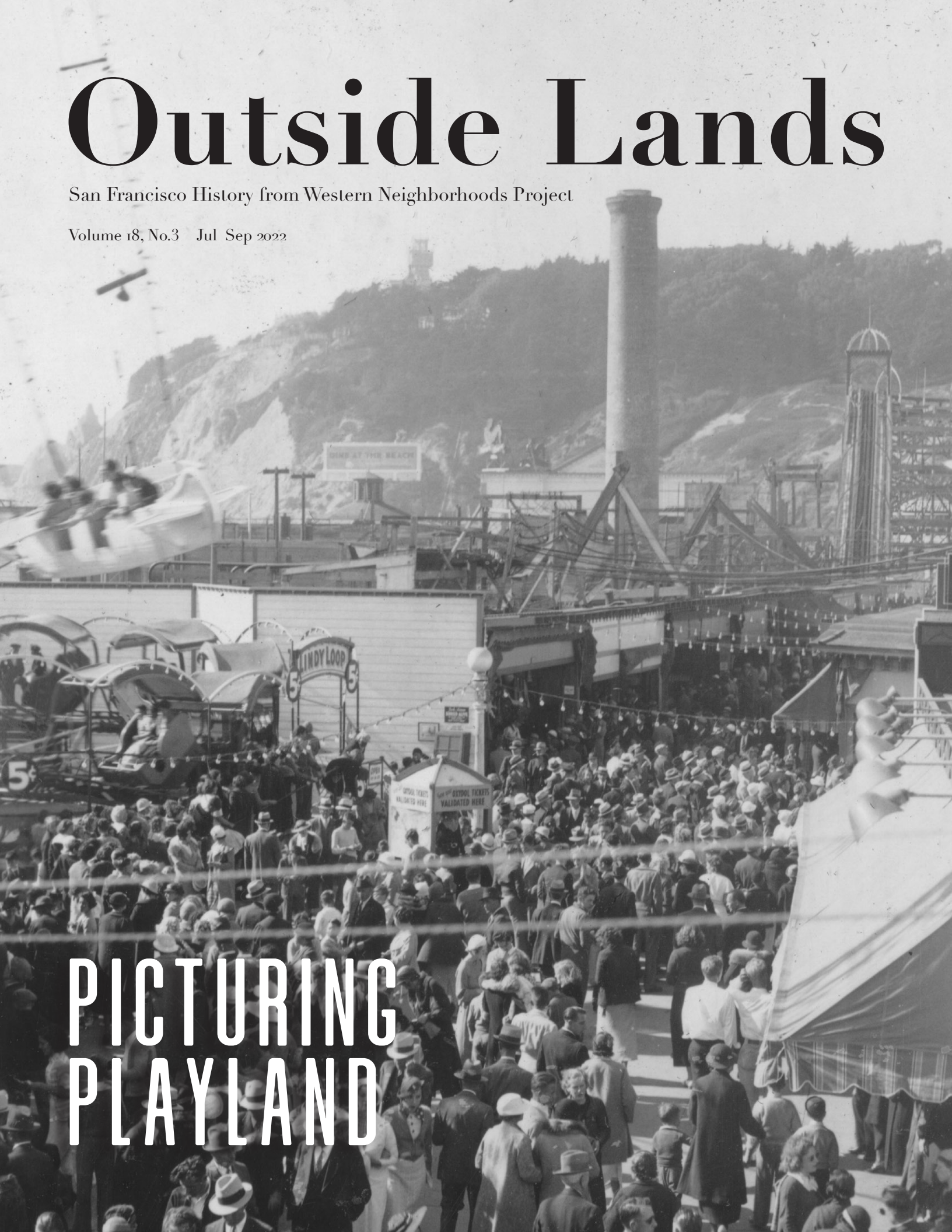
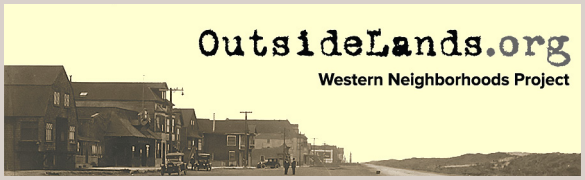
# Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 18, No.3 Jul Sep 2022




# PICTURING PLAYLAND





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

Jul-Sep 2022: Volume 18, Number 3

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**Cover:** Playland at the Beach, circa 1935. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.324)

**Right:** Great Highway near Balboa Street, 1930s. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.353)

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# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

## Nicole Meldahl

I write this while sitting on a bank of abandoned booths in the empty downstairs dining room of the former Cliff House Restaurant, watching water crash into Seal Rocks. This view never gets old and it will always feel surreal that Western Neighborhoods Project had the privilege of hosting The Museum at The Cliff in this iconic location.

And what a whirlwind experience it's been. Generations of San Franciscans and visitors have come to the Cliff House to experience something that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. This place is special, not because of the food or drinks but because it endures, despite changing hands several times and burning down twice since 1863. It roots us to the landscape and connects us to our ancestors.

We are acutely aware that we're temporary keepers of this place and holders of this history. The Cliff House will have a future for generations beyond us and hopefully we can help the new restaurant group tell stories from this storied area. Stories about people like Laurence "Laurie" Hollings and Reino Niemela, two men who designed the look and feel of Playland at the Beach, which inspired Walt Disney as he conceptualized a new kind of amusement park. Maybe you've heard of it…

The layout of the *Naiad Cove* exhibit at The Museum at The Cliff encourages visitors to experience Reino's hand-painted signs and then walk into the kitchen to view highlights from a photo album compiled by Laurie. We followed the building's lead when curating the installation, but we've since found that these two men are linked in real life as well as in the exhibition. I like to call that curatorial serendipity. Read ***Illuminating Laurie Hollings*** to learn just how intertwined this history is.

It's so much fun to find and share these stories with you. This issue also presents treasures found by volunteer **Andrew Roth** while cataloging Whitney family scrapbooks, and an oral history with **Bruce** and **Douglas Chan** from *Chinese in the Richmond* – our collaboration with the Chinese Historical Society of America. And, of course, we can't forget ***Where in West S.F.?*** which sees the debut of **Margaret Ostermann** flying solo! She and Charlie track down the details of a mysterious wooden carving that may not depict a Naiad but is a mythical she-creature nonetheless.

After all, art and history are coequals in storytelling. They go together like peanut butter and jelly. Or perhaps tamales and French bread. Or popovers and California wine…or…

# WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

## By Margaret Ostermann

**Although the Goddess of the Forest spent decades in a foggy meadow, memories of her were not at all foggy! Standing 26 feet tall and with a girth of nearly 21 feet at the base, her presence in Golden Gate Park's Lindley Meadow left a lasting impression, as seen by the responses to last issue's mystery photo.**



Goddess of the Forest, circa 1975. (Photo by Tom Gray, Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.10222)

Citing Outside Lands podcast #332, **David Friedlander** correctly noted that the Goddess was "originally done for GGIE by Dudley Carter." Indeed, artist and woodcarver Carter created the Goddess at the Golden Gate International Exposition as part of the Art in Action program, which allowed fair-goers to interact with and observe artists at work. Using a double-bitted axe, Carter chipped away at a 25-ton redwood log over the course of 30 days. He completed the Goddess on September 28, 1940 – one day before the World's Fair on Treasure Island closed.

**Roger Goldberg** aptly referred to our mystery photo subject as a "totem." It's a pertinent classification, as Carter's artistic style was heavily influenced by the Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) people of British Columbia. During his childhood, Carter had a chance to closely observe their woodcarving craft and artistry – specifically totem poles. We can see the principles he picked up at play in the Goddess of the Forest. Minimising the amount of wood to be removed, her head and folded limbs fill the log's dimensions, while an owl and bear interlock with her body to eliminate spaces requiring deep cuts.



Three views of Dudley Carter in the Pan American Unity mural. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

Carter's reverence for indigenous techniques was quickly recognized by another participant of the Art in Action program: Diego Rivera. As Rivera worked on his Pan American Unity mural, he was so captivated by Carter's skill and style that he incorporated not just one, but three views of Dudley Carter into the middle of his emerging mural. Posed next to architect Timothy Pflueger and outfitted in plaid, Carter represents his role as a woodsman; the other two poses depict Carter as a sculptor at work on another piece he created during the GGIE: The Ram.

Following the Exposition, the Goddess of the Forest was given to the city and placed in Lindley Meadow. While the eastern half of Golden Gate Park is studded with cast statues, it's fitting that the redwood Goddess found her home in the less developed western half of the park; the half notably absent of statues today.

Seeing our mystery photo, **Pat Cunneen** aptly questioned "Where are the sheep?" They were a fixture in Lindley Meadow since 1918, where their practical grass-shearing productivity and shorn-wool income were easily eclipsed by the entertainment value provided to city dwellers! It was a theme echoed by **Julie Alden,** who recalled seeing the flock of sheep "in the '60s at Christmas time" during the annual nativity scene. The beloved biblical panorama can be traced



Goddess of the Forest in Lindley Meadow with flock of sheep, circa 1953. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.2683)

back to at least 1932, when the pack's regular shepherd, Barney Kelly, costumed himself in "the garb of the ancient guardians of the flocks."[1] Although the park's sheep were sold to a Redwood City ranch in the late 1950s, the nativity scene was so popular that sheep were brought back to the meadow annually for the display.

Dudley Carter returned to San Francisco in the spring of 1983 to restore his other World's Fair piece, The Ram, which had been given to City College of San Francisco (CCSF). At age 92, Carter used his double-bitted axe once again, this time to chip off layers of paint that students had crudely covered his redwood sculpture in over the decades. Visiting Lindley Meadow, he found his other GGIE piece in a sorry state as well.

When the Goddess of the Forest was placed in the park, Carter specified that the statue be set on blocks, as air circulation was imperative to her longevity. Disregarding the artist's advice, the Goddess was placed on a solid concrete pedestal. Adding insult to injury, a raised lip around the base created a shallow pan which pooled water. This was a recipe for decay.

The carved graffiti scarring the Goddess's lower half was only a superficial problem when compared to the extensive interior decay the wood had suffered. Puddling water and a north-facing exposure were cruelly mulching the sculpture from the base upwards. Missing the mark, a park official suggested recasting the Goddess in concrete or fiberglass; a sure-fire shot at longevity, he reasoned. Carter, who began felling trees at his family's logging operations at age 10, politely deflected the proposition. He succinctly pointed out that in that scenario, his forest goddess is "not wood anymore" and that if park officials simply followed his recommendations, the statue would last for well over a century.[2] Instead, Carter devised a plan to salvage just the upper front portion. It would be an act of extensive pruning.

In the summer of 1986, the Goddess of the Forest was moved from Golden Gate Park to her new home at CCSF, where conservation ensued following explicit instructions and marks placed by Carter. The work was primarily carried out by Roger Baird, a CCSF professor and artist with extensive wood carving experience who had also assisted Carter



Goddess of the Forest looming over the crowd at a Grateful Dead concert in Lindley Meadow, September 28, 1975. (Photo by Greg Gaar; courtesy of Greg Gaar / wnp73.0867)



Charlie at the Goddess's former home in Lindley Meadow, where a patch of grass confirms the pedestal's basin-like structure. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

with the restoration of The Ram. The Goddess's height was reduced to 15'6" and the decayed lower half was disposed of. Her back was removed and core scraped clean of decay, leaving behind a half shell of 1 to 4 inches in thickness and requiring the construction of a new spoked armature to hold her together.

During this stage, the Goddess was stored outside under a tarpaulin. A security guard noticed smoke rising from the area one evening and discovered a homeless person had sought shelter and started a small fire directly on the sculpture's surface. That burn hole, along with bullet holes, test boring scars, and other damages, were carefully repaired when the Goddess was brought indoors in 1991. In November 1993, the Goddess of the Forest was set upright in CCSF's Little Theater (now called the Diego Rivera Theatre) and reunited with Rivera's Pan American Unity mural and the image of her creator at work.

Charlie – your faithful Where in West S.F.? history poodle – eagerly put his paws to the pavement to see Dudley Carter's art for himself. The restored Ram was easily found, and a treat to behold, just inside the front doors of CCSF's Conlan Hall. Although the Pan American Unity mural is temporarily on display in the lobby of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (where you can view it for free through summer 2023!), Charlie and I hoped to at least sneak a peek at the Goddess through the Rivera Theatre windows. But alas, the Goddess was missing!

Thankfully, Will Maynez (Diego Rivera Mural Project) and Barbara Lass (Chair, Works of Art Committee) at CCSF




ensured us that the Goddess was safe and sound. To facilitate the safe removal of Rivera's massive mural, the Goddess was moved to offsite storage in 2019. It's a relationship between these two monumental pieces that has played out before. In December 1940, the Goddess was removed from the GGIE's Palace of Fine and Decorative Arts so that Rivera's newly-completed mural could be photographed unobstructed.

Understandably, this redwood sculpture requires a special – needless to say, indoor – home. CCSF is aiming to incorporate the Goddess of the Forest into a new building being planned for the campus.

If you need any inspiration for an active lifestyle, consider that Dudley Carter taught woodworking classes and carved right up until his final illness, living to be just one month short of his 101st birthday.

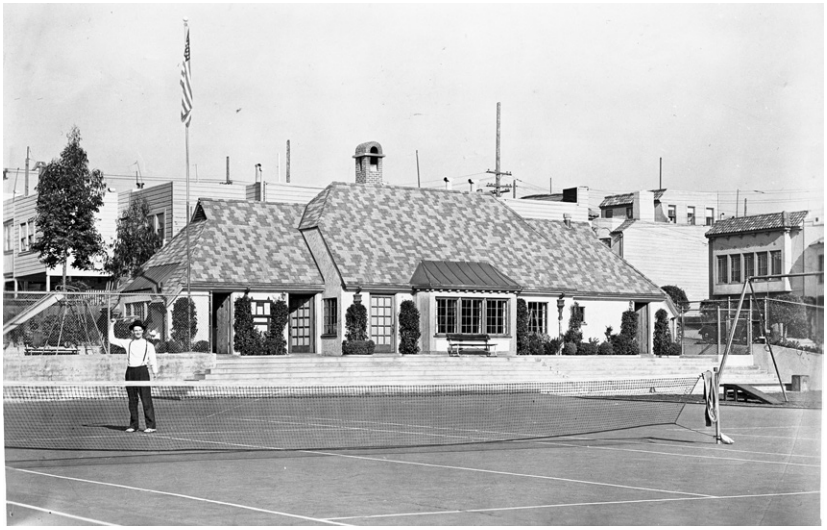
1. "Park Shepherd Scene Will Be Ended Tonight," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 28, 1932.
2. Dudley Carter, conversation with Emmanuel Montoya, Phil Pasquini, and Golden Gate Park officials, March 10, 1983, transcript, riveramural.org



Top Left: Charlie in his new plaid bandana with The Ram. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann); Above: Goddess of the Forest being removed from CCSF's Rivera Theatre, October 9, 2019. (Courtesy of Will Maynez, Diego Rivera Storyteller)

## Speaking of active lifestyles, where is this young fella playing tennis?

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






**Brothers Bruce E. and Douglas S. Chan have led remarkably successful lives as practicing lawyers and civil servants in San Francisco. Their careers were in part propelled by the legacy of their parents. Their mother, Phyllis Soohoo Chan, earned a pharmacy degree at a time when women were rare in the field. Their father, Edwin Chan, founded a pioneering auto parts distribution business, served on the National Advisory Council of the U.S. Small Business Administration, the California Small Business Advisory Council, and was a delegate to the White House Conference on Small Business.**

**Bruce and Doug were interviewed by Palma You and Steve Haines of the Chinese Historical Society of America on November 6, 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. Additional memories were submitted by Doug in writing.**

## Family Origins

Bruce and Doug both remember that their "grandmother was born in 1898" in San Francisco's Chinatown. "Our great-grandfather was born here. We are one of the families with an older history." Their mother, Phyllis Pearl Soohoo, was born in Oakland on July 14, 1922, to Mack and Lilly (Chew) Soohoo. Mack was an outdoorsman who practiced skeet shooting and fishing, and was president of the Chinese Sportsmen's Club. Perhaps that's where Phyllis got her athleticism; during her time at Lincoln Elementary School and Oakland Technical High School, she excelled at tennis, was shortstop for a Berkeley Women's Softball League championship team, and served as captain of a victorious volleyball team. She was also a champion skeet shooter.

Phyllis was accepted to the University of California, Berkeley, but deferred her studies to work at the Shell Chemical Division of the Shell Union Oil Company during World War II. She returned to school after the war, graduating in 1948. Bruce states that "Mom went on to become a pharmacist." She



# Bruce & Douglas Chan Remember

Sutter Street, looking northwest towards Buchanan, August 1948. All buildings in this view were demolished in redevelopment. (Photo by Joe Chapman; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.3883)

graduated from the College of Pharmacy at the University of California, San Francisco and received her license for the states of California and Nevada in 1953. Among other things, Phyllis used her training to volunteer for the Mount Zion Hospital clinic pharmacy.

Edwin Chan was born in San Francisco's Chinatown on March 8, 1920. His parents, Henry and Lillian (Hee) Chan, were both natives of China. "Dad didn't have much of a formal education but he would have liked it. He went to City College of San Francisco, took accounting classes and did things to better himself, but didn't have a college degree," Bruce says.

"My father was part of the Coast Guard during World War II. He also worked at the Alameda Naval Air Base with a quartermaster role," Bruce remembers. Doug adds that Edwin was also stationed at Mills Field, the future San Francisco International Airport. Bruce continues, "He developed some skills. He managed to procure a typical military jeep and used to drive his mother and sisters from Daly City to San Francisco. It was an adventure to ride open top in the World War II jeep down the freeway with no seat belts, etc."

"World War II was a game changer on a variety of levels," Bruce states. "It gave you the sense that the world was larger than six feet beyond your house. He [Edwin] supported himself as a shoeshine boy, houseboy for a rich Jewish couple in Nob Hill. Opportunities were limited, but he was kind of a hell raiser…He fought a lot, skipped school, caroused." Bruce recalls a story about Edwin pocketing money that his mother gave him to pay tuition for Chinese school. "He explained it to me, 'When you need money, you need it.' He was not someone who would always play by the rules and get in line with everybody else."

Doug adds, "Dad was discharged on May 13, 1944, as a Naval Store Keeper, third class…He remarked that when he wore the uniform he was regarded as a man – not as a former houseboy." Bruce continues, "He was a curious person who really benefited from having a consciousness expanded to see there is more to it. People of that era thought going to Golden Gate Park was like going to another country…My dad had moved around: Chinatown, Sacramento, Reno. He always talked about the physical and the psychological ghetto. It's well documented that the by-product of conscription for minorities during World War II introduced folks to different



College of Pharmacy, Parnassus Avenue, circa 1910. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp33.00302)

people you wouldn't normally meet, introduced you to different opportunities, and broadened your worldview."

For his service, Edwin was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. Bruce says, "The GI Bill gave people financial means and civil rights were changing things…After World War II, people could open up a small business. A family friend opened a pharmacy on 10th and Cabrillo. Things like that happened back then. You could be a small entrepreneur and make a living."

## Auto Parts Pioneer

Doug states that "Dad was a pioneer in the auto parts business," founding National Auto Supply, Inc. in 1954. He continues, "Dad explicitly rejected the Chinatown groups, especially Young Wo Association. There was no money to be made down there. Too many big fish in a small pond." Bruce recalls, "His world was the White working world, he felt more at home with the auto parts people in Dayton, Ohio, with God-fearing Republicans, than with local folks in Chinatown."

"Dad started his business with $132 borrowed from Mom (who was pregnant), and he was on unemployment," Doug says. Bruce adds, "It was on the ground floor of a Victorian building he owned in Japantown at Sutter and Buchanan. The upstairs was rented to 'Colored fellows' which my mom told him he could not say anymore. She had to get him from Colored, to Negro, to Black. He wanted to keep Black employees on because it helped him in the neighborhood. At that time, folks worked on their cars in driveways, and he would give people parts because, once they installed the part, they'd come pay him. He wouldn't lend money because he knew he'd never see that again, but he would give parts to people to 'fix the old lady's car.'" But Doug remembers that he said, "'Never comp parts with spark plugs or carburetors: that's real money.'"

Looking back, Bruce says, "After the flattening of the Fillmore – urban renewal – he knew he had to relocate; the neighborhood would change." Bruce continues, "Dad moved to a warehouse on Page Street between Gough and Franklin Streets and combined a warehouse with an adjoining building. The space had a lot of room for inventory. One part of the warehouse had lease customers, where their inventory sat on rented shelf space. He initiated a distribution operation selling to other auto parts stores, repair shops, and gas stations. He had consumer retail and wholesale operations and carried every type of automobile part anyone could use."

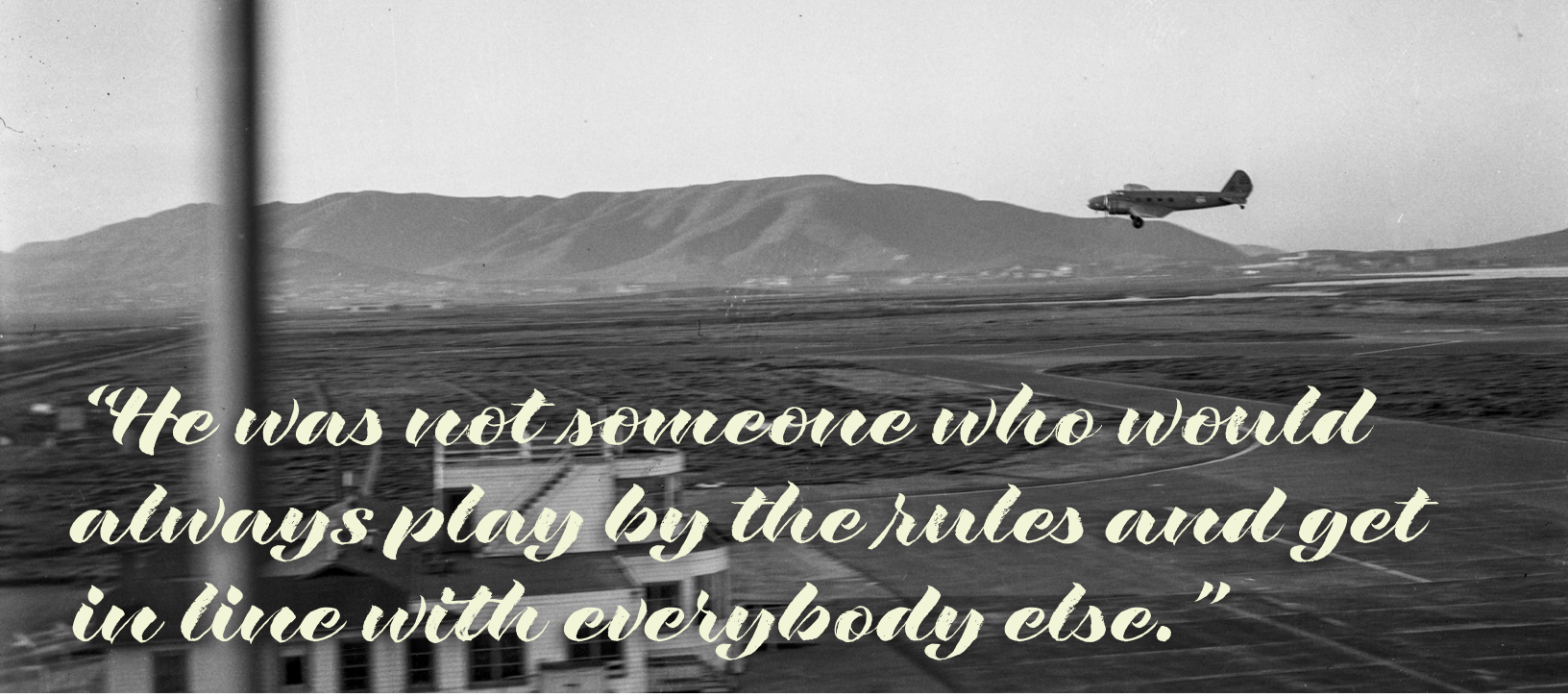
From 1968 to 1981, Edwin served as Chairman of the Board and Chief Operating Officer of General Auto Parts Distributor, which specialized in distributing "hard" (engine and chassis) parts throughout Northern California. Bruce states, "Dad was an incubator for the auto parts industry. He was the first and gave others a start…There were so many people who worked for him, all kinds, some opened their own businesses, some got into trouble like one guy who got behind in taxes and who eventually ran our warehouse. Dad had a big heart and he would be accepting in his own way of people's foibles." Doug confirms this and Bruce follows up with, "My mom was a kind person as well. When I do my work I feel her influence tremendously."

Bruce recalls, "My brother and I both started working at the auto parts store while in grade school, around fifth or sixth grade for me. Every summer, we'd work for minimum wage and inventory the warehouse. In those days it was physical inventory. The inventory was stored on a long tray, there was a 6x4 card with information and we'd verify and count all three floors of auto parts. When older, we did more physical work, loading and unloading, using a forklift, deliveries, did everything but clean the bathrooms." They both remember delivering parts all over the city.

Still, Bruce says that "Neither of us was going to go into the family business. I worked for my dad for 10-12 years. In hindsight, I consider that experience one of the premier educational experiences of my life on many different levels… This was a non-Asian business and not the typical type of merchandise or the location, one of the largest and oldest in the city. My dad would go to Michigan and establish contracts with manufacturers and my brother and I got exposed to the White working-class world…We saw a lot in that union shop and it helped me learn how to talk to all different kinds of people."

## Moving to The Richmond

The Chans moved into a classic mid-Richmond District flat at 511 23rd Avenue in 1954; Doug was born not long after on June 4. Then they moved to a five-room bungalow at 575 42nd Avenue. "I still recall Mom asking landlords over the phone whether they rented to Chinese," Doug states. This is where the *San Francisco Examiner* records Bruce's birth on November 12, 1956, but Phyllis and Edwin were looking to buy a home. They may have seen an advertisement for 249 16th Avenue: "Gorgeous 3 bedroom home plus lovely 3 rm.




Mills Field, March 1938. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.10750)

garden apartment. Immaculate throughout, NEW KITCHEN and NEW bathrm. Loads of tile, beautifully appointed. Charming garden, too."[1] Using the GI Bill, Bruce remembers, "Our parents moved in 1956 to 249 16th Avenue and lived there until 1968."

Bruce continues, "The house had a distinct in-law unit where my grandmother lived. It had a living room, bedroom, and its own kitchen, and a door that led to the backyard. Years later my father observed, 'It's trouble when two women have to share the same kitchen.' My grandmother did a lot of cooking both downstairs and upstairs. She spent a lot of time caring for me and my brother. At one point, my dad's younger sister was there a lot helping him with his books for his business. Also, my step-sister lived there until she got married."

"We had hybrid meals," Bruce recalls. My grandmother was a really good cook, as was my mother, but she didn't focus on Chinese food much. At the time, there was only one Chinese store in the Richmond, Man Hing Market. They'd go there if they forgot something or didn't have time. When I was small, we'd go on shopping trips with Mom and Grandmother to Chinatown. Chinatown was still the center of their world commercially and for food. Grandmother had certain butchers she liked. She'd go into a store and they all knew her. They give her the char-seiw 'roast pork' with a slightly burnt end for the kid. We'd go to Chinatown to eat because there were no restaurants in the Richmond and no such thing as Chinese in the Sunset. It was a transitional time."

The Chan family relocated to a house in Jordan Park on Spruce and Euclid in 1968, on the eastern edge of the Richmond District. Still, Doug remembers Chinese-owned businesses in the neighborhood like Canterbury Corner bookstore and Joe's Ice Cream with their "fresh licorice whips." Bruce adds that the Richmond is "multi-cultural; the businesses back then were an interesting mix. There were Russian emigrants with businesses and newspapers, kind of like the Haight in the old days."

"It was a middle-class postwar neighborhood, very different from what you have now," Bruce states. "On our street there was a Japanese American family, the Nakanos; one Irish American family, McGowans; and one German or Austrian, one kid up in the neighborhood with his lederhosen. I teased him, no fighting but teasing."

"At 16th Avenue, we played a lot on the sidewalk and streets," Bruce recalls. "We used Golden Gate Park and Mountain Lake Park, some nearby playgrounds we'd drift to. Mountain Lake Park had too much dog poop on the ground for my liking and the lake didn't look like any lake I'd ever seen before; it was cleaned up years later." He continues, "Little kids didn't join organized sports, they played in the streets with their glove, ball, and bike. You'd give the playground keeper a key and he'd give you something to play with."

## Schooling

Edwin and Phyllis "made me go to Chinese school at the Y on 18th Avenue and Geary," Bruce remembers. "I was indifferent. Much to my regret I don't speak Cantonese. My parents tried, so I could learn, but it was a different world. Their priority was not that I was connected to Chinatown and they were not literate Cantonese." Doug adds, "Dad could still speak Heung sahn wa, but sam yup (chinglish) was our dialect at home."

Bruce says, "My brother went to public school up to third grade, me up to first grade. My dad was dissatisfied when my brother was at Sutro Elementary and he didn't have homework." Doug chimes in, "Took a test, showed I was



Doug Chan in the second row, second from left, Sutro Elementary School, 1962. (Courtesy of the Chan Family)

three years behind. Ha! I still recall Dad blowing his top." Some of his favorite teachers from Sutro Elementary included Mrs. Murphy in first grade, Mrs. Manko in second grade, and "tired" Mrs. Rowe in third grade.

Doug and Bruce were then sent to Town School for Boys, followed by Cathedral School for Boys. Town School was established in 1939 and is still an active all-boys private school in Pacific Heights. Cathedral School is located in Nob Hill, affiliated with Grace Cathedral, and is also still an active private boy's school. Phyllis served on the Board of Trustees of Cathedral School from 1966 to 1974. Bruce states that "Dad knew we weren't going to get ahead by going to public school. When the focus is what's going to give your kid an advantage, you want to focus and do what's best."

"My best friends were White, moneyed, old San Francisco Protestant families," Bruce remembers, "but I spent most of my time with my Japanese American friend and White friends from Cathedral. I had one friend, Frankie, who was at school because of a disadvantaged student program, and whose parents had a grocery store on Nob Hill. It was a cross-cultural experience for both of us. I engaged with a family who spoke Chinese; he, with a world of non-Chinese speakers. My world was evolving even back then."

Bruce declares that "We were sent to church schools because that was the best school, not because there was affinity for the church teaching – Episcopal, the Church of England." With Doug's help, he elaborates: "Neither of my parents were church goers. Mom went to a Chinese church in Oakland called True Sunshine Mission, but she didn't drag us to church…Dad was irreligious, like most Chinese Americans." Bruce recalls Edwin talking about his first wife, "who died several months after childbirth. Dad's perception was, if she had had some penicillin for her heart condition, or some type of antibiotic, it could have been a game changer. At the time, he went to a priest, possibly at Cameron House, to explain his situation: a daughter a month or two old, being a young father who needed money for medication that was not abundant at the time. The priest said, 'Let's pray together.' Well, Dad said, 'I need medicine not prayer.' Because of that, he didn't have much use for organized religion; he wasn't hostile but he wasn't interested. Christianity and Jewishness was a component of cultural literacy in America and my parents, both being practical, understood it as that."

Doug and Bruce later attended St. Paul's School, a boarding school in Concord, New Hampshire. "It was part of a vision that, to succeed, you need to not just take the well-worn path in San Francisco. Dad had a low opinion of Cameron House," Bruce says. With a fascinating history stretching back to 1874, and roots in Presbyterianism, Cameron House is a social services organization for the city's Chinese American community. However, Bruce states that Edwin "felt that Christianity created people too accepting of the status quo. Content with their station in life, folks weren't willing to throw sharp elbows around. That was not him. Philosophically, he

had differences with organized religion. He was exceptional in that sense, how many people of his generation had a large enough view of life to do that?"

"My father wanted to expose us to things so we wouldn't be limited. Dad said, 'You gotta learn what makes them tick, White people, to take their money.' It's one way of putting it," Bruce says. "Dressing up the concept a bit, this society is run by people other than us. If you're going to be successful, you don't want to be trapped in the group where people only see the traditional roles; you better learn how to compete, not to be intimidated, and learn what their culture is about. He was of the generation where overt racist limitations existed…At the time there were no [Chinese] firefighters, policemen, plumbers, and electricians. Forget it; you were lucky to get a job at the post office…My dad didn't have a college degree but he was a businessman. He was curious and analytical; he talked to a lot of people, asked questions, was innovative, and wanted to do something that was completely foreign to everybody."

Bruce concludes that "We grew up not in the typical pathway and my parents didn't think it was that important…their mission was 'we have to go beyond the Chinese American community,' thinking it was limiting in many ways, in terms of economic opportunities, world view, things like that. As he [Edwin] traveled for work and pleasure he saw the bigger world for us and a different type of assimilation."



Bruce Chan outside the family's Richmond District home. (Courtesy of the Chan Family)

## Conclusion

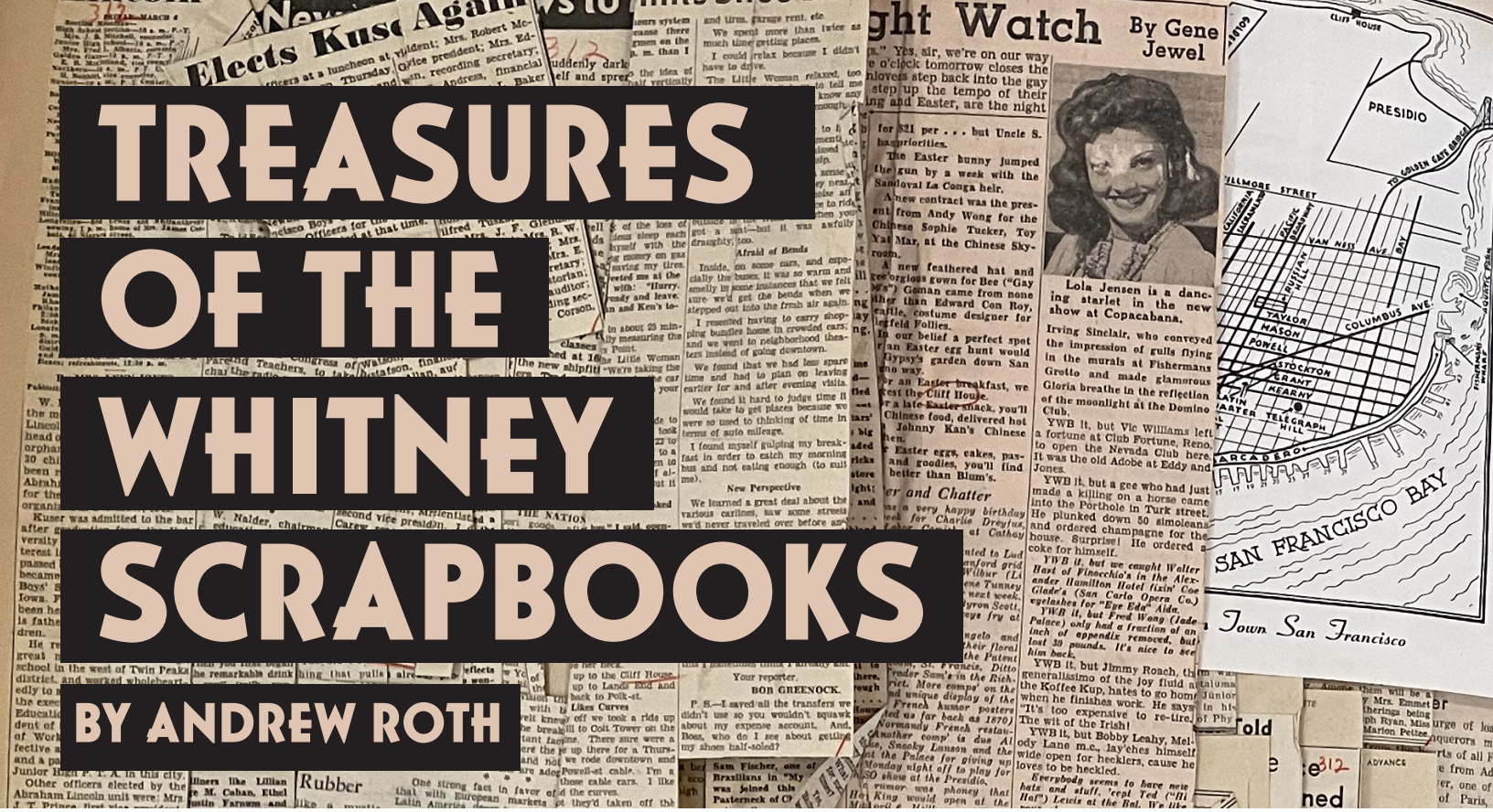
Edwin's determination for himself and his children paid off. Bruce and Doug have remarkable careers in public service that aren't over yet. Bruce remembers, "Dad knew it was hard to get ahead and never looked down on anyone for not being successful. He knew it took a lot to become successful. Luck and generosity of others plays a part, but he wanted to help his kids however he could. He drove us to school every day and that gave him the opportunity to spend a lot of time talking to us then, and at the dinner table. He had a largeness of mind to do things differently. That's why I don't particularly like movies like *The Joy Luck Club*, a movie about Chinese Americans that shows one type of Chinese parent. Our experiences were much more varied and rich than what entertains people."

Both brothers earned their undergraduate degrees from Stanford University and law degrees from the University of California, Davis. Bruce worked as a trial attorney with the San Francisco Public Defender's Office from 1981 through 1999, and has served as a judge to the Superior Court of San Francisco since 2009. He founded the Young Adult Court, a program that helps 18-25 year-olds stay out of the justice system by providing educational, vocational, and other rehabilitative services. Doug says that his brother's "work as a judge has been shaped by a rich, multi-cultural environment that the Richmond represented in the post-war years."

Doug has an equally impressive biography. He is a founding partner of the San Francisco law firm of Chan & Welch, LLP, but also has a long list of civil service positions to his credit, including seats on the San Francisco Rent Stabilization and Arbitration Board and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission. He currently serves as President of the Board of Directors of the Chinese Historical Society of America.

Bruce and Doug also still live in the Richmond District; Bruce at the Chan family home in Jordan Park. "I still walk down to Clement Street; there's more than one Chinese market now." Bruce reflects that by participating in this oral history, "the neighborhood really takes on a significance that maybe a lot of people don't understand. That it was literally and figuratively an opening up of the Chinese American experience from the confines of Chinatown." He adds that "When you live somewhere where you can have a bicycle and ride outside, when you meet kids from different backgrounds, when your horizons are broader, that's the difference…Although Chinatown remains the center of many things, for my parents, progress was not living in Chinatown, it was owning a single-family home, having some room, cars, opportunities, things like that, and the Richmond District is a big first step to that journey."

1. "249 16th Ave.," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 16, 1956.



# TREASURES OF THE WHITNEY SCRAPBOOKS

BY ANDREW ROTH

***Somehow, we wound up working with two Andrew Roths this year. The Andrew Roth who wrote this article reached out to us during the quarantine portion of the pandemic, and has been helping us make sense of our archive. This article is the result of his careful cataloging and highlights a piece of the WNP collection, as well as some of the behind-the-scenes work we do to preserve and share history.***

Among the many items that Western Neighborhoods Project purchased from the estate of the shuttered Cliff House in 2021 were two old cloth-bound black scrapbooks. Dusty and brittle, each are nearly as large as a Lululemon yoga mat. Unpromising from the outside but once opened, these albums reveal a treasure trove: thousands of newspaper clippings from the 1930s and 40s that provide a detailed, intimate, and often amusing glimpse into local history.

The two scrapbooks belonged to brothers George and Leo Whitney, former owners of Playland at the Beach and the Cliff House, and were created to keep track of their press coverage, reviews, and marketing efforts. Starting in the later part of the 19th century, it was common for people or companies to hire a "clipping service" to find specific search terms in newspapers and snip out any article in which those terms appeared. These services, now called "media monitoring," still exist today, although they have moved past physical clippings to cover a range of media types. In the Whitney scrapbooks, a tag at the top of each article identifies the newspaper the article appeared in, the date, and the paper's circulation.

For close to twenty years, any article that mentioned Playland or the Cliff House, no matter where the newspaper was located – San Francisco, Oakland, or Muskogee, Oklahoma – was cut out and is now preserved within the covers of these scrapbooks. For the past several months, I've been slowly burrowing through these antiques, like a paleontologist digging up bones, and cataloging the details on a spreadsheet. Laborious, yes, but absolutely engaging!

Overlapping columns of tightly packed clippings (which must be carefully lifted to reveal their secrets) deliver glimpses of people, places, events, natural disasters, political squabbles, deaths, mysteries, recipes, crimes, and curiosities. A marriage announcement butts up against a map of the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. A complaint about bus service on the Great Highway (yes, there once was one) sits underneath an article of a storm blowing out the Cliff House windows in January 1939 (it happened again in March 1941).

There are columns from beloved journalist Herb Caen going back to 1938, full of poetic reveries on city gossip and glories. Bay to Breakers – then called the Cross City Race – received careful attention every year, even though it numbered only a few dozen male participants. In September 1937, Humphrey Bogart paid a visit to the Cliff House. The October 18, 1938 death notice for Dr. Emma Merritt, daughter of Adolph Sutro, warranted inclusion. Any article that mentioned Playland or

Press clippings inside the Whitney Brothers' scrapbook, 2022. (Courtesy of Andrew Roth)

the Cliff House, no matter how briefly and loosely connected to the article's primary subject, got clipped. On the last day of February 1941, the Sausalito Ferry terminated its service to the city – put out of business by the Golden Gate Bridge. The *New York Journal-American* of June 30, 1940 revealed the recipe for the cioppino at Joe DiMaggio's Grotto. On December 1, 1939, Margaret Gross married George R. Finnigan. Sometimes significant, often trivial, the sheer number and variety of stories and tidbits is mesmerizing.

A personal favorite is the story of Jack Loreen, who had himself buried in a custom-built casket at Ocean Beach in the summer of 1935. The publicity seeker certainly got plenty of coverage: his exploit was reported intensely in the city papers and as far afield as Providence, Rhode Island. Called "a modern Lazarus"[1] and "the Human Mole,"[2] Loreen lay under the sand for 119 days, apparently the world record, and then disappeared from the pages of America's newspapers.

The clippings also reflect some of the casual racism and sexism of the time. Ads for one of the Whitneys' beachfront restaurants, Topsy's Roost, tout the eatery's "best fried chicken this side of Ol' Virginny"[3] with cartoonish racist caricatures. Married women are routinely referred to by their husbands' names. Unmarried women of any age are often called girls.

Though these tropes have – for the most part – thankfully faded, there is one lingering notion that has remained constant to this day. Among the yellowed clippings from nearly a century ago are a good number of laments on San Francisco's decline, melancholy reminiscences of "the good old days," and dire accounts of the city's loss of vitality, beauty, and unique character. Reports of San Francisco's demise have apparently been good business for over a century!



One of the Whitney Brothers' scrapbooks, 2022. (Courtesy of Chelsea Sellin)

1. "Jack Loreen is Modern Lazarus," *Haight Street Herald*, October 17, 1935.
2. "Human Mole Buried Alive At Playland at the Beach Hopeful of Establishing an All Time World Record," *San Francisco Municipal Journal*, September 12, 1935.
3. "Best Fried Chicken," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 26, 1937.

# Illuminating Laurie Hollings

## By Nicole Meldahl and Chelsea Sellin

***During Western Neighborhoods Project's May 2022 Gala, we displayed a photo album donated to us by James Smith, who literally wrote the book (more than one, actually) on Playland at the Beach. The album contains hundreds of images that offer an intimate view of Playland in the 1920s and 1930s; a rare glimpse into this area's past, people, and environs along Great Highway. We see The Chutes transforming into Playland. We witness buildings in the process of demolition, rides being built, people who worked there, and people having fun on their days off: life as it was at Ocean Beach during the Prohibition era. The survival of this precious artifact can be credited to James, of course, but also the album's previous owner, Laurie Hollings.***

Disembarking from the Sleigh Ride rollercoaster, Chutes at the Beach, 1920s. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.180)





Chutes at the Beach's Arcade Row midway, 1920s. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.092)




Chutes at the Beach photo stand v
Photo Album, James R. Smith Col

## *"an artist with engineering overtones...a jack-of-all-trades who will tackle any job that's different and challenging"*

Laurie was one-in-a-million. Born Laurence Nephi Hollings in 1914 in South Africa, he was the youngest child of Elizabeth (Uijs) and Ernest Hollings. Ernest went to South Africa with the British Army during the Boer War and stayed on afterwards, marrying Elizabeth and joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He worked as superintendent of public baths in Bloemfontein, but was also a trained stained glass artist and embosser; a man of many talents, like his son would also be.

The Hollings family came to America in 1917 and settled in Salt Lake City, where Ernest worked as a swimming instructor for the University of Utah. After Laurie's parents divorced, he moved to San Francisco with his mother and siblings sometime in the 1920s. He didn't take well to school and instead looked for work, embarking on a career path that combined his interests in painting, illustration, carpentry, and sculpting.

Young Laurie created displays for department store windows and was hired as a set designer for the San Francisco Opera. He took a taxidermy class, learning the skills necessary to work on gorilla displays at the California Academy of Sciences, which debuted to the public in 1934 as part of Simson African Hall. Knowledge of taxidermy came in handy for his next gig, working on stop-motion photography for the film *King Kong* (1933). This led to modeling work for animated short films.

Laurie served an LDS mission in Minnesota before returning to San Francisco and his diorama work with the Academy of Sciences. He was also involved with Playland and its operators, the Whitney family, although it's unclear exactly what his job entailed. It may have been during this period that he sculpted a large fiberglass seal that was displayed at The Cliff House for many years. Laurie is also credited with creating a version of The Last Supper out of wax, which could be seen at Sutro Baths. Although, George Whitney Jr. – in an oral history interview conducted in 2002 – foggily remembered that the diorama predated his family's ownership of the Baths and was made by a man possibly named Schlesinger.

Laurie went to Los Angeles again, recalling in a 1997 interview, "I went to Hollywood to work for (cartoonist) George Pal, but he wasn't ready for me, so I went over to Disney…Back then, anybody who could draw could get work for Disney."[1] Among




with Old West saloon backdrop, 1920s. (Laurie Hollings lection / wnp66.046)




Whirlpool ride construction, Chutes at the Beach, circa 1924. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.152)

other projects, Laurie helped develop the dancing pink elephants in *Fantasia* (1940). He was also a set designer for United Artists and Columbia Pictures. The set he created for Columbia's film *Arizona* (1940) was used by other films and television shows for decades to come.

On June 7, 1939, Laurie married his neighbor, Lois Virginia Tueller. They both lived on Downey Street in San Francisco, although they wed in Salt Lake City. The Tuellers were originally from Idaho, but like the Hollingses, lived in Utah before coming to San Francisco. Lois's father, George, was a carpenter – one of the many men who built bridges across the San Francisco Bay and homes throughout the Sunset District in the 1930s.

On the eve of U.S. involvement in World War II, Laurie was back in Los Angeles, working for George Pal Productions as well as O'Dee Studios, creating holiday window displays for KGO and KPO radio stations in 1940. Then, duty called, and Laurie served with the U.S Army as a staff sergeant. He worked in a camouflage school but occasionally designed sets and did miniature work for training films. When the war ended, Laurie returned to San Francisco. He and Lois welcomed two sons in the 1950s, Robert and Keith.

In 1953, Walt Disney visited Playland, scouting ideas for the amusement park he would soon open in Anaheim in 1955. He stayed with the Whitney family, and was taken with a music box in their possession. According to Warren Crandall – member of the extended Whitney family and Playland expert – Disney had Laurie purchase the trinket from George Whitney on his behalf. Disney then gave it to his wife, Lillian, as a wedding anniversary gift. Today, the music box is still displayed in Walt's apartment above the firehouse on Disneyland's Main Street. Disney also purchased music machines from the Whitneys, which were on display in Disneyland's Penny Arcade for some time, and four carousel horses, which were put into service on the King Arthur Carousel.

Shortly after Disney's visit, he hired George Whitney Jr. as an engineer to work on Disneyland. Laurie was also hired by Disney around this time, to work for WED Enterprises (which later became Walt Disney Imagineering). He helped design the faces of animatronic figures for the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, and was also instrumental in developing concepts for Fantasyland and Frontierland. According to Warren Crandall, Laurie left Disney and returned to work for the Whitneys in the 1960s. Coincidentally, George Whitney Jr. also left Disney for Playland, after the death of his father in 1958.

Playland's last gasp – or final frontier, if you will – was a Wild West-themed area created for small children, called Fun-Tier Town. Whitney said he was inspired by the concept of total immersion used to great effect at Disneyland. Construction started in 1959 and was completed the following year, built where the Laff in the Dark attraction was once located between 48th Avenue and La Playa Street, Balboa and Cabrillo Streets. It featured ten western themed rides, including the Wild Mine



Big Dipper ride during a Chutes-sponsored Bay Area Boy's Club Day, circa 1922. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.132)




Skee Ball attraction and attendant, 1930s. (Laurie Hollings P James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.316)

train ride, which featured a trellis and a tunnel. Additionally, the Dark Mystery Ride, outside of Fun-Tier Town proper, was expanded and received a Wild West makeover with a facade made to look like a rusty mine entrance. A giant fiberglass mechanical cowboy advertised Fun-Tier Town: a rootin' and tootin' pistol-wielding mascot named Sheriff C.U. Soon (now part of the WNP Collection).

The only name connected with Fun-Tier Town's conception and design is George Whitney Jr., but it's hard to imagine that Laurie didn't influence this western-themed part of Playland. When Nicole first presented this research at WNP's 2022 Gala, she had a hunch (which she couldn't prove) that Laurie designed Sheriff C.U. Soon. We know he constructed the fiberglass seal at the Cliff House, and therefore had experience working with this material, at this scale. Our smoking gun arrived in September: Reino Niemela Jr. – whose father was the artist and designer in charge of Playland's signage from the late 1930s until 1972 – found a concept drawing for the cowboy in his father's old trunk. The drawing is signed by Laurie Hollings.

Bolstering the theory that Laurie was involved in Fun-Tier Town's creation is the fact that he was the chief designer of another western-themed park at the same time: Frontier Village. The park's founder, Joseph Zukin Jr., was inspired – like so many others – after a trip to Disneyland. Frontier Village was initially planned for Sunnyvale, where the Hollings family lived, but ground was broken in San Jose in August 1960. Zukin described Laurie as "an artist with engineering overtones…a jack-of-all-trades who will tackle any job that's different and challenging. He can talk to carpenters and builders and is a storehouse of historical information when it comes to architecture."[2] Frontier Village's first mascot was a deputy marshal who interacted with visitors and participated in hourly skits in which outlaws got into shootouts and the actors carried real Colt Single Action Army revolvers that fired blanks. Much like Disneyland, the park had a central plaza, a Main Street, and was completely encircled by a railroad.

In 1968, Laurie was tapped to manage Amusement Plaza, the midway area and highlight of the grand opening of California Exposition in Sacramento. Cal Expo, as it's called today, was envisioned as a celebration of all the state had to offer, told through the lens of Disney-style imagineering. Laurie may have interacted with former colleagues, as several Disney employees were brought in to design and build the Expo. His career came somewhat full circle in 1970, when he was named the director of art and creative design for Old Tucson, which was a theme park and movie studio derived from the set he designed for the movie *Arizona* back in the 1930s. Sadly, much of the lot burned down in 1995.



hoto Album,




Playland's midway, 1930s. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.430)

By the 1990s, Laurie and Lois lived in a small apartment in Mesa, Arizona filled with scrapbooks, sketches, and other materials created over the course of an incredible life. In 1997, he told a reporter with the *Arizona Republic* that he wasn't done yet. "I still have plenty of ideas. I don't think I'll ever run out of fantasies."[3] Laurie died less than a year later on February 2, 1998, and the things he kept close in his final years were scattered at an estate sale. It's always sad to see a lifetime of work disseminated as fragments, but we at WNP feel so fortunate to have his photo album thanks to James Smith.

The album still holds mysteries – namely, the identity of the photographer(s). Did Laurie take any of the images? Some are too old to have possibly been taken by him. James Smith indicated that the photos came from the Whitney family. Did they give the album to a young Laurie, a talented man embarking on a promising career and eager to learn the ins and outs of amusement parks? Or was it a memento for a longtime collaborator at the end of his tenure? What is clear is that the images were intended to document Playland, and were taken by someone with behind-the-scenes access, making the photos feel almost voyeuristic at times. As historic artifacts alone, they're priceless. Knowing they were kept by someone seeking to understand the complexities of designing and refreshing amusement parks gives them even more dimension.

## "I don't think I'll ever run out of fantasies."

Laurie himself also still holds mysteries. Since he worked on so many projects, often simultaneously, tracking his movements is dizzying. His contributions were sometimes uncredited, or described in frustratingly slim detail, yet his presence can be felt just under the surface. The more we learn about him, the more we understand the reach of his work and influence. And we aren't finished with Laurie yet – this is the beginning of a research journey in our ongoing efforts to interpret and share the Cliff House Collection. We hope to discover more, share it with you, and give Laurie his due. He was a man who gave the public so much joy during his lifetime. For now, his photographs of Playland continue to do so on OpenSFHistory.

1. "Just for amusement," *Arizona Republic*, April 13, 1997.
2. "The Old West – A Business in Fantasy," *Oakland Tribune*, September 24, 1964.
3. "Just for amusement," *Arizona Republic*, April 13, 1997.



The “muses” on display at *Naiad Cove*.
(Courtesy of Nicole Meldahl)

# Inside the Outside Lands




Ben Wood's projection on the south wall of the Cliff House. (Courtesy of Nicole Meldahl)

As The Museum at the Cliff comes to a close at the end of September, it's impossible not to reflect on all we've accomplished at the edge of the western world.

It started with a February 2021 fundraising drive to save art and artifacts from auction, in partnership with The Great Highway gallery and ACT Art Conservation. Then we opened our little history gallery in the former Cliff House Gift Shop in October 2021, with support from the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's Park Archives and Records Center, and the Global Museum at San Francisco State University. Finally, we expanded into the former restaurant space with a special exhibition, *Naiad Cove*, in July 2022. Endeavors like this normally take years to plan, but through the power of community and an organizational willingness to do good, we did great things with very little money and even less time.

Together we turned an empty restaurant into an immersive celebration of this area's vibrant history. Working with **John Lindsey**, **Alexandra Mitchell**, **Reino Niemela Jr.**, **Ben Wood**, and **Andrew Roth** to simulate all you could once experience (and continue to see) out at The Cliff has convinced us more than ever that art and history work best together in communicating the power of place. Our small army of volunteers (who will be thanked properly and explicitly in our final issue of the year) greeted close to 300 people a day during The Museum's run. They've helped us illuminate the exhibition, clean the bathrooms, hang and transport art, write and print labels, cater events, and more.

Because of their commitment and hospitality, we've seen a higher percentage of new members join the Western Neighborhoods Project family in the last three months than in the last three years. This means we're reaching people, the stories we're sharing are having an impact, and WNP is growing. Speaking of growth, WNP got one whole employee bigger at the end of the summer by welcoming a paid Director of Programs: **Chelsea Sellin**. This name will be quite familiar to the Outside Lands faithful, as Chelsea has been a constant presence at our nonprofit, in one way or another, since joining the Board of Directors in 2014. By hiring Chelsea, WNP is choosing to invest in people, and the move ensures we'll continue to be run by two best friends who love sharing local history. Thank you, dear members, for helping us make it happen.

Who knows where this journey will lead us as we push off from the Cliff House and set our sights on the horizon, but oh, the places we will go with two women at the helm. We hope you'll join us in a toast at our Bon Voyage Weekend at The Cliff House on October 15-16.



John Lindsey leads a curator's tour of the contemporary art on display at *Naiad Cove*. (Courtesy of Nicole Meldahl)

# THE LAST WORD

Labor Day weekend this year marked the 50th anniversary of the closure of Playland-at-the-Beach. Its 1972 shuttering was followed by a public auction, and then finally demolition. Condos now stand on the site where generations of San Franciscans found amusement (perhaps with a tinge of danger). By far some of the most common laments we at WNP hear is “why did they tear it down?!” and “bring it back!” But the truth is, Playland was rather shabby towards the end, and no longer exuded “family friendly” vibes. In our recent two-part podcast featuring Playland memories, Paul Judge smartly observed that “Warm memories of Playland linger for many…Yet, it is hard to imagine the will, the real estate, or the means to create and sustain such an amusement park setting today.” Even George Whitney Jr. himself had similar sentiments. In a 2002 oral history conducted by John Martini, he said "I'm not sorry that Playland itself is gone. I'm just sorry that San Francisco doesn't have a good location with a good amusement park. But I don't know where else it would be any better than where it was.”



Demolition of Friends and Relations Theatre, originally the Ocean Beach Pavilion, 1972. (Photo by Greg Gaar; courtesy of Greg Gaar / wnp72.1127)

Playland demolition at Great Highway near Cabrillo Street, 1972. (Photo by Greg Gaar; courtesy of Greg Gaar / wnp72.1128)



## 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.

