# Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

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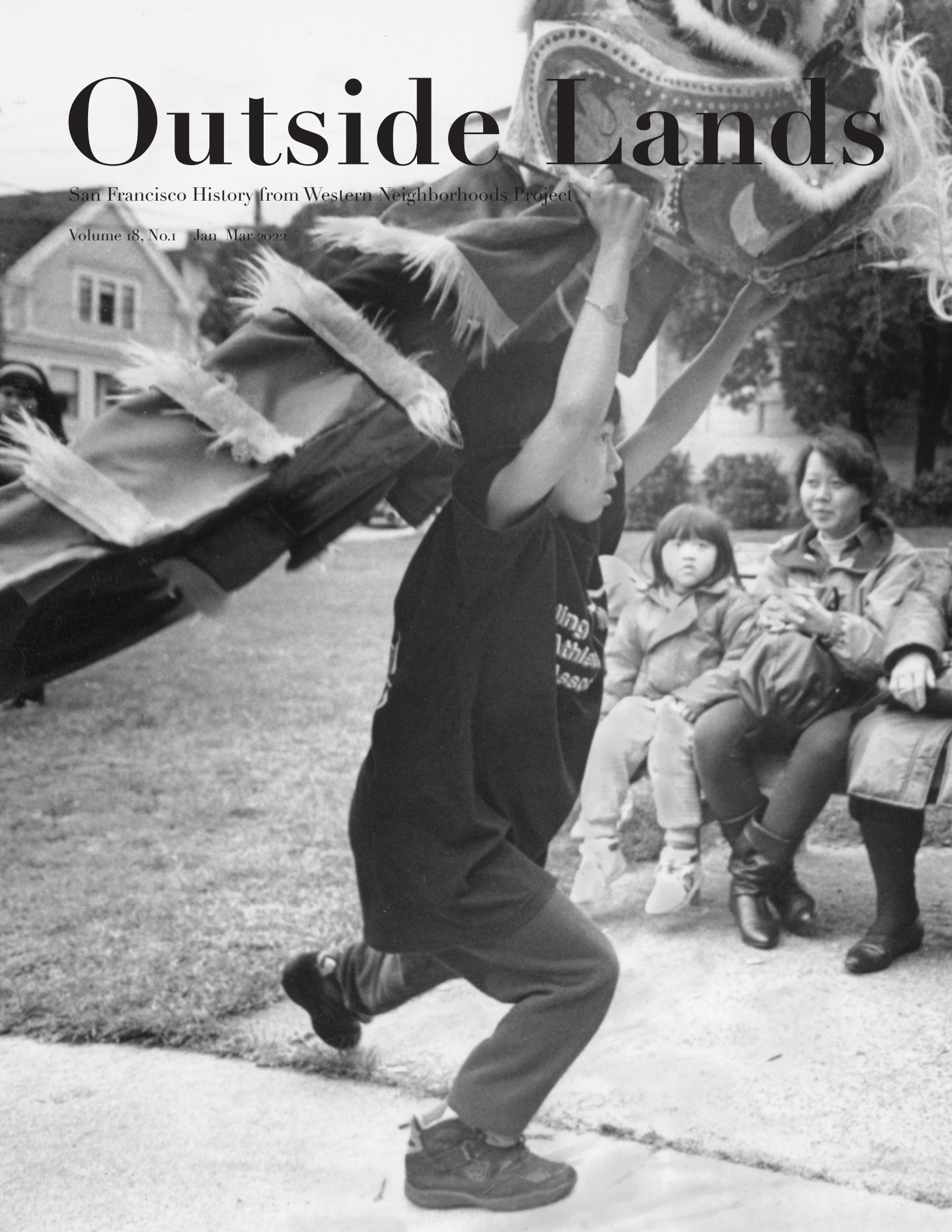

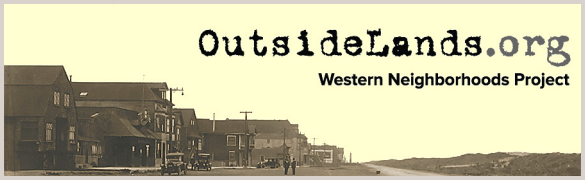


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History from Western Neighborhoods Project
(Previously issued as SF West History)

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**Cover:** Jing Mo Athletic Association performing the Lion Dance for Chinese New Year at the Richmond Branch Library, 1990s. (Photo by Philip Liborio Gangi, Richmond Review Newspaper Collection; courtesy of Paul Kozakiewicz / wnp07.00358)

**Right:** View west on Balboa Street from 37th Avenue, 1956. (Courtesy of Jack Tillmany / wnp5.51187)

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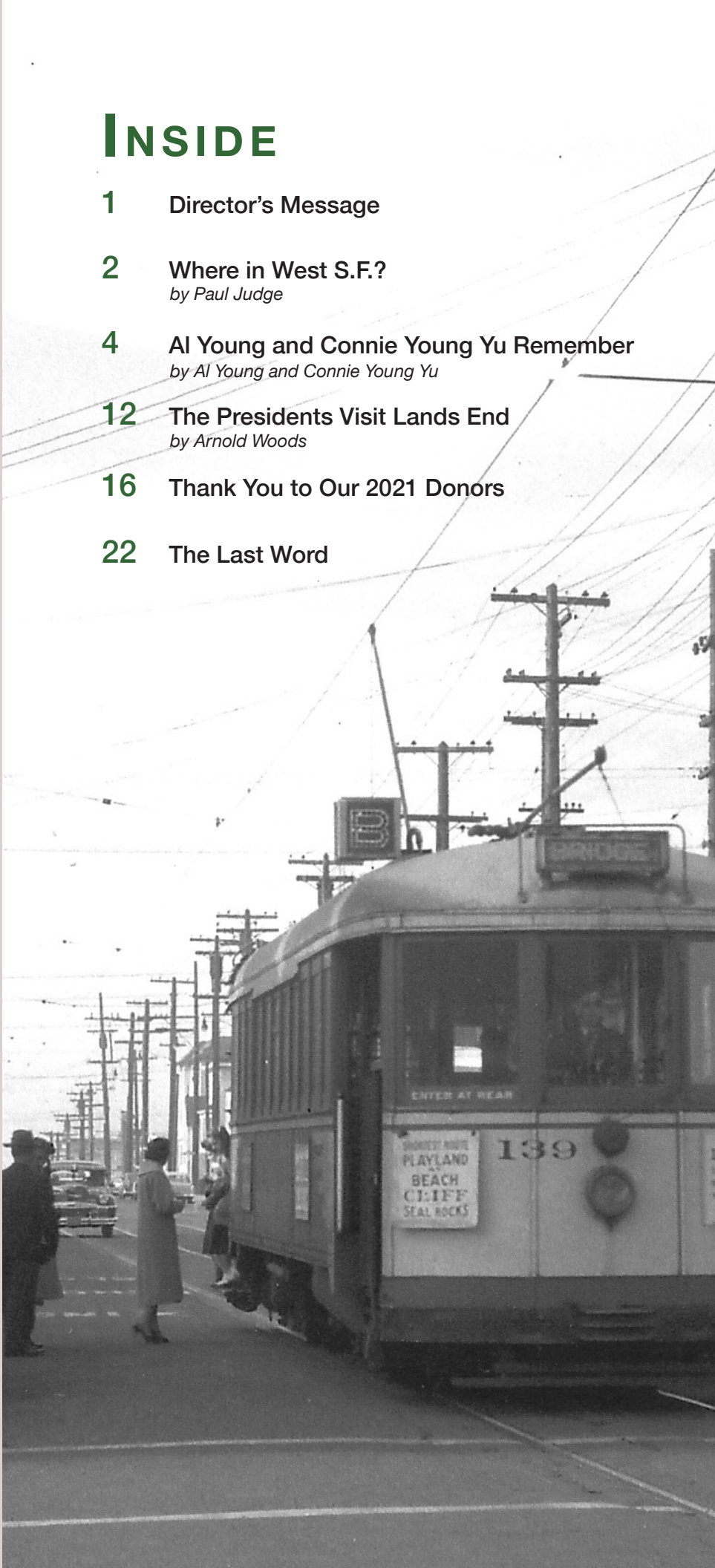

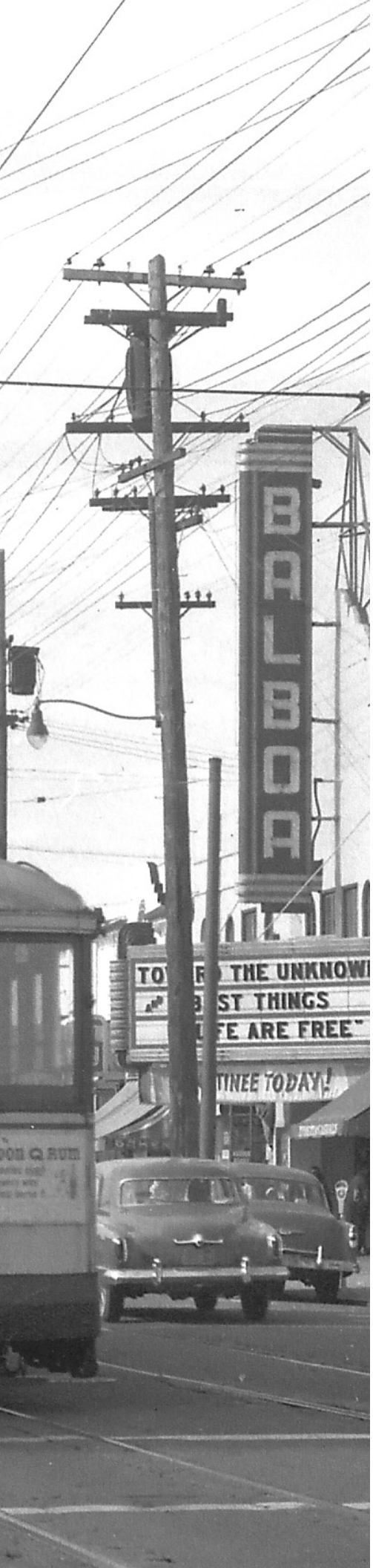




# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

A new year brings new history, which means historians return to their past.

I started 2022 by reading *Ninth Street Women* by Mary Gabriel, about five pioneering artists in the Abstract Expressionist movement centered in New York City circa the 1950s. One of those women, Joan Mitchell, was given a retrospective that just closed at SFMOMA. Another central figure in the book is Elaine de Kooning. Elaine was a powerhouse. Writing for *ARTnews*, she reoriented art criticism with her signature wit, uncompromising empathy, and immersion in a developing movement. She was also an accomplished painter, despite her relegation as a footnote to her husband, Willem. Unlike many of her contemporaries who shunned figurative subjects in favor of pure abstraction, she chose to paint the people around her. But they weren't straight portraits, they were active acts of love. Elaine genuinely sought to understand whomever she captured on canvas. She enjoyed the intimate process of getting to know her subject, and you can feel that in her brush strokes, which are quick with purpose, full of emotion, and leave a lasting unclear impression.

I'm no artist, but this is how I feel about conducting oral histories – one of the most rewarding acts of love a community historian can practice. In this issue, we're proud to feature the first oral history from *Chinese in the Richmond*, our collaboration with the Chinese Historical Society of America that seeks to illuminate the lives of Chinese Americans on the west side. In ***Al Young and Connie Young Yu Remember***, we learn about two extraordinary people from one of the earliest Chinese families to settle in the Richmond District. Stay tuned for more oral histories from this project in future issues.

In our other feature article this issue, one of my old favorites makes an appearance: Theodore Roosevelt. Board President **Arnold Woods** is hot on the trail of several presidents who were lured out to the Cliff House and Lands End during their visits to San Francisco. The appeal of this place isn't surprising to us as temporary residents in this iconic building, but the menu choices for these presidential meals do raise an eyebrow or two. See for yourself in ***The Presidents Visit Lands End***.

To wrap up the first issue of the year, we give space to all of our members who make the WNP family so special. And we leave you in ***The Last Word*** with a person who left us in February this year: Bill Hickey. Kelly's Cove and Ocean Beach will never be the same without him and the Outside Lands wouldn't be the same without all of you.

As I think about all we gained in 2021 and those we lost as well, I'm reminded of another inspiring woman: a favorite singer-songwriter named Jesca Hoop. I had her songs "The House That Jack Built" and "Memories Are Now" on repeat as I wrote and/or read the pieces you'll read now. It's an amazing thing we each do, going about our daily lives and building the memories that build the city around us. We at WNP are honored to preserve them and I personally am so thankful for all of you who take the time to share them with us.

Here's to spending another year together in San Francisco's Outside Lands.

# WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

## By Paul Judge

**There's one thing for certain about the Outside Lands: there is a heck of a lot of sand beneath its thoroughfares, parks, and blocks of homes and buildings.**



View southeast from Geary and Masonic, mid-1940s. (Bill Kostura Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.1401)

Seeing our mystery image, reader **Roger Goldberg** hunched that it might be the Standard Oil "lighthouse" service station on the northeast corner of Point Lobos Avenue and 48th Avenue/El Camino Del Mar. Actually, this is the eastern end of the Richmond District that portrays a landscape undergoing change in the mid-1940s. The photo was taken from the top of the Bekins Storage building at 2690 Geary Boulevard, which was built in 1923 and is a Public Storage building today. Looking southeast, the image shows a cleared Calvary Cemetery, its many graves relocated to Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma.




Bekins Storage building on the northwest corner of Geary and Masonic, January 9, 1949. (Photo by L.L. Bonney; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.1770)

What is to come on this sandy lot after the photo was taken? The Sears, Roebuck and Co. department store opened in 1951 and stood for decades at Geary and Masonic. Downhill further east on Geary, Kaiser Permanente Hospital was built in 1952. Many mid-century kids remember both these establishments: savoring the smell of popcorn wafting from the candy counter while browsing aisles of merchandise, or perhaps receiving polio vaccinations or having their tonsils removed at Kaiser. In the background of our mystery image, further south, the Anza Vista residential development will be built, typical of the post-World War II housing construction that infilled the west side of the city.

The old Sears building has since been renovated into the City Center shopping complex, now anchored by Target. Nicole Meldahl, David Gallagher, and Woody LaBounty discussed the significance of this Sears in Outside Lands podcast #407. In the 2018 second quarter issue of this magazine, Woody wrote about granite curbs and tombstones originating from Calvary Cemetery that were excavated earlier that year from a portion of the old Sears parking lot.




Sears store on the southeast corner of Geary and Masonic, July 31, 1956. (Photo by George McLane; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.50448)



Charlie hoped to get aloft for a current aerial view, but only his ears took flight. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

Super-sleuth duo **Margaret Ostermann** and her canine history partner Charlie sussed out more than just the location of this photo. With no visible branding on the service station, curiosity sent Margaret poking through the 1946 Assessor's block book. It revealed that the southeast corner lot on Geary and Masonic was a Union Oil Company service station, which was confirmed in a city directory of the era as 2699 Geary. Armed with a numbered address, a snoop through the *San Francisco Chronicle* archives pulled up some naughty activity at this little station. In 1944, station operator George E. Hopkins was "charged with possession of 162 counterfeit [gasoline] coupons."[1] Hopkins's fake C-2 ration coupons were of the class issued to those deemed essential to the war effort, such as doctors and mail carriers. The service station was torn down by 1948, and the entire block carved back, to accommodate the widening curve of the Masonic Avenue roadway.

1. "Two S.F. Men Face Gasoline Charges," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 23, 1944.

## Let's take a ride for the next photo quiz!

**Send your guesses to nicole@outsidelands.org**



# Al Young & Connie Young Yu Remember

**Alfred John Young and his sister, Connie Young Yu, have left their mark on the world as descendants of a pioneering Chinese American family with roots that reach back to the Transcontinental Railroad and San Jose's Chinatown. The Youngs were one of the earliest Chinese American families to move to the Richmond District, in 1948. The experience of growing up at 37th Avenue and Balboa Street led Al to become a lifelong, award-winning educator and champion race car driver. Meanwhile, Connie is a prolific historian and writer whose family continues to inspire much of her work.**

**Palma You and Steve Haines of the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA) interviewed Al on November 18, 2020, as part of *Chinese in the Richmond* – a collaboration with Western Neighborhoods Project that illuminates the lives of Chinese Americans in San Francisco's Richmond District. Connie submitted additional memories in writing. As Al declared, "The real stories are far more interesting than what you can make up." Reading through their story, it's hard to argue with that statement.**

## Family Origins

Al and Connie's father, John Chew Young, was born in San Jose's Chinatown on June 16, 1912. His father, Young Soong Quong (known to the family as "Gung-Gung"), came to California as a laborer at the age of 11 in 1881, one year before the Chinese Exclusion Act went into effect. Al recalled that Gung-Gung "had a store there when my father was born, and they registered and purchased the store in my father's name because Chinese could not own property." Connie served as a historical consultant on the archeological excavation of San Jose's Chinatown, and in 2021 co-accepted an apology to Chinese Americans by the City of San Jose for its violence, terrorism, and systemic racism towards Chinese in the city.

John attended Stanford University, where he joined the U.S. Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). In 1936, John received his second lieutenant's commission at a summer training course at Fort Worden, Washington – the only cadet of color in his entire company. Al remembered that in 1937, "my father graduated with a master's degree in petroleum engineering" and soon thereafter married Mary Lee. The couple had three children: Janey, Connie (born in 1941), and Alfred John (born in 1946).

On Al and Connie's mother's side, their great-grandfather, Lee Wong Sang, "came over in the 1860s to work on building the Transcontinental Railroad." He later opened an import-export store with partner Quong Shing Lung in San Francisco's Chinatown. Connie was a co-editor of *Voices from the Railroad: Stories by Descendants of Chinese Railroad Workers*, published by CHSA. She also spoke on behalf of all descendants of Chinese railroad workers at their induction into the Labor Hall of Honor in 2014, and again at the 150th Golden Spike ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah in 2019.



Connie, Janey, and Al in the backyard of the Young Family home, 674 37th Avenue, 1949. (Courtesy of Al Young)




Left to right: Janey, Connie, Mary, John, and Al at the Young family home, 674 37th Avenue, circa 1952. (Courtesy of Al Young)

According to Al, "I never knew why I was Catholic. I would ask, 'Mom, why am I Catholic?'" Mary Lee Young told him the story of her grandparents, San Francisco-born Yoke Suey Lee and his wife Shee Wong, born in China. Yoke had a job based in Shanghai with The Oriental Trading Company, as an agent for American goods for Levi Strauss and the Haas brothers. Yoke brought his family to live with him in Shanghai, and after his death in 1922, his widow and children returned to America in 1924. Shee was detained at Angel Island. Although her children and husband were U.S. citizens, when Yoke died "she lost all status and was to be deported to China." Shee was imprisoned on Angel Island for nearly 16 months. Mary told Al that "My mother was allowed to visit her every week [for 15 minutes], but she wasn't allowed to be within 60 feet of her for almost a year and a half. We had finally exhausted almost every legal means when she heard the rumor that there was a Catholic priest that knew how to get people off of the island. So my mother approached him." The priest said that he could only help if Shee, her children, and grandchildren all became Catholic. They did, and Shee was released in April 1925. Connie returned to the island with her mother in 1974 for a documentary and remembered that Mary "told me tearfully, 'Here is the window where she would wave to me – I could see her hand waving when I was on the walkway going to the ferry.'"[1]

## Standard Oil to Soy Sauce

After graduating from Stanford, John C. Young worked for Standard Oil. Al recalled that they "hired him not knowing he was Chinese. After about a year he was told by several people that there was no future for him at Standard Oil because he was Chinese. So then he worked for the Conservation Committee for a while when we lived in Los Angeles, and then we moved to Whittier." Mary "opened up a Chinese gift shop in Whittier," Al said. "We were the only Chinese people in Whittier. At the time it was an 'in' thing to have something Chinese. All the rich people felt that if they owned something from the Orient, that was cool. So she picked up on that, very astute, and she made a very good living."

As a reserve officer, John was called to active duty with the U.S. Army in 1942. Al remembered, "My dad fought for two-and-a-half years overseas without rotation." He was assigned to the China-Burma-India Theater, where he served in combat zones along the Burma Road as a liaison officer. John returned home in 1945. "After a while my father decided to go into business in San Francisco's Chinatown where he can actually have a business without being impaired by his racial status in America. He built a business producing soy sauce."

John built the Wing Nien Brand with his brother-in-law, George Hall, L.C. Lee, Fred Lee, and George Chew. It was the first factory in the United States to manufacture soy sauce using the old Chinese fermentation process. "At the time, trade with China was difficult so imported soy sauce was expensive and my father and his brother-in-law saw the need," Al explained. "They felt that if they produced soy sauce domestically for the restaurants and all of the other Chinatowns in America, that that would be a viable business." As a teenager, Al was "a delivery driver for soy sauce in Chinatown, as my summer job."

In the 1950s, Wing Nien went into business with Johnny Kan; John Young and George Hall became part owners of Kan's Restaurant in San Francisco. A *San Francisco Chronicle* article from 2003 described it as "among the first elegant Chinese restaurants to cater to Westerners in the Bay Area. Trained as engineers, the pair introduced such touches as a lazy Susan for restaurant tables and perfumed wash cloths."[2]

John Young later became head of Wing Nien and oversaw the move to a larger plant in Potrero Hill before retiring in 1977. In 2013, Connie and Effie Hall Dilworth published *Wing Nien Brand: A Story of Longevity*, which tells the story of the company's early years and how its history connects with Chinatown's growth.

## Moving to the Richmond

Doing well for themselves and wanting more space for their family, the Youngs migrated west in 1948. They were living on Jackson Street between Grant and Stockton Streets in "one of those really crowded apartments," Al remembered. "If you've ever lived in an apartment in Chinatown with a family,



Angel Island Immigration Station; Administration Building with Detention Barracks in background, July 7, 1939. (Photo by Murry N. Fay; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.0725)

then you'd know that you'd really want a house and a garden and everything else. At the time my father was promoted to lieutenant colonel and he was eligible for the GI Bill, so one could get a house with no down payment. And my mother was very successful in her business…so she said we can afford to live in many neighborhoods."

Al continued, "the realtors were always showing us homes in different areas outside of the Richmond District, and my parents wanted to live in the Richmond District. The realtors said, 'We cannot and will not sell to an Asiatic.' My father was really frustrated with this and told one of his army buddies and best friend, Keith Bering, of the situation, and I think they hatched a plot." Keith purchased a Richmond District home and then sold it to the Young family, "and at a great risk because, according to the real estate covenants, if you sell to an Asiatic or someone who is not Caucasian, you forfeit all of your profits from the house."

Connie remembered that the family "moved to a modest house at 674 37th Avenue, the first Chinese family that far down in 'The Avenues.'" A *San Francisco Examiner* advertisement listed the home as "offered by owner for quick sale" in June 1948 for $13,750. The "beautifully decorated" five-room bungalow had new appliances, renewed floors, a yard, and was close to schools, shopping, and streetcars.[3]

*"If you've ever lived in an apartment in Chinatown with a family, then you'd know that you'd really want a house and a garden and everything else."*

"When we moved in, our next-door neighbor circulated a petition to get us out of the neighborhood to enforce the racial covenant against Asians and people of color," Al recalled. John's army buddies "were incensed. When you fight side-by-side, you think totally differently about whom you're with. You form a bond and brotherhood. And so they all decided to



View north on Grant from Jackson, August 15, 1949. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.0854)




St. Thomas First Holy Communion, 1954. (Courtesy

## "We had the feeling that we needed to assert ourselves, an

hold all of their monthly reserve meetings at our house in the Richmond…They parked up the neighborhood, came up in uniform and brass, with their children, and nobody ever gave us a problem after that. Army Strong!" John returned to active duty during the Korean War and remained a reserve officer until 1972, when he retired with the rank of full colonel.

Al explained that "We had the feeling that we needed to assert ourselves, and we're going into this neighborhood to live as Americans. I'm not sure how other people of color felt about moving into, at the time, an all-white neighborhood, but we certainly felt that we had every right to be there as third- and fourth-generation Americans, and an army family…We were accepted into the neighborhood eventually."

### Memories of the Neighborhood

The Richmond District, as Al remembered, was "a middle-class neighborhood. Almost everyone was employed, working class or professional, and had similar backgrounds. Most of the parents were in the war – a lot of shared experiences. The neighborhood was great." The Youngs lived just a half block from the Balboa Theater. "The biggest thing was birthday parties," Al declared. "Everybody had to have birthday parties, and they were almost identical. We'd have hot dogs and ice cream and go to the Balboa Theater for a matinee."

Al also recalled that "Down the block from my home, which was so weird, was a Chinese orphanage. And I never saw the orphans! I lived there for 16 years and I never saw an orphan." Nobody ever saw orphans at 740 37th Avenue (Mei Lun Yuen) because the white neighborhood feared an influx of "Oriental children." A proper garden and fences were proposed to shield the sight of Chinese babies from white residents.

As for local businesses, Al listed "Jack's Hand Laundry was owned by Chinese, and he knew our family also. He was on Balboa, maybe three storefronts up from 36th going towards 35th Avenue. I know that because I always had to pick up laundry. It was right across the street from the Frosty Bossy [ice cream parlor]." Al remembered that "the other Chinese business was a supermarket," kitty-corner from the Shell gas station on 37th Avenue and Balboa. "Next to the Shell station was Cala Foods, and right across the street from that was another supermarket, and then right on the corner of 37th and Balboa there was another – three supermarkets within 150 feet."

Al enjoyed working with his hands, and his mother encouraged his hobbies. "I had a work bench downstairs where I worked on my projects, my model airplanes…There were about three hobby shops in the Richmond District. I knew them all." He "built model airplanes, model boats, model cars, gas engines" and "visited the Polo Field and Spreckels Lake very often, flying model airplanes, or running model



of Al Young)




Shell Station on the northeast corner of 37th Avenue and Balboa, 1951. (SF Assessors Office Negatives / wnp58.201)

## d we're going into this neighborhood to live as Americans."

boats with engines." As a kid, Al "joined model airplane clubs. We would have meetings located at different people's homes and they would be in the Richmond."

"Then that turned into cars," Al explained. "As soon as I hit 15 years old, I bought a car before I could even have a license to drive. It was a 1950 Mercury, four door, $25, with no first gear. I hid it around the corner so my parents couldn't find it. Finally, I had to tell them and they allowed me to bring it back into the house and use the garage. I think they realized that, 'We couldn't fight this, at least he was interested in something.' Boy was I interested!"

Once he had his license, Al "raced around all the time!...We would go to the Great Highway and there would be parking lots at either end. The Great Highway was not blocked off the way it is now, it was a straight stretch, a good three miles. One side, there was no place for a policeman to park, so if you raced on that side, they could never see you because there was a big berm. The other side we called the hot side – a cop could actually see."

### School Days

"We lived four houses down from Lafayette School, so I was able to go to the playground there all the time," Al remembered. "It was a very idyllic childhood and I felt very privileged. I did everything I wanted to do and I never felt any kind of prejudice. If someone said something off-color, most people would say, 'What are you, crazy?' Or I would have to punch them in the nose and then it was all settled. But that was it."

Other Lafayette recollections included the May Festivals. "We would dance around the flag poles and did all these fertility rites that we didn't know were fertility rites. We could not even pronounce the names of the dances that we did. It was all from Scandinavian or Baltic countries, but we loved them!" Al also fondly recalled "Miss Bett, who was our kindergarten teacher; she was also my sister's kindergarten teacher. My sisters went to Lafayette before I went to Lafayette. When I entered in, I felt very much at home."

Al attended St. Thomas Catholic Church on 39th Avenue and Balboa. "We were public school kids, and we were let out for two weeks during the time of our confirmation. We had to take confirmation classes at St. Thomas…for two weeks even though we were enrolled at Lafayette Grammar School. It was organized between the public schools and the Catholic schools. It was a fun time!"

According to Al, "I never knew I had a learning disability going through elementary school." In 1958, his teachers selected him to attend Lux Lab, an after-school science program. "I built a lot of things and I love to work with my hands – radios

and with directions, not that I invented them…there were kids that were truly gifted; I was not one of them, I just like to build things." Al continued, "Here I was with a background of being a gifted kid, going to a gifted school, going to Presidio Junior High School…And I couldn't read. I have ADHD, which is another story. I didn't know I did until I was 50 years old. I can read, but by the time I got to the end of the sentence, I forgot how the sentence started. So reading was futile to me in my early years…I started in the top group and I matriculated slowly downward."

"When I went to George Washington High School, I started at the bottom group and went down even lower, which means I'm cutting school and I'm just not doing schoolwork," Al remembered. "My father goes to Stanford, my sister goes to Stanford, and I can't even read." School was difficult and Al "loved the social part of it and I had lots of friends, but it was depressing." He did serve as team captain for an intramural touch football team after school at George Washington. "I chose one of my best friends, Jim Higgins, who was Black, to be on my team and he helps me recruit other students. He gets his friend, Danny Glover, and they bring on more of their friends. I had this entire touch football team made up entirely of Danny Glover's friends!"

"Fortunately, at George Washington, they give you two tracks: college prep and vocational education," Al described. "I told my dad that I wanted to go voc-ed instead of college prep and, being Chinese, he was vehemently against it. But I told him that it's either that, or I was dropping out of school to become a mechanic." John relented; Al switched to the voc-ed track and "managed to graduate from George Washington High School with a 1.38 grade point average, getting a 'D' in almost all of my subjects that weren't voc-ed related." Al still attends reunions with his Richmond District schoolmates. "Of our high school graduating class, many of us have known each other since we were five years old. We went to Lafayette, then Presidio, then George Washington."

Al's after-school jobs were tied to his interests. "I worked at Balboa Richfield from the time I was 16 until the time I was 18. And that was at 25th Avenue and Balboa, at a gas station. I also apprenticed at an auto repair shop." This was part of the arrangement for switching to the voc-ed track. "I would spend some days after school and Saturdays being an apprentice at a foreign car repair shop. My dad knew an auto repair shop owner, Steven Sui, [who] had a foreign car repair shop, one of the few Chinese-owned auto repair garages in San Francisco."

Connie also graduated from George Washington, in 1959. Looking back, she said "I did not experience overt racism in the public school classroom, though all of us were taught American history was only about white people, and Western civilization was the only real civilization in the world." She thought that George Washington was "great" but "the whole society was sexist. Girls were second-class citizens, verbally insulted, whistled at and it was accepted. We did not have any varsity sports, girls were never class or elected student body president, but fine for vice president or secretary. Asian girls stereotyped as exotic, etc."[4]

The Young children attended Chinese school as well. Al remembered that "Both my parents spoke Chinese fluently." Mary "went back to China as a child to be educated," and John's parents "only spoke Chinese." But from Al's perspective, "here's a guy – me – who can't even read English! Let alone put me in a Chinese school." He cut school so often that "three different Chinese schools had asked me to leave before my parents finally gave up." Connie, however, "speaks pretty well."

Al recalled that his parents "were very civic-minded," and the Young family maintained their connections to Chinatown. John helped found the annual Chinese New Year Parade and was an integral member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Among other things, he "was involved in getting low-cost federal housing [Ping Yuen] into Chinatown." Mary was an artist and "had art shows with her collection of art and some of her own, and she had her group of friends who were also great artists." The art shows were in Chinatown "just to get people interested in Chinese culture. A lot of Chinese wanted to learn about their own culture, so she was able to use her fan, jade, art collection to show them."

## The Next Chapter

Al studied English literature at the University of Washington, earning a BA in 1968 and MA in 1972. He co-founded the Summit K-12 School, one of Seattle's first alternative schools. For 37 years, the man who almost dropped out of George Washington High School taught everything from academic courses to auto shop to Chinese cooking. In 2004, Al was recognized as one of Seattle Public School's "Heroes in the Classroom." He retired in 2008. His wife, Vicki Johnson, is also a retired public school teacher.

Additionally, Al became an accomplished race car driver. From 1976 to 1996, he was twice winner of every major Championship E.T. Drag Race National event in the Pacific Northwest, and he was the American Hot Rod Association World Champion in 1981, among other championship titles. He is still a sponsored driver and ambassador for the Bardahl Corporation. In May 2019, Al was inducted into the George Washington High School Hall of Merit for Motorsports and Education.

Connie studied literature and journalism at Mills College in Oakland, where she was valedictorian of her 1963 graduating class. She reflected that "things changed in a positive way for me going to Mills College, a liberal arts women's college…Women were leaders at Mills College. I was head of Model United Nations, on the literary magazine, worked on the college newspaper. My English professor suggested I write a paper on Mark Twain and the Chinese. That started me on the course of Chinese American history."[5] Connie later served on the College's Board of Trustees. As a founding member of the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee, she played a central role in



Connie giving the valedictorian speech at Mills College graduation,1963. (Courtesy of Connie Young Yu)

getting the site designated a National Historic Landmark.

Connie married Dr. John Kou Ping Yu, an oncologist, and is a force to be reckoned with, equal to her parents and younger brother. She is a renowned historian, lecturer, and writer, having authored numerous articles and four major books that daylight the history of Chinese and Asian America. She also taught fencing for over 25 years at The Fencing Center in San Jose. Connie was awarded the State of California 13th Senate District "Woman of the Year" award by Senator Jerry Hill in 2016.

## Conclusion

John C. Young was an original board member of the Chinese Historical Society of America. Al is active with the organization, and Connie is a Trustee Emeritus Board member and was recognized at CHSA's "Voice and Vision Gala" in 2012 as a "History Makers" inductee.

Looking back on his time in the Richmond District, Al acknowledged "being able to exercise some of the fruits of economic privilege by living [there]. I was able to do everything, I never feared the police, or feared that they were not on our side to help us. I could go anywhere I wanted, I could buy anything I wanted if I had the money. There were jobs available. I felt privileged. The few Black people I knew in the Richmond District probably felt the same way, but with an undercurrent of constant anxiety. I know they felt it. The reason I know that is because one of my best friends, Louis Scott, who is Black, grew up there." In high school, Louis "started hanging out with kids who were from the Fillmore District," and Al remembered that "he wouldn't talk to me. He had found a group of friends that had a shared experience of prejudice and felt more secure with them than he did from our neighborhood…He chose to identify with his Black friends who understood his Blackness. As far as me being Chinese and growing up in the Richmond District, I felt very privileged and did not feel overt racism."

However, Al recognized that he "was accepted into groups that were terribly prejudiced and always talked about Black people in the worst way possible, in the most racist way possible. Sometimes it would go, 'Oh Al, you're White, you're White.' By the time you get to high school you realize people are trying to separate you." Listening to this rhetoric made him feel "horrible, really bad. First of all, it doesn't match anything I know!" At George Washington High School's senior day, Al sang in the barbershop quartet. "All three of these guys were Black and I grew up with them. And we're on stage singing the barbershop quartet and one of my friend's friends says, 'I can't believe you're singing on stage [slur].' That really shook me up…So, I'm very privy to the way certain people act and the mechanics of racism."

Al reflected on a trip to Ireland a few years ago. "They were the friendliest people I've ever met, but it was just like the Richmond District, where I grew up! You know, Irish Catholic and St. Thomas, so I can identify with that so well and I was treated the same way I was treated in the Richmond District. That's a very ironic thing. That's my biggest takeaway growing up here as an Asian. I can't say that for other people of different ethnicities." The diversity of experiences Al had in the Richmond, good and bad, endowed him with relatable characteristics that transcend national boundaries.

1. "In her own words: Connie Young Yu shares her thoughts on being a descendant of Chinese railroad workers," *AsAmNews*, May 27, 2020.
2. "Family soy sauce business long lived / Most such enterprises don't survive past first generation," *SFGATE*, October 14, 2003.
3. "$13,750 Richmond Bungalow," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 6, 1948.
4. "In her own words: Connie Young Yu shares her thoughts on being a descendant of Chinese railroad workers," *AsAmNews*, May 27, 2020.
5. Ibid.

# THE PRESIDENT VISIT LANDS EN

## By Arnold Woods

***As the most populous and prestigious city on the West Coast for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, San Francisco has long been a mecca for politicians courting favor and money. Presidents were certainly not immune to the gravitational pull of the City by the Bay, but it was not until 30 years after the city's incorporation that a sitting president descended upon San Francisco. When presidents did begin making the journey west, much of their focus was naturally on the political elite and rich power brokers largely found in the downtown area. However, Lands End had both an irresistible attraction and a notable resident that brought presidents to the edge of the world.***

Rutherford B. Hayes was the first sitting president to not only make the trip to San Francisco, but to visit the West Coast. "Sitting" is the operative word; former President Ulysses S. Grant and his wife, Julia, visited San Francisco in September 1879, two and a half years after leaving office. During his stay, Grant dined twice at the Cliff House. The first time was for dinner on September 22, 1879 with city supervisors and other dignitaries. Many well-wishers and an army veteran who served under Grant stopped by to greet him. On September 29, Grant returned to the Cliff House for breakfast with members of the military.

President Hayes arrived in the city on September 9, 1880, the 30th anniversary of California's admission into the union. After stepping off the ferry from Oakland, the president was greeted by a large crowd and then took a carriage to the Palace Hotel, where he was staying. Over the next 11 days, Hayes traveled around the Bay Area meeting politicians, greeting crowds, and sightseeing.

On the last day of his San Francisco visit, the president was a guest of the Board of Supervisors. They took him first to a Geary Street Railroad depot to inspect a cable car, as Hayes had expressed interest in seeing how the system worked. The group then headed to Golden Gate Park to visit the Conservatory of Flowers, which had opened the year before. From there, they went to an "elegant" lunch at the Cliff House. With this trip to the park and the Cliff House, Hayes became the first President in office to step foot in the Outside Lands. It would be over a decade before another president would do so. The Hayes party left for Oregon the next day.

Benjamin Harrison was the next United States president to make the journey west to California. Like Hayes before him, the trip was made by train, first to the Los Angeles area, then north to the Bay Area. Arriving in Oakland on Saturday, April 25, 1891, Harrison took a ferry ride aboard the steamer *Piedmon*t, leaving at 6:30 p.m. and arriving in the city thereafter to a grand spectacle that included bands, searchlights, fireworks, and crowds. Once again, the Palace Hotel hosted the presidential party following the welcoming reception.

It was not until Monday, April 27 that Harrison really began to see the San Francisco sights, as the day before had been reserved for church and rest. On the morning of the 27th, school groups packed both sides of Van Ness Avenue as the president and his party paraded up one side and down the other to cheers from the school children. After the short parade, the horse carriages turned and headed west on Golden Gate Avenue towards Golden Gate Park, with more well-wishers lining the street until "open country" was reached.

It was a "perfect day" for the trip to the country, with blue skies, sunshine, and flowers in bloom in the park. Following the Hayes gameplan, the presidential party first took in the Conservatory of Flowers, where there was a reception with many notable locals. After a short visit to see a bison named for him, Harrison took the trip to the ocean, where his carriage was driven along the edge of the surf. As is known to happen, the fog was beginning to creep in at that time. The president was evidently well-informed of San Francisco's notorious weather changes and had a heavier coat that he put on as the temperature dropped.




Menu cover from President Roosevelt's Cliff House banquet, May 13, 1903. (Cliff House Collection; Western Neighborhoods Project)

The president had been expected to lunch at the Cliff House, but Adolph Sutro had joined the procession in the park and invited Harrison to lunch at his home at Sutro Heights instead. Harrison accepted and made only a quick stop at the Cliff House to acknowledge the crowd waiting for him. The Sutro Heights lunch party consisted of 42 people and featured a menu of California oysters, beef tea, cold turkey, goose tongue, ham, goose liver, sardines, sardelles (anchovies), caviar, asparagus, artichokes, sweetbreads with mushrooms, and roasted chicken and duck. Desserts included sponge cakes, wine jelly, ice cream, strawberries, and macaroons. Sutro also had a selection of red and white wines, champagne, cognac, chartreuse, curaçao, kirsch, and coffee to serve his guests.

During the luncheon, Sutro presented Harrison with a 1602 letter from the Spanish navigator Sebastián Vizcaíno, which Sutro claimed was the first letter written by any human from California. In his speech, the president thanked Sutro for the letter and welcome "to a spot, the natural beauty of which has been so much enhanced by your efforts. My visit to Sutro heights, the cliff and park will be a red-letter day in my journey."[1]

After lunch, Harrison and his entourage walked to the nearby Ferries and Cliff House depot and took the train back through the Richmond District. As they were leaving, Sutro gave each member of the president's party a souvenir album with pictures of the views of and from Sutro Heights. Adolph Sutro certainly made a big impression. The president and his group got off the train at First Avenue (today's Arguello Boulevard) and took carriages from there to the Presidio for



President Harrison, Mrs. Harrison, and party on the parapet of Sutro Heights, April 27, 1891. (Photo by A. J. McDonald; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.0194)

further activities. After a few more days of events, Harrison boarded a train for a trip down the Peninsula to San Jose, then to Monterey.

A decade later, President William McKinley undertook a cross-country rail trip early in his second term. However, his wife Ida fell ill on their way to San Francisco. When they arrived on May 12, 1901, they were quickly taken to the home of Irving M. Scott, vice president and general manager of the Union Iron Works and chairman of the executive committee for the presidential visit. McKinley stayed with his wife for



Cliff House banquet for President Roosevelt, May 13, 1903. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.0041)



President Roosevelt dedicating the Dewey Monument, Union Square, May 14, 1903. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.01050)



President Taft breaking
14, 1911. (Photo by G.
Collector / wnp37.018

much of the duration of their trip, only venturing out for a few ceremonial festivities. Although a luncheon at the Cliff House had been scheduled, McKinley never visited. Lunch was held at the Cliff House on May 15 for other distinguished visitors on the presidential trip as well as East Coast newspapermen. Although contemporary press reports indicate that McKinley never made it to the Cliff House, many websites still list him as one of the presidents who visited the site, likely because of newspaper listings showing that he was scheduled to eat there.

Just five months after his visit to the city, McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo, New York. His successor, Theodore Roosevelt, made his own trip to San Francisco, arriving by train on May 12, 1903 and staying at – you guessed it – the Palace Hotel. The day after his arrival, Roosevelt made the same drive down a school-children-lined Van Ness Avenue that Harrison had made a dozen years prior. Roosevelt's group then headed west for a drive through Golden Gate Park to the Cliff House, where an elaborate lunch awaited.

This Cliff House was the elaborate French chateau version; Roosevelt was the first, and last, president to visit it. When Roosevelt arrived at 1:15 p.m. he was first taken up to the tower to view the Farallon Islands. Unfortunately, the fog intervened and obscured the view. He then descended to an ocean-side veranda room where a large banquet table had been set up. The room was decorated with smilax (flowering plants) and acacia twigs, and the long table held roses, sweet peas, marguerites (daises), and ferns. Bunting hung on the ceiling while American flags and a portrait of Roosevelt were placed on the walls.

Other lunch guests, over 80 in all, were already there awaiting the president. The newspapers reported that Roosevelt was very hungry and immediately chowed down on some almonds before digging into the oysters that were immediately served. The rest of the menu included olives, "essence of chicken in a cup", filet of sole "a la Cliff House", lamb chops, roast squab, and a tomato and romaine salad. Liquid refreshments on offer were white and red wines, mineral water, and coffee. Dessert consisted of strawberries, ice cream, and "fancy cakes". Roosevelt liked the filet of sole so much that he asked for a second helping. Chef Zenovich, who prepared the food, called it the proudest day of his life. Western Neighborhoods Project is fortunate to now safeguard a rare surviving menu from this luncheon. Mary Hountalas, longtime proprietor of the former Cliff House restaurant, ensured our acquisition of the menu at the Cliff House auction in March 2021.

The many guests at the luncheon included Mayor Eugene Schmitz, M. H. de Young, Admiral Andrew Bickford, commander in chief of the British Royal Navy's Pacific Station, members of Roosevelt's cabinet, and various American military men including General Arthur MacArthur Jr., Douglas MacArthur's father. Roosevelt, who was also a naval historian, spent much of the luncheon talking with Admiral Bickford on naval matters.

By the time lunch ended around 2:30 p.m., the fog was really rolling in. The president was prepared with an overcoat, however, and got in his carriage for the trip back to Golden Gate Park. He stopped at the McKinley Memorial, where Spanish-American War veterans made a presentation. After




g ground for the PPIE, Golden Gate Park Polo Fields, October
H. Dresser, Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of a Private
74)



President Taft and party dining at the Cliff House, October 15,1911. (Courtesy of Glenn D. Koch Collection)

a speech that evening at the Mechanic's Pavilion, and the dedication of the Dewey Monument in Union Square the following morning, Roosevelt headed across the bay for further ceremonies before leaving for Yosemite late on May 14, 1903.

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, also made the trip west as part of a nationwide tour in which he hoped to drum up public support and thus pressure Congress to ratify his arbitration treaties with England and France. Taft's train pulled into Oakland on Friday afternoon, October 13, 1911, where a parade took him from the depot to the Army transport cutter *Slocum* docked at the wharf at the foot of Broadway. Upon *Slocum*'s delivery of the president to San Francisco, he was warmly feted by large crowds lining Market Street for a parade in his honor. Unlike his predecessors, Taft stayed at the St. Francis Hotel, not the Palace, though a banquet for him was held at the Palace on the night of his arrival. The St. Francis decorated the president's rooms with a "veritable flower garden, with the national colors tastily festooned from chandelier to walls."[2]

With the president coming to town, San Francisco arranged to have a groundbreaking ceremony for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), even though a site for the Expo had not yet been selected. On Saturday, October 14, an estimated 100,000 people attended the ceremony at the Polo Fields in Golden Gate Park, one of the possible locations for the PPIE. After turning a shovelful of dirt in the stadium, Taft spoke about the centuries-long desire for a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and how close to completion it finally was. He congratulated California for "their energy and their enterprise and their patriotism and their generosity" in commemorating this "great event in the world's history."[3]

After attending church services the following day, Taft was escorted by police motorcycles to the Cliff House for lunch with the PPIE directors. The route took the motorcade through Golden Gate Park, which the president had not seen much of the day before at the PPIE groundbreaking event. As Adolph Sutro's grand Cliff House had burned down in 1907, Taft dined at Emma Sutro Merritt's Cliff House, which opened in 1909. The luncheon took place in the main dining room and Taft reportedly appreciated the view out over the ocean. After lunch, the president was taken to a hilltop in Lincoln Park to enjoy the view before heading to the Presidio. Taft departed for Los Angeles by train that evening.

With the death of Adolph Sutro in 1898 and declining business at the Cliff House because of Prohibition and the Great Depression, Lands End was no longer a must-see destination for visiting presidents. They continued coming to the city, typically in connection to campaigning, but Taft was the last president hosted at Lands End. As the city expanded west and sand dunes were replaced by housing and business, the Cliff House was no longer the isolated exotic location it once was. But for a period of just over 30 years, the Cliff House and Sutro Heights were indelible attractions for the leader of the nation.

1. "San Francisco Guests," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 1891.
2. "Arrival of Taft Marked By Cheers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1911.
3. "Reviews Work On Big Undertaking," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 15, 1911.

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Olympic Club Annual Swim at Ocea

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n Beach, January 1, 1912. (Pillsbury Picture Co.; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp15.1072)

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Key System Train, October 9, 1953. (Call-Bulletin; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.7912)



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, 1943. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.10055)



Camp Merritt, June 1898. (Photo by Edwin J. Stotler, Edwin J. Stotler Photograph Collection; courtesy of the Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives / wnp71.20009)

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James Showalter & LeeAnna Kelly
Martha Shumway
Thorsten & Kei Sideboard
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Tim Silva
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Larry Simi
David Simpson
Mike Skalnik
James & Liberty Smith
Barbara Smith
Jessica Smith
Megan Smith
Patrick Smith in honor of My Grandfather
Zach Snow in memory of Laurie Snow
Richard Specht
Mark Speltz
Ken Spielman & Helen Doyle
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Andrew Sponring
Kenneth Sproul in memory of Charles Fracchia
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Andy Thornley
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Tara & Thomas Towne
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Maia & Kenneth Tse
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Monica Williams
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Jim Wood
Ben Wood & Rachel Fleischman in honor of Thank You for the incredible work of Nicole
Kathleen Woodruff
Arnold Woods
Alexis Woods
Ken Woods & Tom Kelleher
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Cynthia Zamboukos
Lydia & Dmitriy Zaverukha
Amy Zelezen & Chris Holmes
Gary Zellerbach
Ken Zinns
Ben Zotto
Laura Zulliger & Julien van Hout

# THE LAST WORD

Bill Hickey, who we lost in February, was a California surf legend whose name appears throughout the *Tales from Kelly's Cove* oral history program WNP spearheaded in 2012. He's as Sunset as they come, with a father who worked for developer Henry Doelger and a family that moved to the neighborhood in 1941. He started bodysurfing at Kelly's Cove in the 1950s with a buddy who lived nearby. Later, he became Jack O'Neill's first employee at his first surf shop on Wawona Street in 1957. Courageous, immensely talented, and, above all else, incredibly humble, he was an integral participant at every Kelly's Cove reunion, which won't be the same without him.

If you knew or were inspired by Bill, please share your stories with us. Those memories are more important than ever.



Bill Hickey and daughter Amber on the Great Highway. (Photo by Dennis O'Rorke; courtesy of Dennis O'Rorke)

Below: Kelly's Cove, 1960s. (Photo by Dennis O'Rorke; courtesy of Dennis O'Rorke)



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