisco Examiner Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.3204.

The Human Rights March—including a young John Lewis and Jackie Robinson--passes the Sheraton Palace Hotel on Market Street near New Montgomery on July 12, 1964. (Photo by Fred Pardini, San Francisco Examiner Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.2273)

Picketers crowd around arrested protestors as officers load them into a paddy wagon in the parking lot of Mel's Drive-In on November 3, 1955. (Photo by Fred Pardini, San Francisco Examiner Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.3207)

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Ad Hoc Committee acquiesced to Rubenstein's demand not to put the agreement into formal writing, satisfied that Weiss and Dobbs had held true to their promise. They considered the matter with Mel's Drive-In was closed on December 5, 1963, but negotiations with other restaurants would continue the following week.

Demonstrations on the edge of the Richmond District had city-wide impacts. Shortly after beating Harold Dobbs and taking office, Mayor John Shelley would appoint an Interim Committee on Human Relations in early 1964, which recommended the establishment of a permanent Human Rights Commission to the Board of Supervisors. Mandated to address the causes of and problems resulting from prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and discrimination, it was most recently invoked by Mayor London Breed to review controversial statues in Golden Gate Park in June 2020.

Those present at Mel's on November 3rd and November 6th became seminal figures in the San Francisco Bay Area fight for civil rights that had only just begun. Terry Francois, former president of the San Francisco chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), soon became first African American named to the Board of Supervisors by Mayor Shelley in 1964. Dr. Thomas Burbridge, then-president of the same NAACP chapter and chairman of the United Freedom Movement, had been a faculty member at U.C. San Francisco since 1956. Working daily with young students, he felt their frustration with the lethargy of the legal system and sympathized with their demands for immediate change. He became an integral voice in the fight for fair hiring practices in San Francisco throughout the 1960s.



Mel's Drive in at 140 South Van Ness, 1951. (SF Assessors Office Negatives / wnp58.154)

That fight gained momentum as the year went on, with protests marches and additional sit-ins at other restaurants, grocery stores, and hotels not equitably hiring African American employees. The Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination next targeted the Sheraton-Palace Hotel with a now historic sit-in that began on March 1, 1964. It was led by Mike Meyerson and 18-year-old Tracy Sims—alumnae of the Mel's Drive-In protest a few months before.

Sims had recently dropped out of San Francisco State College to focus on civil rights work full-time. A chairwoman for the Ad Hoc Committee and a secretary for the W.E.B. DuBois Club, she explained why she was involved in the civil rights movement: "I inherited this fight as part of my Negro birthright."[8]

As we look deeper into the history of race on the west side, we seek to discover and share more incredible stories like the sit-in at Mel's Drive-In. We know we have a lot of ground to cover, but we're taking it one step at a time. Have a suggestion on what we should tackle next? Email us: nicole@outsidelands.org.

Citations:
1. "A Wild Melee at S.F. Drive-In," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 4, 1963. Newsbank.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights: African Americans in San Francisco*, 1945-1975 by Paul T. Miller.
6. "Drive Against 'Fair Housing'," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 7, 1963. Newbank.
7. "Union Row May Snarl Mel's Pact," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 12, 1963:
8. *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights: African Americans in San Francisco*, 1945-1975 by Paul T. Miller.

Historical Happenings

outsidelands.org/events.php

History Happy Hour. 2nd & 4th Thursdays Every Month, 5:30pm – 6:30pm.

Join us via Zoom on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month through the end of the year for happy hour. Nicole Meldahl (and maybe sometimes David Gallagher) sit down with local historians, artists, and other surprise guests to chat about a variety of historical subjects. Audience members are encouraged to participate via chat and, of course, bring their beverage of choice as well.

Sponsored by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development via the Invest in Neighborhoods Program, this event is free but donations are appreciated. Pre-registration is required at www.outsidelands.org/events. A Zoom link will be emailed to you after registration.



(Marilyn Blaisdell Collection, Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.01300)

WNP Story Time. 1st Wednesdays Every Month, 4:30pm.

Nicole Meldahl will read classic and history-themed children's stories live the first Wednesday of every month. We began this series on Facebook Live in May and, after a month off, are shifting to Zoom! Fun for kids of all ages, even if you're just a kid at heart.

See below for our schedule through the end of the year, in case you want to get hold of a copy prior to the reading:

1. **August 5, 2020: "The Cable Car and the Dragon" by Herb Caen**
2. **September 2, 2020: "Levi Strauss Gets A Bright Idea" written by Tony Johnston and illustrated by Stacy Innerst.**
3. **October 7, 2020: "Fly High, Fly Low" by Don Freeman**

This series is sponsored by the Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People (SHARP) and is part of our Education Initiative. All books were purchased at our favorite independent bookseller in the Richmond District, Green Apple Books. This event is free but donations are appreciated and pre-registration is required at www.outsidelands.org/events. A Zoom link will be emailed to you after registration.



Join us for a walk through West Clay Park, seen here circa 1925. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.1678)

History Walks in Real Life!

We've been necessarily paused while sheltering-in-place, but our guided Saturday walking tours are back courtesy of Board Member Richard Brandi and one of our favorites, local historian John Martini.

We hope to see you in real life at one of these upcoming History Walks:

1. **August 15, 2020 at 10:00am: Portola Drive**
2. **August 29, 2020 at 10:00am: Presidio Main Post**
3. **August 29, 2020 at 2:00pm: West Clay Park & Sea Cliff**
4. **September 12, 2020 at 10:00am: Lincoln Manor & Sutro Heights Residence Park**
5. **September 26, 2020 at 10:00am: West Portal, Claremont Court & Merritt Terrace**
6. **October 10, 2020 at 10:00am: Forest Hill & Windsor Terrace**

Sponsored by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development via the Invest in Neighborhoods Program courtesy of District 1 Supervisor Sandra Lee Fewer. Pre-registration is required and space is limited to 10 people to keep us COVID-19 safe, so reserve your space today for just $5. Call us at 415-661-1000 or sign up at www.outsidelands.org/events.

S.H.A.R.P.
Sunset Heights Assn. of Responsible People

SAN FRANCISCO
Office of Economic and Workforce Development



Limousine parked in front of the Junipero Serra statue in Golden Gate Park, 1920s. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp15.564)

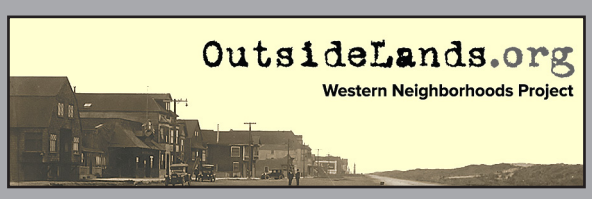
The Last Word

The unauthorized Juneteenth toppling of statues made our deferred exhibition, "Monumental Golden Gate Park," more relevant than we ever imagined. Father Junipero Serra, General Ulysses S. Grant, and Francis Scott Key all came down amid rallying cries against systemic racism and unacknowledged colonialism. The day after, we posted these photos on Instagram asking how people felt and, lordy, did they tell us. Nearly 200 comments later (we typically average 10, on a good day), one thing was clear: San Francisco is divided on the subject of controversial monuments.

In our work researching monuments throughout the park, we find they say more about how specific individuals and groups choose to remember the past than they say about what actually happened in the past. Whatever your belief on Serra and the legacy of his mission system, the motive for his monument was undeniably to promote a singular vision of San Francisco as a white, Christian city. Because this was the singular vision of former San Francisco Mayor James Phelan, the man who paid for and donated it. The same man who ran for Governor on a campaign platform of "Keep California White" in 1920.

History is more nuanced than we can ever communicate in stone so, often, the true message of monuments gets lost. Their erection has always been about claiming history by owning visible space, and, ultimately, this is the same motivation for tearing them down. Hopefully this means we're less divided than it seems. But wherever this leads us, Western Neighborhoods Project is here for it.

-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.