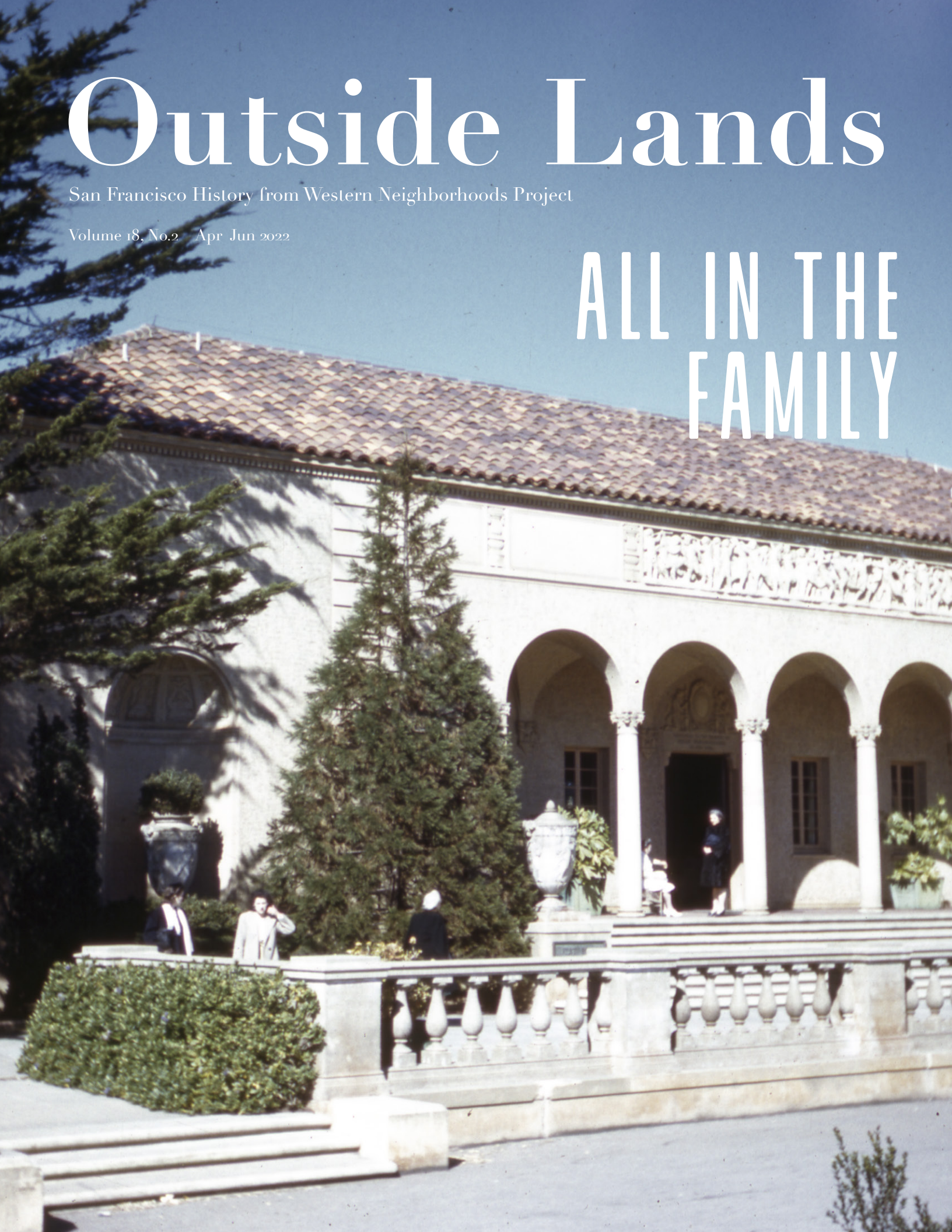
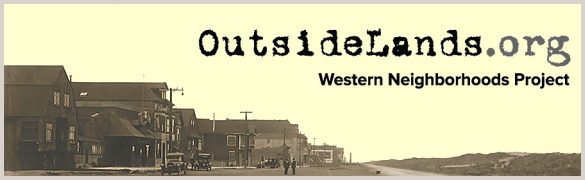
Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 18, No.2 Apr Jun 2022

ALL IN THE FAMILY





Outside Lands

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

Apr-Jun 2022: Volume 18, Number 2

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Cover: Mothers' Building, circa 1945. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.5241)

Right: Richmond District sand dunes, looking south toward Golden Gate Park, circa 1910. (Photo by Willard E. Worden; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp15.352)

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

When I was at the podium working my way through the program for our recent (successful!) gala, I realized that I've been with Western Neighborhoods Project for 10 years. I started volunteering with the organization in 2012 at the age of 27, hoping to expand my resume as a calculated career move. Instead, I found a group of people who loved all the same things I did, and I ended up with a surrogate family.

Let's be honest: nonprofit community history work is hard, and the most rewarding way to go about it is to do it with folks you love. Hence why we have another ***Where in West S.F.?*** written by one of my favorite human beings, **Paul Judge**, with the usual appearance from Charlie the History Poodle. Nothing makes history more approachable than when it's seen from the viewpoint of an adorable poodle, am I right?

Unless, of course, it comes straight from the source. For our oral history this quarter, we're proud to present the story of **Irene Soo Hoo Wong**, a participant in *Chinese in the Richmond*, our collaboration with the Chinese Historical Society of America. Her family owned and operated Richmond Mexico City Restaurant on Clement Street between 9th and 10th Avenues for decades, and it was one of the most beloved tamale joints in town.



This issue, we're also featuring a story from one of San Francisco's most storied families, the Fleishhackers. In exploring the history behind a map that was hidden in a closet for decades, **David Fleishhacker** (with the expert assistance of Angus Macfarlane) uncovered information that compels us to reconsider a longstanding theory about the initial cultivation of Golden Gate Park – one that's been touted by historians, journalists, and the Recreation and Parks Department. Just goes to show you that one man's genealogical discovery can have far-reaching impacts on how a city remembers its past.

One of the Fleishhacker family's gifts to the city that is near and dear to us is the Mothers' Building, which survives within the zoo but is in desperate need of conservation and a new purpose. We hope that can happen by its 100-year anniversary in 2025. In the meantime, **Isabel Scanlon** – our first-ever paid intern – traces its history. Isabel did incredible research for us and I'm thrilled to finally share it with you here.

It's true that most of us aren't as influential as the Fleishhackers or the Soo Hoos, but that doesn't make our own genealogy any less valuable. Ultimately, we're a family because we're all San Franciscans, and that gives us a shared history that is incomplete without having everyone at the table. I'm reminded of the Museum of Modern Art's 1955 photography exhibition, Family of Man. A reflection on World War II, it showcased the universal solidarity of being human, no matter where you lived. The point was to elevate everyday people who were living, despite what they had just survived.

There's comfort in feeling related to the people around us. I believe this now more than ever, as war tears through Ukraine, as a pandemic continues to unsettle the world, and as semiautomatic weapons wreak havoc again in America. This has nothing to do with San Francisco's west side, but everything to do with how we feel about living here and how important our community history work is, in its response to these feelings by providing context, filling gaps in the truth, and hopefully feeling whole together.

As always, I'm so grateful to be able to do this with and for all of you, dear members. Thank you for being part of the WNP family.



WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

By Paul Judge

Our mystery photo of L streetcar #104 rolling westbound on Ulloa Street, with two emblematic landmarks – the West Portal branch library and a glimpse of the original Twin Peaks Tunnel entrance – set off a flurry of reader recollection. We're talkin' a veritable streetcar full of recognition and memories! This bunch could fill pages reminiscing about their rides and destinations aboard the L-Taraval.

Eagle-eyed and with Muni transfers in hand: **Julie Alden**, **Fred Baumer**, **Frances Bruni**, **Tim Dineen**, **Roger Goldberg**, **David Green**, **Norm Stahl**, **Kathryn Wagner**, and **Wallace Wertsch**.

Patricia Kennedy Shanahan noted the photo was likely taken during World War II because "it has a sign in front that says 'Fill The War Chest.'" She further remarked that "today, Parkside residents wait for the 'L bus' heading West toward the Zoo at this location."



Charlie opted for the 1950s era "Muni Wings" livery when crafting his bandana. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)



Ulloa Street near Lenox Way, circa 1944. (Jack Tillmany Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp67.0139)

Margie Whitnah responded: "As a young child, I remember those street cars, like that 'L' on Ulloa which went to the beach and zoo…I mostly rode the 'K' car from Ocean Avenue, which was two blocks from my house, mainly to go Downtown. For many of my earliest years, taking the streetcar Downtown with mom for shopping (before Stonestown was built) meant wearing white gloves and a nice dress, coat, maybe a hat, but most likely a colorful triangular head scarf tied under my chin, fog or not."

Margie's memories vividly recalled "those cross-hatched metal gates that were sort of scary to me…the clinging coin box, interesting ads above the seats, and, of course, the sound of the cord that those riders tall enough could pull to get off at the next streetcar stop. Sometimes, as riders, we'd have to ask for a flimsy piece of paper from the streetcar driver in order to transfer to another streetcar or bus. Often that was with my mom to transfer to the bus to visit my grandmother in the Sunset, Zita Puente. Neither she nor my mom ever learned to drive a car, or 'The Machine', as my grandmother called it, but in Spanish." Before WWII, when streetcars were the more ubiquitous form of transit, "streetcar" was often shortened to "car," while newfangled automobiles were colloquially called "machines."

Junior historian Charlie put on his Muni kerchief to capture a present-day photo. But for Charlie's human, **Margaret Ostermann**, it was the size of the cow catcher-like fender on the "Iron Monster" streetcar that proved totally fascinating. Some research revealed this to be an "eclipse fender," designed "to actually scoop up pedestrians (after a good whack to the ankles!), preventing a fall beneath the streetcar. Looking at bustling street scenes from that era, I can only comfort myself in knowing that traffic moved a lot slower back then."





7-line streetcar #162 on Market Street near 5th Street, August 5, 1946. (Courtesy of Jack Tillmany / wnp5.50650)

Margaret continued: “In reading up on this, I was struck by the fact that there were no traffic signals in San Francisco when Muni was founded in 1912. The first ‘traffic indicator’ was installed in 1915 at Market and Kearny. I hope more signals very quickly followed that first one, considering that the ‘roar of the four’ streetcar tracks down Market Street required pedestrians to cross through traffic to access the inner United Railroad lines. So yes, I can see the need for giant safety fenders back then! Although an ‘eclipse fender’ image search on OpenSFHistory reveals these fenders unintentionally provided a precarious perch to nip a ride when they were folded up on the rear end!”

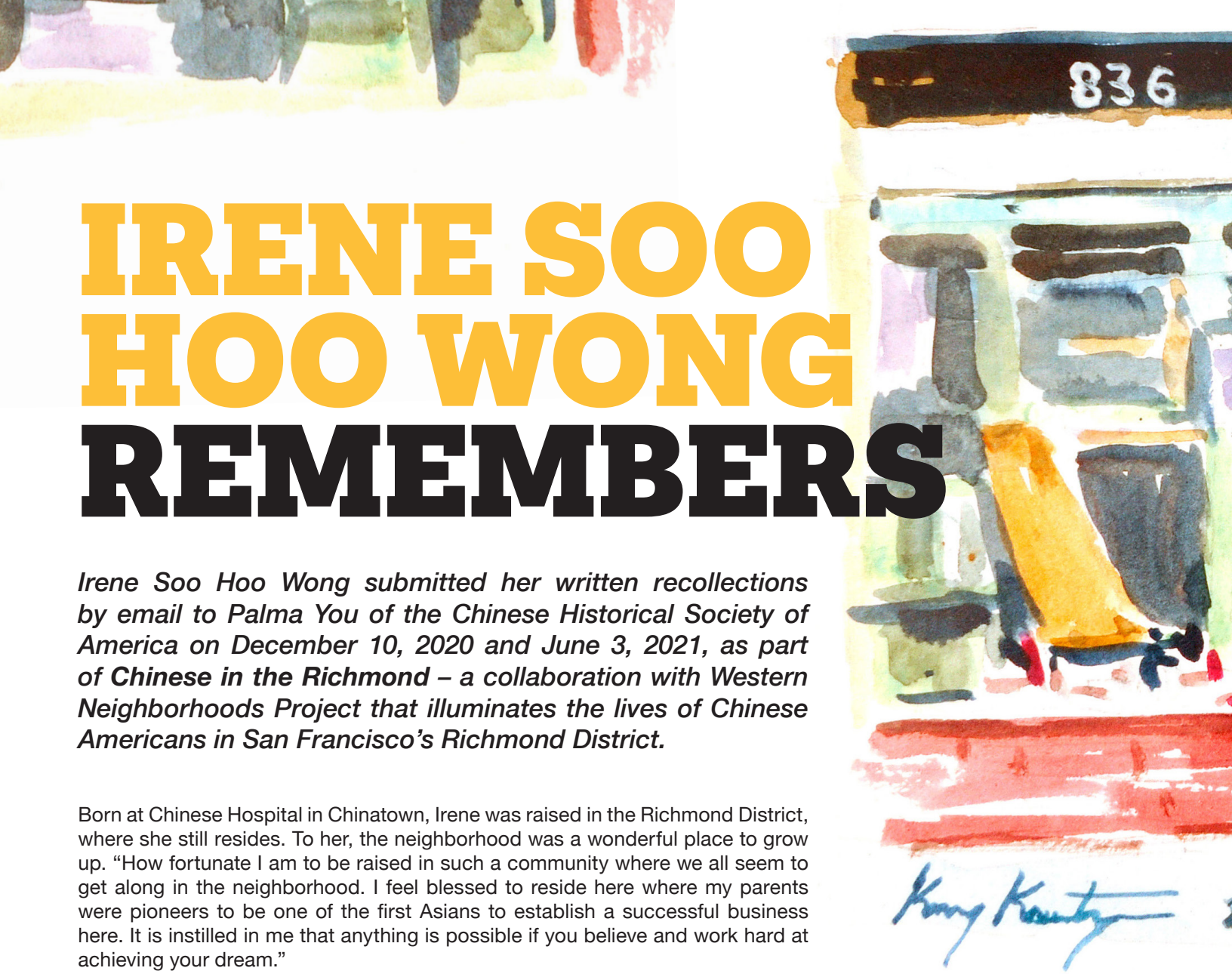


Charlie caught a rare ride on Municipal Railway No. 1 – note the eclipse fender – on Muni Heritage Day, hosted by our friends at Market Street Railway. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

Hop off the streetcar with us to check out the next Where in West S.F.? mystery location.

Send your guesses to nicole@outsidelands.org





IRENE SOO HOO WONG REMEMBERS

Irene Soo Hoo Wong submitted her written recollections by email to Palma You of the Chinese Historical Society of America on December 10, 2020 and June 3, 2021, 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.*

Born at Chinese Hospital in Chinatown, Irene was raised in the Richmond District, where she still resides. To her, the neighborhood was a wonderful place to grow up. "How fortunate I am to be raised in such a community where we all seem to get along in the neighborhood. I feel blessed to reside here where my parents were pioneers to be one of the first Asians to establish a successful business here. It is instilled in me that anything is possible if you believe and work hard at achieving your dream."

Richmond Mexico City Restaurant

Both of Irene's parents, George Soo Hoo and Ong Fee Wah, were born in China. Her father immigrated to the United States first and came to California by way of Wyoming, where he worked in a cafe. By the time George filled out his World War II Draft Registration Card in 1940, he lived in Chinatown and worked at a restaurant at 837 Clement Street in the Inner Richmond. Then, he became an apprentice to the owners of a Mexican restaurant across the street at 836 Clement.

The Mexico City Tamale Factory first appears on the record at 836 Clement Street in September 1932. The business tracks backs to J.M. Cunha, who promoted himself as the "king of all tamales, enchiladas, tortillas" as early as 1914.[1] George returned from service in World War II as a U.S. Army Quartermaster and took over the Mexican restaurant when the owners retired. Irene remembers he "purchased the property through his Veteran loan. By then, he was able to bring Mom and my older sister from China to the U.S."

Irene recalls that "it was a novelty that my parents owned and worked in a Mexican restaurant and not a Chinese restaurant." By the time she was born in November



Watercolor of Ong Fee Wah and George Soo Hoo outside Richmond Mexico City Restaurant, 2012. (Courtesy of Irene Soo Hoo Wong)

1950, the Soo Hoo family lived in a small apartment behind the restaurant. "As kids, we all cramped in small rooms to sleep. As we grew older, home life meant basically working at the restaurant…As teenagers, my sisters and I were waitresses, cashiers, and clean-up crew after closing time. Hours were long: 11:30am-9:00pm. Dad and Mom actually left to work earlier to set-up. Dinner for us was usually after 10:00pm when all was cleaned up at closing time. It is not to say we couldn't eat throughout the day at the restaurant!"

By 1953 – after working long hours without ever taking a vacation – the Soo Hoos were able to purchase a home on 10th Avenue, around the corner from the restaurant, on a block with "several other Asian families." Irene remembers, "Mom worked beside Dad cleaning and cooking…she never did learn to speak much English though she was very jovial and greeted customers and friends with a smile and what English vocabulary she learned."

Their only day off was Wednesday. Irene explains that "family day usually meant going to Chinatown, Japanese Tea Garden or the Zoo. Dad would drive below the speed limit in his 1950 Buick to these places. Sometimes Dad would take us to see a Chinese opera movie at Great Star Theater. While Dad and Mom watched the movie we kids would roam down to the concession stand. I miss the wrapped clove ginger there."

Holidays at the Soo Hoo home were memorable. Although the family wasn't religious, Irene recalls that "we did celebrate Christmas which was great. We always had a real





Clement Street looking east towards 9th Avenue; Richmond Mexico City Restaurant on the left, flanked by Marcella's Photo Mart and Tip Top Creamery, 1948. (Jack Tillmany Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp67.0151)



A La Carte Lunch and Dinner American Plate

Include Salad, Vegetables, Potatoes and Bread

Pork Chop 90c
Top Sirolin Steak $2.25
Fried Chicken $1.35
Roast Beef ..... $1.00 Roast Pork $1.00
Small Steak $1.00
Roast Turkey $1.00

COMBINATION PLATE (Mexican) $1.20
CHICKEN ENCHILADA or DE LUXE BEEF ENCHILADA
Chili Con Carne with Beans and Rice

MEXICO CITY ENCHILADAS

PLAIN BEEF ENCHILADAS
Plain Enchiladas Beef 50c
Enchiladas with Beans or Rice 65c
Enchiladas with Ravioli 65c
Enchiladas with Two Fried Eggs 85c
Enchiladas with Chili Con Carne 80c
Enchiladas w Chili Con Carne & Beans 80c
Mexico Village Enchiladas 80c
Enchilada with Stuffed Pepper 85c

DE LUXE BEEF ENCHILADAS *(MORE MEAT)*
De Luxe More Meat Enchiladas 70c
De Luxe Beef Enchiladas with Chili 95c
De Luxe Enchilada 95c
With Chili Beans or Rice

CHICKEN ENCHILADAS
Special Chicken Enchiladas 85c
De Luxe Chicken Enchilada $1.00
With Chili Con Carne, Beans or Rice

CHEESE ENCHILADAS
Cheese Enchiladas 60c
Cheese Enchiladas 85c
With Beans or Rice
Cheese Enchiladas w Chili Con Carne ... 95c
Cheese Enchiladas with Relleno $1.00
Cheese Enchiladas 95c
With Refried Beans
Cream Enchiladas 80c

MEXICO CITY TAMALES (All in Husks)
De Luxe Beef Tamale 80c
De Luxe Chicken Tamale 85c
Special Chicken Tamale 65c
Beef Tamale Special 60c
High Life Tamale Cup with Chicken 90c
Chicken Cup Tamale 55c
Chicken Cup Tamale with Ravioli 70c
Chicken Cup Tamale with Chili Con Carne 85c
Chicken Cup Tamale with Spaghetti or Macaroni ... 70c
Chicken Cup Tamale with Beans or Rice 70c
Chicken Cup Tamale with Two Fried Eggs 80c

TURKEY DINNER $1.75
Soup *Salad*
Turkey with Vegetable and Cranberry Sauce
Dessert and Coffee, or Tea

HOT TURKEY SANDWICHES 75c
Hot Beef 75c
Hot Pork 75c
Hot Ham 75c
Potatoes, Gravy and Cranberry Sauce

MEXICO CITY SPECIALS
Spanish Beans 55c
Spanish Rice 55c
Refried Beans 70c
Chilis Rellenos (Stuffed Pepper) 55c
Spaghetti with Spanish Sauce 50c
Spaghetti with Chili Con Carne 75c
Spaghetti with Beans 60c
Ravioli with Chili Con Carne 80c
Ravioli with Beans 60c
Spaghetti with Ravioli 60c
Ravioli with Spanish Sauce 60c
Honey - comb Tripe with Spanish Rice 70c
Meat Balls with Spaghetti 95c
Mexican Sausage with Eggs and Beans or Rice 95c

MEXICAN SPECIALS
Beef Taco 55c
Chicken Taco 60c
Cheese Taco 50c
Tostadas Supreme 60c
Bowl Chili with Beans 55c
Chili Con Carne Pure ..... 70c with Rice 80c
Chili Con Carne with Two Fried Eggs 85c

Roll and Butter Included — Tortillas Extra
We Reserve The Right To Refuse Service To Anyone

Richmond Mexico City Restaurant menu. (Courtesy of Irene Soo Hoo Wong)

medium size pine tree brought from Dad's friend. Dad would buy bottles of liquor for his friends who were also the neighborhood store owners or business associates. Lots of Christmas cards were sent out. Calendars and postcards of the restaurant were also given out with some picture on it and advertisement of the restaurant."

Thanksgivings were hosted at the restaurant after hours, when "friends and family were treated to my Dad's perfectly cooked evenly brown, crispy skinned turkey, juicy roast beef, and other dishes of vegetables, rice, and some Chinese dishes…brought from the Chinese deli next door."

Clement Street Community

Meanwhile, the Clement Street business district was starting its transition into what we now know as New Chinatown. Irene remembers "a few Chinese-owned businesses that existed about the same time my parents had the restaurant. Next door to the right was a Chinese restaurant called Chopsticks. On the left of our restaurant was possibly the first Chinese deli, called Man Hing, where my parents bought a variety of food such as barbecue pork, soy chicken, and black bean spareribs. Man Hing later changed owners and another Chinese deli, Kwong Shing, was established."

The Man Hing Market Poultry & Fish opened at 323 Clement Street in 1968. An additional Man Hing Market located at 1368 9th Avenue in the Inner Sunset survived until 2015. Kwong Shing Market, a Hoiping-style Chinese deli, was located at 844 Clement Street and might have been the first of its kind on the street. Though some think it dates back to the 1960s, it first appears in the 1973 city directory, run by Gim





Great Star Theatre on Jackson Street near Kearny Street, circa 1960s. (Courtesy of Jack Tillmany / wnp5.50532)

Yung Lee and Lip Min Louie. The market was known for its five-spice Kong Chow fried chicken recipe that was inspired by Jo Jung – the chef credited with introducing fried chicken to Chinatown – and allegedly in the family for 50 years.

Irene recalls that "the restaurant was also a place that a lot of the business owners and friends came to chat and have coffee or eat…Many customers became 'regulars' and sat in their favorite spot and ordered their 'usual' listed on the menu. The extensive menu listed both Mexican and American dishes." Irene describes George as "a hard-working man with a big heart. Dad had a section in the old cash register that had little torn papers of I.O.U.s from customers he knew who couldn't pay right away for their meals. I don't know if he really kept tally of the I.O.U.s."

Growing Up in the Richmond District

The Soo Hoo kids had a classic midcentury American childhood, raised on television and attending school nearby. Irene went to Sutro Elementary and Ong walked her children to school "as it was only a few blocks away on 12th. It was a red brick building and fenced in with a huge playground." Kids played before school, which officially started "when an authorized person would shake a big gold cowbell." Irene "had no problems getting along with other kids. In fact, it seems that everyone got along and played together."

"We were entertained watching cartoons such as Mickey Mouse, Popeye, and Bugs Bunny on a huge black and white TV," Irene continues. "Cowboy and Indian shows brought the likes of Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Bonanza, and Lone Ranger. The Mickey Mouse Club was another favorite show to watch. Evenings we were entertained by Carol Burnett, Steve Allen and The Ed Sullivan Show." When she wasn't working in her family's restaurant, Irene "mainly hung out with my blonde hair best friend, Michele…as she lived across the street from me. She taught me to ride her bike instead of riding my tricycle. Unfortunately, she had me going down the street and I couldn't brake! Luckily, I survived the fall. We played handball a lot against the corner wall at 10th Avenue and Clement which was once the side of O'Shea's bar. We also skateboarded on a nine-inch by four-and-a-half-inch red board that was attached to metal roller skate wheels. My Roller Derby Skateboard was the first mass-produced skateboard."

As a certified Baby Boomer, Irene has memories common to other members of her generation. Good memories, like Beatlemania, and harder memories, like the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – the latter two memorialized in her high school yearbook. The 1960s were a turbulent time of contradictions, and Washington High School was no different. While the school had an active Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) on campus, it was also "the time of love and peace and protest of the Vietnam War," Irene says. "Some



Ong Fee Wah and George Soo Hoo hard at work in the family restaurant. (Courtesy of Irene Soo Hoo Wong)



Richmond Mexico City Restaurant advertising calendar, 1955. (Courtesy of Irene Soo Hoo Wong)

"It is instilled in me that anything is possible if you believe and work hard at achieving your dream."

of us Baby Boomers were now called Hippies." Otherwise, she remembers the "amazing view of the Golden Gate Bridge from the bleachers" and the prevalence of afro hairstyles, as well as Ms. Adams, "the one-and-only woman principal in San Francisco at the time."

After-school activities included outings to Lincoln Bowl on 6th Avenue between Geary and Clement, and tennis at Mountain Lake Park on 12th Avenue and Lake Street. Irene states that "one highlight of the time was Billie Jean King winning the ladies title at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championship in the U.K. Later in life, I actually got to shake her hand. Wished her tennis skills rubbed off on me!"

The Soo Hoo kids attended Chinese school as well. Irene says, "I'm glad my parents had us attend Chinese school even if for a short time. I hated it then as we went after American school and didn't have much play time. The classes were held downstairs at St. James Church on 8th and California. We also had attended classes at a church located on the corner of 10th and Balboa." Since her mom really only spoke Chinese, Irene felt that "learning the language was an asset to us."

In both Chinese and American schools, Irene and her siblings "were expected to be obedient and study and get good grades. [Our parents] never pushed us on what career we would choose in the future. I'm sure choosing



Ong Fee Wah and George Soo Hoo outside Richmond Mexico City Restaurant. (Courtesy of Irene Soo Hoo Wong)

a profession as a doctor or lawyer would have made them extremely proud. However, I think they would have been proud too if we decided to take over the family business. In fact, my brother did take over for a short time when Mom had passed and Dad's health was declining due to lung cancer."

Final Chapter for Richmond Mexico City Restaurant

"Weinstein Department Store, Landheim Clothing Store next to Johnny's Barber Shop, Sam's Shoe Repair, Lee's jewelry shop, and Owl Drug Store – all had closed while Richmond Mexico City Restaurant thrived," Irene remembers. "In 1978 a devastating grease fire at Chop Sticks spread to my parents' restaurant. It was closed for a few years to remodel and give my parents a long-needed break."

Irene's younger brother took over the business for a couple years, with guidance from George. Then, Ong died in 1981, followed by George in 1988. After 40 years, the Soo Hoo family no longer had a storefront on Clement Street. Irene reminiscences, "I still say to this day that I'm glad my parents didn't run a laundromat. We never starved as we had a restaurant!"

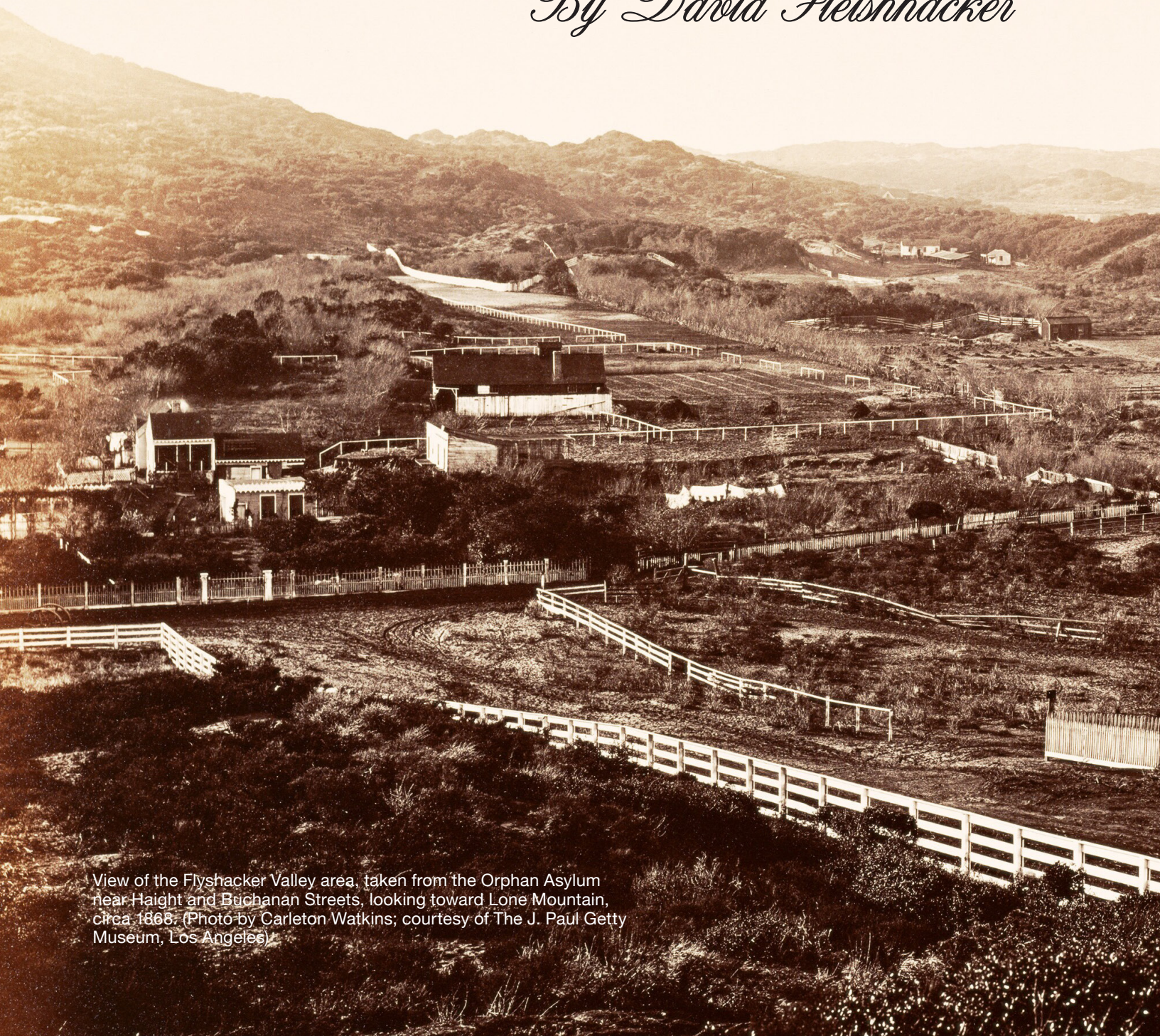
Irene continues, "I still visualize proud Mom in her button-up work uniform with a flower-print bib apron tied around her waist. Dad stood proudly beside her with his white bib apron in front of 836 Clement Street – Richmond Mexico City Restaurant owned and run by ambitious, hardworking immigrants who came to the United States: land of opportunity. Thanks, Mom and Dad."

1. "Business Personals," *San Francisco Examiner*, January 4, 1914



Finding Flyshacker Valley

By David Fleishhacker



View of the Flyshacker Valley area, taken from the Orphan Asylum near Haight and Buchanan Streets, looking toward Lone Mountain, circa 1868. (Photo by Carleton Watkins; courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)

If you're into local history (which we assume you are), then you've probably heard the mythical story about the landscape that became Golden Gate Park. Except for native oak trees – which you can still find on a ridge in the park's eastern corner behind the Conservatory of Flowers – our largest park was mostly pesky sand dunes migrating through valleys. But this land, which was once outside the city limits, also harbored farms and homesteads. We're honored to present an alternative version of the story we've all heard before from a descendant of one of San Francisco's earliest immigrant families. With help from local historians – including Angus Macfarlane, Lorri Ungaretti, and Jim Schein – David Fleishhacker delves into his family's past and finds compelling proof that history isn't always as it seems.

About 50 years ago, an old map, nicely framed, was noticed in a closet of the main house of "Green Gables," my family's property in Woodside which was built by my grandfather, Mortimer Fleishhacker. Dated 1863, the map is titled "Plan of the Fleishacker Claim," and depicts a 38-acre property in some undeveloped area of San Francisco. My father, Mortimer Fleishhacker, Jr., dismissed it as having no special interest. "Probably Aaron or a relative of his was thinking of buying some land," he suggested. "But we never owned any land like that, so it's just a curiosity."

My great-grandfather, Aaron Fleishhacker, arrived in New York City from Hamburg on August 28, 1844 aboard the Bark *Franklin*. The ship's passenger manifest records him as "N Fleischacker" (closer inspection of the record shows that the "N" is actually "A"), a 24-year-old farmer. His designation as "farmer" is questionable; Jews in Bavaria usually could not own land. Almost everyone on the manifest is listed as either a farmer or mechanic, so maybe it just means he did not want to be designated as a peddler, as he and his brother who preceded him to America really were. Aaron became a




Roman Catholic Cemetery.
Buckley.
Masonic Cemetery.
N. W. ¼ Sec.
N. E. ¼ Sec.
Evans.
Crockett.
Plan of the Fleishacker Claim.
Surveyed San Francisco April 11th & Feb. 13th 1863.
Turner & Short. Surveyors.
Scale 5 Chains to an Inch.
East.
Seligman & Cohen.
Road to San Souci.
T. 2. S. R. 5. W.
Area 38.29/100 acres
Fleishacker's House.
Meyer's Corner.
S. W. ¼ Sec.
S. E. ¼ Sec.
A. W. Van Schmidt.
Sullivan.
Byrnes.
N. W. ¼ Sec.
N. E. ¼ Sec.
P. Schade.
San Miguel Ranch.
18



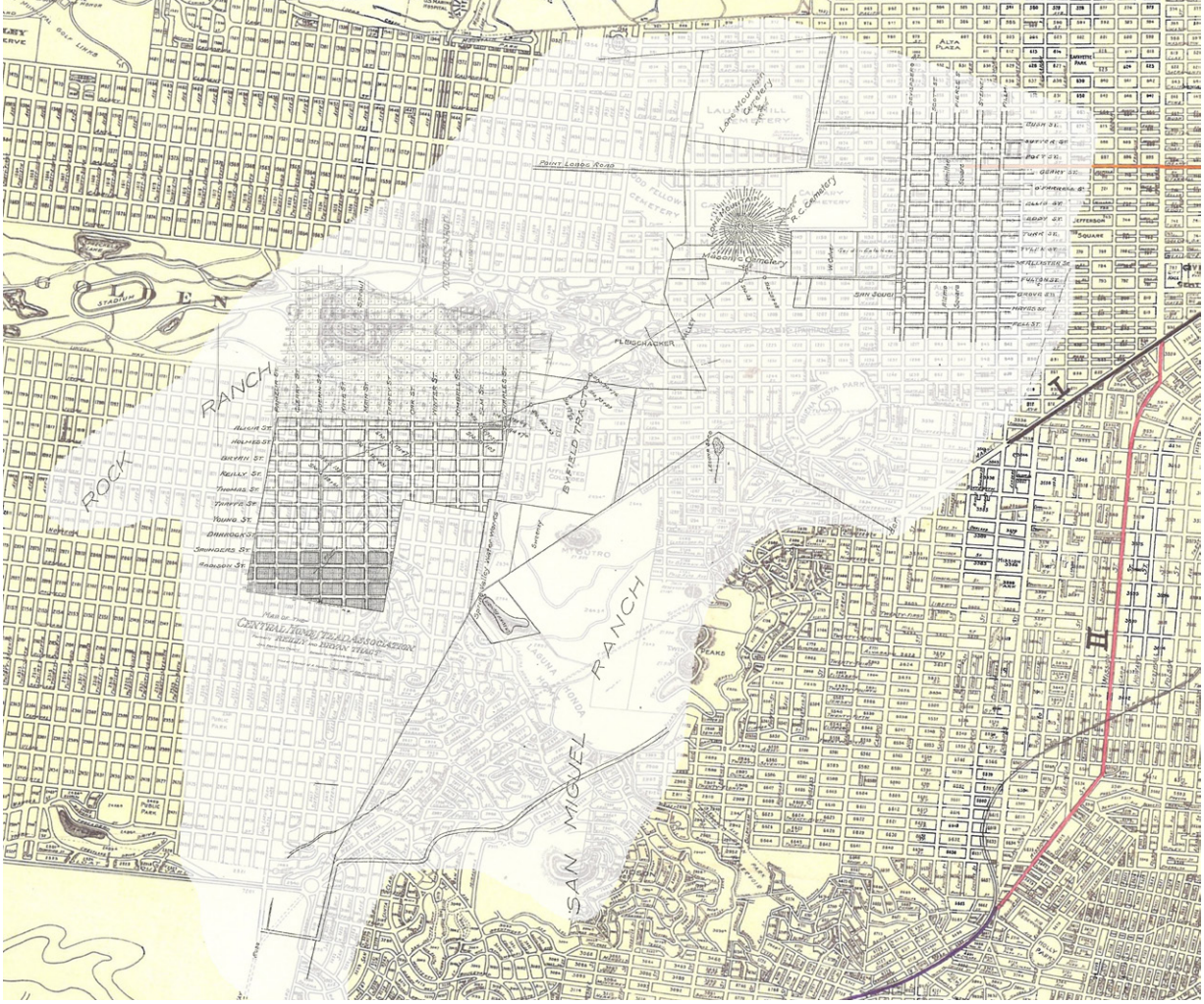
Left: Plan of the Fleishacker Claim, 1863. (Courtesy of David Fleishhacker); Above: Fleishacker Claim (outlined in white) overlayed on 2022 Google map; white star marks approximate site of Aaron's house. (Map data: ©2022 Google; Imagery: ©2022 CNES / Airbus, Maxar Technologies, U.S. Geological Survey, USDA/FPAC/GEO; courtesy of Angus Macfarlane)

naturalized citizen of the U.S. on May 22,1851, according to records of the New York Superior Court. "A. Fleischhacker" is listed on a ship's records as arriving in Panama in 1851 and then, on June 2 of the same year, "A. Fleshaker" arrived in San Francisco on the Steamer *Pacific*, from Panama. No record has been found of Aaron between 1844 and 1851, so how he might have acquired money to purchase land is unknown.

I should mention here that my family has long become used to endless variant spellings of our last name. Census takers and list makers have created many spellings which make any search in old records challenging. In this article, I retain whatever spelling is the one documented, having first done due diligence to be sure the name, no matter how it is spelled, belongs to my great-grandfather, Aaron. He spelled his name Fleishhacker, as have all his descendants.

Nobody cared about the map of the Fleishacker Claim very much, and when I eventually had a house of my own about 40 years ago, I put it aside to hang as decoration. From time to time I'd look at it, and finding some old maps of San Francisco online, I was able to determine whereabouts the property must have been, since the San Miguel Ranch and Masonic Cemetery both appear on it. But other place names on the map meant little to me. And, like my father, I had never seen any reference to anyone in my family having any land, especially of this size in the city.

It was an article by Angus Macfarlane in the Winter 2010 issue of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society's *Argonaut* that changed everything. His article, "The Byfield Tract," included a map from about the same time period as the Fleishacker map, with lines on it that looked very familiar. I contacted Angus and asked if he would be interested in seeing my map and, incidentally, if he had any information that might shed light on it. "Well," he said, "you will remember that I wrote about early San Francisco racetracks and quoted an article that said Flyshacker Valley might be a good site for a race course."





"Don't open your eyes, reader – there is a valley in San Francisco of that name, and a pretty valley it is too, uncouth as it may sound."

"Flyshacker Valley?"

The article Angus was referring to appeared on the front page of the *Daily Alta California* on December 17, 1861:

> "The Flyshacker Valley. – Don't open your eyes, reader – there is a valley in San Francisco of that name, and a pretty valley it is too, uncouth as it may sound. It is situated away out to the westward beyond and to the southward of Lone Mountain Cemetery, and in the midst of the sand hills skirting the Pacific coast. The new road will run not far from it. Mr. Donahue has recently purchased it, and some of the fancy are already eyeing it for a future race course. The valley is perfectly level, about twenty acres in extent, and so fertile that it has for two or three years past been made to produce quite likely crops of grain. In the spring time, when the barley is some two feet high, it looks like a veritable oasis in the desert. This is far beyond the Beideman tract, which at the time of the sale was considered 'away out of town;' but the city, true to her instincts, is rapidly creeping out in that direction as well as to the southward."

A fertile valley out in the sand dunes which has produced crops of barley for two or three years? And where did that name come from? That's my last name, spelled differently, and while I had ancestors in the city as early as 1851, I knew of no records showing any connection with farms or land ownership. I had to wonder if "Flyshacker Valley" really had anything to do with my great-grandfather, Aaron. His brother, Samuel, was in San Francisco a year before Aaron arrived. Samuel was a member of the first Committee of Vigilance, a store keeper on Kearny Street, married the daughter of a founder of Sherith Israel, divorced, and then disappeared entirely. But with Angus's help, I learned about "Flyshaker Valley," and it became clear that this was, in fact, land that Aaron held for several years. It appears on some maps from about 1859 to 1865, maps I had never seen. Fleischacker Valley, no matter how it was spelled, is situated on the present-day flat eastern end of Golden Gate Park. It stretched from the Conservatory of Flowers southeast to the park's entrance at Haight and Stanyan Streets, the approximate location of Aaron's house.





Left-to-Right: San Francisco County Recorder's maps C7 (Central Macadamized Toll Road), C113 (John Sproul), and B159 (Central Homestead Association) composited onto a SF Department of Public Works map, circa 1865. (Courtesy of Erica Fischer) - View north on Stanyan from Haight, with Golden Gate Park entrance at left, circa 1890; former site of Aaron Fleishhacker's house. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp24.503a) - Oak woodland, Golden Gate Park, 1914. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.1833)

Angus has documented in detail the history of the Byfield Claim, a large piece of land just to the southwest of Aaron's land. While researching the Byfield Claim, Angus reviewed documents from various lawsuits which grew out of conflicting claims of squatters and investors in that land. Evidence in those trials reveal approximately when Aaron settled in the valley that would bear his name. They describe a man named Francisco, who lived near the Byfield Claim "on a place adjoining the Fleishacker place." From one transcript: "Q. You spoke of the Spaniard, Francisco. A. Yes, sir…Q. When did you first make his acquaintance? A. In 1853. Q. Where? A. He was working for Fleishacker."[1]

Thus, two years after arriving in San Francisco in 1851, Aaron held enough claim to "outside lands" that this area was being farmed and his name was attached to it. The *Daily Alta* article states that Donahue bought Flyshacker Valley by 1861, so why did Aaron have a map of a 38-acre claim in the same area in 1863? The inference seems clear: the 38 acres shown on my map was an odd-shaped remnant of his property after he sold 20 acres to Donahue. He had the map made not because he was buying land, but because he was contemplating selling the last of it. He had, by then, moved north to Forest City, near Downieville on the Yuba River, where he was a successful storekeeper.

The valley was mentioned again, in an 1863 California statue that granted John F. Hill, William Bryan, and J.C. Treadwell the right to construct a macadamized toll road from the end of Fulton Street west to the ocean. The road would extend "south of the hill called 'Lone Mountain,' and by the place called 'Fleischacker Valley." As late as 1869, "heirs of Fleischacker" were, according to the *Sacramento Daily Union*, among the many owners of lands being acquired by the city to create Golden Gate Park.[2] Aaron was alive and well in 1869, so the use of the term "heirs" may indicate that he had deeded land to his living children.

I have written elsewhere about Aaron's early and substantial involvement as a merchant and one of the first speculators in the Comstock Lode, as well as his sons' involvement with water power, electricity, banking, the zoo and pool, and much more (including donating a carousel to Golden Gate Park located quite near the land their father once owned). It appears they knew little or nothing about their father's connection to that land. So, I have been delighted to spend the last decade or so of my life uncovering and documenting some of the earliest history of this part of the Outside Lands. Most curious of all, to me, is that I should be the first person to put all these pieces together, over a century and a half after my great-grandfather established his long-forgotten farm here.

1. John H. Baird et als. v. Charles P. Duane et als., 1872 (Cal. 1869).
2. "Outside Land Reservations," *Sacramento Daily Union*, February 17, 1869.

CULTURAL EROSION AT THE MOTHERS' BUILDING

BY ISABEL SCANLON



Mothers' Building and wading pool, circa 1934.
(Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.11465)

The Mothers' Building has been closed and forlorn for almost as long as Western Neighborhoods Project has been around. The reason for that is complicated, with several overlapping city jurisdictions and a hefty restoration price tag at the center of the story. But through it all, one man has remained vigilant: Richard Rothman. Now, with the building's 100th anniversary on the horizon in 2025, perhaps Richard's hard work will finally pay off. Learn more about this story from our first paid intern, Isabel Scanlon.

As any San Franciscan knows, unless you're sporting a wetsuit and a surfboard, swimming within city limits is generally reserved for our handful of public and - most importantly - indoor pools. On the three days a year that it's warm enough to tempt some to wade out knee-deep in the surrounding blue, we become painfully aware of the loss of the grand swimming holes of San Francisco's not-so-distant past. Perhaps because the ruins of the foundation are still visible, or because so many monuments of the city still bear the same name, the fallen Sutro Baths are likely first to haunt one's memories. Then, perhaps only for those old enough to remember, follows Fleishhacker Pool, which San Francisco could once boast was the largest outdoor swimming pool in the world.

For younger San Franciscans or recent transplants, memories of these grandiose pools may not come to mind at all, seeing as any trace of them has been nearly erased. Sutro Baths closed in 1965 and was lost to a fire one year later, leaving only the foundations to be reclaimed as urban tidepools. Fleishhacker Pool held on a little longer, but waning use and critical damage to the drainage system after a storm permanently closed the pool in 1971. The San Francisco Zoo, as the last Fleishhacker Playfield recreation facility standing, was left responsible for the stewardship of the out-of-use pool and buildings. Over the years, most remnants of the pool were lost – the main bathhouse was demolished after a fire in 2012, and the pool itself was filled with gravel in 2002 and paved over to make way for the expanded zoo parking lot.

The only structure that survives today is the old Mothers' Building. This small Italianate building was donated to the playfields and pool in 1925 by Park Commissioner Herbert Fleishhacker and his brother Mortimer, in honor of their mother, Delia. The Fleishhacker family – starting with Herbert and Mortimer's father Aaron – made its fortune selling paper, developing the Comstock mines, and establishing electricity in California. They also established a legacy of cultural philanthropy in San Francisco.

The Mothers' Building was originally intended by the Fleishhacker brothers as a site for mothers to lounge while their children swam, offering a place to get refreshments and even receive medical advice. But once the pool closed and the building's future came into question, an additional facet of its historic value rose to the forefront: its murals. In 1934,



Mothers' Building interior with egg tempera murals, February 15, 1939. (Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration)

nearly a decade after the Mothers' Building opened, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired artists Dorothy W. Puccinelli and Helen K. Forbes to install a series of egg tempera murals on the building's interior walls. That same year, the WPA also hired artists and sisters Helen, Esther, and Margaret Bruton to install two mosaic murals in the exterior loggia. These murals quickly became not only a defining feature of the Mothers' Building, but also a defining work in San Francisco's catalog of public art.

The Bruton sisters' bucolic mosaics of St. Francis, children, and animals cap each end of the loggia, greeting visitors before entry into the main room reveals Puccinelli and Forbes's tempera renditions of Noah's Ark. Floor to ceiling mosaic murals of this size were rare in California at the time. The Bruton sisters drew heavily on the guidance of Anthony Falcier, an Italian mosaic expert who worked on the marble medallion mosaic on the floor of the Ferry Building. While mosaic murals were common in Europe, architectural mosaics such as the Ferry Building's were the only mosaics common in San Francisco. The scale of the Mothers' Building's egg tempera murals is also rare – the nearly story-high band runs continu-



Helen K. Forbes and Dorothy W. Puccinelli finishing their murals in the Mothers' Building, June 4, 1938. (Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

ously along the upper four walls of the main room. Their size was the brainchild of Puccinelli and Forbes, who were originally hired to paint only the four small lintels above the doors. They spun the opportunity into a much larger commission, designing murals for the entire building instead. They then convinced George Kelham, the building's architect, to support their plans for larger murals in order to get their work approved by the WPA.

Even rarer than the murals' size is their authorship. Although San Francisco saw somewhat of a mural art renaissance during the WPA-era public art stimulation of the 1930s, the WPA stipulated that only one person per household could be hired. Therefore, women were often limited from involvement in the work programs. As a result, no other large-scale WPA project was undertaken by female artists in San Francisco. The Bruton sisters ideated and assembled the mosaics together in their childhood home in Alameda, but because they belonged to the same household, only one of them could technically be hired by the WPA. Margaret Bruton attended the call for artists at the de Young Museum in 1933, where proposals were given to the Public Works of Art Project (later reworked into the WPA), but Helen was eventually the one to end up on the official PWA payroll. The sisters had to split Helen's share between the three of them. Forbes and Puccinelli could both be hired, as members of separate households, but they had to occasionally put their work on pause when the incomes of their husband or father, respectively, pushed their household income above the WPA employment threshold.

During the years-long debate over the fate of the main Fleishhacker bathhouse, the Mothers' Building similarly managed to evade both demolition and restoration. Its repurposing as the zoo gift shop from 1978 to 2002 ultimately saved it from the bathhouse's demise, but by 2002 the effects of the ocean air and unstable sand dunes had taken their toll on the building. Seismically and structurally unsafe, the zoo closed the Mothers' Building to the public once again. Constant exposure to humidity and salt was not kind to the egg tempera murals either, and although they were given "significant conservation treatments" in 1990, according to the San Francisco Arts Commission, moisture has faded the paint and eroded some portions entirely.[1]





Mosaic murals, 2022. (Courtesy of San Francisco Heritage)

As its 100-year anniversary looms, the Mothers' Building remains closed and at risk. However, the failure of the restoration project has not exactly been for lack of trying. In fact, various groups have pushed for the building's restoration since its original closure. In 1979, when the city was contemplating the best site for the new Southwest Sewage Treatment Plant, the Fleishhacker bathhouse was floated as a possible location. Wastewater officials roped the Mothers' Building into the plans as the potential location for displaying photographs and architectural drawings that would, in theory, be collected as historical documentation of the bathhouse before its demolition. The National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the California State Water Resources Control Board jointly hoped that proper documentation of the bathhouse and restoration of the Mothers' Building could act as "mitigation" for the demolition of the historic structure.[2] The Mothers' Building was spared mostly because it was just beyond the site the wastewater agency had its eyes on, but also because, as wastewater official Louise Stoll eloquently pointed out, "It has murals in it and is pretty."[3] Ultimately this proposed plan for the bathhouse and Mothers' Building was lost in bureaucratic miscommunication and scrapped.

The issue of restoration did not arise again until 10 years later, when the city sought $2.4 million in state funds for repairs, which they appropriately announced during Women's History Month in 1991. Needless to say, the proper funds were not secured, but this restoration effort was notably the first instance in which the significance of the building's female artisanship was placed at the forefront of the conversation. While the building's structure remained at risk, the 1991 campaign for funds may have been successful in securing protection for the murals, since they were significantly conserved sometime around 1990, as mentioned above.

In 2014 the Recreation and Parks Department received a $102,484 grant to do an assessment of the building's structural condition and seismic readiness, which left the undertaking with the new price tag of $5 million in repairs. This hefty number revealed perhaps the issue at the heart of it all: exactly whose responsibility is it to cough up the cash? "We would love to," said zoo deputy director Joe Fitting, "but our number one priority is safety, animal wellness and welfare."[4] Afterall, the zoo is only an overseer of the Mothers' Building, and historic preservation seems to be beyond the purview



Egg tempera mural on the west wall with visible water damage, 2017. (Courtesy of Richard Rothman)

of their zoological mission. The responsibility perhaps then falls to the actual owners of the building, the Recreation and Parks Department. They, however, claim their hands are tied, citing restoration alone as not a powerful enough driver to raise the necessary funds.

Today the biggest advocate for the Mothers' Building is Richard Rothman, a retired city employee and member of the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee. He specializes in saving WPA murals, and as a Coit Tower tour guide and WPA mural photographer, he is no stranger to San Francisco's New Deal-era gems. Rothman founded the Friends of the Mothers' Building Facebook group and has been the main contact between the Recreation and Parks Department and Mothers' Building advocates.

Thanks to Rothman's advocacy, the Mothers' Building restoration may be gaining the most traction it has in decades. On March 15, 2022, landmark designation for the Mothers' Building was proposed to the Board of Supervisors by District 7 Supervisor Myrna Melgar and co-sponsor District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar. Landmark designation would limit demolition or alterations, but in terms of preservation, the city is gambling against a fast-approaching deadline. According to the 2014 assessment, the murals should be repaired before 2024. Already up to 50% of the tempera mural on the west wall may be beyond saving. At stake is more than just the loss of a historic structure, but the loss of a rare display of female craftsmanship, a significant mark of New Deal legislation on San Francisco, and the remaining memory of Fleishhacker Pool and Playfield.

1. "SF looks for sources of funding to restore historic Mothers Building," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 6, 2016.
2. "Problems that thrive in bureaucracy byways," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 23, 1979.
3. Ibid.
4. "SF looks for sources of funding to restore historic Mothers Building," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 6, 2016.

Inside the Outside Lands

Maybe you heard, or were one of the 150+ people in attendance, but the gala we held at The Clubhouse at the Presidio Golf Course on May 15th was quite the party! We had a performance by the Golden Gate Park Band, souvenirs for purchase, and a silent auction so stacked it was hard to choose what to bid on. To support our Playland at the Beach theme, we displayed artifacts from the WNP Collection and original Playland signs provided by **Reino Niemela**, whose father painted them by hand! To top it off, we had a new projection by the always amazing artist **Ben Wood**, a program courtesy of co-hosts **Kristine Poggioli** and **Carolyn Eidson**, authors of *Walking San Francisco's 49 Mile Scenic Drive*, and our own **Nicole Meldahl** sharing personal stories and surprising untold histories.

We also presented awards to incredible people who are underpaid, overworked, and doing amazing things in our community. Going forward, we'll present two awards annually: the Founders Award, given to someone from the WNP Board or volunteer pool who has an outsized impact on the organization; and the History Hero Award, given to someone who goes above and beyond in the name of San Francisco history.

Naturally, the first Founders Award went to our co-founder, **Woody LaBounty**, for his exceptional career and for getting the WNP party started. We were honored to have **District 1 Supervisor Connie Chan** with us to present the History Hero Award to **Palma You** and **Steve Haines** of the Chinese Historical Society of America. Palma and Steve were tasked with conducting five oral histories for our collaborative *Chinese in the Richmond* Project, and they actually recorded 25 – truly above and beyond. The oral histories featured in the membership magazine this year are the results of those interviews, and if you'd like to read the expanded stories, you can find them on our website.

We also recognized some of our critical volunteers who work behind the scenes and/or who are tireless advocates for what we do: **Rick Bellamy**, **Nicolette Heaphy**, **Judi Leff**, **Laura Macias**, **Eric Mar**, **Margaret Ostermann**, **Andrew Roth**, **Thorsten Sideboard**, **Ken Spielman**, and **Lorri Ungaretti**.

Finally, we received unexpected acknowledgement from two awesome people. **District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar** surprised WNP with a Certificate of Honor from the Board of Supervisors, and longtime member **Michael Busk** contributed $10,000 towards our Fund-A-Need campaign. Wow. Just…wow. There are no words. It was absolutely a night to remember and we're so grateful we could share it with so many in the face of a COVID surge. However, we heard feedback that people wanted to support us but were priced out of this event. We hear you, and we take that to heart – especially as we develop events for The Museum at The Cliff, which reopens in June with a refreshed historical gallery and brand-new exhibition, *Naiad Cove*, in the main restaurant space, courtesy of funding from **Supervisor Connie Chan** and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development.

So, what can you expect from The Museum and *Naiad Cove*? Due to staffing constraints, both spaces will only be open on the weekends, with special programming during the week. **John Lindsey** of The Great Highway Gallery is curating a selection of contemporary photographs that inspire a deeper connection to place; artist **Andrew Roth** (a different Andrew Roth than mentioned above) is creating an immersive sound installation that will transport you to Playland at the Beach and Sutro Baths; ongoing projections by **Ben Woods**; and even more of The Cliff House Collection returned to its rightful place. Plus, exclusive opportunities for you to hear musical performances, attend curator's tours, enjoy sunset happy hours, and reserve seats at downhome dinners in this historic former restaurant.

Keep an eye on your inbox as well as the Events page on our website to catch the where and when for all of the above.

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THE LAST WORD







Scenes from WNP's 2022 gala. (Top two photos by Chrissy Huhn; bottom photo by Jim Jenkins)

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.

