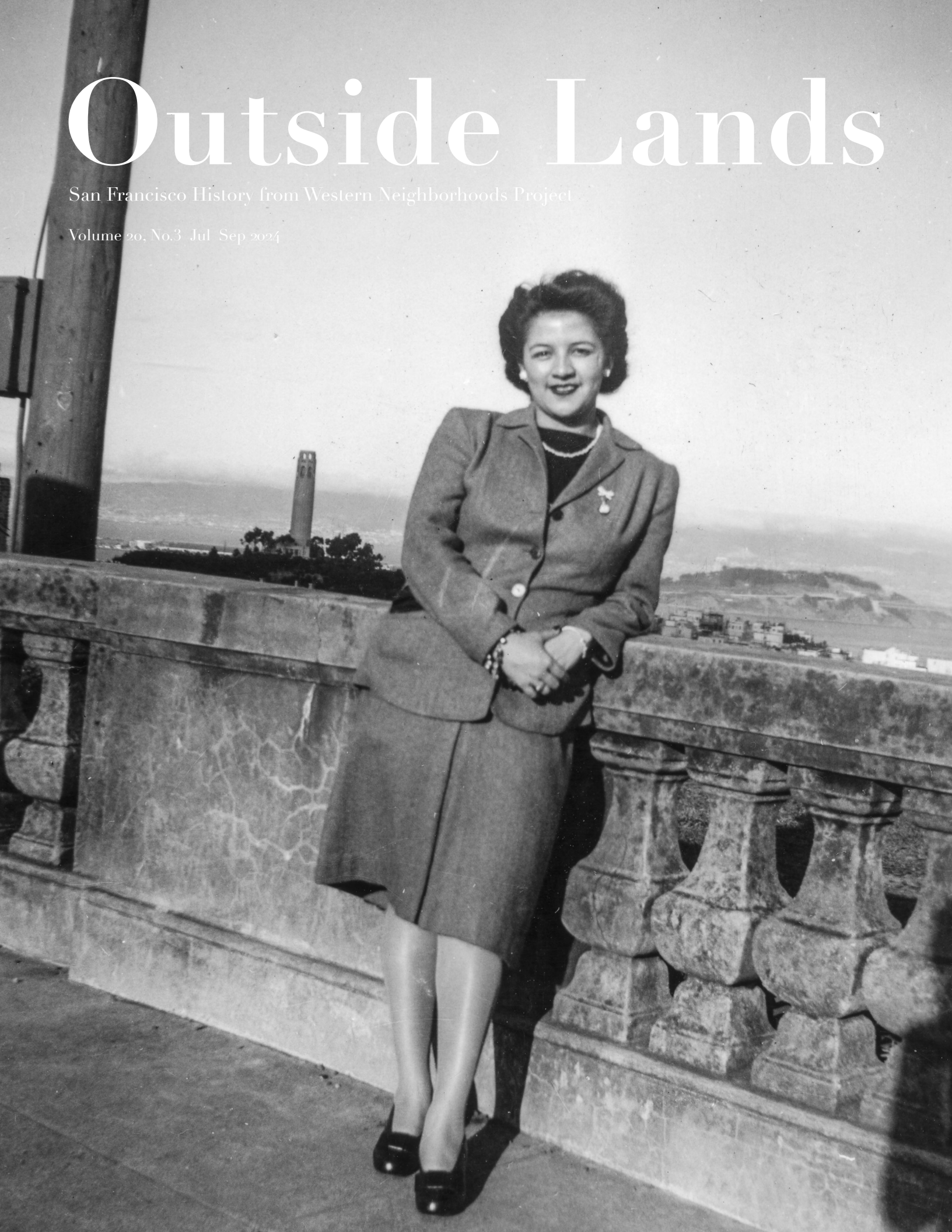
Outside Lands

San Francisco History from Western Neighborhoods Project

Volume 20, No.3 Jul Sep 2024



OUTSIDE LANDS

History from Western Neighborhoods Project
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Cover: Unidentified woman at the Russian Hill-Vallejo Street Crest park, 1940s. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.7616)

Right: Unidentified woman on ferry boat in San Francisco Bay, July 29, 1928. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.6919)

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

NICOLE MELDAHL



We've finished the busiest time of year here at Western Neighborhoods Projects, when the weather heats up and requests come in to participate in all kinds of community events. It's crazy, but I love it.

I have always loved the summer months; time seemed to slow down and we got to spend extra time with friends and family. Devouring books by the water, afternoons all dressed up and chaperoned by my dad at the Del Mar Racetrack where he worked, warm evening walks with loved ones, hosting big BBQ dinners—these were hallmarks of my summers. The older I get the more I treasure that kind of precious time, and it's the simple moments I miss most.

The simple moments are often overlooked when we dig into the past. Big events are used to benchmark a life, but when WNP conducts oral histories, we like to ask about day-to-day living in the western neighborhoods. That kind of living is recounted in beautiful detail in ***Dale Blosser Remembers***. We're separated by a full generation, but like Dale, I met my husband doing something I love, and we too occasionally take in a film at the Balboa Theater. These kinds of touchstones connect us across ages, and the historic businesses that are thriving on the west side is what makes that possible.

But the simple moments don't often make headlines, except in this magazine OR a small local newspaper. Neighborhood news, like that found in WNP's collection of *The Richmond Banner*, is invaluable to community historians. ***Inside the Outside Lands*** highlights the steps we're taking to preserve and make the newspapers accessible. Funding for this kind of work is hard to come by and our Director of Programs, Chelsea Sellin, has done an incredible job securing the support needed to keep the work moving forward. As they say, it takes a village.

I'm lucky to have always had an incredible village at my disposal. Turning 40 in September made me even more nostalgic than normal (which, frankly, feels impossible), and I've been thinking a lot about the people who got me here. I come from a long line of quietly incredible women. These women, as well as those I "meet" doing research for WNP, inspired me to curate a very personal exhibition featuring anonymous women from the OpenSFHistory archive. Now on view on street lamp banners along Great Highway from Lincoln to Sloat, you can read more in ***Look at Her, She is HER(E)***. If you're local, go see for yourselves; they're magnificent.

I was nervous about this public installation because it's very personal for me, but then again, all this work is personal because it's about people in this community I've chosen to be part of. We just wrapped up our second annual Shipwreck Week, and are both honored and so very sad to present one last article by **Arnold Woods,** on the explosion of the *Parallel.* The ship destroyed part of the Cliff House, which feels right, since losing the man who helped us save the Cliff House collection and run The Museum at The Cliff has left a parallel hole in WNP. It's almost a year since his passing and we're still adjusting as well as can be expected, thanks to the reservoir of incredible people who remain with us.

All of you, and the love we have for this work, has kept us calm and carrying on. We're so grateful for members like you, and for your grace when another unforeseen loss causes your magazine to be delayed, as this one has….which is a long way of saying: thanks for being with us, History Friends.



WHERE IN WEST S.F.?

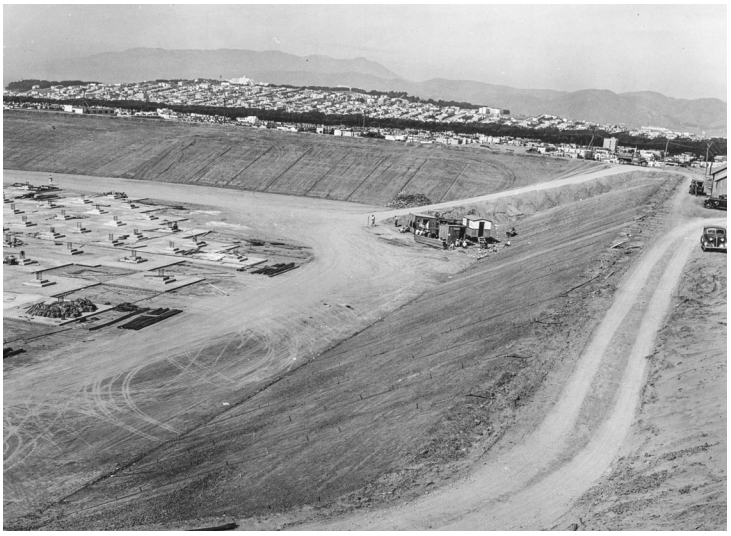
By Paul Judge and Margaret Ostermann

If you're not from the Sunset District, it may register as simply utilitarian: nothing more than a water reservoir on a map. But for its neighbors, Sunset Reservoir is a community gathering place. Its perimeter hosts a perpetual flow of foot traffic, where faces become familiar, dogs learn who carries cookies to hand out, and friends catch up upon its benches.

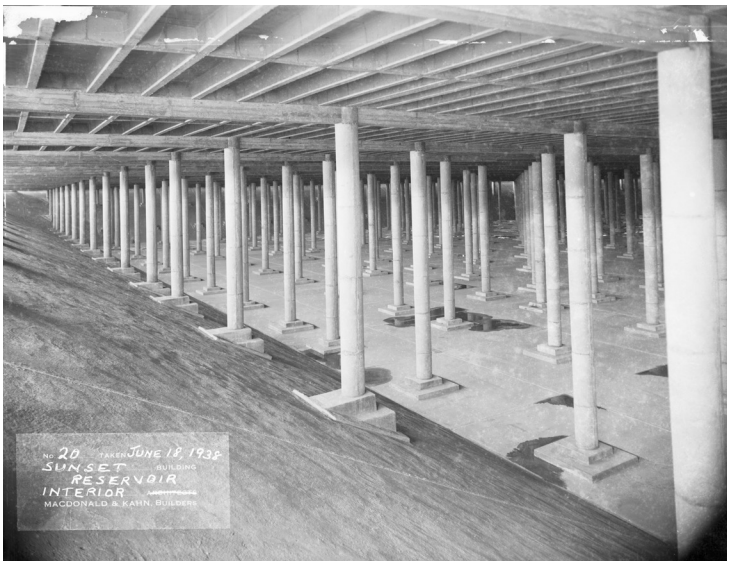
Our mystery photo of Sunset Reservoir's construction in 1937 inspired a flood of guesses, confirming its park-like status in the hearts of its neighbors. Among those who recognized the future structure of the 'hole in the ground' were: **Julie Alden**, **Matthew Ayotte**, **Glenn Bachmann**, **Frederick Baumer, Ray Casabonne**, **Robert Cherny, Louette Colombano**, **David Friedlander**, **Wendy Herzenberg, Judy Jacobs, Larry Simi**, **Martin Szeto,** and **Peter Tannen.**

In 1933 it was that original utilitarian need for water storage that convinced voters to pass a $12 million bond measure: a package of five reservoir and pipeline projects necessary for the upcoming arrival of long-fought-for Hetch Hetchy water. Condemnation proceedings claimed the sandy lots bound by 24th to 28th Avenues and Ortega to Quintara Streets. By 1936 the streets within the reservoir's boundaries were closed and abandoned, giving a sly subtlety to the "secret" code phrase **Daniel Hollander** and his wife use when it's time to leave a party: "We have to get to our appointment over on 26th & Pacheco."

A fascinating progression of photos—available on opensfhistory.org—document the quick construction of the reservoir's north basin by builders MacDonald & Kahn. It wasn't until 1956 that the Public Utilities Commission sought bids to begin excavation for the reservoir's south basin. In the meantime the "wild side of the reservoir" was a magnet for childhood exploration and horseplay, where both wild strawberries and garter snakes could be collected.



View north of construction of Sunset Reservoir, October 12, 1937. (Photo by Horace Chaffee, SF Department of Public Works; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp36.10023)



Sunset Reservoir interior, June 18, 1938. (Morton-Waters Co., SCRAP Negative Collection; courtesy of SCRAP / wnp100.00555)

When the south basin was dedicated on October 26, 1959, the dual-basined Sunset Reservoir could lay claim as the city's largest, holding an immense 176.7 million gallons of water under its 11.44 acre roof. As **Gino Fortunato** hypothesized: "The only thing that could be that big on the west side is the Sunset Reservoir!"

But all that water is held up upon a hillside, which classifies the reservoir as a dam for state safety officials. This of course being the west side, that particularly steep northwest corner sits on native sand and silt. As **Frank Dunnigan** contemplated his first home purchase in 1979, "my real estate agent (who was trying to sell me a more expensive house elsewhere) planted this seed in my mind, 'Do you really want to live on the downhill side of that BIG reservoir?'"



Sunset Reservoir's northwest corner at 28th Avenue and Ortega Street, 1990s. (Photo by Jennifer Cheek, Richmond Review Newspaper Collection; courtesy of Paul Kozakiewicz, Richmond Review / wnp07.00019)

In the early 2000s, state officials declared it time for a seismic retrofit. Existing soils were mixed with cementitious materials to form a massive grid of columns within the worrisome northwest embankment, followed by the bracing of support columns and the roof within the north reservoir. **Siobhan Ruck** works with the geotechnical engineer who was responsible for the strengthening, a project quite literally close to home for her and husband **Bill Ruck**.

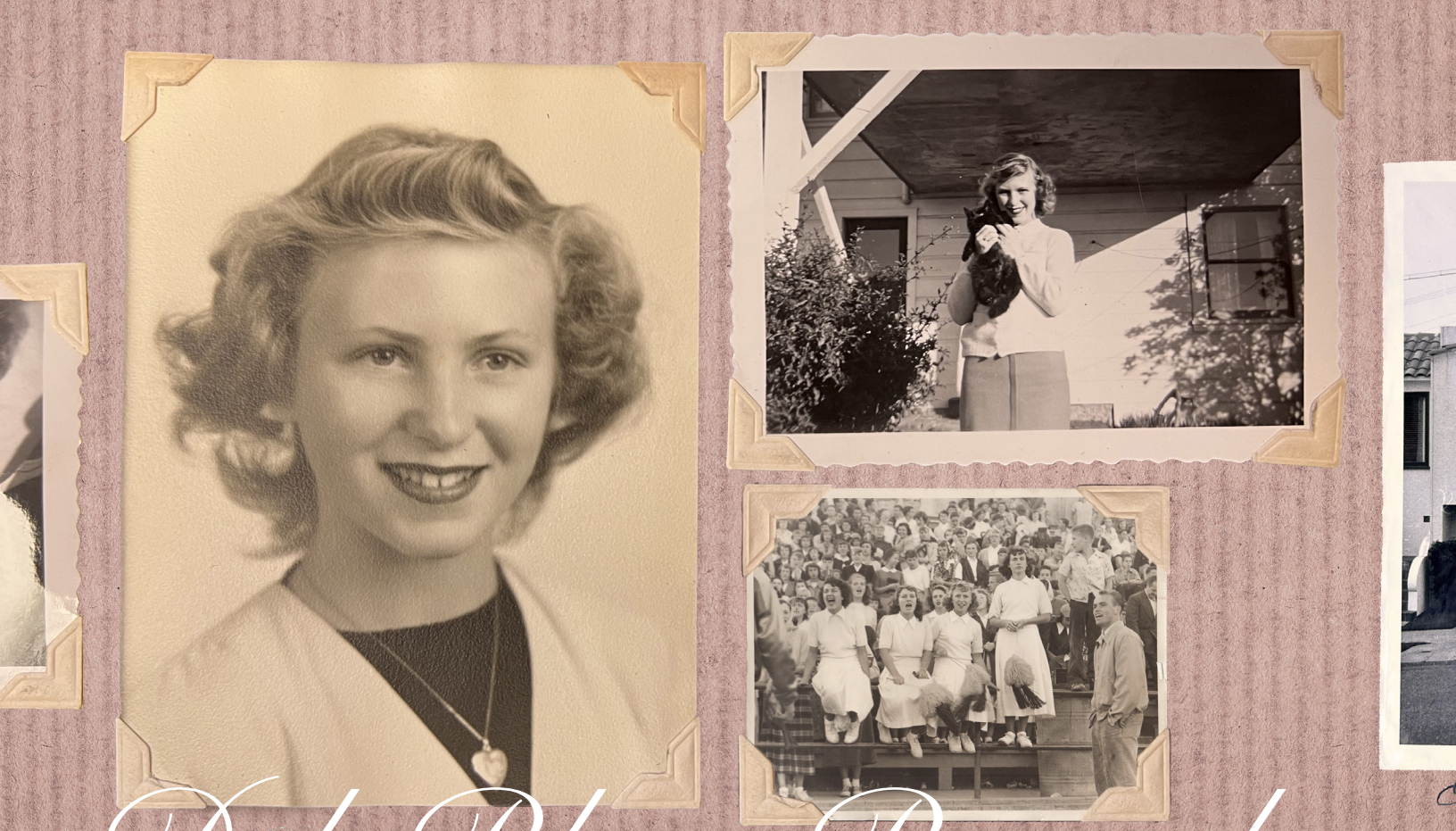
Neighbors were anxious to see the project fences come down, so they could once again stroll the terraced walkways of the northwest corner. **Bobbie Piety** fondly recalled running and sliding upon that steep grassy slope as a child, where today you can reliably find a group of dogs meeting up around dinnertime to scale the hillside in pursuit of balls. Meanwhile, uphill on the benches, you'll find the smaller and elderly dogs mingling while owners and friends take in the vistas, be it shallow in fog or for miles to the Farallon Islands and Marin Headlands. Eagle-eyed readers **David Volansky** and **Leif Hatlen** picked out landmarks such as the VA Medical Center and George Washington High School in the background of our mystery photo.

From dawn to dusk walkers and runners loop the reservoir, children emerge from their strollers to frolic in the playground, and students from Lincoln High spill out to consume their lunches. Sunset Reservoir was built to hold water, but it's also loved and treated like a neighborhood park.



Where is this little corner of the west side?

Send your guesses to chelsea@outsidelands.org



Dale Blosser Remembers

By Dale Blosser and Nicole Hallenbeck

From reminiscing about growing up in the Parkside to discussing popular west side attractions like Playland at the Beach and Fleishhacker Pool, Dale Blosser's oral history offers unique and thought-provoking insights into the history of San Francisco. Born and raised in the city in the 1930s and 40s, Dale shared her fond childhood memories with Executive Director Nicole Meldahl on March 24, 2021. She also talked about her adult life in San Francisco, including becoming a folk dancer and volunteering at the California Academy of Sciences.

Growing up West Side

Dale was the first child born to Frank Reinke and Doris Baines, in 1932. The family lived in an apartment across the street from the Balboa Theater, in the Outer Richmond District. There, Dale warmly remembers playing in the sun with her toys on the roof's landing. San Francisco native Frank was a linotype printer, while Doris, who grew up in El Verano, Sonoma County, was a stay at home mom.

After Dale's brother Ted was born in 1937, the Reinke family moved to a house on 32nd Avenue between Quintara and Rivera, in the Parkside District. Growing up in an era before televisions were widely owned in family homes, Dale and Ted spent much of their time outside. The neighborhood was still sparsely developed at that time, and she reminisces that "We kids played in the sand dunes all the time, and we had a great deal of fun, really a good time. My mother was such a good housekeeper, and there was always sand in the house." Dale and the other neighborhood kids also played in the new homes being built in the Parkside. Dale describes herself as a tomboy and adds, "We had a lot of fun because the street didn't go through, so we could play all sorts of games, like One Foot Off the Gutter—all these games, where we could run across the street, because no cars came unless they were coming to a house where they lived, which was very rare. Everybody didn't even have cars in those days."



Left-to-Right: Dale, 1946. Dale with cat Pepper, 1948. Lincoln High School Song Leader Girls; Dale is third from left, Fall 1949. Reinke home at 2179 32nd Avenue, 1953. Dale, August 1946. Dale (second from left) and friends, September 26, 1946. Doris and Frank Reinke. Dale and friend Patti in downtown San Francisco, July 1952. (Courtesy of Dale Blosser)

Dale loved going to the movies, and with her friends would either walk to the Parkside Theater at 19th Avenue and Taraval, or take the streetcar downtown to the big cinemas on Market Street. She fondly remembers the Flash Gordon serials, although a strong early memory is of her mother taking her to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at the Balboa Theater. "She had to take me out because I was so afraid of the witch, I cried."

During the summer, Dale and her friends frequently spent their days at Fleishhacker Pool. With her friend Joan, "We became friends with the lifeguards. They always knew when we were coming, and they let us in free." Dale also went to Sutro Baths, where her brother took swimming lessons. One summer, she recalls the kids all saving up three dollars each so they could go on every ride at Playland at the Beach. Dale's favorite was Laff in the Dark. They ended the day at the Fun House, because you could stay as long as you wanted, but "we used all our money and we had to walk home."

Dale especially loved roller skating at Skateland at the Beach. She took lessons, and received her own pair of skates at Christmas. As a teenager, she sewed little dresses and had a dance partner, a guy in his twenties. "On Friday nights, a lot of the kids from high school would come out, and they saw me doing these fancy dances with this fellow…I think I liked showing off a little bit [laughter]."

School and Work

Dale attended Parkside School (now Dianne Feinstein Elementary) until sixth grade. She remembers the school being very strict, particularly about the dress code, and the girls being reprimanded for their dress lengths. When a male classmate, Henry, pulled up her









dress with a stick, Dale recalls “I got mad at him and I socked him—I was tough—and he fell in the street and the traffic boys reported us.” The principal was angrier with Dale than with Henry, but Dale looks back on that time with levity, and states that she and Henry later developed a friendship. She then attended Aptos Junior High, and had to take a streetcar and connecting bus to school each day. At Abraham Lincoln High School, Dale has fun memories of being a song leader.

On Monday nights during high school, Dale held a job at the Emporium department store downtown on Market Street. She recalls that you had to have good grades to get the job, and although her parents told her she didn’t need to work, she wanted to anyway. She wrapped packages, and “It was a very busy job, so it was fun to be busy.” Dale also reflected on how protective her mother was of her, meeting her at the bus stop at night to make sure she got home safely. Like many women, Dale experienced harassment, and someone once followed her off the streetcar. Funny enough, Dale’s mother, Doris, would later get a department store job of her own—at the City of Paris store in Stonestown Galleria.

Dale also addressed the racism she witnessed in the city growing up. She remembers her parents were very warm and welcoming to all, but the same could not be said of the other neighbors. When the first Black family moved into their neighborhood, other families voiced their disapproval, but Doris went over and welcomed them to the neighborhood. Later, both Dale and Doris stood up to Dale’s mother-in-law when they refused to sign a petition barring people of color from renting apartments in a building on Funston Street. Dale told her mother-in-law, “If they’re nice people, and they can afford an expensive apartment, they should be allowed to move there.”

Finding Community

After graduating high school in 1950, Dale attended the Lux School for Industrial Training for Girls, where she studied to become a medical secretary. During college, she also worked as a salesgirl at the White House department store on Grant Avenue. She received her degree in 1952 (the final year of Lux’s operation), and immediately got a job at San Francisco General Hospital, where she stayed for two years. After Dale married her first husband, Ralph Akin, they moved to Santa Cruz. She worked at Santa Cruz Medical Center, and remembers that “There were nine doctors, so I was really busy. That was a lot of fun.” After her divorce, Dale and her sons, Stephen and Mark, moved back to San Francisco to live with her parents.



Opposite Page: Dale and friends from Lux School, early 1950s. (Courtesy of Dale Blosser)
Above Left-to-Right: Powers family in Daly City, early 1960s. Bill and Dale Powers, early 1960s. Bill and Dale at Bimbo's 365 Club, November 8, 1950. Bill and Dale with friends at the Tonga Room, June 2, 1951. (Courtesy of Dale Blosser)

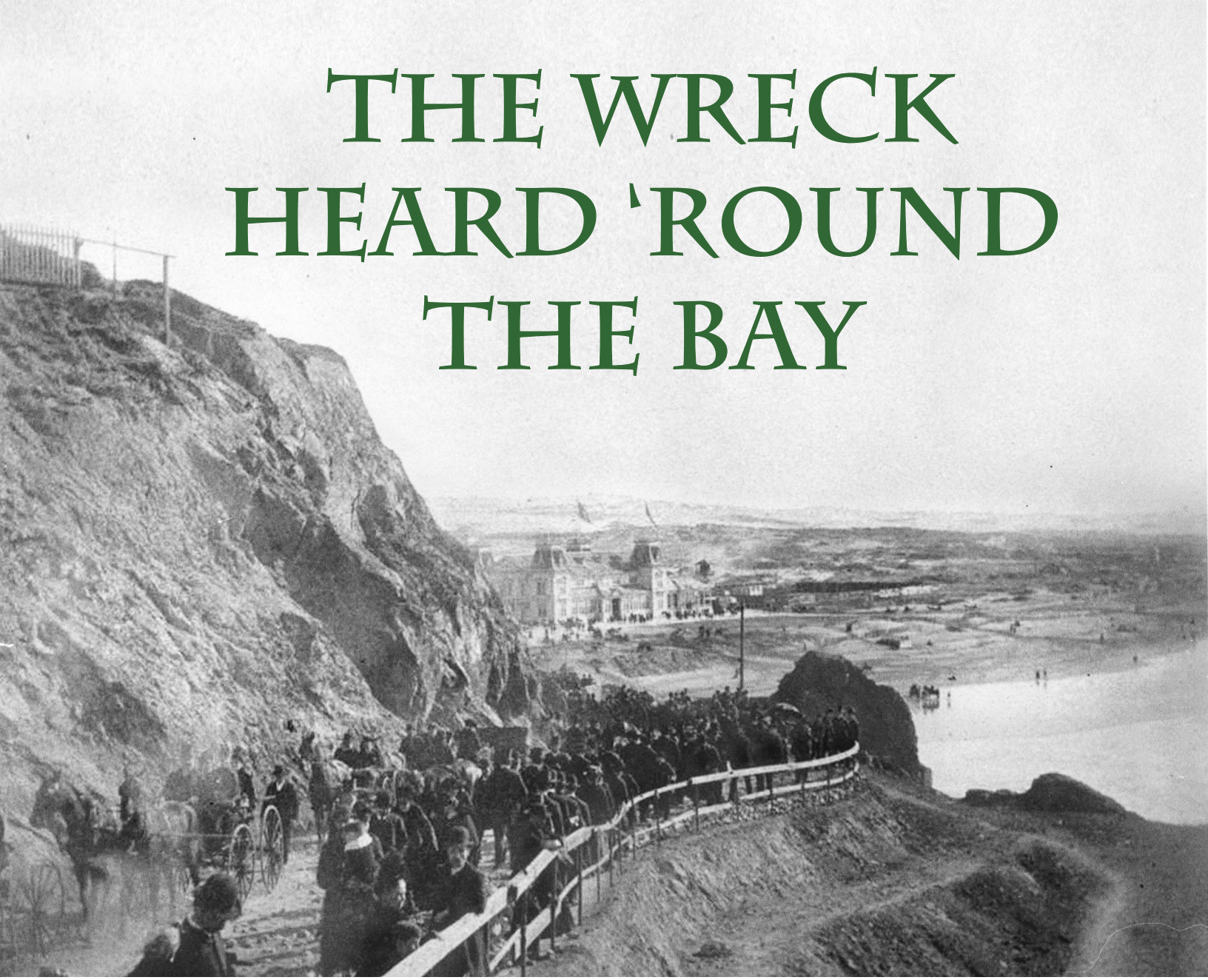
Dale's father encouraged her to find an extracurricular activity (both Frank and Doris had their own golf groups at Harding Park). So Dale took up folk dancing, and discovered an active and friendly social circle. "I was reading the paper and it showed that there was a folk dance class starting near me that I could drive to in a place called Glen Park. I signed up for that, and my goodness, I met so many nice people." Through these friends, Dale met her second husband, Bill Powers; he owned Excelsior Roofing Company. They were married at the Brookdale Lodge in Santa Cruz on Valentines Day 1960, and then moved to a new neighborhood in Daly City. Dale remarks that "Having grown up in San Francisco, where the houses were smacked together, it had four feet between each house. It seemed really special." Dale and Bill had 2 children, Bill and Wendy, and in a repeat of her own childhood, the kids "would dig in areas where they hadn't built houses yet."

Bill and Dale were married for 28 years, until his passing. Dale met her third husband, Gale Blosser, again through folk dancing. She jokes that "Everyone who knew us separately never got our names mixed up, but when we got married, people couldn't keep us straight anymore." The pair had been friends for many years, and enjoyed social gatherings with the rest of the group, such as camping trips and picnics. Gale and Dale remained married until his passing.

Dale worked at Excelsior Roofing until her retirement at age 62. In 1994, she became a volunteer docent at the California Academy of Sciences, a position she held until 2020. She led the "Highlight Tours" at the old Academy; after the current building opened she would "take a cart out and put things on it…animal skins, and skulls, and different things like that. Then people come and they ask questions. I explain why this animal has long fur, why this one has short fur, why these teeth are this way. Everything has a reason. It's fun… I love it when kids are interested." Dale especially enjoyed the museum-hosted trips in the years between the old building and the new building, when scientists would take docents to New York City and Chicago.

Dale currently lives in Millbrae with her son, Stephen, but she fondly remembers her origins. "I loved growing up in San Francisco. I loved it."

THE WRECK HEARD 'ROUND THE BAY



BY ARNOLD WOODS

Crowds on Cliff Road gathered to view the wreck of the *Parallel*; Ocean Beach Pavilion in distance, January 16, 1887. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.0781)

The Golden Gate strait has long been a hazard to ships because of frequent fog. Many vessels wrecked on their way in or out of the bay because they could not see where they were going. However, the Golden Gate could also be dangerous in clear, calm conditions because of the strong tides flowing through the strait. Those were the conditions on the night of January 15-16, 1887, and they resulted in a shipwreck that literally announced itself to the world.

A half hour after midnight on January 16, San Franciscans and beyond were awakened by a powerful blast that many thought was an earthquake. However, while the region was indeed shaken, it was not a quake but a powder keg. A 98-foot schooner called the *Parallel* had blown up at the foot of the Cliff House.

The *Parallel* was built in San Francisco in 1868 and spent its life plying the coastal trade. On January 13, 1887, the *Parallel* left San Francisco's Hay Wharf, headed to Astoria, Oregon. Hay Wharf was along Channel Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets, essentially in the area of today's Oracle Park. It was designed, of course, to



Wreckage of the Cliff House carriage sheds following the explosion of the *Parallel*. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp13.087)

receive shipments of hay for the city's horses. The *Parallel* was carrying something else though. It had a dangerous load: approximately 53 tons of black powder. Additionally, there was a large cask of blasting caps, some cases of coal oil, kerosene, a little bit of lumber and pig iron, a new salmon boat, and, yes, some hay. The cargo was intended for the Clatsop Mill Company in Astoria, with the powder going to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company in Portland.

As a schooner, the *Parallel* depended on winds to fill its sails. The crew found their voyage thwarted almost immediately. Stormy weather and heavy tides kept the ship from getting through the Golden Gate, and they were forced to turn back and wait at anchor for better weather. They made another attempt on January 14, but were again turned back.

On January 15, Captain Miller—making his first journey on the *Parallel* and second journey as a captain overall—ordered the crew to head for the Golden Gate again. The ship made it past Fort Point and had passed Mile Rock, nearly clearing Lands End. About halfway across the channel, the breeze died out and the heavy tide began pushing the *Parallel* toward the San Francisco shoreline. The crew was unable to steer and unsuccessfully tried to turn around.

The *Parallel* hailed a nearby tugboat and asked for a tow out of the breakers. The tug wanted $25 for the work, but Captain Miller said he would only pay $10. The tug said no deal and left the area. With the rocky shore approaching and knowing they were carrying dangerous cargo, Captain Miller ordered the crew to abandon ship in a rowboat around 8:30 p.m. They were in such a hurry that they left behind their clothing, money, and the ship's dog.

James Wilkins of the Cliff House noticed a light approaching the shore and notified John Hyslop, keeper of the Point Lobos Signal Station. Located in the area of present-day Fort Miley, the signal station watched for approaching ships and relayed their arrival to the Merchants Exchange downtown, via telegraph. Hyslop saw the *Parallel* drifting broadside toward Point Lobos, notified the Merchant's Exchange, and the tugboat *Neptune* from the Pacific Towboat Company was dispatched to render assistance.

Hyslop then met up with Adolph Sutro and a few of his gardeners in the cove between Point Lobos and the Cliff House (present site of the Sutro Baths ruins). Sutro owned most of the land in the area, including the Cliff House. Waves repeatedly pushed the *Parallel* at the rocks by the cove until the keel was dropped onto a jagged rock about 12 feet from shore below the Cliff House. Hyslop and Sutro's employees lowered a line to the *Parallel*, which still had its sails set and lights burning, but discovered that no one was onboard to take it.



Cliff Cottage showing damage from the explosion of the *Parallel*, January 1887. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp13.084)

"LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN A TORNADO AND AN EARTHQUAKE. THE SOUND WAS SHARP AND, I BELIEVE, AS LOUD AS COULD BE PRODUCED."

Meanwhile, Wilkins took a buggy down to the Life Saving Station at Fulton and Great Highway and woke up the crew there. Trained and at the ready to assist victims of shipwrecks, the lifesavers scrambled to arrange a rescue of the *Parallel*'s crew. Wilkins used his horse to help haul the lifesaving gear up the hill and into the cove. The lifesavers arrived about 11:40 p.m., but Hyslop informed them that no one was aboard. Sutro's employees and the Life Saving Station crew then worked to save parts of the ship that had washed ashore, and managed to rescue the ship's dog.

Given the darkness, the lifesavers decided to wait until morning before investigating further. The crew's chief, Captain C. F. Kroeger, posted a couple of guards, Henry Smith and John Wilson, near the ship. Smith and Wilson built a bonfire on a bluff above the *Parallel*. Wilkins closed up the Cliff House and everyone went home to bed. Hyslop returned to the signal station at 12:15 a.m.

The *Parallel* would not wait for the morning, however. Getting pounded by waves against the rocks either caused some friction that ignited the cargo or knocked over oil lamps left burning by the crew. The cask of blasting caps exploded, which touched off the black powder and kerosene early on the morning of Sunday, January 16.

The resulting explosion threw anyone in the vicinity out of their beds. Given the way the ground trembled, the first assumption was that another great earthquake had struck. The *Parallel* and the rock it was lodged on were utterly obliterated. Small bits of wood, iron pieces, and rocks were found all over Lands End, Sutro Heights, and down Ocean Beach, as much as a mile away from the explosion site. Tides carried debris up and down the Pacific Coast where they were found in the ensuing weeks and months.

The Cliff House—where many of the establishment's staff also lived—suffered the brunt of the damage. Its north wing was destroyed, balconies collapsed, doors were knocked off hinges, all windows were shattered, large chunks of plastering were torn off, walls had



Horse-drawn lifeboat and crew in front of the U.S. Life Saving Station, circa 1890. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp4/wnp4.1137)

holes as if hit by cannonballs, tables and chairs were overturned, and debris was strewn about the entire building. Furthermore, most of the restaurant's stables and carriage sheds were in ruins. The frame of the *Parallel*'s skylight was found on the Cliff House's roof.

Uphill from the Cliff House, the entire Cliff Cottage was pushed five feet by the blast. Cliff House proprietor R. C. Pearson lived there with his family (including Wilkins, his son-in-law). A guest, Mrs. Fay, was sleeping in a room facing the ocean. The blast tore apart her room, breaking her bed into many pieces and tearing all the plaster off the walls. A baby asleep in an adjoining room suffered cuts from broken window glass. Mrs. Pearson suffered a deep gash above her right eye from the glass flying about. A stove was torn apart, a marble mantel was torn from the wall, roof beams were snapped, and the entire back of the cottage was blown in.

The Sutro Heights estate above the Cliff House, where Adolph Sutro lived, had its windows blown out and its outer buildings badly damaged. The conservatory's glass pane exterior was nearly completely demolished. Surprisingly, with the exception of *Venus Coming from the Bath*, which was reduced to terracotta rubble, the statues on the grounds came through the experience intact. A clock in Sutro's bedroom stopped at 12:34 a.m., fixing the time of the explosion.

The Ocean Beach Pavilion, down the hill at Great Highway near today's Balboa Street, had its large front doors blown open, the locks completely snapped, and windows broken. At the Life Saving Station, Captain Kroeger said the explosion felt "like a cross between a tornado and an earthquake. The sound was sharp and, I believe, as loud as could be produced. The earth trembled as though suffering from a terrible convulsion of nature, and the houses rattled as though they would go to pieces. My house felt the shock very severely."[1]

Hyslop had just arrived back at the Point Lobos Signal Station when the blast occurred. He initially thought that Sutro's powder magazine, about 100 yards from the station, had blown up, but when he looked out, he could see no damage to it. At that point he realized that it must have been the *Parallel*. He tried to telephone for help, but found that it wasn't working. Windows had been blown out at the station and things strewn about.

Hyslop ran down to the Cliff House to use its telephone, but it was also out of service, so he headed to the Seal Rock House (just north of the Ocean Beach Pavilion). Its phone was also damaged, but Hyslop was able to repair it and finally send a message to the Merchant's Exchange that the *Parallel* had exploded. The message stated that the Cliff House and pretty much everything within a half mile of Point Lobos had been devastated.



Ocean side of the Cliff House, 1880s. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.0438)

A police captain named Loos telephoned San Francisco Police Chief Patrick Crowley and requested assistance. Loos reported that the Cliff House had been "blown to atoms."[2] Chief Crowley dispatched four officers in a hack to Point Lobos.

Smith and Wilson, the lifesavers who stayed on the bluff above the *Parallel*, were knocked back some 200 feet in the explosion. They were severely injured and initially not expected to make it. Smith's skull had deep lacerations to the bone, a compound fracture of his right elbow, and bad bruises over his entire body. He was transported to the Life Saving Station. Wilson had a fractured nose, severe scalp wounds, many bruises, and internal injuries. He was taken to the Point Lobos Signal Station. They were eventually both taken to the Marine Hospital in the Presidio sometime after 3:00 a.m. Fortunately, both would survive. They were later transferred from Marine Hospital to German Hospital on January 17, at the request of their friends and because they had sufficiently recovered to be moved.

Just a month earlier, on December 17, 1886, a whaler called the *Atlantic* had wrecked below the Cliff House. One of the few survivors, a man named Powers, had been pulled out of the Ocean Beach surf by Smith. Powers was still at Marine Hospital when Smith was brought in and appointed himself Smith's personal attendant to repay him for his actions.

Around San Francisco, reports came in of earthquake-like shaking, windows and doors rattling, and things falling off shelves. People as far away as San Jose and Sacramento contacted authorities to ask what had happened. 15 miles out at sea, the shock wave struck a ship called the *Commodore*, causing the crew to believe they had struck a reef. The *Neptune* tugboat, which was still on the way to the *Parallel* when it exploded, was fortunate to be protected by rocky bluffs between it and the *Parallel*. Although his boat got a terrible shaking, Captain Ferguson stated that it would have been much worse a few minutes later, when they would have been in line of sight with the *Parallel*.

The crew of the *Parallel* was initially feared lost in the water when they did not show up on the San Francisco shoreline. Watches were posted on many wharves to look for them, but they did not turn up during the night. It turned out that when they abandoned ship, they had rowed to the Marin shoreline because they could see the Point Bonita Lighthouse there. It took them several hours to get there; the entire way, the crew waited expectedly for the *Parallel* to explode.

After arriving at Point Bonita, members of the *Parallel*'s crew offered to ride a horse into Sausalito, or take a boat back to San Francisco, to send a message about the impending danger. However, Captain Miller refused to provide security for either the horse or the boat, so no message could be sent. About an hour after the crew reached the lighthouse, the *Parallel* announced itself to the world. The crew returned to San Francisco aboard the steamer *Sausalito* later that day.

After dawn on January 16, the curious began to arrive at Lands End. Trains and carriages brought the crowds and by mid-morning the Cliff Road and Ocean Beach was packed with people seeking a view of the carnage or to scavenge parts of the wreck. By 1:00 p.m., it was estimated that 50,000 people had visited. Despite damage to the Cliff House, Wilkins recognized an opportunity when he saw one. He had the bar quickly cleaned and opened. Reportedly, the Cliff House had record sales that day. Sutro Heights on the other hand, normally open to the public, was closed. A 50-cent admission was charged for anyone wanting to see the wrecked Cliff Cottage, although this was intended mostly as a crowd deterrent, as the public were at risk of injuring themselves as they climbed freely over the debris.

One fear of the explosion, of course, was the death or injury it may have caused to the sea lions that inhabited nearby Seal Rocks. However, although they were barking louder than normal, no carcasses washed up on the shoreline and there was no evidence of injuries among the Seal Rocks inhabitants.

Wilkins estimated the Cliff House damage to be at least $20,000. Sutro had crews at work the day after the disaster and repairs were finished just over a month later. The Cliff Cottage was also rebuilt and ready for occupation again by July. The new design allowed for the rental of rooms in addition to housing the Cliff House caretaker. Carriage sheds for horses and buggies were built on the other side of the street from the old ones.

Just to the north of Point Lobos, the first wave motor had been installed on a rock outcropping only a year before. It was designed to generate electricity from the motion of waves. The *Parallel* blast, however, badly damaged the motor and it was several years before another one would be built. An aquarium that Sutro was building in the cove was also damaged. Sutro repaired and debuted his aquarium later that year, a precursor to the larger Sutro Baths project.

R. C. Pearson filed litigation against the owners of the *Parallel* for the damage to the Cliff House and cottage. Many called to account the actions of the *Parallel*'s skipper in abandoning his ship, including his own crew. Captain Miller stated that he had been afraid to drop anchor for fear that the "jarring of the chain running out might make the powder explode."[3] In later testimony, the ship's mate Morris Olsen pointed out that they had already dropped the anchor several times since leaving Hay Wharf. Olsen also noted that typically, the captain



Construction work on Adolph Sutro's original aquarium and rock breakwater enclosing cove, circa 1887. (Marilyn Blaisdell Collection; courtesy of Molly Blaisdell / wnp70.0539)

is at the wheel until a ship crosses the bar, but Miller had asked Olsen to steer the *Parallel*. Other seafarers said Miller should have signaled to shore while there was still time to have a tugboat come get them, or attempted to notify the authorities of the dangerous cargo.

Notwithstanding the shipwreck and explosion, Miller still failed to follow several regulations. Blasting caps were not allowed to be carried in the same cargo as powder, and combustibles were not supposed to be loaded onto a vessel from a wharf, but rather taken out to the ship on lighters. Newspapers noted that the latter law wasn't being enforced. Ships with combustibles had to fly a signal flag denoting their dangerous cargo, and sail a certain course out of the bay. Several observed that the *Parallel* did neither of these things.

The *Parallel*'s steward, Frank Blindsile, testified that upon seeing the ship's explosion, Miller said "it was a good thing she had blown up and he was glad of it."[4] Whether Captain Miller was simply inexperienced and made bad choices, or there was something more nefarious afoot, remains unknown.

The newly reconstructed Cliff House only lasted another seven years before disaster struck again. It burned down on Christmas Day 1894, and was replaced with the French chateau-like structure that has since become iconic. For years after the explosion, Point Lobos was interchangeably referred to as "Parallel Point." Today, a plaque hangs on the side of the current Cliff House, telling the public about the wreck heard 'round the bay.

1. "A Talk With Kruger," *San Francisco Examiner*, January 17, 1887.
2. "A Big Explosion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 16, 1887.
3. "The Parallel Explosion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 19, 1887.
4. "The Parallel," *San Francisco Examiner*, January 27, 1887.

LOOK AT HER







SHE IS HER(E)

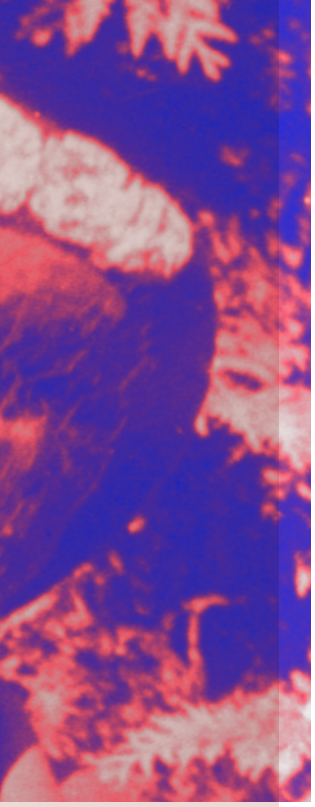
BY NICOLE MELDAHL

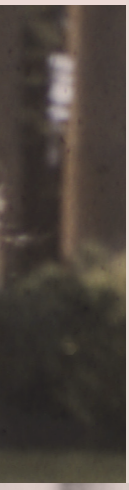














WESTERN NEIGHBORHOODS PROJECT IS PROUD TO DEBUT HER(E), A NEW EXHIBITION ON VIEW THROUGH DECEMBER 15 THAT CARVES OUT PUBLIC SPACE ALONG GREAT HIGHWAY FOR EIGHT VIBRANT WOMEN FOUND IN THE OPENSFHISTORY PHOTO ARCHIVE. HER(E) BEGAN WITH THE DISCOVERY OF ONE OF THESE WOMEN BY NICOLE MELDAHL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WNP.

In a short promotional film for HER(E) that was screened at the 4 Star Theater for Local Critique in August 2023, Meldahl explains her discovery of the photo on page 16:

> I don't know who she is but I met her in the OpenSFHistory archive and I fell in love. Immediately. When I see women like her I know Time is irrelevant, because this woman is my kin. Look at her. This is a woman who knows what she's about, right. Outfit on point, head tilted back almost daring the camera to capture her. Look at her. She is radiant and she is still with us because that is the magic of film. I love her like an older sister who's gonna teach me how to smoke and listen to punk music, and she's transcended time because it's an elastic illusion but also because some women are just powerful enough to break through from the past with just one look. Even without a name to call her by. Look at her. I love her.
>
> And she is one of so many unknown women I've met in archives across San Francisco and beyond. Look at them. Look at these women.
>
> Who are these women? Who are these women who lay lost and abandoned in archives across San Francisco and beyond. We describe what they're wearing, what they're doing, where they are, but so many of them don't have names or a voice and it breaks my lonely only child heart. What if this was my mother? My grandmother? In a way, they are.
>
> I hate how women like them have been silent and overlooked for so long. Generations of unknown women have had their entire history held hostage in their homes. At home, away from the gaze of public life. At home, tending hearth and habit. At home, remembered only as long as that home survives. I hate that I find these women full of life in sterile archives with bland descriptions, unknown women abandoned and buried inside The Museum visible for only the few of us who pause long enough to linger with them. I hate that gallery walls and museum halls are lousy with idealized depictions of a woman's form, but it's so hard to find real women, you know?…So what am I, a real woman in San Francisco, gonna do about it?



Unidentified woman posing in an unidentified park, circa 1920. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.0654)

This is what she's doing about it. Staged in partnership with The Great Highway gallery and Friends of Great Highway Park, *HER(E)* is a deeply personal outdoor exhibition curated by Meldahl. In August 2024, photographs of eight women elevated out of the OpenSFHistory archive debuted on banners installed on street lamps along the eastern edge of Great Highway, marking intersections at Lincoln, Judah, Lawton, Noriega, Pacheco, Rivera, Taraval and Vicente Avenues. Each banner is supported by accompanying QR-coded posters to catch the attention of passers-by at ground level, reminding them to look up.

In support of our mission, WNP launched the OpenSFHistory program in 2014 to digitize and make accessible online thousands of historical San Francisco images. *HER(E)* is an expansion of WNP's traditional history practice into the realm of the theoretical, and an evolution of OpenSFHistory as a space of interrogation; it occupies the liminal space between art and artifact, document and image, memory and memorial.

Making real women from the OpenSFHistory archive visible in this way helps to correct a gender imbalance acknowledged by the City of San Francisco. In an introduction to the *2022 Representation of Women in*

City Property Report, Kimberly Ellis, Director of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women (DOSW), writes that "women are still vastly underrepresented, compared to men, in public spaces across San Francisco." This imbalance is mirrored in archives throughout the world, including OpenSFHistory. A work of remembrance and mourning, *HER(E)* celebrates photography archives as sites of collective memory that are inherently destabilized by archival patriarchy.

The Elevated Eight

With equity in mind, WNP acknowledges curatorial bias in highlighting the eight women featured in *HER(E)*. Selections were constrained by formatting limitations, since vertical shots translate best to the verticality and standard dimensions of the light pole banners. The limited scope of the OpenSFHistory archive–the majority of which emerged from the holdings of one white, male private collector–also presented challenges.

It's important to note that curatorial decisions are situated firmly within a deeply personal gaze, as Meldahl specifically chose women who feel like kin. Meldahl was born and raised in Southern California, the only daughter and survivor of Janis and Robert Meldahl. Her mother assumed a traditional stay-at-home parent role while her father worked as a jockey's agent in Arcadia and Del Mar. Meldahl moved to Northern California in 2002 to attend San Francisco State University, where she studied American History. She's worked (oftentimes simultaneously) as a journalist, archivist, museum technician, historian, and curator. It's this work that has helped her survive the loss of critical family members–her father in 2010, her grandmother in 2013, her mother in 2018, and a beloved uncle in 2019.

Again, Meldahl in her own words, adapted from the *HER(E)* promotional film:

> I came to worship at the Church of San Francisco. I came here in '02 to figure out what I was supposed to be in the fog of San Francisco. I was 17 and I wrote poetry and I ran as fast as I could to North Beach as a North Star and it helped, it certainly helped, but I didn't really find my way until I found History—Capital H. Now that's the altar at which I pray.
>
> And I know what you're thinking, "What does this all have to do with her, the woman [in the photograph that started this project]?" Well, I kinda met her in the halls while walking through the Church of History. And thank goodness we crossed paths because she makes me feel a whole helluva lot less alone, because in the past 13 years I sure got a whole lot more alone. In that time, I've buried all the people that made it all make sense, you know? And I'm an only child so now I need History more than I ever did before, I rely on history to make it all make Sense. Capital S.

HER(E) is an act of archival meditation and reclamation. In "meeting" the featured women, preserving their presence in perpetuity, and getting to know them better when research was reachable, Meldahl has been able to feel at Home as part of a feminine legacy in San Francisco. These women, who have been overlooked by the public record, much like Meldahl's mother, have a resonant presence. They are joyful and fierce, commanding the frame even beside San Francisco landmarks. They either stare straight at the camera or stand to the side, with a watchful eye on their children in an act of maternal deference. They are not constrained by the stiff archival medium in which they're presented; instead, they are very much here. Of the eight women made visible through this installation, Meldahl has only been able to identify one of them: Norma Ball Norwood. You can learn more about Norma on OpenSFHistory.

Women like Norma deserve to be seen, to be heard, to hold space here in San Francisco. In the short term, the purpose of installing the images of these women on Great Highway is to help WNP identify them–to restore their names and find their history. The broader goal is to expose and remedy gaps in not just the OpenSFHistory archive but in citywide archival collecting practices. Over the course of this project, WNP hopes members of the public will contribute photographs of the women in their lives to WNP and beyond to other nonprofits that maintain a permanent collection, thereby adding their stories to the History of San Francisco. In the long term, this installation is envisioned as the first of many, with a diverse array of successive curators daylighting more women from more archives.

If the Society of American Archivists defines archivization as "the process of selecting records for retention in an archives and preparing them for research use," then *HER(E)* is our way of selecting overlooked women from the OpenSFHistory archive and transforming them into public monuments.

Look at her. *HER(E)* she is. Here she is in San Francisco.



Unidentified woman on Sutro Heights parapet overlooking Great Highway, July 30, 1939. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.1611)



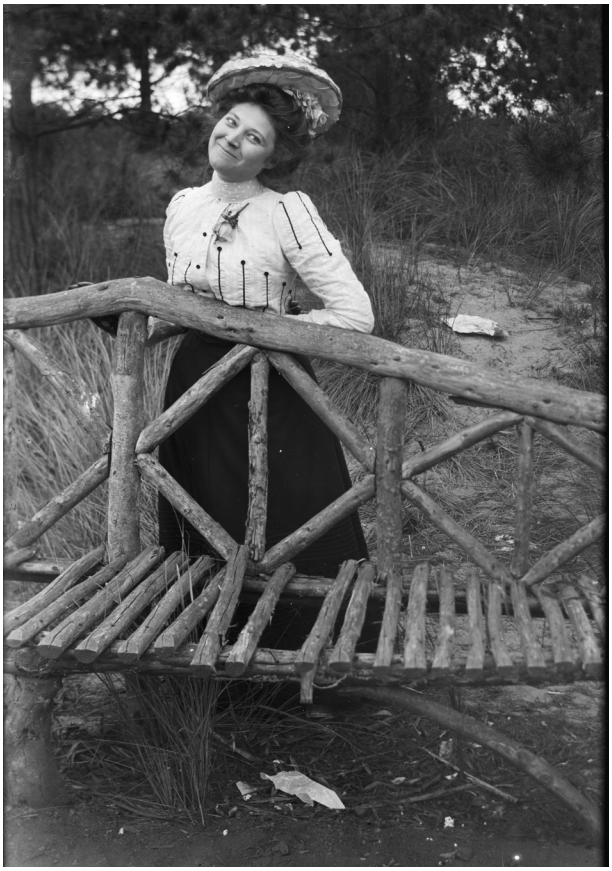
Unidentified woman, “Kay,” circa 1945. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp27.2012)



Norma Ball Norwood on a back porch in the Inner Sunset, circa 1938. (Norma Ball Norwood Collection; courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp26.1262)



Unidentified woman on roof with City Hall in background, circa 1928. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.4538)



Unidentified woman, circa 1902. (Bauchou Family Photographs; courtesy of Peter Linenthal and Potrero Hill Archives / wnp31.00008)



Unidentified woman at the Palace of Fine Arts lagoon, circa 1954. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp25.6528)



Unidentified woman and toddler in the Mission District, circa 1935. (Courtesy of a Private Collector / wnp14.0648)

HER(E) is an outdoor exhibition on view until December 15th. Explore this unique display along the eastern edge of Great Highway, marking the intersections at Lincoln, Judah, Lawton, Noriega, Pacheco, Rivera, Taraval and Vicente Avenues. Special thanks to The Great Highway gallery and Friends of Great Highway Park.



Inside the Outside Lands

Something we love doing here at Western Neighborhoods Project—but often struggle to carve out time for—is working with our collection. Both **Nicole Meldahl** and **Chelsea Sellin** have backgrounds in archives and collections management, so we were pretty excited to host a Community Archiving Workshop on June 15 at the Internet Archive.

What is a Community Archiving Workshop? So glad you asked. These workshops (which are held all over the world) bring together collecting organizations like WNP with archivists and volunteers for a one-day event to catalog as many collection items as possible. Through the cataloging process, WNP gains a better understanding of the content of our collection, along with any preservation risks that need to be addressed. Cataloging also serves as a catalyst for access; researchers can't really use our materials if we don't have a good grasp of what we have! Additionally, the workshop is a skill-sharing environment, assembling people with different levels of experience and expertise and providing volunteers with hands-on training so they can continue doing this kind of work in the future.

WNP's workshop was funded by a $2,000 grant from California Revealed, which is a California State Library initiative launched in 2010 that helps public libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and other heritage groups digitize, preserve, and provide online access to archival materials that document California's history, art, and culture. California Revealed focuses on educating and empowering regional organizations to make the most of their collections. The training that WNP's staff received from this grant will allow us to host more archiving workshops in the future!

We had to choose a specific part of our collection to catalog at the workshop in June, and we selected *The Richmond Banner*, which was the weekly neighborhood newspaper for the Richmond District from 1894 to 1976. WNP has about 1,300 issues covering a wide time span. Our collection came from a few sources but mostly from The Great Overland Book Company, a used book store once located at Judah Street and 9th Avenue. (If you have any issues of *The Richmond Banner* that you're interested in donating, let us know!) The *Banner* is a valuable resource because it covers news at a hyper local level, more so than San Francisco's big daily



Community Archiving Workshop at the Internet Archive, June 15, 2024. (Courtesy of Guadalupe Martinez)

papers. The advertisements alone are an incredible record of neighborhood businesses.

Our intrepid group of 13 volunteers gathered at the Internet Archive bright and early in the morning on June 15, alongside Nicole, Chelsea, and **Pamela Vadakan** and **Guadalupe Martinez** from California Revealed. While many of the attendees were stalwart WNP volunteers, a lot of them had never had the opportunity to meet each other. It warmed our hearts to bring everyone together, and created a lot of energy. Archival work is usually pretty solitary, but here we created a sense of community that carried us through the long day, including bonding over lunch from Sunrise Deli.

Chelsea kicked off the workshop with in-depth training on how to properly handle and catalog these century-old fragile newspapers. Working in teams, our volunteers processed the *Banner* issues in assembly-line fashion. Relevant information about each issue, such as publication date, editor, number of pages, dimensions, etc., were captured in a spreadsheet. The physical condition of each paper was carefully recorded as well, and then they were lovingly placed in archival folders and boxes to ensure their long-term preservation. We all had a lot of fun perusing the content of the newspapers as well, sharing interesting finds with the group. By the end of the day, we had cataloged 218 issues! We still have many more to go, but there was a great feeling of accomplishment. This workshop built momentum, and many expressed interest in continuing this project either at a future workshop or in smaller teams at the WNP Clubhouse.

Building interest and awareness of *The Richmond Banner* collection, not just at the workshop but to all of WNP's supporters, will aid the collection's preservation. We are more likely to get support—both monetary and volunteer time—when people know what is in our collection and why it's important. Having the *Banner* digitized some day would be a dream, and a huge boon for local historians. While we're not there yet, cataloging is an essential step in bringing that dream to fruition.

Thank you to California Revealed, the Internet Archive for generously hosting us for free, and of course to our volunteers: **Eli Beutel**, **Thomas Beutel**, **Barbara Cannella**, **Nikki Flynn**, **Paul Judge**, **Drew Moss**, **Margaret Ostermann**, **Andrew Roth**, **Amanda Williford**, **Joyce Wong**, and **Christy Yaeger**.

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Historical Happenings



Tues Nov 19 at 7pm: WNP Film Club

Join WNP's resident film buffs, John Martini and Chelsea Sellin, for this series at the 4 Star Theater that celebrates movies filmed on location in San Francisco. Each screening will open with background about the film and its featured locations, including historical images from the OpenSFHistory photo archive. November's screening is the noir thriller *Experiment in Terror*. $15 General Admission, $12.50 for seniors and children; tickets available on the 4 Star website.

Sat Nov 23 at 10am: The Historian is HER(E)

Nicole Meldahl will be hanging out as a Historian in Residence at Java Beach Cafe in support of our HER(E), our current exhibition on Great Highway featuring eight vibrant women that Nicole "met" while working with the OpenSFHistory archive. She will present info on the exhibition and other good old-fashioned west side history. Stop by for a visit on your way to the highway to see the exhibit.

outsidelands.org/events

Not a WNP Member?

Outside Lands magazine is just one of the benefits of giving to Western Neighborhoods Project. Members receive special publications as well as exclusive invitations to history walks, talks, and other events. Visit our website at **outsidelands.org,** and click on the "Become a Member" link at the top of any page.

