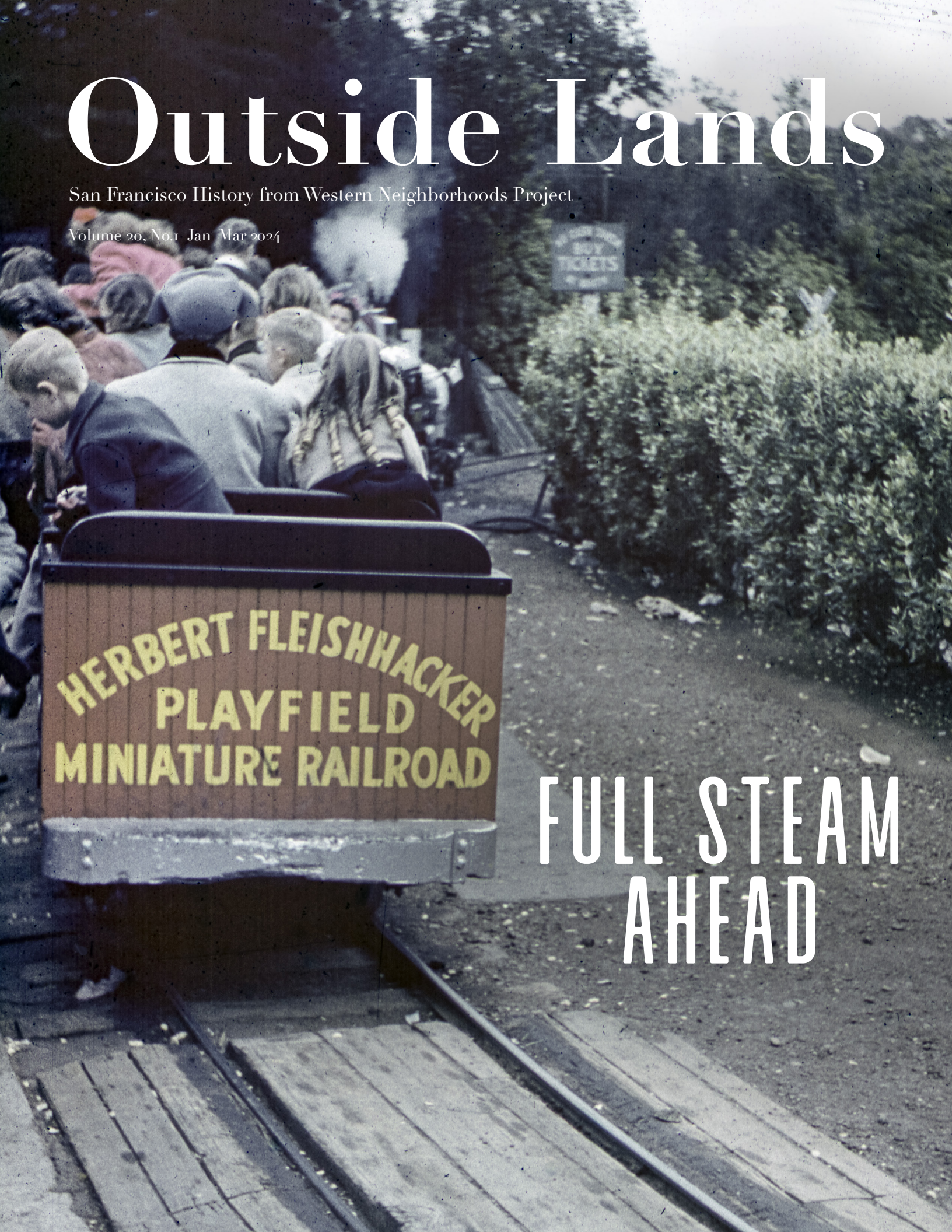
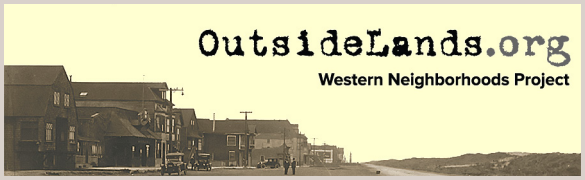
Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 20, No.1 Jan Mar 2024



FULL STEAM AHEAD



Outside Lands

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

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Cover: Little Puffer steam train at San Francisco Zoo, circa 1944. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.5950)

Right: Main entry gates to Sutro Heights, circa 1898. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/ wnp4.0074)

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Inside

1 Executive Director's Message

2 Where in West S.F.?
by Paul Judge and Margaret Ostermann

4 Remembering Arnold Woods
by Nancy Myrick

8 Ocean Terrace Neighbors: Gone But Not Forgotten
by John Martini and Chelsea Sellin

16 Thank You to Our 2023 Donors

22 Historical Happenings



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Nicole Meldahl



In 2024, we'll achieve some big numbers here at Western Neighborhoods Project: the OpenSFHistory program will be 10 years old, WNP celebrates a whopping 25 years, and I will turn 40. Milestones like that cause one to pause and reflect; a natural reflex for historians anyway, I suppose, but this one feels extra momentous.

In thinking about how far we've come and where we're going, I'm reminded of Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. Solnit is a San Francisco treasure; her work is impeccably researched and incomparably structured, but somehow the complex stories she shares still have the feeling of being related by an intimate friend. That's the balance we strive for at WNP as well.

Wanderlust also reminded me of our co-founders, David Gallagher and Woody LaBounty, who consistently wander the city by foot or bicycle. This slower way of experiencing San Francisco naturally offers opportunities to stop, think, and fully absorb its meaning. As Solnit says, "The streets are repositories of history, walking a way to read that history." In ***Ocean Terrace Neighbors: Gone But Not Forgotten***, **John Martini** finishes the Ocean Terrace journey he started in the previous issue, with assistance from our incomparable editor, **Chelsea Sellin**. Together, they walk the landscape and breathe life into this forgotten outpost by introducing us to the people and places who are no longer there.

If every city has its own unique language, phonetically spelled out in the built environment, then we only become fluent if we take the time to truly inhabit the place in which we live. I encourage you to close your eyes and imagine **Paul Judge** and **Margaret Ostermann** waving as they heartily say, "All aboard!" I think this perfectly encapsulates their vivacity as historians, but it's also the perfect energy to compliment our ***Where in West S.F.?*** on the San Francisco Zoo's iconic Little Puffer. When I visited the zoo in 2023, it was wonderful to watch how much joy it still sparks in youngsters. I hope it does the same for you in print.

I often refer to WNP as the little nonprofit that could: we just keep on chugging, learning a lot and finding new friends along the way. The steam that keeps us on track comes from the people who help us do the work, and few people kept us moving steadily forward more than Arnold Woods. In place of an oral history this quarter, we've made space for his dear friend **Nancy Myrick** and others to remember him in their own words. Grab a box of tissues before you start in on that one.

In the wake of losing another loved one, I take comfort in the laws of physics, which say that we, as people who are merely bundles of energy, cannot be destroyed, only transformed. In *Scratching the Beat Surface: Essays on New Vision from Blake to Kerouac*, Michael McClure riffs on an observation by Yale biophysicist Harold Morowitz that "the flow of energy through a system acts to organize that system." I see that happening at WNP as we evolve in the image of those who take the time to form it, a fact I'm reminded of whenever we highlight our volunteers at the end of one year and thank our donors at the beginning of the next.

At its core, WNP is composed of friends who are curious about where they live and excited to share what they find in the spirit of community. It's an incredible family of like-hearted souls (to steal a phrase from my boyfriend) that took me in and gave me purpose; for that, I will always be grateful to David, Woody, Arnold, and the community they created, one that continues to grow and shape the kind of history we make. I am so proud to be with you all and can't wait to see where we go together next.





Little Puffer steam train with Engineer Peter Neilsen at the controls, Fleishhacker Playground, circa 1925. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp15.1149)

WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

By Paul Judge and Margaret Ostermann

If you were a kid lucky enough to visit the San Francisco Zoo & Gardens, what were the first attractions you headed towards to climb aboard, ride on, peer at, or be captivated with?

The answer is as varied as each person and their memories – a visit to the zoo offers sights, sounds, and activities almost too exciting to choose. But for many, the answer is the subject of our mystery photo: the scale model steam train known as Little Puffer. They were drawn by the sound of its steam whistle or its diminutive appearance as it chugged along near the animals on display. And what kid (of almost any age!) isn't attracted to scale models of real things? When a child encounters a replica in scale to her or his own size, they are likely to feel, "Here's something I can relate with."

Little Puffer – and our mystery photo – both predate the zoo. However, the readers of Outside Lands magazine are sharp-eyed patrons of local places and history. New WNP member **Gino Fortunato** (welcome Gino!) identified the train but aptly noted that in this particular image, "it's not clear if it was the zoo at that time." **Wendy Herzenberg** also sent in a correct answer, and **Martin Szeto** hit the nail on the head with his identification of "The old Fleishhacker Playfield Limited train (aka Little Puffer) located in the (now) zoo by Ocean Beach. I'm guessing around its opening ~1925." But as spiffy as it looks in our mystery photo, Little Puffer had already lived a few lives before arriving in San Francisco.



Little Puffer, September 10, 2023. (Courtesy of Nicole Meldahl)

The "Class-E" miniature coal-powered locomotive was built around 1904 by the Cagney Brothers' Miniature Railroad Company of New York City. It's believed only six or seven of these narrow 22-inch rail gauge trains were made, and yet the Puffer's first owner proves to be a mystery! Our beloved Little Puffer's arrival in California can be traced to Santa Cruz, where it gave rides along the beach between 1907 and 1915. In the early 1920s, the



Little Puffer, circa 1955. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.12763)

tiny train was chugging around Pacific City – San Mateo's short-lived amusement park that was notoriously shut down due to its proximity to a sewage disposal outlet.

San Francisco philanthropist and civic leader Herbert Fleishhacker purchased the locomotive, tender, and passenger cars in 1925 and installed them in the area between Lake Merced and Ocean Beach that the city had designated for public recreation. Renamed the "Fleishhacker Playfield Limited," the train came to be affectionately known as Little Puffer. It ran on a third-of-a-mile track just to the east of the 1,000-foot-long saltwater Fleishhacker Pool. Fleishhacker Playfield also offered an athletic field, playground, a wooden carousel, a small ferris wheel, and animal rides. These attractions shortly preceded construction of the Herbert Fleishhacker Zoo in 1929. Much of the zoo complex was built out in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration. At Fleishhacker's suggestion the official name – The San Francisco Zoological Gardens – was adopted in 1941. The zoo's website states that in the early decades of operation, "the little steam train carried about 100,000 visitors a year…running a capacity of 42 passengers in three cars…for about three minutes."

Little Puffer's very existence may be a surprise to nearly a generation of zoo-goers who never experienced it, for it was taken out of service for nearly 20 years in 1978 to make room for the Gorilla World exhibit. Little Puffer was stored away behind the Pachyderm House, neglected in disrepair.

In the late 1990s, with vital funding from community entities, dedicated volunteers from the Golden Gate Railroad Museum (GGRM) restored Little Puffer. This labor of love entailed recreating missing pieces, overhauling the engine, and converting the locomotive to run on cleaner burning natural gas. Little Puffer returned to active service in August 1998, pulling out from a new storage barn and plaza onto its new longer route. Today children and families enjoy the novelty of a miniaturized locomotive, just as those in generations past. While San Franciscans may lament the loss of other childhood amusements, for Little Puffer we can at least "credit zoo officials who realized that sometimes the best new idea is bringing back the old."[1]

1. "The (not so little) zoo that could," *San Francisco Examiner*, August 27, 1998.

Do you know where this mother and pram are having a stroll?

Drop a line to chelsea@outsidelands.org

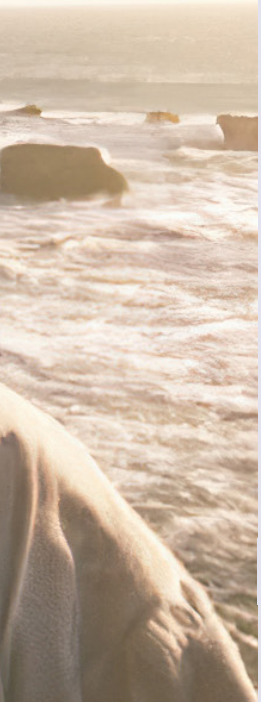


Remembering

ARNOLD WOODS

1962-2023





A TRIBUTE BY NANCY MYRICK

Arnold was not the first person you noticed when you walked into a room. He was usually behind something: a sound board, a camera, a table. Or he was behind someone. He wasn't the loud voice, wasn't the emcee or the facilitator. His name was rarely in the news. He mostly left that stuff to other people.

But once you were in the room behind the room, in the working group, at the poker table, or on the pickleball court, then Arnold was everywhere. He was always there when something needed to get done. He was always there when you just needed a helping hand.

This was true in his history work and in his personal life. Since college, Arnold had been my friend. We partied, hiked, saw movies and Giants games galore, played racquetball and pickleball, talked about politics, history, and friends. That's 40 years of having a friend that both had my back and was never perturbed by my last-second cancellations. He was unflappable.

I know I am not alone in feeling the large hole in my life that Arnold's passing has created. Western Neighborhoods Project has relied upon him since its inception. People like Arnold are the heart and soul of organizations that primarily depend on volunteers to get their work done. Without the Arnolds of the world, things grind into low gear, and we are often at a loss as to why something just isn't getting done.

The names that go down in history are not people like Arnold. Alexander the Great and Napoleon, Washington and Roosevelt, Feinstein and Pelosi, even Meldahl and LaBounty: that's the front-of-the-room crowd.

I hope that the person that stood just behind Washington knew their worth. I hope that the folks that went down in history, whose names made it to the history books, gave homage at least privately to the person behind them.

Here is my homage: Let us always remember this man by giving his name to those reliable, hardworking, supporting characters in the lives of the leaders. If someone is an Arnold, that is the greatest of complements. "Kim and Jo are so great! They are true Arnolds!"

May you be blessed to have an Arnold of your own. Or, if you are an Arnold, know that you are in the best of company.

Nancy Myrick and Arnold Woods at Lands End.
(Courtesy of Nancy Myrick)

The First Gentleman of WNP

Arnold Woods was one of the five founding directors of Western Neighborhoods Project when it was formed in 1999. He remained on our board until his death on December 1, 2023, and in those 24 years he held basically every formal and informal board position you can hold, multiple times. Arnold's service to WNP extended even further; he researched and wrote articles for this magazine and our websites; he co-hosted our podcast, Outside Lands San Francisco; he was a constant presence at our public programs and other community events, either as a presenter or helping behind the scenes; and he assisted with tasks big and small around the WNP Clubhouse. Even still, this laundry list does not feel like a sufficient summation of everything Arnold was and did as a volunteer, a friend, and an integral member of our local history community.

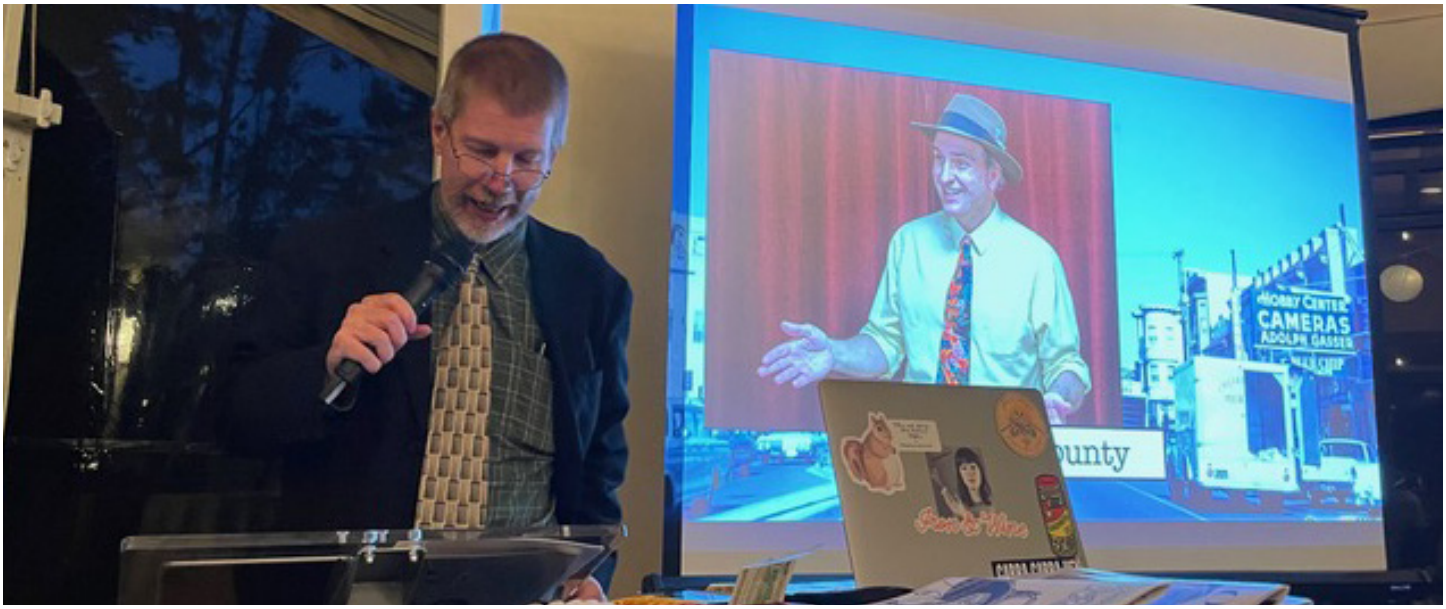
Arnold attended UC Berkeley from 1980-1984, graduating with a BA in Political Science and Sociology. His role as on-air talent at KALX 90.7, the university's radio station, would later make him a natural fit for WNP's podcast. Arnold helped to host guest DJ Elvis Costello in 1983; co-interviewed George Clinton in 1985; and covered events such as the 1982 Cal/Stanford Big Game and Desmond Tutu's speech at the Greek Theatre in 1985. Perhaps the highlight of his radio career occurred on February 25, 1985, when Arnold and Keven Kennedy interviewed Charles Manson at the State Medical Facility in Vacaville. Paul Judge recounted the story, as it was told to him by Arnold: "They conducted the interview obviously under heavy guard. What became apparent was that Manson, or his outside support, had erred, thinking that his interviewers were from radio station KPFA, which had a much larger radio audience. Arnold and his buddy conducted the interview in their best professional fashion and got a big time radio scoop." The interview is referenced in just about every history of KALX and earned Arnold a footnote in Greil Marcus's seminal book, *Real Life Rock*.







Top-to-Bottom: Nicole Meldahl and Arnold at the WNP table for Chinese American History Day, 2019. - WNP Board member Kyrie Whitsett and Arnold staffing the WNP booth at Outside Lands Music Festival, 2017. - Arnold helps move a piece from the Cliff House Collection at the WNP Clubhouse, 2021. (Courtesy of Nicole Meldahl)



Arnold speaking at WNP's gala, May 15, 2022. (Courtesy of Nancy Myrick)

Arnold brought this experience and his love of music to the 50th anniversary commemorations for the Summer of Love in 2017. Giving a WNP walking tour of the Haight Ashbury neighborhood, he spoke about Manson in front of Manson's former apartment. Paul Judge remembers that he "had the group's full attention at his heels while covering locations and recounting events and people that populated the place and time. Arnold was in his element." Arnold was also the driving force behind WNP's booth at the Outside Lands music festival in Golden Gate Park every year. Paul further recalls that "Arnold made sure to schedule [WNP's] volunteers in such a way that they might also attend the stage performances of the artists they favored."

After earning a law degree from the University of Colorado in 1990, Arnold was admitted to the California State Bar in October 1996, and made the Richmond District his home that same year. He specialized in general practice, litigation, personal injury, family law, and appeals. While it's hard to imagine such a nice man litigating, he offered legal advice and guidance to many of us for free. Arnold also brought his legal acumen and attention to detail to his research at WNP, covering dense legal topics such as the Outside Lands Act of 1866, and the case of Ephraim Merida.

Arnold came to WNP through his friendship with Nancy Myrick, the wife of WNP co-founder Woody LaBounty. In his 2023 oral history for WNP, Woody stated that "At first Arnold was acting mostly as a legal advisor…I think he found a pathway to something more fulfilling through WNP, where he started writing articles and doing research, and he would often combine his other interests, and I think he started finding a way to express himself, and a bit of a calling, that he was very excited to follow up on."

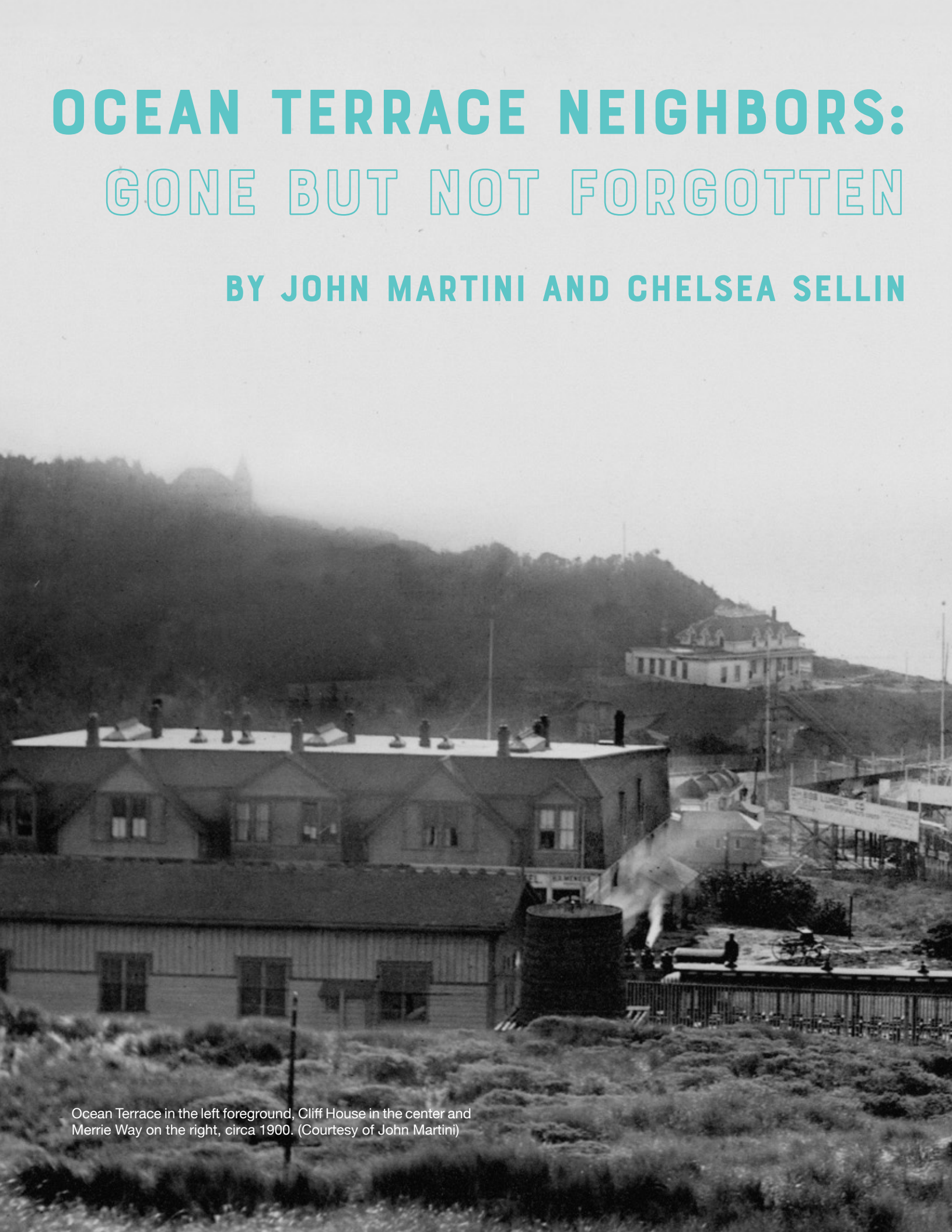
During WNP's transition from co-founders Woody and David Gallagher to current Executive Directory Nicole Meldahl, Arnold was invaluable – a bridge from one generation to the next. He was also essential to the operation of the Museum at The Cliff in 2021-22. John Lindsey of the Great Highway gallery stated that "the Cliff House wouldn't have happened without Arnold – I am forever grateful for his all-in never wavering support." Pam Wright, a fellow volunteer at the museum, wrote "I'll fondly remember the hours spent with him at the pop-up museum. He was so humble about his knowledge and his countless hours of hard work for WNP."

WNP volunteer Jim Jenkins perhaps sums it up best: "The one thing that stood out for me about [Arnold] was his commitment to service. No matter what the occasion or event, he was always there, actively helping or standing by with a ready set of hands and willingness to take leadership wherever it benefited the most. What a kind soul! He seemed to embody the spirit of the Western Neighborhoods Project: our steadfastness to the community, our sense of wonder, our sense of humor, our humility, our hope for the future."

Arnold was deeply valued by the west side community, and his life was memorialized beyond the walls of WNP. His obituary ran in the Richmond Review newspaper; KSFP 102.5FM aired a special broadcast of WNP's podcast tribute episode to Arnold; and the final San Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting of 2023 included a memorial to Arnold read by District 1 Supervisor Connie Chan.

OCEAN TERRACE NEIGHBORS: GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

BY JOHN MARTINI AND CHELSEA SELLIN



Ocean Terrace in the left foreground, Cliff House in the center and Merrie Way on the right, circa 1900. (Courtesy of John Martini)

Ocean Terrace was a sort of 19th century "strip mall" situated on the northwest corner of today's Point Lobos Avenue and El Camino Del Mar, facing the train depot where visitors arrived to head out to the Cliff House, Sutro Baths, and Sutro Heights. During its short life from about 1890 to 1920, the 200-foot-long street housed restaurants, saloons, curio shops, and photo galleries. Read Part I of this article, which appeared in the Oct-Dec 2023 issue of this magazine, to learn about the history of the physical development of Ocean Terrace. Here in Part II, we will explore the various commercial enterprises on the street, and the people who called Ocean Terrace home.

Tracing the evolution of Ocean Terrace's businesses is a challenging task that requires cross-referencing between San Francisco City Directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, early phone books, and U.S. census records for 1900, 1910 and 1920. Complicating this process are additional challenges: the street's name changed multiple times; at least two different street numbering systems were used; census takers frequently misspelled occupants' names and wrote down incorrect street numbers; and some residents gave their address as "Ocean Terrace" while others gave theirs as "48th Avenue" or even "NW corner Cliff & 48th Ave."

We've done the best we can to reconstruct this vanished population, but mysteries still remain. While we've chosen to focus on just a few Ocean Terrace enterprises, many more people and businesses passed through this once-bustling community.





Rendering of Ocean Terrace facades circa 1915. (Courtesy of John Martini)

Curios, Fruit, and Candy

The storefront at 2 Ocean Terrace hosted a series of commercial enterprises selling some combination of fruit, candy, and curios. Napoleon Vasilatos, the first proprietor, may also be the very first tenant at Ocean Terrace. The 1889 city directory recorded him as selling "shells and curios" at the enticingly vague location of "Point Lobos Av opp Sutro Heights." Vasilatos was born around 1851 in Greece and immigrated to the United States around 1880; his wife Louise was California-born to German parents, and together they had eight children. The location of their shop (and family home) was definitively placed at 2 Ocean Terrace in the 1891 directory, and in 1896 Vasilatos added fruit as well as a second location at B (Balboa) Street near 49th Avenue. However, this was the last time the family was listed on Ocean Terrace.

Another Greek immigrant, Dimitrios E. Valissaratos, took over the shop at #2 around 1898. He already operated a fruit stand near the Cliff House when he added Ocean Terrace as a second location, but it was seemingly short-lived, perhaps just a couple years. Valissaratos died on November 6, 1913 and his obituary in the *San Francisco Call and Post* described him as a leader in the local Greek community. He was President of the Greek Community Society of San Francisco and is thought to have had the first fully orthodox funeral in the city, at Holy Trinity Orthodox church at 345 7th Street.

The shop was largely dormant after that, although Anthony Vassios was listed as selling candy at 2 Ocean Terrace in the 1917 directory, followed by Geve Stephanidis in 1918. On the 1920 U.S. Census, Nick Lampre and his brother Elefterios lived at 2 Ocean Terrace. Born in Constantinople (today's Istanbul) to Greek parents, Nick was a candy vendor and Elefterios worked at a grocery. They shared #2 with Fred and Alice Kidd, who ran a photography gallery; together they were the last residents left on the street. Neither the Lampre nor the Kidd operations served liquor, which probably explains their continued existence after the onset of Prohibition.

Vasilatos, Valissaratos, and Lampre are part of a long tradition of businesses owned by Greek immigrants and their descendants in the Sutro Heights/Cliff House area. The most recent examples are Dan and Mary Hountalas, the former proprietors of the Cliff House, and Tom and Bill Hontalas, the former proprietors of Louis' Restaurant.

Schrumpf Family

The extended Schrumpf family members were not only some of the earliest and longest-lasting residents of Ocean Terrace, but they are connected to some of the biggest names in west side history. Originally hailing from Stadtlengsfeld, Germany, matriarch Sophia and five of her children all ended up in San Francisco in the late 1800s. Their histories form a web for which Ocean Terrace serves as something of a nexus.

The eldest of the children, Henrietta C. Schrumpf, was born in 1866 and immigrated to Boston in 1887 with her 14-year-old brother Albert. The following year she married Leopold Paul Burschinsky and they quickly set out for San Francisco, where their two children were born. Leopold went by the name "Paul Busch" and was listed as operating a saloon at 1 Ocean Terrace in the 1891 city directory. Over the next five years he expanded his operations to include a restaurant, shooting gallery, and boarding house. An 1891 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* described an incident where three young men working for Adolph Sutro got



B (Balboa) Street looking easterly from Great Highway to 49th Avenue; "Ocean Beach Gallery" at center, 1904. (Courtesy of Marilyn Blaisdell)

drunk, descended on the shooting gallery, and proceeded to damage both patrons and property. One of Busch's employees beat one of the offenders with the gallery's rifle, who in turn threw a chair through one of the windows.

The Busch family hosted as many as 30 boarders, including Henrietta's brother Albert, who worked for Paul as a bartender. In 1892, Paul took out a five year lease on the Ocean Boulevard Hotel, located on today's Great Highway between Ulloa and Vicente Streets. The hotel was on the site of the former Ocean Side House, a roadhouse built in 1866 that had already achieved historic infamy by the time Paul Busch entered the scene.

The Busch's home life was perhaps not as successful as their professional life seemed. In August 1895, Henrietta began divorce proceedings against her husband. The 1896 city directory revealed that Paul relocated to Ocean Side House, while Henrietta was listed as the proprietor of 1 Ocean Terrace. She utilized her full last name, Burschinsky. Her brother Albert continued to live and work with her. Another brother, Frederick, moved to 1 Ocean Terrace around 1897, although he worked as a cellarman for M. Rothenberg & Co., a wholesale liquor company. The third Schrumpf brother, August, arrived at Ocean Terrace around 1899.

It's unclear if the divorce was ever finalized, but either way, Paul died at the City and County Hospital on June 6, 1898. Henrietta also left Ocean Terrace around that time, although in the early 1900s she operated a restaurant on the southeast corner of Ocean Boulevard and B Street (August briefly worked there as a bartender). The three Schrumpf brothers all vacated Ocean Terrace between 1904 and 1908. Frederick left San Francisco altogether, but Albert and August relocated to 49th Avenue. Both briefly returned to Ocean Terrace; August just in 1912 and Albert from about 1914 to 1918. Albert had changed professions and was working as a gardener at Sutro Baths. When he left Ocean Terrace for the second time, he moved across the street into the Sutro mansion at Sutro Heights. Albert worked for, and lived with, the family of Adolph Sutro's daughter, Emma Merritt.

Henrietta seemed to live a quieter life after her Ocean Terrace adventures, but the 1926 city



Advertisement from *San Francisco Call and Post*, June 24 1913.

directory interestingly noted that she worked as a clerk for her sister, Mrs. M. A. Billington. The former Margaret Anna Schrumpf had married John R. Billington in 1895. John ran the "Cliff House Foto Gallery" next to Sutro Baths, while his brother William C. ran a photo gallery at Sutro Heights. They took commercial images of the surrounding landscape and attractions as well as studio portraits, and the surviving images are invaluable to researchers of this area's history; we are fortunate to have hundreds of them on OpenSFHistory.

John died in 1925; it seems like Henrietta worked for her sister in 1926 in order to lend a hand to the recent widow. Margaret had taken over her husband's curio shop near the Cliff House in addition to managing an apartment building on 8th Avenue. It's worth noting that Sophia Schrumpf, the family matriarch, had lived with her daughter Margaret and son-in-law John at 499 11th Avenue in the 1910s and 20s. Sophia, along with Henrietta's son, Paul Jr., are buried in the Billington family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma.

Photo Studio

Another of the early and long-lived establishments known to have operated on Ocean Terrace was a photography studio located at #2, which first appeared in the 1892 city directory. The fruit/candy/curio shop sometimes shared the same address as the studio, although it's unclear who might be subletting to whom. Originally operated by Rodney C. Jones, the studio was a tintype gallery that turned out quick "while-you-wait" photos for patrons. Incidentally, that 1892 directory stated that Jones lived in Oakland – an almost unimaginable commute from Ocean Terrace that would be undesirable even by today's standards. Surely either Jones had employees running the gallery, whose identities have been lost to time, or he boarded during the week at Ocean Terrace or nearby.

Jones was a Kentucky native who also operated photo studios at The Chutes amusement park on Haight Street and near Ocean Beach at 49th Avenue and B Street. In the mid-1890s, Jones took on a partner, North Carolinian Luther W. Kennett, and shortly after that, an employee, Alfred John Kidd. By 1902, the Chutes location closed (due to the park's closure) and Kennett moved to Los Angeles. It appears that Kidd took over operations at the Ocean Terrace studio around 1905, while Jones focused on the Ocean Beach studio, although Kidd was not listed in directories as a partner until 1914.

Of the three gallery operators, Kidd is the only one confirmed to have actually lived at Ocean Terrace. The street was his home from about 1899-1921, along with his wife, Alice. Both were Illinois natives with no children, although they probably weren't lonely, as the 1900 census shows five boarders living with them, all "day laborers." Alice most likely helped her husband with the studio, and may have taken it over at one point around 1910; records from around that time tease an unfinished story where she was the photographer, while Fred worked as a carpenter. Either way, the photo studio survived to become probably the last commercial enterprise on Ocean Terrace, and the Kidds possibly the final residents, before the street was demolished in late 1920 or 1921.

Sanborn maps show a second photo studio on Ocean Terrace, located down the street in building "I," the false-front building adjacent to the Mecca building. This studio's presence is also confirmed by a 1910 photograph that shows a display rack of tintype photos on the sidewalk outside building "I." This second studio's name and proprietor have not been determined, but the presence of two photography studios this close together was not unusual in the Cliff House area. Two more studios were located down the street just west of the Sutro Baths entrance, while still another operated on the parapet of Sutro Heights. Tintype photos were very popular keepsakes at the turn of the 20th century. In 2006, archeologists investigating Ocean Terrace found over a dozen small glass plates. Too small for window panes, they most likely were unexposed photographic plates from one of the studios.



Opening of the new electric Cliff Line streetcar and 48th Avenue depot; Hermann Schmidt third from left, May 27, 1905. (Photo by John Henry Mentz / SFMTA.com/Photo)

Rohrs Brothers' Restaurant and Saloon

Another longtime Ocean Terrace establishment was a restaurant and saloon operated by the Rohrs brothers at #5 and #6. John Henry Rohrs was born in Germany in 1862; he and his younger brother Richard immigrated to the United States in the mid-1880s and first appeared in San Francisco records a decade later. John Henry is listed in the 1896 city directory as a bartender for The Louvre restaurant on Powell and Eddy Streets. Later that year he married fellow German immigrant Anna G. Bonke and the new couple relocated to Seal Rock House, at the northern end of Ocean Beach (they eventually had three daughters). At the same time, John Henry partnered with Henry Reincke in operating a restaurant that was advertised as being at Sutro Baths, but may well have been on Ocean Terrace. Either way, Reincke was out of the picture by 1900 and the Rohrs family both lived and worked at Ocean Terrace. The establishment was called Sutro Heights Louvre – John Henry seemingly chose to borrow the name of his first place of employment in San Francisco.

John Henry befriended at least one neighbor, Fred Kidd, and trusted him enough to temporarily watch over his business. Seems that Fred may have needed better training; in 1905 he was sentenced for "selling a racing pool to a pair of detectives"[1] while minding the saloon. In something of a reverse situation in 1907, two men impersonating Federal revenue officers tried to fleece John Henry out of some cash. He saw through their ruse and promptly gave them a severe beating, with an assist from his bartender.

Following the 1906 earthquake and fire, the sale of liquor was temporarily banned in San Francisco. John Henry was arrested for violating the order on May 5, but it was subsequently revealed that his brother Richard had conducted the illegal transaction. Richard's liquor license, which covered Sutro Baths, was revoked. This event set in motion an official partnership between the brothers. John Henry's license was reinstated in June, and that same month, he purchased a saloon at 91 Main Street in Napa. However, newspaper accounts show that The Richelieu, as it was called, operated under Richard's care.

The Rohrs Brothers ran both locations until John Henry's death on January 28, 1915. In his will (which was witnessed by Fred Kidd), John Henry left everything to his wife, Anna. Richard sold the Napa saloon that October and permanently moved to San Francisco to run the Louvre with his sister-in-law. However, Anna lost her license in April 1918 due to illegal gambling activity. Perhaps sensing the beginning of the end of life at Ocean Terrace, Richard purchased the Lincoln Manor Market at Geary and 39th Avenue that June, and he and Anna moved to 548 44th Avenue. On January 6, 1919, Richard and Anna were married (it was his first marriage), a union that ended up outlasting her marriage to John Henry.



Ferries & Cliff House locomotive at 48th Avenue terminal siding next to the Sutro Heights Casino, circa 1900. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.1052)

Sutro Heights Casino

While not technically an Ocean Terrace address, the community included the Sutro Heights Casino, which was a sprawling building with a covered veranda that sat across the railroad tracks and behind the train station, dominating the northeast corner of 48th and Point Lobos Avenues. Operated for many years by Hermann "Baby" Schmidt, it provided additional refreshment space for patrons who presumably couldn't find satisfaction at Ocean Terrace's numerous drinking establishments. Schmidt, a native of the Saxony region of Germany, initially ran a saloon called the Saxonia at 115 Eddy Street. The "Baby" nickname was a joke referencing his extreme girth, which was frequently commented upon by both Schmidt and the press. On his business cards, Schmidt actually advertised "Come And See The Baby. Fighting Weight 399 Lbs."

Starting in the mid-1890s, Schmidt ran the Casino and lived there with his wife, Ida. They had no children but appear to have regularly provided boarding for their bartenders. On April 29, 1896, Schmidt led a group of German singers across the grounds at Sutro Heights to Adolph Sutro's front door, where they serenaded the mayor for his birthday. At some point after 1906, Schmidt sold the business to Oscar Olsen, who operated the bar/restaurant as "Cafe O.B. Olsen" for many years. In the 1910 census, Olsen lived in the structure with his wife Violet and a single boarder. The Casino disappeared from photos after 1923.

Ocean Terrace Demographics

The residents living on Ocean Terrace formed a cross-section of working class San Francisco at the turn of the 20th century. The population recorded during the 1900 and 1910 censuses was overwhelmingly white, male, and single. The majority were not born in the United States, especially so if you remove children from the statistics. Nearly 50% were boarders/lodgers with listed occupations such as gold plater, cook, carpenter, gardener, streetcar motorman, or often just "laborer." City directories further illuminate the extent to which the boarding population of the street fluctuated. It was an itinerant, blue collar, European community composed mostly of single men from the British Isles and Northern and Central Europe.

Most of the proprietors along Ocean Terrace listed the same address for both their workplace and residence, indicating that the owners and their families lived above the storefronts on the second story of the commercial block. Nearly every foreign-born person listed on the censuses had also become a naturalized citizen. (The only holdout was an unmarried Irish woman who lived with the Rohrs family as a cook; since women lacked many legal rights at the time, including voting rights, there was little incentive to undertake the citizenship process.) In short, the business owners of Ocean Terrace reflected the 19th century dream of many Europeans: move to the United States, open a business, become an American, get married and raise a family, and (if possible) make a fortune.





View east from Point Lobos Avenue near Merrie Way, towards 48th Avenue; rear of Ocean Terrace buildings at left, February 8, 1921. (Photo by Horace Chaffee, SF Department of Public Works; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.0864)

It must be noted that the residents of Ocean Terrace didn't exist in a vacuum. Their street was only one of several now-vanished residential areas along Point Lobos Avenue and the Great Highway. Additional working class enclaves included residential areas uphill from the Casino, within Sutro Heights itself (for Sutro's maintenance crew), adjacent to Merry Street (Merrie Way), within Sutro Baths, on the lower floors of the Cliff House, and in small buildings adjacent to the Ocean Beach Pavilion at Balboa Street and Great Highway. Their occupants were mostly the people who operated the attractions built by Sutro and other 19th century entrepreneurs that lined the cliffs overlooking Seal Rocks and the sand dunes of Ocean Beach. Their occupations often mirrored those of the Ocean Terrace residents (e.g., bartender, saloon proprietor, laborer, carpenter), but sometimes their trades reflected the specialized nature of employment in the Sutro empire: gardener, waiter, stableman, porter, boiler engineer, Baths' watchman.

A large number of these workers lived on Cliff Avenue (today's Point Lobos Avenue), probably on the slope of Sutro Heights across from the now-shuttered Louis' Restaurant, where Sutro maintained a boarding house and other residences for his employees. In the 1900 census, 31 people listed this Cliff Avenue address as their home. 30 of the residents were male, 29 were single or widowed, and their average age was 37. Based on their occupations (mostly food service or hotel operations), all were probably employed at the nearby Cliff House.

Surprisingly, six of the men living in this boarding house were from Japan. Four listed their occupation as "porter" and two as "laundryman." Together with two Chinese cooks who lived elsewhere in the neighborhood, these were the only non-Caucasian residents found in the entire 1900-1920 censuses for the Ocean Terrace-Cliff House area.

Conclusion

Ocean Terrace disappeared and its residents departed for two primary reasons: restrictions on the sale of alcohol during World War I and Prohibition that spelled doom for the saloons and restaurants lining the street, and the Sutro Estate's perception that the street and its activities were detrimental to a never-implemented residential subdivision.

The residents of Ocean Terrace lived with a terrific view overlooking Seal Rocks before moving on, and they left few physical remnants to document their existence. It's been rewarding to give life to some of the long-departed families such as the Rohrs, Kidds, and Schrumpfs. They likely never dreamed they'd someday be the focus of archaeological digs and archival research projects. These Ocean Terrace families were also the unknowing pioneers in a tradition of commerce and recreation at Lands End that continues today.

1. *San Francisco Call*, February 10, 1905.

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We want to extend a hearty THANK YOU to everyone who made a donation to support Western Neighborhoods Project in 2023 - especially to those who answered the call of our Winter Appeal. Because of your generosity, we exceeded our goal and raised over $78,000! An all-time fundraising record for us. We do our work for you, and we couldn't do it without you. Thank you for helping us keep history alive!

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Left-to-Right: Sleigh Ride Roller Coaster at Playland at the Beach, circa 1927. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.0943) - Dedication ceremony for the Twin Peaks Tunnel, West Portal, July 14, 1917. (Photo by Horace Chaffee, SF Department of Public Works; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp36.01654)

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Historical Happenings

Sat Mar 23 at 10am: Cliff House & Sutro Baths History Walk
Join historian and retired park ranger John Martini for a walking tour of the Cliff House, Sutro Baths ruins, and other Point Lobos landmarks. $15 for members, $25 for non-members; this strenuous tour lasts 2 hours and the meeting location will be emailed to you when you purchase tickets.

Thurs Mar 28 at 6:30pm: OpenSFHistory Photography Forum
First in a series of online events celebrating the 10 year anniversary of OpenSFHistory! Join us for a conversation about photography past and present with two Richmond District photographers, Dave Glass and Yameen. This event is online only and free! Access to the Zoom meeting will be emailed to you when you register online.

outsidelands.org/events

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