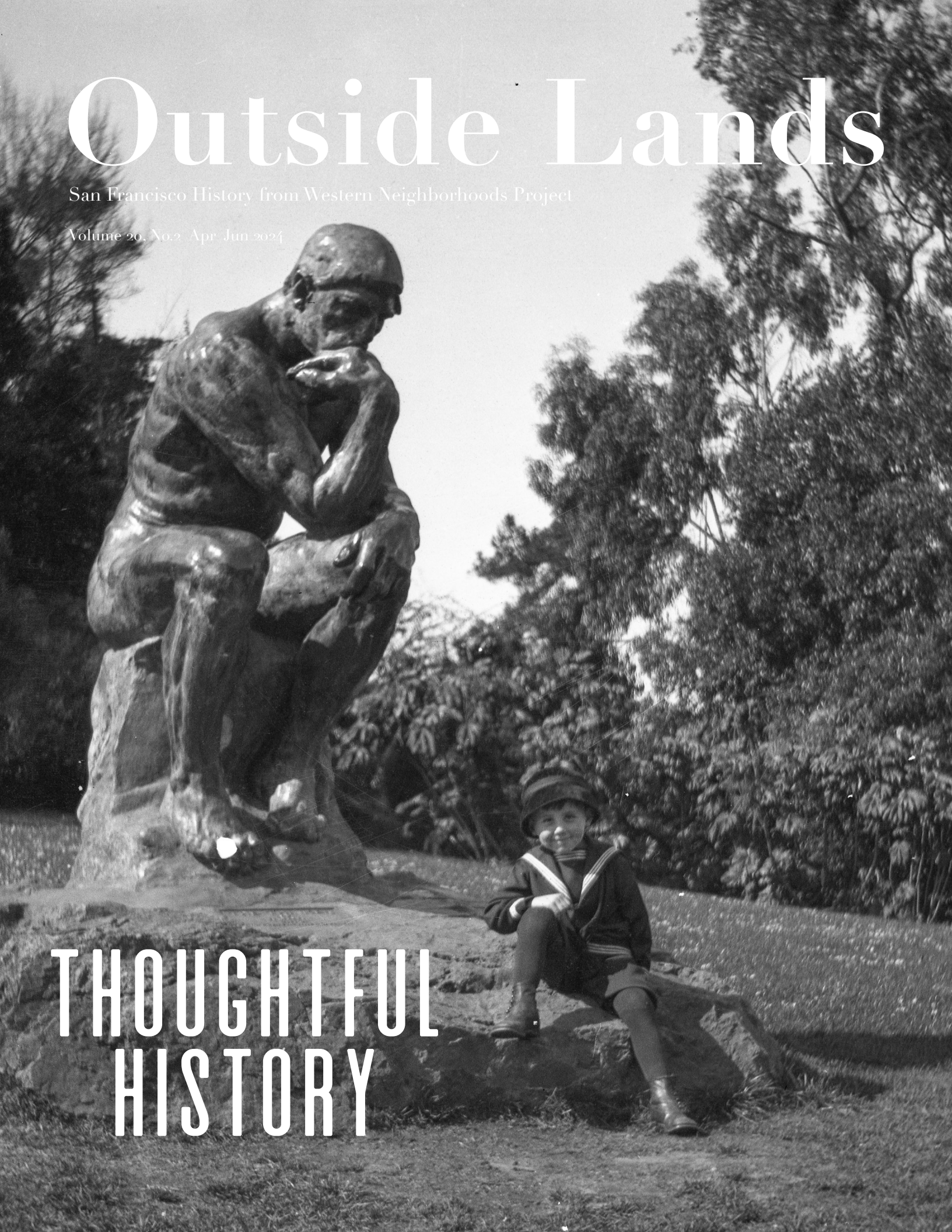
Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 20, No.2 Apr Jun 2024



THOUGHTFUL HISTORY

OUTSIDE LANDS

History from Western Neighborhoods Project
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Cover: Boy posing with Rodin's 'The Thinker' in Golden Gate Park, circa 1920. (Emmett Howard Family; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.12798)

Right: View east from the south end of Pine Lake, circa 1910. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp15.185)

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

NICOLE MELDAHL



It's a long time and also no time at all, 25 years. Western Neighborhoods Project has accomplished so much since our founding in 1999, which you can read much more about in ***25 Years of Western Neighborhoods Project***. I feel like this nonprofit is just starting to hit its stride. Behind the scenes, we're gearing up to launch a thoughtful rebrand with a new website, so we can more easily share the same old history you know and love us for, but with a fresh new look. Our Board of Directors is also working on a five-year Strategic Plan—our first coordinated long-term planning effort. Because, as any city planner will tell you, infrastructure is important. It helps you get where you want to go and makes the city accessible for future generations.

Speaking of infrastructure, **Paul Judge** and **Margaret Ostermann** take you to the gates of Westwood Park in this issue's ***Where in West S.F.?*** How and why things get built in this city fascinate me, and the herculean effort of city planning has been on my mind recently, having just finished *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs—a book in which San Francisco pops up not infrequently (and not always positively). What struck me most was twofold: first, how the problems Jacobs identified in 1961 are still universal problems; and second, how we keep trying to find blanket solutions to issues that require individuated assessments and tailored approaches. How remarkable it would be, for example, to pass a rezoning plan and in one fell swoop solve our housing crisis. But it's never that easy.

As Jacobs makes clear, a city must thoughtfully evolve to best serve the people who want to make it their home. If we want to do that while keeping the historic character of San Francisco intact, then, as we consider how to fit more people in, we must take the time to find the places that are important to the communities that make our city worth living in. This is how the soul of San Francisco will survive the change that's inevitably coming. The team in charge of the San Francisco Citywide Cultural Resources Survey within the San Francisco Planning Department is trying to record what these places mean to people, and ***Inside the Outside Lands*** explains how WNP is helping the Planning Department reach more folks in the Richmond District.

Preserving stories now will hopefully protect the places that hold them, when change comes later. And let's be honest: stories are the fun part of history. *Inside the Outside Lands* also shares highlights from our evening with drag legend Peaches Christ, who transformed The Bridge Theater into a beacon for San Francisco's queer community at the turn of the last century. Now THAT was a night of fun stories. In this issue, we also hear from longtime member **Ray Casabonne** about French American culture on the west side that is often overlooked. And, to always keep in mind that San Francisco's fertile ground has enabled all of us to grow here, we have an article by **Peter Starzhevskiy** (whom we met at an Open House last year!) about a mysterious creek in the Outside Lands.

As we remember how far WNP has come in 25 years and how we want to travel the many years we have to go, one word keeps coming to mind: thoughtfully. After all, that's been the key to our success as your friendly neighborhood history group so far. So, we'll just keep on keepin' on, if that's ok with you? Thanks for being with us as we do so, History Friends.



WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

By Paul Judge and Margaret Ostermann

Our mystery photo is an eye-catching image of a woman pushing a pram past a portal archway towards an avenue lined with modest bungalows. Purposely staged as an enticement to the dreams of working couples, it seems to say "Come here and live, start your family. Realize your dream in a uniquely planned, newly-built neighborhood of affordable homes."

The image was snapped about 1920 at the entrance gates to Westwood Park, at Miramar and Ocean Avenues. The pedestrian gateway provides a sense of place that defines the residence park. Its construction, a marketing tool, speaks to an era when developers needed to lure homebuyers out into the remote western half of the city. Fortunately, Westwood Park also boasted easy access to a business district on Ocean Avenue and an efficient commute downtown via the Twin Peaks Tunnel.

The thoughtfully-designed family bungalows of Westwood Park are the creation of Baldwin & Howell, one of the oldest real estate firms in San Francisco. Known for their work developing residence parks, here on the lower southern slope of Mount Davidson they scaled the grandiosity down to offer a growing middle class the benefits of residence park living, albeit in a more modest way. Detached single family homes were architect-designed and placed upon a nested pair of oval-shaped landscaped streets. Although lots and homes were smaller than nearby St. Francis Wood and Forest Hill, the ambience and exclusivity of residence park life were imparted.

But before any homes were put up, Baldwin & Howell first established the neighborhood's identity in 1916 with barrel-vaulted pedestrian gates and pillars topped with wrought iron lanterns. Bookending the neighborhood's main thoroughfare of Miramar Avenue, one set denoted the tract's northern boundary at Monterey Boulevard, and another the southern boundary at Ocean Avenue. These defining entrances were designed by renowned architect Louis Christian Mullgardt, fresh off the architectural board of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. He would become better-known for designing the Infant Shelter (now Lycée Français de San Francisco) at 19th Avenue and Ortega.



View north through arched entry over sidewalk at northwest corner of Miramar and Ocean Avenues, circa 1920. (Photo by Moulin Studios, Westwood Park Album; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.4352)



Charlie gets his own pram glamor shot at the Miramar and Monterey entrance gates. (Courtesy of Margaret Ostermann)

Although homes in San Francisco can virtually sell themselves these days, Baldwin & Howell had to put significant effort into advertising Westwood Park, most of it banking on the successful completion of the Twin Peaks Tunnel in 1918. They hired a film crew to document the tract's transformation. Tree stumps were dynamited, roads graded, time-lapse progression captured a bungalow from framing through occupancy, and perhaps most enthralling: the public was invited to Westwood Park's "Motion Picture Day" to see themselves caught on film touring the tract. The film

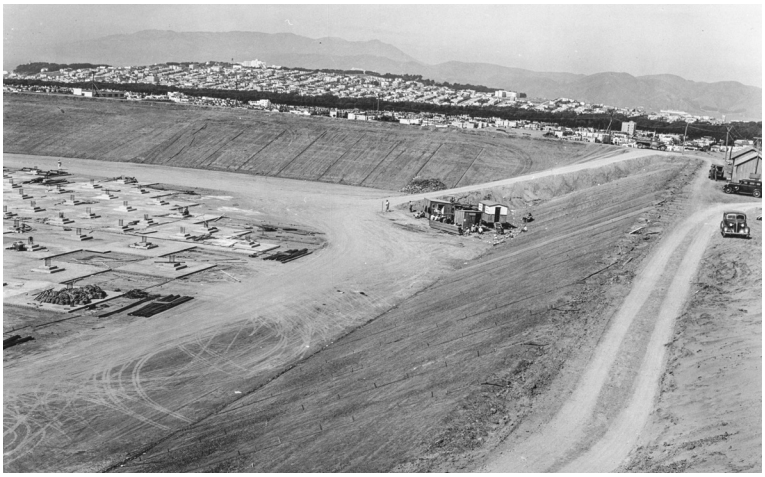


View north past Westwood Park entrance gates at Miramar and Ocean Avenues, circa 1917. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp37.02799)

debuted to great acclaim at the 1917 California Land Show (an exposition organized by the San Francisco Real Estate Board and tailored to the "landless man"). Fairgoers were lured into the theater by a replica of the Miramar and Ocean Avenue entrance gates: emblems of the new community. Clips from the film can be seen on WNP's YouTube page as part of the "Building of San Francisco's Westwood Park" video.

David Volansky swiftly pinpointed our mystery photo's location, noting the long slope of the hill and Miramar Avenue's median. Although the arched portals have disappeared at Ocean Avenue, a pair of pillars remain, crowned – as David noted – with the original fluted wrought iron lanterns. Meanwhile, up the hill at Miramar and Monterey, the original sidewalk gateways and median pillars remain, likely because of reduced traffic pressure. For **Glenn Bachmann**, these arched portals were a familiar sight during his City College days.

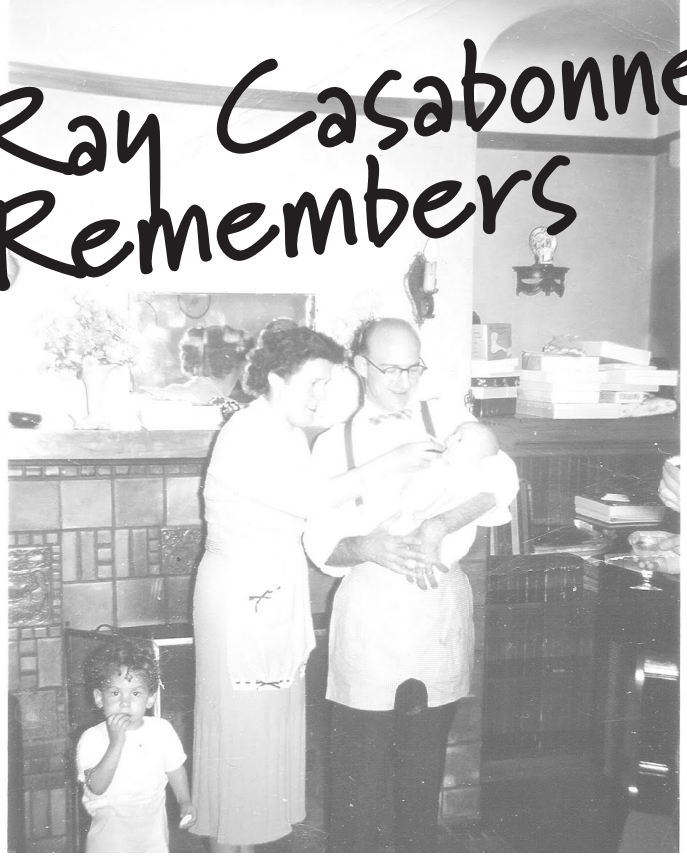
The survival of the entrance gateways is not taken for granted by the Westwood Park Association, a group of property owners active since the neighborhood's very beginnings. In 2003 they undertook a major restoration of the entrance features, while also earmarking a budget for repainting and repairing the iron work every decade. The restored gateways at Miramar and Monterey, as well as the surviving pillars scattered around the neighborhood's boundaries, recently received city landmark designation. The landmarking process was finalized in January 2024, recognizing the entrance features' ability to enhance and define Westwood Park, just as Baldwin & Howell set out to do over a century ago.



Who can guess what's being constructed in this photo?

Send your best shot to chelsea@outsidelands.org

Ray Casabonne Remembers



Fernand and Claire Casabonne holding Ray, with his brother Francois on the left, 1953. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)



Pierre Fondacabe delivering laundry, circa 1910. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)

By Ray Casabonne and Nicole Hallenbeck

Ray Casabonne is a native San Franciscan whose family roots in the city date back to 1899. In his interview with Nicole Meldahl on January 6, 2021, he told the story of his family's migration from the South of France to California, and painted a picture of French American culture in San Francisco, particularly the long history of French laundries. Ray also shared stories of his childhood in the Richmond District near Lincoln Park, declaring it "a fantastic place to grow up," and attending Saint Ignatius High School.

French American Roots

All four of Ray's grandparents were born in the former province of Béarn, in the Pyrenees in the South of France. When they came to the United States, they joined a long tradition of immigrants from Béarn to California. His maternal grandfather, Pierre Fondacabe, arrived in 1905 and worked for a wealthy family in Pacific Heights. In 1910, his maternal grandmother, Marie Bidalot, moved to San Francisco. The pair met and married in 1912, and together opened a French laundry on Clement Street between 24th and 25th Avenues called the West Clay French Laundry. Marie's brother, Simon Bidalot, also owned his own laundry on California Street and Funston Avenue. Eventually, Simon and Pierre combined their businesses and opened up the California French Laundry in the Inner Richmond.

In the 19th century, France's laundries were famed for their quality. The first French laundry in San Francisco opened in 1903, and by 1915 there were about 100 laundries run by Béarnais immigrants. In Ray's words, the laundries were "ready-made jobs" for French immigrants in the U.S. Most of the laundries even had dormitories on the upper floors. When Ray's grandparents came to California, they were received by a strong-knit community with a familiar language and culture. Ray's paternal grandfather, Jean Casabonne, also worked in a laundry when he first came to San Francisco, but spent most of his life as a baker for Langendorf Bakery in the Mission District.

Ray's grandparents on both sides married at Notre Dame des Victoires, a French Catholic church founded in 1856 on Bush Street between Grant and Stockton. Ray's mother, Claire Fondacabe, was born in 1920 at French Hospital on Geary. She was raised in the Richmond District, while Ray's father, Fernand Casabonne, grew up in the Mission. However, both Claire and Fernand attended the Notre Dame des Victoires grammar school, which was founded in 1924. Ray remembered that "my mom and my dad's sister were very good friends growing up." Claire stayed at École Notre Dame





Wedding of Ray's paternal grandparents, Jean Casabonne and Marie Pourtale, 1911. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)

des Victoires while Fernand attended Saint Ignatius High School, graduating in 1937. He briefly worked for a small stock trader until he was drafted into the army in 1940.

Fernand served as a radio operator during World War II, stationed on Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands. "He was sent to the Pacific, which I always said was a very fortunate thing, because he spoke perfect French. Had they really realized that, he could have gone someplace much more dangerous," Ray pointed out. Tinian still had its dangers, however. Ray recalled "that's the island where the Enola Gay took off to drop the first atomic bomb. On that day, he [Fernand] was in the hospital. The guy in the bed next to him apparently was supposed to be on that plane but he got sick, so he didn't get to go."

During the war, Claire was active in the USO. She participated in dances to entertain the troops and sold war bonds. One year, she sold $750,000 in war bonds because her father knew the owner of the White House department store. According to Ray, "I guess all the bonds that they sold at that store were credited to her somehow." Claire was also active with the Young Ladies' Institute, a Catholic women's organization, where she was a member of the drill team and marched in parades. Fernand marched in the same parades as a member of the drum and bugle corps of the French Athletic Club. They also participated in Bastille Day celebrations, dressing in traditional outfits from their region of France.

Upon returning home to San Francisco after the war, Fernand married Claire in 1947 and began working at her family's laundry on Clement Street. Unfortunately, the family business was slowing down because "in the early [19]50s, more and more people started getting their own washing machines, so those businesses were starting to die out," Ray explained. Fernand briefly returned to stock trading before landing a job with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, located in the Federal Building at 450 Golden Gate Avenue. At one time, he worked as a courtroom clerk for Judge Cecil Poole, the pioneering lawyer who broke several racial barriers and infamously had a cross burned on the lawn of his Ingleside Terraces home.

An Outer Richmond Childhood

In 1953, Ray was born at French Hospital. The third of four boys, they attended École Notre Dame des Victoires like their parents. Ray recalled that "we would hop on the number 2 Clement every morning, my brothers and I, and schlepped downtown to go to school." Fernand and Claire remained active in the parish, singing in the choir and attending the French Mass on Sundays. However, they didn't speak French much at home, "only when they didn't want us to understand," Ray said with a laugh. These days, Ray is sharpening his French skills with Duolingo, in preparation for his next trip to France.



Claire Fondacabe in traditional Béarnaise outfit, 1944. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)



Young Ladies' Institute Drill Team marching in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, 1943. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)

The Casabonne family lived on 34th Avenue between Clement and Geary, right near the entrance to Lincoln Park. "It was like growing up in the country for us," Ray remembered. He and his brothers played in the park, where "we used to be able to see bits and pieces of gravestones where the third hole is." They also played around the Legion of Honor museum, which Ray described as "a great place when you're a little kid. You can be in a fortress that you're protecting." The museum was free in those days, and Ray particularly recalled visiting the porcelain room in the basement. On Saturdays, the boys would pack lunches and head out with their cousin Michael (who still lives in his family's home in the Inner Richmond) to hike around Lands End and down to the beaches.

Ray also holds fond memories of Richmond District mainstays like Norman's Kingdom of Toys, the 4 Star Theater, and Joe's Ice Cream. His parents used to shop at Petrini Plaza on Masonic and Fulton. The Casabonnes didn't eat out much, because both Fernand and Claire were "outstanding cooks," according to Ray. He remembered his mother cooking the family's everyday meals, while his father cooked special occasion meals, as well as large group meals for upwards of 200 people at church. They made French food, of course. "One of my father's hobbies was reading French cookbooks," Ray shared. He recalled his parents saying that "because they married each other – most of my aunts and uncles married Italians and Irish and whatever – we kept the closest to the French traditions."

Like his father, Ray attended Saint Ignatius High School, at their Stanyan Street campus. But his last two years were spent at the school's new Sunset District campus on 37th Avenue, which was still under construction. "I think we started at 7:30 and we were done at 1:00 or 2:00 because the workers had to be able to have more time without students there. It was a real crazy year," Ray explained. The school hosted dances – Ray pointed out that at the time, there were eleven Catholic girls' schools in San Francisco, but today there are only two. Ray's first concert was the famous 1967 appearance of Jefferson Airplane and Buffalo Springfield at the University of San Francisco gymnasium; it was a fundraiser for the new Saint Ignatius campus. "I guess my brothers convinced my parents to let me go because I was going with my older brothers, and they were pretty straight," Ray figured. He also saw concerts at Speedway Meadow and noted that "we always stood out because we were pretty clean cut. [laughing] Had to have hair above our ears."

Adulthood

Ray returned to Lone Mountain when he attended USF for college. The university had purchased the recently-vacated Saint Ignatius facilities on Stanyan. "I went back to the old campus. I had classes in the same building I went to high school in," Ray recalled. His older brother also went to USF; "Because we were so close – just two years apart – we had a lot of mutual friends, so we used to hang out together a lot." Although Ray entered college as a math major, he changed course and received a degree in accounting in 1975. He also earned a spot in an IRS work/study program that automatically gave him a job upon graduation. According to Ray, "It ended up being a great experience. Then, when I graduated, it was the





Ray and Marian Casabonne on their wedding day, August 11, 1979. (Courtesy of Ray Casabonne)

best option for me, so I stayed there…I enjoyed my almost-37 years working for the Internal Revenue Service in San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area." Early in his career, Ray lived with his parents and worked in the Federal Building, just like his father. "Some days when I had been out driving around to audit people, I would have my car, so I'd stick around because judges like to go late sometimes…I would give my dad a ride home."

After college, Ray met his wife at a bar called the Tarr and Feathers on Union Street. She had grown up in Westwood Park and attended Convent of the Sacred Heart. In an echo of his own parents' relationship, Ray stated that "I met her older brother at USF well before I met her. Needless to say, we had a lot of common friends from our high school days and stuff." After they were married (at Notre Dame des Victoires, of course), they bought a house in the Outer Mission, but left San Francisco for Moraga in 1981.

Ray had a long, successful career as an IRS auditor, and also taught tax law for a time. Since 2012, he has used his skills to help people do tax prep through the AARP. He and his wife raised three daughters, all of whom lived in the Richmond District for a few years after college. Their eldest daughter carried on family tradition by being the fourth generation Casabonne to get married at Notre Dames des Victoires. Ray also still gets together with his Saint Ignatius buddies around the Bay Area; most have left the city. He stated, "I do wish that our kids had had the opportunity to grow up in San Francisco. It's a great city still."



Notre Dame des Victoires Church, November 1977. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.3791)

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.

25 YEARS OF WESTERN NEIGHBORHOODS PROJECT



BY NICOLE MELDAHL

The idea for Western Neighborhoods Project (WNP) came to Woody LaBounty in 1998 on a visit back to San Francisco from North Carolina, where he had temporarily relocated with his young family. Nostalgic and homesick, he wondered aloud to his friend, David Gallagher, why a small town like Belvedere in Marin County had its own historical society but not a vibrant neighborhood like the Richmond District, where LaBounty had grown up. Why was the local lore he heard about not researched and well-documented, and why were these stories not kept safe by some nonprofit?

The pair discussed starting a citywide Overlooked Neighborhood Historical Society, but instead, they compromised with a focus on the western neighborhoods. LaBounty moved home and paperwork to form our nonprofit was filed on May 15, 1999. He remembered, "We didn't know what to call the new organization, so settled on the pedestrian 'Western Neighborhoods Project.' About six months after incorporation it dawned on me that obviously 'Outside Lands' was the correct name! Too late for the IRS, but our new website's URL changed from the very uninspiring 'www.wnp-sf.net' to the web address we all know and love."[1]

It's true that people often have a hard time remembering the full, proper name of Western Neighborhoods Project, but that name has turned out to be very well suited to us. Words you traditionally see connected with history organizations, like "Society," "Association," and "Museum" feel far too formal for the folksy nature of WNP's work. "Project" implies that we're building something together, and that has certainly turned out to be true. Over the last 25 years, we've been steadily building an all-encompassing history of the western neighborhoods—story by story, neighborhood by neighborhood, with the help of many volunteers and partners.

LaBounty and Gallagher were joined by foundational board members Brady Lea, Felicity O'Meara, and Arnold Woods. The work began with everyone doing history that meant something to them.

WEST PORTAL HISTORY WALK

The first major undertaking that had a real WNP look and feel was the self-guided West Portal History Walk. Fifteen historic photos with short blurbs of interpretive text, or "milestones," were installed in storefront windows on West Portal Avenue between Ulloa Street and 15th Avenue. The project was spearheaded by West Portal resident Richard Brandi, a fourth-generation San Franciscan who began researching his neighborhood. WNP was awarded a Minigrant from the California Council for the Humanities (now California Humanities) to fund the endeavor.

Historic photographs were sourced from the California Historical Society, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), and local photographer and collector Greg Gaar, whose work you can now find in our OpenSFHistory archive. The images were used to create a brochure that included a short synopsis of the neighborhood by Brandi. Mae Kramer Silver, a prolific community organizer and author who wrote the definitive book on Rancho San Miguel after discovering her house sat on the former Mexican land grant, served as a consultant. In many ways, the brochure pioneered WNP's focus on



West Portal History Walk reception, February 2002.

WORDS YOU TRADITIONALLY SEE CONNECTED WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS, LIKE "SOCIETY," "ASSOCIATION," AND "MUSEUM" FEEL FAR TOO FORMAL FOR THE FOLKSY NATURE OF WNP'S WORK. "PROJECT" IMPLIES THAT WE'RE BUILDING SOMETHING TOGETHER, AND THAT HAS CERTAINLY TURNED OUT TO BE TRUE.

providing curious locals with simple, approachable history. Published in November 2001, *A Brief History of West Portal* is now available online through SFPL, showing how far WNP has come—the historians have become the history. Work begun by Brandi with this History Walk eventually led to the Residence Parks Historic Context Statement, written for the San Francisco Planning Department, and his book, *Garden Neighborhoods of San Francisco: The Development of Residence Parks, 1905-1924*, published in 2021.

The West Portal History Walk "milestones" debuted in storefront windows on February 1, 2002. The walk was also made available on outsidelands.org, at a time when not many history nonprofits had a robust presence online. A kick-off reception was held at Italian restaurant Bocca Rotis at 1 West Portal (today's Squat & Gobble), with wine provided by The San Francisco Wine Trading Company at 250 Taraval Street—coincidentally, just near WNP's first office at 300 Taraval, which we moved into in 2009.



Woody LaBounty, Mae Silver, and Richard Brandi at West Portal History Walk reception, February 2002.

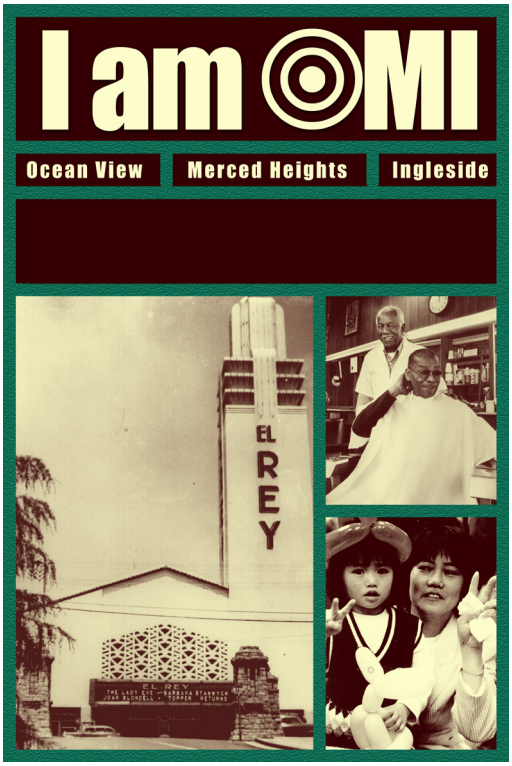
Sam Whiting of the *San Francisco Chronicle* covered the installation. Hilariously, he took aim at the nonprofit's name. "San Francisco historians-at-large, they teamed up to form the Western Neighborhoods Project, but Brandi & LaBounty would make a better name. It sounds like a 1950s private eye team, and they looked just like one, going door to door to investigate locations for their vintage photo display."[2]

Many of the businesses highlighted in the article and on the History Walk are now, themselves, consigned to the past. Village Grill closed in 2014, after 25 years, and became Toast. Manor Coffee Shop, filled with what LaBounty described as "customers who can remember it back then," held on until owner Raymond Jeung retired and sold the business in 2016 after nearly 50 years in the neighborhood. While it's always sad to see a longtime staple go, we've learned as historians that you can document and remember it all even if you can't save everything, and change like this is the hallmark of a healthy, dynamic city district.

But students of history also know that things have a way of coming back around. Whiting lamented the loss of West Portal Joe's on the corner of West Portal and Ulloa in 2002, but in 2020, Little Original Joe's opened on West Portal and 15th Avenue. That same year, Shaw's also changed hands; West Portal resident Diana Zogaric has brought the neighborhood's iconic candy store back to life.

Helping residents and visitors experience these often-overlooked neighborhoods, and supporting local businesses in the process, has always been part of what WNP does. We continue to lead guided history walks and pub crawls every year, and the West Portal History Walk came full circle when Nicole Meldahl joined Brandi in 2018 (then both WNP Board Members) to lead history enthusiasts on a West Portal Pub Crawl. More recently, we married the original "milestones" concept with our pub crawls by designing and installing History Stop posters in four Inner Richmond bars in 2023. Same concept—provide people with bite-sized snippets of neighborhood history alongside compelling historic photos—but now with QR codes linking to an expanded history on outsidelands.org.

Whiting's article ended with a quote from LaBounty that summarizes what we strive for in helping people explore where they live and work. Looking at a 1924 panoramic photo, he said: "Wow, this kind of looks like it does now." That kind of connection, seeing the past in the present as part of experiential place-making, is irreplaceable. In 2020, as San Franciscans sheltered-in-place, WNP asked residents to find photos on opensfhistory.org, print them at home using a link that generated a QR-coded poster, and then post them on light poles in their neighborhoods for a "then and now" experience in real life. This activity was safe, intergenerational, and encouraged people to learn more about their community, together.



"I am OMI" postcard.



Community Film Screening, August 1, 2003.

I AM OMI

The same could be said for WNP's first coordinated oral history program, "I Am OMI." Looking back, we can see how the nonprofit began to evolve its interdisciplinary approach to community history, building on lessons from the West Portal History Walk and taking it to the next level. Between 2003 and 2005, WNP collected stories from, and researched the history of, the southwestern part of the west side known as the OMI: the Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside neighborhoods. Again, funding was provided by the California Council for the Humanities, as well as the San Francisco Foundation.

The OMI is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in San Francisco. This project used history and story-sharing to bridge ethnic, cultural, and generational divides, and aided residents to find common ground to address local problems. The purpose of "I am OMI" was to help an often-divided neighborhood find a unified voice.

The initiative was multi-pronged. Through both the Ocean View Recreation Center's Safe Haven program and the OMI Beacon Center, 12 neighborhood teens became "Community Filmmakers." They took historical field trips through the neighborhood, learned about current businesses and parks, interviewed older residents, and captured OMI's past while speculating on its future. Instructor Amanda Herman led a month-long Digital Video Camp, where the students learned to shoot video, interview neighbors, and create their own stories by editing the footage.

On August 1, 2003, the teens hosted a community screening of their finished product: *Lakeview, the Way it Waz*. Attendees watched interviews with business and community leaders; "then and now" images of local landmarks; and segments in which the filmmakers read poetry, gave tours of their homes, and introduced their family members. The students received certificates of achievement and $50 each for completing the program—historians being paid for their efforts to preserve OMI history, all while learning new technology, meeting their neighbors, and getting a chance to show off their creativity.

A second cohort of students from the Beacon Center at James Denman Middle School went through the program in the fall. They produced *Getting to Know You OMI*, which offered the history of the Ohlone people from Rico Miranda, alongside community interviews. The filmmakers also shared some of their own hopes for the future.

The youth video program was showcased at two OMI History Days, held at Temple United Methodist Church on October 11, 2003 and Voice of Pentecost Church (in the old El Rey Theatre) on March 27, 2004. Visitors saw displays of old photographers, chatted with their



Kirkham shacks being removed from their lot, March 5, 2005.

neighbors, and left with a free OMI History Booklet. The student films were screened, alongside a 1920s newsreel of the neighborhood and the building of Westwood Park, with colorful narration from Woody LaBounty.

The "I Am OMI" project also encompassed the production of an original play spearheaded by ArtsConnection, produced by Maria Picar, and directed by Norita Gonzalez-Blum. Both actors and backstage roles were filled by community members, who came together to tell the history of the OMI based on neighborhood stories. *Once Upon a Time, Now and Then* ran at the Diego Rivera Theatre at City College of San Francisco on June 12, 2004. A radio drama based on OMI stories was also produced, and aired on KPFA 94.1 on June 24, 2005.

And, in a format that might sound familiar, "I am OMI" history panels were displayed in 29 storefront windows along Ocean Avenue between Harold and Victoria Streets in April 2005. The self-guided walk featured historic photos, maps, and brochures alongside excerpts from interviews with longtime residents. LaBounty also gave a guided tour along the route. Just as in West Portal, some of these businesses remain while others have left the neighborhood. They are frozen in time here, as partners in celebrating the history of the OMI's central commercial corridor.

Work conducted for the "I am OMI" project eventually led to the Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside Neighborhoods Historic Context Statement, written by LaBounty and Richard Brandi for the San Francisco Planning Department. LaBounty's book on Ingleside Terraces, published in 2012, also grew out of this project. Additionally, there's a clear throughline from the History Days conceived by WNP for this project to the much-beloved (and now defunct) San Francisco History Days, which for many years brought dozens of history groups from the city (and beyond) together for a weekend of coordinated programs at the Old U.S. Mint on 5th and Mission Streets.

Most importantly, creating comfortable spaces for community members to share their stories has become a hallmark for how WNP does history. We do this by letting people respond to us on social media channels, start their own threads on our website's community message boards, or sit down to chat with us as part of our never-ending oral history program. We also focus on oral history projects that aim to elevate specific communities, like the Tales from Kelly's Cove program, and our support of the Chinese Historical Society of America with Chinese in the Sunset and Chinese in the Richmond.

KIRKHAM SHACKS

Simultaneous to the West Portal History Walk and "I am OMI," WNP was asked by community members to respond to a preservation crisis in the Sunset District, which fundamentally changed the size and scope of our fledgling nonprofit.

Between 2002 and 2006, WNP salvaged four refugee cottages that were built after the 1906 earthquake and fire and then converted into permanent residences at 4329 and 4331 Kirkham Street. Earthquake refugee cottages, or "shacks," were built by the San Francisco Relief Corporation to house thousands of disaster-displaced residents in eleven refugee camps throughout the city. From September 1906 to March 1907, union carpenters built over 5,000 cottages made of cedar-shingle roofs, fir floors, and redwood walls. When the camps began closing in August 1907, refugees could buy cottages for $100 or less and have them hauled to



Volunteers celebrate the restoration of Shack One, March, 19, 2006.

private lots. Two or more were often cobbled together to form larger “starter homes.”

The four Kirkham Shacks were moved from a refugee camp (likely Camp Richmond, where Park-Presidio Boulevard is today) and joined together to form two cottages in the Outer Sunset. “The Kirkies,” as the shacks were affectionately called, were assembled by Felix H. Irvine, a dance instructor and carpenter who had purchased a lot on K Street (later Kirkham) near 48th Avenue.

It’s estimated that less than 50 earthquake cottages survive today. These humble, often hidden structures came back into public consciousness in the early 1980s when “shack activist” Jane F. Cryan began lobbying for their preservation after discovering that she was herself living in one. Her efforts created City Landmark #171, a complex of shacks at 1227 24th Avenue, among other victories and some losses.

Many of these cottages suffered from neglect, intentional or otherwise, and the Kirkies were no exception. The last owners, brothers Ronald and Jeffrey Reich, put their property on the market and applied for a permit to demolish the 96-year-old cottages in June 2002.



Miranda and Woody LaBounty at Shack One on Market Street, April 2006.



Nicole Meldahl and Arnold Woods at San Francisco History Days at the Old Mint, March 2019.

Tenant Stephen Bosserman said of the shacks at the time, "They're both very dilapidated, dry-rotted. It's sad to see them go, but they just weren't livable."[3] Even Woody LaBounty admitted that the cottages had been in terrible shape for years. The paint was peeled, the roofs were rotting, and the back cottage didn't even have heat.

However, preservation and historical groups got wind of the demolition proposal. The site had been flagged by the Planning Department after a failed effort to landmark the buildings in the late 1980s. They sent a letter informing the Reichs that the shacks may be a historic resource and subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review in August 2002. City Planner Moses Corrette also notified San Francisco Architectural Heritage (now San Francisco Heritage), who in turn notified WNP that the Kirkies were endangered. WNP soon launched a multi-year campaign to save the shacks.

To explain the importance of these unassuming shacks to skeptics, WNP created a brochure using historic photographs from the San Francisco Public Library. When the *San Francisco Chronicle* covered WNP's effort to save the Kirkies in August 2004, staff writer Kathleen Sullivan was skeptical. "It takes some imagination to picture the precious heirlooms David Gallagher sees when he looks at a pair of dilapidated wooden homes that have long shared a single lot a few blocks from Ocean Beach."[4]

By that time, however, a new generation of union carpenters from Mayta & Jensen Inc. were leaving their 9-5 jobs working on the Cliff House to donate their time by demolishing rooms, removing part of the roof, and exposing the original cottages from within years of expansions. Reed Walker, a project manager at Mayta & Jensen, also convinced three other Bay Area companies to donate their services: Bluewater Environmental Services Inc., Sheedy Drayage Co., and Recology Sunset Scavenger. Donations were key at a time when WNP had no formal office and just over 100 members. The Reich brothers, who were very cooperative once they realized their property was historic, donated their $8,000 demolition budget to the preservation effort.

All four salvaged cottages were moved to a backlot at the San Francisco Zoo on March 5, 2005. With the help of numerous volunteer work parties, WNP comprehensively restored one of the shacks back to its period of significance. Shack One was then displayed on Market Street at Yerba Buena Lane from April 3-29, 2006, as part of the earthquake's centennial commemoration. Over the course of the month, 13,000 visitors learned about the earthquake refugee camps alongside an exhibition on the science of earthquake



West Portal Pub Crawl, September 2018.

retrofitting. WNP opened Shack One at 5am on April 18th—just a half-block from Lotta's Fountain, where San Franciscans annually mourn the city's worst disaster.

Following the commemoration, Shack One was donated to the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society (now the San Francisco Historical Society) and installed in the Conservation Center at the San Francisco Zoo, where the public can visit it. The three remaining cottages—one of which was beyond restoration—were donated to the 5th Avenue Institute, a nonprofit in Oakland. WNP also began certifying extant cottages, expanding the list Cryan began in the 1980s by conducting field work and listing them on outsidelands.org after we were sufficiently convinced. The list has grown to cover neighborhoods across the city, and beyond to Santa Cruz and San Bruno.

Due to the publicity around the Kirkham Shacks, WNP became the de facto expert on earthquake refugee cottages in San Francisco. In 2007, WNP received a California Governor's Award for Historic Preservation. WNP is also significantly acknowledged in the Planning Department's Earthquake Shacks Theme Document.

WNP hosted a virtual program in April 2022 that highlighted the Planning Department's efforts to identify and protect extant cottages, with guests LaBounty and Cryan. "Saving The San Francisco Earthquake Shacks" was recorded and is available on WNP's YouTube Channel. And to bring everything full circle, our 2024 partnership with the Planning Department to assist with community outreach in the Richmond District reconnected us with City Planner Moses Corrette. This city isn't as big as she thinks she is, and projects like saving the Kirkies from demolition show that size doesn't matter.

THE FUTURE OF WNP

In 2019, WNP started its next chapter with the appointment of longtime volunteer and board member Nicole Meldahl to the role of Executive Director. LaBounty left to work with San Francisco Heritage, for which he is now President and CEO; Gallagher left in 2021 and launched SFMemory.org, where he continues to share historical discoveries.

This year will see the launch of a brand new landing page called, ironically, wnpsf.org. Here, we will gather under one umbrella all that WNP has come to be known for, leading visitors to our work about the Outside Lands, our citywide photo archive on OpenSFHistory, and everything related to the Cliff House Project. Proof that everything comes back around!

1. https://outsidelands.org/wnp-ten-years.php.
2. "Portal Into History," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 3 2002.
3. "Cottages Earmarked for Demolition," *Sunset Beacon*, September 2002.
4. "Saving the cottages that saved San Francisco in 1906," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 2004.



A Mystery Creek in the Outside Lands

By Peter Starzhevskiy

Before I set out, I found that the SF Public Utilities Commission Flood Risk map had already placed this creek against a modern-day map, which helped me properly locate it. I began my day as close as possible to where the creek's origin was marked on the map, about half a block east and uphill from Kensington Way and Ulloa Street. I looked around and below, but there were no signs of any flowing water in the manholes under Ulloa.

I began to have doubts about the survival of the creek, but continued west down Ulloa to see if there could be water building up further down the slope. A couple blocks down at Dorchester Way and Ulloa, I stopped at a conspicuous storm drain in the middle of the intersection. Kneeling down, the sound of trickling water below gave me hope that this creek still existed after all. Evidently, it was fed by a spring somewhere between Edgehill Mountain and Mount Davidson, and in the rainy season, I imagine it could have carried a decent amount of water.

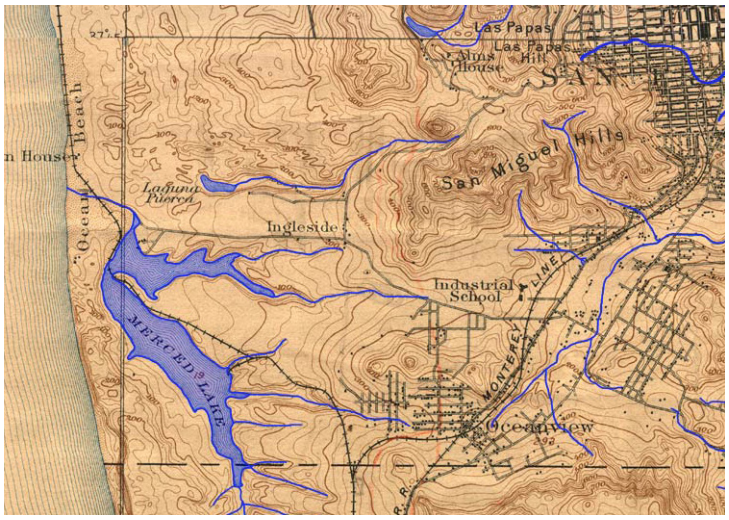
Walking a block further downhill along Ulloa, the drain below Claremont Boulevard held the same stream of water. Scanning the intersection's topography, it became clear that I was standing where the creek once had flowed, which was now an empty gulley topped off by asphalt.

I moved "downstream" past the West Portal commercial district to 15th Avenue and Wawona Street, where the Flood Risk map indicated a flood-prone area. The creek, according to the map, passed underneath the homes just northeast of the intersection. I found a number of Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1915 which mark the creek's exact location in the immediate area of the intersection.

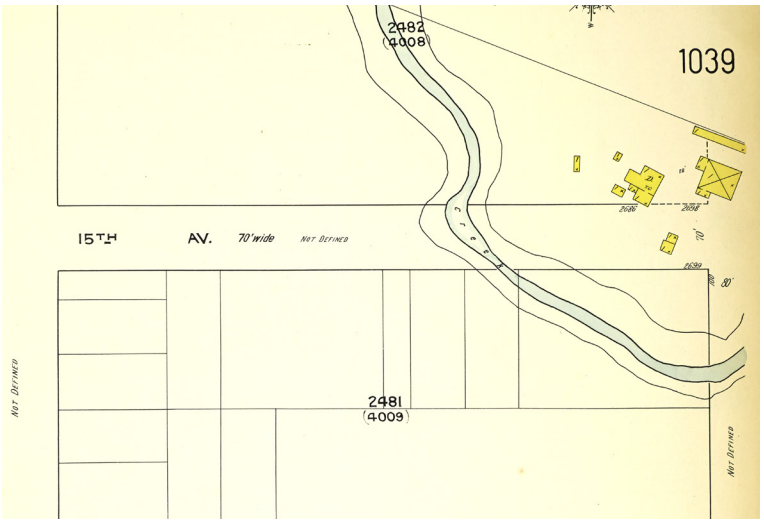
At the intersection, yet another manhole. While Arden Wood castle towered over me, the sound of a torrent of water ran below me. Both the Sanborn and Flood maps were correct. The Sanborn maps documented the creek as moving only a few paces from 15th and Wawona, so the culvert must have moved the creek's waters slightly south. It was also obvious how easily the area could flood, with three surrounding slopes able to carry water down into this intersection during a rainstorm. It was only further proof that a stream once flowed here.

San Francisco is a city that is defined by water. San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean form the contours of the city's boundaries, and the natural bodies of water and waterways that are within tell their own stories. Lobos Creek, Lake Merced, and Islais Creek loom large in the conception of our natural environment. However, the casualties of San Francisco's urban expansion – the creeks and small lakes that were hidden or lost completely – tell their own interesting stories. I came upon one of these hidden creeks, buried underground many decades ago as San Francisco's concrete footprint moved toward the Pacific Ocean. On the 2008 San Francisco Historical Creek Map, the blue line which meandered down from the east, through what is now West Portal, before emptying into Laguna Puerca (Pine Lake), caught my eye. I had never heard of any creek running through that area, so I went out to get a sense of it and figure out whether it still existed in any form.

Elevated view northwest of Pine Lake with low water level, circa 1910. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.468)



Detail from 2008 San Francisco Historical Creek Map; USGS 1895 topographic sheet with original creeks in blue. (By Christopher Richard, courtesy of Oakland Museum of California)



Detail from 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of San Francisco. (Courtesy of Library of Congress)



View west from about Kensington Way down the future Ulloa Street, with 15 Allston Way at center, circa 1915. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.0488)



Flooded intersection at 15th Avenue and Wawona, February 13, 1938. (Photo by E.W. Eaton, San Francisco Examiner; Fang family San Francisco Examiner photograph archive © The Regents of the University of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license / BANC PIC 2006.029)

There were plans for preserving the creek when St. Francis Wood and St. Francis Circle were being built in the early 1900s, as Richard Brandi outlines in his book, *San Francisco's St. Francis Wood*. The residence park's landscape architects, the Olmsted Brothers, "proposed to run the Muni streetcars from the [Twin Peaks] tunnel along both sides of an existing creek (covered by today's West Portal Avenue)...This would have created an extraordinary scenic drive never seen in San Francisco." Nothing came of the plan, however, it is interesting to imagine how that would have looked.

The only trouble now at 15th and Wawona was that I could see no discernable continuation of the creek's path without jumping into people's backyards. I decided against it, and made a half circle around to the 19th Avenue side of the Arden Wood eucalyptus forest. I had never really looked into this forest, and scanned the area. I was pleased to see a deep gully which stretched from 15th to 19th Avenues. Yet, at the bottom, there was no sign of water or any storm drains, only an asphalt road that led into a thicket, and an apartment complex sitting on the gully's north slope.

It is likely that this gully continued onward through the area of Wawona where I had just walked through, but it must have been completely filled in. In a footnote to his 2003 article "Farms, Fire and Forest: Adolph Sutro and Development 'West of Twin Peaks,'" Richard Brandi explains that "Merlo's ranch was next to a creek that cut a ravine along present day Wawona, behind the Ardenwood Christian Science into Sigmund Stern Grove and ending in Pine Lake. This ravine was filled in with 250,000 cubic yards from excavating the Twin Peaks tunnel in 1914-1917. Sinkholes occasionally appear on Wawona according to a neighbor on the 200 block of Wawona," the result of building on fill.

As I crossed 19th toward Stern Grove and reentered the gulch, I began to comprehend the rather strange valley which includes the grove and the Arden Wood forest. The entire gully, from 15th and Wawona to 34th Avenue, was carved out by the creek over a long period of time, and it brought the water to its terminus in Pine Lake. Today, the small valley is divided in two by 19th Avenue, whose extension across the gulch was constructed in the first decade of the 1900s. There are a wealth of newspaper articles from 1899-1904 which detail the planning for the roadway, and which also reveal the name of our mystery creek.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that at the November 6, 1899 meeting of the Board of Supervisors, citizens filed a petition to fill in Trocadero Gulch, so that 19th Avenue could be extended south to Ocean Avenue. At the same meeting, the City Engineer was ordered to draw up plans for a culvert where 19th crosses Trocadero Creek. In the December 27, 1899 issue, the *Chronicle* wrote that right of way had been granted by the Spring Valley Water Company and "the owners of Trocadero." Today's Stern Grove was once owned by the Green family, who planted eucalyptus trees in the gulch and built the Trocadero Inn in 1892, which stands to this day. Although the question remains: was the inn named after the creek, or vice versa?

On November 24, 1904, the *San Francisco Call and Post* reported that the City Engineer had completed



Widening of 19th Avenue north of Sloat Boulevard, November 5, 1937. (Photo by Horace Chaffee, SF Department of Public Works; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.013)

"the macadamizing of Nineteenth avenue, between Trocadero road and Ocean avenue." Over 30 years later, in 1937, the entirety of 19th Avenue was in the process of being widened in order to support traffic from the newly-built Golden Gate Bridge, and the gulch was filled in more along 19th Avenue.

I walked on further west past the Trocadero Clubhouse, where repairs have begun to fix the damage from last year's storms. During my walk to Pine Lake, all that I saw resembling a waterway was a small, empty creek bed meandering through the redwood grove west of the clubhouse, ending just before the parking lot. The closest mention that I could find describing water reaching Pine Lake was in a post by Ron on the Western Neighborhoods Project community message board on April 5, 2006: "I have been going there for 45 plus years now, and remember when the stream from the house went all the way to the lake."

I finally reached the stone terrace alongside Pine Lake, looking for a pipe feeding into the lake, but saw nothing. Simply Pine Lake, looking as it always does, with a variety of birds and turtles resting or hunting for food. I was unable to figure out where the culvert which houses Trocadero Creek directs the water. Of the possibilities, two stand out in my mind. The first option is the culvert goes underground all the way until somehow flowing into Pine Lake where I could not see it. Or, the water is directed into the general storm system and deposited out through the Oceanside Treatment Plant at Sloat and Great Highway. If the water does indeed get diverted, Pine Lake must have been larger in the past.



Arden Wood gully, 2024. (Photo by Peter Starzhevskiy)

Despite Trocadero Creek being nearly lost to urbanization, it still lives on, beneath the homes of West Portal, and its water flows on toward an uncertain destination. In spite of an unsatisfactory ending, I was able to learn a lot about the intersection between urban development and San Francisco's natural history. And even though its destination is uncertain, the fact that some knowledge about the creek still exists is better than none. I hope that there will be further research into this and other hidden waterways in the city, and that this article will be a component in a more complete understanding of San Francisco's urban and natural spaces. If our readers have any insights into Trocadero Creek, please chime in!

Inside the Outside Lands

For those who couldn't be with us on May 15th at the 4 Star Theater, you missed an incredible 25th Birthday Bash for Western Neighborhoods Project, featuring a live recording of the *Outside Lands San Francisco* podcast with drag legend **Peaches Christ** and special co-host, SFGATE reporter **Amanda Bartlett**. We love sharing the history of neighborhood theaters at thriving neighborhood theaters, and it was especially meaningful to introduce our attendees to Peaches.

It feels too recent to be history, but the bawdy "Midnight Mass" screenings hosted by Peaches at The Bridge Theater (now the San Francisco Baseball Academy, 3010 Geary Boulevard) in the late 1990s and early 2000s have become legendary, and speak to a San Francisco where young creatives could craft performances with far fewer regulations than now. Peaches Christ is the altar-ego of Joshua Grannell, who was the last in a long line of colorful managers at The Bridge, including Maury Schwarz—a Polish immigrant who became a world-renowned amateur boxer and raised the money to purchase the theater by gambling while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. It's truly heartwarming to see how one theater has served as a welcoming place for so many different San Franciscans in just over 70 years, from the Italian immigrant families who built it and lived nearby to members of the queer community who were able to be fully themselves way out in the midnight fog of the Richmond District. You can hear the full story on podcast episode #534. We're so grateful to Amanda for bringing her expansive knowledge of horror films and camp culture to the night, and of course to Joshua for allowing us to share his history with some of our greatest supporters.

We ended the evening with a fashion contest, won by **Jamie O'Keefe** and **Eileen Braunreiter**, who wore a custom WNP dress. Honorable mention goes to **Woody LaBounty**, whose attire was described by Peaches as "Studio 54 Indiana Jones." He was a good sport all night as we praised his co-founding of WNP way back when, and gifted him a deeply historic relic: a six-pack of Anchor Steam beer. We surpassed our fundraising goal, thanks in large part to **Adam Bergeron** of CinemaSF, who waived the rental cost of the 4 Star to help us out. Time and time again, our history friends astound us with their generosity.

In other news, WNP is assisting the San Francisco Planning Department this year with community outreach in the Richmond District as part of the San Francisco Citywide Cultural Resources Survey. Specifically, we're helping folks learn more about two Historic Context Statements that identify, document, and consequently (hopefully) preserve places and cultural landscapes significant to the city's Chinese American and Russian American communities.

We launched this partnership in March with a podcast episode interviewing Rich Sucre, Deputy Director of Current Planning for San Francisco, who spoke about how the Survey informs historic preservation efforts in







Community members interact with SF Planning Department staff at the Community Forum. (Courtesy of Moses Corrette)



Peaches Christ, Jamie O'Keefe, Eileen Braunreiter, Woody LaBounty, and Amanda Bartlett during the WNP 25th Birthday Bash fashion contest. (Courtesy of Yameen)

the city. Working closely with authors of the Statements like **Eric Mar** and **Nina Bogden**, we've embarked on a series of in-person programs, which started with a Community Forum on June 5th. Attendees were able to meet city planners and learn more about significant stories in the neighborhood. It was great to see so many community members gathered in one place and learn more about how the city is working to identify and share stories about the people and places that make San Francisco culturally unique and so very special.

Nicole Meldahl and **Chelsea Sellin** spent half a day traversing the Richmond to post fliers advertising the Forum—in English, Chinese, and Russian—in local businesses, library branches, and on telephone poles in commercial corridors. While walking back to the car, they saw three older men looking at one of the fliers, which was very exciting, proof that this grassroots marketing plan was working! Getting closer, they overheard the men complaining because the flier was not in English. The rhetoric was sadly very familiar: something about this being America, obligatory comment about politically correct nonsense and city bureaucracy, finished off with a non-sequitur grumble about slow streets. It was, to be honest, the perfect illustration for why these Historic Context Statements are so important.

A draft of the Chinese American Historic Context Statement is currently available for public review, while the Russian American Historic Context Statement will be released soon. The stories of how these communities came to the Richmond District are very different but, in many ways, also very similar: enduring strife abroad; battling racist immigration policies to get here; building networks of support; and still, to this day, encountering the daily violence of systemic prejudice. Making these stories and the commonalities between them more visible is so important and we're lucky to have entities like the Planning Department and nonprofits like the Chinese Historical Society of America, which spearheaded the *Chinese in the Sunset* and *Chinese in the Richmond* projects, doing this work on our side of town.

We hope you'll be able to join us for a workshop and focus groups later this year that will make these Historic Context Statements stronger by including as many stories as possible.

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More photos from WNP's 25th Birthday Bash





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