The Argonaut

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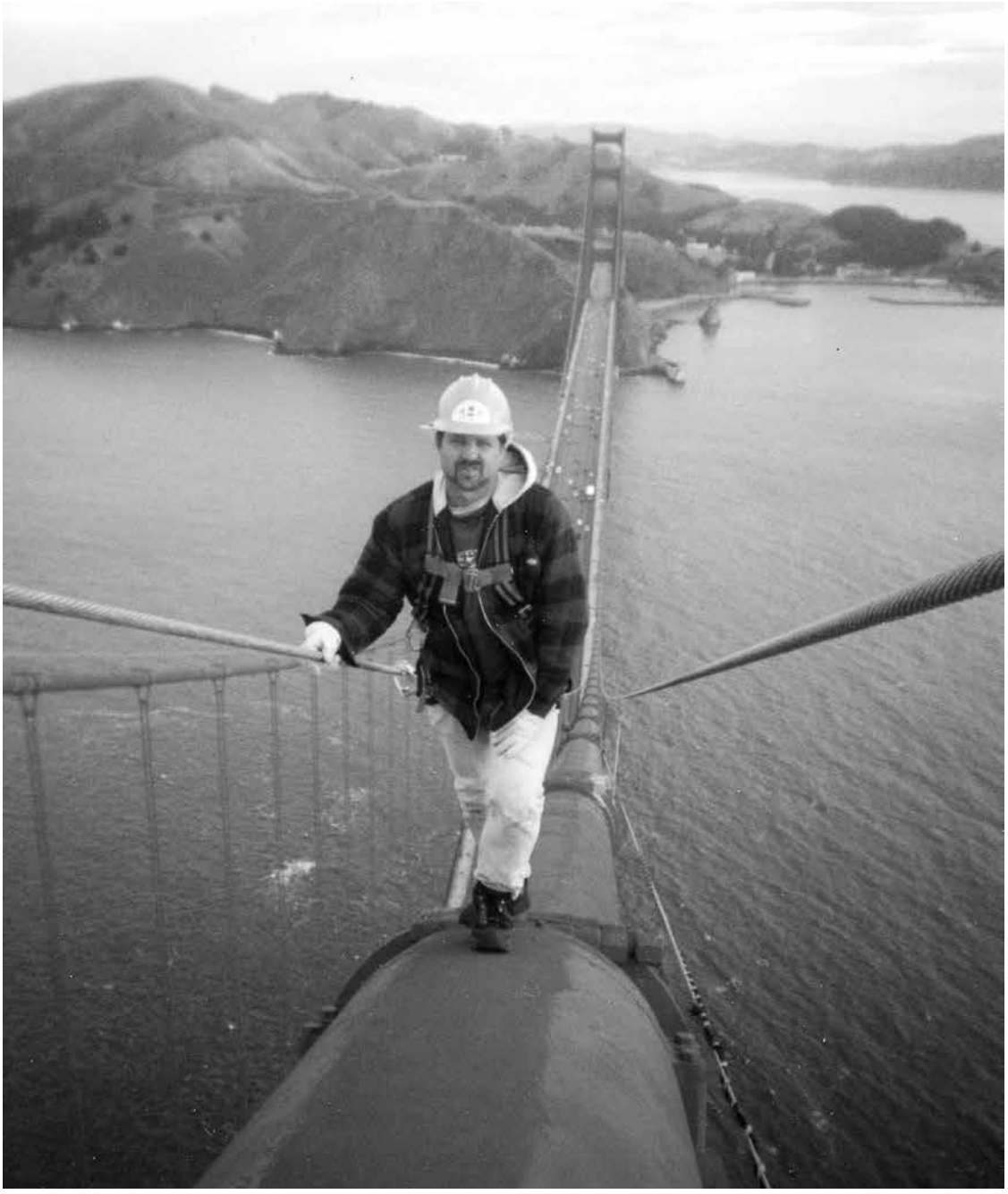
Journal of the San Francisco Historical Society



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THE ARGONAUT
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Cover photo: *Bridge painter Bob McGee walks up the south tower of the Golden Gate Bridge. Photo courtesy of Bob McGee.*

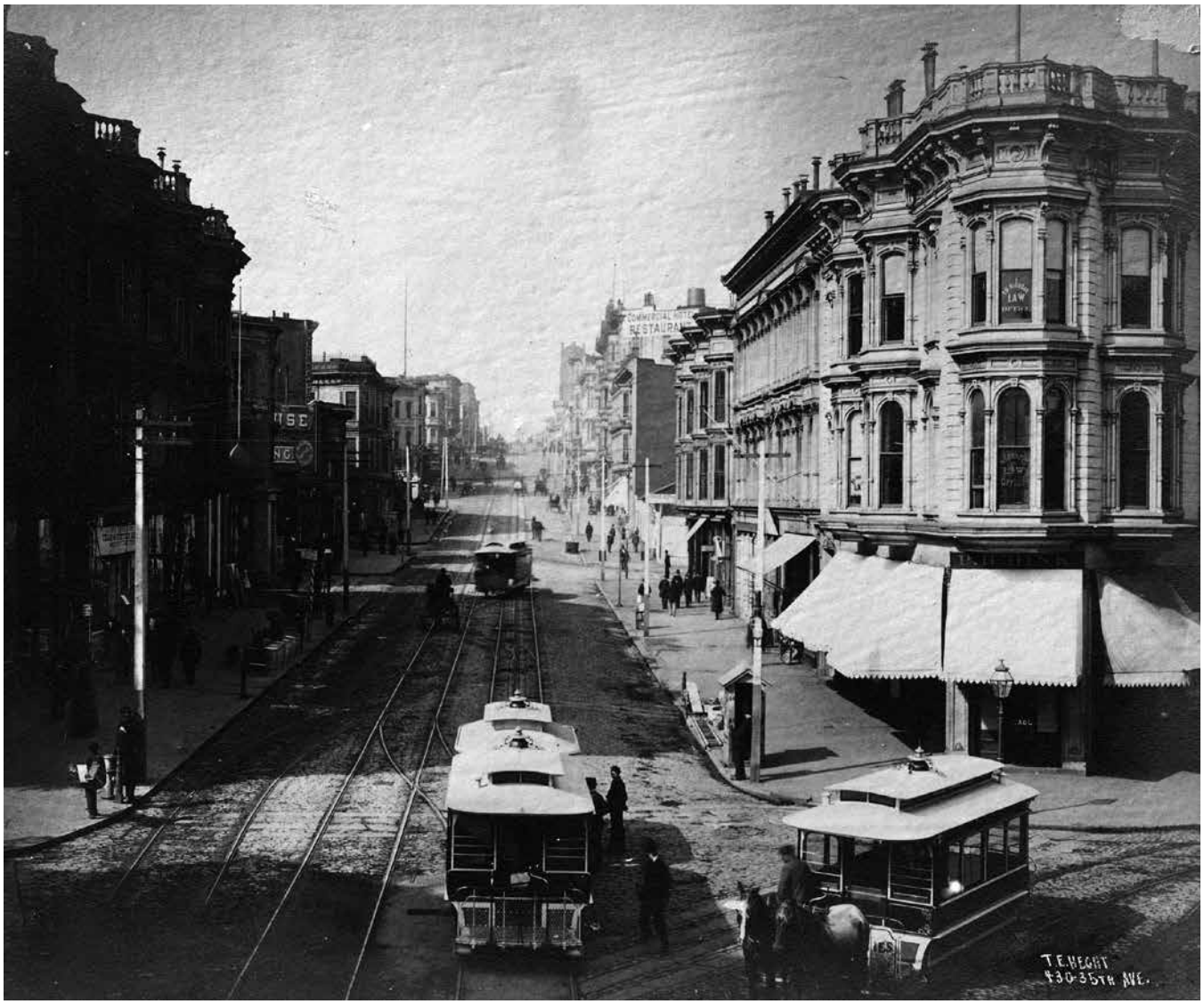
The Presidio & Ferries Railroad

by Robert Bardell

The first commercially successful passenger-carrying endless cable railway—aka cable car line—emerged in San Francisco in 1873, courtesy of Andrew Hallidie, William Eppelsheimer, and their financial backers. During the next sixteen years eight separate cable car companies spread lines out over San Francisco's hills and flatlands. When the Presidio & Ferries Railroad commenced full service in January of 1882, it became San Francisco's fifth cable car line and the first to cross Russian Hill.[1] It also brought efficient and convenient street railway service to the lightly settled Spring Valley neighborhoods at the foot of Pacific Heights on the city's north end.

The Presidio & Ferries connected its namesake terminals with a multi-modal transportation system over a route that mimicked the old Presidio Road. Although the Presidio & Ferries was primarily a cable car line, it also incorporated steam engine and horse car lines. The cable car segment began near Portsmouth Plaza, formerly the terminal for horse-drawn omnibuses providing transportation to the Presidio. In 1882 Portsmouth Plaza was still the heart of "downtown." The cable ran along Montgomery (now Columbus) Avenue—a street that did not exist in omnibus days—turned up and over the Union Street hill, and ran out Union Street as far as Steiner Street. There, a steam engine, better known as a "steam dummy," hauled passengers in mainline-railroad-style coaches along a line that ran into the Presidio via Harbor View, an area on the bay adjoining the Presidio's eastern boundary. A short horse car line linked ferry terminals clustered at the foot of Market Street with the cable railway's terminal near Washington Street and Montgomery Avenue.

Montgomery Avenue made the Presidio & Ferries a practical possibility. To be financially successful, any cable car line crossing Russian Hill needed to reach downtown. Without Montgomery Avenue cutting diagonally across the original North Beach street grid, a cable car line connecting the Portsmouth Plaza area to Union Street over the only feasible routes would need to make two 90-degree turns. But early San Francisco cable car lines, like the Presidio & Ferries, could make 90-degree turns only when running downhill.[2] A cable car could turn from Powell Street onto Union Street (and vice versa), because both streets ran downhill toward the intersection, but it could not make the same turn over level or uphill terrain, and thus, for example, could not turn from Washington Street onto Powell Street. A Presidio & Ferries cable line over Union Street unable to reach downtown directly could have terminated at Washington Square, although this was an unpromising spot from a ridership perspective. A horse car line could have connected Washington Square to downtown, but it would have had to traverse streets already franchised to competing and hostile street railway companies.[3] Transfer agreements with competitors were not a



Horse car meets cable train at the foot of Montgomery Avenue.
Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

given. Even if promoters of the Presidio & Ferries had managed to secure the necessary franchises or purchased operating rights, employing horse cars to reach downtown would have represented an expensive technological step backward. Cable cars, albeit more expensive to install, were faster, more capacious, and cheaper to operate than horse cars.[4] Montgomery Avenue created a straightforward route from Spring Valley, via Union Street, into downtown. Had it not become part of San Francisco's street plan, the Presidio & Ferries Railroad probably never would have existed.

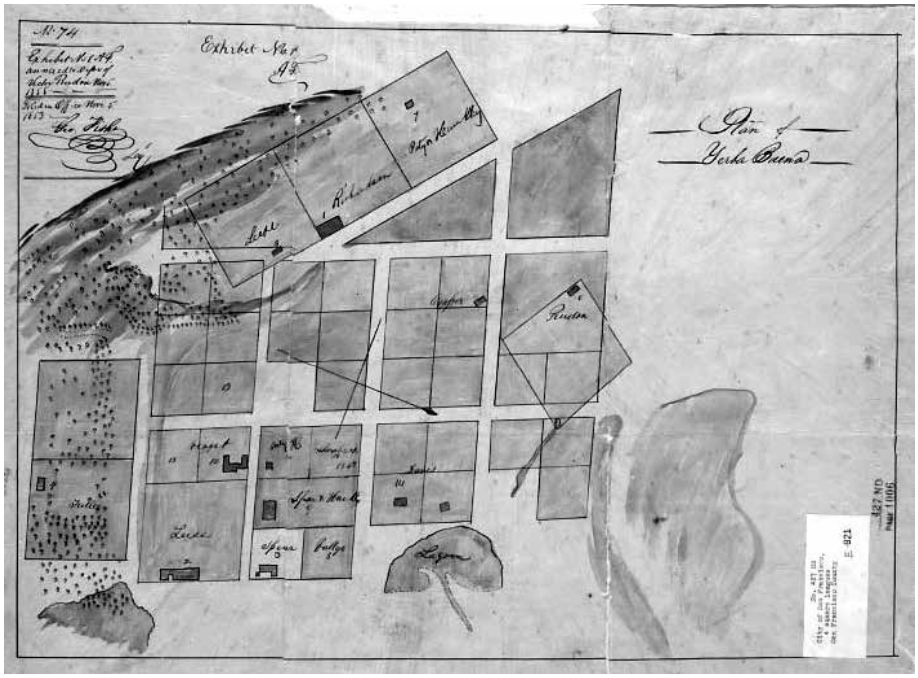
If Montgomery Avenue provided essential infrastructure for the Presidio & Ferries Railroad, Henry Casebolt provided its animating vision. Casebolt, a manufacturer of carriages, wagons, and street cars, contracted to build the Front Street, Mission & Ocean Railroad (FSM&O, more commonly known as the "Sutter Street Railroad") in 1865. Financial backing for this street railway was shaky at best. Casebolt accepted stock in partial payment for his contract, but when he completed construction, the company still owed him $31,500 and had no money in the treasury to pay it.[5] Casebolt invested his own

money to get the railroad up and running. Eventually he became its superintendent, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1880. In a drive to attain profitability, Casebolt secured trackage rights to extend his railroad to the ferries. He obtained the dormant franchise of the Fort Point Railroad and initiated an omnibus service from Broadway and Polk Streets, the terminus of the FSM&O's Polk Street branch, to Harbor View and the Presidio. Casebolt eventually created the first railway link between the Presidio and San Francisco's waterfront and blazed the way for the Presidio & Ferries Railroad.

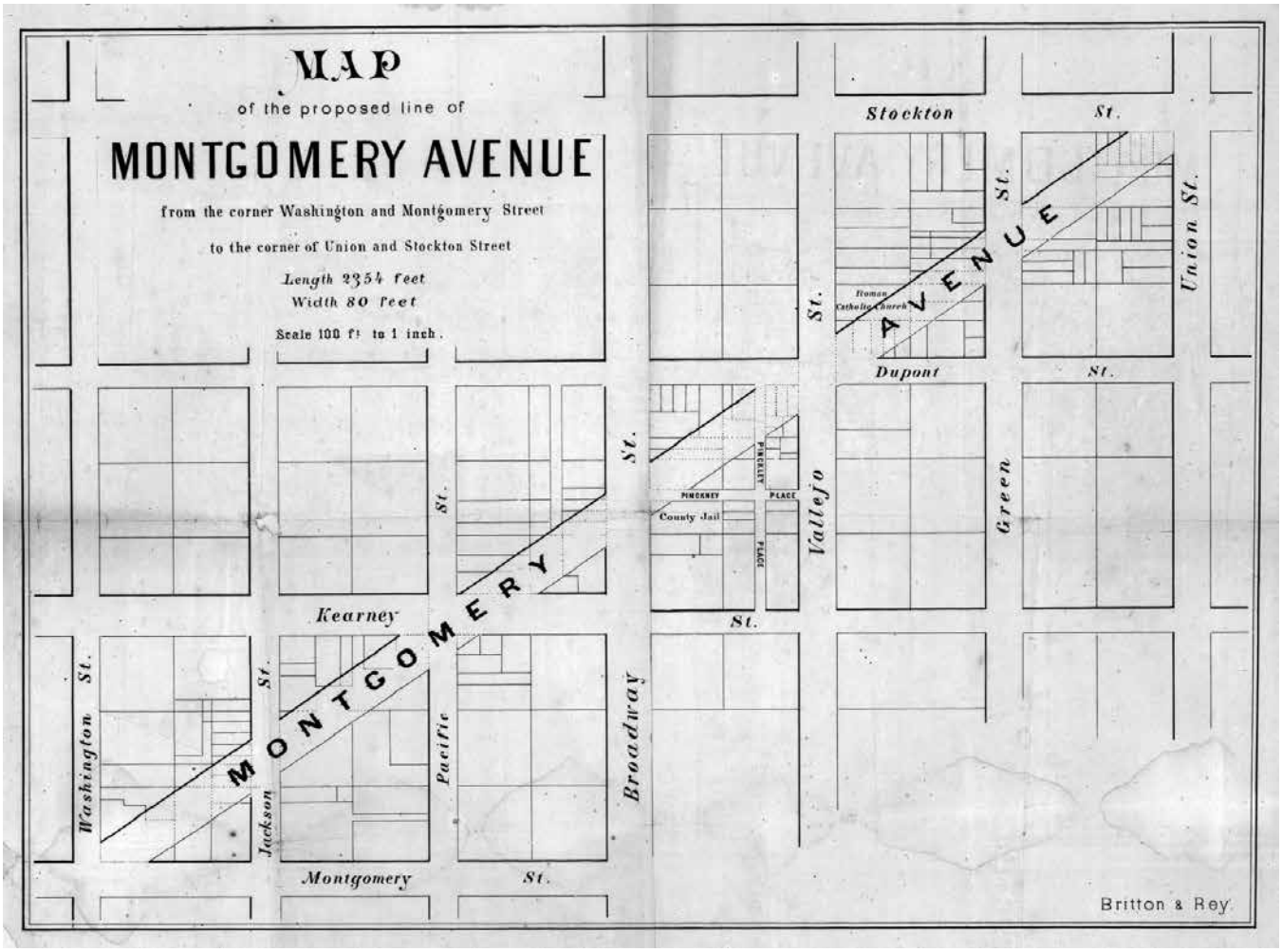
Montgomery Avenue

San Francisco's street plan evolved from Jean-Jacques Vioget's pioneering survey of Yerba Buena, which had been completed in 1839. Although Vioget's survey retained Yerba Buena's first street, Calle de la Fundación, laid out by William Richardson in 1835, its new streets formed a grid oriented on Yerba Buena cove. Blocks contained six square lots measuring 50 vara per side.[6] Vioget's grid was not orthogonal—its streets did not intersect at right angles. Jasper O'Farrell corrected this defect in his 1847 extension of Vioget's survey. O'Farrell also laid out Market Street on an imaginary line from the center of Yerba Buena cove through the cleavage of Twin Peaks. Blocks bordering Market Street on the north were truncated into gores. South of Market Street O'Farrell created blocks with 100 vara lots. Blocks of the so-called "100 vara survey" faced Market Street without truncation. This asymmetric layout meant streets north and south of Market Street did not, in general, have a smooth continuation into one another.

In the late 1860s this situation began to irritate William Ralston and other south-of-Market property holders. They began agitating and lobbying for a "Montgomery Street straight" plan, which would eventually be partially implemented via New Montgomery Street. This political activity might have inspired North Beach property owners to seek their own improvement to O'Farrell's street plan. On February 2, 1870, a meeting of property owners convened to determine if enough popular support existed to persuade the state legislature to create a new 80-foot-wide street running diagonally from the northwest corner of Washington and Montgomery Streets to the southeast corner of Union and Stockton Streets. Archibald C. Peachy, a lawyer and exponent of the project, argued that steep street grades—impassable for horse-drawn wagons carrying heavy loads—and a lack of direct access to downtown suppressed both population growth and real estate values in North Beach. The new thoroughfare would correct these deficiencies by exploiting the natural topography between Russian and Telegraph Hills. It would create considerable new real estate frontage on a broad avenue and drive out the "disreputable class of persons" currently occupying the district.[7] By the end of the month Senator John H. Saunders, Democrat of San Francisco, introduced a bill to open and establish a public street in San Francisco to be called Montgomery Avenue. The proposed route of the avenue was also extended through Washington Square to Jefferson Street.



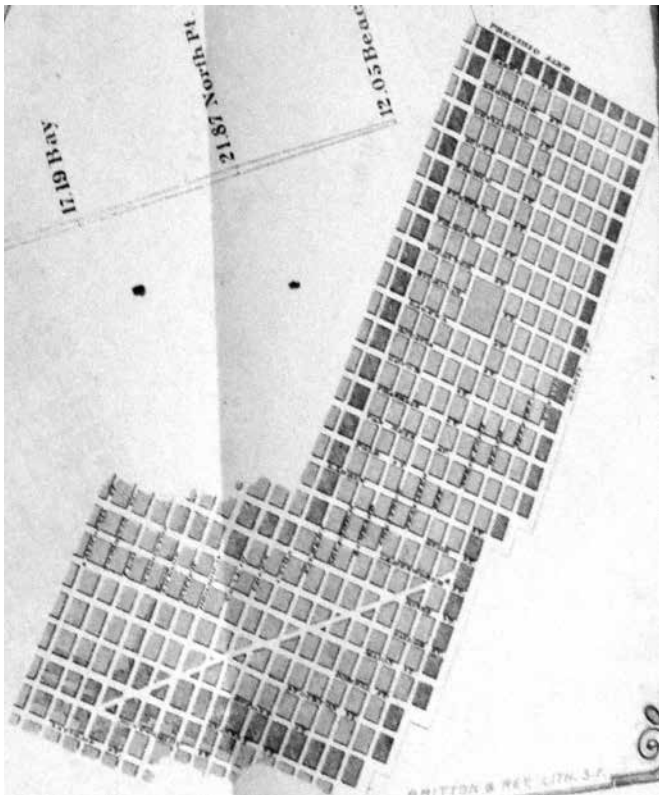
Jean-Jacques Vioget's 1839 Yerba Buena survey. Note the slightly tilted orientation of the primordial street grid. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



This is the original proposal for Montgomery Avenue, envisioning a limited thoroughfare between Washington and Union Streets. It reflects the belief, still somewhat justified, that all the action along the avenue would be confined there. Note that the extension of Montgomery Avenue toward the North Beach waterfront cut through the heart of Washington Square. Map courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

Archibald Peachy actively lobbied in Sacramento for passage of the Montgomery Avenue bill. His "pleasant, taking way that finds favor [pleasant personality]" converted most skeptics to advocates. Unfortunately, the proposed route of Montgomery Avenue would have cut through the city jail as well as St. Francis Church and the Convent of the Presentation on Powell Street. Vigorous protests from parishioners and clergy brought about a revision of the route. The new route would leave behind many more irregular lots than the original and terminate at Beach Street.[8] The state legislature rapidly approved the Montgomery Avenue bill, and it became law on March 29, 1870.

An assessment district defined in the Montgomery Avenue Act would bear all costs of opening the avenue. The act created a three-person commission to determine those costs, which included the value of property actually taken for the avenue; the value of property improvements damaged by those takings; and the costs of grading, paving, curbing, sidewalk construction, administrative fees and salaries, and raising buildings to new street grades on Montgomery Avenue and intersecting streets. Benefits to the assessment district were also estimated. The commissioners labored at this task for more than a year and finally released their report in late May of 1871. It pegged the total cost of the



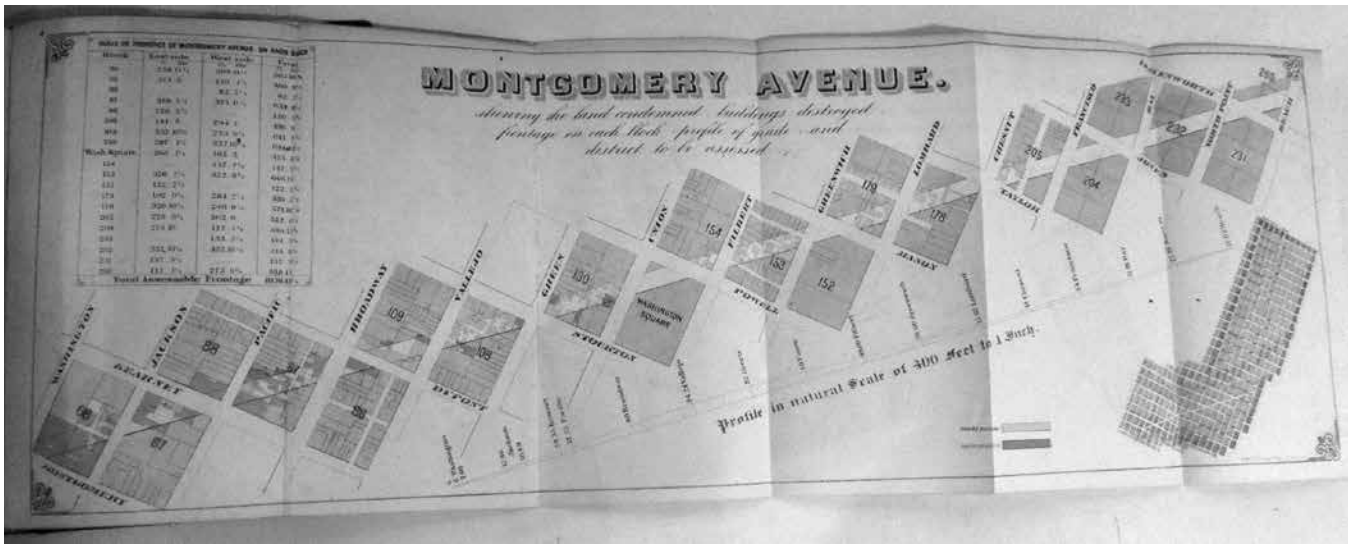
The 1872 assessment district. Montgomery Avenue cuts across the street grid. The large, empty rectangular block represents Lobos Square, now Moscone Recreation Center. Some of the lots depicted were under water.
From San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1872–73.

project at $2,679,485 and estimated the benefit of Montgomery Avenue to the assessment district at $8,543,500.

Property owners within the assessment district immediately attacked the report, claiming that assessments were too high and benefits were exaggerated. At a general community meeting held to discuss the report, some speakers alleged their assessments nearly equaled the value of their properties, and one claimed the value of all property assessed in North Beach did not reach $2 million. Another "excitable and rather unreasonable owner of real estate in the vicinity" advocated hanging the commissioners. Public ire rained down on Archibald Peachy. He was due to receive hefty compensation as attorney for the Montgomery Avenue commissioners, while also renting space to them in the Montgomery Block (which he partly owned). In addition, the assessment rate on the Montgomery Block was just 7 percent of its estimated value, even though Montgomery Avenue would begin right outside its door, while assessments on properties relatively remote from Montgomery Avenue ran as high as 50 percent.[9] Even though most property owners in the assessment district believed Montgomery Avenue would be a desirable improvement, they were outraged at the cost.

Angry property owners and their representatives soon formed a Montgomery Avenue Opposition League. The league sought to bring enough political and electoral pressure on the state legislature to force repeal of the Montgomery Avenue Act. About 12 percent of property owners in the assessment district filed official protests over their assessments.[10] The Montgomery Avenue commissioners heard these protests, but delayed filing their final report. That the commissioners collected $500 a month each for their dilatory activity only further inflamed passions in the opposition league. The commissioners finally filed their report at the end of December 1871, but it hardly mattered. A bill repealing the Montgomery Avenue Act was introduced in the legislature on December 7, 1871 and became law on March 1, 1872.

Less than two weeks after repeal of the original Montgomery Avenue Act a replacement bill was introduced in the state assembly. Unlike the original bill, the replacement did not seek a uniform grade for the new avenue. The new grade would conform to grades on crossing streets. This change entailed major cost savings. Expensive regrading and sewering on crossing streets would no longer be required. Estimated cost of the project was cut in half to $1.3 million. Major property owners along the proposed line of Montgomery Avenue, eager to enjoy its promised benefits, backed this new bill and agreed to pay all costs associated with the former commission and to reuse its surveys and other work as far as practicable. The new Montgomery Avenue bill did not actually order the avenue opened. It allowed it to be opened on petition of a majority of property owners in the assessment district defined by the bill. This change would have interesting consequences. The new Montgomery Avenue bill became law on April 1, 1872.

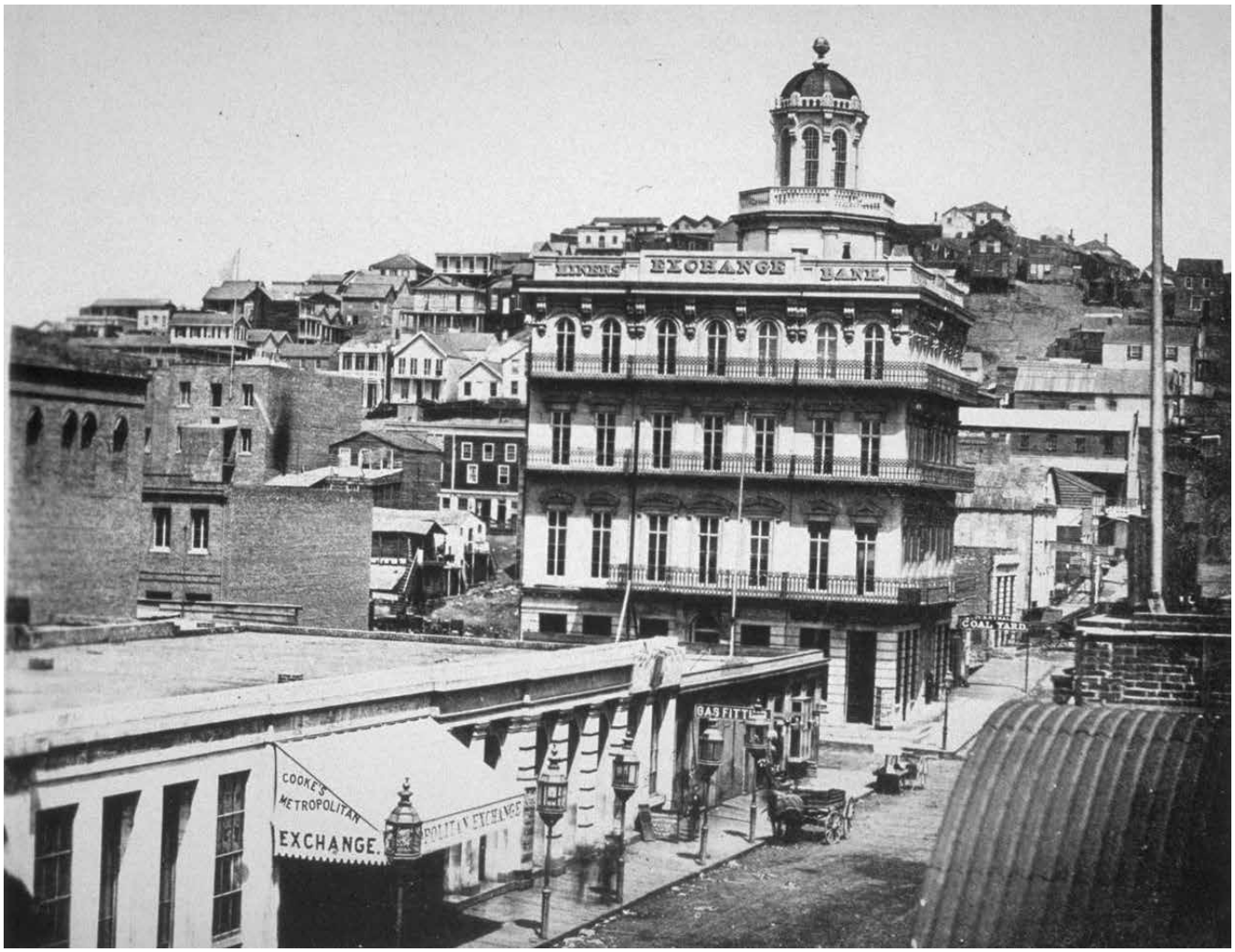


Map of properties condemned for the construction of Montgomery Avenue.
Map from San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1872–73.

Montgomery Avenue Bonds

The Montgomery Avenue Act of 1872 mandated bond financing for the project. Rather than direct, one-time assessments, yearly assessments on properties would pay bond interest and fill a sinking fund for bond redemption. The act defined an assessment district of about 300 blocks with 437,060 feet of street frontage. These blocks constituted the area officially benefited by Montgomery Avenue. In late May 1872 owners of 225,000 feet of frontage petitioned the mayor to open the avenue. This triggered the creation of a board of public works tasked with determining costs and benefits associated with opening Montgomery Avenue as well as issuing bonds to pay for it. This was not a board of the city and county but an independent, quasi-corporation created for the sole purpose of opening Montgomery Avenue. The board worked rapidly, piggybacking on work by the previous Montgomery Avenue Commission, and submitted its report in late September. The county court heard objections to this report in late October and confirmed it November 14, 1872, clearing the way for a bond issue. The board of public works ultimately issued $1,579,000 worth of bonds.[11] Solicitation for bids on $1,000 par value, 30-year Montgomery Avenue bonds payable at 6 percent per annum began November 30, 1872.

The bonds did not sell like hotcakes. The mayor, city auditor, and treasurer supervised bond sales and reserved the right to reject "any and all unreasonable bids" for the bonds. They set 85 percent of par value as the minimum bid.[12] Many property owners seeking damage awards were expected to accept bonds in lieu of cash payments but refused to play along. If they bid at all, it was below the minimum. Others refused to bid and demanded immediate, full payment in gold. Property conveyed to the city at the east end of the avenue allowed demolition to begin there in May of 1873, but unless all owners conveyed their property, the avenue would never be completed. Twenty property owners who had been paid in full had not even removed their "obstructions" (aka buildings) as required. The board of public works moved to sell these buildings to the highest bidder. As 1873 drew to a close, a number of property owners remained adamant in their refusal to accept bonds for their properties. The old International Hotel on Jackson Street became the poster child for this refusal.[13] A lawsuit challenging the 1872 Montgomery Avenue Act's constitutionality also threatened the project.



Opening Montgomery Avenue required demolishing the Miners Exchange Building. Roy D. Graves pictorial collection. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Opening Montgomery Avenue

Prospects for the completion of the avenue brightened considerably in 1874. The California Supreme Court brushed aside the lawsuit recently filed. Then, in February, a large sale of bonds went through that yielded enough cash to pay off the owners of the International Hotel and other properties. The obstinance of these property owners paid off. They received cash for their properties, not bonds. On September 22, 1874, the board of public works declared Montgomery Avenue clear of all obstructions and open throughout its whole extent, although the stretch between Chestnut and North Point Streets needed grading to create a gentle and continuous slope, and the whole avenue needed sewering and paving. Title to all land taken for and composing Montgomery Avenue was now vested in the city and county. Responsibility for all further necessary work on the avenue passed into the hands of the board of supervisors.

Predictably, progress stalled. Most of the avenue was little more than a quagmire. Not only was the avenue an "eyesore and a nuisance," but property owners were slow to erect new buildings fronting on it.[14] The avenue remained in bad shape through the end of 1875, although there was some planking at the east end, basalt paving stones between Union and Powell Streets, and sidewalks and curbs over the crown of the Montgomery Avenue hill between Vallejo and Powell Streets.

Other serious problems plagued the avenue. The 1872 decision to make the grade of Montgomery Avenue conform to the grades of intersecting streets rather than vice versa—a major cost-cutting move—meant several blocks along the avenue actually tilted. Some were as much as six to eight feet higher on one side than the other.[15] It took an act of the legislature to correct this defect, and on April 3, 1876, a bill passed into law authorizing the necessary grade changes. The act created a three-person commission to assess damage to property from regrading. All this commission work took time, and the avenue remained in disgraceful condition through the end of 1876. Only those blocks south of Broadway were in anywhere near acceptable condition. "Ever since the rainy season commenced it has abounded in mud-holes of various extent and depth throughout its whole length," wrote the *San Francisco Chronicle* on December 1, 1876. Crews finally began regrading work in February of 1877 and completed their work through to Chestnut Street by late October.[16] The avenue was paved in a piecemeal fashion with basalt blocks from Washington to Lombard Streets between August 1876 and June 1879.

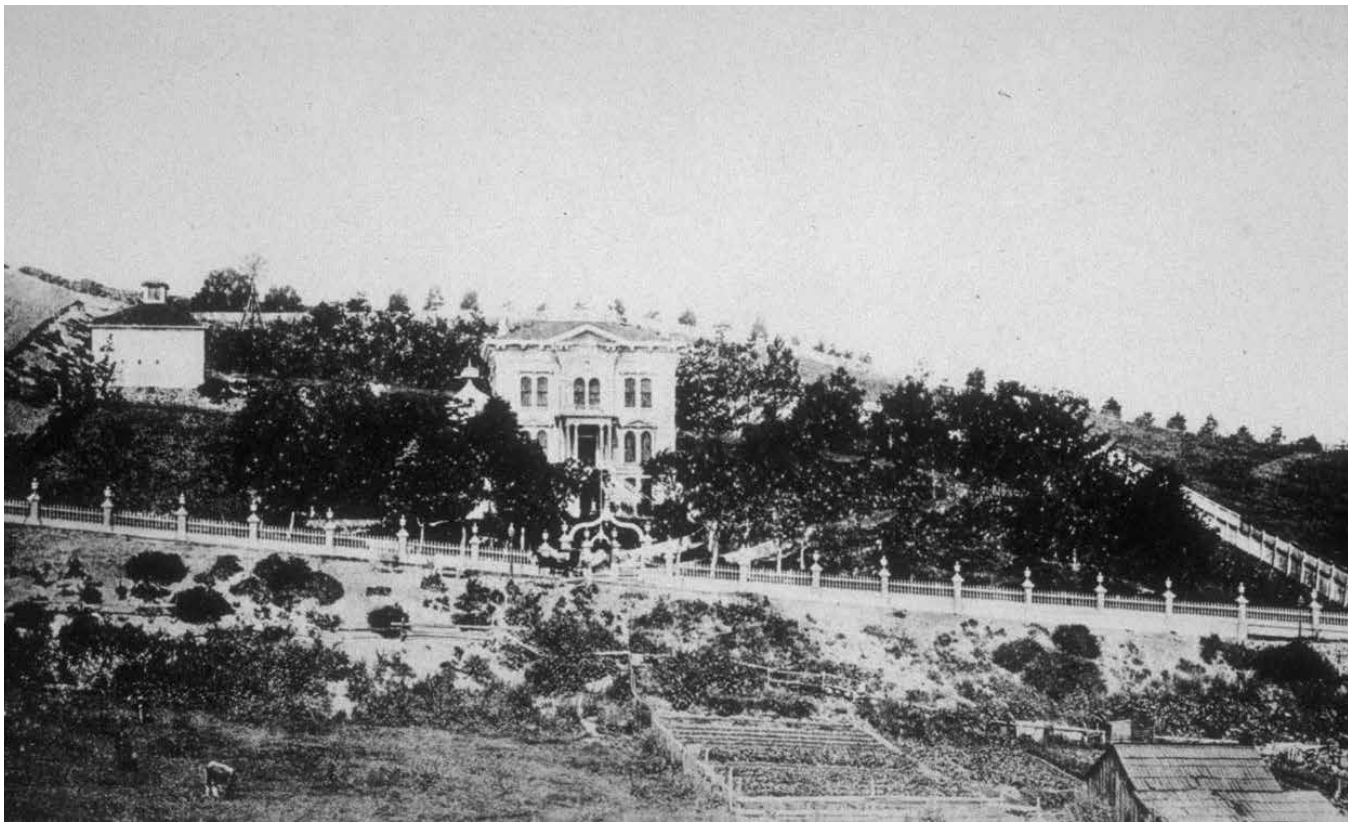
Opening Montgomery Avenue did not dampen the ire of property owners on the hook for its costs. They complained the assessment burden on their properties actually lowered property values. And why, they wondered, should they bear the sole burden of opening the avenue when the whole city benefited from it? Especially peeved were property owners delinquent in paying assessments for the avenue or for its regrading. The city threatened to sell their properties to pay off the delinquencies. Naturally, some of the property owners sued San Francisco's tax collector to block the sales. They received temporary injunctions. On June 22, 1878, Judge E. D. Wheeler, writing for the Nineteenth District Court, refused to block the sales and dissolved the temporary injunctions, on what some might view as a technicality.[17] Although Judge Wheeler dissolved the injunctions, he accepted the plaintiffs' principal factual argument against the assessments and the Montgomery Avenue bonds themselves—namely, that no majority of owners in frontage in the assessment district actually requested opening Montgomery Avenue.

The Fate of Montgomery Avenue Bonds

Were Montgomery Avenue bonds valid or void? This question languished in legal limbo for three years until a California Supreme Court ruling on October 26, 1881 settled the matter. In deciding *Mulligan vs. Smith*, the court effectively released all property owners in the Montgomery Avenue assessment district from their obligations for Montgomery Avenue bonds.[18] The Supreme Court agreed with Judge Wheeler that the petition signed by a majority in frontage in the Montgomery Avenue assessment district was invalid. A sufficient number of legally defective signatures undermined that majority. Defective signatures included people not on the assessment roll, just one of several tenants-in-common on the roll, and corporate officers lacking the authority to sign. Neither the mayor's certification of the petition nor the county court's confirmation of the board of public works report conclusively proved the validity of the petition. Therefore, the board of public works created by the 1872 Montgomery Avenue act had no authority to levy assessments, and the county court had no jurisdiction to confirm such authority. Both the assessments and the sale of property for their delinquency were invalid and void.[19]

Where did that leave the bondholders? Out of luck. Although many assessments were delinquent, enough others were paid over the years to cover interest on the bonds through 1879; however, the sinking fund established to pay the bond principal had virtually no money in it. Assessments did not begin flowing into it in until 1880.[20] As revenue collected from assessments dropped, so did bond interest payments. In the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1880, a little over 20% of Montgomery Avenue bond coupons could be redeemed. Assessment payments dried up. Although some property owners continued paying assessments through 1881, by the end of 1882, even those payments ceased. For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1882 the interest account for Montgomery Avenue bonds held 95¢, and there was just $12,318.20 in the sinking fund.[21] Eventually, the money in this sinking fund was transferred to the city's general fund.

Many original bondholders sold their bonds for pennies on the dollar to speculators, who over the



Casebolt owned the entire block bounded by Pierce, Vallejo, Scott, and Green Streets. The structure on the extreme left is a carriage house/stable. Note how the driveway curves along gentle gradients from Pierce Street to reach it. Chinese vegetable gardens stand in the foreground. From Jesse Brown Cook Scrapbooks documenting San Francisco history and law enforcement. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

years sought various legal remedies to compel the city to pay back interest and make good on the principal. None succeeded, since the 1872 Montgomery Avenue Act explicitly exempted the City and County of San Francisco from any obligation to pay off either principal or interest.[22] After the bonds matured on January 1, 1903, Union Trust Co. sued the state of California seeking to recover the principal and unpaid interest on 855 Montgomery Avenue bonds in its possession. On December 21, 1908 the state supreme court blocked this last-gasp attempt at recovering something for the bonds.[23] The state would not be forced to pay. The original owners along Montgomery Avenue who eschewed cash and accepted bonds for their lost or damaged property took a financial beating. Perhaps they found some solace in enhanced property values. The speculators got nothing.

Henry Casebolt and the Sutter Street Railroad

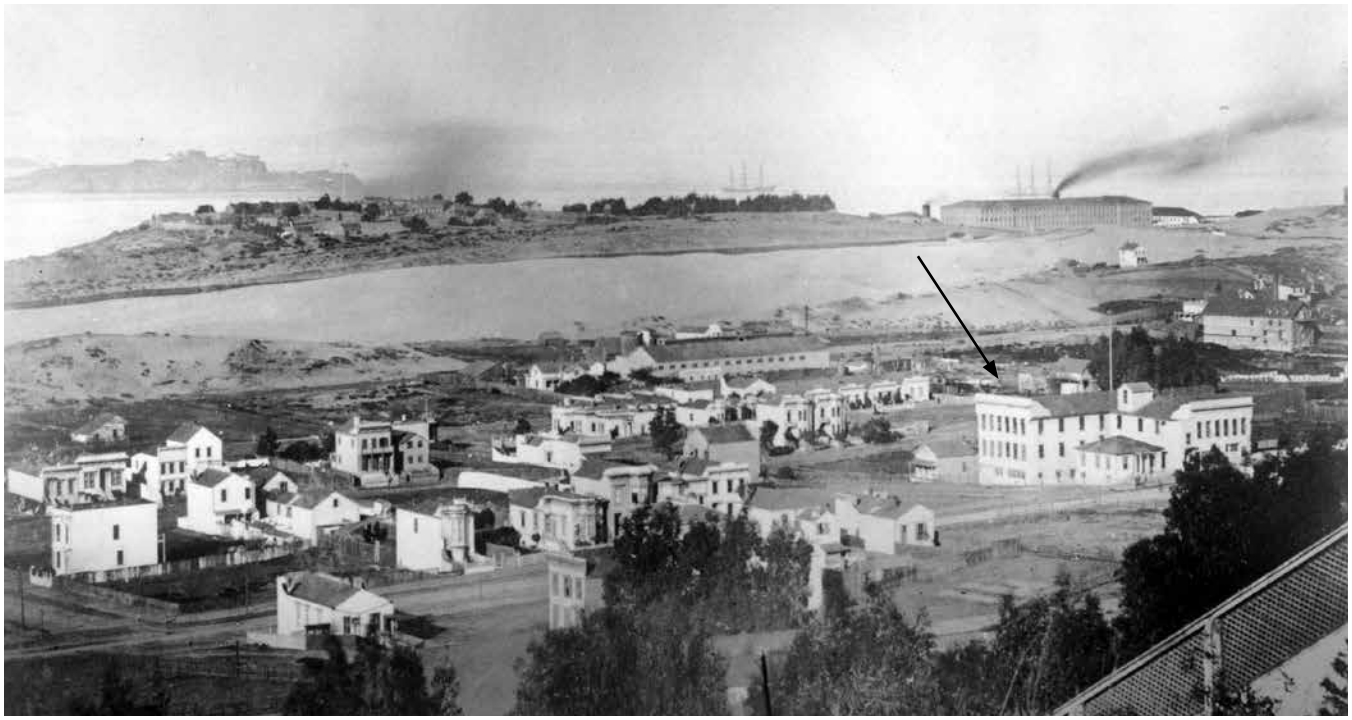
Henry Casebolt, a blacksmith, came to San Francisco in the mid-1850s and co-founded Casebolt & Darbyshire, a carriage manufacturer located on Kearny Street between Pine and California Streets. When street railways first came to San Francisco, Casebolt jumped into streetcar manufacturing. Eventually, he partnered with David Kerr and established a factory on the southwest corner of Market and Fifth Streets. Casebolt & Kerr built cars for the Front Street Mission & Ocean Railway (FSM&O), which, as noted earlier, Casebolt would ultimately supervise and control. On May 1, 1866, horse-drawn cars of the FSM&O began running from Sutter and Sansome Streets out Sutter Street to Polk Street and along Polk Street to a depot at Broadway.

The FSM&O depot at Polk and Broadway overlooked Spring Valley. Something about this suburban area appealed to Henry Casebolt. He built a fine home on Pierce Street in 1868[24] and bought real estate along the Presidio Road. He moved his carriage and car factory from Fifth and Market Streets to the northeast corner of Union and Laguna Streets at the end of 1872. When the FSM&O initiated service along Polk Street, horse-drawn omnibuses provided the only public transportation through Spring Valley. The area was lightly settled at the time, but omnibuses saw relatively heavy service on weekends, except during the rainy season. The Presidio itself and Fort Point, as well as the Harbor View area, were attractive weekend destinations for San Franciscans. Despite the draw of these locations, the old omnibus company faltered financially. It signed its own death warrant by refusing to pick up passengers at the FSM&O depot. On April 7, 1867, miffed by this refusal, Casebolt initiated a competing omnibus line running from the depot over the Presidio Road and on to Fort Point. The old omnibus line soon ceased operation while business boomed for Casebolt's omnibuses. He quickly added two more coaches to his fleet and, on Sundays, dispatched two coaches, rather than just one, per hour.[25] This new omnibus service helped push the FSM&O to profitability.

Despite the success of his omnibuses, Casebolt could see their future was dim. They were slow and had low capacity. Their route over the Presidio Road was often impassible in winter. After purchasing the unused franchise of the Presidio and Fort Point Railroad, Casebolt constructed a single-track (with passing sidings) horse car line from the FSM&O depot to Harbor View, a place on "a small island in the bay near Fort Point."[26] The "island" was actually a long peninsula of sand. Why was this place a destination for a horse car line?

Harbor View Park

It was really two things. San Francisco's bay shore was short on sandy beach and long on mudflats. The original Presidio anchorage was on this peninsula of sand,[27] which ran north of the mainland from near Fort Point to Divisadero Street. In 1864 Rudolph Herman, a German émigré who arrived



Henry Casebolt's street car factory, at the corner of Union and Laguna Streets, was vacant at the time of this photograph (1880) but would soon host construction of a fleet of cars for the Presidio & Ferries Railroad. The Laguna Street wing of the factory, in a slightly remodeled form, still exists. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

in San Francisco in 1854,[28] opened Harbor View House in the area north of Jefferson Street and west of Baker Street. It was a roadhouse/hotel catering primarily to soldiers stationed at an army base far from any Civil War action. Prior to the Civil War, various roadhouses along the Presidio Road held target-shooting contests now and again, but after the war (and perhaps because of it), target-shooting became the rage. Numerous shooting clubs, often organized along ethnic lines, held regular daylong contests. Shooters competed for prizes—sometimes valuable ones. Capitalizing on the enthusiasm for target shooting, Herman opened the National Shooting Gallery west of Harbor View House in late 1867. He received a permit for his shooting gallery—not to exceed 200 yards in length—on October 9, 1867, and the Scheutzenverein (German for "marksmen's club") held its first shooting match there on December 1, 1867.[29] Harbor View offered certain advantages for rifle shooting. It was relatively isolated and adjacent to open land in the Presidio. Shooters could fire on targets set in front of a sand hill backstop. Errant shots would fly out into the bay. For forty years the Harbor View peninsula would be San Francisco's premier target-shooting venue.

Once Casebolt's horse cars began running to Harbor View, Herman could afford to develop his holdings. By 1870 he had constructed a dance pavilion[30] and begun landscaping his grounds. His property, now known as "Harbor View Park," offered many attractions to fraternal organizations in addition to target shooting. Patrons could dance in the pavilion, drink in the bar, picnic on the grounds, eat in a restaurant, or stroll along a sandy beach to picturesque Fort Point. In the 1880s Herman erected hot and cold saltwater baths on his property near the beach. Harbor View Park became a full-fledged family resort. By the time other old-line resorts like the Willows or Woodward's Gardens had begun to fade or had disappeared, Harbor View Park was hitting its stride. Even the development of Golden Gate Park failed to diminish Harbor View's popularity. There was no target shooting in the park, and the Pacific Ocean did not offer the same benign environment for swimming the bay did. Eventually other entertainment operators opened near Harbor View Park, and the whole area remained a popular destination into the early twentieth century.

Balloon Cars and the End of Horse Car Service to Harbor View

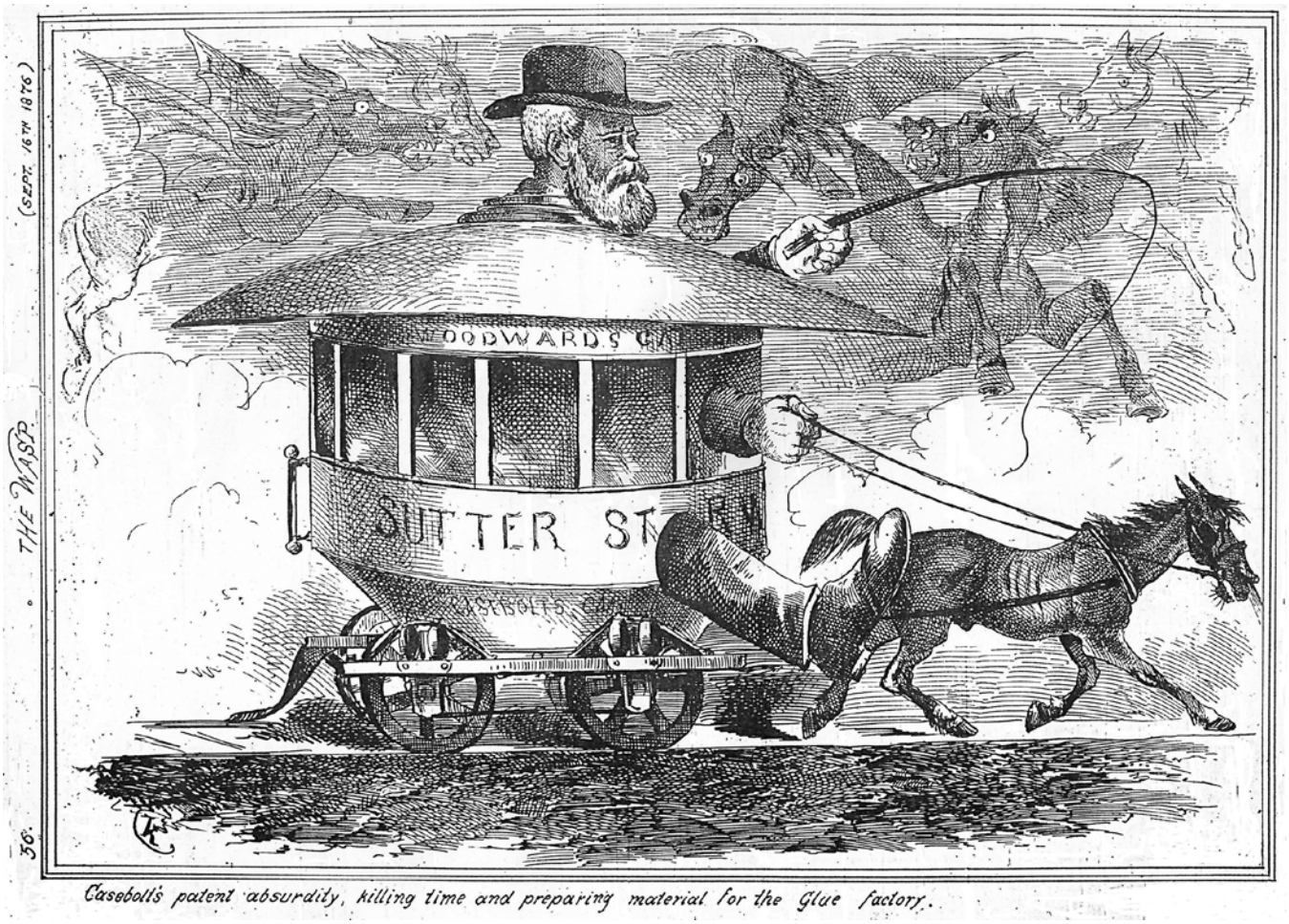
Notwithstanding the weekend-excursion draw of Harbor View and environs, Casebolt realized he had to economize on the "Presidio branch" of his railway. He opened the Presidio branch using heavy cars drawn by four horses.[31] These cars ran fine on relatively level terrain, but not so well over the uneven topography west of Polk Street. The segment between Polk and Filbert Streets and Union and Gough Streets featured particularly steep climbs and descents. Other up-and-down segments further taxed the stamina of the horses. Four-horse teams did not pay, despite, and perhaps because of, heavy weekend traffic to Harbor View. Casebolt responded to this drain on company resources by substituting lightweight cars and two-horse teams for the heavy-weight, four-horse cars.[32] He soon deemed these lightweight cars failures, as well. Casebolt wanted single-horse "bobtail" cars on the Presidio branch, but its hilly terrain was too much for a single horse to handle. It was hard work even for two-horse teams. He then took two steps to address this problem. First he acquired franchise rights allowing him to run track west on Vallejo Street from Polk Street as far as Octavia Street and north along Octavia Street to connect with his old track on Union Street.[33] This route avoided the worst uphill sections of the old route from Polk Street to Union Street.

In the fall of 1874, Casebolt began turning out a new type of super-lightweight car at his Union Street factory. This was the infamous balloon car, perhaps the most reviled vehicle in San Francisco transit history. Typical horse cars could be operated from either end, but balloon cars, like bobtail cars, could not. Bobtail cars needed a turntable or a loop track to reverse directions, but Casebolt designed the balloon car so its rounded body could revolve on a central pivot. When a balloon car driver unlatched the pivot, the car's own horses could rotate the car body so it faced in the opposite direction. The balloon car could reverse direction anywhere. Casebolt thought this feature would prove convenient.[34] Unfortunately, the pivot wore out rapidly. As *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Walter J. Thompson put it, "The result was that in a short time every balloon car was as wabbly [*sic*] as a ship in the trough

A balloon car. Allegedly, Henry Casebolt sits in the driver's seat.
Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

of the sea without a rudder, and to the passengers the sensations were about the same as if they were on that ship. As developers of headaches and as contrivances conducive to the dislocation of the human anatomy the balloon cars were worthy of first merit medals." Frank Pixley, editor of the original *Argonaut*, derided balloon cars as "revolving water closets." Derailments also plagued the balloon cars, and passengers were expected to climb out and assist the driver in heaving the car back up on the tracks. In July of 1878 Casebolt announced his intention to discontinue balloon car service. Some of the balloon car bodies ended up at Harbor View Park, where picnickers used them as "summer" houses providing shelter from the prevailing winds.[35]

Service deteriorated at the outer section of the Presidio branch after June of 1875. No cars ran beyond Union and Octavia Streets for at least nine months. In February of 1876 the Sutter Street Railroad offered the Presidio branch to Rudolph Herman, cars and all, if he would operate the line. Herman, who had been providing connecting omnibus coach service to Harbor View from the Union Street terminus of the Polk Street line during the long periods of service suspension on the Presidio branch, declined the offer. On many days Casebolt's balloon cars ran no farther than Vallejo and Octavia Streets, and on November 20, 1876 a city supervisor accused the Sutter Street Railroad of abandoning all regular streetcar service north of that intersection and sought revocation of



A cartoon showing "heartless Henry Casebolt" and the ghosts of balloon car horses past. From The Wasp, *September 16, 1876.*

the company's charter on that account.[36]

Casebolt gave up on horse car service on the Presidio branch. Horse cars were too slow and too expensive to operate. The Sutter Street Railroad purchased two small steam locomotives of a type recently perfected by Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia.[37] Known as "steam dummies," these locomotives looked something like horse cars. Baldwin advertised them as "noiseless." Casebolt built five coaches in the style of mainline railroad coaches of the day at his Union Street factory. Although the Sutter Street Railroad bought the equipment for the Presidio branch, Rudolph Herman would operate the line from Octavia and Union Streets to Harbor View.[38] Steam dummies began running to Harbor View in late September of 1877.

By the time the Sutter Street Railroad began converting its horse car lines to cable power in 1877, Casebolt's influence on street railways was waning. He shuttered his Union Street factory in 1877.[39] He retired as superintendent and sold his interest in the company in January of 1880. Casebolt believed in the future of Spring Valley and Harbor View, but his successors did not. They disposed of the Presidio branch line by selling it lock, stock, and barrel to the Presidio & Ferries Railroad in 1881 and made no move to block that railroad's application for a franchise over the route to Harbor View.[40] The Polk Street line remained a horse car backwater until late November 1888 when cable cars replaced horse cars on both Polk Street and Pacific Avenue. A four-block-long horse car shuttle remained on Polk Street from Pacific Avenue to Union Street so riders on the Polk Street line could transfer to the Presidio & Ferries at Union Street.

The Presidio & Ferries Railroad

In September of 1878 a group of investors, which included Andrew Hallidie, petitioned the board of supervisors for a franchise to run a "wire railroad" from the intersection of Montgomery Street and Montgomery Avenue to Union Street, out Union Street to Gough Street, and from there to the Presidio Reservation "by the most feasible route," which the franchise defined as Union Street to Steiner Street to Greenwich Street to the Presidio Reservation.[41] The Presidio branch of the Sutter Street Railroad had, of course, already blazed this route. In 1879 the petitioners applied for and received a modified franchise that included a connection via Washington and Jackson Streets to the ferry terminals at the foot of Market Street and an adjusted route to the Presidio Reservation via Greenwich, Baker, and Jefferson Streets. The board of supervisors overrode a mayoral veto to approve this franchise.[42]

James B. Stetson, supervisor for the twelfth ward, which encompassed Spring Valley and the Sutter Street Railroad's entire Presidio branch, defended his override vote with some telling remarks about the transportation situation in Spring Valley. "This part of the city is practically isolated from the business and other portions of the city, and can only be reached by a tedious and winding road, and is to all intents and purposes as isolated as the village of San Mateo." The new street railroad would be "a poor man's road" and would afford "the people" "cheap travel" to the pleasures of the Presidio and Harbor View.[43] Another supervisor noted that property owners in Spring Valley being assessed for the opening of Montgomery Avenue deserved modern transit service along that avenue and out Union Street.

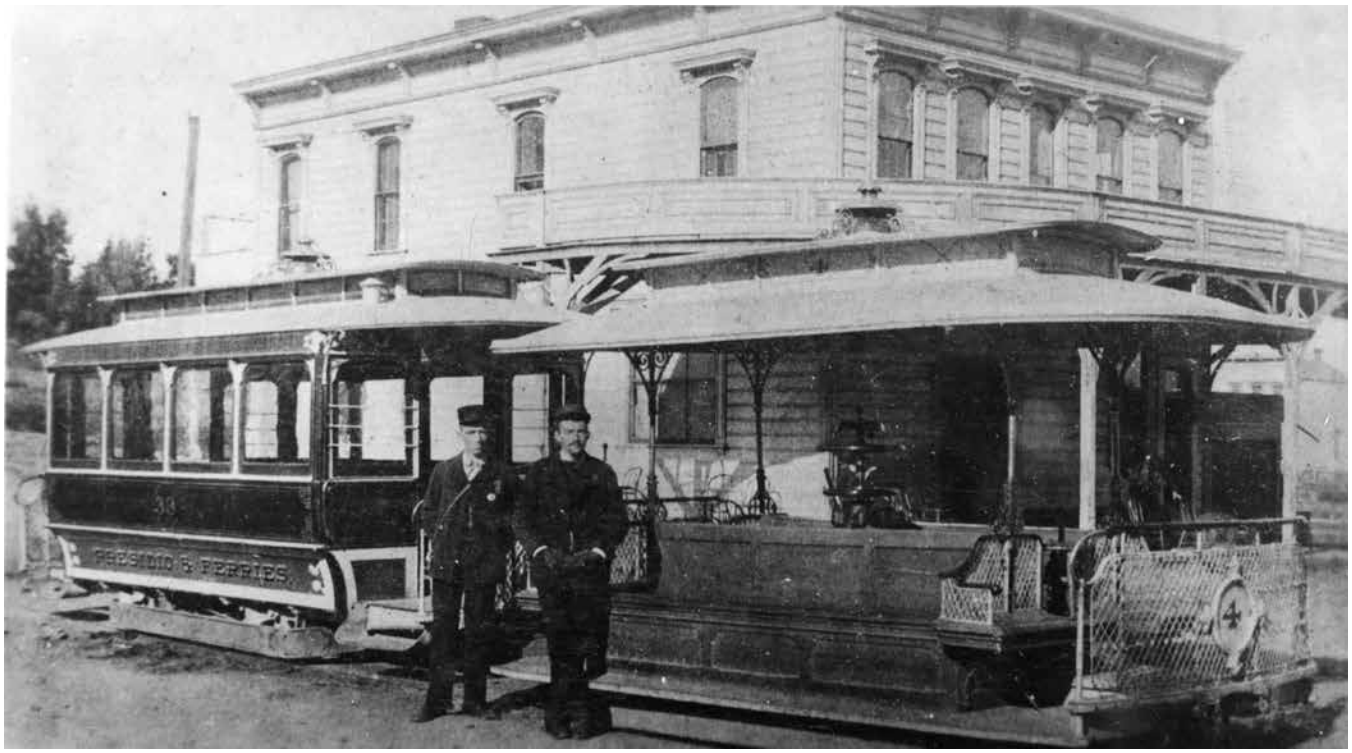
In the spring of 1879 and prior to receiving its franchise, the Presidio Railroad—it would reincorporate as the Presidio & Ferries Railroad on January 1, 1882—solicited plans and specifications for the construction of a "cable road" from the intersection of Washington Street and Montgomery Avenue to Union and Steiner Streets.[44] Construction commenced at Washington Street and Montgomery Avenue in mid-June of 1880, but was immediately halted by a temporary injunction and restraining order granted to the venerable Omnibus Railroad Company, which had opened its first horse car line in 1861. The Omnibus Company claimed the

The Presidio & Ferries cable train at Union and Steiner in the early days. Passengers bound for Harbor View boarded steam dummy trains on Steiner. The four-story pump house and windmill belong to Stephen Tilton whose 1872 home now sits at 2460 Union Street. The house originally stood near the center of Tilton's lot. Echeverria/Brant Collection. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory.

1872 act authorizing Montgomery Avenue created a contractual right for it to use the avenue that could not be "invaded" by the Presidio Railroad. A superior court decision rejected this and other arguments made by the Omnibus Company and dissolved the injunction and restraining order. The Omnibus Company appealed that decision to the California Supreme Court, but lost in a close decision. The way was finally cleared for construction to begin.[45]

By today's standards, construction of the Presidio & Ferries Railroad was nearly instantaneous. In a little over a year the road was open for business. The railroad erected its powerhouse and car barn at the top of the Union Street hill on Sharp Place and built its cars at Henry Casebolt's old streetcar factory on Union Street. Crews spooled out and spliced two cables on October 8 and 9, 1881. The eastern cable measured 11,000 feet once spliced; the western, 13,000. Sixteen horses were needed to pull the western cable up the hill from Van Ness Avenue to Larkin Street.[46] The first test car successfully rolled over the Union Street track from Laguna Street to Steiner Street on October 9, 1881, thus complying with terms of the railroad's franchise. The Presidio & Ferries opened for revenue service on January 1, 1882.[47] The Presidio & Ferries ran cable trains, consisting of a lead car that gripped the cable, and one or more trailer cars. The horse car section on Washington and Jackson Streets, with a one-block run on Montgomery Street and tracks on East Street adjacent to the ferry terminals, remained a fixture on the line until the end of cable car service in 1906. Initially, technological limits forced the selection of horse cars on the Washington/Jackson loop. As noted earlier,[48] when the Presidio & Ferries cable line was designed in 1879, the so-called "pull curve" had not been invented. In a pull curve the grip retains its hold on the cable through the curve. A cable car can drop the cable and roll around a curve by gravity—a "let go" curve—but it cannot use this method to negotiate level or uphill curves. Pull curves would have been needed at two locations, if not more, to haul Presidio & Ferries cars to the foot of Market Street. Franchise issues on Washington and Jackson Streets also came into play and would ultimately block the Presidio & Ferries from extending cables to the waterfront.

The horse car connection to the ferry terminals



A Presidio & Ferries cable train at Union and Steiner Streets. Note the wheeled grip. From the Roy D. Graves pictorial collection. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

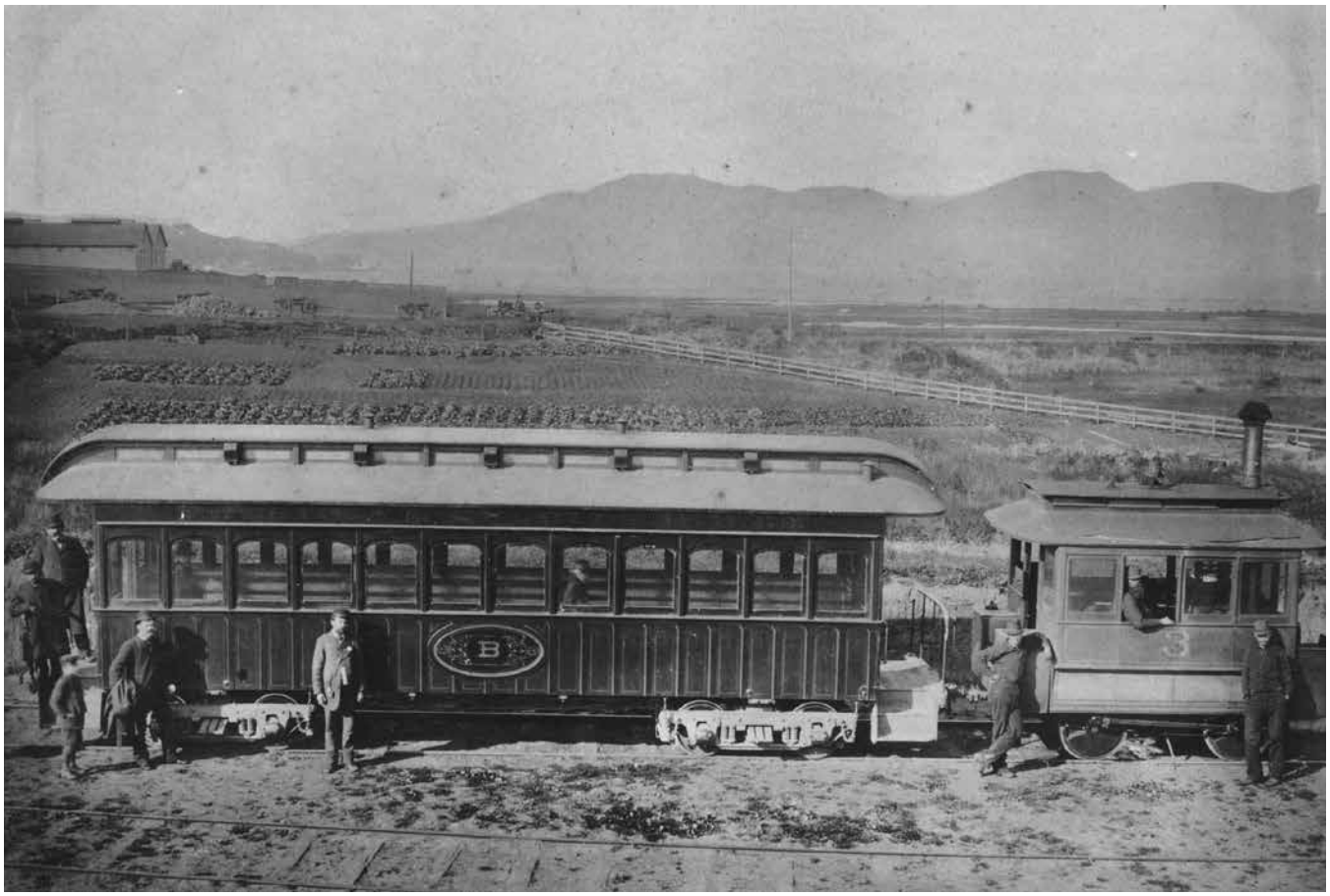
opened in late April of 1882. Scheduled running time from the ferries to Harbor View was only thirty-six minutes.[49] Transfers from several horse car lines meant that many San Francisco residents now had easy access to Harbor View Park, which undoubtedly contributed to the rising popularity of Herman's resort. Steam dummies and coaches were stabled in a round house/repair shop on Jefferson Street opposite the National Shooting Gallery. An extension of the steam dummy segment into the Presidio opened in August of 1883.[50] The extension ran from Jefferson and Baker Streets through the Presidio boundary and across marshlands to a depot near the post hospital. Some of this trackage crossed the marshlands on a trestle. This direct link to the Presidio was something the earlier Sutter Street Railroad steam dummy line had not provided. Civilian employees now had an easy commute to the Presidio, and soldiers and any family members had a reliable way to reach downtown San Francisco.

Harbor View. From the author's collection.

Growth and Change in Spring Valley and Harbor View

The Presidio & Ferries line had a negligible effect on real estate in North Beach and the eastern slope of Russian Hill. These areas were already well developed by the time the railroad commenced service. West of Larkin Street was a different story. In a July 28, 1888 article about increased service on the Presidio & Ferries line (base service had trains running on four-minute headways), the *Chronicle* estimated that in the preceding year, 150 residences had been constructed between Larkin and the Presidio. In 1887 the Pacific Cable Railroad Company, a trust company controlling many of the patents applicable to cable railway construction and operation, noted that real estate values on land bordering the Presidio & Ferries route had enjoyed a 20% jump in assessed value from 1879 to 1884.[51]

The Spring Valley industrial landscape had changed since Sutter Street Railroad days. Many of the pioneer industries bordering Washerwoman's Lagoon no longer existed in 1880. The lagoon itself had been partially filled with sand, and its remaining waters had been drained by the Lombard Street sewer. Lobos Square (site of today's Moscone Recreation Center) had been graded flat, a project that marked the beginning of the end for the great sand dunes separating Spring Valley from the bay shore.[52] By the end of the 1880s, most of the dairies in Spring Valley (aka Cow Hollow) were about to shut down, condemned and shunned for producing impure milk.[53] Two major manufacturing facilities came to the neighborhood shortly after service on the Presidio & Ferries began: a coal gas plant at Fillmore and Bay Streets and a factory for producing heavy forgings on the site of today's Marina Safeway. This latter facility, The Phelps Manufacturing Company, advertised itself as a specialist in "cable road work."[54] By the 1880s Spring Valley's transformation from its semirural past to an urban future was in full swing, and the Presidio & Ferries was an integral part of that transformation.



Steam dummy No. 3 and Coach B pose just north of the Presidio Station, located near today's intersection of Lincoln Boulevard and Girard Road. Marshutz & Cantrell, a San Francisco firm, built No. 3 in 1885. Beyond the train lies Thompson Reach. Note the row crops. The cultivated area would later become a firing range. From the Roy D. Graves pictorial collection. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Completion of the Presidio & Ferries Railroad stimulated growth in pleasure facilities at Harbor View. Rudolph Herman opened bath houses for surf bathing in July of 1883 and a hot salt water bath complex featuring porcelain tubs and private rooms in May of 1885.[55] Herman received some competition in 1882 when P. H. Hink opened Seaside Gardens (later to be known as Germania Garden) on the east side of Baker Street between Jefferson and Beach Streets. Seaside Gardens immediately made a name for itself hosting band concerts at its pavilion. Perhaps this new facility contributed to overcrowding on the steam dummy line. Conditions were so bad that at times patrons chose to walk back to Union and Steiner Streets.[56] Hink opened his own bath house in 1883 at the corner of Divisadero and Jefferson Streets. The resorts at Harbor View and Seaside Gardens were often the scene of much gaiety. The *San Francisco Chronicle* of July 1, 1889 reported on a day of concurrent picnics. At Seaside Gardens the Sharpshooters of the Alps held their annual picnic. The grounds were crowded. A merry-go-round was set up for the kids and a lottery table for the adults. Dancing couples filled the pavilion. The Garibaldi Guard and the Bersaglieri were in attendance. The paper went on to say: "The red uniforms of the guards and the green plumes of the Bersaglieri added a touch of color to the scene and captured the feminine eyes. Under the trees and in the quiet nooks the dark-eyed daughters of sunny Italy sat and talked small nothings with the boys in uniform and then danced until they were tired." Over at Harbor View the First Hebrew Ladies Mutual Benefit Association held its picnic. The beach was crowded

Cable trains ran into the Presidio over this track on Greenwich Street from 1892 until 1906. Note the gap in the Presidio wall and the off-center cable slots. Photo courtesy of SFMTA.

and the bathhouses full. A string orchestra played in the dance pavilion. "The floor was crowded and the couples bumped into each other at every turn, but it did not matter; they were there for fun, and were consequently too good humored to be annoyed with such little things. The festivities were kept up until late, and the merry-makers came home tired, but feeling the better for their exercise."

The picnic season at Harbor View Park and Seaside Gardens boosted profits for the Presidio & Ferries Railroad. Another revenue generator out by Harbor View was the Presidio athletic grounds constructed by the Presidio & Ferries on a plot of former marshland filled in and leased by the estate of James G. Fair.[57] The athletic grounds occupied land bounded by Baker, Broderick, Francisco, and North Point Streets. The grounds were fitted up with a grandstand capable of holding 1,500 spectators and included a clubhouse with lockers and showers for the athletes.[58] Baseball games were the most popular activity at the athletic grounds in its early years, but football, rugby, soccer, cricket, and lacrosse contests were held there as well, and eventually predominated as newer baseball fields were built around town. The grounds contained a cinder track and were host to track-and-field meets, which achieved a degree of popularity in the first decade of the twentieth century, perhaps inspired by the revival of Olympic Games. The Presidio athletic grounds opened in June of 1896 and closed in the summer of 1912 in advance of site preparation for the Panama Pacific International Exposition.

As the 1880s drew to a close, the Presidio & Ferries Railroad began formulating plans to extend

Presidio & Ferries cable train heading downtown at Union and Mason Streets. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

its cable line out Union Street and into the Presidio via Baker and Greenwich Streets. The extension would eliminate steam dummy transfers and create a faster, more direct connection between downtown and the Presidio. The railroad advertised for construction bids in late 1889 but did not begin work until 1891 because the city needed to establish official grades along streets, like Union Street, that cut through the old Laguna Survey in eastern Spring Valley. Establishing official grades for these streets was a prelude to opening them. In 1891 Van Ness Avenue ended just north of Vallejo Street at the edge of a 40-foot cliff. Most of the area north of this cliff between Van Ness Avenue and Gough Street as far as Filbert Street eventually would be covered in fill. Union Street itself would be raised ten to twelve feet above its old grade. Since the Presidio & Ferries was a profitable street railway, paying regular dividends, its financial position allowed it to secure a $250,000 mortgage on its property in 1891 to fund the Presidio extension. The railroad raised its roadbed to Union Street's new grade by building a trestle between Van Ness Avenue and Gough Street. Cable trains would rattle over this trestle for well over two years. The Presidio extension required installation of a pull curve at Union and Baker Streets and necessitated modification of the Hallidie screw-type bottom grip used on the original line. The old Presidio terminal and steam dummy trackage within the Presidio were abandoned when the extension opened in August of 1892. Steam dummy service to Harbor View remained, but the dummies ran on Baker Street only. Baker Street received two blocks of new track in mid-1893, which allowed the dummies to reach the Harbor View baths, practically on the bay's shoreline.[59]

Riding and Working on the Railroad

By today's standards, the Presidio & Ferries provided an enviable level of service. On the cable section, headways varied from four to six minutes, depending upon the time of day. After 1888 the most common headway was four minutes. On Sundays headways were often three minutes. Horse cars shuttled from the ferry terminals to Montgomery and Washington Streets from 6:30 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. The cable ran from 6:00 a.m. until midnight, and the steam dummy pulled its railway-style coaches between Union and Steiner Streets and the Presidio from 6:40 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. Headways on the steam dummy line were fifteen minutes between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. and thirty minutes otherwise. The Presidio & Ferries operated six two-horse cars, four steam dummies, and five coaches. The cable line's original car roster comprised twelve grip cars (also called "dummies") and eighteen trailers. By 1885 the line had ten grips and ten trailers in regular service, with fourteen grips and cars (division unknown) in reserve. In 1885 the road averaged 3,250 riders a day. The car roster expanded further when the Presidio extension opened in 1892. Rather than purchase new equipment, the Presidio & Ferries acquired second-hand grips and trailers from the California Street Cable Railroad, which had recently modernized its own fleet with the type of double-ended car still plying California Street today. Riders despised the shabby, hand-me-down cars, which were placed in service without being repaired or even cleaned.[60]

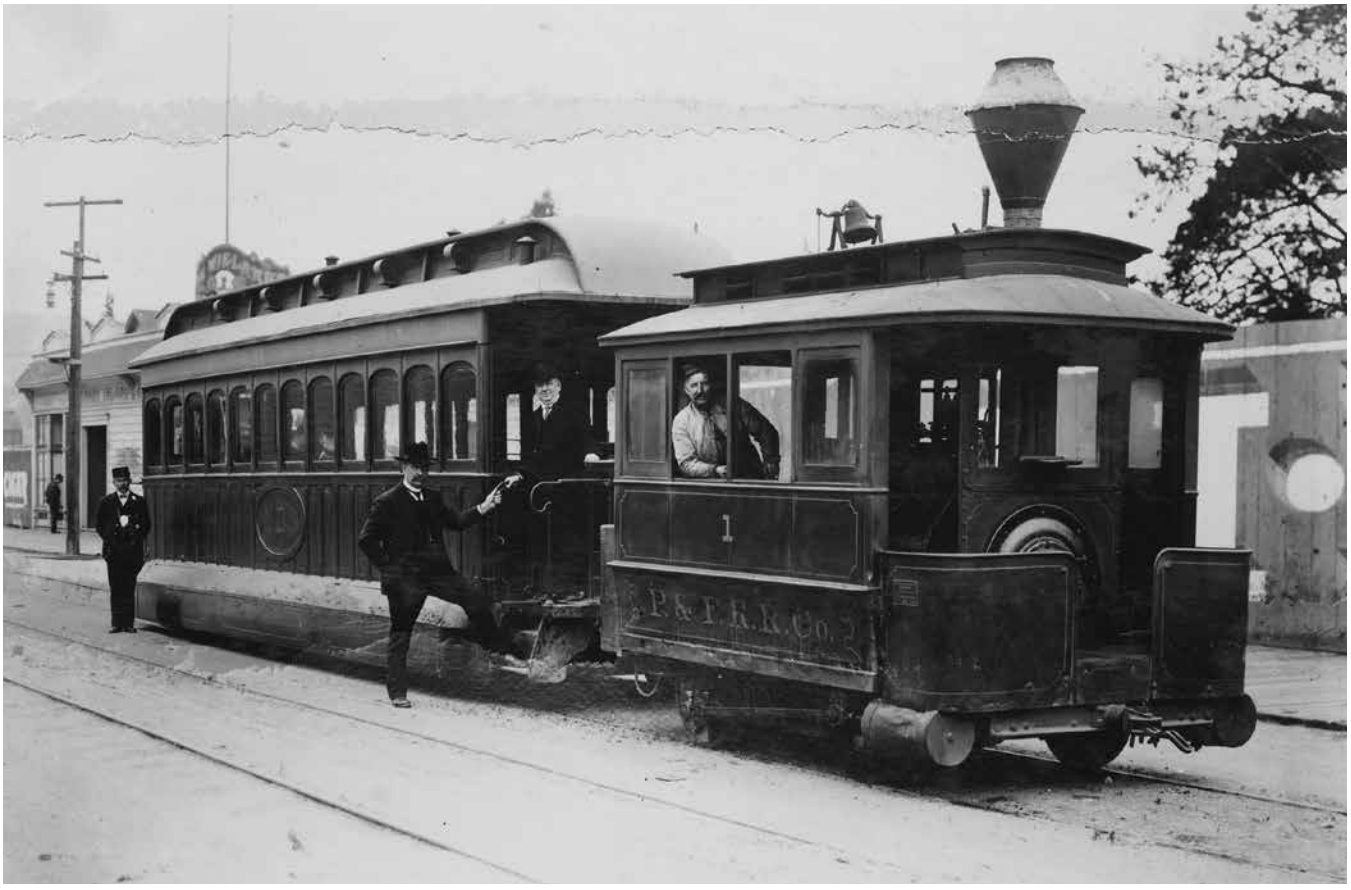
Gangs of hoodlums terrorizing patrons on public transportation is not just a modern phenomenon. Such a gang, none older than fifteen, boarded a Presidio & Ferries car at the Harbor View station in 1890 and proceeded to frighten the passengers, mostly women and children, with "foul language" and "low horse play." Two conductors on the car did

Presidio & Ferries car barn at Filbert and Gough Streets. The two-story building behind the car barn once housed the Occidental Laundry. From the Echeverria/Brant Collection, courtesy of OpenSFHistory.

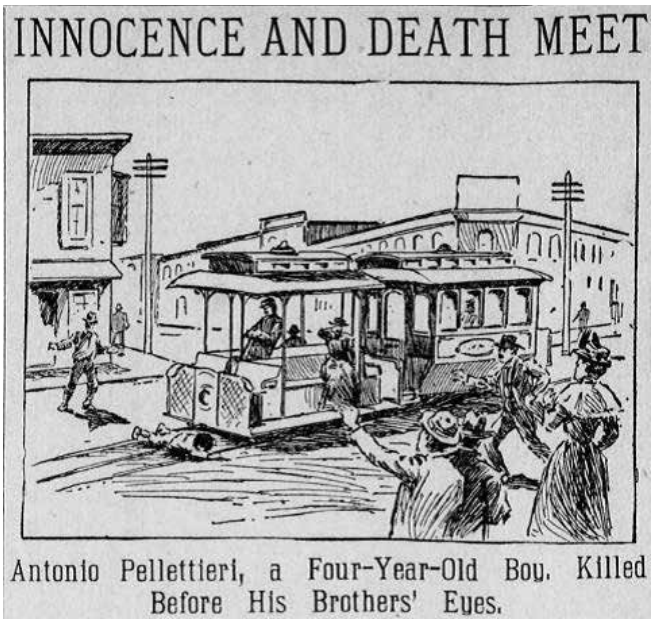
nothing. Once these passengers transferred to a cable train on Union Street, other "tough youngsters" amused themselves by throwing rotten vegetables at the passing train. A more serious incident occurred a year later when a group of about fifty hoodlums, male and female, crowded into a car at Harbor View. "All stages of intoxication were exhibited," and before the car had gone a block several fights had broken out. Four or five windows were smashed, one by the head of a young man from Sacramento. As with most such incidents that occur today, no arrests were made.[61]

Fatal accidents on the Presidio & Ferries occurred at a higher rate than they do today. The steam dummy line averaged one fatality a year for its first six years of operation. Inebriation may have played a part in some of these accidents, as well as general carelessness. (Trying to board a moving train is never a good idea.) At least four fatal accidents involved children running in front of a train, although one adult fell from a train (probably from the open grip car) and was subsequently dragged underneath it. Cable machinery was responsible for two gruesome accidents, one fatal. The nonfatal accident occurred in an underground vault at Montgomery Avenue and Washington Street. An employee engaged in oiling the sheaves and pulleys there lit a gas jet in the vault not knowing the cable had dropped below its designed level and cut through a gas supply pipe. Gas accumulated in the vault, which was sealed by a manhole cover, and it exploded. Miraculously, the employee escaped with his life, though he was seriously burned. He had smelled gas but discounted it.

The fatal accident occurred at the powerhouse. An employee charged with applying resin to a belt connected to the main driving wheel dropped the resin, slipped trying to retrieve it, and dislodged the belt in a way that trapped his hand in the driving wheel. He was dragged completely around the wheel and died of a fractured skull.[62]



Presidio & Ferries steam dummy No. 1 and railway coach on Baker Street in Harbor View. Note the skirts on the coach, fitted there to divert wayward pedestrians from unforgiving iron wheels. From the Roy D. Graves pictorial collection. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.


INNOCENCE AND DEATH MEET

Antonio Pellettieri, a Four-Year-Old Boy, Killed Before His Brothers' Eyes.

"Innocence and Death Meet," from the San Francisco Call, *June 3, 1898.*

Electric Dreams Realized

Endless wire rope street railways enjoyed fifteen years as state-of-the-art technology. That all came to an end on February 2, 1888, when Frank J. Sprague opened the first commercially successful electric street railway system in Richmond, Virginia. Although the Presidio & Ferries extended its cable into the Presidio in August of 1892, by 1894 the company was planning for a conversion of its main line from horse and cable power to electric traction. In June of 1894 the board of supervisors granted the company the right to power its cars with electricity. The plans contemplated a counterbalance section between Larkin and Polk Streets similar to the type used for nearly fifty years on Fillmore Street between Broadway and Green Streets. The company wanted to electrify the Washington/Jackson horse car section of its line, but failed to reach an agreement with the Market Street Railway, which had acquired franchise rights on Washington and Jackson Streets when it absorbed the Central Railroad. The Market Street Railway had also stymied earlier plans by the Presidio & Ferries to extend its cable line down to the waterfront. So the Presidio & Ferries remained a multi-modal horse-, cable-, and steam-powered system until April 18, 1906.[63]

The great earthquake of 1906 destroyed the railroad's powerhouse. What the shaking had left undone the ensuing firestorm finished. The roadbed suffered severe damage. A large section of it gave way between Steiner and Pierce Streets, and in many places the earthquake's force actually closed the cable slot itself. The fire burned up all the cars.[64] It did not reach Harbor View, but the steam dummies and their coaches would never run on Baker Street again. The Presidio & Ferries decided to rebuild itself as an electric trolley line. Its franchise rights would expire in less than eight years—too short a time to recoup its investment in a rebuilt cable line. Rebuilding could be done on the cheap. No powerhouse would be needed. The railroad would buy its power from United Railroads. Company leaders believed the engineering challenge of surmounting Russian Hill could be solved by a variation on the counterbalance principle. City Hall was reluctant to green-light electrification. Some voices argued the railroad's franchises had already expired. Not everyone was happy with this foot-dragging. One supervisor complained that his friends were suffering from lack of access to the salt water baths at Harbor View. Finally, on August 27, 1906, the supervisors ratified the validity of the railroad's franchises and cleared the way for electrification.[65]

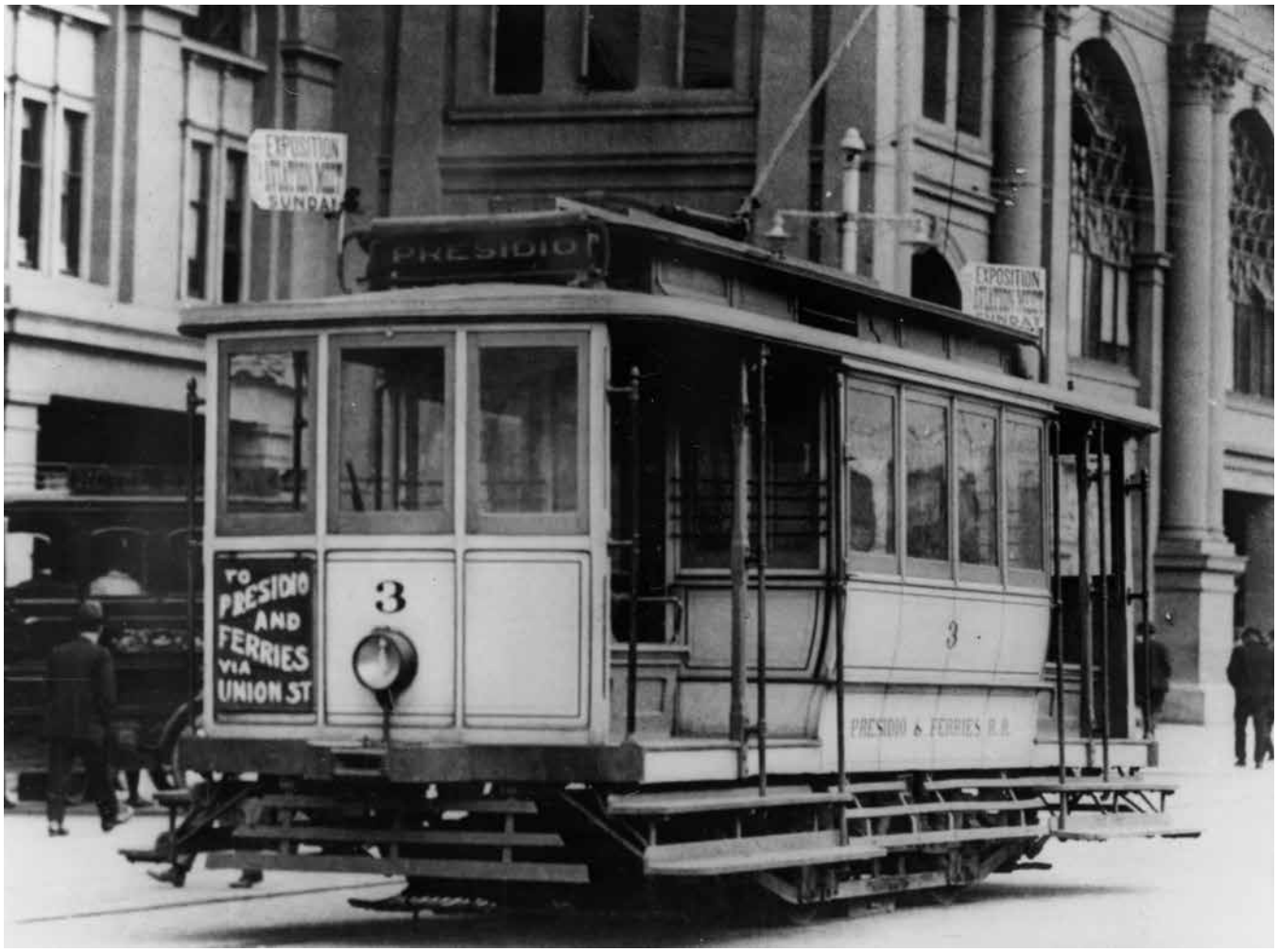
By late March of 1907, the old broad gauge tracks and cable conduit with its heavy supporting material had been removed from Union Street between Polk and Pierce Streets and replaced by a new standard gauge roadbed. Trolley wire had been strung along the route, and a few trolleys were on hand, but the board of supervisors balked at granting an operating permit for this segment of the Union Street line. The city attorney also rejected the railroad's performance bond.[66] Despite this opposition, the Presidio & Ferries began training motormen on a short electrified section between Steiner and Fillmore Streets in April of 1907 and provided limited service between Pierce and Polk Streets beginning in May, during the Carmen's Union strike. The Presidio & Ferries enjoyed good relations with its workers, who did not walk out at the beginning of the strike, but when the union men, acting under orders from their union's president, refused to issue transfers to the Polk Street line of United Railroads, they were discharged and replaced

with non-union operators. The strike effectively collapsed in November of 1907, and the Carmen's Union itself folded in February of 1908.

By the fall of 1907 four-wheel, single-truck electric cars purchased secondhand from United Railroads were running out Union Street from Polk Street to Baker Street and thence to Harbor View.[67] Work on the eastern part of the line was in progress from the ferries to Powell Street, but moving slowly. The board of supervisors would allow Montgomery Avenue to be ripped up only three blocks at a time. Although United Railroads no longer blocked electrification on Washington and Jackson Streets, work ceased during the fall harvest season on Washington Street where the line passed through the produce district.[68] No solution for running cars over the steep grade between Larkin and Polk Streets on Union Street had been settled upon. All other blocks on Union Street could be ascended by the little electric cars. Finally, in June of 1908 the board of supervisors granted the Presidio & Ferries a franchise to run electric cars from Union and Larkin Streets to Franklin and Union Streets via Larkin, Vallejo, and Franklin Streets. In the late spring of 1909 service was restored to the Presidio, and the Presidio & Ferries once again connected its namesake terminals.[69]

The Presidio & Ferries continued its profitable operation until its franchise expired on December 13, 1913. The city purchased twenty-nine obsolete four-wheel streetcars, track, roadbed, and miscellaneous equipment for $312,535.32 and turned it all over to the recently created Municipal Railway.[70] The city also agreed to lease the nearly new car barn at Filbert and Gough Streets for a year with options for two further years. The Presidio & Ferries car barn later became the site of the eight-lane Marina Bowl and Car Barn restaurant. Harbor View Park

Roadbed damage from the earthquake to Union Street between Steiner and Pierce Streets. Courtesy of the National Archives.



Presidio & Ferries #3, a four-wheel single truck electric streetcar purchased secondhand from United Railroads, waits at the Ferry Building. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

survived the amputation of its rifle range due to the opening of Lyon Street and as late as 1910 was serving cracked crab, clam chowder, and "all short orders" at the tavern on its "beautiful grounds" while providing hot and cold salt water baths at the Baker Street terminus of the Presidio & Ferries electric car line. Some of Harbor View's landscaping remained to grace the grounds of the California Building at the Panama Pacific International Exposition. Cars ran out Baker Street as far the Presidio athletic grounds until 1912,[71] but site preparation for the exposition put an end to that, as well as for Harbor View Park, by the middle of the year.

One physical part of the Presidio & Ferries Railroad survives in the Jackson Square Historic District. The much-remodeled horse car barn still stands at 440 Jackson Street.

* * * * * * * *

About the Author

Robert Bardell was born in Berkeley and received his B.A. in English from the University of California in 1971. He now resides in Golden Gate Valley on the north side of the Presidio Road, west of the lagoon.

Notes

1. The Presidio and Ferries Railroad incorporated January 1, 1882, the day it commenced revenue operation. Prior to that date it was incorporated as the Presidio Railroad and then as the Presidio and Ferry Railroad. The railroad was commonly referred to as the Union Street line. A note on "and" versus "'&": both forms appear in newspaper reports, with "and" predominating, but I prefer "&" since it appears on car body lettering.
2. The curve connecting Montgomery Avenue and Union Street worked only because street grades at that intersection allowed cars traveling in either direction to drop the cable and roll through the curve by gravity —a so-called "let go" curve. It was not 100% effective. Passengers were sometimes called upon to push. A cable car system in Dunedin, New Zealand installed the world's first "pull curve" in 1881. This engineering advance, in which the cable is not dropped while a car negotiates a curve, came along too late to become part of the original design of the Presidio & Ferries Railroad.
3. The North Beach and Mission, Omnibus, and City Railroads held franchises on Powell, Stockton, and Dupont (Grant Avenue) Streets. The North Beach and Mission and Omnibus Railroads actively opposed the Presidio & Ferries Railroad at every turn. In the face of this opposition, backers of the Presidio & Ferries considered ending the cable at the intersection of Union Street and Montgomery Avenue and operating horse cars from there to the waterfront. They likely envisioned using Montgomery Avenue, however, and not the older streets. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 30, 1879, p. 4.
4. Horse car horses could work about four hours a day and had about a four-year service life. Each horse dropped around ten pounds of horse manure on the streets per day and also drenched the pavement with urine. The manure contained tetanus virus which meant that any cut or scrape suffered on the street carried the risk of fatal disease. Frequent and copious urination eliminated smooth pavements like asphalt for horse car lines because the horses tended to slip and fall on such slick, smooth surfaces. Instead, cobblestones or other forms of intermittent pavement were used to ensure traction for horse hooves. See George W Hilton, *The Cable Car in America* (La Jolla: Howell-North Books, 1982), 15, or http://www.cable-car-guy.com/html/cchorse.html.
5. The Front Street, Mission & Ocean Railroad would become the Sutter Street Railroad in 1872. The name change required an act of the state legislature to become official. For details on Casebolt's financial underwriting of the railroad see H. Casebolt, *Historical Report of the Management and Financial Condition of the Sutter Street Rail Road Company from September 22, 1865 to June 10, 1872*, (San Francisco: Cubery & Co., 1873).
6. The term *vara*, as used in San Francisco surveying, equaled thirty-three inches.
7. This class included Chinese and denizens of the Barbary Coast. *Daily Alta California*, March 19, 1870, 2.
8. Peachy's lobbying: *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26, 1870, 1; opposition to the original route and subsequent changes to it: *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 18, 1870, 1. The new avenue would be 6,226 feet long: Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1872-73*, (San Francisco: Spaulding & Barto, 1873), 490.
9. Hang the commissioners: *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 8, 1871, 3; unfair assessments: *Daily Alta California*, June 8, 1871, 1; *San Francisco Chronicle* June 9, 1871, 2.
10. *Daily Alta California*, July 11, 1871, 2.
11. Status of the board of public works: *Statutes of California Passed at the Nineteenth Session of the Legislature 1871-72*, (Sacramento: T. A. Springer, state printer, 1872), 911-924; bond issue: Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1880-81*, (San Francisco: Geo. Spaulding & Co., 1881), 534.
12. Advertisement for Montgomery Avenue bonds: *Daily Alta California*, Nov. 30, 1872, 2; bids rejected below 85% of face value: *Daily Alta California*, April 8, 1873, 1 and May 8, 1873, 1.
13. Constructed in 1854 on Jackson between Montgomery and Kearny Streets, the hotel was "the palace hotel of the Pacific" until about 1860 when it began a rapid descent to third-rate status. Montgomery Avenue cut right through it. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 5, 1874, 3.
14. *Daily Alta California*, Jan 17, 1875, 2; and the *San Francisco Real Estate Circular*, July 1875.
15. The April, 1876 *San Francisco Real Estate Circular* reported a tilt ranging from six to eight feet, while the *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1875, 3, reports an eleven-foot tilt in one place.
16. Montgomery Avenue would not be graded as far as Bay Street until July 1879 and would not be graded from Bay Street to North Point Street until the late 1890s.
17. Wheeler ruled that the manifest illegality of opening Montgomery Avenue did not "cloud" the title of properties being sold by San Francisco's tax collector. He cited a state Supreme Court decision in a classic demurrer. *California Legal Record*, 1:13-14 (San Francisco: F. A. Scofield & Co., 1878), 262-263. Wheeler quashed injunctions ordered in two separate lawsuits: *Louis Dutertre vs. William Ford, Tax Collector, the City and County of San Francisco*, filed March 15, 1877 and *Patrick Plover and numerous others vs. William Ford Tax Collector*, filed March 26, 1877, Board of Supervisors,

San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1876-77, (San Francisco: Spaulding & Barto, 1877), 267–8. Formal dissolution of the injunctions occurred on July 11, 1878. The Nineteenth District Court was a California, not a federal court. Prior to ratification of California's second constitution in 1879 limited jurisdiction county courts were overseen by multi-county district courts of general jurisdiction.

18. The plaintiff actually lost his case. He had bought a deed to property sold to recover delinquent assessments and sued to gain possession of it from the old owner of record. The tax deed transferred no title. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 27, 1881, 4.

19. The state supreme court granted a motion for a new trial, but that trial, and subsequent appeal, returned the same result.

20. See *Statutes of California Passed at the Nineteenth Session of the Legislature 1871-72*, (Sacramento: T. A. Springer, state printer, 1872), 911-924, for the timing of payments into the sinking fund.

21. Coupons apparently were redeemed on a first-come first-served basis. Details on Montgomery Avenue assessments, the interest account, and the sinking fund may be found in the appropriate years of *San Francisco Municipal Reports*.

22. Numerous lawsuits sought to compel the city to pay interest and principal on the Montgomery Avenue bonds. Others sought to validate deeds transferred via property sales for delinquent assessments. They all failed. One of these lawsuits even climbed the judicial ladder all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. See the *San Francisco Chronicle*. August 25, 1885, 5 and August 26, 1885, 2, for details of a U.S. Circuit Court decision, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 1886, 8 and April 14, 1886, 2 for details of the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

23. See the *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 24, 1904, 10 and December 22, 1908, 17.

24. Casebolt's house was "nearly completed" in March of 1868 per the *Daily Alta California*, March 11, 1868, 1. It stands today at 2727 Pierce Street between Vallejo and Green Streets.

25. Omnibus line for sale: *Daily Alta California* December 18, 1865, 2; no pick-up at FSM&O depot: Casebolt, *Historical Report of the Management and Financial Condition of the Sutter Street Railroad Company*, 3; new omnibus service to the Presidio and Fort Point: *Daily Alta California*, April 6, 1867, 2; additional coaches: *Daily Alta California*, April 14, 1867, 2.

26. *Daily Alta California*, March 11, 1869, 2. The line commenced service January 6, 1869. It ran down Polk Street from the depot at Broadway to a point between Union and Filbert Streets where it traversed thoroughfares no long in existence until it connected with Union Street near Gough Street. The line then ran out Union Street to Steiner Street where it turned north for a block to Greenwich Street and then west to Baker Street (originally via Broderick and Lombard Streets, later via Greenwich Street the whole way). The Baker Street portion of this route ran over a causeway perhaps constructed by Casebolt with help from Rudolph Herman, proprietor of the Harbor View House and National Shooting Gallery.

27. See J. N. Bowman, "The Spanish Anchorage in San Francisco Bay," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 24:4 (December 1946), 319-324.

28. *The Bay of San Francisco: the Metropolis of the Pacific Coast and Its Suburban Cities: A History*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1892), 1:687.

29. Permit: *Daily Alta California*, October 10, 1867, 1; Scheutzenverein: *Daily Alta California* December 2, 1867, 1.

30. First mention of the pavilion: *Daily Alta California*, October 28, 1870, 1.

31. The Presidio branch was also referred to as the "Harbor View branch," the "Presidio and Fort Point branch," or just the "Fort Point branch." It was also referred to as the Sutter Street Railroad's "Western Division." Four-horse teams: *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 13, 1869, 3.

32. The *Daily Alta California* January 27, 1876, 1 offers details on the useful life of horses on the Sutter Street Railroad; in 1875 the Sutter Street Railroad had 51 cars and 240 horses and spent $15,000 on per year on new horses. The average useful life of a horse car horse was four years. For lightweight two-horse car service to Harbor View see the *Daily Alta California*, March 26, 1871, 4.

33. Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1879-801*, (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton & Co., 1880), 895. After laying track along Vallejo and Octavia Streets, Casebolt moved the terminus of the Polk Street line from Broadway and Polk Streets to Union and Laguna Streets.

34. New terminal: *Daily Alta California* June 6, 1874, 4; trial run of a balloon car: *Daily Alta California*, September 1, 1874, 1. In *San Francisco Chronicle* of February 4, 1938 a letter in the "People's Safety Valve" from a former bobtail car driver confirms SF bobtail cars used turntables. For Casebolt's views on the convenience of balloon cars see his reply to Frank Pixley in the *Daily Alta California* July 7, 1878, 2.

35. Thompson: *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 8, 1917, 28; Pixley: *Daily Alta California*, July 7, 1878, 2; decision to discontinue balloon cars *Daily Alta California*, July 7, 1878, 2 ; for balloon car bodies at Harbor View Park see "The People's Safety Valve" column in *San Francisco Chronicle* of February 4, 1938 and February 5, 1938.

36. No cars beyond Union and Octavia Streets: *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 24, 1876, 2; offer to Rudolph Herman: *Daily Alta California*, February 17, 1876, 1; Herman's omnibuses: *Daily Alta California*, July 29, 1875, 1; threat to revoke charter: *Daily Alta California*, November 21, 1876, 1.

37. Walter Rice Ph.D. and Emiliano Echeverria, *When Steam Ran on the Streets of San Francisco* (Forty Fort PA: Harold E. Cox, 2002), 17-24. The locomotives had names: No. 1 was named "Harbor View," and No. 2 was named "Casebolt."

38. *Daily Alta California*, June 12, 1877, 1. The permit was granted June 11, 1877.

39. Casebolt offered the factory for lease in August of 1875. See the *Daily Alta California*, August 6, 1875, 3. The *Daily Alta California*, August 4, 1877, 1 reported a foiled safe-cracking at the factory, which suggests some sort of on-going commercial activity. The final listing for the Casebolt & Son car manufactory at the north-east corner of Union and Laguna Streets appeared in the 1876 edition of Langley's *San Francisco Directory*.

40. Rice and Echeverria, *When Steam Ran on the Streets of San Francisco*, 24. Casebolt's successors abandoned the connection from Polk Street to Union Street over Vallejo and Octavia Streets and removed the track when the Presidio & Ferries initiated service on Union Street. *San Francisco Real Estate Circular*, November, 1881.

41. Board of Supervisors, San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1879-80, (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton & Co. 1880), 903.

42. *Daily Alta California*, December 31, 1879, 1.

43. *Ibid*.

44. *Daily Alta California*, April 19, 1879, 2. The same ad appeared on subsequent dates.

45. Articles in the *Daily Alta California*, September 28, 1880, 1 and December 16, 1880, 2 contain details on the arguments and legal reasoning in this case. The court held that laws governing street railroads were of a "general nature" and that provisions in an act like the 1872 Montgomery Avenue act exempting a corporation from the uniform operation of a law of a general nature must be void. The Omnibus Railroad Company received a valid franchise to use Montgomery Avenue in 1879 subsequent to the Presidio Railroad's 1878 franchise and was in no position to assert a legal right of priority.

46. *Daily Alta California*, October 10, 1881, 1. The reporter confuses Mason Street with Union Street several times in the article.

47. It was the only cable line besides the Clay Street Hill Railroad to use Andrew Hallidie's screw-type bottom grip—not surprising since Hallidie was an investor in the road. Mechanically, this was something of a reactionary design. Hilton, *The Cable Car in America*, 205.

48. See footnote 2.

49. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 22, 1882, 2.

50. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 1883, 16.

51. Pacific Cable Railway Company, *The System of Wire-Cable Railways for Cities and Towns*, (Felton, CA: Big Trees Press, 1967). The assessment figures come from Exhibit No. 1 in an unpaginated appendix.

52. Robert Bardell, "What Lies Beneath the Marina?" *The Argonaut: Journal of the San Francisco Historical Society*, 14:2 (Winter 2003).

53. William Kostura, "The Cows of Cow Hollow," *The Argonaut: Journal of the San Francisco Historical Society*, 9:1 (Spring 1998).

54. W. H. L. Corran, *Langley's San Francisco Directory*, (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co., 1889), 13.

55. Surf bathing: *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 25, 1883, 2; hot salt water baths: *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 30, 1885, 3.

56. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 9, 1888, 8.

57. For a photograph of the Presidio athletic grounds see: https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf709n-b66z/?brand=oac4

58. The *San Francisco Call*, May 15, 1896, 8 and March 1, 1896, 7.

59. Contracts let: *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 29, 1889, 13; mortgage: *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 8, 1891, 6; Trestle: *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 1892, 10; Baker Street track: *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4, 1893, 7.

60. Equipment details come from The *Daily Alta California*, October 17, 1881, 1, *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 29, 1885, 5, and from Rice and Echeverria, When Steam Ran on the Streets of San Francisco, 24. Hinton, in *The Cable Car in North America*, 206 claims the company had 63 cars, but he offers no breakdown of equipment type and provides no references to check his claim. The start and stop times are approximate. See *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 3, 1887, 10 and July 28, 1888, 8; and the *Daily Alta California*, April 11, 1889, 8 for more specific details. The Alta article indicates service to the Presidio began at 10 a.m. This is probably a mistake. For complaints about used equipment and the Union Street roadbed itself see the *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 30, 1893, 3.

61. *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 22, 1890, 9, and October 19, 1891, 10.

62. Death by dummy: *Daily Alta California*, May 15, 1883, 1; May 26, 1885, 2; October 5, 1885, 1; January 16, 1887, 8; and December 24, 1887, 2; and *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 11, 1888, 8 and January 24, 1892, 20. Death on the cable: *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1882, 3; November 22, 1889, 5; December 2, 1893, 16; June 3, 1898, 9; and November 17, 1902, 8. Gas explosion: *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 21, 1899, 12. Death in powerhouse: *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 24, 1891, 6.

63. Plans for electrification: *San Francisco Call*, June 26, 1894, 3 and March 24, 1895, 24. Market Street Railway blocks cable extension: *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 20, 1893, 5—the writer of that article apparently confused the City Railroad with the Central Railroad. Market Street Railway blocks electric line to waterfront: *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 15, 1896, 13 and March 2, 1896, 11.

64. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1906, 11.

65. Franchises expired: *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1906, 4;. Missing baths: *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1906, 3. Franchises good, will "electricize": *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 22, 1906, 14. Supervisors approve trolley line: *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 1906, 14.

66. Ready to operate but no permit: *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 21, 1907, 3. Performance bond rejected: *San Francisco Call*, April 13, 1907, 10.

67. Electric cars to Harbor View baths (advertisement): *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 12, 1907, 5 (advertisement). Eastern terminus at Polk Street: *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 29, 1907, A43.

68. Progress reports: *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1907, 16 and September 29, 1907, A43.

69. New franchise: *San Francisco Call*, June 9, 1908, 16. Presidio service: *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 21, 1909, 18.

70. M. M. O'Shaughnessy, *The Municipal Railway of San Francisco, 1912–1921* (San Francisco: J. A. Prud'homme Composition Co., 1921). Anthony Perles, *The People's Railway* (Glendale, CA: Interurban Press, 1981), 36 puts the final purchase price at $312,332.67.

71. Harbor View Park open (advertisement): *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 19, 1910, 2; California Building landscaping: Charles L. Camp et. al., *From Land's End to the Ferry*, (San Francisco: The Black Vine Press, 1942) chapter 4; cars still running: *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 7, 1912, p. 50.

A New Eyewitness Account of the 1906 Earthquake

by Robert Cherny

Recently my wife's cousin brought us a copy of a letter written by her great grandmother on April 28, 1906, describing her experiences in the earthquake ten days before. The letter presents the earthquake from the perspective of a young woman working at an orphanage in the Richmond District. In the letter she not only described her own experiences during the earthquake, but also recorded what she witnessed as wagons brought the injured to the nearby Marine Hospital. After presenting the letter, I'll add more information about the author of the letter and about the context.

I have not corrected or marked errors of spelling or grammar. The letter is dated April 28 (a Saturday) and postmarked in San Francisco the following Monday.

The San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

San Francisco
April 28 - 06

My Dear Big Brother,

Received your letter today and was very glad to hear from you and that you are well. At present I am O.K. living out in tents and sleeping with about 23 girls in one tent — this part of the town was shaken up very badly and only one house burned. Our building is gone up the flume. had to vamous [get out] instantly as we had a few small earth quakes all day. It was just 5,25 AM. and I was just getting ready to call the day nurses when the house began to sway from one side to another and jump like a rabbit I could not get to the door. Never did I hear such shreaks & crys as that morning, one little girl got hurt by a large picture falling on her bed and stricking her on the head, but she is all right now, the 6 months baby was sent to the Marine Hospital across the street which was not shaken up so badly. Men from outside came in to help as soon as the shake was over. One of them picked one baby up and as he passed me to go out she made a dash for my neck and cryed O Miss Pizer save me. I tryed to pull her from me with every bit of my strength but I couldent budge her, so I just had her clinging on me had 2 in my arms and so I left the falling building. Saved both of my trunks I would have rather lost my $200 down town [i.e., in a bank] than my trunks, because I have so many nice things from China which Charlie sent me. This will knock his coming home I guess, I bet he'll go crazy when he hears of this. O well I'll have to make the best of it, I think I'll go to Los Angles, as his sister lives at Long Beach and that is not far from here, I dont know what to do, I am sure of my money as we can get it at the mint where all banks pay their depositers so I hear, I would go home but when I think of Pop I get the blues dont you during the worst part of this terrible affair I dident sleep from Tuesday till Thursday night, 2 days & 2 nights—never shut my eyes but I slept fine the last few days. plenty to eat now but nasty water to drink

I guess we'll pull through alright if no epidemic sets in

Jim I never saw & never want to see the sights of such a horrible panic as this one was. Inside of 3 hours, after the quake, wagons and every kind of a vegatable wagon was halling the wounded out here to the Marine Hospital with sheets thrown over them, blood flowing like water in their tracks, Sickening sights was on all sides and wagon after wagon even autos came.

Jim the panic was awful, and the papers could never make it any worse than it realy was. (It could not have been worse.)

Jim I must close it is getting dark and we are not allowed lights of any kind so far. It is a dogs life. Save the papers which you see of it and some day I will tell you all about it

Dont write untill you hear from me again I dont know when I will go. Good Bye

Anna, about the time of the earthquake and fire. Courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.

The letter is not signed, but was written by Anastasia Loraine Pisar, who often signed herself as Anna or Anna Pizer.[1] She was writing to James Pisar, her brother. The letter stated that, at the time of the earthquake, "I was just getting ready to call the day nurses," which suggests that Anna was a night nurse. The events described in the letter took place at the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children, which had moved into a new building at 14th Avenue and Lake Street the previous August.

In 1906, the Marine Hospital was an 1875 building on the southern edge of the Presidio, at the end of 14th Avenue, about 500 feet north of Lake Street, in much the same location as the current building that replaced that 1875 structure. Such federally operated hospitals existed in all major ports, created by a law in 1798 that required the Collector of Customs in U.S. ports to collect funds to be withheld from the wages of merchant seamen for the purpose of maintaining hospitals to care for sick and disabled seafarers. It was the first individual mandate for federally sponsored health care. One purpose of the law was to protect the residents of ports from disease that might be brought to the port by seamen returning from other parts of the world. When the 1906 earthquake struck, the city's hospitals that were able to function were immediately overwhelmed, and both hospitals at the Presidio—the Marine Hospital and the Army Hospital on the Main Post—were opened to those needing care. The army also made tents available to shelter refugees and set up a field hospital in Golden Gate Park.

Unlike most of the city's orphanages, the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children was non-denominational. The socially prominent members of its Board of Women Managers included both Christians and Jews. Before the 1906 earthquake, the children walked to Sunday School at the nearest Protestant church, a Congregational church, but when they tried to return after the earthquake, they were turned away. It's not clear from the available records what was done on Sunday mornings thereafter.[2]

The 1900 and 1910 census manuscripts provide information about the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children before and after the earthquake, and before and after moving to its new building. In 1900, the nursery was still in an old house on Mission Street. The census taker that year listed 65 children, ranging in age from 1 to 13, with a median age of 8. Twelve were age 3 or younger, but none was under 1 year of age. The adult occupants included the matron with her daughter and son-in-law (who were apparently not employed at the nursery); a cook; a laundress; and five nurses: a boys' nurse, a girls' nurse, a babies' nurse, a night nurse, and one identified only as "a nurse." The five nurses ranged in age from 42 to 52, and four of the five were widows. The census taker in 1910, when the nursery was back in the building it occupied in 1906, listed 67 children between the ages of 2 and 13 (median age of 6 1/2); one 5-month-old baby; and a staff of twelve: the matron, cook, launderer, janitor, and eight nurses. Three of the nurses were

Looking north from Lake Street to the Marine Hospital, c. 1910. The low buildings around the flagpole are the Marine Hospital complex. Note the sand dunes and fence in the foreground. This is likely the fence Dr. Manning referred to in his report about the temporary shelter that the nursery residents found before he was able to secure the army tents. Photo courtesy of OpenSFHistory.

Conical tents that were probably the same as those supplied to the nursery. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Sometime before the 1906 earthquake, Anna Pisar cut this photo of the nursery from a publication, added her notes about the location of the various dormitories, and sent it to her family in Nebraska. Courtesy of Martha Plambeck.

teenagers, two aged 16 and one 14, whose work was described as "household work"; they may have been former wards who aged out of that category (which seemed to happen at age 14) and continued to live in the nursery as employees. The other five nurses ranged in age from 20 to 45. The term *nurse* was used loosely at the time and could have indicated either a trained medical nurse or, more likely in most of these cases, a minimally trained attendant. None of the staff members from 1900 were working at the nursery in 1910. In both years, all the staff members were white. All the children were white in 1900, but in 1910 two children were identified by the census-taker as *Bl* (African American) and one each as *Chi* (Chinese) and *Ind* (American Indian).[3]

Fifty-two children were enrolled on January 1, 1906. Of the 89 children who had been enrolled at some time during 1905, 47 were half-orphans (children with only one parent; at that time, many orphanages accepted half-orphans whose living parent was unable to care for them[4]); 7 were orphans; 3 had been abandoned; and 32, according to the nursery's *Annual Report*, were "children whose parents by poverty or trouble were prevented from given them the proper care," including "several sent to us by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty [to Children] and the Associated Charities." The 31 children admitted during 1905 ranged in age from 13 months to 11 years, the average being 5 1/2 years; 21 were girls and 10 were boys.[5]

In February of 1906, the *San Francisco Chronicle* described the nursery this way: "The Nursery always has a 'family' of about seventy-five, composed of orphans, deserted children, and little ones whose mothers have to work and board them there for the limited sum they are able to pay. The constant aim of the women managers of the Nursery is to make the place as much like a home as possible." The *Chronicle's* count of the number of children was too high. Two months later, at the time of the earthquake, 59 children were living at the nursery, an increase of 7 since January 1.[6]

The *Chronicle* supplied this account of the experience of the nursery on April 18: "The forty-nine occupants [again, the number is wrong] of the place escaped without injury, notwithstanding that the interior was badly shattered and one corner of the building, the long perpendicular pipes of the boiler-house, the brick chimneys and portions of the roof were hurled to the ground. This institution is not far removed from the Presidio Hospital. Mrs. M. J. Hubbert, the matron, appealed to the authorities there for tents and received a sufficient number to shelter the children for the time being." The nursery returned to its building on Lake Street in November of 1906.[7]

Another memoir also described the events of April 18 and after, based on interviews with several participants because the author, Albert Wilson, a resident of the nursery in 1906, was only three years old in 1906. He described boys' and girls' dormitories on the second floor and a babies' dormitory on the ground floor.[8] At the age of three, Wilson still slept in the babies' room, suggesting that the term "baby" applied to children of three and under. This explains the line in the letter, "one baby . . . cryed O Miss Pizer save me," a sentence we would expect from a toddler rather than a baby.

Wilson's composite memoir described events at the time of the earthquake: "The night nurse burst out of the babies' room . . . She was bewildered, she was lost. . . . George Strickland, the janitor, appeared from the basement. Next the babies' day nurse appeared in the hallway. The babies were screaming." Margaret Hubbert, the matron, took charge and ordered the night nurse to go through the building and get everyone out. Mrs. Hubbert and a day nurse lifted the babies, including Wilson, through a window into the arms of Strickland outside. Two nurses, one for each dormitory on the second floor, shepherded the older children downstairs and out of the building. Soon everyone was assembled and accounted for outside: the children (Wilson stated there were ninety but was clearly mistaken), eight nurses, the cook, the janitor, and the matron. (Wilson said nothing about a laundress.) Once the children were outside and safe, staff members returned to the ruined building and brought out food, water, clothing, bedding, beds, and tables, and chairs.

Later in the day on April 18, people began to arrive to check on the nursery and its residents. The first was Guy Manning, the physician who took care of the children's medical needs, who was followed by Caroline Baldwin Bertz, the president of the Board of Women Managers, in a borrowed grocer's wagon driven by her son. Later arrivals included other socially prominent women who served on the board or in the auxiliary and also a former resident, a child, who had left the nursery to live with her aunt but could not find her aunt after the earthquake, so she made her way back to her previous home knowing she would be cared for there.[9]

Guy Manning, the visiting physician, later reported that he and the matron drove to the Presidio to request tents and supplies. His report continued:

> You know of the matron and myself driving hurriedly to the Presidio for tents, the promised aid, the hourly expected relief only to find too late in the day [still April 18 but after Manning had departed] that the tents had been sent elsewhere [the nearby Maria Kip Orphanage, the building of which was also badly damaged]. The matron then rose to the occasion and with all the beds removed from the trembling building and arranged along the fence, a thin shelter of bed clothing thrown over a frame, a scant curtain in front, a strip of carpet for the bare feet, tables spread in the open for scanty meals, milk supplied by kindly neighbors for the babies, this was the way your charges lived for several days, I living in the thought of their supposed comfort in warm tents, only to find on the following Sunday [four days after the earthquake] the true condition of things, the rain soaked bed clothing and the damp garments of the children. Using all my influence and by spending the live long day at the wharves [likely those of Fort Mason] I obtained five army tents which we got out to the Nursery at nine o'clock at night and by spending all the next day in a soaking rain succeeded with the help of Mr. Earle Bertz [son of the president of the Board of Women Managers] and others in setting up. Until the 30th of April they lived in tents, crowded it

is true but protected and warm though you nor I will never know all the discomforts nor all the work it meant for the matron and her assistants in this trying time.[10]

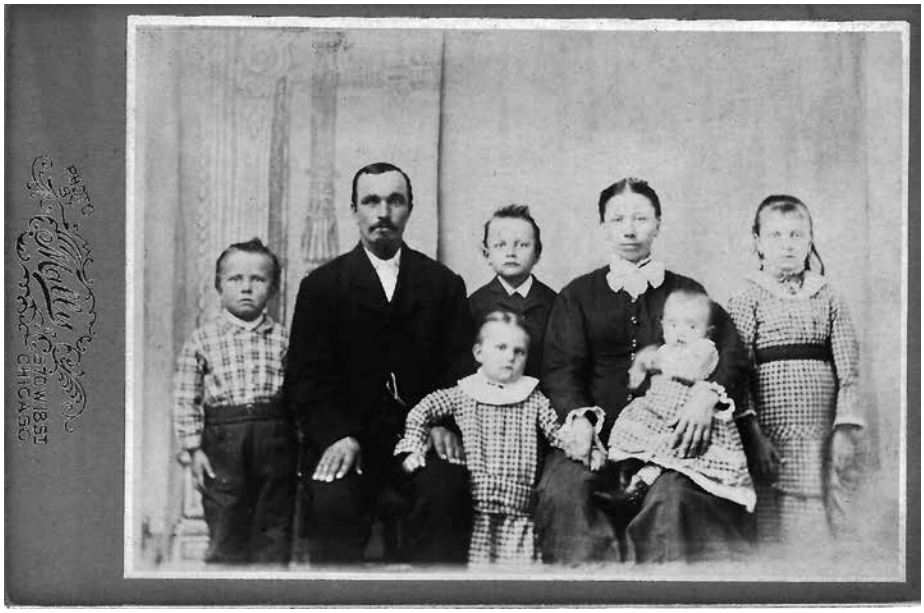
This explains why Anna wrote, "I dident sleep from Tuesday till Thursday night, 2 days & 2 nights—never shut my eyes." The earthquake struck on Wednesday morning. This seems to confirm that Anna was the night nurse, who was awake through Tuesday night, then all day Wednesday, Wednesday night (when she was back on duty as night nurse), and all day Thursday.

Manning's report also explained the section of Anna's letter that described one tent for "about 23 girls." Manning was apparently given five of the large conical tents that appear in a number of the post-earthquake photographs.[11] One tent, we know from Anna's letter, was for the girls and one or more of the nurses. Three of the tents likely comprised dormitories for the boys, the babies, and the staff. Such an arrangement would have replicated sleeping facilities in the building. The fifth tent may have been their dining area or perhaps they were fortunate enough to have received one of the field kitchens that the army deployed around the city.

By the end of April, fourteen of the children had gone to stay with relatives. On April 30, the remaining forty-five children and at least some of the staff went to an orphanage in Sacramento, a decision made in a meeting of the Board of Women Managers. These socially prominent women, most of whom had suffered damage or loss of their homes, nonetheless gathered at the Bertz home the day after the earthquake to make decisions about the nursery children.[12]

In June, Anna was sending postcards from Sacramento to her mother and her brothers, Jim and Victor, with photos of the devastation caused by the earthquake and fire. On one postcard, she announced, "Hope to be home soon In July some time." While the children were in Sacramento, their number continued to decrease, as some were adopted and others went to live with relatives, so that there were only twenty-five waiting to return to the repaired nursery in November.[13] As the numbers of children fell, there was less need for nurses, which may explain why Anna was able to project that she would be able to return home in July.

This portrait of Anna is one of a strip of three, taken, perhaps at the Jamestown Exposition during Anna and Charlie's honeymoon. Photo courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.



The Pisar family in Chicago, late 1880s. Back row, left to right: John, John (Anna's father), Frank, Katrina (Anna's mother), Mary. Front row: Anna, Jim (on Katrina's lap). Courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.

Who was Anna Pisar?

The census manuscripts hold a good deal of information. She was born in Nebraska in 1879, but in 1880 a census taker found her family in Chicago, where her father was working in a lumber yard. Both her parents were born in Bohemia. In 1900 the census takers again found the family in Nebraska, in the town of Wymore, population 2,420, where her father and one brother worked in a saloon and her mother and another brother worked as day laborers. Anna had no occupation listed, but, since her mother was working outside the home, twenty-year-old Anna was likely spending her days keeping house and caring for her younger brothers.[14]

What brought a Czech girl from Nebraska to San Francisco to work in the Nursery for Homeless Children in 1906? One family story (which would have come from Anna's mother or brothers to Anna's daughters and then to their children) was that a doctor had recommended that she go West for the climate.[15]

Anna's letter refers to "Charlie" who had sent her "so many nice things from China" and her concern that the earthquake "will knock his coming home." Charlie was Charles Parnell Mason, a musician in the U.S. Navy, whose ship, which had recently docked in Hong Kong, was in the Pacific. According to a family story, Anna started writing to Charlie after she arrived in San Francisco and found his name and address in a newspaper in a list of service men who wanted pen pals.[16] Perhaps her concern that the earthquake "will knock his coming home" reflected a decision that they had made to be married when he returned to port.

They were married less than eight months after the earthquake, on January 10, 1907, in Brooklyn. My guess is that Charlie's ship came into the Brooklyn Navy Yard and that Anna took the train from Wymore to meet him. A photo

This souvenir photo was taken during Anna and Charlie's honeymoon at the Jamestown Exposition. Courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.

Anna's mother with Anna's daughter Florence, mid-1920s. Courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.

attached to one of the family trees on Ancestry.com shows the couple, with Charlie in his uniform, during what was probably their honeymoon at the Jamestown Exposition, Norfolk, Virginia. Their first child, Beatrice, was born on March 3, 1908, in Wymore. My guess is that Charlie was at sea and that Anna returned to be with her parents for the birth of the child. Their second child, Florence, was born on April 25, 1910, in Bremerton, Washington, apparently Charlie's home port until after WWI. Anna died there on August 4, 1910, of complications during the birth of Florence. Her daughters were sent to Wymore to be raised by their grandmother and never had the chance to hear their mother's stories of the great San Francisco earthquake.[17]

* * * * * * * * * * *

About the Author

Robert Cherny, professor *emeritus* at San Francisco State University, received his PhD from Columbia University in 1972. His research interests are in U.S. politics since the Civil War and California and the West. His published work includes three books on U.S. politics, 1865–1925, forty published essays, and, most recently, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, a biography of a San Francisco artist.

Notes

1. According to Anna's great-granddaughter, Martha Marples Plambeck, who supplied the copy of the letter, "The name is Pisar in Czech but my grandma used to laugh at how people would pronounce it—I think when Anna spelled it Pizar she may just have been spelling it the way it is pronounced to eliminate embarrassing mispronunciations!"
2. The members of the Board of Women Managers are listed in each annual report; the nursery's annual reports comprise series 1 of the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children collection, Record Group 2, Edgewood Records, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. According to the *San Francisco Call*, October 10, 1910, 4, the children were turned away from the Sunday school because they were not contributing members of the congregation.
3. I located the 1900 census listing for the nursery by using Ancestry.com and searching for the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children; for the 1910 census I searched for Margaret Hubbert.
4. On half-orphans, see Ruth Shackelford, "To Shield Them from Temptation: 'Child-Saving' Institutions and the Children of the Underclass in San Francisco 1850–1910" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1991), 312. Shackelford does not mention the Nursery for Homeless Children in her dissertation. See also Philip Smead Bird, "Child Dependency with Particular Reference to Conditions in San Francisco" (Master of Letters thesis, Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley, 1910), 104–105, for the causes of half-orphans. Bird visited the nursery while conducting his research (p. 20) but had little to say about it, except to summarize information about it on pages 71, 73, and 145. He also noted that the nursery received very few children from the courts.

Anna's daughters and grandchildren, early 1940s. Back row, left to right: Richard Balderson, Florence Mason Marples, Beatrice Mason Balderson. Front row, left to right: Jerry Marples, Joyce Balderson, Barbara Balderson. Courtesy of Martha Marples Plambeck.

5. *Sixteenth Annual Repo*rt, 1905, 10.
6. *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 15, 1906, 9; *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 7.
7. *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 1, 1906, 2; Nov. 30, 1906, (page illegible). For the nursery in 1910, see the full-page article in the *San Francisco Call*, October 10, 1910, 4.
8. This description of the location of the dormitories is at odds with the photograph of the building and the labeling of the various dormitories provided by Anna Pisar and reproduced elsewhere in this article.
9. Albert Wilson, *These Were the Children* (Menlo Park: Albert Wilson Publishing Company, 1963), esp. 3–6, 8–12. Wilson does not provide names for any of the nurses.
10. *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 12–13.
11. Charles R. Shrader, ed., *United States Army Logistics*, 1775–1992: An Anthology, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1997), 2:346. The book lists seven conical tents as appropriate housing for a company of 106 infantrymen or a troop of 100 cavalrymen: i.e., each tent could house 14–16 men.
12. Wilson, *These Were the Children*, 12.
13. *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 7.
14. All census information comes from Ancestry.com.
15. Martha Marples Plambeck was told that Anna had a "tipped uterus," and that her doctor recommended she go to San Francisco for it. Now called a retroverted uterus, the condition can produce pain during menstruation, increased urinary frequency, or urinary tract infections. It seems unlikely that a change of climate would affect such a condition, so perhaps there were doctors in San Francisco known for their ability to correct that condition through the procedure described by Herman E. Hayd in "Treatment of Retrodisplacements of the Uterus," *International Journal of Surgery*, 18 (1905), 65–69. Or perhaps Anna had other reasons for going to San Francisco and only told her mother that it was for health reasons.
16. Postcards from Charles to Anna, saved by Anna's daughter Florence and now held by Martha Marples Plambeck place him and his ship in Hong Kong in March 1906. Plambeck told that Anna wrote to Charles because of a newspaper account of U.S. Navy personnel seeking pen pals.
17. Information about the date and place of the wedding and the birthdates of the two girls is available on Ancestry.com.

Letter by Willam Hindshaw

Describing his experiences in the immediate aftermath of the 1906 earthquake

by Ken Sproul

This letter was originally handwritten and sent by my grandfather, William Hindshaw, to his aunt in England in May of 1906 from Alameda, where he and his wife, my grandmother Emma, found temporary shelter from the fires raging in San Francisco.

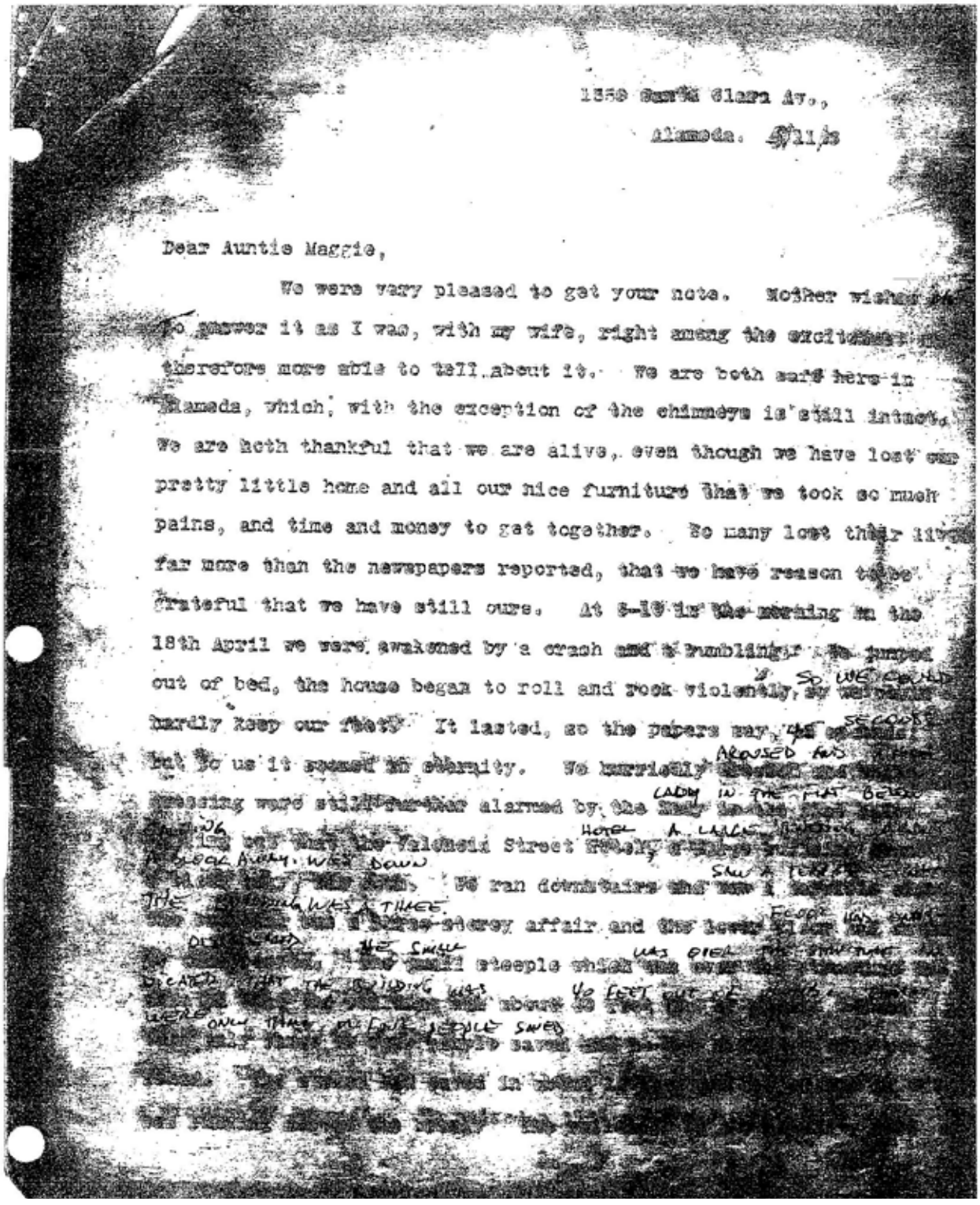
The letter was returned to our grandfather after his aunt's death in the 1940s, and he typed up a transcription of it in 1947. He and his family had emigrated from Scotland and settled in San Francisco in the 1890s. He was the manager of a Levi Strauss shirt factory on Mission Street. My grandmother, Norma Menesini Hindshaw, was a teacher at Presidio and Marina Junior Highs. William and Norma lived at 847 Valencia Street between 19th and 20th Streets; they lost their home, which was undamaged in the earthquake, in the subsequent fire. Emma's extended Italian family lived in North Beach at 616 Filbert Street, adjacent to what is now Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, facing Washington Square. Her father was a prosperous butcher.

In reading the letter, keep in mind that my grandparents walked from their house in the Mission, dressed in whatever they could find in the dark, all the way to North Beach on the early morning of the earthquake, a distance of almost five miles, with aftershocks, damaged buildings, streets covered with rubble, distant fires, and a population in extreme stress. They walked over Nob Hill to descend into North Beach, not knowing what they would find.

In all the years that followed I never once heard them complain of their loss or dwell on what they saw and felt that day. I do know it was always with them. I remember a time when we were at dinner in North Beach when I was about nine or ten and a short tremor rattled the restaurant. Sudden and complete silence by all, no comments, just a feeling that many in the room were remembering a day in April of 1906 that they did not want to relive. My grandparents looked at each other and said nothing.

This letter tells of my grandfather's search for family, for shelter, his discovery of the loss of their house and their then lifestyle, the street scenes, the refugees in the parks, the growing fires, the army, looters, the dead and dying, the collapse of the Valencia Hotel, the long walks through debris. All were accepted in the telling as an experience that needed to be told and then put aside in order to rebuild their lives, which they did with charm and grace. My mother was born roughly twelve months later.

As you read, consider all of the walking, from the Mission to North Beach and back, from the Ferry Building to the Mission, detouring to avoid fires and destruction, 20 or more miles in 1906 city clothes and shoes. Imagine the Ferry Building, which was the main hope for safety, and ferries running 24/7 to evacuate the homeless. Picture families camping on wet grass with embers falling on them, not knowing where or how to reach safety. Notice the lack of panic amid the chaos, the determination to rebuild lives from the ground up, the speedy relief efforts and clean-up. The loss of electricity, transit, water mains to the hydrants; the boom of dynamite in the



1558 Santa Clara Av.,
Alameda. 4/11/06

Dear Auntie Maggie,

We were very pleased to get your note. Mother wished me to answer it as I was, with my wife, right among the excitement and therefore more able to tell about it. We are both safe here in Alameda, which, with the exception of the chimneys is still intact. We are both thankful that we are alive, even though we have lost our pretty little home and all our nice furniture that we took so much pains, and time and money to get together. So many lost their lives far more than the newspapers reported, that we have reason to be grateful that we have still ours. At 5-13 in the morning on the 18th April we were awakened by a crash and a rumbling. We jumped out of bed, the house began to roll and rock violently, so we could hardly keep our feet. It lasted, so the papers say, 45 seconds but to us it seemed an eternity. We hurriedly dressed and were dressing were still further alarmed by the lady in the flat below running out and the Valencia Street hotel ... We ran downstairs and saw ... three-storey affair and the tower ... steeple which ... about to fall ... were only three people saved ...

background where giant plumes of dense smoke told you where the city was burning; the dead, dying, and injured; people trapped in burning buildings; the fear of another earthquake to follow; not knowing where and how would they eat, find basic sanitation, get some sleep; the gnawing fear of uncertainty—all of the things that came out of nowhere to a new city with a varied population—a city that that less than 10 years later hosted the Panama Pacific Exposition.

My grandparents' story is great story of grit and survival in a time when the city and its people proved they were indeed "the City that Knows How." How would the people of today respond?

William Hindshaw's Earthquake Letter with "Best Guess" Transcription

1358 Santa Clara Av.,
Alameda 5/11/1906

Dear Aunt Maggie,

We were very pleased to get your note. Mother wished me to answer it as I was, with my wife, right among the excitement and therefore more able to tell about it. We are both safe here in Alameda, which, with the exception of the chimneys, is still intact. We are both thankful that we are alive, even though we have lost our pretty little home and all our nice furniture that we took so much pains, and time and money to get together. So many lost their lives, far more than the newspapers reported, that we have reason to be grateful that we still have ours.

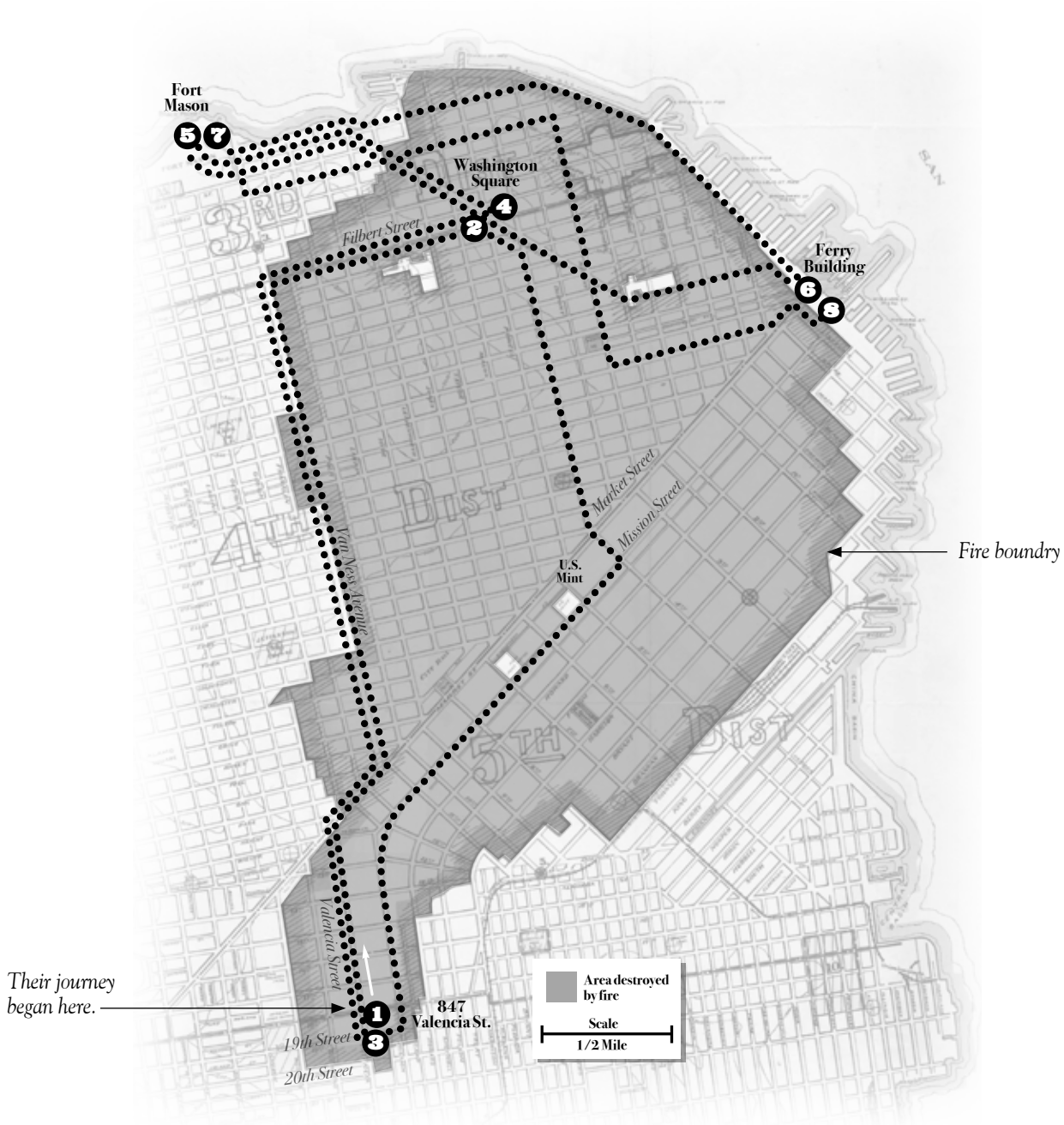
At 5:10 in the morning on the 18th of April we were awakened by a crash and rumbling. We jumped out of bed, the house began to roll and rock violently, so we could hardly keep our feet. It lasted, so the papers say 45 seconds, but to us it seemed an eternity. We hurriedly dressed and while dressing were still further alarmed by the lady in the flat below calling out that the Valencia Street Hotel, a large building about a block away, went down. We ran downstairs and saw a terrible sight. The building was a three story affair and the lower floor had entirely disappeared. The small steeple which was over the structure indicated that the building was about 40 feet out of plumb. There were only three or four people saved and no one knows how many perished.

A large building about a block away had collapsed into a break about 12 feet wide and a stream of water was flowing across the break. The buildings in our vicinity were in a deplorable condition. Some of them were horribly twisted and distorted. One large flat building had sunk about 16 feet and some of them were wrecked completely inside and out.

Alarming reports began to come from the city about buildings collapsing, and after a hasty examination of our own place, which was practically uninjured, we set out for the city. We had little thought that we were taking a last look at our little home and even if we had thought so we would not have had much time for sentiment.

Emma was afraid that her people had been hurt as they were living in a brick house at the other end of the town. The cars could not run, the wires were down, we could not telephone and the distance was about five miles. We went first to the factory [on Mission Street] and saw more sights to alarm me. When we got there we were surprised to find the building and machinery in excellent condition. Very little damage had been done and I felt good about the small loss we were liable to sustain.

After seeing the factory was all right we started again for North Beach, where Emma's folks lived. That walk I



This map shows the areas William Hindshaw walked to after the earthquake. We don't know the routes he took, but he was surrounded by earthquake rubble, as well as burned-out and damaged streets, so walking had to be difficult. Map by Mike Kimball, based on Chadwick Business District Map (1904) and a map by the U.S. Army of the burned area (May 1906).

shall never forget. Everywhere was ruin and desolation. Every brick building seemed to have suffered. The factory of one of our business rivals was completely wrecked and one could not help but think what would have happened had the 500 employees, mostly women, been at work when the shock came. A little further on we saw one of the most popular theatres which had collapsed entirely. The tall buildings did not appear to have suffered at all, then we saw City Hall erected at a cost of six million dollars and the pride of the city. It looked like a tremendous dust heap. The whole building had collapsed and the building looked like a picture of Pompeii.

The Valencia Street Hotel was a three-story building only a block from the Hindshaws' home. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

We walked a little further and got another tremendous earthquake. We were walking close to a large stone hotel and it began to sway and swing, the windows were bulging and drawing in. Frightened and running as we were I distinctly remember wondering whether the building would fall on us or whether only the glass would fall. When we got away from that (the shock only lasted 15 seconds) we were very careful to walk only on streets where there were only frame buildings.

When we got to the top of Nob Hill, and after we began to realize the extent of the damage caused by the earthquake, we saw that the entire wholesale district was in flames. We hurried on, and to make an awfully long story short, we found Emma's folks all safe and sound but badly frightened. I left them and hurried back to the Mission.

Our district did not appear to be in the least danger from the fire which was then raging about four miles away, and I did not bother to save anything, as I did not see the necessity. Several firemen passed by and assured us that

An April 1906 view from San Francisco Bay showing the Ferry Building as the city burned.
Photo by C. P. Magagnes, 1906. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

everything would be alright and the fire could not possibly get beyond Tenth St. as they had blasted a whole block to prevent the fire's further progress. If they only had an idea just how many hundreds of pounds of dynamite they would have to use before the same time the next day they might have thought differently.

I left my house and factory feeling confident that everything would be all right. Played a little on our beautiful new grand piano and left everything in perfect confidence that everything would be all right. Went back to the beach [North Beach] and slept out doors in the grass as we were all afraid to sleep indoors, on account of small earthquakes that kept occurring with monotonous and terrifying regularity. After awhile the soldiers (martial law had now been declared) began to bring the dead in the plaza. There were about thirty dead in the square where we were [Washington Square].

The fire kept coming closer and closer and finally hot cinders began to drop on us as we lay. We got a wagon, which was

This photo shows my grandparents and my mother at Ocean Beach on June 2, 1908. My mother was about 13 months old at the time. Courtesy of the author.

standing idle, and headed off for Fort Mason. I omitted to say that the earthquake had broken the water mains and the only method of fighting the fire was with dynamite. We got to Fort Mason all right although the streets were badly torn up and stayed the balance of the night in the wet grass. There were twenty one of us including two babies in arms and three small children.

The fire seemed horribly close to us and early in the morning I set out to find out if the ferry was running to anywhere at all away from the dreaded fire. Many people said the Ferry Building had fallen and crushed the boats and we were very much bothered to know whether or not the fire had cut us off. I started off to find out at four o'clock and got back at 5 with the news that the ferry was running and we could get across (to Alameda).

Just as we were getting ready to haul our wagon (we had no horse), a soldier rode up at the head of a group of infantry, who, with leveled rifles, commanded us to stay where we were for a few minutes. In a little while a lot of prisoners from the jail where remanded prisoners are kept, came by all shackled and handcuffed on a slow and dreary march to the Presidio military reservation. After they had passed by we started our journey.

It was a miserable trip among broken streets with the glare of the fire and the early morning sun redder even than the fire itself looking on us. People carrying babies or all their belongings, dragging trunks over the streets, Chinese, white, negroes, and all nationalities all mixed and looking for safety. Some wandering around wild eyed and wondering what to do and where to go, but the majority swelling the procession to the ferry. After a long time, in which we learned that the house in which Emma's people had lived for 20 years and which they owned and that the houses of all of the party except ourselves were certainly doomed, we arrived at the ferry. We got over to Alameda all right and were welcomed with open arms.

I had to spend the bulk of the day getting a horse to haul our little wagon from Oakland mole to Alameda. We slept that night under a roof and while we all admire God's starry canopy, yet I must say we all prefer an ordinary house with a tight roof over it. As we lay the next night at the port, thousands of people with wagons and bedding came along and camped, and in the morning I would judge there were at least five thousand people camping under the stars. Some had improvised tents of sheets and blankets but we did not have enough to spare

Mission Street after the 1906 earthquake and fire. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

for such a purpose and consequently got very wet with the heavy night dew.

After a night's rest and settling things the following day I went over to the city in full expectation of finding our house and my factory intact as the reports from our district were very encouraging. Harry [brother] and I went over and had to make a wide detour to get to the Mission. We went away south of our street and as we came along we were encouraged by the look of things into believing that all was well. We came to 14th St. and it was burned to Mission St. and past. Then we went another block and saw that the fire had swung around a little and spared a little more of 15th St. we followed the line and saw a little more of 16th had been saved. I saw my factory was burned but still had hopes for our home. As we followed the unburned district could see plainly, we thought, that our place was safe and it was only as we turned the last corner that we saw our little flat was burned and that the fire had stopped only 200 feet away.

The place was level with the ground and I must confess to feeling pretty bad

My grandfather and my mother when she was about two years old. Courtesy of the author.

having felt so hopeful to have my hopes dashed to pieces and by such a small margin. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, except the frame of the piano, by which I could identify the house.

Well, it is gone and the best we can do is make the best of it and start anew. I thought though of the way we had saved and denied ourselves pleasures in order to get our house together and the many happy days we had spent in it and felt very sorry for ourselves. Emma has proved herself a thoroughbred and does not whimper for which I am very thankful. We think as much of one another as ever and this has brought us, if possible, even closer to one another. At the same time it was she who got the things together and made a home and naturally she should have felt worse than I did. If she did she managed to conceal it, and considering all we have been though we are feeling well and confident in the future.

A number of incidents in connection with the disaster, some humorous, some sad, may interest you. Harry went to my house just as the fire was creeping towards it. His idea was to save if possible the furniture and contents of the flat. He tried very hard to get a wagon but with no success. There was a piano factory next door and the manager threw open his doors and invited everyone to help themselves. None were taken, and that will give you an idea how hard it was to get a wagon. Harry waited around in the hope that the fire would stop before it reached the house and finally when the corner caught he ran upstairs took a sheet off the bed and filled it with Emma's clothes, our silverware, some clothes of mine, a cut glass bowl, a silver cup and several other things. The whole thing must have weighed about 200 lbs. and made an enormous package. He had to lug it by a roundabout way to the ferry, it was about 5 miles away and it took him until one o'clock in the morning to get to Alameda. I cannot understand how he managed to get it over at all. It certainly was a great help and highly appreciated. He had to take a long detour on account of the fallen buildings and the fire in his path. We can't thank him enough for what he did.

When the first shock came nearly everyone ran out in their night shirts or any manner they thought fit. Some of them, in their excitement, picked up the craziest things and wandered around with them. One woman ran out of the St. Francis Hotel with a silk parasol and a

A 1906 refugee camp in Washington Square, North Beach.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

parrot and absolutely nothing else but an idiotic grin. Some saved the family canary, others a soup pot, and if it were possible to feel in a humorous frame of mind there would have been a lot to smile about. One old lady I knew of had lived in her house, a little cottage of 3 rooms, for forty years. She was 88 years old, and absolutely refused to leave the place. Said if God were going to take away her home, He may as well take her too. Not until the building had caught fire, did her daughter succeed in getting her out of the house long enough to slam the door and prevent her from getting back. An old Chinawoman came down the street headed for the hills. The poor woman had a chair which she would place in front of her and drag herself towards it. She had come about a mile that way and had a tremendous climb in front of her. The looters began to get in their work and amid the noise of the fire, once in a while one would hear the crack of a rifle and another thief got what was coming to him. A great many people were shot for stealing and under the circumstances I think the shooting was justified.

About a week after the fire I was coming down Market Street towards

My mother and my grandmother in their finest Sunday outfits when my mother was 18 months old. Courtesy of the author.

the ferry, a lot of men were selling souvenirs of the fire, cups and saucers stuck together and other such curiosities. One persistent man got in my way and insisted on selling me a souvenir. I couldn't shake him until I told him I was a souvenir myself. He didn't bother me anymore.

I could tell you for hours of the incidents which during and after the excitement but feel I have said enough. All over the city temporary structures are being erected. People are building anywhere and starting businesses in any manner. The water front has several barber shops made of corrugated iron and everywhere there are tents. The work of relief is proceeding systematically, and I don't think anyone lacks food. Golden Gate Park is one big camp. Soldiers still patrol the streets. Steam railroads are running all over the main streets clearing away debris.

There is an air of hopefulness and cheerfulness all over, and we all expect San Francisco to rise from the ashes and show the world what can be done in the face of terrible odds. My firm is to renew business and I expect instructions to build my factory any day.

I am glad you didn't telegraph as it would not have done any good. Laura telegraphed from New York and we got her letter before the telegram. I wrote to Uncle Frank the day after the earthquake and while the fire was still burning but I guess he did not get the letter as so far I have received no reply. We got a nice note from Auntie Fan offering assistance which we appreciate very much. I am glad to say that we will be able to win out all right. Just the same the offer was a very thoughtful one and I for one will never forget it.

I could go on scribbling away for a good many hours but I think I have said enough for once. I wish you would see Aunt Maggie that everyone sees this letter as my time is taken up too much at present to write everyone. Remember us to everyone with best wishes and thanks for the kindly inquiries. Well good bye and good luck. We are always glad to hear from you Aunt Maggie and any of you who write. Love from all here to all of you and particularly from,

Your affectionate nephew,
Wm. Hindshaw

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Sproul is a native San Franciscan, raised in the Marina District of the 1940s and 1950s. He graduated from Lick Wilmerding High School and Stanford University, where he majored in English.

For more than 40 years, Ken worked in the commercial real estate field, watching and participating in the growth and change of San Francisco. He concentrated on the sale and leasing of major properties for adaptive re-use, including Hills Bros, China Basin, the Clocktower complex on Rincon Hill, the Playboy Club and Dollar properties, and the former Southern Pacific Hospital. He founded his own company, the Rubicon Group, and has served on the Board of Directors of SF Heritage and other groups. He is currently on the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Historical Society.

Ken lives in Woodside and has traveled extensively in Central and Southeast Asia. He circumambulated Mount Kailash, traveled from Beijing to Istanbul, and has tried to get to those places and cultures that are relatively unknown, unappreciated, and are subjected to change and "progress."

Ken gardens and grouches in his spare time. He is most interested in the personal lives and times of San Francisco's past, but he is also a Civil War buff and a supporter of Tibet and all peoples suffering from overbearing governments.

My grandfather and grandmother on their 50th anniversary, before we all trundled off to Bimbo's 365 Club on Columbus for dinner and a show. I was not allowed to see "the girl in the fishbowl." Courtesy of the author.

Working as a Painter at the Golden Gate Bridge:

A View to a Jump

by Bob McGee

Heading southbound through the Waldo (now Robin Williams) Tunnel at sunrise was an experience I was privileged to encounter every morning I went to work. Coming out of the tunnel you are met with a most humbling sight. The San Francisco skyline is the first view that hits you. To your left is Alcatraz Island, flanked by the sun rising up over the East Bay hills. Immediately to your right are the picturesque Marin Headlands, which give way to the endless expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

Then, if you're lucky, it's a foggy day and you enter what appears to be the bridge's own distinct environment. As you approach the bridge, a white mist creeps along as if it is going to engulf you, and then leads you into a shifting fog bank. This thick white wall, accompanied by the eerie call of the bridge foghorns, can almost give the illusion that this mass of concrete and steel is perhaps a living entity.

As you walk along her sidewalk, scattered clouds mark the sky, casting their silhouettes upon the bridge's towers. The gentle morning mist wraps you in a blanket of fog, teasing your senses with a slight chill that never satisfies. Fog completely surrounds you, energy flows through the muted steel, and a hush fills the emptiness like a voice waiting to speak.

Hours later she could get your attention in other ways, tearing through your body with gusts of wind, one after the other, wailing on you relentlessly, not wanting you to forget there is power behind her beauty, and once she grabs hold of you, she won't let you go.

She has given me views of San Francisco Bay that are absolutely breathtaking. She has shared evenings with me from her south tower, showing me an unimaginable sight of the city, or of the rising moon breaking out of the clouds at midnight over the ocean. These experiences always gave me a chilling delight that I never tired of and will never forget. I used to think of how lucky I was that bridge management didn't know they were actually paying me to do a job I would no doubt have done for free.

There were many reasons why I dreamed of being a painter on the Golden Gate Bridge. The bridge was a tremendous achievement in both design and construction. What an honor to be responsible for keeping this architectural treasure safe in my hands! Constant maintenance from a permanent paint crew is required to dress the bridge with a coat of international orange, protecting her from the natural erosions of wind and fog, along with the constant exposure of her steel to the salty sea air. It is the most glorious job for any painter, even though the job amounts to no more than picking her sores and licking her wounds, but I was more than willing to risk life and limb to do my part to keep her standing forever.

On my first day as a Golden Gate Bridge painter, Rocky, the paint superintendent, took me onto the bridge in his paint scooter. He told me that the east sidewalk, which faces the bay, was open to walkers

A view of the Golden Gate Bridge, 1961. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Work partners for twelve years. Mike Curr (left) and I gear up to paint on the South Tower. Courtesy of the author.

and bicyclists. The west sidewalk, facing the ocean, was only for bridge workers. (Now the west sidewalk is open to bicyclists during certain hours.) We took to the east sidewalk first, and Rocky emphasized that dealing with tourists was an important part of our job. He insisted that I be courteous, take time to answer their questions, and try to make their visit to the bridge as pleasurable as possible.

I never had a problem with this part of the job and actually enjoyed interacting with visitors. At times I felt no different than one might feel who had been hired to wear a Mickey Mouse costume roaming Disneyland, posing for selfies, pointing the way to the restrooms, and letting kids stomp your feet. Interaction with visitors was a simple means of sustaining my love for the bridge. This made my job more than "just a job," and enabled me to become a part of each visitor's bridge experience.

During my years working on the bridge I was asked many different questions. Some are the same ones over and over, and the answers become repetitious: yes, that is Alcatraz prison; the color of the bridge is called international orange; an elevator in each tower goes to the top; no, we don't paint the bridge from one end to the other and then start again. These answers became a normal part of our daily routine as bridge painters.

Another not-so-trivial subject matter was brought up quite often by inquiring visitors and still asked today when I tell people I'm a retired painter from the Golden Gate Bridge: "What do you know about suicide jumpers?"

My initial thought is, "More than I would like."

Let's be honest. It's a subject that often comes to mind when one thinks of the Golden Gate Bridge. These questions are perhaps asked out of harmless

The west sidewalk with various cabinets holding workers' equipment. Courtesy of the author.

morbid curiosity or possibly just people's misconception of urban myths leading them to believe suicide jumpers, like earthquakes, happen here every day, which, of course, they do not.

Thousands of tourists from all over the planet flock to the Golden Gate Bridge every week, but it's not a secret that the bridge's intrigue, mystique, and popularity also attract another element: those who are looking to end their lives in a romanticized manner by jumping off this famous landmark.

This article is not intended to analyze the psychological reasons why a person leaps from the bridge, because I actually know very little about the subject. The bridge itself may know why people jump, but the bridge is unable to tell its secrets, so I will try my best to tell you all I have witnessed concerning jumpers, and along the way, try to answer some of the questions I have been asked about suicide jumps from the Golden Gate Bridge.

By 2009, an estimated 1,300 people had jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge, and the number may be considerably higher if you count those who jumped at night. During the last few decades an average of nearly 30 people a year have jumped off the bridge.

Profiles of jumpers were not kept in the early years, but from the information we do have about jumps from the past, plus the accurate records kept now, we have an idea of some profile percentages. We know jumpers are almost exclusively from the Bay Area, and the average age is 41 years old. Occupations of the jumpers have varied over the years, but usually professors and students lead this list; lately, suicide jumps by software engineers have been on the rise. Eighty percent of jumpers are white, and fifty-six percent who jump are not married.

Have I seen a woman jump?

Suicide jumps are obviously random. Sometimes there are three or four jumps in a week, and other times, several months may go by without a reported jump. One fact that isn't so random is that male jumps far outnumber female jumps (three males to each female), but females do unfortunately jump, and when it does happen, it makes a permanent impression, much different to me than seeing a male jump.

Once, while tending the blast pots on the west sidewalk near midspan, my partner and I noticed something unusual happening across the roadway on the east sidewalk, about 100 yards north of where we were standing. We saw that bridge patrol had closed the northbound lane closest to the east sidewalk and had parked a patrol car behind a car that appear to be stalled. This is not an unusual sight on the bridge, but I did notice that the car was parked irregularly and seemed to be abandoned. We started walking down the west sidewalk to get a better view, and began to notice something strange. I could see a small woman standing, in what appeared to be a very agitated state, with her back against the outer guardrail of the east sidewalk.

I immediately turned on our bridge radio and heard that the woman had stopped her car in the lane and got out, not bothering to close the driver's side door. She then ran around her car, crawled through the safety barrier that separates the roadway from the sidewalk, and ran across the sidewalk to the outer rail, where she now appeared to be in some sort of standoff with two bridge security officers.

The two officers cautiously approached the woman, careful to keep a safe distance from her, as they appeared to plead with her. We were confused as to why the officers didn't just grab her before she had a chance to jump over the rail. We got our answer on the bridge radio. She had several hypodermic needles in her hand and was acting violently toward the officers.

I watched the woman wielding the needles like knives, hacking and slashing them vigorously. Her aggressiveness was unbelievable for someone so small. She obviously did not want anyone near her. Every time the pleading officers got close to her, she poked and jabbed them.

Then, as if she had no doubts or fears about accomplishing what she had come to the bridge to do, her petite frame rolled up and over the guardrail so quickly that the lunging officers could not grab her, and then she was gone from our view. My partner and I gasped in horror, knowing that the only thing beyond the rail was a 3-foot-wide chord and then a 210-foot fall.

We saw both officers quickly approach the rail and look over. We thought for sure she was gone. Then we heard a report on our bridge radio that the woman was still actually holding onto the outside of the chord. We looked at each other with amazed approval. Then we saw the officers throw their bodies around in frustration. We knew then that the woman could not hold on any longer or she had let go on her own; either way, she had obviously fallen. Ultimate sadness overcame me. By the time she fell, the Coast Guard workers had had time to position themselves below her, but we heard on the radio soon after that it was a recovery, not a rescue.

The incident happened so fast, and it's impossible to explain the emotional overload and feeling of futility to witness something like this and be truly helpless to assist. I feel sorrow for the two bridge patrol officers and how they must have felt, always wondering if they should have just sacrificed themselves and taken the stabs from the needles—filled with "who knows what"—to save a woman who wanted more than anything to die on this day.

A view of the outer chord as seen from underneath the sidewalk that curves around the South Tower. Courtesy of the author.

Our Voyeuristic Society

Eric Steele's film, called *The Bridge*, came out in 2006. Steele and his crew set up surveillance cameras that continuously filmed the Golden Gate Bridge from stationary cameras in various locations, with the intention of catching suicide jumps on film. The purpose of the film was to focus on suspicious people on the bridge who might or might not be contemplating suicide. Many people have seen or know of this film. It was a viral sensation for a while but was eventually removed from the Internet, as some criticized it as being morbid and unethical voyeurism.

On April 26, 1957, a would-be jumper who was dissuaded from committing suicide jumps down from a supporting cable on the Golden Gate Bridge. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Steele defended his film as an anti-suicide project. He stated that most of his film focused on heartfelt interviews with loved ones the suicide jumper left behind. Steele argued that he prevented at least six suicides when his filming crew pointed out suspicious characters to bridge security officers, who removed the possible jumpers from the bridge. He also has on film a woman's life being saved when a passerby pulled her back over the rail.

Of course, this is not where controversy lies. We are a voyeuristic society by nature. We desire to be indulged and shocked by "reality TV" and "fake news." The public interest and curiosity in this film didn't come from the lives that were saved, but from those that were lost. Steele's film crew filmed at least two successful jumps. One of these jumps I remember all too well. I experienced it live from a different angle, and I have a much different perspective than when I saw it on film.

Have I Ever Seen a Jumper Hit the Water?

Let me begin by saying that if you work on the Golden Gate Bridge long enough, you have probably seen at least one person go over the rail, heard a splash from someone who has hit the water, or seen an unfortunate soul floating in the bay; but to witness an entire jump is a rare thing.

It was a beautiful morning at the bridge. I had been employed at the bridge for only about four months. Festis was my work partner that morning, and we were painting under the bridge on the east end of the south tower base. The base of the tower is a giant concrete block elevated about two stories

above sea level and is the main support for the tower legs. We call this area the South Tower Pier. The pier extends perpendicular away from the bridge, outward across the water. A moat of seawater circles around the base and is surrounded by a concrete wall serving as a breakwater. From our location, we could actually look up and have a clear view of the east sidewalk's outer rail, which was about 190 feet above us, and about 210 feet above the water.

We heard on our portable bridge radio that a man was pacing back and forth on the east sidewalk and had been speaking to bridge personnel on his cell phone for the last two hours. He was contemplating jumping off the bridge and threatened to jump if anyone approached him. We couldn't see the man on the sidewalk and had no idea what he was discussing with bridge personnel. We figured that if he was in some sort of negotiation standoff, there was nothing we could do, so Festis and I went back to what we were doing.

Then, to get my attention, Festis pointed up toward a man sitting on the outer rail. I looked up and saw a man about 100 yards north of the south tower, toward midspan. He had long hair and was sitting on the top rail with his back to us, apparently talking casually on his cell phone. After watching for a few minutes, I still doubted this man was actually going to jump. From my vantage point, he looked calm. I figured he would most likely decline to jump, having had plenty of time to contemplate his fate.

Two workers on the South Tower of the bridge. Courtesy of the author.

The view from the concrete breakwater that surrounds and protects the South Tower pier. Courtesy of the author.

I figured wrong! I looked away for just a moment and heard Festis yell, "Oh, s___! He jumped!" I immediately looked up and couldn't believe what I was seeing: a man falling feet first with his arms stretched out above his head.

One . . . Man falling.

While the man was plummeting to the water with his arms up, he didn't scream, but I remember the loud flapping of his clothes.

Two . . . Man still falling.

Even though the man was traveling downward very fast, the four seconds to reach the water seemed so much longer. I can't even imagine how long the four seconds must have seemed to the jumper.

Four . . . Man hits water.

The man hit the water, causing a huge splash. Then I witnessed the most defining moment of the jump. The sound.

During the first months I had worked at the bridge, I used to look down from the sidewalk at the 210-foot drop and wonder why more people didn't

A view of choppy waters from the South Tower pier. Courtesy of the author.

survive the jump. It didn't look like a fatal distance from above, especially on a nice day when the waters were calm. Watching this man collide with the water ended all such notions for me, forever.

The sound that followed the splash can only be compared to a shotgun blast. My body cringed when I heard this sick sound. I closed my eyes, knowing at that exact second I had witnessed a death. I will never forget the sound I heard. There was no doubt in my mind; this man did not survive.

Being at an elevated position atop the pier, I could look down at the victim, who was less than 100 yards from me in the water. He remained submerged three to four feet below the water's surface, drifting along in the swift current, surrounded by a ring of blood. It was a sobering sight to say the least.

Then the smoking kettle that signifies a jump has occurred came crashing into the water near the body. The Coast Guard wasted no time getting to the body, but in this particular case there was to be no rescue or resuscitation upon their arrival, just the retrieval of a broken body.

Later, other bridge workers told me that it was rare to see a jump this close. I did not feel privileged. I hoped I'd never see one again. I was left with mixed emotions, a sensation of feeling astonished, humbled, and depressed—all at the same time. Also, my belief that a jump from the sidewalk is survivable ended in an instant.

The Dangerous Outer Rail

The east sidewalk is the setting for almost every jump. The sidewalk is a ten-foot-wide concrete walkway running the length of the bridge, taking gradual turns around each tower. A safety barrier, constructed in 2002, protects pedestrians from the roadway, separating the sidewalk from "lane one." About every 100 yards, metal-latched emergency gates have been installed for bridge patrol and tow service to access the sidewalk from the roadway.

The sidewalk's main outer steel guardrail is a little over four feet tall and runs the length of the bridge. Rumor has it that the railings are low because bridge designer Joseph Strauss was only five feet tall. On the other side of the outer rail, three feet below the outside edge of the sidewalk, is a three-foot-wide steel box chord, which is the only thing between the outer rail and a 210-foot fall to the waters below. Due to constant fog and moisture in the air, the top of the chord is wet nearly all the time and can be extremely slick. It's very dangerous for those of us who walk on steel every day, let alone a nervous person who climbs out onto it for the first time.

One victim caught on surveillance video learned a tragic lesson on just how dangerous going over the outer rail can be. In the video, a middle-aged man awkwardly climbed over the guardrail on a dark, foggy, drizzly night with no other soul in sight. He climbed over the guardrail near a light post, so a dim light was all he had to help guide him. He stood on the chord ready to jump, but suddenly looked as though he had second thoughts about jumping. He seemed scared and disoriented, but not ready to end his life. He finally got his nerve to climb back over the rail to safety. He tried to grab onto the top

A painter on the outer chord of the west sidewalk. Courtesy of the author.

handrail, which was now about seven feet above him due to the drop from the sidewalk to the chord he was standing on. The man could reach only the bottom of the guardrail he was holding onto, trying to find a foothold to hoist himself back over the rail, but his foot slipped, his grip failed him, and as he fell back down to the chord, he slipped off the wet chord, out of sight of the video camera, and fell to his death. He learned the hard way just how slick and dangerous the outer chord can be and will never get his second chance at life.

It is impossible to know what goes on in the mind of a jumper after he or she leaps off the bridge, but we do have reports from a few survivors who have lived to give their accounts. They all agree that regret set in immediately after they jumped.

Beating the odds of surviving a jump from the bridge was obviously not enough for one man, who jumped from the bridge and miraculously survived. He followed this feat with an interview telling the world of his regret within a millisecond of jumping, and how thankful he was that he had survived the jump. The following year, something compelled this young man to jump again, this time falling to his death.

The Coast Guard's Role

Suicide can be attempted many different ways. Most ways of taking one's life are fallible. Suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge constitutes a good chance of success. In four seconds, it is all over. During the four-second fall, the body will fall at nearly 80 miles per hour, and the fall ends with a bone-shattering impact of 15,000 pounds per square inch. This type of fall will destroy a body and most certainly result in instant death. For those who survive the fall, their unconscious body will most likely drown from the injuries in the swift-moving water of the 350-foot deep channel. They may also die from shock and, if not rescued quickly, they will die of hypothermia in the frigid waters. Of course, there are jumpers who are rescued and do live, but it takes more than just luck to survive a jump from the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Coast Guard is the first responder to a jump. The Coast Guard is immediately informed when a person is seen to have jumped from the sidewalk. At the same time, A member of bridge patrol will drive to where the jump occurred, exiting onto the sidewalk through the access gate, and immediately drop a basketball-sized smoking kettle straight down into the water from the spot the jump was made.

The jumper's body will sometimes be submerged and start drifting even before the Coast Guard can get to the scene. Because a submerged body can be several feet below the surface, it can be difficult to see at eye level from a Coast Guard rescue vessel. The smoking kettle will drift the same route as the body, whether the tide is ebbing or flowing outward. This way, the Coast Guard can follow the rising smoke to locate the body quickly. This gives the Coast Guard a better chance at a rescue.

The Coast Guard station, located under the bridge near the north end, is on constant alert for jumpers. Coast Guard workers are ready to respond quickly to revive a drowning victim; administer CPR to an injured survivor; get a potential survivor up and out of the water quickly before hypothermia can set in; or, as in most cases, complete the grim task of locating and removing a lifeless body from the water.

Festis and Vince posing at the door to the South Tower elevator on the east sidewalk. Courtesy of the author.

On October 10, 1941, this man was rescued before he tried to commit suicide.
Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Have I Ever Seen Anyone Talked Out of Jumping?

Bridge management takes pride in training employees from all departments in suicide prevention. Trained professionals instructed us on what signs we should look for in a potential jumper, how we should approach the person, and what we say when we have the potential jumper's attention. These tactics have helped convince many people not to take their lives. Sometimes all the training the world isn't enough; just being you and lending an ear to someone in distress can be the remedy.

A woman had climbed over the guardrail and was standing on the outer chord below. She was clinging to the bridge support cables that run up through the chord, threatening to let go if anyone tried to grab her. Alfredo, a bridge painter who was working nearby, saw what was happening and calmly approached the frightened woman. He sat next to her for more than an hour, and through dialogue full of heartfelt concern and patience, he eventually talked the woman out of jumping, and then helped her back over the rail to safety. The crowd that had gathered around the incident, including myself, began cheering as Alfredo helped the woman get into the bridge patrol scooter that would take her off the bridge . . . alive. For this woman, the odds of remaining alive are good. A study started in 1978, of people stopped from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge, found that 94% were still alive more than twenty-six years later.

It was a glorious achievement, and for his act of caring, Alfredo was awarded Bridge District Employee of the Year by the Golden Gate Bridge Board of Directors. There's now one more person in this world with a second chance at a happy life, thanks to Alfredo.

A beautiful view of the San Francisco peninsula from atop the South Tower. Courtesy of the author.

Reactions to People Who Jump

Not all bridge employees have compassion for suicide jumpers. Some figure if people want to jump, let them; others aren't interested either way. Then there are those who actually find a way to create amusement and capitalize on others' tragedies.

The bridge workers, like workers in many environments across America, engaged in many types of gambling. There were poker games, dominoes, football pools, parley cards; basically, any type of gambling that could exist did. Management frowned on gambling in the workplace but was unable to eliminate it.

A couple of enterprising employees decided to take workplace gambling to the lowest level when one day a "jumpers pool" surfaced. It was somewhat similar to a common football pool, but was laid out in the form of a monthly calendar. There was a blank square for each day of the month. A participant paid for a square and then chose any day on this calendar, writing his name or initials in it. The objective was simple: if there were a suicide jumper on a player's day, he would win all the money that had been built up since the day of the last jump. If there were no jumpers that month, the pot rolled over into the next month.

I saw this pool and figured it was just a bad joke, or a novelty that would soon just go away. It didn't go away; in fact, the first month's sheet filled up so quickly that another pool for the month was added. It was popular only with a small percentage of employees; most others thought it was repulsive, irresponsible, and in terrible taste. Many of the players were not bad people; they were just among those who had no compassion for jumpers, and I guess they really just loved to gamble. Those who were in the pool gave themselves away by running into bridge security first thing every morning to ask if there had been any jumpers the day before. I couldn't help but think that every time a person jumped, a fellow worker made some money. It was hard to imagine someone was actually hoping a person would jump off the bridge on a particular day, just so they could make a few dollars.

This pool flourished discreetly for a few months, but good judgment eventually took over, and interest waned. Bridge management was horrified when they learned of this pool's existence. They laid down a zero-tolerance rule immediately. Anyone involved in these games was to be unconditionally terminated. Management also punished the rest of us by banning all types of gambling. Collateral damage can be a motivational force, as the rest of the department rose up against the abhorrent pool and put an end to it. Eventually, our football pools and card games resurfaced, but the "jumpers pool" will hopefully stay gone forever.

The First Jumper and Other Jumper Stories

It was August of 1937, just a few months after the bridge had opened, when H. B. Wobber, a 49-year-old World War I veteran was on the sidewalk. He told another man standing next to him, "This is where I get off. I'm going to jump." The other man tried to grab Wobber, but Wobber broke free and threw himself over the rail. Wobber officially became the first person to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge.

In the more than 80 years since Wobber's jump, there have been many ways that jumpers have chosen to end their lives. There are impulsive suicides, involving those who just stop their car, run to the rail, and go up and over. Many park in one of the the lots at either end of the bridge and walk to the spot from which they choose to jump. Still others go onto the outer chord below the guardrail and just stand there contemplating the reasons that brought them there, while they take the last few breaths they will ever take.

Many jumpers have left suicide notes. Apologies, health issue, and of course references to sour relationships head the list of fateful subjects. Sometimes notes can be heart wrenching, like this tragic note left by a young pre-med student from UCLA in 1954. He followed his father off the bridge just four days after his father had committed suicide: "I am sorry. I want to keep Dad company." In 1945, a man placed his five-year-old daughter on the chord, made her jump, and followed her, leaving the note, "I and my daughter have committed suicide."

Disturbing tales and accounts have circulated around the bridge for decades about those who desire more than just an end to their lives: they

want to make a statement, as well. Every once in a while a selfish man, who doesn't want to leave anything behind, jumps with his life savings in his pocket. Some jumpers take computers and other incriminating evidence over the side with them. In one case, a 77-year-old man jumped after murdering his wife.

I heard of a couple who made a lover's leap together. Some sort of pact, hand in hand, over the rail, four last seconds together. Some jumpers take their pets with them. Most of the time, they hold onto their pets when they jump, but I remember one sad instance where I watched a man toss a helpless dog over before jumping himself.

Pets aren't the only ones who go over the rail unexpectedly. I have already described the man and his daughter. There are other terrible instances where jumpers, in their moments of instantaneous desperation, take innocent people over the rail with them. A man once got into an argument with his girlfriend near the South Tower. He got so upset that he forcefully shoved the woman up and over the guardrail and then followed her over the side. Both died, but the woman unfortunately didn't get to choose where she landed; she hit the concrete breakwater surrounding the pier.

Other painters told me about an incident they witnessed a few years before I starting working at the bridge. A man just grabbed a young child he didn't know who happened to be standing next to him, and he was going to jump with her in his arms. Luckily, several people in the vicinity wrestled the girl from his grip, saving her from a horrific fate. The man ended up jumping alone.

It's hard to grasp people's states of mind when their own demise is not enough and in a moment of senseless desperation, they choose to add the murder of innocent victims to their final act.

Have I Ever Seen Anyone Physically Stopped from Jumping?

As high-steel painters, we spend many hours training to work safely. Management takes great concern that we go home alive every day. One required policy is that we always work in pairs, ensuring our partner's safety as well as our own. You never know when a life-threatening situation involving a fellow worker may arise, or what the situation may be, but the key is to be ready and prepared when it does. As employees, we don't always get along with one another, and that's okay, because we definitely have each other's back when the need arises, as this next account illustrates.

A man was driving southbound toward San Francisco in the far lane next to the west sidewalk. He just stopped his car, jumped out, and climbed onto the west sidewalk through the safety barrier. At that time, the west sidewalk was for bridge worker access only and off-limits to the public, but this man obviously wasn't in a state of mind to worry about such trivial restrictions.

I was driving my paint scooter on the other side of the bridge, on the east sidewalk, and I pulled over when I saw the man stop his car and run for the west sidewalk. There was a lot of commotion and honking as cars behind him swerved to avoid his abandoned car. This man, like the woman jumper I mentioned earlier, had made up his mind to jump. He wanted to be over the rail, into the water, and out of his life.

Things were happening quickly, and there was no way that bridge security could get to this man before he would jump. At the moment I saw him enter the sidewalk, I noticed he was heading to where one of our paint scooters was parked, near the South Tower. Two painters were sitting in that parked scooter, Brian in the cab and Mar in the back.

The jumper was heading for the outer rail at the South Tower. Mar spotted the man, jumped out of his scooter, and got into position to intercept the jumper. The man was a few steps away from Mar, and surprised us all when he threw his car keys as hard as he could into Mar's face. Mar grabbed his face in pain. The insanity didn't stop there. Instead of side-stepping the stunned painter and continuing with his jump, this tall, well built man ran with all his heightened anxiety straight into Mar, slamming him hard into the outer rail. Then he grabbed Mar's right leg and began trying to force the shocked painter over the rail.

This all happened in a matter of seconds, and I remember watching in amazement and unbelievable horror, helpless from the other side of the roadway, seeing a co-worker and friend struggling for his life against a madman. The man lifted Mar's right leg even higher, and Mar's left leg came off the ground.

The bridge's north approach viaduct with the Marin Headlands on the right. Courtesy of the author.

I remember thinking that Mar was actually going to be thrown over the rail.

Then, out of nowhere, Brian came up behind the crazed man, grabbing him around the neck, causing him to release Mar, who fell to the sidewalk. Brian wrestled the would-be jumper to the ground, burying the man's face in the sidewalk. The man still violently protested, but Brian's strength kept him pinned to the ground until help arrived.

This bizarre chain of events was a good example of why we work in pairs. Brian was there to save his partner when the opportunity presented itself. An ever-thankful Mar made sure Brian didn't have to worry about buying his own lunch for a long time after this event. Brian's quick reaction not only saved his partner's life, but also saved the potential jumper's life. I never knew how this new chance at life would affect the saved jumper, but he had to deal with being alive at least a while longer. I hope he made the most of his new opportunity. Going home alive was our number one priority at the bridge, and all three of these men were alive at the end of the day, thanks to Brian.

Suicide Prevention

The bridge has an efficient Suicide Prevention Response Plan. The Coast Guard has already been mentioned as providing first responders when a jumper hits the water, but other measures are in place to prevent a prospective jumper from getting that far.

The first line of response is a trained bridge security team that responds quickly to any type of suicide jumper threat. For urgent cases, bridge patrol cars, teamed with bridge tow service, can create a lane diversion or closure to converge quickly on a possible jumper to question him or her, or actually remove the suspected jumper from the bridge to a safer place to talk further with bridge officers. For less obvious suspects, who may only be contemplating a jump, bridge security has patrol scooters and officers on bicycles to discreetly approach a suspected jumper for a subtler encounter.

Due to the bridge's status as a national monument and an American icon, it has been considered a target for terrorist attacks. Since 9/11, security on the bridge has become a high priority. High-tech security also adds a new dimension to suicide prevention. Bridge

security is able to monitor the bridge much more thoroughly due to dozens of security cameras that have been installed on or around the bridge during the past decade. From a main security room, bridge security can now watch suspicious characters more closely.

Another effective aspect of the Suicide Prevention Plan is an early-warning system. This occurs when a family member or loved one reports that a person may be heading to the bridge to commit suicide. In these instances, bridge security sends a message over the bridge radio that includes a general description of the person, what he or she may be wearing, and even a possible vehicle the person may be driving to the bridge. This way, if any bridge workers come into contact with the person, they can inform bridge security.

Suicide prevention using a hands-on approach primarily involves bridge painters and ironworkers because we frequent the sidewalks all day. We carry bridge radios with us and have the authority to report any suspicious characters to bridge security. Of course, we also have the option of approaching possible jumpers and talking with them to better determine their intentions. To judge whether a person is contemplating suicide is not always easy. In fact, it is a difficult call more often than not.

Bridge officials are sympathetic to the grief that families of suicide victims endure. I have attended public bridge board meetings where victims' family members address the board with heartbreaking testimonials. These usually end with family members questioning whether their loved ones would have committed suicide had they not been standing at the Golden Gate Bridge.

Proponents for a suicide barrier that would more effectively prevent jumping have long suggested that the Golden Gate Bridge's popular legend, coupled with its easy access and relatively low safety rail, make it a prime destination for those contemplating suicide. Anti-suicide barriers on the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building have been successful at deterring jumpers. Anti-suicide and mental health activists have pressured bridge directors for decades to create some sort of suicide barrier for the Golden Gate Bridge.

Bridge directors announced recently that a suicide barrier is now being constructed for the Golden Gate Bridge. It is scheduled to be functioning by 2021.

Unpredictable Behaviors

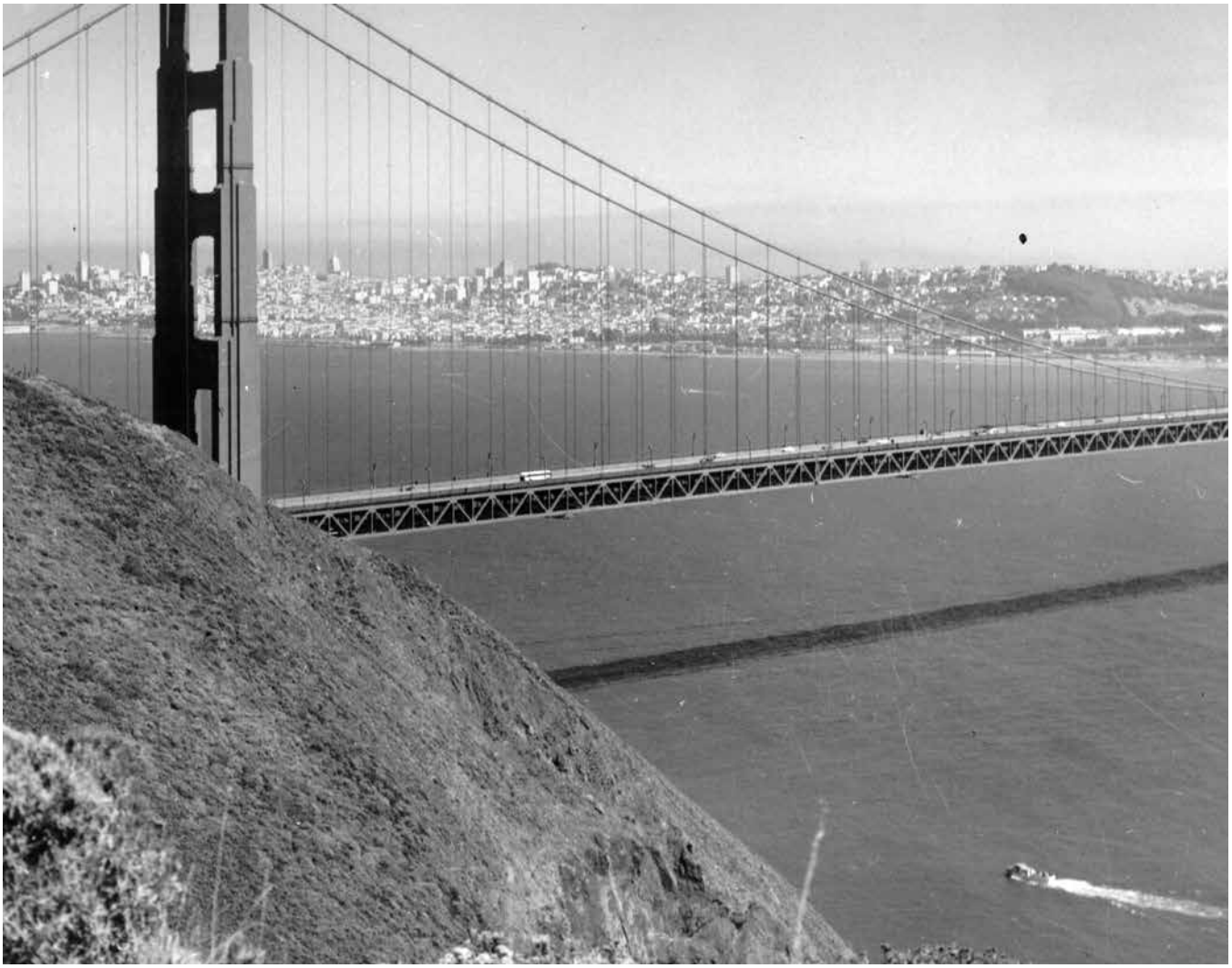
Ten million pedestrians from all over the world cross the Golden Gate Bridge every year. I have seen amazing things on that sidewalk, and so many distractions make it hard to spot someone who might be contemplating a jump.

The afternoon San Francisco wind can wreak all kinds of havoc on the east sidewalk. There is often that poor soul whose hat blows off, and he will chase it a quarter mile down the sidewalk, only to have it rise up and shoot into traffic. Or the person who discreetly throws a half-drunk cup of coffee over the rail, only to have it swirl back up and drench him or her—or a neighboring walker. Many times I have witnessed men repeatedly pulling a shirt down that keeps blowing up and exposing their portly bellies or women frantically fighting to pull down dresses that keep blowing over their heads.

The bridge's unpredictable wind has a mind of its own and is not always kind. Once I saw the wind do the unthinkable. A young lady was fulfilling a loved one's last wish by throwing his or her ashes off the bridge. The girl dumped the bag full of ashes over the outer rail, only to have the entire contents of the bag blow back up, covering her and the dozen or so onlookers beside her.

Bridge security used to be strict about conduct on the east sidewalk, but oddballs always found ways to risk peril for attention. For example, I have seen a man on a ten-foot unicycle, a clown on stilts, and a woman doing backflips from one tower to the other. I even saw a man speed by me on a High Wheeler bike from the 1800s, ringing a little bell. The bike had a huge front wheel and a tiny rear wheel, and a seat above the front wheel sitting more than five feet tall. Each turn of the pedals sent the big front wheel around once, so the bike traveled a long distance with a single turn of the wheel. This guy had no control over his speed, wasn't able to turn the bike at all, and couldn't stop the bike if he had to. He just buzzed down the sidewalk, loving all the attention he was getting, not caring that a single mishap or a big gust of wind could topple him over the outer rail to his death.

I also witnessed a political protest during the running of the Olympic Torch across the bridge in April of 2008, when protesters ascended the South



A view of the Golden Gate Bridge with downtown San Francisco in the background, taken in 1954 from the Marin headlands. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Tower fromthe sidewalk and unraveled a huge "Free Tibet" banner.

Luckily, most walkers on the sidewalk are not there for attention and keep a much lower profile. Many are amateur photographers, recording poses with a backdrop of the bay, maybe taking a selfie glamour shot or a silly picture, or taking pictures with bridge workers. Others are pedaling rental bikes up and down the sidewalk, trying to stay upright as they weave their way through the sidewalk traffic. These are examples of actively busy bridge visitors who are obviously not there to jump.

Then we have walkers who love to take in the whole bridge experience, stopping every few feet to catch all angles of the inspired view. They may look over te rail for hours at the beauty the bridge has to offer, soaking up as much scenery as they can.

This is where good judgment on our part must come into play. Many jumpers waste no time in jumping, as I have mentioned in descriptions of other jumps, but there are those who contemplate their intended leap for hours, whether through fear, doubt, second thoughts, or reflection on their last precious moments on Earth. It can be hard to separate these types of pre-jump suspects from people who are just enjoying the beautiful view. When I ran across this type of dilemma, I found it was a good idea to approach the person politely and strike up a casual conversation to further evaluate the situation.

Have I Ever Approached a Prospective Jumper?

One day, two other painters and I had been working down in the cells, located inside the bottom of the South Tower. We were coming out of the tower onto the east sidewalk after our elevator ride up to roadway level. It was time to take our morning break, and we were on our way to our paint scooter for our ride back to the painter's break room.

I noticed a young man at the outer rail looking extremely anxious, wearing a beige short-sleeved t-shirt. What made this unusual was that the weather that morning was foggy and overcast, with a howling wind. Moisture was running down every inch of the steel, and the sidewalk was wet. Certainly this was not the kind of weather a disoriented sleeveless man should be in. However, that alone wasn't too much cause for concern because tourists often underestimate the changing weather that San Francisco offers up, even in July.

The young man appeared to be the only person anywhere on the sidewalk. I told my fellow workers to give me a few minutes so I could talk to this man. As I got closer, I saw that the man was unkempt, shivering from the cold, and very nervous. He walked toward me as I approached him, and it seemed as if he wanted to engage in conversation.

"Looks like a real crappy morning to be sightseeing," I said, noticing that his t-shirt was soaking wet.

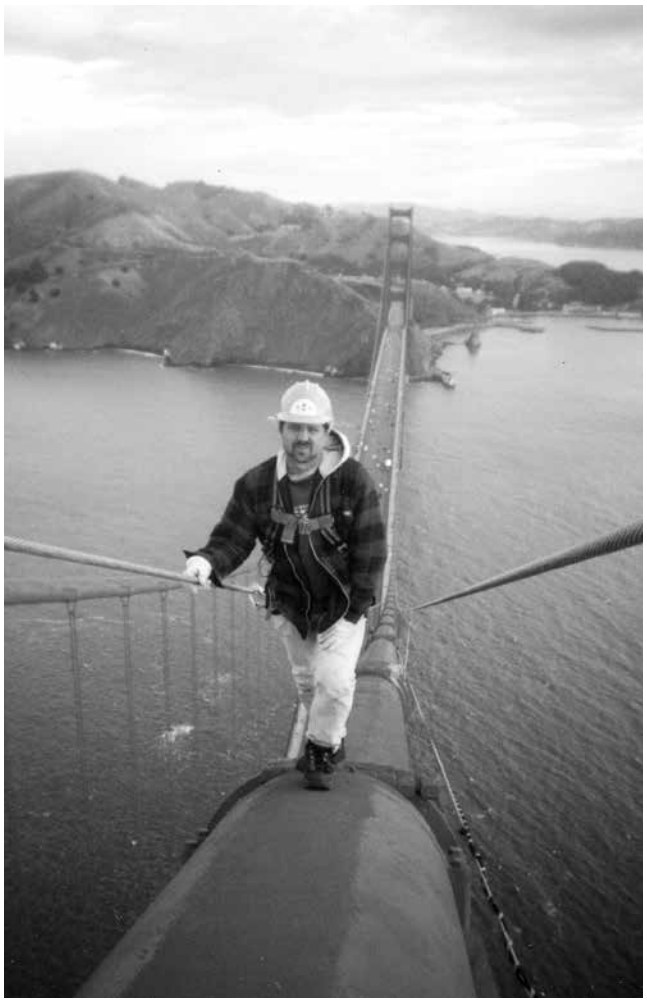
"Oh, I'm not sightseeing," he replied. "I'm waiting for my girlfriend to come by on her bike. She is heading to work in the city and will be coming by here any minute."

I looked around and saw no sign that anyone was coming, and doubted that anyone would be out on a bicycle in this type of weather. "Dude, you are going to freeze," I said. "Why don't you wait for her at the gift center café, or someplace out of this rotten weather?"

Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a diamond ring. "When she comes by, I'm going to get down on my knees, hold this ring up, and propose to her right here at the tower."

I smiled and gave him a genuine nod of approval. "That is really cool," I said to him.

I was still skeptical and started reasoning things out in my head. Had he already proposed to her somewhere else and she had refused, leaving him so depressed he was contemplating jumping? Was there actually no girl at all, and he was just playing me to get me to leave him alone? Or was this girl real, and actually going to come riding up at any moment, and this young man's gesture would prove to be the most romantic moment in both of their lives? I had no idea what to believe.



I'm on the main cable near the top of the South Tower, with my back to Marin County. Courtesy of the author.

What I did know was that if I made a call to bridge security about this man, they would definitely come out to question him, and perhaps they would be present at the moment the girl arrived on her bike, thus turning the romantic moment into an awkward and embarrassing experience for him.

Once again I scanned the sidewalk, and there was no sign of anyone coming through the gloomy darkness. I closed my eyes and contemplated my

options one last time. Then I put out my hand, grasped his hand tightly, and smiled. "Well, good luck. I know she is going to say yes."

"Thank you. Thank you. I sure hope so," he replied, smiling.

I got in in the scooter with my co-workers, and we headed in for our break. Who am I to stand between true love?

Our break ended about 30 minutes later, and we jumped into the scooter to head back to the South Tower. The weather seemed much more pleasant upon our return to the tower. The fog that had clung to the bridge had lifted and dissipated in the warmth of the morning. I wondered how Mr. Romantic was doing, and I smiled at the thought of the engagement actually happening. After making the turn from the plaza to the sidewalk, I saw the northbound number one lane blocked off and a bridge patrol car at the tower.

Immediately, my hope that I might have been part of something special were destroyed. I was overtaken by a feeling of intimate pain. A pit formed in my stomach, taking control and crying out for me to realize that some great misfortune was about to happen.

It was obvious that there was a problem at the tower, but I didn't turn on the portable bridge radio because I was afraid of what I might hear. I saw the bridge patrol officer on the sidewalk directly in front of the South Tower looking down over the outer rail. After we parked our scooter, I looked around but saw no sign of anybody other than the officer. My bad feeling getting worse, I headed toward the officer.

"Jumper?" I asked in a somber tone.

"Yep. A driver reported on his cell phone that he saw a man go over the rail about a half hour ago," answered the officer.

My heart sank as I approached the rail, looked down, and saw what I had expected, but hoped and prayed not to see. It was the young man. I closed my eyes and just wanted to cry. There he was, floating face down in the moat, his beige t-shirt still clinging to his lifeless body.

The officer could see I was upset. "Do you know this man?" he asked.

"No, I don't, but I think I was the last one to talk to him." Then I asked, "Was there any report of another person with him before or after his jump?"

"I haven't heard," said the officer. "Why? Was there someone else here with him?"

"No, I was just curious. Thanks," I said.

I'll never know whether he proposed and she refused, or if there was never any girl at all. It didn't really matter anyway, because all I knew was that I felt that I had let a man die that day. I could have prevented his death by reporting him and having him removed from the bridge, had I not favored curiosity over prudence. I made the mistake of ignoring obvious signs for the sake of my faith that the "good" in this situation would prevail.

It took a while for me to come to grips with what happened. I kept feeling angry at myself, frustration with him, and sadness over the whole ordeal. I still think of him sometimes and what I could have done differently. I have stopped condemning myself over the incident, and realize now that I never could have known what was going on in the young man's head that day. If there can be any upside to this tragedy, and I was the last person he had contact with, no matter what his reason for jumping was, I was able to give the young man a genuine smile and a warm handshake before he left this world.

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I am now retired from the Golden Gate Bridge paint department, but people still say to me, "Wow! You worked on the Golden Gate Bridge? Have you ever seen a person jump?"

I say, "Yes, and I pray nobody else ever has to see it again!"

About the Author

Bob McGee was born in Richmond, California, and attended California State University, Hayward. After college he became a third-generation steel painter. He spent 20 years painting bridges in the Bay Area, the last 12 as a member of the Golden Gate Bridge paint crew. He retired in 2014.

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