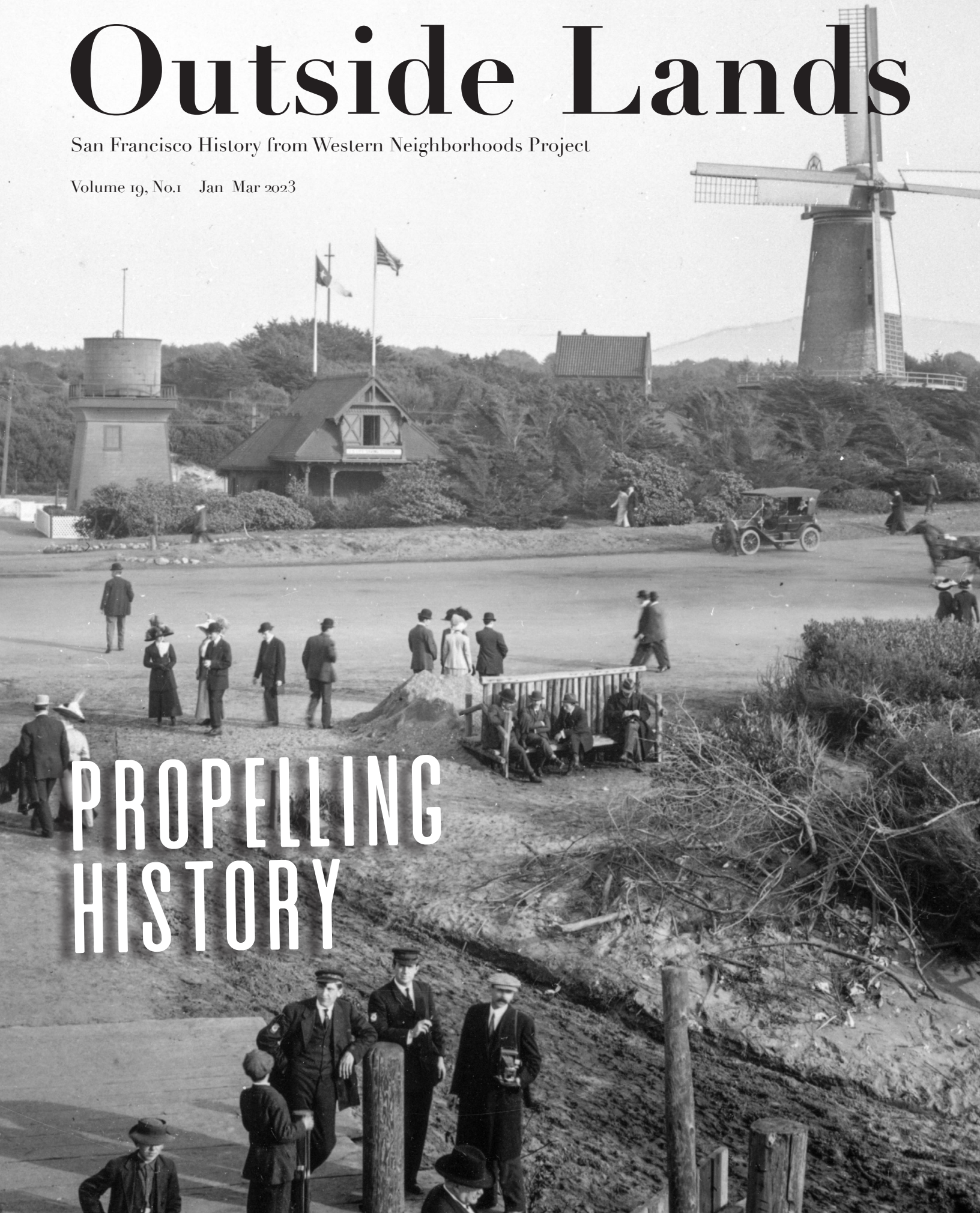
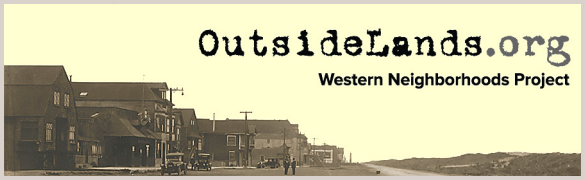
Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 19, No.1 Jan Mar 2023



PROPELLING HISTORY



Outside Lands

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

Jan-Mar 2023: Volume 19, Number 1

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Cover: Dutch windmill and Golden Gate Park Lifesaving Station, seen from Great Highway near Fulton, circa 1907. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.695)

Right: San Francisco Bay, circa 1950s. (Photo by Mitchell Bilafer, Mitchell Bilafer Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp28.3701)

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Nicole Meldahl

I ended 2022 by reading Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, which traces how thinking changed in the United States after the Civil War. It profiles foundational thinkers like Oliver Wendell Holmes and John Dewey. Joan Didion, who was hardly ever wrong, thought the book brilliant. And I think so too.

Much of the book examines how these men and our country sought to reconcile science with religion, and facts with beliefs, in a post-war world. History has shown us that when we survive unthinkable events like war, we come out the other side questioning how society has constructed itself, because the life we knew before died in battle alongside our brethren. How do we make sense of something so senseless? We need a new mode of thinking that is grounded in the past – one that's neither rehearsed nor restricted but rather informed and propelled by our shared history.

In **David Friedlander Remembers**, we see the best of this at play. He is of a generation motivated by war and inequality to find a better way, but he is also a son of San Francisco. David is a frequent contributor to our podcast, where you can hear more about his counterculture experiences in the 1960s. In this issue, he shares his family origins and remembers our fair city in the 1950s. This mid-century San Francisco is not the one we find today, but by sharing David's memories alongside others like his, we find truth in what's come to pass and how it's constructed our present. Because individual stories bring the city into focus and help us make sense of things.

Everything in the present has a precedent. Our new year started off with wet and wild weather, which somehow always seems to incite a debate about the validity of global warming and the reality of California's drought. Here we are again on the battleground of facts and beliefs, although that's thankfully not the fight we take head-on as community historians in the Outside Lands. I believe that history doesn't have an opinion in debates like these, but I also think it usually has something to say. In this spirit, **Paul Judge** and **Margaret Ostermann** are meeting our stormy start to 2023 with a ***Where in West S.F.?*** that reminds us the unthinkable can also sometimes be real: snow in San Francisco.

And speaking of history that propels us, our former student intern and newest WNP Board Member, **Lindsey Hanson**, wrote a wonderful article on the windmills in Golden Gate Park. Completed in 1903, the Dutch windmill turns 120 this year, and we're celebrating this historic milestone with a window exhibition also curated by Lindsey. I often forget about the windmills, as they are the silent sentries of the wild western edge of the park. In their dignified and utilitarian simplicity, I simply take them for granted. Thanks to Lindsey, I now have a new appreciation for Old Dutch and its slightly younger counterpart, Murphy windmill.

It's easy to take things for granted until history reminds us to remember. Louis Menand reminded me that thinking is like breathing – it's something we do every day without questioning the mechanics of how it happens. And both actions take a lot of heart. You, dear members, are the beating heart of Western Neighborhoods Project and that's why we start off each year with a nod to all of our supporters. We're so grateful for your contributions and so excited to see you in 2023. Without further ado, here's to another year of magical thinking together, starting with your first issue of ***Outside Lands***.



WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

By Paul Judge and Margaret Ostermann



Pacheco Street and Magellan Avenue, February 28, 1951. (Photo by Duke Downey; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.2700)

We were delighted to receive a veritable blizzard of reader responses identifying our snowy mystery photo. The view of Magellan Avenue curving into Dorantes Avenue, as seen from Pacheco Street, was easily identified by Patrick Schlemmer, Pete Tannen, and Grant Ute. Wallace Wertsch aptly described the intersection as the "Forest Hill Butterfly," capturing the neighborhood's hill-circling ascension on curling streets. For Todd and Eliza Campbell, the broad stairway stood out as part of the Crosstown Trail, a 17-mile diagonal urban hike which captures often-overlooked sections of the city. With a sweeping staircase and oversize planter, the classic residence park embellishments that the Newell-Murdoch Company used to entice home buyers into Forest Hill still provide the neighborhood with a unique sense-of-place today.

Margie Whitnah told us that "growing up in SF, it wasn't unusual for my dad to drive us by this lovely intersection as we continued on our way to family outings in his light green 1950 Chevy, perhaps off to Golden Gate Park." Margie related that her grandmother's house on Pacheco was one of the earliest built in Forest Hill.

Our frosty Forest Hill image dates to February 28, 1951 and depicts a rare city snowfall. Snow in San Francisco? That's as odd sounding as the old radio ads for Berkeley Farms Milk that proclaimed "Farms in Berkeley!" For San Franciscans of any neighborhood, snow falling and actually sticking on the ground long enough to mold a snowball rates memorably high as a life event. To those visitors or transplants from regions where snow is a seasonal fact of life, they may stare with bemusement as we locals "go bananas" over a light powdering of that cold white stuff. Our region can go decades between an incidence of snow falling.

We coastal inhabitants at this latitude would hop in the family car for a winter trip to the Sierra's more reliable snowpack. It became common for social clubs and youth groups to charter buses on weekends to take groups skiing. Most folks didn't own ski equipment, so gear was rented at places such as Ski Pit Rentals or Flying Goose sports, both on Taraval, or Dave Sullivan's Sports & Baits Shop on Geary Boulevard. Paul remembers his older sisters returning home from Parish teen club ski trips, tired with snow- and sun-burned faces and sore



Charlie has no experience with snow, but can testify that the twisting and dipping streets of Forest Hill make for a delightful walk. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

limbs, but thrilled having had the time of their lives.

For many WNP members of a certain vintage, it was the January 21, 1962 snowfall that sparked memories. Residents in San Francisco and on the Peninsula woke up to either a white dusting or carpet of snow. It was the latter for **Kevin Brady**, who recalled snow "so deep it reached the bottoms of our shoelaces in some places." The snowfall triggered giddy



View of snow-blanketed Marin Headlands from Ocean Beach, February 5, 1976. (Courtesy of Dennis O'Rorke)

activity amongst kids not used to such an event. In no time, attempts were made to build snowmen that rarely grew more than a foot tall. Besides, one had to also defend themselves from siblings and neighbors tossing snowballs! Some craftier kids climbed atop flat roofs and had themselves a superior vantage to rain down snowballs (some loaded with roofing gravel) upon the hapless in the street below. Meanwhile, others grabbed pieces of cardboard which became sleds on our city's ample slopes.

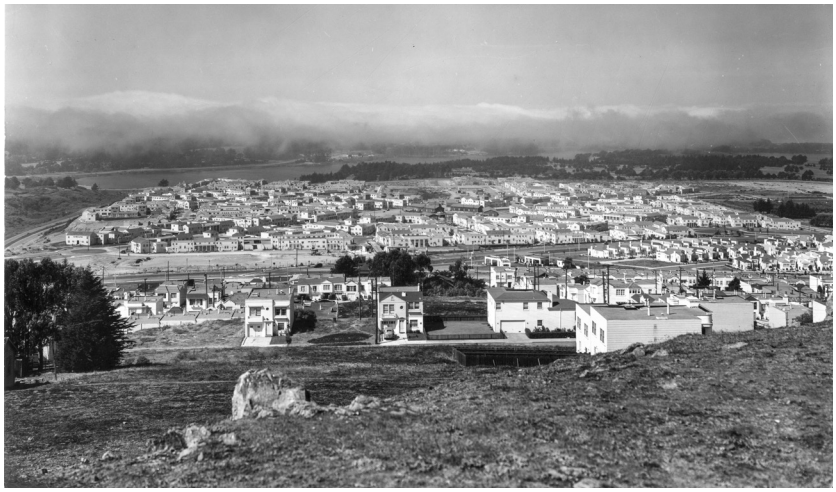
Judy Hitzeman recounted the snowfall of 1962: "We lived in Noe Valley at the time. My sister and I were delighted and thrilled to see snow, and of course wanted to go out and play in it right away. It was a Sunday, however, so Church was first on the agenda. Our parents insisted…Finally, after lunch my Dad drove us to Golden Gate Park, where the snow had stuck for a while. We made snowballs, threw some, and I saved one (somehow getting it home without it melting much) and put it in the freezer. Some months later, Mom had me get rid of it. I most likely threw it into the backyard and watched it melt."



Kevin Brady with his father, Tom, and neighbor, Karen, January 21, 1962. (Courtesy of Kevin Brady)

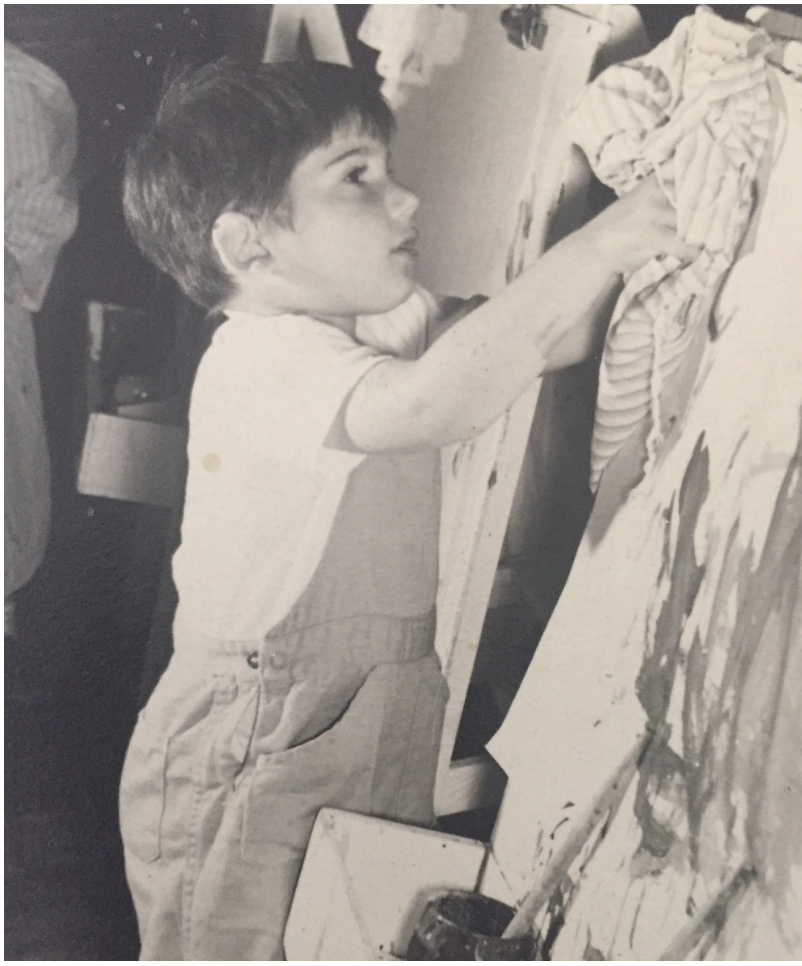
Can anyone pinpoint this vista? It might look a little different today!

Send your guesses to chelsea@outsidelands.org





DAVID





"MY UNIVERSE WAS THEN, AND IS STILL, CALLED THE SUNSET DISTRICT"



FRIEDLANDER REMEMBERS



The best part of running a neighborhood history nonprofit is becoming friends with your members. After interviewing David Friedlander remotely via Zoom in 2020, not because of the pandemic but because of the miles that separate San Francisco from Tennessee, we knew this man was a keeper. David is a gifted writer and an incredibly generous storyteller whose tales of San Francisco make us all proud to call this city home. Here, in his own words, he remembers his parents, his childhood, and lessons learned from a bowling team.



FAMILY ORIGINS

I grew up in the 1950s in San Francisco. My universe was then, and is still, called the Sunset District. My parents, Harry and Anne Friedlander, bought a house in 1949 at 2018 46th Avenue. My maternal grandparents, Morris and Ida Eisenstadt, lived around the corner at 2127 45th Avenue.

My mother's family, the Eisenstadts and the Levitts, migrated from modern-day Ukraine and Belarus to Canada in the 1880s and 1910s. After my mother's birth in 1921 in Calgary,

Left-to-Right Clockwise: David in his Cub Scouts uniform, circa 1960. (Courtesy of David Friedlander) - David painting in kindergarten at Noriega Home School. (Courtesy of David Friedlander) - David in his Davy Crockett outfit, circa 1955-56. (Courtesy of David Friedlander) - Kezar Pavilion, Stanyan Street near Waller, July 29, 1948. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection / courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.02346) - Morris and Ida Eisenstadt with their children, Irv and Anne, Portland, circa 1929-30. (Courtesy of David Friedlander)



Morris and Ida Eisenstadt in front of their home on 35th Avenue, circa 1940. (Courtesy of David Friedlander)

the family moved to Portland, Oregon before settling in San Francisco in the early 1930s. They lived in the Richmond District on 35th Avenue between Cabrillo and Fulton Streets. My mother, Anne, and my Uncle Irv both went to Presidio Middle School and George Washington High School. The family moved to the Sunset District after World War II.

I never knew my dad's family since he grew up in New York City, but those relatives all came from Belarus to America in the early 1900s. My father migrated west during the Great Depression and stayed in San Francisco after serving in the army in WWII. When he married my mom, he was 39, she was 26, and I was their only child. My dad never talked about his youth. Like many, I wished I had asked more questions. I know he was in the garment industry for a while as a machine operator and served in the California National Guard prior to WWII.

My grandparents lived around the corner from us. I was their only grandchild who lived close by, so they were always over, or I was over at their house. My grandfather, Morris, had a garment business downtown – first making ladies clothing, and later mens – until he retired. He had a little potting shed in his backyard where he kept all his gardening tools and supplies. My grandparents grew up with nothing but now had something and were always gifting me things, like a TV! I would spend the night at their house and eat breakfast in their little kitchen with a banquette. A lasting memory of my grandfather is him adding up long columns of numbers in pencil at his small desk in his bedroom. I had that desk refinished and it sits in my office today in Nashville.

After WWII my father – like many other veterans – joined the Post Office, where he worked the rest of his life. He worked different shifts at Rincon Annex downtown. He liked the swing shift, which started at 3:30pm and had an extra pay differential for night work. He just got home late. He got a break at 10:30pm and would call my mom to check in. Being an only child, she let me stay up to talk to him. My mom and I watched a lot of old movies together and I learned about all the great character actors of the 1930s and 40s. Then I would go to bed, but actually I would go to my room and watch Jack Paar or Steve Allen late night shows on my little TV. I would be very, very quiet.

SUNSET DISTRICT AND BEYOND

Our neighborhood was predominantly Caucasian. I only remember a handful of non-white families. Much later I learned about racial covenants but back then I had no idea. Of my posse of friends, I was the only one who was Jewish. The families in my neighborhood were either Catholic or Protestant, with a smattering of Jews. Catholic schools and churches like Holy Name, St. Anne's, and St. Cecilia's were scattered throughout the neighborhood. The closest synagogue, Ner Tamid, was near my high school at 22nd Avenue and Quintara. I remember going out on Good Friday to look for my friends to play with and nobody was around.

There were maybe 15-20 kids who lived on my block. Lots of brothers and sisters and lots of baseball, football, hide and seek. When a car drove down the street, we yelled "CAR" so everyone heard. Mothers would open their kitchen window and yell out for their kids to come home for dinner. If you were out playing somewhere else, just be home by the time the streetlights came on at night. It was a different time.

One of the wonderful aspects of growing up in the Outside 'Lands was that you could never get lost due to how the streets and avenues were laid out. My life was bounded by the wondrous Pacific Ocean and Ocean Beach to the west; Golden Gate Park and the parks and beaches beyond the Cliff House that stretched through the Presidio to Fort Point

" IT WAS FOR ME THE EDGE OF THE WORLD. THERE WAS SO MUCH TO SEE AND EXPLORE AND I DID."



Rincon Annex San Francisco Post Office, Mission & Spear Streets, circa 1945. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.0785)

to the north; 19th Avenue to the east; and to the south, the San Francisco Zoo, the woods around it over to Lake Merced, and Fleishhacker Pool. Eucalyptus trees were everywhere. It was for me the edge of the world. There was so much to see and explore and I did.

You could walk to the beach anytime. Sometimes with my bedroom window open you could hear the waves breaking on the foot of Pacheco Beach, where later in life my friends and I would swim, surf, body surf, and skim boards into the waves for hours at a time. Afterwards, in cold weather, we built bonfires with the wood scraps and trees that washed up right to our beach. I walked to the Cliff House and the beach below known as Kelly's Cove, where the old pier used to be. Walking home would probably take two hours, unless you detoured through Golden Gate Park to see the bison or windmills or Amundsen's ship at the Beach Chalet, the *Gjoa*, or anything else that looked interesting. Time didn't really matter when I was a young boy. Watching the sunset became a daily ritual that carried on until I left the neighborhood and my parents' house in my early 20s.

I rode my bike anywhere and everywhere. We built skateboards out of old skates and screwed them on to pieces of wood and rode them until they fell apart, which didn't take long. Eventually, when the first mass-produced skateboards with ball bearings appeared, we walked or took the bus up to Sunset or Golden Gate Heights and rode our boards down the steep hills back to our neighborhood. The 18 Sloat Muni bus ran down 46th Avenue right past our house and I have vivid memories of the bus decelerating every 20 or 30 minutes before it stopped at the corner of our block, dropping off or picking up our neighbors. You could take the 18 or walk to Noriega Street and catch the 71 Haight/Noriega or transfer to the streetcars on Taraval or Judah and go have adventures all over the city.

The neighborhood movie theaters were of course a big deal. You had a car ticket from school for 50 cents that the Muni driver punched each time you rode the bus or streetcar. If you got another 50 cents from your parents, you could get in, have popcorn and a soda, and watch a double feature with maybe a serial episode or a cartoon. If you stayed after and cleaned up you could get a free pass the next week. Of course, you were cleaning up flattened popcorn boxes which you yourself probably flew down from the balcony. The Parkside Theater at 19th and Taraval was the main one in our neighborhood, plus the Surf Theater on 46th and Irving. Occasionally we ventured over to the Richmond District to the Balboa, the 4 Star on Clement, and even the Alexandria on Geary. They were far afield but close enough that you still felt at home.

MEMORIES AND PASTIMES

The schools were all in the neighborhood until high school. Noriega Home School, Mark Twain Elementary, A.P. Giannini Middle School, and then Abraham Lincoln High School. Everyone pretty much knew each other until high school when the student body drew from other neighborhoods. When I was 11 or 12, I developed some skin conditions which much later would be diagnosed as heredity allergies. I couldn't wear leather shoes, wool clothing, or anything with dyes. I developed eczema, dermatitis, impetigo, all sort of skin issues. Finally, I had to wear white socks to school with plastic sandals. That lasted for about five minutes and eventually, to the sounds of my new nickname, "Freak!," I ended up being home schooled for the better part of the seventh and eighth grades until my condition improved. Oy vey. I had two wonderful home teachers: Ms. Cowen, who was an English teacher, and Ms. Bialkin, who taught Social Studies. They helped me keep up with my coursework.

In my free time I read lots of books, and developed my own fantasy sports leagues for baseball, football, and bowling. You could buy a deck of cards that was a simulated baseball game and I put together leagues. You could modify it for football. I had a small set of plastic bowling pins and would play for hours in my room, using the names of the bowlers I watched on TV. So, I managed to survive my upbringing.

My parents took me to the library at a very early age. Having a library card opened up a whole new world to me. The Ortega Branch library was built in the mid-1950s between my



Parkside Theatre, 1964. (Courtesy of Jack Tillmany / wnp5.50409)

elementary and junior high schools, about eight blocks from my house. With my bike I could ride there, pick up my limit of books (usually five to six), and then ride home and see how fast I could read them. I don't remember exactly how old I was when I read it, probably 10 or so, but *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury blew my mind and still does. This opened a whole new world to me. The world of words and stories and other people's lives. I still love the smell of books and holding one in my hand while I read it. Old school. What can I say?

My friends and I all played in the sand dunes around West Sunset playground until eventually the new Saint Ignatius High School was built there in the late 1960s. We were all on the same little league team, Tower Market. Our outfield coach was an ex-big leaguer and San Francisco Seal named Joe Sprinz. I came to find out years later that in 1939, he tried to catch a ball dropped from 800 feet out of a blimp as a publicity stunt for the Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island. Not a good idea but he survived to become our coach. He told me I was a born outfielder. Unfortunately, I couldn't hit.

During the flooding of 1955 I remember going to the picnic/parking area just west of the Zoo, where the Sewage Treatment Plant is today. All the picnic tables were adrift in four to five feet of water. I climbed aboard one and rowed around until I fell off and dragged myself home soaking wet. Another early memory is being in a Scout-O-Rama at the Cow Palace when I was in the Cub Scouts. We put lights on our bike spokes – I had a red Schwinn three speed – and rode in figure eights in the darkened stadium. Amazing to remember after all these years. It was Cub Scout pack 165. I'm pretty sure I was 12.

The earthquake of Friday, March 22, 1957 was memorable because we took some Asian figurines off the shelves in the living room and stood in the doorway during one of the aftershocks. I still have these in my house in Nashville. My dad took me to Seals Stadium that night to see an exhibition game between the Seals and their major league affiliate, the Boston Red Sox. Ted Williams played in that game.

When I think about my youth, I distinctly remember several things: polio shots, duck and cover drills during the Cold War, getting a library card as soon as I could, earthquakes, and later the Cuban Missile Crisis. Though I was 13 then, it still scared the shit out of me. I watched Al "Jazzbeaux" Collins on local TV before heading to school in the fall of 1962 and wondered if my house would be there when I walked home.

Finally, the seminal moment of my youth and many others: November 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I was 15, just finishing my gym glass at Lincoln High School. It was also my birthday. This was the end of my youth; the world looked a little different the next day and ever after.

SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Kezar Stadium, where the 49ers played, was within a Muni ride. My dad took me to the Turkey Day High School Football Championships there. I remember drinking Tang from a thermos and sitting on the 40-yard line in 1959. Later I went to Niners games with my friends. My dad also took me to Seals Stadium to see the Seals and then to Candlestick to see the Giants play after they moved west in 1958. As with many kids of my era, my hero was Willie Mays. I was fortunate enough to meet him years later and tell him about growing up in the city, and I got to shake his hand!

My dad also took me to wrestling matches at Kezar Pavilion, where we saw Leo Nomellini from the Niners and Gene "Big Daddy" Lipscomb from the Colts, as well as people like Lou Thesz and my favorite, Edouard Carpentier. So entertaining for a young boy. I clearly remember watching "Cowboy" Bob Ellis beat the local villain Ray Stevens in a wrestling match on the little TV my grandparents gave me. I was in my room and jumping up and down on my bed so hard I broke the 1x4s holding the mattress and box springs in place.

Sports on TV were always a big part of our lives. When KTVU Channel 2 appeared in the late 1950s we watched roller derby and wrestling. Baseball and football were always on the radio if not on TV, accompanied by the voices of Russ Hodges, Lon Simmons, and of course Bob Fouts. KSFO was the flagship station back then, "The World's Greatest Radio Station." Once I had my own portable TV, my dad and I would bring it into the living room and watch two bowl games at once

on New Year's Day. That was a big deal! Our teachers in the eighth grade at Giannini let us listen to the 1962 World Series between the Giants and Yankees in class. At least for sure the seventh game. That was cool.

One thing I watched over and over was the Three Stooges. Curly Howard was my favorite Stooge and I watched enough of these that I knew the dialogue by heart. Local TV stations at the time ran these over and over again and created a whole new interest in them. My so-called friends and I watched these shows after school and recorded snippets of dialogue and then randomly called people up and played it back over the phone to the sounds of "Who is this?" Of course, we would laugh hysterically.

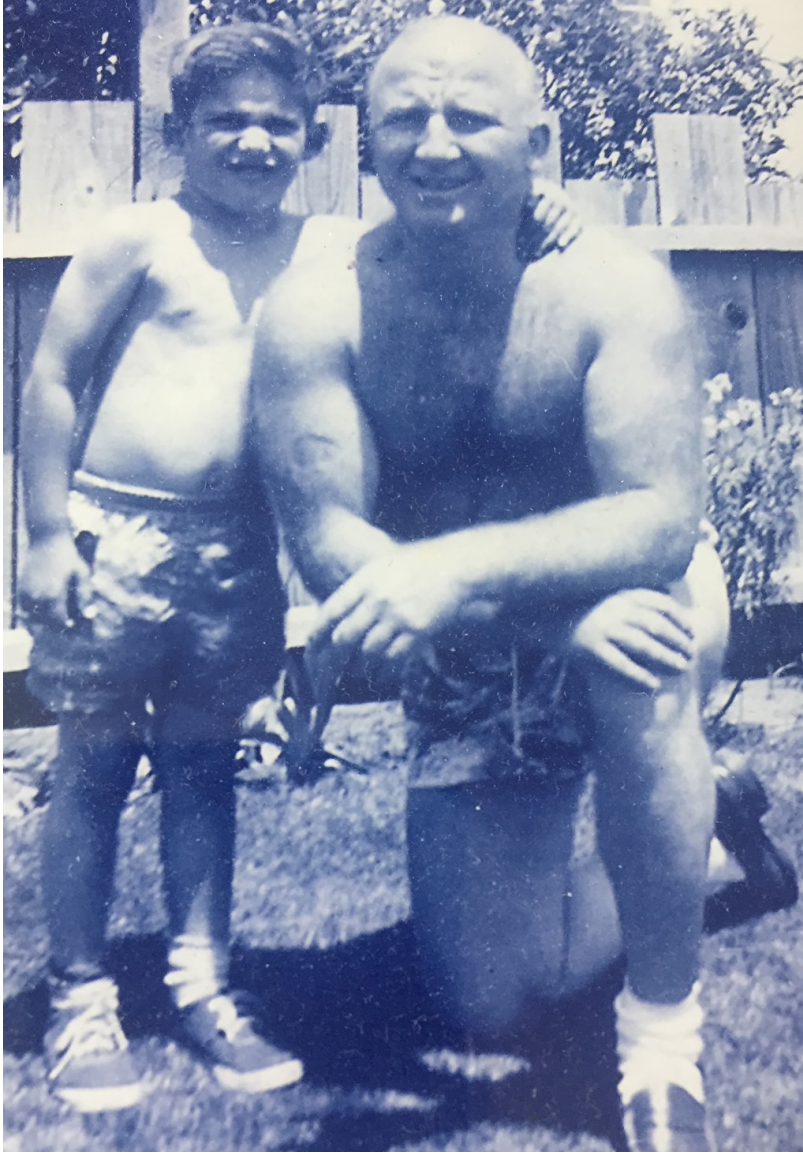
I have a picture of myself wearing a Davy Crockett shirt, coonskin cap, and fake rifle during the Disney craze in the mid-1950s. Who knew that a scant 15 years later I would be living near a small town in Tennessee where Davy actually lived with his family and had a grist mill in the early 1800s.

LESSONS FROM A BOWLING TEAM

A unique experience for me was my father's Post Office bowling team. It was a true United Nations and his bowling team reflected this. Very ecumenical. Over 60 years later I can still remember his entire team from one year. My dad and his best friend Sam Bass were Jewish. Duke Marlowe and Joe Black were African American. Willie Hongo was Chinese and Al Lenore was Filipino. Finally, Guido Cerruti was Italian and the only southpaw on the team. Very few of them lofted the ball down the lanes. Most had a very smooth delivery. Every summer my dad took me to bowling alleys all over the city: the Bagdad Bowl on 26th and Noriega, Lincoln Bowl on Clement, Park Bowl on Haight, Downtown Bowl, Sports Center on Mission Street, and Westlake Bowl in Daly City. My dad would schlep me with him and I got to hang with these guys and maybe their kids if they came along. Nobody on the team was great but they were all very good. I seem to remember trophies but I don't know what became of them. I remember Al Lenore had a daughter named Birdie and he drove a 1959 yellow and white Nash Metropolitan, that really small car that was around then. We went to parties at his house in Daly City. Looking back, it seems incredibly exotic.

Years later when I moved to Nashville, I sat in a diversity class as part of local government training and told my story of growing up in the Outside Lands, and it was so different from anyone else's backstory. I then realized how amazingly fortunate I was to have grown up when and where I did and to have been exposed to people of color and their cultures at a young age. It was only a bowling team in the heart of the city back in the day. But those experiences that I had, they forever changed me and helped make me the person I became as an adult. I was very lucky.

Looking back, I am amazed my relatives had the chutzpah to travel across the Atlantic in a ship with little money and no language skills. The cultural and political influences that made this happen in Russia just prior to the revolution must have been profound indeed. I was the result of that and many other decisions in people's lives along the way. How random yet how wonderful and magical.



David and his father, Harry, in the backyard on 46th Avenue. (Courtesy of David Friedlander)

> "I WAS THE RESULT OF THAT AND MANY OTHER DECISIONS IN PEOPLE'S LIVES ALONG THE WAY. HOW RANDOM YET HOW WONDERFUL AND MAGICAL."

If you want to be a part of history as the subject of our next interview, have written memories that are just dying for publication, or know of someone who should have their stories saved, email Nicole Meldahl at nicole@outsidelands.org.



Painting of the Dutch windmill by Heliodor Hammarstrom.
(Courtesy of David Lewis Hammarstrom)

The Windmill Sentries

By Lindsey Hanson

The prevailing rumor, for many years, was that Golden Gate Park's first windmill, Old Dutch, was gifted to the city by the Queen of the Netherlands. The tulip garden that explodes into a constellation of colors is called the Queen Wilhelmina Tulip Garden, planted at the windmill's base in 1961 and named in 1962. However, that is where the connection between Old Dutch and Dutch royalty ends.

When civil engineer William Hammond Hall was designing Golden Gate Park, he was told repeatedly that there was absolutely no way the desolate sand dunes could ever be suited for Victorians' Sunday strolls. Hall had learned various methods of sand dune reclamation from his experience with the Army Corps of Engineers, and was convinced otherwise. He first planted barley, then small native plants like lupine, and finally trees. To prevent the park from being reclaimed by the sand and sea he needed an irrigation system. Soon after, Hall was appointed Golden Gate Park's first superintendent in 1871.

The first irrigation system was supplied with water from Spring Valley Water Company, which was gouging the city on the price of water. At the edge of Golden Gate Park, where the Great Highway now runs, is a natural aquifer. Park commissioners eventually decided it would be financially prudent to discontinue their contract with Spring Valley. In 1902, they began taking bids from contractors to build a windmill to pump water throughout the park from the aquifer.

Residing near the northwestern end of the park, the Dutch windmill was completed in 1903, its vanes spinning magnificently in the winds off the Pacific. The strong summer winds, however, proved too vigorous, and the vanes had to be reefed by a quarter of their length soon after their inauguration. Old Dutch – as it has been affectionately dubbed over the years – supplied water for the entire western end of the park beyond the Chain of Lakes. By 1907, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Old Dutch was pumping over 890,000 gallons of water each day.

The success of the first windmill prompted Samuel Green Murphy, San Francisco's First National Bank president, to donate $20,000 for the construction of a second windmill. Construction began in 1905 at the southwestern end of Golden Gate Park. By 1907, the Park Commission had decided to name the new windmill after its benefactor. Murphy Windmill was completed that same year, and on April 11, 1908, the Park Commissioners went together to start the great vanes spinning and the water pumping.

The Windmill Keepers

The windmills required constant supervision and maintenance. The Park Commissioners had small brick cottages built to house millwrights, who tended to the daily upkeep of the windmills. The first cottage was built for the Dutch windmill's millwright in 1903, and the second was built behind Murphy windmill in 1909. The millwrights' work was demanding and often dangerous.

On April 6, 1906, 38-year-old millwright and Norwegian immigrant, John L. Hansen, fell from Old Dutch's guidemill platform onto the main platform whilst trying to secure the vanes for the night. The men of the nearby Lifesaving Station saw the vanes spinning at an hour when they were typically inactive, and rushed to the windmill to find Hansen moaning on the platform. They carefully carried Hansen into his cottage and placed him on the kitchen floor. One of the lifesavers ran to fetch an ambulance; it arrived with Dr. Lawlor, just as Hansen's wife, Mary, returned home after collecting her husband's monthly wages. In the fall, Hansen's skull was fractured, his ribs were crushed, and he had sustained a compound fracture to his right leg. The millwright died soon after his wife and the doctor arrived. The next day, Park Commissioners Metson, Lloyd, Spreckels, and Dingee donated $100 each to widow Mary Hansen.

The millwright that followed Hansen was Swedish immigrant Carl Augustus Heliodor Hammarstrom, the son of a sea captain. Known as Heliodor or "Hammie," he studied art at the Mark Hopkins Institute and privately with painter and sculptor Gottardo Piazzoni. His work was exhibited at the San Francisco Art Association and the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. Hammarstrom's first job in San Francisco was as a streetcar conductor. He would discreetly sketch his riders in between taking tickets and making change. The 1906 earthquake demolished his studio and home, and for a short while he lived in a tent near the Cliff House. When he accepted the position as millwright that same year, he moved into the millwright's cottage at the foot of Old Dutch.





Caretaker's cottage for Dutch windmill, circa 1910. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.03871)

Hammarstrom raised seven children in the little stone cottage. When his daughter Winifred's engagement was announced in the newspapers, Hammarstrom said, "It isn't many children that have the Pacific ocean for a front yard and a 1000-acre park for their back yard…I've raised seven of 'em out here at the windmill, and I've gotten rid of all of 'em except this one [Winifred] and another girl. And she'll probably be leaving me soon, too, but that's the way it goes. Life's just like that old windmill there."[1]

The *Chronicle* featured an article on Hammarstrom, singing his praises: "Bossing a windmill requires a sailorman… Engineers aplenty have sought the job as windmill boss, but have balked when they learned that a part of the job is to scale the mighty wings to furl sails…It's dangerous work, too, when the wind is snoring and a scramble aloft is vital lest a gale carry away sails and frame. If you think Heliodor has a snap, try some day to climb to the tip of a windmill wing that trembles exactly 102 feet from the ground."[2]

Even with his millwright and parenting duties, Hammarstrom seemed to have time to help others. When young Ellis Mallery, a geologist, and Laura Clark, a student, came by train from Los Angeles to San Francisco, they had already made plans to thwart Clark's aunt and guardian and find some beautiful outdoor location to elope. On Christmas Day 1913 the two lovebirds took a taxi ride through Golden Gate Park. When they came upon Old Dutch, Clark was taken by the beauty, and as a devotee of Ralph Waldo Emerson's work, she believed they had found the perfect place. Clark later explained, "Every little nook and glen looked so inviting. But suddenly we came upon Mr. Hammarstrom's dear little brick cottage under the trees, and we knew he could help us. It was just the sort of a cottage Emerson lived in, I know."[3]

Hammarstrom volunteered the windmill for the couple's nuptials and loaned Clark a phone book, to look for a clergyman. Clark stopped at Reverend Frank W. Emerson, who by chance was related to the famed philosopher-writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Hammarstrom went off and commandeered the reverend, and Clark phoned her sister to hurry down to the edge of the sea from the Palace Hotel, where the group had been lodging. Once everyone arrived, Hammarstrom agreed to be best man, and the couple were married on the balcony of Old Dutch with the salty Pacific air swirling about them.

In 1921, the American Legion hosted an event at Old Dutch to raise money for unemployed veterans, following the Great War. The event called for daredevils willing to strap themselves to the tip of one of the windmill's massive vanes and go around in a full circle. The prize, for any soul brave enough, was a $1 box of candy. From tip to tip the vanes spanned 150 feet.

One young adventurous woman, Velma Tilden, took up the challenge. She was known to a wide circle of friends as "an expert swimmer and a taker of dares for many a thrilling stunt on sea or land."[4] Tilden also bred rabbits, in order to supply herself with enough fur to create a faux-ermine coat and hat. She then piloted a patented "Water Walker," consisting of two pontoons slid into a ramshackle wooden frame. Her goal was to cross the bay via Water Walker, but the tides prevented her from completing that particular mission.

Regarding her windmill stunt, Tilden said that her stole and hat remained secure throughout her passage. Not to be outdone by any other potential risk takers, Tilden spun around the mill 25 times! With each turn she went up nearly 200 feet into the air, and around a full circle of more than 660 feet at every turn. She told the *Chronicle* that it was the dare, and not the 25 boxes of candy, that motivated her.

In 1913, the city had installed the first electric motor, which assisted the water pump on the days when Old Dutch was not visited by westerly gales. By 1935 both Old Dutch and Murphy windmill were rendered obsolete by electric motors, and in 1936 Hammarstrom put in his notice to retire. Metal and other parts of the windmills were later used for scrap to



Dutch windmill without sails; former Lifesaving Station at right, July 18, 1960. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.0958)



Velma Tilden strapped to the Dutch windmill's vane, November 1921. (Underwood & Underwood)

assist in the World War II effort. After his 20-year tenure as Old Dutch's millwright, Hammarstrom said that he planned on spending more time with his grandchildren.

Hammarstrom took a job as a park gardener but continued to live in the millwright's cottage for a spell. He then moved into a little tent and allowed his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren to remain in the cottage. The tent could have very well been the same tent that provided him shelter after the 1906 earthquake.

Today, Heliodor's grandson, vintage circus historian and writer David Lewis Hammarstrom, reminisces about his grandfather's warm hands that held his when they walked to Playland-at-the-Beach. Heliodor would treat his grandchildren to salt water taffy, popcorn, or It's-Its. David would bring his grandfather a cup of Ovaltine every morning and poke around the tent, marveling at the treasures within. He once watched his grandfather sketching and was fortunate to be the recipient of some of the drawings, but after Heliodor moved out of the little brick cottage, he ceased to paint. His family is in possession of some of his paintings and others have been sold by auction houses.

David remarked that, "of his paintings that I grew up to love the most was of the windmill in a soft darkening sunset. My mother willed it to me…Grandpa would live for another 20 years, evidently without ever holding in his hand another paint brush. To this day, I see my favorite of his paintings on my wall…Maybe the restful and moody blues that rule it are the reason why blue is my favorite color."[5]

Saving Old Dutch

Born the same year as the completion of Old Dutch, Eleanor Rossi Crabtree became its savior later in life. Her father was Angelo Rossi, San Francisco's mayor from 1933-1944. Crabtree contracted polio when she was very young, and couldn't walk for seven years. Her father would take her in his "horseless carriage" through the park, and stop to watch the windmills. Of those outings, Crabtree later recalled: "Oh, those windmills, moving so effortlessly in the wind, were my special joy. It was a heavenly sight, with those sails going around above the cypresses and the ocean in the background…It's such a disgrace that we've let these noble structures, built at the turn of the century, come to this sorry state."[6]

Crabtree's quest to save the windmills began around 1960. She started by asking for small donations, collecting $1 and $5 bills to put toward a restoration fund. By 1970, she became the chairman of the Windmill Restoration Committee and had raised $45,000, including money from city supervisor (and later judge) Jack Ertola for an Urban Beautification grant. Throughout the decade, Crabtree sent hundreds of letters asking for donations toward the restoration fund. Her husband, Allison Crabtree, was tasked with licking and stamping envelopes. Allison also happened to be the grand-nephew of Charlotte "Lotta" Crabtree, the "Golden Girl" of the stage and donor and namesake of Lotta's Fountain on Market Street.

By 1976, Crabtree recruited U.S. Navy Seabee Mobile Battalion no 2 Reserve Unit, from Treasure Island, to volunteer time and labor to Old Dutch's restoration. The Seabees soon began to call the project "their baby," and in total volunteered one week a month for three years. Tragically, on April 19, 1980, Seabee Robert W. Carroll – who was also a full-time journeyman electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 551 in Santa Rosa – fell to his death while helping to restore Old Dutch. A plaque was placed at the foot of the windmill in his memory.

Crabtree was active in several organizations, including San Francisco Beautiful and the Women's Chamber of Commerce. But she became known as "The Windmill Lady" at City Hall, because of her tireless efforts to persuade city officials to fund the restoration. Crabtree was hellbent on seeing the vanes spin yet again. She told the *Chronicle*: "If it hadn't been for those windmills, we wouldn't have a park…I feel it's just

as important to retain open spaces for recreation as it is to build tennis courts. To be a good citizen you can't just take. You have to give, too."[7]

During the energy crisis of the 1970s, Crabtree promulgated the use of wind energy in the city, believing that the windmills would pay for themselves if they were restored to their former glory and allowed to create energy. "In time, the windmills could start pumping water again. Why, it would more than pay for itself in new energy and as a tourist attraction…I'll never rest until I see them going again. But I need help. I'm just afraid I won't live long enough."[8]

As luck would have it, Crabtree did indeed live long enough to see Old Dutch's vanes spin again. The San Francisco Citizens Commission for Restoration of the Golden Gate Park Windmills, with Crabtree at the helm, raised $117,000 and another $107,000 from various federal and local agencies. With the funds and years of labor that the Seabees donated, the vanes on Old Dutch were released on November 14, 1981, in a ceremony to honor the windmill's restoration and Crabtree's perseverance. David Warren's Playland Research Center – which hosted parties in Playland's rubble, along with Playland archives and ephemera – provided pink champagne to celebrate the occasion.

Murphy Spins Again

What Eleanor Rossi Crabtree was to Old Dutch, Don Propstra was to Murphy windmill. Propstra grew up in Vancouver, Washington, where his grandfather, a Dutch immigrant, and then his father, owned a butter company called The Holland. After college, Propstra ventured to the Bay Area in the 1970s to find his own way, and though he left his family behind in Vancouver, he took with him a deep love and appreciation for his Dutch ancestry.

Settling in San Francisco, Propstra and his partner raised three children. In the late 1990s, Propstra and his children were in Golden Gate Park when he came upon the dilapidated Murphy windmill. He thought of his children's investment in their Dutch heritage, and the Salmon Run Belltower and glockenspiel in Vancouver's Propstra Square (named after his father). Don had designed the tower to honor his father and create a beautiful marker for his hometown. The tower's Dutch clarion bells salute the family's Dutch heritage.

Propstra went to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department to ask about the restoration of the windmill. Learning that it was not a priority, he gathered a team of dedicated volunteers to form the Campaign to Save the Golden Gate Park Windmills. Mark De Jong, a local Dutch contractor, committed to helping with the restoration. A Dutch woman, Hendrika "Henny" Neys, was an early key contributor. Patricia Costello, whose grandfather had supplied the original lumber for Murphy windmill, joined the Steering Committee. Propstra and a couple others were allowed to go inside Murphy windmill. They had to wear hazmat suits, and it was filled with pigeons, ravens, bats, and their excrement, and holes and rot could be seen throughout. "If you blew on the windmill too hard it would have collapsed!" Propstra said.[9]



Heliodor Hammarstrom painting outside the Dutch windmill. (Courtesy of David Lewis Hammarstrom)

Propstra hired Paula March as the Development Director and a fundraising campaign began. They prepared a presentation for the Gordan and Betty Moore Foundation, but halfway through Propstra's portion of the presentation, Moore stopped him and said "We don't fund brick and mortar projects." Thinking quickly, Propstra responded with, "It is not just brick and mortar! The windmills are educational and historic!" and told Moore that the campaign wanted to teach local children how wind energy transformed the city and built the park. Propstra's passion was contagious and the Moore Foundation gave half a million dollars to the project.

During the restoration, Propstra proposed that the dome of Murphy windmill be taken to Holland to have a Dutch restoration company do the work. Lucas Verbij, owner of Verbij Hoogmade BV in Hoogmade, Netherlands, agreed to take the job after a 1995 visit to see the windmill. Crews removed the dome and antique machinery in 2002, to be shipped overseas. Propstra brought his three children to the Netherlands to see the progression of the restoration. When the 2008 recession hit, Propstra had to leave the project, but his initial enthusiasm and hard work were the catalyst for Murphy windmill's eventual restoration in 2011.

The Golden Gate Park windmills may have powered the irrigation system that made the park a reality, but had it not been for the people who dedicated their time and love to the windmills, they would not be standing today.



Murphy Windmill with caretaker's cottage at left, February 17, 1924. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.2552)

1. "Romance Buds Beside S.F. Historic Park Windmills," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 3, 1929.
2. "Bossing a Dutch Windmill Heliodor Hammerstrom's Job," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 11, 1920.
3. "Lakeview In On Frisco Romance," *Lake County Examiner*, January 9, 1913.
4. "Park Scene of Daring Stunt," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1921.
5. David Lewis Hammarstrom, email message to author, January 7, 2023.
6. "Energy Plea For Park Windmills," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 28, 1973.
7. "Rossi's Eleanor Tilts at City Hall," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 15, 1970.
8. "Energy Plea For Park Windmills," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 28, 1973.
9. Don Propstra, interview by Lindsey Hanson, August 16, 2022.

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San Francisco Bay, circa 1910. (Robert & Beatrice Laws Photo Album; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.1172)

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Model boats on Spreckels Lake, circa 1930. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.12321)



Stow Lake, circa 1910. (Courtesy of a Private Collect

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tor / wnp15.681)



Stow Lake, 1903. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp13.170)

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Gary Silberstein & Carla Buchanan in memory of Charlie Grimm
Austin Silva
Larry Simi
Judith & Gary Simmons
Ramon Simon
David Simpson
Jack Sinay



Lifesaving Station Crew at Ocean Beach, circa 1920s. (Laurie Hollings Photo Album, James R. Smith Collection / wnp66.024)

Ralph Sinick
Mike Skalnik & Jenn Chan
Connor Skelly & Greg Govan
Jessica Smith
James & Liberty Smith
Douglas Smith & Kate Kordich
Barbara Smith
Megan Smith & Rory Smith Russell
Steve Smoot & Linda Radler
Loida Sorensen
Richard Specht
Mark Speltz
Ken Spielman & Helen Doyle
Gary Spiess
Andrew Sponring
Richard Spotswood
Kenneth Sproul in memory of Charles Fracchia
Joseph Squeri
Bonnie & Michael St. James
Norman & Carolyn Stahl
Howard Stein
Moli Steinert & Donna Canali
Kathleen Stern & Yope Posthumus
Ruth Stevens
Bob & Pat Strachan
Katherine Straznickas
David Stroud
Elise Stupi
Barbara Styles & Margaret Repath
Edward J. Summerville
Holly Sutter & Rita Heiser
Richard Swig
Martin Szeto
Peter Tannen
Robert Tatt
Sarah Jane Taylor
Richard Taylor & Tracy Grubbs
Michelle Terman
Alan Thomas
Lee & Kalen Thomas
Nate & Rebecca Tico
Maureen Tierney
Joseph & Jasdeep Toback
Vivian Tong
Carissa Tonner & Ryan Butterfield
Tara & Thomas Towne
Sharon Truho
Maia & Kenneth Tse
Sharron Tune
Ed Turner
Karen Ulring
Lorri Ungaretti
Grant Ute
Damon Uyeda & Nathalie Roland
Parisa Vahdatinia
Jonathan Vaknin
Kyle Van Essen
Tim & Pam Van Raam
Mark Van Raam
Charity Vargas & Jason Riley
Joan Vellutini in memory of Douglas Martino
Bob Vergara
Christopher VerPlanck & Abby Bridge
Valerie Vienot McNease
Tony & Anthony Villa
Adrianne Vincent & Amelia Nemzer
David Volansky
Jan Voorsluys
Kathryn Wagner in memory of Mayor Harvey Milk
Stephanie H. & Grover Wald
Brad Wallace & Morgan Fenner
Kevin & Morgan Wallace
Joy Walsh in memory of Kathleen Kilgariff Castro
Nancy Walters & Carol Anderson
Margaret Warren
Stuart Watts
Daniela Wehmeyer & Asim Bhansali
Willow Weibel
Marc Weibel
Gary Weiss
Elaine & Stanley Weiss
Wallace & Eve Wertsch
Margie Whitnah
Kyrie Whitsett
Jeno & Dionna Wilkinson
Lynn Wilkinson
Sarah Wille & Zach Burns
Monica Williams
Eric Wong
Susan & Gilbert Wong
Ben Wood & Rachel Fleischman in honor of Thank You for the incredible work of Nicole
Jim & Jane Wood
Kathleen Woodruff
Ken Woods & Tom Kelleher
Alexis Woods
Pam Wright
Kenneth Wun
Matthew Yankee & Jamie Nickel
Joey Yee
Virginia Yee
Ming Yeung & David Hurwich
Jennifer Yip
Kerri Young
Andra Young
Jay Young
JulieAnn Yuen & Monica Nolan
Cynthia Zamboukos
Gary Zellerbach
Ken Zinns
Laura Zulliger & Julien van Hout

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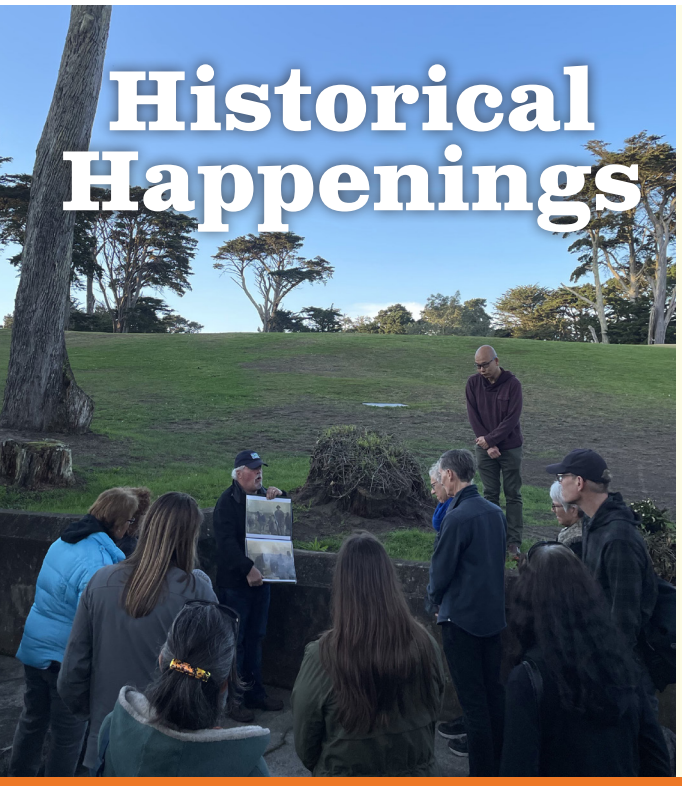

History Walking Tours
Join historian and retired park ranger John Martini for history walking tours! Each tour lasts 1.5-2 hours, and the super-secret meeting location will be emailed to you when you purchase tickets. $10 for members, $20 for non-members, and each tour is limited to 30 people.

Saturday March 11 at 10am: Presidio Main Post
Learn about centuries of Presidio history; highlights include the Presidio Officers Club and the new Presidio Tunnel Tops project. Grade: easy.

Saturday March 25 at 10am: Golden Gate Park Music Concourse
Nicole Meldahl joins John Martini for a tour of the surviving remnants of the 1894 California Midwinter Exposition. Grade: easy.

Saturday April 8 at 10am: Mountain Lake
Discover natural history, a Spanish colonialist campground, the Public Health Service hospital, and a former military balloon launch-site in this park on the edge of the Richmond District. Grade: easy but with one long flight of steps.

outsidelands.org/events

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. Visit our website at **outsidelands.org,** and click on the "Become a Member" link at the top of any page.

