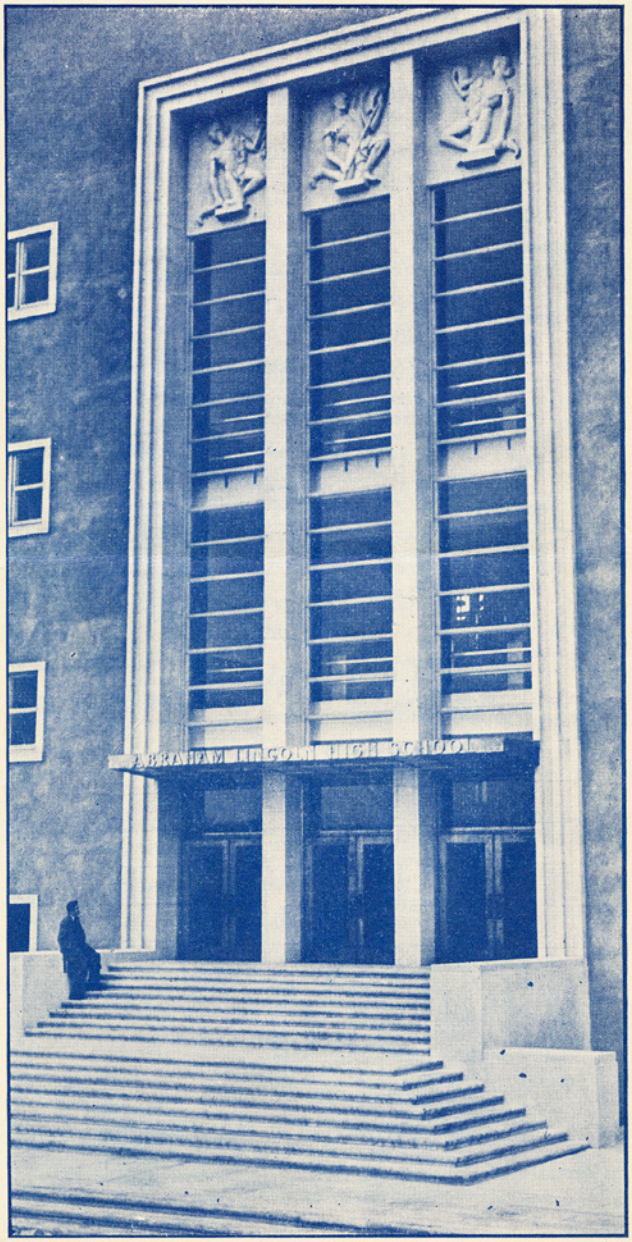
SF WEST HISTORY

JUL-SEP 2015

Newsletter of Western Neighborhoods Project

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 3





Dedication Excercises
Abraham Lincoln
High School

Twenty-Fourth Ave. and Rivera St.
San Francisco

Sunday Afternoon
September 22, 1940 At 2 o'clock

ALFRED H. HONS, General Chairman
W. L. KUSER, Vice Chairman
MRS. RUSSELL A. POWELL, Secretary
MRS. JAMES J. FENTON, Treasurer

Western Neighborhoods Project
outsidelands.org

SF West History

Newsletter of Western Neighborhoods Project

July-September 2015: Volume 11, Number 3

EDITOR: Woody LaBounty

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Cover
Program from Dedication Exercises for Lincoln High School, September 22, 1940. WNP Collection.

At right
Detail of Reverend Roland Gordon's collage inside Fellowship Hall at Ingleside Presbyterian Church. Photograph by Dani Vernon.

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Thanks again to all who responded to our recent survey. As I promised last issue, here are some findings from the 300 responses we received. Of course, this isn't super scientific, just information from those who shared their thoughts with us.

Who are you folks?
Not surprisingly, people most interested in history have some history of their own to remember. Our top three age groups:

66–75: 32%
56–65: 29%
46-55: 16%

Also not shocking: most of you live in the western neighborhoods. The top zip codes of respondents were 94122 (Sunset District) and 94121 (Richmond District). And being or having been a resident of the west side was the top answer people gave for joining WNP as a member.

I miss my old neighborhood!

I am a San Francisco native growing up in the Sunset District. I now live in Southern California and feel so far away, I want to do all I can to keep in touch with anything related to my beloved City.

How do we reach people?
Most respondents first heard of us from a friend or family member or stumbled upon us online.

Couple of weird guys from SF turned me on to it.

Mentioned in the SF Chronicle circa 2005. I was immediately excited to see a refreshingly new and different approach to gathering "a history of place" that drew from those who had lived in the neighborhoods and cared to share and learn more of a usually overlooked yet significant portion of San Francisco.

In connecting or interacting with WNP, the website (58%) and this quarterly magazine (43%) were the top two choices, with our email newsletter and history events next popular.

I enjoy the website and newsletter, and I want to see them continue. I live a long way from my native SF, so I'm not able to participate in the walks and other live activities.

What should we be doing?
We asked people what they felt were the three most important ways WNP shared history. Top answers were:

Historical photos: 64%
Historical articles: 63%
Quarterly magazine: 59%

When we asked what we should be doing more of, we received similar responses. People want us to share more historical photos and participate in or host more events.

Would like to see more historical photos posted. I really enjoy the photographs because they really stimulate my memories of growing up in the Sunset

Having monthly show-and-tell meetings. Maybe in various bars or coffee shops? Using the photo archives to do pop-up presentations. Speaking to other neighborhood groups and advising them how to do historical research.

Are you a member?
About two-thirds of those who participated in the survey said they were members. Of those who weren't, the top reasons for not joining were money and time. These are usually the big reasons given to organizations everywhere—if you don't have it, you don't have it.

What do you want us to know?
We welcomed advice and other thoughts, and we received some good ideas for outreach, new programs, and improving presentations of history. Most people just told us to keep on doing what we're doing, because they like it.



Need more outreach by WNP to gain members. In short, more people, particularly youth, should know about it.

More literature in book form would be great.

Love the podcast. Also like the new better sound quality for them.

Maybe offering some new/different items in the WNP Store.

Not a criticism, but the website could possibly stand a face lift. Monitors are wider in 2015 and there's a lot of wasted real estate on the screen with the very narrow container. Just a thought… :)

I would just like more opportunities to get together with people. The message boards are great, but I don't spend much leisure time on the computer (especially since my work time is almost entirely on the computer), so I'd like to get together with people.

More history.

So now what do we do with this information? Like almost any organization, we have to balance doing more great things with doing some things great, but in the responses there emerged two strong calls to action for WNP.

Many people said they appreciate our work as a way to keep a connection with an old neighborhood, with a city they love, but don't live in anymore. While some may write

continued on page 12

Where in West S. F.?

The bucolic scene from last issue was a northerly view of Laguna Honda, the natural lake that was turned into a reservoir in 1863. The car (a Buick?) is headed south on 7th Avenue at the intersection of Clarendon Avenue between the Inner Sunset and Forest Hill neighborhoods around 1921.

Congratulations to correct guessers Julie Alden, Rex Bell, Robert Cherny, Jim Clifford, Jack Donahue, Frank Dunnigan, Clare Harper, Sanford Kingsley, Steve Lundberg, John Paul Sant, Gary Silberstein, David Volansky, and Nancy Williams-Baron.

OK, enough nature. This time we're headed back to concrete, sidewalks, and is that a streetcar track visible at the lower left? Take a look at the photograph below and give us your best answer as to where and when City Super Market and Jeannette's Coffee Room stood on San Francisco's west side. A hint: the supermarket building is no more, but others in this scene are still with us.

Email your guesses to *woody@outsidelands.org* or send by post to our brick-and-mortar office: Western Neighborhoods Project, 4016 Geary Boulevard, Suite A, San Francisco, CA 94118



Auto headed south on 7th Avenue near Clarendon Avenue ~1921. (WNP photo wnp15.486, courtesy of a private collector.)



Where was City Super Market and Jeannette's Coffee Room? Send us your guesses and any memories or stories!



U.S. Lifesaving Station in Golden Gate Park, 1890s.
(WNP photo wnp4.1137, courtesy of a private collector.)

We continue cataloging, housing, scanning, and sharing the thousands of historical images donated by a private collector who prefers to be anonymous. Visit our website to browse the ever-increasing gallery. Retired National Park Service ranger and WNP member ***John Martini*** *is a volunteer helping us process the collection. Here he shares information on some of his favorite images. John's excellent book on Sutro Baths is available on our website.*

"You have to go out. You don't have to come back."
— Unofficial motto of the U.S. Lifesaving Service

Few people know that Golden Gate Park once had its own Lifesaving Station. Not for park visitors, but rather for coastal steamers and sailing ships that found themselves in harm's way along Ocean Beach and the cliffs of Lands End.

Before the 1870s, ships that wrecked along America's shores were essentially on their own. Except for local citizen efforts, there was no centralized, professional lifesaving agency in the country. To fill this critical need, Congress created the United States Lifesaving Service in 1871. Before long, Lifesaving Stations began to appear along coastlines and lakeshores around the country.

California's first station was the "Golden Gate Park Lifesaving Station," located at the corner of Fulton Street and Great Highway in 1878. Crewmen lived at the station and were ready at a moment's notice to effect a rescue of crews and passengers. The lifesavers relied on two primary pieces of rescue equipment: beach carts, containing a complicated assemblage of ropes and pulleys for firing a lifeline to a stranded vessel and rigging ship-to-shore rescue slings called "breeches buoys;" and self-bailing, self-righting surf boats that the lifesavers rowed out to ships in

distress, hence the nickname "surfmen." The latter role was the most dangerous, since ships tended to need rescuing in the worst weather the Pacific Ocean could muster.

The crews from Golden Gate Park trained frequently on the sands of Ocean Beach opposite the station, drawing huge crowds that watched the dramatic practices. Sometimes the lifesavers rigged a breeches buoy along the beach, using a small cannon to fire a lifeline to a replica ship's mast set into the sand. Other days, they launched their lifeboats into the surf and rowed out through the breakers, out past Seal Rocks, and then back to the beach. Due to the distance between the station and the surf line, a team of horses hauled the boats on wheeled carts across Great Highway and down a ramp to the sand.

The original station buildings were constructed in what might be called U.S. government Victorian architecture, and originally included a Chief Keeper's residence, lifesavers' dormitory, boathouse, and various sheds and stables. In 1914, the station became part of the newly created U.S. Coast Guard, but its mission remained unchanged.

In the 1920s, the Coast Guard began replacing the aging Victorians with more mundane-looking structures. A former lifesaver name Torleksen purchased one of the 1870s buildings from the government for $75, moved it to a vacant lot at the corner of 47th Avenue and Cabrillo Street, plopped it on a new foundation, and moved in. It's still there.

Surprisingly, the station continued its lifesaving mission through the end of World War II and beyond. By the 1950s, though, improved communications and rescue techniques (think "helicopter") had made many Coast Guard rescue stations around the country obsolescent. The ten-man crew of Coasties working at Golden Gate Station received orders in October 1951 that they were being reassigned to new duties. According to a story in the *San Francisco News,* the station's last day of operation was November 1, 1951.

However, the buildings remained in place long after the Coast Guard departed, and although their demolition date is unknown, this author remembers passing the weathered and abandoned buildings through the late 1950s.

Perhaps some WNP reader can remember the exact date of their removal?



U.S. Lifesaving Service practicing on Ocean Beach ~1910.
(WNP photo wnp4.1145, courtesy of a private collector.)

LINCOLN HIGH CELEBRATES 75 YEARS

This year marks the 75th anniversary of San Francisco's Lincoln High School. Getting Lincoln built was a decades-long effort by residents of the Sunset and Parkside District, as the Great Depression and other conflicting city priorities kept pushing plans off.

The dedication exercises for Lincoln High School were held a month after classes officially began. On the afternoon of September 22, 1940, twenty-five marching units, drum corps, and drill teams paraded from 12th Avenue and Taraval Street to the school for speeches, flag presentations, and the singing of the national anthem. The building was then opened "for inspection by the public."

The printed program for the dedication exercises made sure to document the long struggle. The fight still wasn't over, as lobbying had already begun to get funding for school gymnasiums and a theater/auditorium (World War II delayed construction of these additions until the 1950s). For a celebratory give-away, the program was unusually candid on the challenges and compromises made along the way. Here follows the complete text:



Portico entrance of Lincoln High School. Perhaps in reference to the murals and monumental art frieze at Washington High School, the dedication ceremony program noted: "Rigid economy is evident in the architectural design at all points, by reason of the limitation of funds."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

Two thousand new homes built in the Parkside District within the past five years brought to realization a vision seen by supporters of the public school system as far back as the year 1917 when a report was made, under the direction of the United States Commissioner of Education, urging additional high school facilities in San Francisco.

At that time little attention was given to the Parkside area which then sent its few children of high school age to Polytechnic High School, miles away. In 1923 a committee of educational experts suggested a circle of high schools around the city. The Abraham Lincoln High School completes that circle. The Board of Education, upon the initiative of one of its members, Hon. Alfred L. Esberg, passed a resolution in 1924 to acquire land for a high school in the Parkside area. Dealing with separate landowners, the problem of acquiring four square blocks of land in a district then being settled was a tedious task, not completed until the year 1928. The land acquired is between Twenty-second and Twenty-fourth avenues and Quintara, and Rivera streets.

From that time forward there was intermittent agitation for the erection of a high school, but what with the depression period and uncertainty as to the number of children of high school age in the area served by the new school, plans for the building were postponed.

What now proves to have been an historic meeting, a turning point in the campaign for the new school, was held in the Parkside Elementary School on March 18, 1937, under the auspices of the West of Twin Peaks Public Schools Association. William L. Kuser, president, presided. His Honor, Mayor Angelo J. Rossi, attended this meeting and spoke, as did Mrs. Joseph E. Morcombe, then president of Second District, California Congress of Parents and Teachers. Superintendent of schools, Joseph P. Nourse, through his chief deputy, John F. Brady, sent word to the meeting that he was anxious to see the school built. Moving spirits of that meeting were: Waldo P. Postel from the St. Francis Wood District, Andrew J. Gallagher and Carl Maritzen.

From that evening a dignified campaign went forward to make possible the erection of the new building. The main chance came in September, 1938, when a citywide bond issue of $2,800,000 was approved by

an overwhelming majority and the Board of Education set out to make the Abraham Lincoln High School a reality.

Architects for the new building were named by Hon. Alfred J. Cleary, chief administrative officer, in October, 1938, and eight months later plans were completed by a group composed of Fred H. Meyer, Martin Rist and Timothy L. Pflueger. Bids totaling $750,000 for the academic unit were received in June, 1939 and work started one month later. One third of the cost was borne by the federal government under a P.W.A. [Public Works Administration] grant.

The academic unit of the Abraham Lincoln High School is the first unit of the building which will ultimately accommodate 2,000 students, compared with the 950 students who were registered on August 26, when the school opened its doors to students for the first time. The second unit will be a $225,000 girls and boys gymnasium; the third a $200,000 auditorium and music center. When completed the new structure will represent an investment of $1,500,000, including the cost of the land, which represents an investment of $275,000.



"Here then is a school demanded by the people of a district for 15 years..."

The Abraham Lincoln High School, with a facade three hundred and seventy-six feet long, and four stories high constructed of reinforced concrete, is modern in design, expressing in its simplicity the true purpose of school architecture. Rigid economy is evident in the architectural design at all points, by reason of the limitation of funds.

The exterior walls of the building are cement stucco plastered; the central motif of the building, which accentuates the main entrance and stair hall, also the horizontal classroom window bands at each side, are trimmed in Travertine colored terra cotta. All classrooms have an east and west exposure. All corridors, and the cafeteria ceiling, are finished with acoustical plaster which eliminates echo. Vocational shops,



"A class in physical culture under the able instruction of P. J. Prinz and George Canrinus." This photo was taken the first week of classes and printed in the *San Francisco Pacific News,* September 20, 1940.



Aerial view of the Sunset District with Lincoln High School top center. A former quarry and part of the new Sunset Reservoir is at lower left.

R.O.T.C. headquarters and cafeteria are located on the ground floor. The building, facing west and fronting on 24th Avenue, shelters the various play areas from the westerly winds.

Here then is a school demanded by the people of a district for 15 years, and built from funds specifically voted by the people of the entire city. It is one of the items that add to the increased cost of education, considering that the cost of operating a large city high school is approximately one-half million dollars each year. It is evidence of the determination of Americans that their children be provided with modern, accessible educational institutions.

Facilities maintained by the new school will be equal to those of any other high school in the city or state. The full program of subjects offered by other high schools will be given, leading to admission to universities and colleges of California.

Clyde W. White, recently named principal of the school by Joseph P. Nourse, superintendent of schools, is no stranger to the district, where he has made his home for several years. It was his highly successful administration of the principalship of High School of Commerce which resulted in his promotion to the new Abraham Lincoln High School.

Miss Anita Truman, who has been named by Superintendent Nourse as dean of girls, is known for her outstanding service as a member of the faculty at Mission High School and her elevation to the vice principalship of Abraham Lincoln was in recognition of her efficient service at Mission.

75th Anniversary Celebration
OCTOBER 3, 2015

On Saturday, October 3, 2015, Lincoln High School will hold a day of celebration in honor of the school's 75th Anniversary.

From 12:00 to 6:00 pm, the campus will be the site of school tours, sports tournaments, a classic car show, a kids carnival, as well as local history presentations and displays (courtesy of WNP). The day will be capped by an "All-Decades" dance from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. Tickets are $20 for adults, with reduced rates for students. Children 10 and under are free. Learn more at:

http://www.lincolnhigh.net/75thWelcome

MEMORIES

Scotty's Drive In

In a series of recent emails, a few old-timers of the Richmond District reminisced about Scotty's Drive In, which stood on Geary Boulevard at 31st Avenue, across from George Washington High School. A former gas station, Scotty's was a teenager hang-out spot in the 1950s.



Scotty's Drive In, 1951. San Francisco Assessors Department Collection, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

John Freeman: It was the hangout for the class-cutters at GWHS. I doubt if the Presidio [Junior High] kids were bold enough to invade this Washington "club house?"

Paul Rosenberg: My memories of Scotty's were rather negative. We Presidio kids who lived west of the school always took Clement because of the bullies who hung out at Scotty's and threatened us with their cigarettes.

John: Paul—that was my impression, but I had no experience since I was Inner Richmond and in the Catholic School queue. We hung out at Mel's brother's place, Hal's, at Geary & Collins, where thin burgers were 19 cents. No one to threaten there. It was essentially an evening spot, where we congregated to decide where the action would be that night. I got the impression that Scott's was more of a daytime, class-cutters hangout, which extended past 7th Period, but was not much of an evening spot as the fog came down Geary to engulf the place. Both were definitely low-budget operations, where you would NOT bring a girl to impress her after the school dance!

Ray Shanahan: Scotty's burgers was always a hang out for the want-to-be tough guys. I think a few of the car clubs claimed it as theirs. "The Lairds" of the late 50's comes to mind…

John: OK, Ray, you forced my hand… I was a founding member of the Lairds in '56—the Car Club without any cars. But by the time this picture was taken, probably in early 1959, I had totally switched to being a clean-cut Ivy-Leaguer. The Lairds guys hung out at Frank McCoppin [School]. Three of the original group went to SI [St. Ignatius High School], one to Riordan, two went to Lincoln [High School] and there rest "attended" Washington. That is me on the far right.

Dennis O'Rorke: Tom Doyle is in this picture. There was, I believe, a Navy jacket that was handed down from brother to brother, and when the younger brother got the jacket he crossed off the previous brother's name, which was in white letters on the back, and added his own.

John: "Gary Blackman [also in this photo] was in my 3rd grade class at Star of the Sea. One day he was messing around with one of the stubby pencils that came with donation envelopes and swallowed the damn thing. The nun leapt into action and picked up little Gary and shook him and out popped the pencil. We sat there in stunned silence and never messed with that lady in the black habit the rest of the year.

"Gary was a very sociable guy and hung around with a guy named Marty Buchwald at Washington. Buchwald later changed his name to Marty Balin and became a founder and lead singer of Jefferson Airplane. Gary wrote some lyrics for the band."


The Lairds hanging out at Scotty's, ~1959. John Freeman on far right.

The Safest Driver in the State of California

by Woody LaBounty



Nell A. Leavitt with the Dodge she drove across the county, posed across the street from her home in front of 852 42nd Avenue in 1936.

She is Champion Safe Driver

Six hundred and fifty thousand miles of driving without a single mishap is the record on which a safety committee headed by Ray Ingels, director of the California Department of Motor Vehicles, declared Mrs. Nell A. Leavitt of San Francisco the State's safest driver. Mrs. Leavitt is seen here starting in her Dodge sedan for New York City and a national Safety conference once at which she represented California.

That was the news copy accompanying the image, transcribed from text pasted on the back of the print.

I stumbled onto the photo on eBay, and thought the scene looked like a western San Francisco locale.

I was intrigued. The Department of Motor Vehicles used to track the safety of state drivers and award them prizes? The winner selected was a woman?

In the 1930s, most women didn't have motor vehicle licenses, much less drive hundreds of thousands of miles. A quirky story, I thought. So I bought the print, planning to perhaps put it on the back page of *SF West History* magazine with no more than the short caption that came with the image.

But first, I wanted to do a little research to pin down the western San Francisco location, since I assumed Mrs. Nell A. Leavitt was posing in front of her house. Turned out I was right. The photo was taken on the 800 block of 42nd Avenue.

But I got much more than I bargained for, discovering an unusually adventurous and independent woman

that experienced a terrible tragedy six years before she smiled for a press photographer with her Dodge sedan.

Nell Anthony was a graduate of Polytechnic High School (the school changed its name from Commercial High School while she was attending in the 1890s). She later said she chose the school specifically because it was the only high school offering commercial subjects. Polytechnic's mission was to prepare students to enter the trades and the world of work, to graduate capable in shorthand or cabinetry or accounting or welding. Nell Anthony was a hands-on type of person.

Shortly after high school, she married John Wheeler Leavitt, a man who started as a bicycle salesman in 1894 and moved into motorcycles. By 1902, had taken on two partners, W. J. Pedlar, and a teenager named Albert D. Plughoff, to run one of the first automobile dealerships in San Francisco. The age of the motorcar had begun—in 1902 alone, fifty new companies formed to manufactured automobiles in the United States.

J. W. Leavitt & Co. became one of the country's largest auto dealerships, and its energetic president became head of the city's Automobile Dealers' Association. Leavitt was an adventurous and confident face of automobile ownership and enjoyment when people weren't quite sure if the new inventions were nothing more than rich men's toys. Taking a new roadster or touring car on a three-day ride across California, Leavitt would make sure to get a short article in the newspapers about the ease and convenience, touting how well his product could tackle wild country while simultaneously advocating for new and improved public highways. In the days when roads were often rutted, muddy, and impassable in bad weather, when a day of driving could mean two or more flat tires, Leavitt wandered up to the Sierra Mountains in winter, drove one of the first automobiles into Yosemite, and accompanied a buyer to christen Calaveras County with its first motorcar. He became one of the earliest transcontinental drivers, going to the East Coast multiple times to find new models and drive a sample back to his San Francisco showroom.

Nell accompanied her husband on most of these publicity jaunts, not only as a passenger, but also as an enthusiastic driver. She knew her way around an engine and a tire change. In 1908, she was called "one of the city's best known women motorists."

Oh, and along the way she had six children.

Selling automobiles had become a very good business by the 1910s and 1920s. In 1902, when Leavitt started his auto dealing, about 23,000 motor vehicles were registered in the United States. In 1929, that number had risen 23 million. Leavitt and his partner Plughoff, vice president in the firm, prospered. They were great friends outside of business that went on hunting and fishing trips, and had neighboring country estates in Belvedere. Both were rumored to be millionaires. The Leavitt family lived in the Richmond District at 101 20th Avenue, a stately home on the corner of Lake Street.

But fortunes fell after the stock market crash of October 24, 1929. As the world slid into what would become known as the Great Depression, Leavitt and his partners found themselves scrambling. Sales fell so much in the auto industry that production was halved in 1930.

In late July 1930, J. W. Leavitt & Co. had to shut down. Behind the doors of the firm's showroom and offices at 1414 Van Ness Avenue on the city's "Auto Row," the owners made a desperate attempt to reorganize the firm and save it from bankruptcy.

The pressure on 62-year-old Leavitt must have been overwhelming. He rewrote his will in early August, simplifying it to leave the entirety of his estate to his wife, Nell. He borrowed a pistol from his son-in-law, saying he was planning on doing some "squirrel shooting."

Then, in the middle of the negotiations to rescue the company, Plughoff told Leavitt he had accepted a well-paying job from General Motors. The old friend and business partner, whom Leavitt had hired as a 15-year-old to sell bicycles thirty years earlier, said he wanted out. The two began negotiations on a financial settlement for Plughoff's exit that looked to leave a near-death J. W. Leavitt & Co. $40,000 in the red.

On the afternoon of August 11, 1930, employees cleaning up the mostly-emptied showroom heard a muffled report they assumed was a car backfiring. President Leavitt walked slowly out of the building, remarking "Looks like a quiet day in the automobile business." He drove away.

Soon after, the body of Plughoff was found at his desk. He had been shot behind the ear, and a note on the desk signed by Leavitt read "Sorry to do this."

Nell greeted her husband when he arrived home



COMPARATIVE TEMPERATURES

	High	Low		High	Low
San Francisco	69	58	New York	74	64
Los Angeles	74	65	Chicago	70	62
Seattle	86	60	Kansas City	82	66
Denver	82	64	New Orleans	82	76

San Francisco Chronicle

LEADING NEWSPAPER OF THE PACIFIC COAST

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

WEATHER TUESDAY

Fair and mild, with early morning fog. Complete Weather Report on Death Page

FOUNDED 1865—VOL. CXXXVII, NO. 28 CCC SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., TUESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1930 DAILY 5 CENTS, SUNDAY 10 CENTS; DAILY AND SUNDAY PER MONTH, 1.15

J. W. LEAVITT SLAYS PARTNER AND SELF

on 20th Avenue. She didn't notice anything odd in his demeanor. Leavitt went upstairs, still in possession of the borrowed pistol he had used on Plughoff. He wrote two blank checks made out to his wife and stripped off his shirt. When he heard the police arriving outside, he went into his son's bedroom and shot himself in the head.

When Nell filed final accounting of her administration of her late husband's estate, after the payout by the life insurance policy and the settling of debts, there was a net balance of $13,573.11.

Six years later, when Ray Ingels announced the winner of the California State Automobile Association safety campaign contest, Nell A. Leavitt was living at her daughter Dorothy's house at 847 42nd Avenue. Dorothy had divorced her husband—the man who had lent her father the pistol he used on his partner and himself—three years earlier.

The California contest had been part of a national campaign. Each state's designated safest driver would meet in New York City for a safety motorcade and conference. Nell Leavitt definitely deserved the honor in California: no recorded accidents or violations in a 34-year-old driving record, much of it in the days of poor roads, horse-drawn wagons, few signals or traffic controls. But prejudicial assumptions and jokes about women being bad drivers were commonplace in 1936. Only two other states picked woman drivers, and the Associated Press noted "Ingels admittedly stuck out his chin in the direction of male drivers when […] he picked Mrs. Leavitt as the queen of California's driving army."

Leavitt herself said she was surprised to be chosen, because of how women drivers were criticized, but took the opportunity to say that women were as good, if not better drivers then men, mostly because of attitude and manners. "Look at any traffic crowded intersection where there are only male drivers in a tieup due to a lack of courtesy."

As if to alleviate fears that Mrs. Leavitt's title somehow threatened the presumed role of women in society, articles across the country described the 57-year-old as a "motherly individual" with grandchildren. A list of her safe driving maxims were printed, including "watch the left front wheel of an approaching car to find out what the driver is going to do" and "watch the feet of old people to determine how long they will take to cross the street."

The national safety conference and motorcade took place on August 31, 1936. As part of the rules of participating, Leavitt had to drive herself to New York City. She planned to cover 300 miles a day in getting there, visit some East Coast family afterwards, and brought her 20-year-old son Robert as a passenger to keep her company.

She officially launched her trip from City Hall on August 19, where Mayor Angelo J. Rossi offered her a personal farewell at the window of her Dodge



Safest driver Leavitt checking the oil in a *San Francisco Chronicle* photo, August 5, 1936.

sedan. Her first car back in 1902, was, in her description, a "'one lung' red roadster, with tiller control and chain drive." She'd owned 21 different makes of car between that roadster and the Dodge, which she praised highly on her return after covering 7,000 miles of the United States.

Her time in the limelight didn't end after the successful conference and cross-country trip. As "California's No. 1 safe driver," Nell Leavitt went on in the next few years to speak at luncheons, appear on radio shows, advocate for newsboys to be more visible by wearing white at night, and pose for public service photos checking her oil and getting her windshield cleaned.

Nell Leavitt died October 18, 1960. A simple notice in the newspapers listed her as the widow of J. W. Leavitt, named her children, and identified where the funeral service would be held. There was no mention of her onetime title as California's safest driver.

continued from page one.

this off as people living in the past, over the years we've come to see this a real public service worthy of an educational nonprofit. We try to be true, clear-eyed, and honest about local history, but recognize that the sharing of old memories can be grounding, and a real source of pleasure to people.

So we will, of course, keep putting out old photos, articles, nostalgic columns, and podcasts through our website and social media. As the one person wrote to us: "More history."

In the survey responses there was another important role people saw for us. The city of San Francisco is in the midst of dramatic changes. We're in an era of more new people, more new buildings, and more new money. There's lots of planning and discussion on how the city can accommodate "more" and adapt to "new."

By focusing on neighborhoods that are often neglected in the public conversation, by using local history as a way to build appreciation for this side of town, we can try to positively affect the future.

Engaging in this role means WNP has to occasionally get off the Internet and get face to face with people—hosting fun and educational history events, and partnering with local groups, nonprofits, and government agencies on public projects.

It's tricky pulling off the out-in-the-world role, because we're staffed by volunteers doing history work around their "real" jobs. But we see in the survey responses that it's important to people, so we have to do it.

Thanks to board member **Chelsea Sellin** for all her help organizing the survey and analyzing the results.

OUT AND ABOUT

Speaking of meeting people face to face, we had some nice events this summer and more on the way.

Our thanks to **Doug Nelson** for leading our first bicycle history tour in Golden Gate Park in June, and to member **Mary Rose Cassa** for getting us into the Model Yacht clubhouse!

In July, the Balboa Theater again acted as a generous host for our movie night, "Seaside San Francisco."



We sold out and really had a great time showing **Gerald Varney's** haunting *Woman in the Sutro Baths.* **The Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum** partnered with us to show off a high-quality version of the Charlie Chaplin film, *The Jitney Elopement,* part of which was filmed at Ocean Beach. Obviously, the movie nights are a big hit, so we have started planning now for next year.

On July 18, the San Francisco History Association honored us at their awards banquet and board member **Nicole Meldahl** gave a great, succinct thank-you speech to the assembled guests. Getting an award presented "to a person or organization for focusing on local neighborhood history or to an ongoing project to educate and enlighten the residents of an area of the city" is a great honor, but being together with our colleagues and friends made it a magic night.

Information on upcoming WNP events are on the "Historical Happenings" page in the back of the magazine. I look forward to seeing you soon.

PODCAST

Our *Outside Lands San Francisco* podcast continues its long run (over two years) of providing a nice weekly earful of west side history to you, the consumer, absolutely free.

David Gallagher and I are the hosts and we try to make each episode short (about 20 minutes), entertaining (we joke a lot), and at least 60% factual. (See, that was a joke right there!)

Recent episodes have been on St. Ignatius High School (we may have fallen short of our 60% factual goal with that one), the Golden Gate Park Carousel, and the Coronet Theater.

Subscribe via your device (phone, tablet, etc.), or just tune in right on our website. You can do either and catch up on old episodes at: **www.outsidelands.org/podcast/**

Historical Happenings

Lincoln High School 75th Anniversary
October 3, 2015 (Saturday) 12:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.

Go Mustangs! History exhibits, classic car shows, and a sockhop to celebrate 75 years of the Sunset District's Lincoln High School. The day's activities will take place on campus, 24th Avenue and Quintara Street. More information on page seven of this issue and at **http://www.lincolnhigh.net/75thWelcome**

Ingleside Presbyterian Church and the Evolution of the Western Neighborhoods
October 15, 2015 (Thursday) 6:00 p.m.

Discussion on the evolution of the church and the greater Ingleside neighborhood, from its early days of development to its ascension as San Francisco's first black middle class neighborhood. Presentations by Al Williams and WNP's Woody LaBounty followed by a tour of the amazing *Great Cloud of Witnesses* mural and Reverend Gordon's mammoth collage. Part of San Francisco Heritage's Lecture Series 2015. Tickets and more information at **http://www.sfheritage.org/upcoming_events**



Reverend Roland Gordon beside part of his amazing collage of African-American role models inside Ingleside Presbyterian Church. Photo by Dani Vernon.

Lincoln Park Cemetery Walk for WNP Members
October 31, 2015 (Saturday) 5:30–7:00 p.m.

The fairways and greens of Lincoln Park were once the site of San Francisco's most remote and impoverished burial ground—City Cemetery. On this ghoulish guided walk by John Martini we'll learn about the rise and fall of the cemetery, explore a Chinese funerary temple, discover an iron memorial to forgotten sailors and learn the surprises that lay beneath the Legion of Honor. This event is free to Western Neighborhoods Project members. To RSVP, email *david@outsidelands.org* or leave a message at the WNP office at 415-661-1000 with the number in your party, and we will reply with the meeting location.

The Fight for the Fair: How the PPIE Didn't End up in Lake Merced or Golden Gate Park
November 13, 2015 (Friday)
3 Fish Studios, 4541 Irving Street, San Francisco
with author Laura Ackley

Join us for a presentation on the fight for the location of the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915. Lake Merced and Golden Gate Park, two options with strong backing, lost out to today's Marina District. How different would the city have developed and looked today if either had won? More information on the way, but save the date.

The Last Word



(WNP photo wnp8.008, Acme Newspictures photo.)

"JUST A COUPLE OF JUGGLERS, THESE GRIDDERS" "The air is literally full of pigskins when Capt. Jim Barber [right] and Larry Siemering, stars of the University of San Francisco football team, practice for the Shrine East-West classic. Siemering, All-Coast center, will snap the ball plenty in the contest, and here he's getting used to it." (ACME Newspictures, December 23, 1934)

Siemering went on to have a long career as a football player and coach. He coached the College of Pacific to an undefeated season in 1949—the team outscored opponents 575–66, and led the nation in offense. At the time of his death in 2009, he was the oldest surviving professional football player at 98 years of age. This shot, taken on USF's field on Turk Street and Parker Avenue, is likely faked.

Western Neighborhoods Project
outsidelands.org

Not a WNP Member?

SF West History is just one of the benefits of giving to Western Neighborhoods Project. Members receive special publications as well as exclusive invitations to history walks and 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.