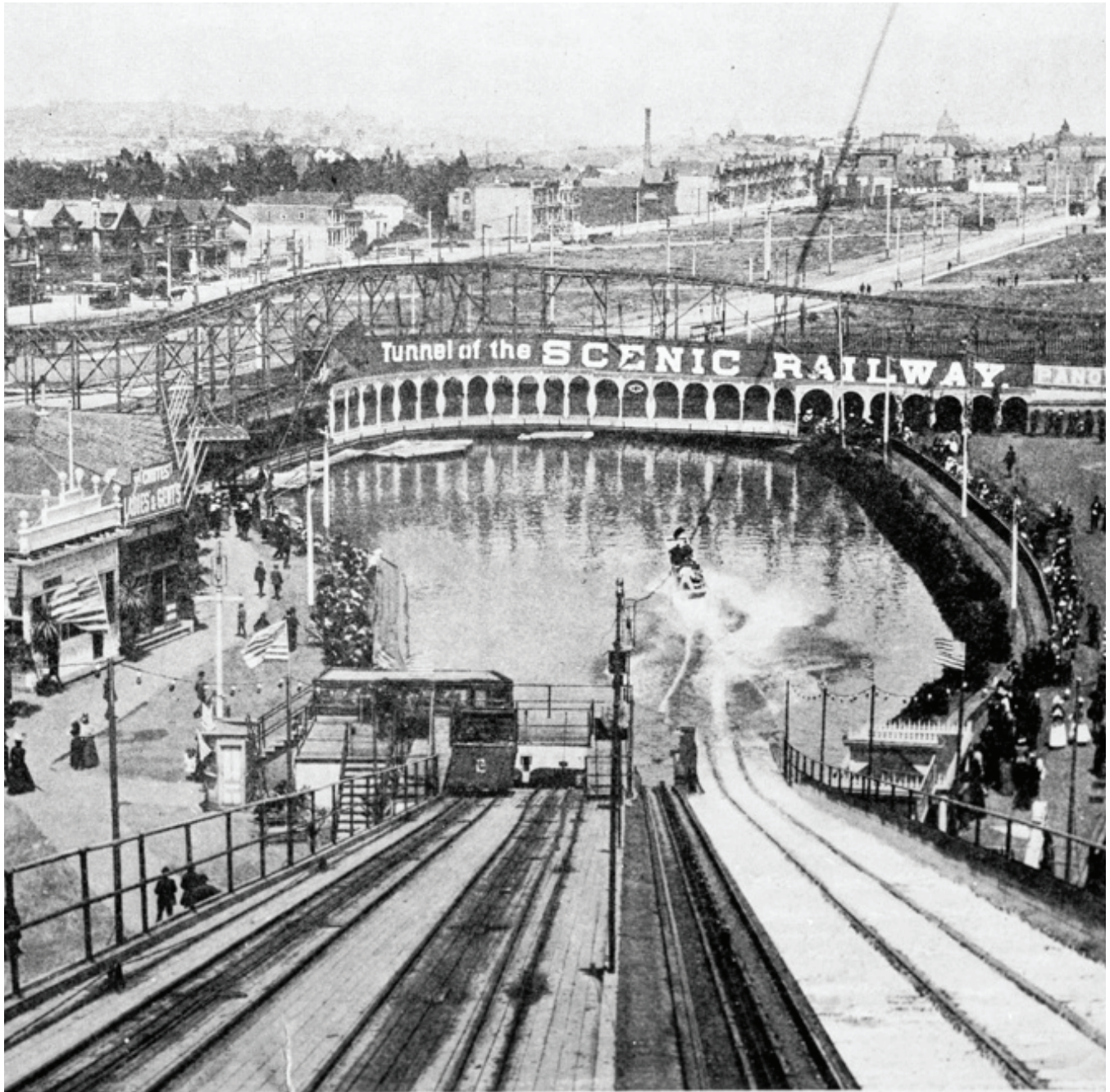


SAN FRANCISCO *at Play!*



Special ARGONAUT Edition

JOURNAL OF SAN FRANCISCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

“Tell me how a city takes its pleasure
and I will tell you the character of its people.”

SAN FRANCISCO AT PLAY!

Since the COVID-19 shutdown, San Franciscans have been deprived of one of our favorite activities—FUN around town. With restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and parks closed for the time being, we can only recall our favorite places and pastimes with a wistful smile and look forward to the eventual restoration of our city’s thriving social life.

This Special Edition of *The Argonaut* takes a nostalgic look back in time at some of the unique, lively, sometimes bawdy, one-of-a-kind San Francisco experiences we once treasured with frequency and abandon—and, perhaps, took for granted.

HERE ARE THE FEATURES YOU’LL FIND IN THIS ISSUE:

- **San Francisco’s Wonderous Drink, Pisco Punch** by *Paul Scholten* – Vol. 8 No.2 (Fall 1997)
This classic San Francisco cocktail, said to have been invented in the Bank Exchange Saloon, proves the truth of this old adage: “One is just right; two is too many; three is not enough.”
- **The Chutes: San Francisco’s Unique Destination for Amusement** by *John Freeman*
– Vol. 14. No. 2 (Winter 2003) Who knew gravity could be so fun? Find out why people once flocked to an unusual form of amusement in a neighborhood now called “the Haight.”
- **A Toast to Paoli’s** by *Deanna Paoli Gumina* – Vol. 25 No. 2 (Winter 2014) Written by the daughter of Paoli’s founders, this article celebrates the iconic, elegant bar and supper club that once graced Montgomery Street and fed the city’s appetite for “continental cuisine.” Some recipes from Paoli’s menu are included.
- **Finocchio’s Club: A San Francisco Legend** by *James Smith* – Vol. 28 No. 2 (Winter 2018)
Long before the LGBT movement was in full swing, one San Francisco nightclub gained fame through featuring performances by a breathtaking array of female impersonators. (“Ladies, his gowns will simply slay you!”)

A glimpse of San Francisco at play would be incomplete without a touch of naughtiness. Local author Peter Field has written several articles about the history of brothels in San Francisco. This issue includes one of them:

- **The Tenderloin’s First Brothels (223 and 225 Ellis)** by *Peter M. Field* – Vol. 22 No. 2 (Winter 2011) Find out how the first and most famous brothels of the Tenderloin came to be. Meet San Francisco’s noteworthy madams and ladies of the night, including Dolly Adams, who gained national fame as “the Water Queen.”

Of these pleasures just one remains—Pisco Punch. But San Francisco’s love of social engagement, world-class cuisine, curious cocktails and pushing the boundary of what’s acceptable are an indelible part of our identity. We will resume these passions in good time.

We hope this Special Edition brings a smile. — Lana Costantini, *SFHS Executive Director*

SAN FRANCISCO'S WONDROUS DRINK, PISCO PUNCH

by Paul Scholten, M.D.

This is the story of a fabled beverage of legendary strength and delectable palatability, a lost secret recipe, a globe-trotting reporter, and a fifty-year search for the elusive secret of that beverage.

JIM HOWE

James Pomeroy Howe was a fascinating character and skilled raconteur with an insatiable curiosity. He was born in Hutchinson, Kansas in 1878, the son of Ed Howe, then quite famous as a crusading newspaper editor and author of an enormously popular best-seller, *The Diary of a Country Town*. Jim Howe became a world-roving correspondent for the Associated Press and was the first American reporter to get into Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. He covered the Sino-Japanese War from a hotel rooftop and during the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, slept on bricks still warm from the fire. In 1927, George Bernard Shaw threatened to shoot Howe over a scrapbook he had compiled on Shaw. Howe gained entrance to Buckingham Palace by sharing a recipe for tripe with the palace chef and in return, the chef invited him on a tour of the palace. British royalty were shocked to learn that Howe was an American reporter after he published a story on the tour.

Howe was in retirement in Walnut Creek at the age of ninety-one and dying when he called the author to his bedside. He told how he had spent fifty years searching for the recipe for Pisco Punch and was now bequeathing the hunt to his listener,

who was asked to go under his bed and take what was there. The author retrieved a file of Pisco-related papers and fifty-eight full bottles of Pisco of various brands and strengths, took up the search for the true recipe, and now wishes to report his findings.

THE FORTY NINERS' THIRST

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered in California's American River and as soon as the news was known, fortune hunters from all over the world rushed to California. The "Forty-Niners" had a tremendous thirst for gold and an equally great thirst for alcoholic beverages, not readily available in the area. During the Spanish and Mexican period (1769-1846) the good mission fathers had planted grapes and produced a strong, hearty, acceptable red wine from Mission grapes. But this source of alcohol soon ran dry and nearby areas were searched for further supplies.

Wine was brought from Mexico along with stronger native tequila and mescal. Rum was obtained from Central America and the Caribbean Islands, trans-shipped across the Panama Isthmus. Down the coast in Peru and Chile, a potent raw local brandy called Pisco was widely available and large quantities were brought to San Francisco. Pisco was properly alcoholic at 80 proof but had one big drawback: it made a rough drink and didn't taste very good. So, bartenders started to experiment, mixing Pisco with other liquors, bitters, and fruit juices to smooth out the drink. One very successful concoction was

Pisco Punch, developed about 1854 by the owners of the Bank Exchange Saloon, Orrin Dorman and John Torrance. The Bank Exchange soon was commonly called "Pisco John's". It was located on the southeast corner of Montgomery and Washington streets, on the ground floor of the Montgomery Block.

The Montgomery Block was a massive four-story brick building and when erected in 1853, was the tallest such structure west of the Mississippi. Being built on a tideflat, the contractors floated it on a fifty-foot raft of redwood logs sunk into the mud. It had thick folding steel shutters on all the outside doors and windows and survived several fires that destroyed the district around it, including that of 1906. It was somewhat decrepit but still intact when torn down in the 1960s to be replaced eventually by the Transamerica Pyramid.

Pisco John's and its Pisco Punch became famous and every visitor to the city felt obliged to try at least one. The recipe was a closely guarded secret and legends of its potency were legion.

Duncan Nicol, a Scottish publican, took over the saloon in the late 1870s and kept it thriving until its doors were closed by Prohibition on January 16, 1920. Nicol personally mixed the Pisco Punch base in his back room and filled unlabeled bottles with it. The bartender would then dispense from these bottles, mixing up individual drinks as required. Nicol guarded the secret recipe carefully, and when he died in 1926, had still not given his formula to anyone.

Many other bartenders tried to duplicate the original recipe with only partial success but most financial district bars in the 1890s served some form of Pisco Punch. Jim Howe spent fifty years asking questions and writing to knowledgeable sources and came up with a general recipe: a little sweet, a little sour, Pisco, and a little fruit. He combined a shot of Pisco brandy with simple syrup, lemon juice, and crushed pineapple to make his version of Pisco Punch.

Howe died in 1970 and shortly thereafter, the mystery was solved when William Bronson, a San Francisco historian, published a landmark article, "Secrets of Pisco Punch Revealed" in the Fall 1973 issue of *California Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 3. Bronson, the author of the definitive book on the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, *The Earth Shook, The Sky Burned*, had been asked by a prominent lawyer, A. Crawford Greene, to review

Greene's private papers with the thought of writing an autobiography. Among the papers, Bronson came across letters which gave what seemed to be the original recipe as recorded by John Lannes, who was listed in the 1920 City Directory as manager of the Bank Exchange. Whether Nicol gave the recipe to Lannes or snooped to find it out is not known, but drinkers with long memories testified that it tasted exactly like the original when new batches were concocted by Bronson.

By a curious coincidence, Jim Howe was a good friend and drinking companion of Lawyer Greene's partner, Farnham Griffiths, and Howe never knew how close he was to someone who could give him the secret.

Lannes' Pisco Punch Recipe

1. Take a fresh pineapple. Cut it in squares about 1/2 by 1-1/2 inches. Put these squares of fresh pineapple in a bowl of gum syrup to soak overnight. That serves the double purpose of flavoring the gum syrup with the pineapple and soaking the pineapple, both of which are used afterwards in the Pisco Punch.
2. In the morning mix in a big bowl the following:
1/2 pint (8 oz.) of the gum syrup, pineapple flavored as above
1 pint (16 oz.) distilled water
3/4 pint (12 oz.) lemon juice
1 bottle (25 oz.) Peruvian Pisco brandy

Serve very cold but be careful not to keep the ice in too long because of dilution. Use 3 or 4 oz. punch glasses. Put one of the above squares of pineapple in each glass. Lemon juice or gum syrup may be added to taste.

The secret ingredient is gum syrup, a sugar solution containing gum arabic, which is the dried sap of an acacia tree that grows in Arabia. It is water soluble and is used as a thickening agent in pharmaceutical products, cosmetics, and food sauces. Gum syrup is frequently confused with simple syrup, a thick mixture of sugar and water that is used to sweeten iced tea and mixed drinks. Simple syrup does not contain gum arabic,



The interior of the Bank of Exchange Saloon, where Pisco Punch was standard drink until Prohibition. The proprietor, Duncan Nichol, is third from the left. Photo courtesy of the Transamerica Corporation.

the ingredient that somehow takes the rough edges off the Peruvian brandy and creates the smoothness and the thickened sense of “body” for which Pisco Punch is noted.

Gum arabic can be purchased at some drug stores, confectionery supply houses, and health food stores. To make the gum syrup, one crushes one pound of gum arabic and soaks it for twenty-four hours in a pint of distilled water. Add the gum arabic solution to a simple syrup of four pounds of sugar and one quart of water boiled to 220 degrees Fahrenheit. As the mixture continues to boil, skim off impurities and let cool to room temperature. Filter through a cheese cloth and store in bottles.

Lannes’ recipe can be made up, stored in bottles, and as needed, poured over cracked ice, one cup at a time.

WHAT IS PISCO?

The Incas of Peru apparently did not cultivate grapes, but the Spanish conquistadores planted them shortly after their conquest of Peru in 1533. Soon they were making wine and the founder of the town of Ica, Don Geronimo de Cabrera, began distilling the wine from grapes grown in the district. There was no decent wood for making barrels, so he employed the local natives of the Pisco tribe (from the Quechua word for “bird”), who were skilled potters, to make jars in which to store and transport the liquor. These were earthenware pots, much like Greek amphorae, which were coated internally with the wax of wild bees to make them spirit-tight. The jars became known as *piscos* and the liquor in them was termed *Pisco*, as was the small port at the mouth of the Ica river

from which the jars were shipped up and down the coast. By 1640, Pisco brandy was well known, even in Europe, widely drunk in Peru, and its manufacture spread down the coast to Chile, up into the Bolivian Andes, and eastward to Argentina, still called Pisco and still stored in earthenware pots coated with wax.

The grape that the Spaniards planted was called *Italia* or *negro corriente* by them and is thought to have come from Spain by way of the Canary Islands. It is possibly identical to the Mission, the original black grape planted in Mexico, which is called the *criolla chica* in Argentina, *pais* in Chile, and may be the *Monica* of Spain and Sardinia. Later, the muscat grape, which thrives luxuriantly in Peru's coastal valleys, became the main variety used and today, most Pisco is distilled from muscat wine.

The best Pisco is made by distilling sound wine like any other brandy to produce a fresh, fruity, clear spirit of considerable finesse. Generally, it is kept unaged in the clay pots until used. In recent years small lots of the finest Pisco have been aged in imported oak barrels for a year or two, which gives it a cognac-like bouquet, often with a muscat aroma.

Being awash in Pisco, the author secured a small charred oak barrel from Kentucky and filled it from the bottles. After twenty-eight months and occasionally topping-off, it had turned into something between cognac and bourbon whiskey.

Most Pisco, however, is pommace brandy, produced from the residual grape skins, seeds, stems, and pulp remaining after fermented wine is pressed off. Water is added to the pommace and any residual carbohydrate is allowed to ferment. When distilled, it results in a raw, oily, varnish-like alcohol: hot, heavy, and harsh. It is full of fusel oil and other higher alcohols, petroleum refinery flavors, and more than a hint of rotten grapes. In Italy, a similar raw pommace brandy is called *grappa*; in France it is termed *marc*.

Traditionally, Pisco is made in the old-style pot stills, but the cheaper brands that are mass produced use column stills. Most Pisco that comes to the United States is bottled at either 80 or 86.8 proof, but in Peru it may be anywhere from 60° to 94°.

The national drink of Peru is the Pisco Sour. As made in the cocktail lounge of the Gran Bolivar Hotel in Lima, it consists of a 1-1/2 ounce jigger of

Pisco, 3/4 of an ounce of sugar syrup, half the white of one egg, crushed ice, and the juice of half a lemon. This is shaken or blended into a frothy head and strained into a small stemmed shot glass. A drop of Angostura bitters is placed in the center of the foam.

In Peru, Pisco is the standard distilled spirit, used in a variety of mixed drinks as a substitute for vodka, gin, or light rum in martinis and highballs. Pisco is the drink of the masses: un-aged, crystal clear, cheap, and strong. It is usually drunk as straight shots with a chaser or as Pisco Sour but is also bottled in various flavors: lemon, cherry, orange, strawberry, and so on. It is also felt to have great medicinal properties and all manner of herbs, seeds, barks, peels, flowers, and creatures such as snakes and toads are steeped in Pisco to provide cures for everything from malaria to dandruff.

In Peru, a Pisco Punch is a favorite alcoholic drink but it is more like a chocolate milk shake than the fabled San Francisco beverage. Its principal flavoring agent is syrup of algarrobina, made from the edible pods of the carob tree. The syrup looks and tastes like molasses but has a chocolate-flavored element. Peruvian Pisco Punch is made of Pisco, algarrobina syrup, evaporated milk, ice chips, and sweetened condensed milk shaken vigorously or run through a blender. If the algarrobina syrup is not available, dark molasses is often substituted.

Here are some of the recipes that Howe collected:

Lucius Beebe, writing in *Gourmet Magazine* in September, 1957, gave the authentic recipe as: 2 jiggers Pisco, 2 jiggers white grape juice, 1 teaspoonful pineapple juice, and 1 teaspoonful absinthe or Pernod. Since no one else ever mentioned the strong licorice taste of Pernod, we assume Beebe did not have the correct recipe for Pisco Punch.

Mrs. Paul Elder gave Howe this recipe as served at "a little place on lower California Street": 2 ounces Pisco, 4 dashes curacao, shaved ice, and sparkling water to fill. A sprig of mint or a fruit garnish is not amiss. Another impostor.

Another friend gave him this version: 1 ounce Pisco brandy, 3/4 ounce unsweetened pineapple juice, 1/2 ounce apple juice.

Another said: put 1-1/2 ounces Pisco in a tall glass nearly filled with cracked ice and add strong lemonade to fill.

Millie Robbins, the *Chronicle* food columnist, said to cut up a pineapple and marinate it over night in Pisco. To serve, place cracked ice in a 6-ounce glass and add 1-1/2 ounces of the Pisco, the juice of a lime, 1 ounce of pineapple juice or gum syrup, and a piece of marinated pineapple and fill the glass with plain water. This is a pretty close copy but not quite the Lannes recipe.

Ever since Gold Rush days newspaper columnists and authors on tour have been filing stories about the fabled potency of Pisco Punch. It makes good copy and characterizes the writer as a genuine adventurer. Actually, a four-ounce cup of the Lannes/Duncan Nicol recipe has the same alcoholic strength as any mixed drink containing one and a half ounces of bar whiskey or gin; about the same strength as an average martini. Thus, two Piscos would make one moderately happy but hardly lay one out. But reporters love to write spectacular stories. From Commodore Perry's opening of Japan in 1854 until World War II, traveling authors wrote of the fearsome potency of Japanese sake, which, in truth, is no more than twelve percent alcohol, no stronger than the average California still white wine, and usually drunk in thimble-sized cups.

But Pisco Punch made good copy. Here are a few of the published descriptions of its effects.

Pisco Punch soon had a reputation for incredible potency. Millie Robbins said that old-timers told her that after a couple of Pisco Punches a gnat will fight an elephant. A. J. Liebling, in the *Jollity Building*, wrote that in 1856 the San Francisco bartenders allowed but one Pisco Punch per person in twenty-four hours—it was that propulsive. Duncan Nicol, who prided himself on running a decorous establishment for gentlemen, was recorded as willing to serve only two Piscos to a customer. F. H. Butler, writing in 1910, termed Pisco a seductive but powerful spirit containing a very high percentage of alcohol and said that even those who are well accustomed to it speak with respect of its potency.

In Lima, it is said that after you have had one Pisco Sour you immediately want another. After you have had two, you feel like another person; so you have two for him. Once again, you feel like a

new man and have two for him. By that time you can speak Quechua, the Inca language, or at least a tongue equally incomprehensible.

A writer who first tasted Pisco in San Francisco in 1872 described it thusly:

It is perfectly colourless, quite fragrant, very seductive, terribly strong, and has a flavour somewhat resembling that of Scotch whiskey, but much more delicate, with a marked fruity taste. It comes in earthen jars, broad at the top and tapering down to a point, holding about five gallons each. We had some hot, with a bit of lemon and a dash of nutmeg in it....The first glass satisfied me that San Francisco was, and is, a nice place to visit....The second glass was sufficient, and I felt that I could face small-pox, all the fevers known to the faculty, and the Asiatic cholera, combined, if need be.

Pisco brandy was also used in a San Francisco drink called Button Punch, which Rudyard Kipling, in his *From Sea to Sea* (1899), described as the "highest and noblest product of the age... I have a theory it is compounded of cherubs' wings, the glory of a tropical dawn, the red clouds of sunset, and fragments of lost epics by dead masters."

One can hardly top Kipling. It is to be hoped that Pisco Punch will again be the San Francisco drink if some popular watering hole can be persuaded to feature it with adequate advertising.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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THE CHUTES:

San Francisco's Unique Destination for Amusement

by John T. Freeman

*Tell me how a city takes its pleasure
and I will tell you the character of its people.¹*

San Francisco once had a pleasure park that was unique to the city's character and the compactness of its real estate. From 1895 until 1911, the Chutes was an amusement park in the city that was unlike any other in the country. It had most of the carnival attractions popular in other parts of the United States, but on a compressed scale of a city block of less than four acres. During a period of vaudeville's zenith, the Chutes provided this popular entertainment form as an integral part of the visit. Many forgotten talents and a couple of the icons in the history of entertainment delighted audiences from the Chutes stage. This amusement park was a model of integrity and wholesome entertainment in an industry better known for con-artistry and titillation. The Chutes was an intimate, exciting place of joy and laughter built to be accessible by the city's regular public transportation.

The concept of the trolley park developed in the 1890s in cities in the eastern United States. Trolley companies, with a desire to induce people to travel on the weekends, provided picnic groves near bodies of water at the end of a trolley line. San Francisco had its own version of the trolley park located at the "end of the line," Golden Gate Park. In the East, picnic grounds evolved into amusement parks. In San Francisco, for almost six months, there was an amusement midway in Golden Gate Park, as part of the Midwinter Fair in 1894.

The first location for the Chutes was on the block bordered by Haight, Waller, Cole, and Clayton streets.² This was an area well suited for a recreation park, served by both cable cars and electric trolleys. Visitors to the Midwinter Fair in 1894 were familiar with the Haight Street entrance to Golden Gate Park. For seven years, baseball had been played in the California League's Haight Street Grounds, in the block between the Chutes and the Park.³ The Haight neighborhood had experienced a building boom in the late 1880s and early 1890s, but after the downturn in the economy in 1893, land was available and reasonable in cost.

Seasonal water slides in summer and ice slides in winter had been popular in Europe for centuries. In London a seasonal water slide, called the "Toboggan Slide," was claimed to be popular with the nobility.⁴ Paul Boyton was the originator of Chutes amusement rides in America. Impressed by the midway attraction success at Chicago's Columbia Exhibition of 1893, Captain Boyton built the first enclosed admission-entry amusement park in the United States in Chicago in 1894, called "Paul Boyton's Water Chutes."⁵ It started a new concept by being a park whose sole draw consisted of rides and carnival attractions and not a lake or other body of water with picnic facilities.

Captain Boyton was not interested in operating amusement rides, but in franchising and developing new attractions. Boyton advertised in the



*The Haight Street entrance of the Chutes, which was on Haight Street from 1895 to 1902.
Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.*

New York Clipper of March 23, 1895: "SHOOTING THE CHUTES... The Paul Boyton Co., of Chicago, Owners and Patentees. Patented in All Countries. Six Strong and Perfect U.S. Patents, and \$150,000 Reserve Fund to Back Them.... Chutes now in course of construction all over the world.... WE DON'T WANT SITES; have all we can handle now. Rights for sale. If you want a good thing, safe investment, fast money maker, get up a syndicate and build a chute for next season." Chutes were established in or near many American cities at the end of the nineteenth and in the early years of the twentieth centuries. The Chutes in San Francisco was another Boyton franchise.⁶

There is no record of who originally owned and developed the Chutes on Haight Street when it opened in 1895, but evidence points to Charles Ackerman. He was listed as president of the Chutes in the 1899 City Directory. Incorporation of the Chutes Company is reported in the *San Francisco Call* of November 2, 1900, with Ackerman as president and capital stock of \$500,000. Ackerman was a prominent San Francisco attorney who represented prestigious clients such as Southern Pacific, Market Street Railway, and Sutter Street Railway, as well as leading city officials. He was reported to have been a dramatic extemporaneous speaker, and had a reputation for winning every case for which



*Charles Ackerman, ca. 1895. Photo courtesy
San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum.*

he was retained. Ackerman had numerous business affiliations and was also an avid patron of the theater. He was legal counsel to various amusement enterprises, president of the Orpheum Theater, and vice-president of the Grand Opera House and the Tivoli Opera House Company. Ackerman was a founder of and legal counsel to the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit, the theater-bookings empire that started in San Francisco in the late 1880s. His theater affiliations and association with the Chutes after 1899 suggest that Charles Ackerman may have been the founder of the Chutes in 1895, but chose not to “go public” until the amusement park was successful.

Amusement parks were ever-changing environ-

ments, adding and removing attractions to meet popularity and profit. The Chutes in San Francisco started modestly with this single attraction on November 2, 1895. It consisted of the shoot-the-chutes ride and a refreshment stand built on one city block. The signature feature of the Chutes was the 350-foot water slide, which reportedly allowed the descending boat to reach a speed of sixty miles per hour by the time it splashed and skipped across the awaiting pool of water. At the top of the slide was a Japanese-style structure that had a camera obscura offering its mysterious views of the neighborhood, downtown, and even the North and East Bay hills on a clear day. In the summer of 1896, the elevated Scenic Railway was built to enclose the Chutes Park, reaching heights of thirty-five feet. This, too, was a patented ride, franchised by the L.A. Thompson Co., Coney Island pioneer in gravity amusements which would later evolve into the roller coaster.⁷ There was an upper and a lower track with cars seating six persons. The terminus of the ride was through a tunnel 800 feet long “lighted up at intervals with electric displays of marvelous beauty.”⁸ In addition to the scenic railway above the park, there was a steam-propelled miniature railway on nine-inch gage tracks that ran around the grounds. It was billed as the “smallest miniature passenger train in the world”⁹ and had ten cars, each seating two persons. The other amusements on the main grounds at the Chutes were a merry-go-round, shooting gallery, penny arcade, and two cafés, one where adult beverages were available, and another featuring soft drinks and ice cream for the “women and children.”¹⁰

On the west end of the city block of the Chutes was a 100 x 130 foot auditorium called the Pavilion, added that same summer of 1896. This theater had 2,000 reserved seats on the main floor for an extra ten cents, and 1,000 seats in the gallery free with general park admission. The theater featured a full range of vaudeville acts, starting with “dumb acts,” the acrobats or animal acts that required no speaking which would be hard to hear when an audience was trickling into the theater, through a range of singing, dancing, and comedy



*Chutes Scenic Railway visible from Golden Gate Park.
Photo from the Marilyn Blaisdell Collection.*

sketches. Ending the bill was a short motion picture. In 1896, the Chutes introduced the Animatoscope, an early form of movie projector.¹¹

The theater started modestly with a weekly amateur night and a mix of local performers. Soon it was booking traveling acts and emphasizing a full theatrical experience to complement the amusement rides. On January 9, 1898, the Chutes introduced Chiquita, billed as the smallest woman in the world. The Cuban-born twenty-six-inch midget was advertised as “Cuba’s Atom.” Her act included more than being just a sideshow curiosity. Chiquita also sang in both Spanish and English. In her five-month engagement at the Chutes, which coincided with the jingoism leading to the Spanish-American War, she was described as the “Condensed Cuban Patriot,” wore a dress of Stars and Stripes, and sang patriotic songs.

A month after Chiquita’s act opened, the Chutes announced the building of a zoo facility and claimed it to be “the only permanent wild animal show west of the Rocky Mountains.”¹² Frank C. Bostick, from a British family of animal-act showmen, was in charge. He secured for the Chutes a large variety of exotic cats (lions, tigers, panthers, leopards, a jaguar, and a puma), an elephant, and bears (including “Brutus,” a grizzly that compared in size with “Monarch” in the bear pit at Golden Gate Park). The Monkey House had a variety of primates and a featured act called “The Congo Family,” which claimed to be the “only Orag-Outangs [sic] in America.”¹³ In addition, there were a fourteen-foot alligator, sea lions, and an elk that gave a twice-daily exhibition of diving into a twenty-foot square tank. Reptiles were on view, including a python and various smaller Australian snakes. Some of the animals were

trained for performances; others were viewed as zoo attractions.

It is not known whether Chiquita and Frank Bostick were acquainted prior to their engagements at the Chutes, but she left under contract with Bostick. Bostick was the showman and entrepreneur. He booked Chiquita at the Trans-Mississippi & International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska in June of 1898. In the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, Frank C. Bostick, "The Animal King," and Chiquita, "The Living Doll," were sensations of the midway. The Exposition was memorable for the assassination of President William McKinley



*Chiquita, a 26-inch midget, played the Chutes on Haight Street in 1889 and on Fulton Street in 1905.
Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.*

in September 1901. Chiquita dramatically broke her contract with Bostick, and he claimed that, just as the ill-fated Exposition was closing, Chiquita "disappeared" on November 1, 1901. It was soon discovered that the thirty-one-year-old "Living Doll" had eloped with a seventeen-year-old former Bostick usher named Tony Woeckener. The press delighted in the story of the Dolly Lady and Boy Husband versus the Animal King. Both sides filed charges, but they were dropped when Chiquita agreed to complete her contract with Bostick as long as her husband could accompany her. Her promise was short lived. While touring with Bostick's carnival in Eldin, Illinois, a few weeks later, Chiquita and her husband fashioned a rope ladder of sheets and fled their hotel in the middle of the night.¹⁴ Eventually things were resolved and Chiquita retired to obscurity with her husband in Erie, Pennsylvania. Chiquita would make her comeback three years later at the Chutes in San Francisco.

When the Chutes was built at its location on Haight Street, a year after the close of the 1894 Midwinter Fair, there was extensive vacant land around it. Due to the economic recession of the early 1890s, land was a bargain. There were very few obstacles to retrieving the balloons from the weekly ascensions, nor was there much competition from land speculators. Seven years later, the neighborhood was densely built up and property values had greatly increased. It was time to move on to the next end of the trolley line. The Chutes on Haight Street closed on March 16, 1902.

When Charles Ackerman was seeking new grounds to expand the Chutes, he selected a parcel on the northern side of Golden Gate Park. There had been extensive transit lines leading to the Park's Concert Valley entrance near Ninth Avenue and Fulton Street for the Midwinter Fair. He leased the block between Fulton and Cabrillo streets and Tenth and Eleventh avenues from John Farren, a pioneer businessman. The Chutes Company then bought the half block on the east side of Tenth Avenue.

In November 1901, the Southern Pacific-owned Market Street Railway extended the McAllister Street cable line along Fulton Street



Looking east from the top of the Haight Street Chutes, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.

from Seventh Avenue to Eleventh Avenue. At the same time, the Geary Street, Park & Ocean Railroad line that ran on Fifth Avenue was routed onto Fulton Street and used the same track to terminate at Eleventh Avenue. Since Charles Ackerman had done extensive legal work for both transportation companies, it would seem he must have influenced the decision to terminate the two cable lines in front of his new Chutes location.

During late March and April 1902, the principal amusements and all the animals were moved to Tenth Avenue and Fulton Street from the Haight Street location. The 350-foot-long water slide and the elevated “roller coaster” style Scenic Railway were reconstructed facing the park. A larger vaudeville theater with 4,000 seats was

constructed across from the main amusements at the corner of Tenth Avenue and Cabrillo Street. Because the theater was part of the amusement complex, the stage of the building was at the corner with the entrance at mid-block. Entry to the theater was either over Tenth Avenue on a bridge from the main park or under the street by a tunnel to reach the orchestra seating. The nine-inch gage miniature scenic railroad was installed, but the engine had been converted from steam to electric. A new zoo was constructed on the northwest corner of the Chutes block. Completing the park were a café, merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, shooting gallery, penny arcade, and photograph gallery. Unlike the Haight Street Chutes, the new Chutes opened on May 1, 1902 with all attractions and the theater in operation.



*A view of the Chutes grounds, ca. 1906. The Circle Swing is in the foreground and the Chutes Theater is in the background.
Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.*

From the beginning, the Tenth Avenue Chutes made the theater a major attraction. There were vaudeville programs and full-length melodramas, and every Thursday night was amateur night. Because of his connections in the Orpheum Circuit, Ackerman could get second tier acts or offer an extra week's booking for Orpheum performers at the Chutes. In June 1905, Chiquita came out of retirement and traveled with her husband from Erie, Pennsylvania, for a special engagement arranged by the management of the Chutes.¹⁵

Postcards document the changes to the park as additional attractions were added to the grounds. The Chutes either copied or purchased the rights to some of the most popular thrill rides in Eastern amusement parks, particularly from Coney Island. The Circle Swing was added, probably by 1905,

on the east side of the Chutes lagoon.¹⁶ At night, rotating with its lights, the swing created a dramatic effect. In 1905 and early 1906, the Chutes drew large crowds and enjoyed profitable seasons.

The earthquake and fire in April 1906 had an interesting effect on the Chutes. Because of Ackerman's numerous theater connections and the Chutes location, it served a unique role in the theatrical community of San Francisco. Initially actors took refuge there during the fire days. Alfred Hertz, a conductor for the Grand Opera, spent the night of April 18, 1906, at the Chutes. He said, "To my dying day, I will never forget my experience when I was awakened by the roaring of lions. I knew not but I was in a jungle or den of wild beasts."¹⁷ In the following months, employees of the Tivoli were invited to collect their back salaries at the Chutes offices.¹⁸ In the days and

weeks after the earthquake and fire, the Chutes took on a role as a kind of a theatrical clubhouse.

Since all of the downtown theaters were destroyed, the Chutes Theater, located well out of the fire zone, became the home of the Orpheum for nearly nine months. The Orpheum opened one month after the catastrophe with a Sunday matinee on May 20th, featuring a vaudeville aggregate of vocalists, slapstick comics, bicyclists, and jugglers. The *Chronicle* reviewer the next day drew parallels with the grim tragedy of the previous month, saying the afternoon provided "...no more memory of the fire than the burnt-cork background of the comedian's smile, and no more of the temblor than the applause from the gallery." He championed the opportunity to laugh again, saying "...even when we are at work so hard at reconstruction and rehabilitation we can spare an hour for the relaxation of the theater as it was before." He ended his review with the observation that "...all false reports to the contrary, the laugh has not been burned."¹⁹

The addition of the Orpheum program, the lack of competing entertainment, and new workers drawn to high-paying reconstruction jobs

meant a period of high attendance and good profit for the Chutes. Ackerman planned further expansion in the winter of 1906-1907. A roller skating rink was built on the northeast corner of Tenth and Fulton. This was the last of seven roller skating rinks built in San Francisco after the earthquake, during a roller skating mania. In letters to his son, Irving, who was taking law courses at Harvard, Charles Ackerman discussed the gamble of adding the roller skating rink and speculated that this might just be a passing fad and a saturated market.²⁰

The Orpheum ended its billing at the Chutes and moved to a newly completed building on Ellis Street, in the block west of Fillmore Street. The Chutes Theater reopened January 21, 1907, to a small crowd with a vaudeville card that included a singer and comedian in blackface named Al Jolson. Rainy weather and the simultaneous opening of the new Orpheum hurt attendance at the Chutes Theater. Bad weather continued the first three months of 1907. Weather and inconsistent streetcar service diminished attendance at the February 9th opening of the Chutes Skating Rink. Ackerman's premonition had proved



Chutes Roller Skating Rink on the northeast corner of Tenth Avenue and Fulton Street. The Chutes Theater at Tenth Avenue and Cabrillo Street is visible in the distance, ca. 1907. Photo from the Marilyn Blaisdell Collection.



*Irving and Gertrude Ackerman at the Chutes, ca. 1910.
Photo courtesy San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum.*

correct. Attendance began to quickly decline at the Chutes Rink and all the competing rinks in San Francisco. The roller skating fad had peaked and Ackerman's gamble lost.

The Chutes struggled in 1907. The winter rains cut into the amusement park's attendance. In March 1907 the Chutes management brought in the Italian San Carlo Opera Company, and grand opera was reintroduced to San Francisco society. The March 22nd *Chronicle* review listed the attendees of local society, but confessed that it was "...not a representative first-night house by any means. Society was sparsely represented, and a little handful of Burlingameites only lent the glitter of their presence. Then society scarcely knew how to dress for an opera in the great, cold, barn-like Chutes Theater."²¹ On the second night, the reviewer was more enthusiastic about the performance, but called the environment "...only a few degrees better than a circus tent, for the blare of a cheap brass band in a roller skating rink could be heard in the lobby, and outside the distant roar of the lion, Wallace, in the zoo was occasionally audible."²²

Labor unrest dominated the month of May. There were so many strikes that labor rallies

seemed to be the major recreation. Violence in the carmen's strike, unreliable service, and boycotting of the "scab-driven" cars kept many citizens off public transportation for months. The Chutes closed for most of May in what should have been a profitable month.

The seven months following the earthquake had been extremely successful for the Chutes, yet the succeeding months of 1907 had been a disaster. Even popular Eastern attractions like "Fighting the Flames," where a full fire battalion rescues a hysterical woman in nightclothes from a burning building, couldn't save the Chutes when it was staged at the end of that season. It was time to reevaluate and make a move toward profits again. In October, to cut costs, the Chutes sold off its entire zoo.²³

The focus of the entertainment-hungry public was shifting elsewhere in San Francisco. After the earthquake, Van Ness Avenue and Fillmore Street became the principal retail centers. Vaudeville houses and nickelodeons were springing up on or near the more working-class Fillmore Street. On November 23, 1907, Coney Island Park opened on the east side of Fillmore Street between Turk and Eddy streets. It was modest in comparison to the Chutes, with only a merry-go-round and a rotating "Barrel of Fun." Coney Island Park was more like a carnival, with forty concessions and circulating performers.²⁴ It had the advantage of being something new and in the fun zone of the Fillmore.

The Chutes closed its amusement park for the winter of 1907- 1908. The Chutes Theater was leased out to charitable fund-raising programs and school drama performances. During its closure, remodeling was done and new attractions added. The entrance to the amusement park was moved down the block to Tenth and Cabrillo.

The Chutes reopened on May 1, 1908, to a crowd of 15,000 patrons, most of them school age children who had been offered free admission and the choice of any two concessions. The arrival of the Great White Fleet on May 6th further buoyed attendance at the Chutes during the Fleet's three-



*Coney Island Park (1907 - 1909) was on Fillmore Street between Turk and Eddy streets.
Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.*

month stay. The Chutes amusement park stayed open until sometime in the fall of 1908. Its closing for the winter of 1908-1909 was treated as “routine.”

On January 25, 1909, Charles Ackerman died and the Chutes would soon be making changes. He had been in poor health for about two years, but was still involved in Chutes affairs. However, his son Irving had been learning the business. Irving was the only Ackerman child. He had grown up around the Chutes and show business. After graduating from Stanford in 1906, he spent a year at Harvard studying law and was admitted to the California Bar in September 1907.²⁵ With

Charles Ackerman’s death, Irving took control of family affairs. Irving brought a new vision to the Chutes. He could see that the drafty barn of a theater, the poorly attended skating rink, and the aging amusement park in a rapidly developing residential neighborhood had a limited future.

It was announced in the press on March 9, 1909, that the Chutes was going to move to the Coney Island Park site.²⁶ The article said that the Chutes rink would continue to operate at Tenth and Fulton, but that the amusement park was to be torn down and much of it reassembled on Fillmore Street. No mention was made of the theater, and no advertisements appear in the



Entrance to the Chutes at Tenth Avenue and Fulton Street (1902 - 1909). Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.

newspapers after May 2, 1909. The theater ceased advertising, but again leased the building to school groups for plays and graduation exercises into June.

Irving Ackerman had legal credentials and theatrical familiarity, but his father had prepared the way for business success. The contract that Charles Ackerman had prepared for leasing the Chutes block from the Farren family had a clause that allowed the Chutes Company the right to purchase the block for \$75,000, which it did in January 1910, from the estate of John Farren.²⁷ The Chutes Realty Company promptly sold the Chutes block and the theater and roller rink half block to Fernando Nelson, the residential builder,

who built homes on the property.

Irving Ackerman was ready to use his legal and theatrical expertise and his youthful energy to build the finest of amusement parks. This location for the Chutes, on the block bounded by Fillmore, Webster, Eddy, and Turk streets, was at the heart of the retail and entertainment action in 1909. The Chutes Realty Company took a thirteen-year lease on the former Coney Island Park site and pledged to spend \$250,000 on amusements. They installed some of the same attractions from the Fulton Street park, but claimed them to be more spectacular. The Shoot-the-Chutes was "longer and swifter." The Scenic Railway was billed as eight blocks long and

attaining a speed of sixty miles per hour. The Circle Swing increased its capacity and became the Circle Air Ships. The miniature railway, Ferris wheel, and merry-go-round made the transition from Fulton Street without claims of change.

The new Chutes opened at the Fillmore Street location on Bastille Day, July 14, 1909. The advertisement claimed “Everything New but the Name” and “A Solid Block of Joy Right in the Heart of Things.”²⁸ The “new” included an underworld theme with a zigzag ride called The Devil’s Slide, and an attraction with a darkened interior with back-lit tableaux called Dante’s Inferno. The Human Roulette Wheel, a rotating disc that sent its riders flying unless they had a center position, had never been seen before in San Francisco. Other novelties not seen at the previous Chutes locations were the flea circus and the house of mirrors called the Ha Ha Gallery. All the food and drink and the arcade booths of a carnival were available. A dancing pavilion with a forty-piece band kept the crowds entertained and lent a festive air to the park.

This new Chutes resembled the old Chutes with the addition of some new rides, but it did not have either a zoo or a theater. Even without a proper theater, a temporary structure was constructed and there were boxing exhibitions, motion pictures, and regular vaudeville performances. Irving Ackerman even located Wallace from the old Chutes days and staged a lion-taming act. The Chutes closed for the season in early November with a promise of coming back bigger and better. In late November 1909, the Chutes purchased the entire zoo of the city of Victoria, British Colombia, and had it brought by ship to San Francisco. The Chutes reopened on New Year’s Eve 1909 with the installation of a theater, menagerie, and aquarium.²⁹ Mayor P.H. McCarthy dedicated the 1,600-seat



Sophie Tucker, a singing comedienne, made her first appearance in San Francisco in 1910. Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.

steel and reinforced concrete theater that evening. The Chutes complex was now a complete entertainment package. It had its thrill rides, a zoo, and a theater, just like its previous two locations.

The year 1910 was an exciting one at the Chutes. The theater became a full-time vaudeville and musical comedy venue. In August, Irving Ackerman was persuaded to book a “singing comedienne,” Sophie Tucker, unknown on the West Coast, for \$250 a week. Billed as “the best exponent of Coon Shouting extant,”³⁰ Sophie had come up working the tough crowds back East. She knew how to fire up an audience

and keep them begging for more. When she belted out the opening lines to the new Ziegfeld hit, "Dance of the Grizzly Bear," the hometown crowd was hers:

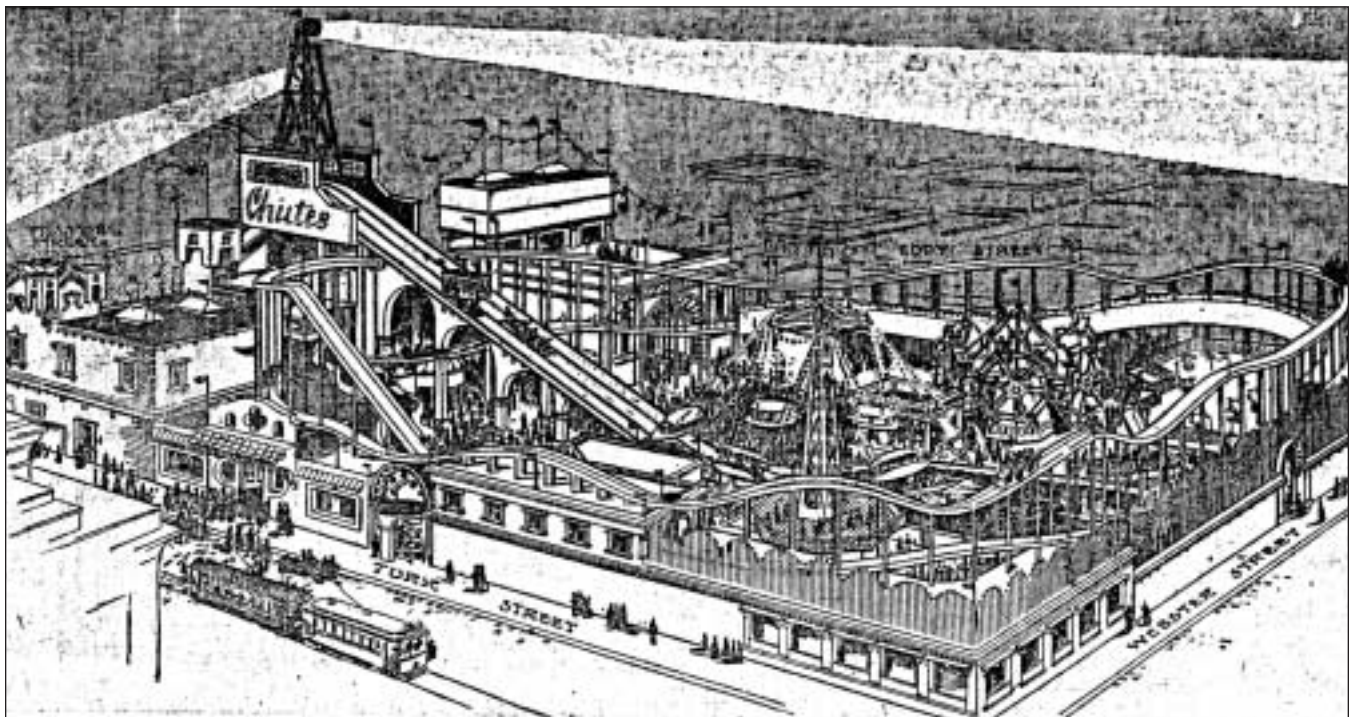
*Out in San Francisco where the weather's fair,
They have a dance out there, they call the
Grizzly Bear*

She was such a sensation that Ackerman persuaded her to return for the week of September 18th and moved her from second to top billing.

The Chutes may have found a formula for success. The vaudeville house carried such importance that theater patrons were admitted free to the Chutes grounds. That was a big departure from the earlier days, when the amusements were the draw and admission to the park gave visitors free admission to the theater. There was not a noticeable difference in the operation of the Chutes in 1911. It continued to offer a good mix of family fun with carnival midway entertainment, vaudeville, and special presentations. In April and May 1911, the Chutes closed to make a radical departure from their original concept by removing the water slide and filling in the splash

pond with a grassy lawn. The owners were ready to test the concept of an amusement park where vaudeville would be the primary draw and amusements would serve as a "side show." The newly remodeled Chutes would test its new image with a Memorial Day reopening.

To be successful, an amusement park had to constantly increase the thrills, but in that unregulated era they also had the challenge from equipment accidents or fire. In Coney Island, New York, at the start of the Memorial Day weekend in 1911, there was a spectacular eighteen-hour fire that completely destroyed the Dreamland Park. Coincidentally, two days later on May 29th, the Chutes in San Francisco suffered a similar fate. About 1 A.M. on that Monday morning an unattended water heater started a fire in a barbershop concession. The fire engulfed the entire Fillmore Street frontage, including a rooming house on the second floor, where three people died. The Chutes assessed the damage and found that the theater was not damaged and the eastern side of the park was intact. The *San Francisco Call* reported that the management "announced that the park would be reopened within a few days."³¹



The Chutes on Fillmore Street (1909-1911). Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.



*Destruction of the Chutes Park on May 29, 1909. This is the Fillmore Street entrance looking east.
Photo courtesy John T. Freeman.*

Optimistic reports of quickly rebuilding were premature. The *San Francisco Chronicle* editorialized, "...such an establishment as the Chutes is a very dangerous fire risk and ought not be licensed for such a place as the corner of Fillmore and Eddy streets, nor in any section closely built up with frame lodging-houses."³² Lawsuits filed by the property's owner against the Chutes for failing to pay rent and live up to the conditions of its lease dragged on in court for over a year. By the time the Chutes was in a position to start again, the city was gripped by Panama Pacific International Exposition fever. Planning for the PPIE midway in 1915 would eclipse any plans for a new amusement park in San Francisco. The name "Chutes" would be used again for a water

slide at Ocean Beach that was built around 1920 and torn down in 1950. The amusement park that would become Playland was called Chutes-at-the-Beach from 1921 to 1928, but had no relationship to the Ackerman family or their amusement park.

Irving Ackerman would not rebuild the Chutes, but he did remain in show business. He partnered with Simon (Sam) Harris to form Ackerman and Harris, major vaudeville booking agents and theater owners throughout the western United States. At one time he was also a partner with Marcus Loew as builder, owner, and operator of the Warfield and other downtown theaters in San Francisco. Irving Ackerman was a pioneer in the Hollywood movie industry as a

founder and vice-president of Columbia Pictures and also as an investor with Sid Grauman in the 1918 "Million Dollar Theater."³³

The Ackerman family was among those who strove to maintain justice, dignity, and morality in San Francisco. The city had earned its reputation as a tolerant or, some would insist, morally "loose" place. The history of the city is legend with stories of opium dens, prostitution, and vice condoned or supported by corrupt politicians. But great cities are also built by and flourish because of moral and forthright citizens. Charles Ackerman was that kind of noble man, who grew as the city grew. He was a year old when he arrived in San Francisco in 1851. After legal training in Boston, he returned to San Francisco to practice law. He was a founder of an entertainment circuit that worked to eliminate the shady operations of theaters and give actors the respect and dignity they deserved. As a founder of the Orpheum Circuit, Ackerman established legal protections for theaters and performers that would advance the professionalism of entertainment. As owner of the Chutes in San Francisco, Charles Ackerman carried the same dignity for his performers and the acts he booked. The Chutes, throughout its fifteen years and three locations, always emphasized family entertainment, from balloon ascension parachute drops to grand opera. His son Irving, when he succeeded Charles in overseeing the Chutes, carried on that same morality. Years after the close of the Chutes, when Irving was a major booking agent and theater owner throughout the West, he set a precedent that his theaters would not book any act that "burlesques various nationalities."³⁴ The 1922 pronouncement prohibited comedy dialect acts on his vaudeville circuit because they could be offensive to those being burlesqued. In his later years, Irving Ackerman preferred to take credit for advising Sophie Tucker, when she was performing at the Chutes in 1910, to drop the lowbrow songs and use more dignified material.³⁵

The Chutes in San Francisco packed a lot of fun into a small space. It was a hometown destination on the trolley line. At each site, the

emphasis was upon rides that thrilled or delighted, and circus-style performances that enchanted or amazed. The Chutes zoo offered a comprehensive collection of exotic animals to awe the adults and ignite the imaginations of the children, at a time when there was nothing like it in the city. The theater of the Chutes brought the earliest motion pictures to San Francisco audiences. The performances on that stage ranged from single spotlight amateur-night solos to full Grand Opera extravaganzas. Long forgotten performers as well as names that are enshrined in the history of vaudeville entertained audiences at the Chutes Theater. Overseeing this entertainment complex was a family that brought not just joy to so many, but maintained integrity and respect for performers and audiences in San Francisco well past the closing of the Chutes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Freeman is a native San Franciscan and a graduate of the University of San Francisco. He began his career as a history teacher in the local public schools, but his minor in mathematics quickly trumped history. He retired in 2001 after over thirty years of teaching high school math. John has now returned to his love of local history, concentrating primarily on the period of reconstruction following the earthquake and fire of 1906.

NOTES

- 1 *San Francisco Call*, August 1, 1909. Attributed to “a famous Frenchman” but source of the quote not found in either English or French quotation indexes.
- 2 After the Chutes closed in 1902, Belvedere Street was cut through to create two blocks.
- 3 Baseball stadium closed in 1894. See Fall 2001 issue of *The Argonaut* article by Daniel Bacon: “Sandlots to Stadiums: the Baseball Parks of San Francisco,” p.10.
- 4 *The Chutes and its Myriad Attractions*, p.1 (promotional brochure, ca. 1901).
- 5 Paul Boyton spent a lifetime correcting the spelling of his name. The Press seemed to prefer “Boynton.” The 1898 Sanborn map shows the Chutes on Haight as having “The Paul Boynton Chute” on the site, again incorrectly spelled.
- 6 *The New York Clipper* (1853-1923) was a weekly newspaper that featured sports, theater, and other entertainment. It might be compared today to a combination of *Variety* and the *Sporting News*. In an interview on the history of chutes (*NY Clipper*, January 1906), Boyton talked of the Chicago Chutes, then Coney Island’s. He goes on to say: “Chutes were then built under my patents in Boston, Cincinnati, New Orleans, St. Louis, Rochester, Buffalo, Providence, Philadelphia, and, in fact, every large city of the United States.”
- 7 LaMarcus A. Thompson installed a scenic railway at the Midwinter Fair. He even distributed business cards with an address in Chicago and at the Midwinter Fair, San Francisco.
- 8 *The Chutes and its Myriad Attractions*, p. 2.
- 9 *The Chutes and its Myriad Attractions*, p. 3. This seems to be identical to one at Dreamland, Coney Island, which had only three cars seating two passengers each.
- 10 *The Chutes and its Myriad Attractions*, p. 7. It is unclear if the first Chutes may have served beer, but it is unlikely that the other two locations served alcoholic beverages. In both of the other locations, bars were close by, but not operated within the Chutes Park. The Arcade Bar at Turk and Fillmore streets was there before the Chutes assumed the lease in 1909, and was only accessible from outside the park.
- 11 *San Francisco Call*, September 22, 1896. Also, Irving Ackerman told Albert Toff, the cartoonist, that his father Charles Ackerman started the first motion picture performances in San Francisco around 1897, using the Animatoscope. Toff drew the cartoon of “The First Movie Theater in San Francisco” for the *San Francisco News* in 1958, reprinted in his book *In Old San Francisco: A Cartoon History*.
- 12 *San Francisco Call*, February 28, 1898.
- 13 *The Chutes and its Myriad Attractions*, p. 10.
- 14 *Buffalo Evening News*, August 28, 1902.
- 15 *San Francisco Call*, June 24, 1905.
- 16 The circle swing was featured in a number of Eastern amusement parks. Harry Traver patented it in April 1904 (Patent # 758,341). The circle swing does appear on the Chutes property in the Sanborn Insurance Underwriters 1905 map.
- 17 Mack, Gerstle, 1906: *Surviving San Francisco’s Great Earthquake & Fire*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco 1981, p. 58.
- 18 *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 7, 1906.
- 19 *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 21, 1906.
- 20 Irving Ackerman Correspondence (Manuscript Collection), History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- 21 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 1907.
- 22 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 23, 1907.
- 23 *San Francisco Call*, October 20, 1907.
- 24 *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 23, 1907.
- 25 Ackerman Family Collection, San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum.
- 26 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 9, 1909.
- 27 *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 27, 1910.
- 28 *The Bulletin*: San Francisco, July 10, 1909.
- 29 There had been polar bears and sea lions in previous Chutes zoos, but an aquarium was the only feature never tried before.
- 30 *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 7, 1910. “Coon shouting” sounds today like a debasing, stereotyping art form. In a very scholarly article by Pamela Brown Lavitt, titled *First of the Red Hot Mamas: “Coon Shouting” and the Jewish Zeigfeld Girl*, Ms. Lavitt persuasively argues that Coon Shouting had racist minstrel show origins, but by the time Sophie Tucker and Fanny Brice were using it in vaudeville in the 1900-1915 period, it had evolved into a predominately Jewish art form, with songs written during the Tin Pan Alley’s heyday by Jewish composers and performed by Jewish women. In San Francisco, there is no record of Sophie Tucker affecting “black face” makeup. Three songs she performed during her second week engagement at the Chutes were “Casey Jones,” “The Angle Worm Crawl,” and “Yiddish Rag” (*San Francisco Examiner*, September 19, 1910). These songs may reflect bawdy sentiments, but not racial stereotyping.
- 31 *San Francisco Call*, May 30, 1911.
- 32 *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 29, 1911.
- 33 Ackerman Family Collection.
- 34 *San Francisco Examiner*, July 28, 1922.
- 35 *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 21, 1961, and July 14, 1970.

A TOAST TO Paoli's RESTAURANT

by Deanna Paoli Gumina

It was the best of times, without a shadow of a doubt. For 16 years, from December 15, 1951, until its closing in the spring of 1968, Paoli's Restaurant welcomed guests at its Montgomery Street location (at California). On a "good" Friday night, the bar alone exceeded the weekend revenues for both the main dining room and mezzanine. It was a wild run that received praise for its continental-style cuisine from *Holiday Magazine*, the gold standard for gourmets, who described the clientele as an "unbelievable crush of Montgomery types." Curt Gentry's doomsday book, *The Last Days of the Late Great State of California*,¹ pronounced the restaurant as the hottest Friday night spot on the West Coast, where young attractive career girls went "to get a jump on the competition" in the hopes of meeting "Mr. Right."² The Paolities, as the clientele deemed themselves, were young, good looking, and the masters of their universe.

Paoli's captured the euphoric spirit of the 1950s, a time when the country was breathing a sigh of relief after the world emerged from a disastrous world war and before plummeting into the uncertainties of a decade that always seemed on the brink of some dangerous confrontation. The decade heralded a new class of diners who emerged from the American middle class and became the fastest growing sector of a rising food industry.³ It was a clientele whose appetites were whetted on the hard liquor brews of bourbon – America's whiskey – as well as rye, and the sweetened syrup

of Coca-Cola, unless you were Jewish and drank Manischewitz wine. The strong taste of these brews had to be considered as these newly minted American diners nearly anaesthetized their taste buds drinking them, only to proclaim that the food did not taste of anything!

Changing this bourbon-on-the-rocks palate was the challenge that trained chefs and restaurateurs born or schooled in Europe contended with as they sought to encourage the drinking of wine as the perfect accompaniment to fine dining.⁴ However, it was not until Robert Mondavi's 1969 Cabernet Sauvignon won top honors at the *Los Angeles Times* Vintner's Tasting Event in 1972 that the quality of California wine was heralded as equal to or excelling that of wines produced in France, Spain, Italy, and Germany.⁵ Even before this event, which would focus the wine world's attention on the Napa Valley wineries, my parents selected Mondavi's 1969 Cabernet Sauvignon for my wedding.

The neighborhood that surrounded Paoli's included some pioneer restaurants that dated to the 1860s, with patrons loyal to Jack's Restaurant on Sacramento Street and Sam's Grill on Bush Street. Newer restaurants opened in the 1930s, including The Blue Fox, which specialized in frog legs but had the reputation of being neighbor to the City Morgue on Kearney Street.⁶ At the upper end of Montgomery Street was Il Trovatore Café, which was renamed Ernie's by its two young owners and former busboys, Vic and Roland Gotti.⁷



A busy night at Paoli's. In view is the Oyster Bar, with part of the main dining room and the bar. Author's collection.

Paoli's followed in the footsteps of the newly opened Panelli's Bar and Grill at 453 Pine Street, which was run by the dapper, silver-haired Joe Panelli and his brother, Roy, who were well known for their Italian cuisine (especially their savory osso buco), as well as selected meats and chops charcoal broiled to order with a tantalizing aroma that stimulated appetites. Panelli's was already attracting a sizable bar business with its latest drinks accompanied by platters of tasty hors d'oeuvres, and for the after-theatre crowd, there was a banquet room.⁸

By 1959, Roy Panelli was on his own, breaking away from the Italian-style menu. He opened The Red Knight at 624 Sacramento Street, a venue that combined a "dash of the Edwardian." As for

Panelli's, it became Ruggero's in 1967 as Joe retired, handing the baton – or the reservation book – to Ruggero Bertola, one of the finest chefs in San Francisco. Ruggero's expertise included blending exactly the right ingredients in his veal dishes and *Petrale Meunier*; diners would have licked their plates in tribute if social etiquette allowed. Sweet butter, a zest of lemon, and knowing when to flip the clove of garlic out of the pan were the essence of delicacy. Contrary to popular thinking, garlic was meant to flavor the oil, unless it was cut into silvers and blended with ingredients. It was not meant to overpower a dish or to stick to a diner's taste buds like Velcro. Ruggero ran Paoli's kitchen for several years, until he opened his own restaurant on Pine Street.

Indeed, competition among restaurants was rampant, but as Joe Panelli said, “there was enough business to go around for everyone.”⁹ Sensing that they were on the forefront of great change brought about by the end of a world war, a new consumer culture, and the ability to globetrot, there was no doubt in the restaurateurs’ collective thinking that San Francisco was and would always be a restaurant town. Conceived in the chaotic Gold Rush days of hearty appetites and hard drinking, now the city sought to be the equivalent of New York in the breadth and appeal of its restaurants. As in Manhattan, new restaurants would draw the city’s population away from the neighborhood eateries and into a district of financial institutions and banks as they catered to the tastes of those working in the maze of streets that was dubbed “the Wall Street of the West.” Between 1950 and 1960, the number of workers in San Francisco’s finance, real estate, and insurance industries increased dramatically. By 1960, about 70 percent of all Bay Area workers employed in these fields worked in San Francisco’s Financial District, nearing New York City’s statistics.¹⁰

Advantageously located at 347 Montgomery Street at California Street, Paoli’s was on the perimeter of the Financial District’s major intersection, a four-way noontime corner scramble of bankers, stockbrokers, insurance agents, attorneys, engineers, and as Herb Caen wrote, “some of the most attractive secretaries” in town.¹¹ With an hour for lunch that for some extended to mid-afternoon, this clientele rushed through the restaurant’s double doors with hungry appetites that were washed down with a quick pick-me-up libation.

Paoli’s opened ten days before Christmas, 1951. My parents were hopeful that the spirit of this festive season would favor them with an opportunity to participate in this new venture, although neither had any formal culinary background or restaurant management experience. My Dad, Joe, had shucked oysters and steamed crabs in the hot cauldrons at a Fisherman’s Wharf restaurant, earning his way through high school. When World War II erupted, he was drafted into the Army, but at a boxing show at Fort Ord in Monterey the C.O., a boxer himself, asked Dad if he would be willing to

transfer out of the Army into the Navy and continue to box for the troops. To qualify for a transfer between these branches of the service, Dad had to profess expertise with either deck engines or as a steward in the galley. Claiming knowledge of cooking, Dad joined the Merchant Marines and sailed out of San Francisco on a Liberty Ship that he described as a “sitting duck” against any adversary. His duties as chief steward, he wrote in the black sketchbook he kept as a journal, consisted of “the lowest job of galley man, dishwasher and pot washer and deck scrubber.” He knew that if he failed, he would be transferred back to the Army as a foot soldier. As the ship swayed with the winds and rode on the crest of waves, he oversaw the preparation of the daily meals served to the captain and the crew. Keeping tins of this and jars of that on the shelves was no easy task.¹²

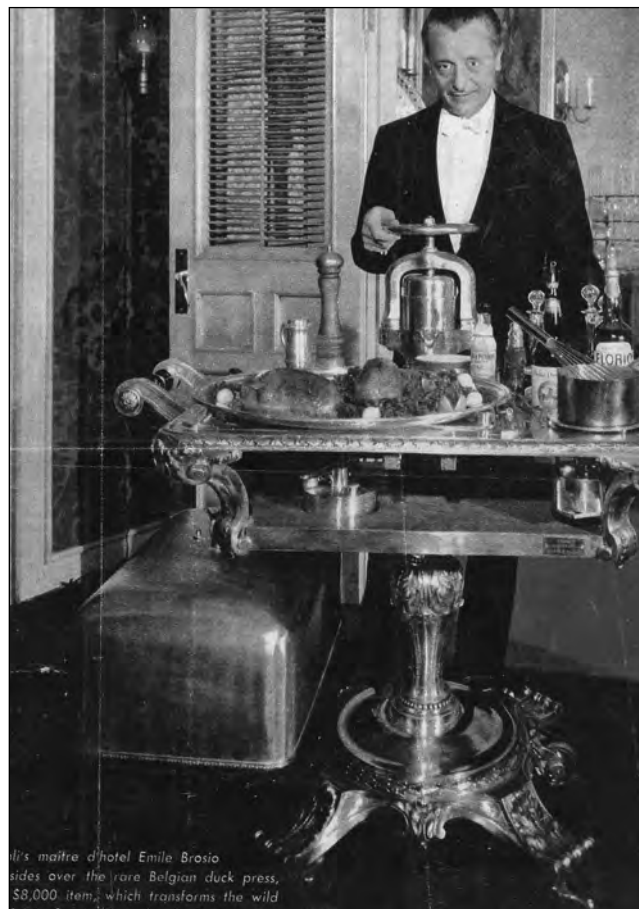
When the war ended, Dad found work at the historic Maye’s Oyster House on Polk Street, and he eventually acquired a modest partnership in the restaurant. Maye’s was owned and operated by Phil Modrich and his family, immigrants from Yugoslavia. Their culinary expertise was cooking a variety of seafood and fish. The specialty of the house was their “Old-Fashioned Oyster Loaf.”¹³ After five years of working for Modrich, Dad left, eager to strike out on his own. His timing was fortuitous. Within a month of his departure, a disastrous fire consumed the popular Maye’s. Dad had already made the transition to Paoli’s, but his name still appeared on the fire department’s emergency call list for Maye’s. In the middle of the night, a dispatcher called him saying that “your restaurant” was on fire and he was to meet the fire captain at the sight immediately. Stunned, my Dad asked whether the fire had started on Montgomery or California Street. The dispatcher quickly responded, saying Polk Street. Relieved but disheartened for his former partners, Dad went to stand on the street amid water hoses and smoldering ashes, consoling Modrich and his crew.

Paoli’s was at the forefront of a new wave of dining that became known as “continental cuisine.” Taking the best from a variety of cuisines and a step back from the French standard of *haute cuisine*, continental cuisine was defined in part by

décor: heavily starched white table linens; plush leather or vinyl booths that were usually semicircular in shape in red, dark brown, or black hues; and highly polished silver serving pieces. Indirect lighting softened the dining rooms, and flickering candles, a bud vase, and the customary ashtray (a sign of the times which can still be purchased on eBay¹⁴) completed the table setting. Although menus were written in the native language of French chefs, cooks, and East Coast restaurateurs whose English language skills were limited,¹⁵ their impact intimidated unsophisticated diners with an affront of snobbery. Later, like subtitles in a foreign film, these French culinary terms were translated beneath the dish, enabling diners to order without embarrassment.

“What is the basic difference between French and Italian cooking?” asked Enrico Galozzi, the noted Italian gastronomic expert. He explained, “French cooking is formalized, technical, and scientific. Order Béarnaise sauce in 200 different French restaurants and you will get exactly the same sauce 200 times. Ask for Bolognese sauce in 200 different Italian restaurants and you will get 200 different versions of *ragù*.”

In *The Food of Italy*, Waverly Root, the noted food historian, wrote, “most persons think of the French as the great sauce makers; but it was the Italians who first developed this art. The French learned it later from the cooks who came to France in the train of Catherine de Medici. It is a given that in large French kitchens making the sauces is the job entrusted to a specialist, the *saucier*. In Italy every cook must be able to concoct sauces or he [or she] could hardly cook at all. In France, a sauce is an adornment, even a disguise, added to a dish more or less as an afterthought. In Italy it is the dish, its soul, its *raison d’être*, the element that gives it character and flavor.”¹⁶ Italian cooking, concluded Root, is home cooking – *la cucina casalingua*, human and light-hearted compared to the formal French tradition that ruled restaurateurs and food critics of the 1950s and 1960s. Decades later, a new generation of dedicated “foodies” would come to embrace this growing preference for fresh, healthy, informal meals.



Ernie Brosio, Maitre d'hotel in H's Lordship Room.
Author's collection.

Continental cuisine adopted a near-military protocol, as the dining room was under the direction of a knowledgeable but often intimidating-looking *maitre d'hotel* who supervised an entourage of tuxedoed captains escorting diners to their reserved tables and handing them menus. Nothing was left to chance; without reservations, casual diners were turned away—except at Paoli's, which always found an available table, even if it was a quickly assembled wooden top draped by a white linen tablecloth in some corner.

The meal began with the presentation of a menu as busboys scurried about filling water glasses and bringing sliced bread and butter patties kept chilled in silver bowls with shaved ice. Table service included carts or hand-trays, which were brought to the table loaded with assorted appetizers and



Main dining room with Oyster Bar. Author's collection.

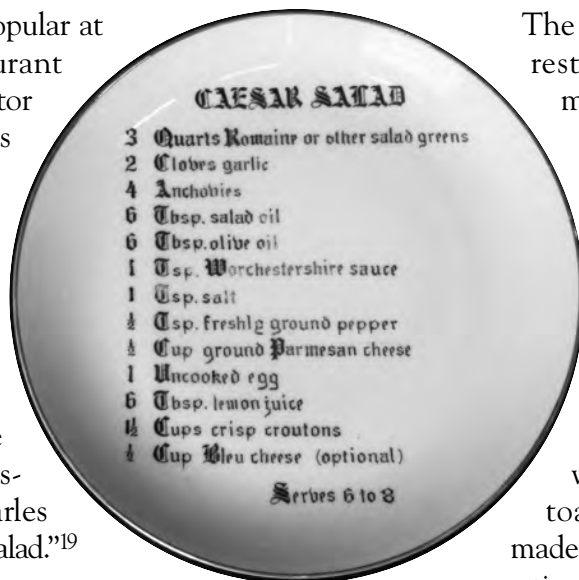
presented with great fanfare to the hungry diners, as were the forthcoming entrées, unless the meals were cooked to order in chaffing dishes set ablaze as the diners oohed and aahed. Salads were dressed and tossed at tableside, and soups came in tureens and served steamy. Desserts and coffee followed with their own regimented service. And the coffee service included Sanka, one of the earliest decaffeinated instant brews with the gall to call itself “coffee.” Paoli’s served it for 50 cents a cup.¹⁷ This was the drumbeat of upscale continental cuisine dining.

As diners opened the double doors to Paoli’s, they were welcomed into an attractive dining room that under my mother’s decorative eye featured French-provincial decor typical of the 1950s. My mom, Rita, had acquired wallpaper that she had hoped to use at home. Instead, she purchased addi-

tional rolls and papered the restaurant walls with it. She rummaged through antique shops, gathering an assortment of copper pots, a vintage clock, and other artifacts that she had hoped would give the dining room a cozy, comfortable, homey look. As a gimmick, a three-foot-high wooden pepper mill especially made for the dining room was ceremoniously used to season the Caesar salads. Three times, the giant pepper mill was stolen by customers and later returned. The gold plaque attached to it stated the most recent prankster’s name and the date that the pepper mill was stolen. It was reported that Sherman Billingsley of New York’s famed Stork Club wanted the pepper mill. The game ended when the last culprit kept the mill.¹⁸ Lost but not forgotten, it was replaced by ceramic plates printed with the recipe for

Caesar salad, a salad made popular at the House of Murphy Restaurant in Los Angeles, owned by actor Bob Murphy. The story was that Murphy had eaten this salad in Mexico and brought it to his restaurant, putting it on the menu as DeCicco Salad. It consisted of lettuce tossed with imported cheese, anchovies, tossed croutons, garlic, coddled egg, and wine vinegar. One of Murphy's customers, fellow actor Charles Laughton, renamed it "Caesar Salad."¹⁹

Two other features of the young restaurant capitalized on San Francisco's restaurant tradition: the oyster bar, which prepared salads and seafood dishes to order, and an historic bar, a source of great indulgence made from imported South American mahogany. Oysters were extremely popular throughout the United States. Oysters were served according to local customs, including raw and on the half shell, fried, broiled, roasted, pickled, deviled, scalloped, and barbecued. They were consumed on their own or in soups, chowders, and pastas. While New Orleans boasted of its Oyster Rockefellers, San Francisco's Chef Ernest Arbogast of the Sheraton-Palace Hotel created Oysters Kirkpatrick. Every upcoming restaurant had to have an oyster bar or its equivalent. Paoli's showcased pantry men setting up Eastern Blue Point oysters on the half shell at \$1.50 a plate, steamed Cherrystone clams for \$1.75, or shrimp and cracked crab as a tasty snack or as a full lunch or dinner course.²⁰



*After the pepper grinder disappeared permanently, my father began giving patrons a plate with Paoli's popular Caesar Salad recipe printed on it.
Author's collection.*

The focal point of the refurbished restaurant was the venerable mahogany bar. Dedicated to the consumption of hard liquor and wines, the bar was built sometime between 1866 and 1867 for its previous owner, Salvin P. Collins (better known as "Sam"). It was described as a "magnificent" expansive length of highly polished wood upon which drinks were poured, toasts were given, deals were made, and dice were rolled. (At one time, gold nuggets paid for rounds of hard liquor.) Parallel to the mahogany bar was another bar of equal length that was "piled high" with "luscious" meats (roasts, chickens, and game birds), locally grown vegetables, and heaps of iced, freshly-caught bay crabs, shrimp, prawns, and the all-time favorite, oysters. In this era, the "food-erati" could eat their hearts out — the magnificent abundance of California's vegetables, fruits, fowl,



A 1953 postcard showing Paoli's said, "A Gourmet's Rendezvous. PAOLI'S spacious, attractive dining room. Where a superb cuisine and a varied selection of tempting menu suggestions greet the visitors from the four corners of the Earth." Author's collection.



A young Carl Lombardi bartending. Author's collection.

beef, and fish came to market having been grown and raised in uncontaminated soils and waters.

Successful in his restaurant venture, Collins took in a partner, the knowledgeable James Wheeland, to tend bar. Together, they managed their restaurant, making Collins and Wheeland “the place men came to eat” and drink at all hours.²¹ Women were not included, invited, or welcomed. Instead, women sought respite in their own private parlors, which served afternoon tea as well as sweet sherry and cordials in fancy aperitif cut glassware.

As the kitchen prepared a plethora of foods, the bar offered California and imported wines, ports, sherry, cordials, and champagnes. It was reported that the Jackson Street distillery, A. P. Hotaling, supplied Collins and Wheeland with an average of 55 barrels of liquor a week, making it one of the hottest liquor saloons of its day. The sight of this cooperage lined up in front of Collins and

Wheeland whetted a plethora of appetites and indulgences. And if this was not enough, around the corner was the California Market, described as a “great bazaar” [sic] of delicacies that on foggy mornings served an invigorating breakfast of “oyster cocktails” washed down with a strong mug of coffee.²² Across from Collins and Wheeland was the Mining Exchange, where dusty fortune hunters came to have their gold dust assessed. In all, this corner boomed with the confluence of rough-and-tumble activities and exaggerated talk. It would later be the entrance to Paoli’s upscale dining salon, *H’s Lordship Room*, and the piano bar, *The HMS Pinafore Room*.

Eventually, Collins and Wheeland died, leaving their establishment to their sons, who passed the business on to other family members. By the 1930s, one chef from the California Market, another Yugoslav whose expertise was the preparation of fresh fish, took over Collins and Wheeland, adding

private booths to attract women diners who could avoid a boisterous dining room filled with copper cuspidors (spittoons) and cigar-laden ashtrays.

Over the years, Collins and Wheeland slipped into mediocrity. By the time my parents took over the restaurant, along with the side entrance that had been part of the California Market, Collins and Wheeland was aged and worn.²³ The diamond-shaped tile floor was cracked, the Vienna bent-backed chairs were so rickety that they had lost their balance, the white-jacketed waiters with full-length aprons were past their prime, and the smell of stale grease that stuck to the walls like brown glue permeated the place. All that was left was the aging mahogany bar, which badly needed refurbishing.

The Pacific Coast Review, a Financial District journal, wrote a promotional piece at the time of Paoli's opening. The reporter described that the bar was heavily polished and consisted of 17 stools serviced by four attentive bartenders. The article proclaimed that this vintage bar added the "right touch of age and stability" to the modern décor of Paoli's.²⁴ Diners who came in with reservations were escorted to their tables; those without reservations were shown to the bar area. As diners began their meals, the bar crowd grew, and to keep these revelers on their side of the restaurant, the bar was piled high with Sterno-fueled silver bowls that kept the heavily seasoned appetizers, lavished with freshly grated Parmigiano cheese and salt, warm. (After all, there is nothing like salt to stimulate one's thirst and keep the bar crowd drinking.) Like Collins and Wheeland, which offered the ladies private booths, Paoli's initially offered the ladies free drinks during a designated cocktail hour to attract their male counterparts. The hottest drink was Pisco Punch, San Francisco's historic concoction, famously mixed by Alfredo Michele, known to all as "Mike."

Mike had worked for Duncan Nicol's, the overseer of the Bank Exchange bar at the corner of Montgomery and Washington Streets. Secretive about this Peruvian-based brandy drink that reportedly "went down like nectar and came back with the kick of a Missouri mule" (meaning that anyone who drank it seemed to float "in the region

of bliss of hasheesh and absinthe"), Mike learned Nicol's mix. Spying on Nicol, who always made the drink to order behind a locked grate, Mike watched which bottles Nicol took with him to brew the punch. Mike finally worked out his own version of the drink, telling people to "Just call it Pisco Mike's Punch." Those who drank it said it was "near the original Pisco Punch" that Nicol had created.²⁴

PISCO PUNCH RECIPE³⁷



1. Cut a fresh pineapple in squares about .5 to 1.5 inches. Put these squares of fresh pineapple in a bowl of gum syrup* to soak overnight. (*This serves the double purpose of flavoring the gum syrup with the pineapple and soaking the pineapple, both of which will be used in the Pisco Punch.*)
2. In the morning, mix the following in a big bowl:
 - a. 1/2 pint (8 oz.) of the gum syrup, pineapple flavored as above
 - b. 1 pint (16 oz.) distilled water
 - c. 3/4 pint (10 oz.) lemon juice
 - d. 1 bottle (24 oz.) Peruvian Pisco brandy
3. Serve very cold, but be careful not to keep the ice in too long because of dilution. Use 3- or 4-oz. punch glasses. Put one pineapple square in each glass. Lemon juice or gym syrup may be added to taste.

Over the years, others have included 1 tsp. of absinthe, Pernod, or Herbsaint.

- * Gum syrup (*also known as gomme syrup*) is a liquid sweetener sometimes used in place of simple syrup in classic cocktails with a high alcohol content.

The hors d'oeuvres never seemed to stop. Paoli's opening chef, the Dutch Marten Van Londen, had apprenticed in hotels and restaurants and had also worked on the Holland-American Line, where he developed his skills as a pastry specialist. But it was his masterful creation of hors d'oeuvres that made Paoli's an eagerly-sought rendezvous for the cocktail hour.²⁵ Each succeeding *chef de cuisine* continued these offerings. With more customers coming in for the cocktail hour, which extended well past the time normally reserved for a bar business, the initial offering of elaborate hors d'oeuvres eventually gave way to what was left over from lunch. From 3:30 pm until closing time, a variety of food items such as lasagna, calamari squid (heads and all) planked ground-round steak, Idaho potatoes sliced extra thin, and any food that could be battered and fried were destined for the bar. Some of these items were kept piping hot in silver dishes suspended above Sterno flames. One bartender overheard a woman say to her friend that this "hot stuff" [under the heated dish] must be delicious as she reached for a flaming ball of Sterno. The bartender quickly repositioned the hot dish. But it became the locker-room joke for years that customers would eat anything that was hot.

Many tantalizing dishes made their way to the bar, but it was the humble zucchini that made it big. In Dad's journal, the recipe was immortalized. He cut the zucchini finger size. Then they were salted to sweat out their cellular water, floured, dipped in egg batter, rolled in finely ground bread-crumbs, deep-fried, and finally sprinkled with freshly grated imported Parmigiano cheese. They were "to die for." Platters and chafing dishes were piled high with these steaming sticks, which were washed down by more drinks. Many years later, Pacific Southwest Airlines contracted with Paoli's to provide these zucchini appetizers. However, the airline did not have the culinary technology to keep these simple but delectable vegetables warm in flight. Certainly, flight attendants tending to a deep-fryer as oil splattered over the cabin would defy the FAA safety code. Even worse, the zucchini sticks would end up as soggy fried food tasting of oil, deep-fried oil.



Fried Zucchini

1. Cut zucchini finger size.
 2. Wash and drain well.
 3. Salt the slices and let the zucchini slices "sweat," draining them of any moisture.
 4. Dredge with flour, and then shake off the flour.
 5. Dip or drop the zucchini pieces in whipped eggs that have been seasoned.
 6. Toss them in bread crumbs, coating them.
 7. Deep fry them in hot oil until golden brown.
 8. Garnish with Parmigiano Cheese.
-

As drinks were passed hand over hand from the bartenders to thirsty drinkers, Paoli's dining room hummed with captains and waiters attending to their diners. Appetizers were brought to tables in silver serving stands with glass sectionals known as merry-go-rounds, featuring an assortment of marinated foods, including mushrooms, smoked herring in sour cream, crab or prawns, and Caponata (egg-plant salad). At the Oyster Bar, shellfish, flown in fresh daily from the Atlantic Coast, was prepared to order with fresh prawns, shrimp cocktails in a spicy sauce, and cracked crabs—when in season. The kitchen's charcoal broiler specialized in thick cuts of Idaho grass-fed beef grilled under intense heat with sizzling grill marks topped with *maitre d'hotel* butter. As the commentator for *Fortnight* wrote, "the care taken over the broiling" of meats with "hickory" charcoal "creates an aromatic heat which seals in the juices." The aroma of this process lured the lunchtime crowd hankering for chops and steaks.²⁶

But more was on the menu. The signature dish was oven-baked cannelloni. Paoli's Chef, Tony Ancini, blended veal, chicken, and fresh ricotta, spread this mixture onto freshly made crepes (not the commercially made pasta shells), rolled the

crepes, and then topped them with a light tomato sauce and a pinch of fresh basil. The cannelloni were a hit for lunch and dinner. Other staples on the menu were house-made gnocchi, handmade tortellini floating in a savory consume, red sauces and a creamy white sauce base for fettuccine Alfredo, a hearty minestrone, and white clam sauce with linguini. At the end of the day, a stockpot of leftover minestrone was sent to St. Anthony's Dining Room.

There was one soup that never made it past the kitchen. It was the creative concoction of a day cook whom Dad had told to "do something different" with the soup. So, the cook added blue food coloring. The startled expression on Dad's face was memorable as the kitchen staff froze, waiting for his reaction. The soup was dumped.

The "doggy bag" was introduced during the height of World War II in 1943 by San Francisco eateries promoting "Pet Pakits" to encourage pet owners to feed table scraps to their pets.²⁷ Paoli's had wax-lined paper bags labeled "Bones for Bowser." An attending waiter once overheard a little girl ask her parents, "Oh! Are we getting a dog?" when they had asked for a doggie bag. The exchange became an item in Herb Caen's column.

Paoli's was popular and an upbeat place to mingle, but its evolution as a premier meeting place was not accidental. My dad was a handsome six-footer, with a physique sculpted by his lightweight boxer days. He was a Dolphin Club swimmer who never missed the yearly swim to Alcatraz. At other times, he dressed à la Robert Kirk Ltd., always wearing a fresh miniature carnation in his lapel, courtesy of his father, who grew them. Early in the game, he figured out the social drill for success; he had a phenomenal memory for faces and names that enabled him to greet each customer by name, even when he had met him or her only once. Relying on charm, good looks, and expertise, he easily manned the maitre d' station. Appropriate in those days, he used a microphone to announce to the waiting diners, "Mr. So-and-So, your table is ready." But, more importantly, he quickly learned to extend his arm to the "Mrs." of the family and escort her with her family in tow to their table, making her the focus of his attention. The ladies loved it.

The restaurant eventually outgrew its initial floor plan. Over one weekend, from its close on Friday night through Saturday and Sunday afternoons, when the restaurant was closed for lunch, the mezzanine office was transformed into a dining room. Plush booths surrounded the periphery of the room with tables for twos and fours in the middle. One time an unassuming couple who were honeymooning were sitting at one of these tables. They enjoyed watching, as Dad described, "the flying waiters who missed their steps as they went up the mezzanine" balancing heavy trays of food. The couple was Juan Carlos, the future king of Spain, and his bride, Sophie of Greece. Ten years later, the Princess Sophie accompanied her mother, Queen Frederica of Greece, to Paoli's, but this time she dined in one of the private rooms, H's Lordship Room.

“ Ah, Paoli's, a first class restaurant and a fine dining experience, as well as Joe Paoli being a first class restaurateur. Located in the heart of San Francisco's Financial District, this was the place to be and to be seen. During the week and especially on Fridays after the close of business hours, Paoli's was the place to meet. The fare was classic Italian Cuisine featuring Shrimp Scampi, Veal Marsala, Chicken Parmigiana and many wonderful desserts, such as Zabaglione.

We celebrated my husband's 40th birthday at Paoli's, with 40 guests, and everyone knew they would be in for a special treat, which it was! As native San Franciscans and still residents, we so miss the warmth and friendly atmosphere and the fine dining of Paoli's.”

— JUDY MENICUCCI MUROLO

The mezzanine hosted other glitterati of the day. Rocky Marciano, the undefeated heavyweight champion of the world, “spent many nights having dinner at Paoli’s.” Dad wrote that Marciano’s usual order consisted of two top sirloin steaks. He ate the first one, while he “just had the blood” of the second. Dad would spend two weeks with Rocky at his Calistoga training camp working out with the champ and his sparring mates, and trying to keep up with him as the team jogged along the Silverado Trail. Dad wrote in his journal that the boxer knew every stone and pebble along the 12-mile stretch of road and deliberately “kicked” them out of his way to avoid twisting his ankle. Continuing with this memory, Dad wrote that keeping up with Marciano at “his regular cadence” nearly caused “my heart [to give] out... but . . . Hell, I would have died if I couldn’t keep up with them.”²⁸

Marciano died when the small plane he and some of his team flew in crashed in inclement weather. This loss of this friend only exacerbated Dad’s fear of flying. Years later, when Dad befriended the comedian Red Skelton, he was invited to Hollywood to play a nonspeaking role of the trainer in a Cauliflower McPugh scene. Dad drove to and from Hollywood, taking home with him a pair of cufflinks with the comedian’s image.

A silkscreen portrait of another heavyweight boxing champion, Bobo Olson, hung over another mezzanine booth while the local boxing trainer, Lew Powell, was honored with his own corner. Powell had trained a “a dark haired, good-looking kid” with a “natural left jab” who had speed and “knew how to pull away from, or slip, punches.” This kid took the name of “Rocky Ross” but never fought professionally. This kid’s mother was my grandmother. She refused to give permission for her son to turn pro. So on and off, Dad sparred with champions at their training camps. He never relinquished his membership in the Northern California Veteran Boxers Association.

Over the years, other guests graced Paoli’s, entering through either the Montgomery Street or California Street entrance. San Francisco’s mayor, George Christopher, hosted Queen Frederica of Greece and Princess Irene in H’s Lordship Room.

Princess Irene was a strict vegetarian, but the other members in her party ate roast saddle of lamb. The princess was presented with “12 different vegetables cooked different ways,” wrote Dad, who was rewarded with a “kiss from Irene and Sophie.” That was small recompense for Dad having spending that morning culling for appropriate recipes after hearing from the mayor’s office that Irene was a vegetarian.

From Hollywood came actors and actresses. The swashbuckling Errol Flynn hosted a party with the hope of enticing guests to support the Cuban revolution. He was followed by the very handsome James Garner of *Maverick* fame; Robert Young, whose family owned a vineyard and winery in the Alexander Valley; Gregory Peck, with his mellifluous voice; and pop singer Rosemary Clooney. All of these stars autographed backsides of the restaurant’s penny postcards. Tarzan, aka Johnny Weismuller, talked Dad into a trade: lunches for a song — a song bird, that is. The bird was a Panamanian parrot named Lolita, who sang arias. What Weismuller had failed to mention was that when the bird wasn’t singing, she made a piercing shrill that brought complaints from our neighbors. (Dad was not permitted to trade out lunches again



Dad with actor Tony Curtis, who is holding an H.M.S. Pinafore hat worn by the bartenders. Author’s collection.

without our knowing what the rate of exchange was.) Another Olympian left a less volatile gift, a photo of himself in his rowing scull, writing from one “water shoveler” to another, signing it “Jack Kelly, Olympics 1920.” Kelly, a triple Olympic Gold Medal winner, was revered as the most accomplished American oarsmen of his day. He was later known as the father of actress Grace Kelly, who would become the Princess of Monaco.

Dad’s journal included other celebrities, as well: singer Vic Damone, who “liked pasta with butter and parmesan cheese; Harold Smith of Harold’s Club, Reno, who took home five pounds of roasted candy coffee beans – a specialty of the house; actress Yvonne de Carlo, who “ate everything” yet maintained “quite a figure”; music composer David Rose, who loved the Emperor’s Desire (strawberries in Blue Nun with sautéed orange rinds, sugar, grand mariner, and cognac – all set on fire and then topped with two scoops of vanilla ice cream); Satchmo Louis Armstrong, who liked double-cut broiled lamp chops with fried potatoes; and songwriter Jimmy McHugh, who tended toward the marinated artichokes and mushrooms, cracked crab, and sour cream herring.

Then there was the very talented singer and actress who had sneaked into San Francisco, sat in H’s Lordship Room, and ordered Steak Diane for lunch. The maître d’, Emil Brossio, expertly prepared it tableside, and when he presented it to her, his eyebrows knitted together and his eyes rolled heavenward when Barbra Streisand asked for ketchup. When Emil retreated to the kitchen, it was reported that the staff gave him CPR.

When opera diva Licia Albanese came to open San Francisco’s opera season, she was feted in a private room where it was reported that the “great one” had gobbled “great gobs of what she calls ‘Southern Italian food’” at Paoli’s. “You know,” quipped Herb Caen, “puppies a la Milanese.”²⁹ From another corner of the show business world came the first televangelist, Emmy Award winner Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, whose calming demeanor was testimony to the title of his weekly show, *Life Is Worth Living*, which ran from 1951 to 1957. He penned prayerful good wishes on a penny postcard that has long been lost.



Louis “Louie” Armstrong. Author’s collection.

By the mid-1950s the restaurant had expanded, adding the HMS Pinafore Room, a classy piano bar that featured a wall-sized *trompe l’oeil* of the Admiral of the Queen’s Navy. The bartenders dressed in period sailor costumes based on the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *H.M.S. Pinafore*, which Dad adored. Crystal bar glasses engraved with the names of frequent customers were placed in full view on the back-bar, ready for each special customer, along with specialty ceramic goblets that featured themes reminiscent of the South Seas. Every time Dad walked into the room, the pianist played “Monarch of the Seas.” While other restaurants capitalized on the exotic experiences of World War II soldiers and sailors returning from the South Seas, the Pinafore Room served strong rum punches in fantastical ceramic goblets with floating flowers against the décor of an English operetta. The room was a great success.

The success of the Pinafore Room heralded an upscale and sophisticated dining room called H’s Lordship Room. It was really “His Lordship Room,” but Dad insisted on the British spelling, emphasizing the *h* and *s* and dropping the vowel for what he thought represented a more authentic version of a British sailor’s accent. We didn’t question his rationale, as the room was his idea. Red leather booths surrounded the room with a service table



H's Lordship Room. Joe Paoli felt that H's Lordship Room" was how the British would spell "His Lordship Room." Author's collection.



The popular H's Lordship Room, a private dining room. Author's collection.

in the center. The ceiling was arched with heavy beams made to resemble the inside of a captain's cabin. Hurricane candles sat on all tables, and a black wooden statue of a Moor greeted the diners. Every detail was perfectly executed according to the nautical standards of an English frigate. On opening night, guests were welcomed aboard with a piper's lively tune while a drummer dressed as a

sailor in period costume tapped out a rhythm, announcing each set of guests on the deck of seafaring dining room that would never sail.

In this room, diners were far from the hustle and bustle of the main bar and the merriment of the Pinafore Room. Service carts with heavily starched red skirts and chafing dishes and silver service embossed with the Paoli family coat-of-arms rolled from table to table. One evening the captain, Victor Bennett, dressed in his finery, rolled a cart filled with all of the ingredients required to make a dish to order tableside. He overshot the chafing pan with the liqueurs. The alcohol in the Courvoisier hit the heavily starched fringe of the table linen and the linen burst into flames. Busboys busily ushered the flaming cart through the exit doors onto California Street, where the fire department was on hand to douse the flames.

Victor Bennett wrote several best-selling cookbooks, including *Chafing Book Magic*,³⁰ with all featured photographs taken in the H's Lordship's Room.

Reading the menu of the H's Lordship's Room is to drool – not only about the food but the prices. The 24-inch-long menu included appetizers, soups, and entrees served with an herb salad. Wines and desserts were priced in an accompanying menu. The highest-priced entrées were beef, beginning with a Double New York Steak Gourmet at \$8.50 per person. *Chateaubriand Richelieu* for two was available at the same price. Of course, for diners who wanted the show-of-shows with their entrée cooked at the table, there was the traditional filet, butterfly steak, Vesuvio Flambé with Cognac for \$8.50.

Lesser entrées were the Abalone Steak Sauté Supreme at \$6.50; Fresh Frog Legs à la Provençale at \$6.75; and fresh fish and seafood, which went for between \$6.00 and \$7.00. The higher priced à la carte entrées were Tournedos of Beef, Rossini and Butterfly Filet Steak Diane, and Cognac Flambé — all at \$6.85 per person, unless you ordered the Planked New York Sirloin Steak Bearnaise, Rack of



A Holiday magazine photo showed “important” people in San Francisco, including mayor George Christopher in the foreground and others on the cable car. From left, Joe Paoli; baseball great Frank “Lefty” O’Doul; restaurateur and writer Barnaby Conrad; model Lily Valentine; press agent Don Steele; polo-playing Charlie Low, owner of Forbidden City; advertising executive Howard Gossage; and columnist Herb Caen. Author’s collection.

Lamb, Chateaubriand, or the New York Steak *Moutarde à la Cliff* at \$7.75 per person (\$15.50 for two). The lowest-priced entrée was Chopped Sirloin Steak (a hamburger) at \$3.75. Fish, chicken, and veal were \$5.00 or less, unless you craved imported *Langouste Buerre* (lobster tail with butter) at \$5.25.

These were the days when meals ended with a flaming dish described as a “flambé” of *Crepe Suzettes*, *Grand Mariner Soufflé*, or *Cherries Jubilee*. The specialty of the house was French Pancakes Balzac filled with diced pears in a pastry cream flavored with green chartreuse liquor priced at \$5.50—for two! Butter, cream, and alcohol were not spared in the name of cholesterol or calories

consumed. And sweet butter was in every dish.

The wine list began with a brief discourse that explained how wine appealed to the senses and some rules about the variety of wines. Dry white wines would taste better before red wines, and the great wines taste best when they follow lesser ones of a similar type. Tart dishes and highly spiced ones could spoil the taste of wine, and a sweet dessert would destroy a dry wine, although champagnes, sauternes, and Barsacs could be the perfect accompaniments to some desserts.

Holiday magazine dedicated its entire April 1961 issue to San Francisco and, as the saying goes, the game was on as to which restaurants would be written up and which excluded. The spokesman



New Year's Eve in the Main Dining Room. Author's collection.

for this edition was San Francisco newspaper columnist Herb Caen, who wrote that, "It's a tribute to the first-rate restaurants of San Francisco that the dinner hour is still the most exciting time of the day." Continuing, Caen wrote, "San Francisco has about 2,000 eating places, give or take the meal-a-minute assembly lines [local chains of coffee shops]. A few of them are among the world's best. A few undoubtedly are among the world's worst. In between lies a hard core of bustling restaurants whose batting, or fattening, average is several choice cuts about the national average. ... The reason San Francisco restaurants maintain such a high average is, I think, because San Franciscans know food and demand quality."³¹

Caen listed what he considered San Francisco's good, better, and best restaurants, breaking the list into "five sections: Fancy and Expensive; Very San Francisco; Hale and Hearty; Colorful, Amusing,

Exotic; and Notes on the Back of My Menu."³² Paoli's was in the category of "Hale and Hearty" and "moderately to expensively priced." Caen described Paoli's as a "hustle and bustle" restaurant that meandered from the bar with its "unbelievable crush of Montgomery Street types," whom Caen compared to the Madison Avenue workforce, to the dining room that served "very good food indeed" under the auspices of the retired chef of the Palace Hotel, Lucien Heyraud. Caen concluded that Chef Heyraud, or Lucien as he preferred to be called in his retirement, was a "far-sighted" appointment.³¹ As Dad wrote in his journal, he had the good fortune to "hire great chefs" but he did not consider himself a chef. Instead, he thought of himself as a purveyor of fine foods and wines, a modest description that suited him.

Lucius Beebe, a veteran figure in San Francisco's history, described Lucien as an "unhandsome person" who was "one of the last living repositories of the grand manner of gastronomy as it was lived in the Golden Age not only in San Francisco but of the rest of America." Lucien had a father-and-son relationship with my father. My dad described the short, rotund Lucien as a "cherub." Dad respected his expertise, his *savior faire*, and his having achieved the coveted crown bestowed by the culinary world, the black hat torque, its highest honor.

Lucien began his career at the bottom, starting as a potboy and apprentice at the Maison Bernard in Lisbon, Portugal, where his father worked. Later he worked in the galleys of the English Castle Line ships; did a stint with the French army for several years; and finally made his way as a saucier on the While Star Line's Majestic as he crossed the Atlantic. In New York, he cooked at the Commodore, the Colony Club, Hotel Madison,



Paoli's chef Lucien Heyraud. Author's collection.

and then the Stork Club. His break came in 1935 when the chef and Baron Edmond A. Rieder of the Sheraton-Palace sought him out and made him the highest-paid chef west of the Mississippi. Lured by Michael Romanhoff to Los Angeles, Lucien moved south, but he was unhappy among the glitterati and returned San Francisco, proclaiming that his "work has been my life, and to be chef at the Palace is enough for any man."³²

In was in the downstairs kitchen of Paoli's that the famed Julia Child came to visit Lucien. A stickler for perfection, the home-French chef sat watching the veteran chef as he put the finishing touches on a Christmas Boche du Noel, a chocolate cream cake resembling a holiday log. As Lucien worked, Julia was heard to say that she didn't want him to exclude any of the traditional steps. Lucien,

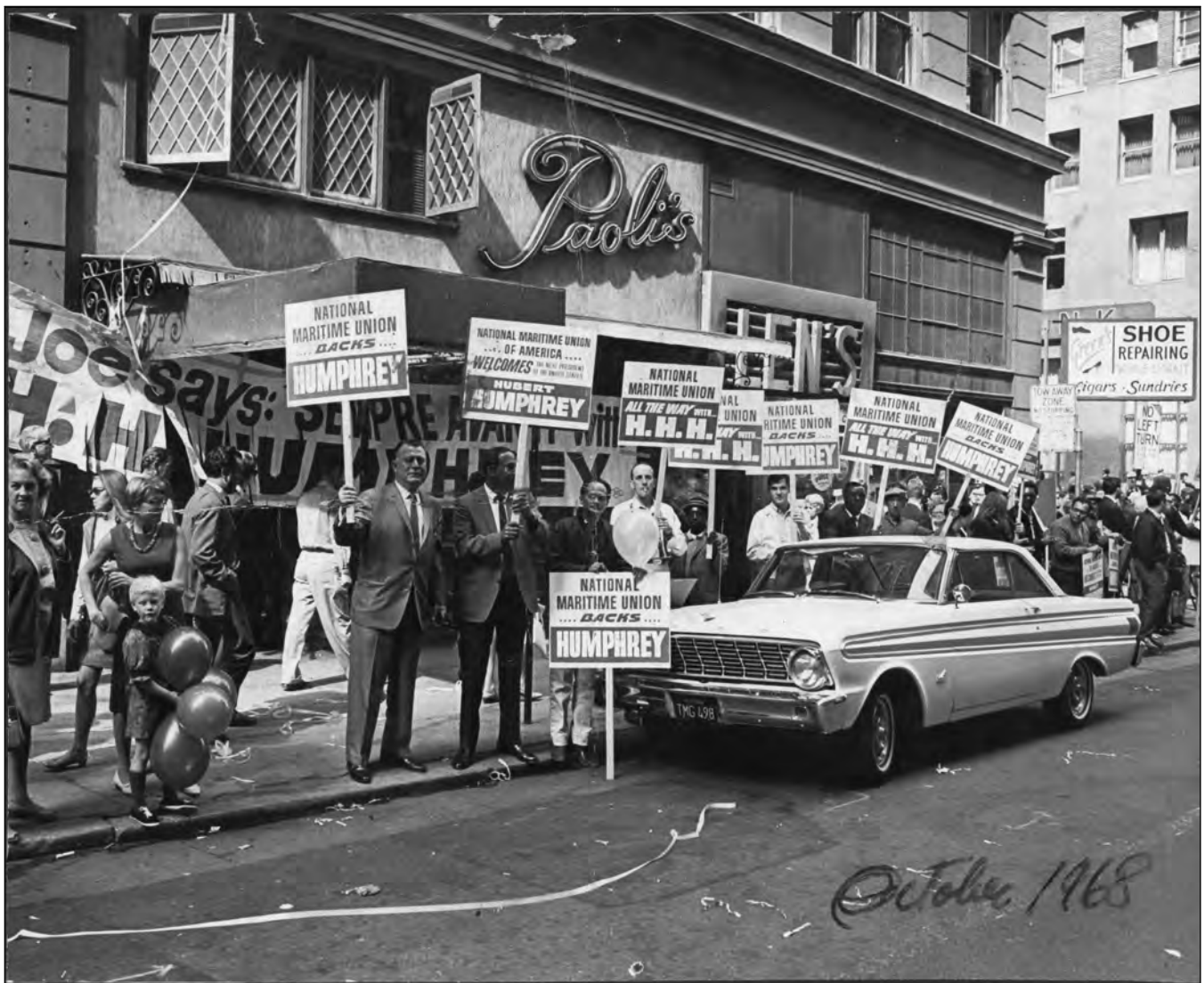
who always smoked a cigar as he worked, replied curtly, having run out of patience with her needling, that he knew the recipe very well. As they sparred back and forth, the black and white ash that had lengthened at the end of his cigar fell onto the Boche like a mixture of snow and soot while Lucien was heard to say, "But, Madame, I have done it correctly."³³

The competition between restaurants continued. In 1963, *Holiday* magazine published another San Francisco restaurant guide, a less ambitious accounting of culinary doings among the city's restaurants. Only five San Francisco restaurants were listed; Paoli's made the cut. There were no two ways about it: either diners liked Paoli's or they did not.

There were no tepid or half-hearted opinions about Paoli's on the part of the San Franciscans we met. Either they were wildly enthusiastic or down-right denunciatory. From the crowd we watched there one evening, the Paolites seemed to be extrovert types—broker's men, jovial wheeler-dealers, crew-cut young executives and young career gals who sipped double Bloody Marys and talked about "the rat-race." The huge menu is packed to the margins with dishes often encountered in San Francisco. There were Italian pastas in shoals, as well as Bay shrimps and jumbo pawns, Pacific crab and lobster, broiled scampi, rex sole, abalone steak, breast of chicken a la Kiev. Perhaps the most important to the typical guest was the New York cut of sirloin or Chateaubriand with sauce béarnaise. The portions are generous, the waiters chatty and familiar of manner, the fun infectious if you are handicapped by constitutional stuffiness. Good wines. Expensive.³⁴

Paoli's made the 1964 and 1966 editions and, whatever the critics said, prided itself as a gourmet haven set in an atmosphere of elegant dining. Paoli's even took advantage of that description in the yellow-page ads for all those who thumbed through telephone book looking for good value.

By the mid 1960s, most restaurants had public relations people who promptly fed stories to columnists on a daily basis and were paid dearly to



Montgomery Street entrance to Paoli's during a Hubert Humphrey rally.
Author's collection.

organize special events. However, unsolicited by any public relations effort, two unexpected accolades came to Paoli's in 1965 and 1967. On Sunday, September 5, 1965, the *San Francisco Examiner* comic section led off with Walt Disney's Donald Duck. The comic featured Scrooge McDuck buying a pizza factory named "Paoli's" and renaming it "McDuck's Pizza" because Paoli "was using too much pepper," as McDuck said to his nephew, Donald. One of the cartoonists had been to Paoli's, and the cartoon strip was considered a plum of publicity that was distinctly different from the gossip items written by the city's many columnists. The other piece appeared in *Time* magazine the

week of September 15, 1967. The featured essay, "The Pleasures & Pain of the Single Life," told of single men and women who chose big cities as their "habitat" and were attracted to "dating bars." The essay named New York's Mr. Laffs, Maxwell's Plum, and Friday; Chicago's The Store; Dallas's TGIF (Thank God It's Friday); and San Francisco's Paoli's.³⁵

Competition continued with coveted Michelin stars, which Paoli's never received. Instead, Dad had his family crest embossed on all the menus in gold foil.

By the mid-1960s, Paoli's was on the verge of change. The diners who had made Paoli's popular

had begun to age. People became less tolerant of elbowing their way toward a boisterous bar. Others learned more about foods and wines, and as restaurant critics gave their ratings and the industry gained professional status, tastes began to change.

My parents acquired a neighborhood bar and eatery known as The Old Library on lower Clement Street. They renamed it Paoli's Library, but it drained their energy, so they sold it. The neighborhood ventures were not for them. Most of my father's competitors had retired, while a few seriously upscaled their operations. But they all knew that there was a new kind culinary style in the making. A new generation of restaurateurs and chefs were on the rise—and they did not tip their torques to the oldsters.

Unlike the hit song "Let the Good Times Roll," the good times confronted the downward spiral of the economy that rolled into the Great Inflation of 1970. Paoli's lost its lease on Montgomery and California Streets and moved. As my parents exited Paoli's for the last time, my mother walked through the Pinafore Room and ordered that a case of deep red tomato paste be pulled off the moving trunk and that the cans be opened. Facing the magnificent *trompe l'oeil* that caricatured the admiral of the Queen's Navy, she aimed for the old gent's monocle and plumed hat, and after targeting them, she let lose with the paste, bull's-eyeing the corpulent physique. It was a true Hollywood ending as red paste dripped down the gold background. My mother was determined that no one would peel him off the wallpaper. No one would ever own him.

My parents had acquired a PG&E substation known as Station J at Montgomery and Leidesdorff. They temporarily rented the space to a disco bar. This space eventually became the location of the "new Paoli's." But it was not the same. The vintage mahogany bar would never be replicated, and with it went the memories of those generous piles of hot hors d'oeuvres. The two-or-three martini lunches, the generous executive expense accounts, and the relaxed lunch hours were relics of the past.

New Paoli's closed on June 30, 1984. Dad died on January 26, 1996, leaving a legacy among his peers and Paolites that was summed up in another famed

restaurateur's obituary, Lorenzo Petroni, who "... learned the art of restaurant promotion from Joe Paoli, considered by some to be the best in the business."³⁶

"I met Joe Paoli in the twilight of his life. I was simply born too late to have rubbed shoulders with throngs of young San Franciscans who swarmed his famous Paoli's Restaurant in search of great drinks, complimentary appetizers, and hopes of meeting the "right one." What a meeting place it was--nationally renowned--and Joe Paoli was a legend. I knew this because I came from a restaurant family.

I met Joe when he was in his eighties and I was in my thirties. We were both stalking a restaurant auction. We bumped into each other and struck up conversation. I didn't even know who he was at first.

Even at eighty, Joe retained his natural good looks and charisma. Above all, he was a gentleman. He shared that he was an old friend of my dad from way back, and that they had promoted each other in amateur boxing matches. His was the perfect profile: classy, gentlemanly, and when need be, rough and ready. What an honor it was to get to know him. He was charming, he was dashing, he was an icon.

—MARIE DUGGAN, ORIGINAL JOE'S

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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DEDICATION

This article is dedicated to my parents, whose hard work helped to elevate the status of restaurant work as a skilled profession.

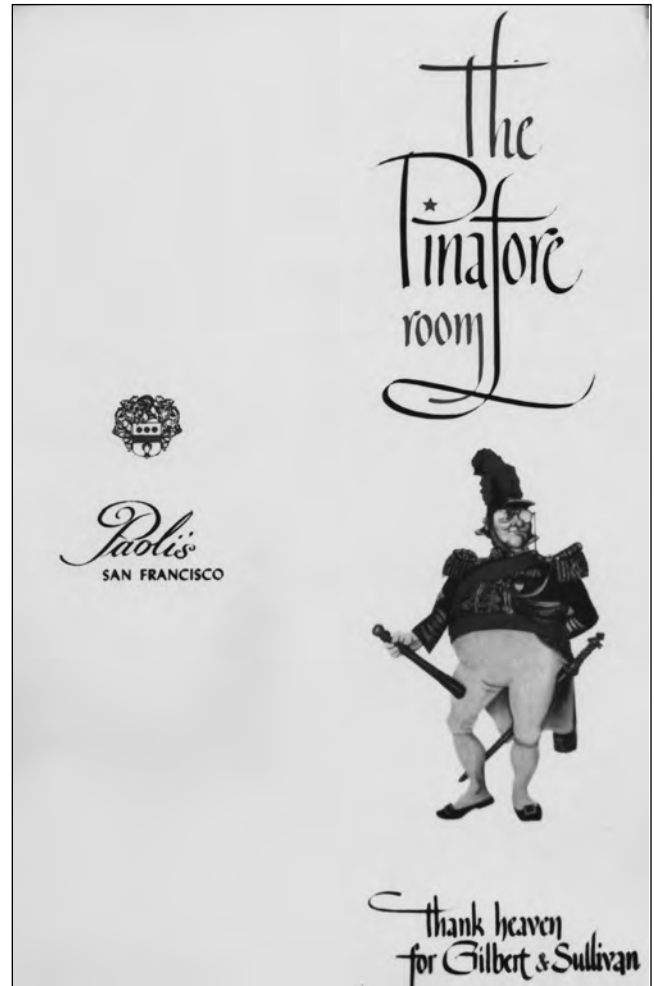


Vintage Paoli's ashtray.
Courtesy of Vintage Gypsies.

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The menu for The H.M.S. Pinafore Room.
Author's collection.

FINOCCHIO'S CLUB:

A San Francisco Legend

by James Smith

The headlines on November 28, 1999, read, “Strutting into History, Legendary San Francisco Club Closing” and “‘What a Drag’: Famed San Francisco Club to Close.” On that day at 1:20 a.m., Eve Finocchio, surrounded by her cast, crew, and friends on the stage at Finocchio’s Club, blew kisses to the final audience, shed a few tears, and then shut the doors forever. The club had stood at that Broadway location for nearly 63 years and previously on Stockton Street for 8 years, surviving Prohibition; the Depression; laws banning gay, lesbian, and transgender clubs; World War II and the Korean War; the building and rebuilding years of the 1950s; competition by the topless and bottomless shows of the late sixties; and the great turnover in clubs and real estate in the late seventies and eighties. It survived the loss of Marge Finocchio, Club Manager George M. Filippis, and Joseph Finocchio. What it could not survive was a raise in rent and dropping attendance.

Joseph (Joe) Finocchio¹ arrived in San Francisco from Italy in 1910 at the age of 14. He was greeted at the Ferry Building by his father, Bernardo Finocchio, who preceded him to the United States and then sent for him. Finocchio recounted that event in an interview with David Kleinberg of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The first restaurant he saw was Il Trovatore on Broadway; later Enrico’s. He said that he told his father, “I hope I’ll be able to make enough money to have a dinner at that place.” His dad said, “If you work hard enough, you will.” Joe’s first job was working in the produce market, where he made \$2 a week.²

After serving in the army during World War I (March 18, 1918–February 15, 1919), Joe Finocchio took a job in the restaurant business. On September 20, 1920, he was working as a checker at the Colombo Restaurant at 623 Broadway and was arrested in a raid by Prohibition enforcement officers. The officers, colloquially called “prohis,” confiscated two truckloads of wine and whisky, as well as liquor from the tables. A search produced more liquor stashed in various places throughout the restaurant.

Finocchio appeared before United States Commissioner Francis Krull the next day.³ Officials stated that this was the third time in two months that Finocchio, along with Thomas Del Bufalo and Salvador Firpo, had been arrested for violating the prohibition law. They were formally charged on November 23, 1920, with bail set at \$1,000. No other mention of these charges was published in the newspapers. Perhaps it can be concluded that they skipped bail, the equivalence of a fine.⁴

On October 17, 1921, Finocchio posted a large advertisement for bachelor suites at the Hotel Maxwelton at 515 Bush Street (near Grant Avenue), a business he managed for his father, Bernardo. When Bernardo returned from Italy in 1920 with the rest of Joe’s siblings, he listed his profession on the passenger list as hotel proprietor. Joe Finocchio later admitted that he manned the peephole in his father’s speakeasy during the prohibition years. The hotel was not the only business run by father and son.



Finocchio's Club on Broadway, 1964. From the Alan Canterbury collection, courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Joe was married by February 1, 1925 to the divorced Marjorie Masters (her maiden name was Faxon), who had a son, Herbert Masters. On that day, she used the name Finocchio when she posted a quarter-page ad announcing the opening of her upscale beauty shop, La Jeunesse (with individual styles created by VAN), on Sutter Street.⁵

CLUB 201 – THE ROOTS

Contrary to popular belief, in 1929⁶ Marjorie Faxon Finocchio bought and owned the 201 Club,

a speakeasy at 406 Stockton Street in the seedy Tenderloin. The 201 Club was the predecessor to Finocchio's Club. Joe worked there as a bouncer part time. He looked back on the family's experience with the speakeasy in 1981, saying, "We had a door with a French mirror. . . we could see out, but they couldn't see in. It was a lot of fun." Equipped with liquor, three slot machines, and "a nice crowd" of customers from the offices nearby, it was "an all-around night club."⁷

The business attracted a crowd of mixed gays and straights, much of the latter working in the theater



*Li-Kar in the Finocchio's program, 1949.
Author's collection.*

or working as artists and living in the Montgomery (Monkey) Block. Li-Kar, a Finocchio's lead performer and art director, wrote the following in a 1949 20-page Finocchio's Club program:⁸

"Finocchio's came into being some fifteen years ago as a small Bohemian café [speak-easy]. There were to be found, writers, painters, people of the Theatre, and all other fields of artistic endeavor. It was the favorite, and intimate gathering place, of San Francisco's famous art colony. As a matter of course, groups of people gathering there, of an evening, for a tall cool drink and lively chatter, would burst into impromptu songs, dances, and sketches, entertaining not only themselves but everyone. From this, the management Marjorie and Joseph Finocchio, derived the idea of using an intimate form of entertainment, with male performers, burlesquing the opposite sex.

Journalist Jesse Hamlin wrote, "A well-oiled customer got up and sang in [a] dazzling style that sounded just like Sophie Tucker. The crowd ate it up, and Finocchio saw their future."⁹ Joe and Marge adopted the concept of promoting gender illusionists/female impersonators in a choreographed stage show. Joe hired the customer on the spot. The show presented a female impersonator capable of singing and performing as a female and a young exotic or "Oriental" dancer offering a Hula or Chinese performance. Finocchio recalled, "Everyone came to see the show. And to drink."

Though Finocchio was straight, this new offering initially attracted more gay patrons, becoming a popular gay pickup spot. Gay-rights pioneer Harry Hay claimed, "If you wanted to meet a young man who was sitting [at another table], you had the waiter take a glass and a bottle of wine on a little tray and your card, and he carried it from you [to the other table]."¹⁰ If agreeable, the maître d' would seat both at the same table and make the introductions. The club religiously avoided notice and stayed low key until the end of Prohibition on December 5, 1933.

After the repeal of Prohibition, the Finochios were allowed to promote their club openly. They expanded their cast and put on a more lavish floor show. This pushed the level of propriety beyond what even San Francisco could accept. Performers mixed with patrons, and employees were paid on a percentage basis, both violating current statutes. "Nightclubs like Finocchio's were not gay bars in the sense that they sustained an overtly gay or homosexual-identified clientele, but because they profited from men willing to buy drinks for and sex from female impersonators, they helped to establish a public culture for homosexuals in San Francisco. This phenomenon, the public emergence of queer and transgender clubs, can be measured in part by the civic outcry it generated."¹¹

This emergence of a queer culture did not sit well with the city, engendering a public outcry at the flaunting of morality. Regulations were put in place to limit such establishments, with Police Chief Quinn declaring war on transgenders and female impersonators. He announced, "Lewd entertainers must be stopped!"¹²

In the early morning of July 20, 1936, the club "was chockablock with merry-makers, many of them

fashionably attired, some even in fraternal regalia. Drums and a piano were providing a chanting refrain, to which five female impersonators were doing a fancy series of steps. Liquor flowed freely, yet expensively.

Standing near the microphone, plain-clothes officers James McCarthy and Louis Cames from Central Station, on special duty from Chief Quinn's office, watched and listened, unobserved. At the termination of what the officers characterized as a vulgar parody given by one of the impersonators, Officer McCarthy appointed himself temporary master of ceremonies and, through the microphone, advised the guests: "This place is under arrest. Patrons will not be molested. Those who have nothing to do with this place may leave without fear of arrest."¹³

The crowd, said to be more than 120 patrons, rushed for the exit. The police arrested the ten people remaining, escorting them to the Hall of Justice. The police booked Joseph and Marge Finocchio and Jack Peterson, club manager, for keeping a disorderly house, selling liquor after 2:00 a.m., and employing entertainers on a percentage basis. The Finocchios challenged the charge of selling liquor after 2:00 a.m. since the raid had begun at 1:45.

Six others, Walter Hart, Carroll Davis, Eugene Countryman, Jack Lopez, Dick Vasquez, and Frank Korpi were booked on vagrancy charges, a \$1,000 fine. (Hart and Davis received recognition in later years as pioneers in female impersonation.) The police booked John Puedo, the last of the ten arrested, on charges of public drunkenness, and released him in the morning. Each of those charged were released on \$100 bail, with the exception of Vasquez and Korpi, who claimed to be unassociated with the club and could not make bail.

The following day, Municipal Judge Daniel S. O'Brien said performance of songs offensive to the ears in public would not be tolerated and sentenced Hart and Davis to 30 days in the county jail. The arresting officers said that Eugene Countryman took no part in the singing, so he was given a thirty-day suspended sentence. O'Brien dismissed charges against the other performing defendants. He declared, "I'm serving notice on every night club in San Francisco that vulgar and ribald songs will not be tolerated, and every entertainer had better

heed this warning." The Finocchios asked for a jury trial with attorney William Hornblower, charging that the undercover police specifically requested those songs. No mention was made of Peterson, the club manager.¹⁴ Because there was no further discussion of the charges or a trial in the press, it might be concluded that the Finocchios negotiated a settlement.

The publicity brought even larger crowds to the establishment, especially tourists and curious locals. The Finocchios' financial success seemed assured. Joe Finocchio received a large write-up in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on November 18, 1936, when he bought a new, luxurious Studebaker Dictator Coupe and flew to Chicago and from there to South Bend, Indiana, to pick up the automobile and drive it back to San Francisco. The trip took six days. The article called him a "San Francisco nightclub magnate and Studebaker enthusiast."

The Finocchios realized the need to move forward – the 201 Club's days were numbered. Tourists made up a part of the 201 Club clientele, and that was the future. They knew they had to attract more tourists in order to grow. The club's location in the seedy Tenderloin was not attractive to tourists. The Finocchios searched for a better venue and found an expansive nightclub space available for lease. Located at 506 Broadway above Enrico's Café, formerly the location of Il Trovatore, the site reminded Joe of his earliest focus when arriving in San Francisco. The club space was accessed by a stairway to the left of Enrico's and offered a stage and orchestra pit.

At that time, Broadway was the northern boundary of the Barbary Coast and the former Red Light District. "San Francisco's post-Prohibition nightlife emerged as flamboyantly gender-transgressive, and through the 1930s publicly flourished in the city's tourist districts. Homosexual and transgender populations socialized alongside adventurous heterosexuals and voyeuristic tourists in popular nightclubs such as Mona's and Finocchio's. The 1940s brought the emergence of bars that catered specifically to a queer clientele. These bars were adjacent to Broadway, the central artery of San Francisco's vice and tourist district."¹⁵

Upon leasing the property, the Finocchios hired a larger cast of female impersonators, enlarged the



Ray Bourbon. Author's collection.



Walter Hart, 1944. Author's collection.

band to five performers, and acquired a greater diversity of “fabulous” gowns. Li-Kar wrote the following in his short history of Finocchio’s:

They [the Finocchios] agreed to present to the public, entertainment that was so unusual and spectacular that it would set the entire country talking. Marjorie Finocchio definitely knew what she wanted and got exactly that. Mr. Finocchio agreed whole-heartedly with her and left complete charge of the entertainment in her capable hands. He had more than enough to do managing the beverage end of the business, and all the other things that take managing in order to run a successful nightclub. Marjorie Finocchio contacted and booked the finest impersonators to be found, carrying on an art that is almost older than Time.¹⁶

The cast now included some of the world’s most famous impersonators, including Ray Bourbon; Lucian Phelps; and Walter Hart, the “Male Sophie Tucker.” The refurbished club was described as

“swank and lavish.” Finocchio now advertised the club as a tourist attraction. He related this in his interview with David Kleinberg: “The cops, they objected. I had to fight a little bit of trouble, but then they told me if you run the place straight, everything would be fine. They don’t want the entertainers to mingle around with the customers. I promised to run it like a regular theater.”

AN INSTITUTION IS BORN

The new Finocchio’s Club opened on July 15, 1937 (not 1936, as is commonly reported) to great fanfare and large crowds. Everyone wanted to see what the Finocchios were now offering. They advertised, “Where the entertainment is different, and how.” What they did not advertise was what the entertainment consisted of – female impersonators. That soon became an inside secret for locals taking out-of-town friends and family to the club. The performers were careful to avoid giving up the secret until the end of the show, when they would pull off their wigs and take their bows. The showmanship

had increased markedly, and tourist magazines and brochures now billed Finocchio's as "America's most unusual nightclub."

Joe stated in a 1981 interview: "Broadway was quite a different place 45 years ago. There was nothing but Vanessi's on the street. Then the Three Swiss started a place over there." He motioned toward the parking lot next door. "They did a tremendous business. But they enlarged and they were not so successful. They went kerflunk. And New Joe's came. Across the street there was Mike's Pool Room. There was nothing else on Broadway. We were all friends."¹⁷

HERB CAEN AND FINOCCHIO'S

Celebrated columnist Herb Caen joined the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 5, 1938, about the same time that the new club opened its doors. It did not take long before Caen zeroed in on Finocchio's, a favorite target over the years. On Monday, July 25, 1938, he wrote, "Navy men are given specific instructions to stay out of Mona's, Finocchio's, Bradley's, and Dixon's. . . ."

Caen typically took a snide approach to Finocchio's Club, especially in the early years. The club was an easy target and Caen's readership took time to warm up to it. Just like the beatniks and hippies (both of whom he named), anything not mainstream was fair game. His moniker for the club was the Italian-Swish Colony. Regardless, any publicity was good publicity and with Caen as San Francisco's top columnist, it was all gold. Herb Caen died in 1997, missing the opportunity to bid Finocchio's a fond farewell.

The following is a sampling of Herb Caen's take on Finocchio's in the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

"The attractive lady sitting in a corner of Finocchio's is Mary Cook Coward, the soprano, who smiles as the painted boys go through their act; 'I gave a concert last night,' she laughs, 'and so tonight I'm seeing the town.' Oh yes – Mary Cook Coward is blind."
—April 23, 1940

"Billy Herrra, the young Mexican lad in Finocchio's' naughty show, makes a better looking gal than most of the Jr. Leaguers in this man's town." —August 7, 1940



Ad from the *San Francisco Chronicle*,
Thursday, July 15, 1937.

"Suggest to the female impersonators up at Finocchio's that they don't have to spend all that money on dresses, wigs and makeup – a tiny black mustache, a lock of hair over their eye, and they've got it." —September 12, 1941

(Speaking of himself) . . . "He's always a little embarrassed when he sees the men who dress like women in the shows at Finocchio's – but that's the first place he takes visiting firemen and he hopes the display shocks 'em plenty." —November 14, 1941

"Ethel Merman (with her buddy Venuta, and some of the 'Auntie Mame' gang) dropped in at Finocchio's early yesterday where Eth took one stare at a female impersonator in a gray wig and gasped: 'Gad, now I know how I'll look when I get old!'" —October 24, 1958

"In answer to queries, no, dearies, Joe Finocchio is not eligible for the Queen Mother contest." —April 16, 1962

"Joe Finocchio, owner of the historic Italian-Swish Colony on B'way, bought five gallons of stain (for his house) from Rhodes Paint Store on Irving. The shade: Fruitwood." —November 23, 1964



*"There never is a dull moment at Finocchio's, 506 Broadway. Here is Carol Davis, singing from the stage behind the bar, between shows. 'Toni' Milosevich is at the keyboard. In foreground, Mixologists 'Len' MacDonald and 'Chet' Moss tend bar," 1942.
Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

"Richard Aston spotted what has to rate as the most bewildering sight of the week. At B'way and Kearney, a steel-helmeted cop on a tricycle [Harley police motorcycle] roared across two lanes of traffic, skidded to a halt at the curb, opened the trunk, pulled out a big bunch of flowers, and dashed up the steps of – Finocchio's??? Yop."—October 5, 1965

"THE BOSOMS rise and fall on old Bawdway [speaking of the topless clubs] but Joe Finocchio's historic Italian-Swish Colony continues to do the best business on the street, averaging 1,600 patrons a night at \$2 a head cover – and I leave it to you to figure how close to a million-a-year he grosses." — October 17, 1968

"IN ONE EAR: Crazy scene at Finocchio's Wed. night. emcee Boobs Laray, criticized by owner Joe Finocchio, said, 'I don't need this, I quit!' and tore off his drag. On the way out, still in a snit, Boobs kicked belly dancer John

Compton, who was on stage, so John flung Laray into the audience, which applauded lustily, thinking part of the show. Ah Finocc's, where boys will be girls and versa-visa."
—March 23, 1984

GGIE AND FINOCCHIO'S

1939 brought the Golden Gate International Exposition (World's Fair) to Treasure Island, the island built just for that occasion. The tourist trade boomed with hordes of attendees, far from home and looking for quirky, exotic entertainment. Sally Rand's Nude Ranch on the island was a big draw, but in town, it was Finocchio's. The exotic shows appealed to tourists looking for something different to brag about back home. David de Alba, Finocchio's performer from 1970 until 1989, said in a telephone interview that emcee Carroll Wallace told him that Marge (Marjorie Finocchio was known as Madam Marge within the club) was the primary owner of the club. The *Chronicle's* "After Dark" column

penned by “The Owl” claimed on January 4, 1941, that Finocchio’s Club was one of the places that made San Francisco famous. Not bad after two and a half years on Broadway. Much of that could be attributed to Marjorie Finocchio, the acknowledged power behind the show. Her importance became abundantly clear later that year after a challenge to her position.

Herb Caen broke this news on September 15, 1941 in his “It’s News to Me” column: “Mr. and Mrs. Joe Finocchio (they own the popular night spot) have rifted to the point where they’re discussing property settlement.” It is clear where Caen got the tip. In the next day’s paper, the *Chronicle* posted a notice that the pair had filed for divorce. The following day Caen wrote, “Mrs. Joe Finocchio, soon-to-be-divorced wife of the No. Beach night club operator, fell off her new boat in the bay the other day – and was rescued by a sailor who got to her just in time.” Suicide attempt? Unknown, but it is believed she had received some disturbing news from husband Joe. Caen wrote a week later, “Don’t forget to say good-bye to Mrs. Joe Finocchio (she’s



David de Alba. Courtesy of David de Alba.



*Souvenir photograph of guests waiting for the show to begin, 1942.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

splitting with her husband, the night club owner), who leaves for Melbourne, Australia, come Oct. 15." Caen (still tracking the pair) wrote a month later, on November 17, 1941: "Mr. and Mrs. Joe Finocchio (They own the night spot and are in the midst of a divorce) sharing coffee and a table for two in Tiny's Powell St. at 3 a.m." Joe Finocchio had been seeing Eva Filippis, who called herself Eve.

Concetta Finocchio was born to Eve [Eva] Filippis (later Mrs. Finocchio) on February 1, 1941. No, the math does not work. Stranger still, no record could be found of the divorce (though Marge's obituary claimed they divorced in 1941) or of the marriage of Joe and Eve. According to the city directories, Joe and Marge continued to live together at 1020 Francisco Street through 1945; perhaps by then they were only business partners. Marjorie Finocchio was listed as the owner of record in the 1949 Real Property Directory. There were no other listings at that time for Joe or Eve Filippis Finocchio. Stranger still, Joe and Marge left for Liverpool, England, on the Queen Mary, returning to Halifax on December 14, 1948. The 1950 city directory listed Joe and Eve Finocchio at 145 Castenada Ave. in Forest Hill, but none for Marge.

As a final note on this odd circumstance, the *Chronicle* reported on September 11, 1947, that the home of Joseph and Marjorie Finocchio at 1020 Francisco Street had been looted of \$45,000—\$30,000 in furs and \$15,000 in cash. The thieves removed a safe from a third-floor closet, abandoning it on Lake Merced Drive after breaking it open. The furs were insured. The robbery was solved with the arrest of a man who "stuck up" the state unemployment office on Mission Street. He confessed to both jobs. The blurb in Herb Caen's column on April 25, 1949 cited it as the "celebrated burglary of Mrs. Joe Finocchio's home last year."

The December 1, 1941 weekly column, "After Night Falls," printed the following: "Finocchio's gets a gold star for its new show. . . . It's off the top. . . . A list of the performers ought to give you an idea . . . Walter Hart, Li Kar, Reeder Richards, Freddy Renault, Frank Doran, Nicki Gallucci, Carol Davis and Tex Hendrix." Despite the upcoming divorce, the needs of the club superseded. On December 19, 1941, Herb Caen took sides, writing, "If she's a handsome, impressive looking woman who dresses

Finocchio Alex J (Lucy; New Tivoli Restr) r Kentfield
 " Gilbert mach h1567 Palou av
 " Gloria J clk SFNS r3430 Scott
 " Jos (Marjorie; Finocchio's) h1530 Lombard
 " Jos A (Louise) br mgr Bank of Am h3430 Scott
 " Leonilda ofc wkr r1567 Palou av
 " Marjorie Mrs (Finocchio's) h1530 Lombard
 " Nicholas (Eliz; New Tivoli Restr) h26 Cervantes blvd
 " Theresa clk h1316 Jessie
 " Wm F (Frances) barber Palace Hotel Barber Shop r
 281 Avila
 Finocchio's (Herbert A Masters Anthony J Peterson Jos
 and Mrs Marjorie Finocchio) liquors 506 Broadway

Polk's San Francisco City Directory, 1953.

all in impeccable style and if she speaks in the soft, cultured tones of a person with background and gentility, she's Mrs. Joe Finocchio, the talented woman who has made a jernt [joint] featuring female impersonators pay and pay and pay."

Caen's comments aside, Marjorie Finocchio was not to be cowed. Joe was "seeing" Eve Sara Filippis. According to Carroll Wallace, Marge said to Joe unequivocally "as long as she [Marge] is alive, Eve could not ever come into her club," Regardless, Joe and Marge continued to collaborate and in March, 1943, opened a new lounge adjoining the main rook appropriately named the Victory Room. World War II raged on and Finocchio's Club took an active role in selling War Bonds. Additionally, Marge Finocchio volunteered at the Red Cross with her friend Dr. Chung, who was preparing to join the Chinese Army Medical Corps.



San Francisco Chronicle ad for Tex Hendrix, master of ceremonies, 1941.



Joseph Finocchio standing in a corner of Finocchio's nightclub.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

A new show followed the opening of the Victory Room: the "Nifty 90s Revue," with new gowns, stage settings, and routines. The *Chronicle's* After Night Falls column of April 12 stated, "The gowns, stage settings and routines are really most artistic and the impersonators are so convincing in their roles that you forget they are impersonators in a very few minutes." Finocchio's typically announced new major themes twice annually at the start of each of the tourist seasons, January and July. The theater went dark for a week or two in December.

MARJORIE AND THE NAZI

The war had an impact on Finocchio's in an unusual way. The owners unknowingly employed a Nazi spy as a waiter. George John Dasch, known to his coworkers as Jerry, would stir up arguments whenever in the kitchen. Mrs. Finocchio finally fired him shortly before 1940 for his loud pro-Nazi arguments. On July 6, 1942, Dasch's photo appeared on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

While earlier employers claimed he could not be a spy given his good behavior, Marge Finocchio testified against Dasch, claiming that his unpatriotic, pro-Hitler sentiments made his employment unbearable. "He was a trouble maker," she said. "He constantly talked to the other waiters about the wonders of Germany and the rottenness of America. I fired him so fast that he didn't know what hit him."¹⁸ It was learned that after Dasch's firing, his superiors determined his value in San Francisco was diminished. They evacuated him on a Japanese boat before he could be captured.

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, he was captured on June 13, 1942, by the FBI and was identified as the leader of the Nazi "submarine saboteurs."¹⁹ German-born Dasch and seven others had returned to Germany some time between 1939 and 1941 for training. They were captured burying explosives on a deserted beach in Long Island. The group had been dropped off by submarine. They brought with them eight heavy cases of explosives

and \$169,700 in cash with the goal of destroying railroad lines, utilities, and critical industrial plants. Spotted by an unarmed Coast Guardsman, the FBI picked them up after a short hunt.

The eight spies received a speedy trial with a maximum penalty of death by the electric chair. The verdict was returned on August 3, 1942, and was sent to President Roosevelt. All were convicted as spies and by August 9, six had been executed, one received a life sentence, and Dasch was sentenced to 30 years at hard labor in return for helping the government prepare its case.

THE WAR YEARS – WORLD WAR II

The wartime shipyards were booming, and many people not serving in the military came to San Francisco to work in the shipyards. Some were African-Americans who moved to the Fillmore

District, replacing the Japanese-Americans who had been sent to the internment camps. Finocchio's was open to all, especially new patrons. Between the military and the shipyard workers, the club ran at full attendance most days.

The relationship between Finocchio's and the San Francisco Police Department remained cooperative, as long as the club owners maintained their agreement. Gay clubs in North Beach were harassed by the police (often in plainclothes), unless the bar owners paid them off. Finocchio's never paid, and neither did Mona's, "The Place Where Girls Will Be Boys," paraphrasing Finocchio's.²⁰

The military proved to be an issue during the war. In 1942, Army Commander Major General Walter K. Wilson began declaring certain bars off limits. The navy followed suit, as did the State Board of Equalization. More than 50 bars were targeted, citing morals, which included gay bars and "rough



*Soliders sitting at a table in Finocchio's nightclub in 1942.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*



*Chief Frank P. Kelley of the Fire Prevention Bureau warning Joseph Finocchio not to open his nightclub before safety improvements are made.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

trade" establishments. Finocchio's was cited that year.²¹ Many taverns had agreed to the "Midnight Rule," selling no liquor after midnight. Finocchio's sidestepped that issue by agreeing to sell liquor to servicemen only between 6:00 and 10:00 p.m., although a bartender at Finocchio's was caught selling drinks to two uniformed men after 10 p.m.

"They suspended my license for six months," Joe Finocchio remembered. "I had to sell soft drinks. And you know what? I did a better business than when I sold hard liquor. I sold ginger ale, Coca Cola,

Seven-Up, and I used to get good money for that. And no headache."

There were other city departments to contend with as well. The club received its first fire permit on June 16, 1937, with regular renewals. Finocchio's permit was due to expire on July 20, 1946. The Board of Fire Prevention and Investigation granted the permit's renewal on July 16, 1946, but a month later, on August 23, that same board announced a recommendation for the revocation of that license.²² The notice was the result of an investigation into the

city's nightclubs as potential firetraps. The complaint said the club lacked adequate exits, the fire escape was of "little or no value," the windows opened inward instead of out, the two exits were obstructed by tables and chairs, and "no passageways were maintained by the management to enable occupants of tables to reach the exits, despite repeated orders of visiting chief officers of the department."

Assistant Fire Chief Martin J. Kearns in a formal report said that Finocchio's "constitutes such an extreme hazard from fire and panic that in the interest of public safety I recommend that its permit to operate be revoked." Providing insight into the club's environment, Kearns elaborated on that report:

I visited Finocchio's for the first time Saturday night. There is an ordinance providing that in places of public assemblage 15 feet of space must be allotted for each occupant, which means that the maximum crowd at Finocchio's can be no more than 250 or 300 persons. Saturday night there were more than 500 people crowded into the place. Conditions on the floor area were such that no one could get near an exit.

I don't know who approved the place last month. I'm a fire fighter, not an inspector. I know this though – the place is a hazard.

In a response to Kearns, Frank Kelly, chief of the inspection detail, said, "I don't know why Kearns doesn't agree with my inspectors. But Commissioner Sullivan assigned him to inspect and so he did." Kelly admitted his department had approved the building without asking for structural changes in 1944, 1945, and 1946. He said that his department was overworked and that inspections were done only during the day. "Night clubs, I guess, are more crowded at night than in the daytime."

James J. Sullivan, the president of the Board of Fire Commissioners, further announced he would also seek the closing of 20 to 25 other clubs. This investigation resulted from a fire at the Herbert Hotel and Backstage Cocktail Lounge a few weeks earlier in which four firemen lost their lives.

However, the city Health Department, not Fire Prevention Board, had issued the permits, and only they could revoke them. The license had not

officially been withdrawn, so Finocchio's opened that night but at half capacity. Fire commission chiefs were on hand to make sure that the balconies were kept vacant and that there were not too many tables set up in the central floor area. Kearns said the plan was to patrol every nightclub every night until adequate ordinances were put in place.²³ Joe Finocchio was ordered to show cause why his club should not be closed. The main objection was that the owner had replaced a bar with a balcony to increase the club's capacity without seeking permission. Finocchio complained, "I'm in a tight spot. I've got a \$700-a-day payroll."²⁴

"You'd be in a worse spot if hundreds of people were burned to death," Kelly said. "You'd be in jail for a long time."

News reports the next day said that the San Francisco Health Department, responsible for issuing the licenses, had decided in a hearing that Finocchio's could stay open if it limited the number of patrons to 250.²⁵ The club could continue to operate while management took steps to comply with the structural changes required by the fire department. Those changes involved enlarging the exits and removing the grandstand-like platforms that seated patrons on elevated tiers. However, the license remained under review. Finocchio's attorney, John Molinari, asked city officials not to act hastily in revoking the permit. "My client is a businessman," he said. "Men like Finocchio are the kind of men who keep San Francisco going." Finocchio's Club kept its license after making the required changes.

Finocchio's Club adjusted to the changes, continuing with their successful strategy of providing first-class entertainment, ever-changing reviews, new talent on a regular basis; and respecting patrons and giving value for their money. Performers came and went based on their opportunities and relationships. From time to time, there was conflict.

PROTECTING THE BRAND

In 1948, the *Chronicle* reported that the Finochios were suing four former employees for capitalizing on the Finocchio name.²⁶ Ray Bourbon, Jackie May, Johnnie Magnum, and Francis Russell produced record albums and advertisement folders claiming, "The new Bourbon Records presents the world's



Frank Doran in 1947. Author's collection.



Caricature of Frank Doran by Li-Kar. Author's collection.

foremost female impersonators from Finocchio's of San Francisco." Finocchio's lawyers charged that the use of the Finocchio name was designed to "deceive and defraud the public." The Finochchios fiercely guarded their reputation and brand.

The performers were the backbone of the organization. Their singing, dancing, and comedic abilities – along with their costumes, wigs, and makeup – kept their audiences entertained and kept them coming back. Those qualities, plus with the staff's enthusiasm and the ever-changing shows, made Finocchio's a world-class venue.

Finocchio's was a union shop, with performers covered by the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA). The union offered little protection from firing, but it did guarantee wages at minimal levels. It also held members to certain standards, including not quitting during high season; doing so could get a performer blackballed.²⁷

The following represents a few notable performers in roughly date order. Some of these were gay, some were straight, a few were transvestites – but they all put on a great show.

Ray Bourbon, a vaudeville performer, was looking for a new career following vaudeville's demise. He focused on the pansy clubs, named after the New York Club of that name. These clubs offered true female impersonators, men undistinguishable from women, who could sing, dance, and pull off the gambit with ease. His first foray into San Francisco was at Tait's Café, touting his show as the first pansy show in San Francisco (not so, but he was one of the first to join Finocchio's). Often the opening act, his satire and his vocal performances offered something different in nightclub entertainment. His facelift in 1941 was the talk of the town. He was charged with murder in Big Springs, Texas in 1969, reported by Herb Caen: "'Here I sit at age 76,' laments Rae, 'completely forgotten and in big trouble. Where are my showbiz friends now?'"

Frank Doran started in the theatre in 1906 with such notables as Al Jolson, Edie Cantor, and Fanny Brice. An accomplished dancer, Doran also performed in serious dramatic roles on stage, featured in a road production of *The Drunkard* for four years. His act, "In Present Day Types," was a big hit at Finocchio's.



Karyl Norman. Author's collection.

Karyl Norman, billed as the highest paid female impersonator in 1941, emceed the shows as well as performing a couple of vocal numbers "he made famous on two continents." Known as "the Creole Fashion Plate," Norman toured the world, starring in various productions, as well as his own production of "Lady Do."

Walter Hart, called the "blond bombshell of song," performed Sophie Tucker at Finocchio's, much to Sophie's delight. She gave him many of the gowns and furs he wore and never failed to catch his show when in the city. He began his career at Finocchio's.

Herb Cain wrote, "Footnotes on Headliners: After 15 solid years on the job, Entertainer Walter Hart is out of Finocchio's, on acct. some verbal twanging with Mrs. F. That's sort of like the last ferry leaving the Ferry Bldg." Hart moved on for a run at the Tivoli with Nick Gallucci.

When he died in 1978, Walter Hart only received a three-line obituary per Herb Caen: "One of the best of Finocchio's female impersonators, Walter's heyday was just before and after World War II, when

he wowed the wide-eyed ones from *Wherever* with his campy (but never vulgar) naughtiness. In those days of long nights, he was bigger than Charles Pierce [noted female impersonator] and Nancy Bleiweiss [*Beach Blanket Babylon*] put together today, an odd thought. Everybody in town knew Walter Hart. Once."

Nicki Gallucci began his career as a prima donna and tight rope walker for Barnum & Bailey. Billed as "The Singing Star of Finocchio's," his natural soprano voice earned him the label "Male Lily Pons." He was the only male coloratura soprano capable of reaching high D above middle C.

Freddie Wheeler had a tough time finding work in the entertainment industry during the depression years, but he noticed that women seemed to land the secure jobs that he thought were more suitable for him. Thinking it worthwhile to try "playing like" a woman, he quickly landed a job in a Los Angeles show and much to his surprise, "it worked!" The move to Finocchio's seemed like a natural for a comedian who subscribed to playing the absurd. The crowds loved him.



Nicki Gallucci, 1944. Author's collection.



Freddie Wheeler, 1944. Author's collection.

Carol Davis, skinny as a rail, often sang in a tux behind the Theatre Bar, proving that a man could look like a woman dressed like a man, as shown in the photograph on page 12. He often put on his own one-man show during intermissions, keeping the audience engaged with spicy songs and repertoire.

Tex Hendrix took over as master of ceremonies near the end of 1941. A top impersonator and comedian in England for three years, he previously performed at the Ha Ha Club in Hollywood, Florida. He wowed the audiences by changing evening gowns for each of his 12 acts.

Niles Marsh brought the house down with his rendition of "Pistol Packin' Mama." After a stint on Broadway and the circuit, Marsh turned to nightclub acts, where he was discovered by Mrs. Finocchio. He remained one of the show's highlights for more than eight years.

Li-Kar set a high bar for the multi-talented. Artist extraordinaire, his formal training included the Otis Institute, Chouinards in Los Angeles, and

the Chicago Art Institute. He designed many of the gowns for Finocchio's and for well-known Hollywood stars. In 1941, Tallulah Bankhead wired Li-Kar asking if he would design the gowns for her new show opening on Broadway in New York. Li-Kar was an accomplished dancer and muralist and designed much of Finocchio's promotional material as the club's art director.

Lee Shaw (Aleshia Brevard) joined Finocchio's in 1961. Lestra La Monte, the Mistress of Ceremonies, gave her the stage name Lee Shaw, and Jackie Phillips helped show her the ropes. Shaw stated in her book, *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*: "Newspaper columnists touted me as Marilyn Monroe's double. That was flattering, but it was only good publicity. Mr. Finocchio paid for such fanfare. I was young, professionally blonde, and sang, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," in a red knit sweater, but that does not a legend make. I knew the difference. Marilyn was the epitome of what I wanted to become." That role drew Monroe to attend a performance, enjoying the opportunity to see herself portrayed.



Niles Marsh, 1949. Author's collection.



Lucian Phelps ad in the San Francisco Chronicle.

The press releases also said Lee Shaw did a great Zsa Zsa Gabor impression, but Shaw said that was just made up publicity.²⁸ Shaw went through the medical transformation to become a transgender person,²⁹ one of the few that performed at Finocchio's – and perhaps the first – to do so.

Freddie Renault performed his smash hit, “One Night in Vienna,” to kick off his introduction to Finocchio's. He was a musical comedy and ballet star prior to Finocchio's and quickly rose to producer at Finocchio's, a role he held for more than ten years to critical acclaim. Renault also served a short stint as master of ceremonies and was known for his light comedy routines.

Lucian Phelps, billed as the “Male Sophie Tucker” and as the “Last of the Red Hot Papas,” boomed out to the audience in a baritone, then switched to high C. Phelps began singing in a boy's choir. As with Walter Hart, Sophie Tucker recognized Phelps's skill, sending him dazzling gowns and furs. She sent a letter in 1966 that he read to his audience. “I'm getting better, Lucian,” she wrote. “Carry on the great tradition of vaudeville!” Phelps, survived by his wife, Margaret, passed away in 1973 after a lengthy illness. He began at Finocchio's in 1949 and continued as a headliner to the end.

David de Alba came on board in the early 1970s with a repertoire of characters and impersonations. An outstanding bilingual singer, de Alba brought his Boy-Chic character based on his Cuban roots and singing clown acts, such as Piérrot, but he was known for and still performs as Liza Minelli and Judy Garland, roles that brought rousing applause. David often appears on the stage in Las Vegas, where he now lives.



Freddie Renault, 1944. Author's collection



Ray Francis and John Lonas, "Two Old Bags."
Author's collection.

Lori Shannon (Don Mc Lean³⁰), "King of the Drag Queens," joined the club in the mid-1970s as a comic and singer. His Mae West performances earned him a big hand, but he gained instant fame when he appeared in the sitcom *All in the Family*. In the inimitable words of Herb Caen on September 26, 1975, "Finocchio's Lori Shannon gets his or her big break Monday night playing a female impersonator, **Beverly LaSalle**, on *All in the Family*. According to the plot summary, Archie Bunker saves her life by mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, "unaware that she is a he. . . . I don't know about you and your weird tastes, but I think I can find something better to do Monday night. Even Horrid Cosell." Shannon made a cameo appearance in the film *Save the Last Dance for Me* (1980) and was nominated for outstanding male comedy solo at the Third Annual Gold Awards in 1981.

TWO OLD BAGS FROM OAKLAND – JOHN LONAS (LATER FRANCES BLAIR) AND RAY FRANCIS

Each acted in the comedy routine that Lonas and Francis had created in a beer hall in Oakland. Joe Finocchio loved it, hiring them for his club to do a gay-nineties, vaudeville-style act. They sang bawdy songs and joked about their boobs, which were big rubber balls tied together with string. It brought the house down when one of them would pull the balls out, bounce the balls on the floor and then hang them over their shoulders, saying to women ringside, "Don't you wish you could do that?" Francis Blair joined the act when Lonas died.

Lavern (Paul L.) Cummings was one of the most beautiful cast members. His looks were complimented by his fine soprano voice, and he sometimes switched to his normal baritone. Cummings was a favorite on stage and received glowing press reviews. His Barbra Streisand impersonation and songs elicited enthusiastic applause from audiences. Cummings debuted in 1958 and performed on Finocchio's stage until 1982. Cummings appeared in a 1979 made-for-TV movie *Golden Gate Murders* with David Janssen and Susanna York. The film incorporated his usual performance "with a twist."

Finocchio's cast member Libby Reynolds related the following story about Cummings:

A customer one night, sitting ringside had come in right after I exited the stage. He'd had a winning streak at the racetrack and was being generous to the entertainers who would appear one by one. They had all



Lavern Cummings, early 1970s. Courtesy of David de Alba.



*Top row: Carroll Wallace, Jacquie Phillip, ventriloquist Kenny Stewart, Lavern Cummings, Lori Shannon, Unknown.
Bottom row: the Eve-ettes led by Rene-de-Carlo, left. c. 1977. Author's collection.*

picked up a \$20 bill that he had put on stage. When it was Lavern's turn, she didn't pick up the \$20, so he put up a \$50 bill. Lavern left the stage at the end of her performance with the \$50 bill still sitting on stage! I remember making a comment to Robin Price at the time saying I thought that perhaps Lavern should have picked it up, and Robin replied, "Libby, that was a sign of class."³¹

Carroll Wallace, born Francois Weiridt, was another straight performer who sold his image as an elegant lady. A class act, he soon rose to the role of emcee on the stage and "mothered" some of the younger performers off-stage. He enjoyed "rapping" (chatting) with audiences and relating funny stories, presenting himself as an elegant lady

on stage, emceeing and doing comedy patter. He had a trademark song: "I'm a Singer though I Haven't Got a Voice," which had been written especially for him.

Russell Reed had a joke for every state. He asked where folks were from and always had a great comeback. Previously a male nurse, he found his element among the cast of Finocchio's. Called the "Biggest Act in Show Business," Reed weighed in between 300 and 400 pounds and used his girth to draw huge laughs, especially when he did his comedy striptease. Reed loved to resurrect old songs like those of Fanny Brice.

George "Buchanan" Dalton, well-known puppeteer, provided non-stop laughs with the antics of his characters. He presented a lively "Dueling

Banjos” number performed by an animated guitar and banjo doing a mating dance. Margot, a swan-like ballerina with a woman’s legs, danced with emotion as the immortal dying swan. And there was a ribald sing-along led by a Salvation Army lassie banging on a drum. Other acts included Dalton’s inimitable Madam Melba and his own take on the flying nun. Buchanan’s use of black light and his dark clothing caused him to be only a shadow during the performance, even though he was in full view of the audience.³²

Buchanan entertained at Finocchio’s during the 1970s and 1980s, receiving more than his share of press notices, and later performed in Reno and Las Vegas and on TV. Buchanan passed away in Berkeley in 1992. [See postcard on page 34.]

Kenny “Keny” Stewart, ventriloquist, worked with two life-sized standup dolls: Sally, a young, vivacious tall blond and Sylvia, a heavily made-up middle-aged blond in a sequined dress and a feather boa. Each had her own routine. Sylvia has been



“KENY STEWART & SYLVIA”

*Ventriloquist Keny Stewart with Sylvia, one of his lifesized dolls.
Courtesy of Keny Stewart.*



Comedian Holotta Tymes. Courtesy of Holotta Tymes.

known to say, “Sex is like snow; you never how many inches you’re going to get or how long it will last.” Dressed conventionally (male), Stewart’s performances included dialogue and exchanges of double entendres among himself, one or the other of his ladies, the audience (he usually targeted men), and the Eve-ettes. Stewart joined Finocchio’s cast in early 1978 and entertained there for eight years.

Holotta Tymes performed as a comedian and singer at Finocchio’s starting for “a few brief time frames in the earlier ’90s,” working full time there for the last few years until the club closed.³³ Speaking of his first appearance, Tymes told *SF Weekly*, “I remember how excited I was. The showroom was dated, but under the darkness of the candlelit tables, it was magical. The first time I worked there, it still had a live band, and the show was both live and



Scene from the dressing rooms, 1944. "Is it show-time yet?"
Author's collection.



Scene from the dressing rooms, 1944. "I'll just cinch it
up another inch!" Author's collection



Scene from the dressing room, 1944. It took long lashes to ensure
batting them was not lost on the last row of seats. Author's collection.

lip-synch. So many famous female impersonators/drag artists had worked there and now so was I!"³⁴ His comic impersonations included Reba McEntire, Lucille Ball, and Cher. Tymes is still actively performing and can be seen in San Francisco venues from time to time, most recently at the Starlight Room's "Sunday's a Drag" Brunch at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel. That weekly venue continues to celebrate Finocchio's and female impersonators.

It is impossible to list the many excellent performers who graced the stage at Finocchio's. All had their own stories and many of those were carried in the local newspapers. Newsbytes such as "Walter Hart, No. 1 shimpersonator at Finocchio's finally got his citizenship papers this week (he was born in Manchester, England) after living in the U.S. for 20 years"³⁵ were common in the 1940s through the 1960s.

Items appeared in entertainment promotional columns like "Around Town" by Bill Alex (*San Francisco Examiner*), "Bright Lights" by Lloyd Johnson (*San Mateo Times*), and "After Night Falls" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). The latter occasionally received a byline, but it usually just attributed "The Owl," as written/compiled by whoever got the assignment. Those columns offered a source to find the current entertainment events in town. Most were, in fact, advertising columns, paid plugs. Notices and news items for Finocchio's appeared almost weekly at times, less for others. That was due to press releases sent by Finocchio's. Often the stories flagged new shows or highlighted performers, and sometimes they just reminded people that the club was there and when it was open. The assigned column writer occasionally visited a show or venue and offered his or her own view at no charge. Finocchio's performer David de Alba related the following when asked about press releases:

I was written up once in the newspaper by Bill Alex [*San Francisco Examiner's* "Around Town" column] saying that I sang bilingual songs, with a photo of me as Boy-Chic taken at Finocchio's.³⁶ That night Eve Finocchio came filled with self-righteousness toward me (and I was visiting Rene de Carlo's dressing room at the time), anyway, Eve telling me that only she or Joe Finocchio had the



Scene from the dressing rooms, 1944. Some performers had natural hair; some depended on wigs. Author's collection



Scene from the dressing rooms, 1944. Selecting the fabric for the next gown was serious business. Author's collection.



Scene from the dressing rooms, 1944. Stitching up a new wig. It wasn't all glamour. Author's collection.

power to call the newspaper to tell them to feature any of their revue's entertainers. So I told her, please call Bill Alex tomorrow and he will tell you that it was not me who called him, but it was he who did it of his own free will. She must have called him, but as usual she would not apologize to me the next day because in her mind "she was never wrong."

As de Alba inferred, these columnists did drop in from time to time, made clear by the depth of reporting as opposed to a press release blurb. When columnists did attend the performances, Finocchio's received glowing, if not humorous, reviews. Even the perennial curmudgeon Herb Caen slowly came around.

THE POSTWAR YEARS

Finocchio's struggled a bit during the Korean War era, the early 1950s (if grossing a million dollars at the door is struggling). The populace saw Finocchio's as a little less controversial and more of a San Francisco icon. But locals do not often visit their icons. (As a native, I did not ride a cable car until I was in my 50s. It was never going where I wanted to be.) However, Finocchio's continued to draw visiting celebrities – it was a "must-visit" place – drawing notice and press. Notables like Jack Jones, Frank Sinatra, Pat O'Brien, Eddie Foy Jr., Red Skelton, Angie Dickinson, Bob Hope, Phyllis Diller, John Wayne (the Duke himself), and Earl (Fatha) Hines went to Finocchio's. Groups on tour made it a point to take in a show or two, including the American Ballet Company who attended yearly when in the city, visitors to WESCON, the Mexico Folklorico company, Ringling Bros., and the Oakland Raiders (who were often "in town"). The *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote in 1955, "Joe and Marjorie Finocchio's brand of entertainment has reached the heights of diversion and novelty. Finocchio's has gained world-wide fame as the most unusual nitery in the world with female impersonator shows."³⁷ Marjorie had charge of the shows and had it down to a science. That gave her enough time to enjoy time on her yacht, her favorite pastime.

END OF AN ERA

Everything changed on May 4, 1956, when, at age 64, Marjorie Finocchio died after a lingering illness. The newspapers posted a probate filing notice on May 10, 1956. The club went to Joe; and Eve lost no time taking over Marge's role.

Eve Finocchio had a different approach to the management of the club, playing favorites and at times pitting one performer against another. The family atmosphere disappeared and was replaced with an autocracy. Joe continued to work the bar and the door, leaving the rest to his wife and to the club manager, her brother, George Filippis. Others in the Filippis family quickly assumed different

roles. Eve's daughter, Concetta, became the official photographer but had a greater role as consultant to her mother. After being denied for so long, Eve wanted to put her stamp on Finocchio's Club and its performances. Her first major changes were cutting the number of musicians from five to three and removing individual entertainers' posters. Emcee Carroll Wallace told David de Alba, "David, if you ever want to get fired right away, sing the song 'Margie.'" De Alba continued, "Once I called Mrs. Eve Finocchio over the phone, 'Madame,' and she got furious. I asked her, 'How do you want me to address you?' She said to me: 'Mrs. Finocchio.' . . . then Carroll Wallace explained to me that Marge was referred by everyone at her club as 'Madame.'"



Phyllis Diller (center, with pearls) at Finocchio's, circa 1962, with the cast. Lee Shaw is at the upper right. Courtesy of Aleshia Brevard.



Finocchio's postcard, 1979. Left to right: dancer Rene De Carlo, Eve-ette Florencio de los Santos, Eve-ette, comedian Lori Shannon, emcee Carroll Wallace, singer Lavern Cummings, puppeteer George Buchanan, Eve-ette Paco Rios, and two other Eve-ettes. Author's collection.

Not all Eve Finocchio did was negative. Ventriloquist Keny Stewart, who started in 1978, said, "We all got along, a big family. It was a very popular tourist site – we were professional and performed in my opinion a really good show. Loved my time there and living in the best city ever." Eve was said to have a strong personality and did not appreciate any infighting.

Eve created a chorus line, mimicking the Las Vegas shows, called the Eve-ettes, led by Rene de Carlo. It was reported on October 10, 1956 that the club had been redecorated with a décor "similar to the Carousel of Paris fame." She also tried (successfully) to rehire former employee Les Lee from the Carousel of Paris. Eve showed a determination to make the club more successful than ever. She just employed a different style and wanted to erase any reminders of Marjorie.³⁸

THE EVE FINOCCHIO YEARS

Leah Garchik of the *San Francisco Chronicle* interviewed Joe Finocchio in 1981. Joe said that Eve did most of the hiring. "We always keep our eyes open. It's easy to get fellows in women's clothes. But we don't allow any filth, and most of them resort to filth." After Eve conducted the first audition, "we both look and we both decide." If the decision was positive, she made the arrangements for the newcomers to be costumed, and rehearsed them for a week or so before they join the chorus line. Each dancer got paid \$80 to \$125 a night.³⁹

Eve valued routine and disliked change. The cast was aging and some began calling the club "the old elephant graveyard." To boost crowds, she made arrangements with Holiday Tours and Gray Lines to add Finocchio's to their tour lists. Gray Lines



The "Old Elephant Graveyard," as depicted by Li-Kar (bottom left), 1949. Author's collection.

featured a photo from Finocchio's on its brochure cover. The buses opened the club to a new audience, those who did not want to drive into the still-seedy area of North Beach, as well as tourists who would never have considered it. This ensured a steady flow of guests, leveling out the vagaries of luck and advertising.

Broadway and North Beach was changing, as well. The Beat Generation had arrived in 1954, with Allen Ginsberg talking the lead. Herb Caen named them "beatniks," a term they found derisive. Nightclubs like the Purple Onion and the Hungry i opened then, bringing a new kind of entertainment to North Beach. San Francisco was becoming anti-establishment.

Topless bathing suits appeared in 1964, inspiring the opening of the Condor that year. It was the first topless nightclub in San Francisco, headlining Carol Doda, the "Perfect 36." Other topless clubs followed,

bringing the flavor of the old Barbary Coast back to the city. The Condor went bottomless in 1969, only to be blocked in 1972, with no fully nude dancing allowed for any establishment serving alcohol, as directed by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC).

The *Chronicle's* "After Night Falls" printed, "With male strippers currently in the news in Fremont and North Beach, belly dancer John Compton is receiving his fair share of female attention (even though he does not strip) at Finocchio's on Broadway."

Business at Finocchios did not suffer when the crowds started attending the strip clubs – in fact, business might have increased. By 1977, Finocchio's claimed to be clocking 300,000 customers a year.⁴⁰ On September 9, 1979, Herb Caen wrote in his daily column:

As dusk fell over North Beach, the crowds jammed into Broadway, filling the outside

tables at Vanessi's, Finocchio's, Tommasso's. We keep hearing that "the topless is killing Broadway" – we have been hearing it for years actually – and yet the people were there Sunday night by the thousands upon thousands.

Caen had no axe to grind. If an area were heading downhill, he would likely be the first to report it. He had a reputation for calling things what they were.

Herb Caen also wrote on October 2, 1980, "Tuesday night, a shirt-sleeved mob descending from the tour buses in North Beach where it is always midsummer (not ours, theirs). They stand in line for Finocchio's as they have for 40-odd years, and spill over into Enrico's Coffee House."

Front-page news confirmed Caen's statement with the headline reading "Restaurants, Offices Edging out Broadway's Naughty Nightclubs." Finocchio's was the exception: "In the central blocks of Broadway, visitor action was confined to Finocchio's and such mainstay restaurants as Fior d'Italia and Vanessi's."⁴¹ The trend continued as the *San Francisco Chronicle* announced, "Topless Boom Going Bust Along S.F.'s Broadway" on the front page of the February 3, 1986, edition. Rising rents and dwindling crowds sounded the future for North Beach. El Cid and Off Broadway went dark. The only topless clubs left that sold liquor were the Condor, the Hungry i, and the Galaxy. Still, Finocchio's thrived. Unfortunately, Enrico's, downstairs, did not; the Broadway pioneer restaurant closed after the federal government seized it for back taxes. Enrico Banducci had sold the building the year before for \$2 million

and then leased it back for \$10,000 a month. Enrico already owed Joe Finocchio \$600,000 on an old loan, but his old friend was no longer there to bail him out.⁴² The street had changed.

The performers did not always get along, as mentioned in the David de Alba interview. Leah Garchik wrote in her 1981 interview with Joe Finocchio, that when there were quarrels between the singers and dancers, Eve was often called in to mediate. "They call each other names. You think they want to kill each other. . . it's ridiculous to argue about nothing. I have no patience for it." From time to time, it was necessary to fire an employee; simply "when they don't do what we tell them or they don't show up."⁴³

Long lines outside Finocchio's Club were a familiar sight. They were touted as a reliable tourist traffic index, so popular were the shows. Finocchio's did not have barkers, a practice that was gaining popularity in North Beach. By the 1970s and 1980s, Finocchio's was a San Francisco institution, often compared to the now iconic Beach Blanket Babylon.

Finocchio's offered four shows a night, each running about an hour. The shows had themes that were not always the same from show to show.



Circa 1980 – Top: comedian Lori Shannon, belly dancer John Compton, emcee Carroll Wallace, ventriloquist Keny Stewart, and Lavern Cummings. Bottom: the Eve-ettes. Author's collection.



Fabulous Finoccios 506 BROADWAY, SAN FRANCISCO
CALIFORNIA • DO 2-9913

*The entrance to Finocchio's as shown on the front of the club's fliers.
From the author's collection.*

Guests could stay for more than one show. Show themes ranged from Hawaiian Nights, Funnytime Circus, Heat Wave, Baghdad on Broadway, Tribute to Yesteryear, Strike Up the Band, and Salute to San Francisco. Carefully staged, each variety show format included singers, dancers, comedians, and the odd puppeteer. Finocchio's advertised glamorous gowns and superb choreography – and always delivered. The shows always ended with grand finales featuring the Eve-ettes with one or two of the performers.

By the 1980s, show plugs in the newspapers became repetitive and touted only Eve's favorite performers and acts. Instead of highlighting famous attendees, interesting anecdotes, new show themes, and a cross section of the acts, Eve cited the Eve-ettes at least once per month in the weekly releases, the show hours once or twice a month, and then rotated between plugs for three or four performers. The Eve-ettes stayed her favorites, named after her. The only nod toward advertising the show and a cross section of performers came in April 1982, when a new multipage souvenir program/magazine was produced. The program featured entertainers in before-and-after attire.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, copies of that program have not been available to review or purchase.

THE COUNT DI BROADWAY

During his years as joint owner of Finocchio's, Joe Finocchio was always described as being in the best of health. In a 1977 interview with James Wood, Finocchio said, "Physically, I'm 100 percent. I walk on the beach every day, two or three miles, and in the summer I swim in the ocean."⁴⁵ He regularly sailed his yacht, *The Lady Eve*. That all changed in September 1985, when at 88 Joe Finocchio suffered a stroke, followed by a heart attack in December. Hospitalized after the heart attack, Joe Finocchio died on January 13, 1986, the end of a long run. The story of his death and his short history went national, everyone mourning the loss of a pioneer.

The club became the sole proprietorship of Eve Finocchio, but some of its life slipped away. Although Eve had been sending the press releases, they began to dwindle. She brought her grandson, Eric Jorgensen, 23, into the club management immediately following Joe's death. Jorgensen was being groomed to run the historic nightclub, the third generation of the family to manage Finocchio's.⁴⁶ "He's a very sensible young man," she said. "When Mr. Finocchio died, he came from college and helped me." Eric's mother, Concetta Finocchio Jorgensen, was the second generation on the management team. Eric had taken over as vice president and general manager by 1989, while Eve continued to manage the shows and staff.⁴⁷ Eve, born in 1915, was 74 by that time.

It is unclear whether Joe had been the heart of the organization or if Eve just lost heart, but Finocchio's began to slip. Gray Line Tours dropped Finocchio's off its schedule in March of 1988, opting



*Joe Finocchio with Lavern Cummings above surrounded by the Eve-ettes, June of 1981.
From the author's collection.*

for "a young chit like 'Puttin' on the Glitz,' a lip-synch extravaganza put on at Sutter's Mill." Gray Line vice president Wayne Nelson said, "We felt the [Finocchio's] show had been deteriorating." Gray Line Tours later renegotiated the arrangement in October of 1986. Gray Line vice president Nelson said, "After we left, their show got much better, the way it used to be several years ago. They added more dancers and really improved." (He failed to mention that Sutter's Mill had closed.)⁴⁸ Finocchio's emcee, J. J. Van Dyke, said, "They [Gray Line Tours] were complete out-and-out idiots who made themselves look like fools, as far as I'm concerned. They don't bring us all that much business anyway." Gray Lines



Circa 1984 – Top: puppeteer George Buchanan, Unknown, Cuban dancer Antonio Vizcaino, Florencio de los Santos, Andre, the late Mexican emcee Paul La Ray; in the suit, the late John Compton. Sitting on the floor: Rene de Carlo and the late Paco. Author's Collection.

claimed their tours brought Finocchio's \$75,000 annually. Regardless, it was reported that the lines were (again) around the block.

A 1989 *Chronicle* article covered the competition between Finocchio's and An Evening at La Cage, a glitzy, anachronistic female impersonation show opening in the refurbished On Broadway nightclub. The article reported that Finocchio's "grosses about \$2 million a year in its 350-seat house."⁴⁹

Finocchio's carried on, despite sporadic competition. Other than being regarded as a San Francisco institution, the differentiator was that Finocchio's continued to put on live acts with a live band with the performers still belting out their own songs. The competition lip-synced to recorded tapes of famous singers. However, Finocchio's was soon to change.

The first sign of slipping income came in 1990 with a change in policy. Per Herb Caen on April 26, 1990, "Tourist season must be nigh: Finocchio's,

the 53-yr-old B'way nightspot 'where boys will be girls' (adv't.), just upped its cover charge from \$10 to \$15, with a two-drink minimum. The old joint, which I was once able to refer to as the Italian-Swish Colony, a joke that is no longer politically correct, is now open only four nights a week – Tues., Thurs., Fri., Sat." Finocchio's had never before had a drink minimum.

The next hit came in 1992 with the opening of a new tour company dedicated to putting the excitement back in the nightclub scene. A news article read:

After years of tourists thinking that San Francisco nightlife begins and ends with Finocchio's and *Beach Blanket Babylon*, Paula Sabatelli decided to offer them an alternative. Last month, she and two partners began operating a weekend nightclub tour under the name Three Babes and a Bus that presents a



*Unknown Finocchio's performers with emcee Sophia Petrakis of Greece, who was in fact a woman, c. 1987.
Author's collection.*

much more up-to-date portrait of life after dark in the city.

With different schedules each night, the tour winds through five destinations, spending at least a half-hour at such hot spots as Holy Cow, DV8, Club O, Covered Wagon Saloon, DNA Lounge, even Oz atop the St. Francis Hotel. Each trip also stops for a free drink at the Clubhouse, the Mission District club not coincidentally owned by Sabatelli.

Finocchio's had been relegated to old-folks entertainment, and the lines were dwindling.

Sometime after 1992, Finocchio's transitioned into a lip-sync format, using recorded music and voice, though they transitioned into it, performing both live and lip-synch for a time as confirmed by Finocchio's star comedian, Holotta Tymes, who was there until the end.⁵⁰ The club eventually fired

its band and went totally lip-synched. It is unclear whether this change occurred because it was difficult to find new singing talent or because it saved money. Regardless of the reason, that change was the death knell for Finocchio's. The comics, the dancers, and, of course, the Eve-ettes stayed. Finocchio's was too clean for the hip crowd and no longer unusual enough; the word was "respectable." With less to report, press releases went into decline. Stars like Lori Shannon took their acts on the road, citing past successes at Finocchio's. There were eight drag clubs in San Francisco by 1998.⁵¹

Finocchio's kept advertising, but the paid press releases dwindled further. Articles citing Finocchio's Club also became scarce. The club was tired and down to three nights a week (Friday through Sunday) with only three shows per night – assuming there were people in attendance. Shows were often canceled.

THE FINALE

The hammer fell on November 4, 1999, when most if not all of San Francisco's local newspapers, television news programs, and radio news reported that the club would close. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, in a front page article headlined, "What a Drag: Finocchio's to Close – Cross-dressers Have Entertained at Club for 63 Years." It reported:

Faced with a big rent increase and a dwindling audience for old-style cross-dressing entertainment, the club's owner, Eve Finocchio, is calling it quits. Wherever he is, the late, legendary drag star Charles Pierce, the king of queenly impersonators, must be weeping.

"I don't want to do it, but we have no choice," said Finocchio, whose husband, Joe, created the club at 506 Broadway in North Beach.

That's where countless locals and tourists first saw men in spangled dresses and heels, singing, dancing and cracking lusty jokes.

"My landlord upped the rent from \$4,000 to \$6,000," Finocchio said, "and we have to take care of the plumbing, too. You have to collect an awful lot of money to meet the rent and pay your bills, and we can't do it. I don't feel good about it."

The club's landlord, Peter Mar, said, "She's been at \$4,000 a month for 15 years. That's 8,000 square feet. You tell me where on Broadway you can find (space) for about 75 cents a foot. I think it's a more than reasonable increase."

Mar was not wrong. That added cost was still a bargain in 1999 San Francisco; however, it hit the club at a vulnerable time. Fighting a declining



Eve Finocchiol, onstage with her granddaughter Lara Jorgensen (right), emcee Brian Keith (left) and Holatta (far left), said her goodbyes after the last show at Finocchio's. San Francisco Chronicle photo by Liz Hafalia.

audience (as well as an aging Eve Finocchio), there seemed no way to keep the club open. People like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Enrico Banducci, and Mark McLeod mourned the passing of a Broadway icon. Banducci said, "When you say Finocchio's, people think San Francisco." Mark McLeod, then co-owner of Enrico's, said, "It was clean entertainment on a street noted for the opposite. Eve said, 'I can't imagine Finocchio's not being in San Francisco, but honey, that's the way it goes.'" Finocchio had no special plans for the closing.⁵²

Finocchio's was packed during the final few weeks, but when Saturday, November 27 arrived, as promised, Eve Finocchio put on her last show. *The San Francisco Chronicle* told it best:

The show was a blast, a riot of bawdy jokes, feather boas and campy, lip-synching dance numbers. They were performed by such high-octane artists as Jealousy Jiggets (his real name), Nikki Starr (like Jealousy, a former Miss Gay San Francisco), Angel Amor and Alejandro Cruz, otherwise known as Alejandra the Puerto Rican Bombshell.

"The more you drink, the better we look," said Brian Keith, the hilarious master/mistress of ceremonies, who changed gowns more often than Barbra Streisand. "We want you to have a ball – and remember, I have two."

And so it went. The gaiety was mixed with a few tears, shed by Finocchio, her family, and several patrons who embraced her during intermission and after the final curtain."

Eve Finocchio, who's in her 80s, spent most of the evening in the back of the club, near a photo of her dandyish husband on a bicycle at Ocean Beach, wearing shades and flashing a bon vivant smile.

"I'm sad and I'm happy," said Finocchio. "I feel we've made people happy. I'm sure my husband is watching."

At 1:20 a.m., Finocchio stood onstage in her neat blue pantsuit, surrounded by her family and a bunch of big guys in dresses and wigs. "I love you all," she said, blowing kisses and wiping away tears.

Finocchio's had a great ride, and Mrs. F. likes to look forward, not back. "Tomorrow's another day, honey," she said.⁵³

The story was carried worldwide.

Still, the landlord Peter Mar was not done with Finocchio's. Concetta Finocchio Jorgensen, Eve and Joe's daughter, sent a letter to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* four months later. Mar had filed a case in small claims court against her mother for failure to remove all of the fixtures and updates related to the club that they had occupied since 1936. The building, erected in the late 1880s, was in dire need of updating, but Jorgensen thought they had done their part and the rest was up to Mar.⁵⁴

Holotta Tymes recalled the old dressing rooms. "The dressing rooms were technically in another building, through an alley way, up a flight of stairs, in what was an old Victorian apartment. Many of the rooms were turned into the dressing rooms, some divided, including what had been the kitchen at one time."⁵⁵

That point was further corroborated in a story related by David de Alba. The dressing rooms were typically cold, especially one shared by de Alba and the 300-pound Russell Reed. David placed a small space heater in their room, warming it slightly. When another performer complained, manager Maria Filippis, Eve's sister, told Reed and de Alba to remove the heater, afraid they would blow a fuse in the old wiring. She promised to resolve the issue. The next night, Eve Finocchio turned on the main heater, warming all the dressing rooms. That lasted for one night. Rene de Carlo had screamed that his "makeup would run like butter." The main heater was never turned on after that.

RECALLING A SAN FRANCISCO INSTITUTION

In the years following Finocchio's demise, the club kept its recognition as both a San Francisco institution and the standard against which future female-impersonation acts and clubs were measured. It was mourned by many. But, as with other San Francisco lost landmarks and venues, there was no way it could be revived. Still, the memories and some of the memorabilia remain. Herb Caen, writing on



Russell Reed. Inscription reads: "To Frank: To Meet! To Know! To Love! To Part! That is the story of a performers heart. Your a wonderful person Frank. I hope you have all the happiness you deserve. Always Remember, Russell Reed '51." Author's collection.

the end-of-summer nostalgia in 2005, "Summer is the Harbor Cruise boats so jam-packed they must surely capsize, Gray Line buses parked nose-to-tail outside Finocchio's, the rattle of skateboards down dangerous hills." Postcards and programs can be purchased on eBay. The 12-foot-tall sign that hung above the Finocchio's entryway is now part of the collection at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of Northern California in San Francisco.⁵⁶ Best of all, some of Finocchio's' finest, like David de Alba and Holotta Tymes, still entertain, recalling memories of those other times.

Joe and Marjorie Finocchio found a winning strategy for the club that made him the Count Di Broadway⁵⁷ and made her the power so well described by Herb Caen and Li-Kar. Their strategy included a bawdy, rollicking show that never stepped over the line of good taste; a cast of great singers, dancers, and comedians that was a mix of veterans and fresh faces; live music; continually refreshed shows; consistent advertising and publicity; respect for the cast and the audience; and always, value for the dollar. Though her style was different, Eve kept most of what Marge had started: providing topnotch singers, dancers, and comedy, as well as a fun show that kept the crowds coming.

* * * * *

DAVID DE ALBA AT FINOCCHIO'S

Finocchio's operated on Broadway for 63 years with hundreds of men gracing the stage. David de Alba represents one of the best of those, entertaining the club's audiences during the 1970s and '80s with his female impersonations and voice impressions of Judy Garland, Liza Minnelli, and others, along with his own creation, Boy-Chic. Mr. de Alba kindly shared the following anecdote from his days at the Finocchio Club:

Half an hour before the fourth and last show was to start, Mrs. Finocchio's sister Maria ran upstairs toward our dressing rooms and shouted to emcee Carroll Wallace that we had no one in the audience, and she was going to cancel the fourth show and to announce it to the cast. To Carroll's delight, since we worked very hard on the three previous shows, he blew the whistle and told us to get ready to go home early.

Meanwhile, my Finocchio's roommate, comedian Russell Reed looked at me slyly and said in a whisper, "David, don't believe a word from Carroll Wallace. Don't you dare take your makeup off. Carroll is trying to get us in trouble with the house!" The house meant Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Finocchio.

A few minutes passed by, and Maria ran upstairs again and shouted, "Carroll, three people just walked in and we have to do the last show after all!" Carroll blew the whistle again, shouted, "Showtime!" and announced the bad news to the cast who, including Carroll, had already removed their wigs and part of their stage makeup.

Meanwhile Russell said to me, "What did I tell you, David? It was all Carroll's doing." I told Russell that it was not Carroll's own doing because I heard Maria make the announcement to cancel the fourth show and why would Carroll go through all the trouble to take off his own glue-on wig and makeup? Carroll and Russell did not like each other very much, and I never did find out the reason. I heard that at one time Russell worked for Carroll in a revue that he had formed between his Finocchio's gigs.

Anyway, as the show opened with the Eve-ettes, (the chorus line named for Eve Finocchio) you could see the expressions on the faces and hear the laughter of the few people in the audience. The Eve-ettes appeared

with partial face makeup, no false eyelashes, and their street pants rolled up under their skirts. As they would do a high kick on stage, you could see men's pants instead of girlie type stage underwear. Even Carroll's own wig was not glued on and looked like it could bounce off his head at any moment.

As the show progressed and the middle and final productions came on, The Eve-ettes face makeup progressively improved between appearances, repairing it while acts like Lavern Cummings, Russell Reed and I were on. By the last entrance, all were perfectly made-up and gowned, as though nothing had happened.

From then on there was a note on the blackboard upstairs for the cast that there will always be a fourth show whether there is an audience or not. If the club was empty, it provided an opportunity for any of us singers to break in new arrangements with the band trio headed by Bill Bullard."

Mr. de Alba also opened a hair salon in the Potrero Hill District of San Francisco, gaining fame as the "Stylist to the Stars" for his work with local celebrities. The salon was featured on Bay Area television and in newspaper articles. Famed columnist Herb Caen covered a television pilot

shoot for the series *Spies* with Tony Curtis at the de Alba Salon. Mr. Curtis, a female impersonator in the movie *Some Like It Hot*, met with Mr. de Alba, discussing de Alba's career.

Mr. de Alba's career remains active, highlighted by an avid on-line fan club hosted at www.david-de-alba.com.



David de Alba.
Courtesy of the Transgender Forum.

NOTES

1. Not to be confused with Joseph A. Finocchio.
2. *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 15, 1986, 4 (Finocchio obituary).
3. *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 30, 1920, 2:8.
4. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1920, 3:1.
5. *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 1, 1925, 50:1.
6. Citywide Historic Context Statement For LQBTQ History in San Francisco (project), Donna J. Graves & Shayne E. Watson, City of San Francisco, October 2015, 60.
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THE TENDERLOIN'S FIRST BROTHELS:

223 AND 225 ELLIS¹

by Peter M. Field

PART 1

Curt Gentry's book *The Madams of San Francisco: An Irreverent History of the City by the Golden Gate*² includes, among other things, a well researched history of the principal madams and parlor houses of the Tenderloin District. Gentry traces the origins of one of the Uptown Tenderloin's most famous brothels, 225 Ellis Street, to a madam named Dolly Adams, also known as the Water Queen, in the late 1870s.³ Gentry, who was scrupulous in citing his sources and their reliability, reported that this information was from "the recollections of a local theater historian, as told to him by his father many years ago." Gentry's only other source was William Chambliss,⁴ whose limitations as an historian he gently pointed out.⁵ Still, Gentry's research represented a milestone in the Tenderloin's history, for if his sources were correct, the time period in which this brothel was said to be started made 225 Ellis Street the neighborhood's first house of prostitution. This raises a question: when and how did this residential and small business neighborhood located northwest of Market Street—still called St. Ann's Valley⁶ by old timers—change into San Francisco's middle and upper class hotel, entertainment, and vice district? And how and when did the neighborhood come to be called the Tenderloin?

The change started in 1876, when Elias J. "Lucky" Baldwin's Academy of Music on Market

Street between Stockton and Powell was rushed to completion. It was opened inside the Baldwin Hotel a year before construction of the hotel was finished.⁷ This was the neighborhood's first theater and also its first large hotel. The neighborhood's first office structure, the St. Ann's Building on the corner of Powell and Eddy,⁸ was designed and completed by David Farquharson, one of San Francisco's principal 19th century architects,⁹ the same year as the hotel. And the neighborhood's first music hall, the Tivoli Gardens, was relocated from Sutter and Stockton to the north side of Eddy Street between Mason and Taylor by the Kreling brothers in 1879.¹⁰ These businesses—located within two blocks of each other—were following the growth of Market Street as it extended to the southwest,¹¹ an expansion that was fueled by San Francisco's growing population. In turn, these upscale establishments attracted customers with means to the neighborhood and this clientele attracted other businesses to the neighborhood—for example, high class brothels called parlor houses, so named because they had parlors in which customers were introduced to the prostitutes before making their selections.¹²

Verification of Gentry's assertion that the first of the district's parlor houses opened in the late 1870s would help explain when the neighborhood began to change, as well as offering a way to estimate how long it took to earn its moniker. But how can this claim be verified, especially when



The Baldwin Hotel prior to 1898. The entrance to the Baldwin Theater was planned to be on Ellis Street but was changed to Market Street after the hotel was completed. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



The Tivoli Opera back in its early days when it was still known as the Tivoli Gardens. The Kreling brothers moved the gardens to 26 Eddy Street between Anna Lane and Mason in 1879 after a fire gutted its former location in Judge Burritt's mansion at Sutter and Stockton Streets. The new building was modeled after Burritt's old home. Two of the Kreling brothers can be seen standing on the second-story balcony at the right. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

Gentry, a thorough researcher, has already scoured the available sources? This author's method was to use more modern research tools than those available to Gentry, who did his research in the early 1960s, by doing a computer search of some of the primary sources, in particular the San Francisco City Directories¹³ and the newspapers.¹⁴ Sanborn fire insurance maps were also examined.¹⁵

The 1886, 1899, and 1905 Sanborn maps showed that 223 as well as 225 Ellis were labeled F.B. (or Female Boarding, a euphemism for a house of prostitution) in 1899 and 1905, though not in 1886. This suggests that there were two brothels, one in each house. But when did these brothels first open? The city directory search showed that 223 and 225 Ellis appeared for the first time in 1867, part of the building boom following the opening of Market Street past Third and Kearny Streets in 1860 by the construction of the Market Street Railroad.¹⁶ Each house was occupied by a single family with servants.¹⁷ The buildings' architectural footprints were nearly identical and they shared a structural wall,¹⁸ suggesting that they were built as a single project by one builder for one owner. The owner was probably Jacob Schreiber, a bedding dealer¹⁹ who also dabbled in real estate. He advertised number 223 for lease that year as a ten-room house with hot and cold water, marble mantels, chandeliers, French plate glass windows, and a bath.²⁰

The design of number 225 was doubtless similar, and Schreiber advertised it for rent in 1870,²¹ living there himself in 1871.²² 223 was a single-family house through 1882, inhabited by the superintendant of the Central Pacific Railroad's steam ferry company and, at times, the president of what was listed variously as the California or the Colorado Steam Navigation Company. Number 225 was inhabited by single families through 1871. Both addresses became rooming houses, number 223 in 1883 for just a year, and number 225 from 1872 through 1877, after which it was again occupied by single families through 1885.²³ Therefore, in spite of the claims of Gentry's sources, 225 Ellis wasn't a brothel in the 1870s.



Architect and banker David Farquharson in a photograph that appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle on July 14, 1914. Farquharson built the St. Ann's Building, the Tenderloin's first office structure, in 1877.



When the Market Street Railroad opened Market Street southwest of Third in 1860, it ran on steam dummies. These were steam engines disguised as conventional horse cars so as not to frighten horses. The engines pulled passenger cars that had open upper decks with bench seats. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Number 225 also wasn't the future Uptown Tenderloin's first brothel. That honor went to its neighbor, number 223. The city directories show listings at that address for Inez Leonard, a well known madam, starting in 1884,²⁴ three years before 225 Ellis's family listings gave way to a second brothel. Miss Leonard had operated a parlor house in Virginia City, Nevada, where she had just two prostitutes in 1880.²⁵ Their occupations were coyly listed in that year's census as dressmakers.²⁶ Miss Leonard told the census enumerator that she

was 33 years old, that she was from Maine, that her father was from England, and that her mother was from Nova Scotia. She abandoned Virginia City for San Francisco in early 1883 after the silver mines had pinched out and the big money had left the Comstock.²⁷ She quickly increased her notoriety when she went back to Virginia City in May of that year under an assumed name to testify as a respondent in the divorce trial of James and Theresa Fair.²⁸ Fair—one of the four Bonanza Kings²⁹ who made their fortunes from the



James G. Fair, one of the four Silver Kings, whose fling with Inez Leonard became one of the grounds for his divorce. From History of the Bench and Bar in California, Oscar T. Shuck, ed. Los Angeles: The Commercial Printing House, 1901.

Consolidated Virginia and California silver mines—had been trysting with Miss Leonard at the age of 52. The newspapers referred to the location of these amours as her house at the southwest corner of Dupont and Post Streets. However, this was probably one of the upstairs rooms of Marchand's, one of San Francisco's French restaurants,³⁰ the building that was actually located on that corner.³¹ In spite of the court's policy of excluding reporters, and despite Leonard's efforts to remain incognito, the divorce trial and its details were reported across the country.³²

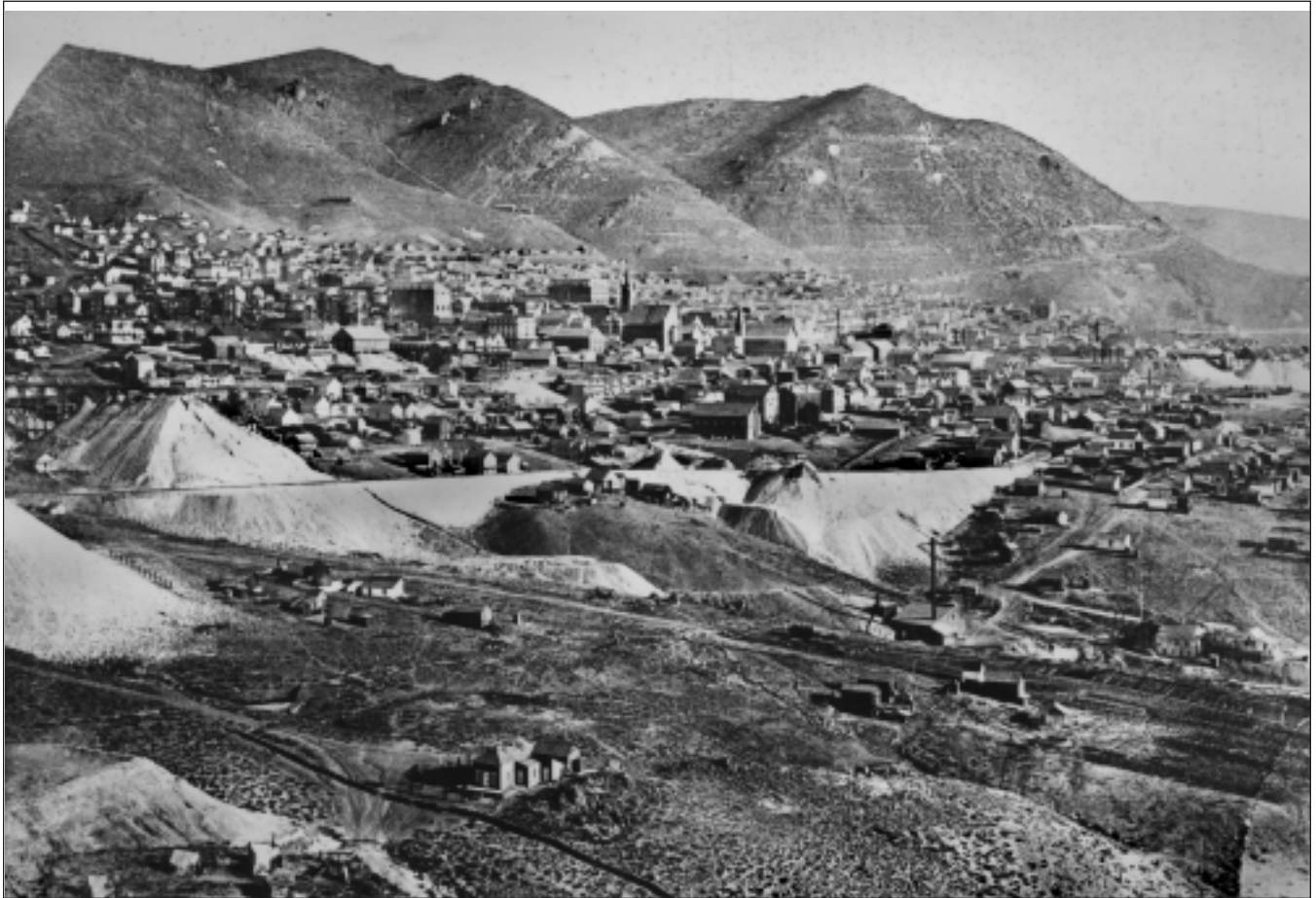
When Miss Leonard³³ opened her parlor house the following year at 223 Ellis, she brazenly advertised the establishment in the usually stodgy *Daily Alta California*. On August 1 the following advertisement appeared at the top of the Business

Personals column: "Miss Inez Leonard, formerly of Virginia City, invites the patronage of her former friends to her newly and elegantly furnished rooms . . ." ³⁴ A writer for the *Alta* committed a gaffe when he reported Mrs. William H. Moore, the wife of the president of the Central Pacific Railroad's steam navigation company and the house's former occupant, as still living at number 223. (The gaffe was worsened when the article went on to list this address as one of the locations to buy tickets from the lady managers of the six charities supported by the Authors' Carnival Association for a series of fundraising concerts held at the Mechanics Pavilion.³⁵)

In 1885 the city directory listed Miss Leonard, Miss Helen Jewett (whose listing had been carried over from the previous year), and Miss Laura

Business Personals.	
Miss Inez Leonard, formerly of Virginia City, invites the patronage of her former friends to her newly and elegantly furnished rooms, 223 Ellis street, near Taylor. Furnished rooms by the day, week or month.	
Best Garden Hose, 10 Cents, at Lane's, 505 Kearny street.	
Show Card Manufacturer—J. Daniels 508 Market st., Room 11.	
Dr. E. Mazzei, oculist, successor to Dr W. F. Smith, Phelan Building.	
Budweiser on Draught and Sold Only at the LOUVRE, Phelan's Building.	
Parisian Dye Works best in the city, 27 10th st.; offices 714 Washington and 213 Post st.	
Consult Magic Mirror—Past, Present, Future. 252½ 4th st. Ladies, 50 cents; Gents, \$1.00.	
Simkins & Felt, Magnetic Healers. Patients visited if desired. 220 Turk st., S. F., Cal.	
Lawton & Co., Real Estate and General Business Brokers. Money loaned. 11 Geary st.	
Type-Writing and Copying by Pen, Room 31 St. Ann's Building, 6 Eddy st. Elevator.	
Rheumatism cured. Consultation free. Address or call on J. H. Annon, M. D., New Atlantic Hotel, San Francisco.	
Something New: Magic Screen. Highest medals awarded at Mechanics' Fair, W. Little, Agent, 128 Geary st.	

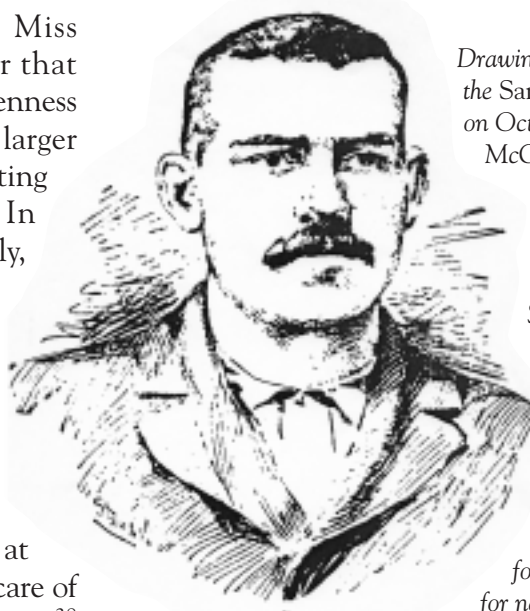
Brothel madam Inez Leonard's Daily Alta California advertisement, dated August 1, 1884, announcing the opening of her brothel at 223 Ellis.



*Virginia City in the 1870s, the decade of the Big Bonanza silver strike, when Inez Leonard conducted her business there.
Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.*

Young at number 223. In 1886 it was Miss Leonard with Mrs. Annie F. Young. After that year, only Miss Leonard was listed. Her brazenness resurfaced several times when she paid for larger listings in capital letters, specifying the renting of furnished rooms as her occupation.³⁶ In other years she was listed more conventionally, or had no listing at all.

In 1887 Miss Leonard was entangled in a scandal when 14-year-old Julia Seiler, the eldest child of German parents³⁷ who lived nearby at 202 Ellis, ran away with a 25-year-old coachman named Dennis McCarthy. McCarthy was employed by a rich politician who boarded his team and rig at the Fashion Stables, where McCarthy took care of them, next door to Miss Leonard's parlor house.³⁸



Drawing of Dennis McCarthy in the San Francisco Chronicle on October 11, 1895.

McCarthy was accused of abducting Julie Seiler to Inez Leonard's brothel, which happened to be across the street from Seiler's home. However, Seiler's later testimony showed she actually begged him to introduce her to Miss Leonard. Eight years later he was convicted of murdering the ranch foreman he was working for near Santa Rosa.

Miss Leonard was arrested after a police investigation revealed that Seiler and McCarthy had spent the night together at her brothel. Frederick C. Merker, a gambler from Sacramento, had to bail her out of jail. Further investigation and a subsequent trial also showed that Leonard introduced Seiler to a madam from San Diego, who disguised the girl's appearance by dyeing her hair and then hid her in a lodging house for several days before moving her to San Diego to work in her brothel.³⁹

In all likelihood, two things that emerged at the trial saved Miss Leonard from being convicted for procuring. The girl's testimony made it clear that instead of being an innocent or unwilling victim of a team of scheming procuresses, she had asked McCarthy to introduce her into 223 Ellis so she could get away from her family and live a "fast" life.⁴⁰ Moreover, her appearance—she looked several years older than her stated age—and her straightforward, unabashed demeanor on the witness stand made it clear that she was far more sophisticated than the average 14-year-old girl.⁴¹ In addition, she accused her Prussian father⁴² of being abusive, a common circumstance among girls who became prostitutes. Because of this, Seiler said she was afraid to return home.⁴³ But Miss Leonard had to testify a year later at the trial of the San Diego madam on a charge of abduction, where she skillfully walked a thin line between compromising herself and incriminating a fellow brothel keeper.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Mrs. Dora A. "Dolly" Ogden, another madam, opened up a brothel at 225 Ellis in 1886,⁴⁵ next door to Miss Leonard's house at number 223. Mrs. Ogden's brothel eventually became one of San Francisco's two most famous (as well as expensive) parlor houses.⁴⁶ Little is known of Mrs. Ogden's history. Her 1880 and 1900 census sheets give contradictory information about her antecedents. If her 1900 census sheet age is taken as accurate, then she was born in October of 1858, making her around 28 or 29 when she started the Ellis Street brothel. She had originally come to San Francisco in 1880⁴⁷ as Mrs. D. Ogden, where she worked as a prostitute at 11 Belden Place, one of 19th century San Francisco's notorious brothel alleys. In 1882 she



Portraits of teenage prostitute Julia Seiler and San Diego brothel madam Kate Clark as they appeared in drawings in the San Francisco Chronicle on August 8, 1888. The drawings portrayed Seiler as a demure young innocent and Clark as a large-bosomed procuress, but Seiler's testimony showed otherwise.

returned to San Francisco as Miss D. Ogden.⁴⁸

Mrs. Ogden presided at 225 Ellis until 1893 or 1894,⁴⁹ when Mrs. Nina Hayman, a madam from Seattle,⁵⁰ took over. Mrs. Ogden was apparently more circumspect than Miss Leonard or Mrs. Hayman: she was never once mentioned by name in the press during her time at 225 Ellis. She went on to open up another house at 326 Mason,⁵¹ near Geary, between 1899 and 1902.⁵²

However, Mrs. Hayman, who apparently didn't own 225 Ellis, was sued in 1894 in small claims court.⁵³ The suit, for \$65, was filed by the building's owner, who sought to recover the cost of pillowcases, towels, and similar sundries that had been unaccounted for at the time of the sale of the building (they were apparently at the laundry) to

one John Flinn.⁵⁴ Miss Leonard appeared in the papers again in 1893 when she was swindled by a tout who gave her a forged betting slip for a twenty dollar wager on a long shot. The forgery was revealed when the nag surprised everyone by coming in first at odds of 8 to 1, causing the tout to default on the winnings, which in turn prompted Miss Leonard to sue him for her \$160.⁵⁵ In 1896 Lorraine de la Montanya filed an action for divorce against her husband James in which, among other complaints, she alleged that he had been unfaithful to her numerous times in several parlor houses, including Miss Leonard's, in 1891.⁵⁶ In 1896 Mrs. Hayman was quoted at length during an investigation of a San Francisco minister's infidelities when describing the activities of a dressmaker and manicurist who she had



San Francisco Call portraits of society figures James and Lorraine De La Montanya. She divorced him for, among other things, consorting with prostitutes at Miss Leonard's parlor house.

employed while operating a house in Seattle.⁵⁷

The following month, the story came out about a hobo, one John P. Harmen, a rather homely German-American who on October 11, 1894 found \$53,000 in loot from a train robbery buried next



One of Dolly Ogden's brothel tokens. The front reads, "Dolly Ogden 326 Mason Street," while the back reads "TOURJOURS LE MEME," that is, "always the same." Courtesy of Jerry Schimmel. Photograph by Therese Van Wiele.

to a stand of willows by his campsite near Sacramento. He managed to carry away \$30,000 and transformed himself into Carl Herman or Schroeder, a well dressed gentleman who was fond of wearing diamond jewelry.⁵⁸ He then took a train to San Francisco and moved into the Golden State Hotel in the Uptown Tenderloin in May of 1895,⁵⁹ where he patronized Mrs. Hayman's brothel and several other sporting houses in the district, acquiring a reputation as a big spender. He eventually fell in love with one of the prostitutes, May Devon, and installed her in an apartment at 412 Post between Powell and Mason. He was finally caught by Wells Fargo detectives in February of 1896. They recovered just \$12,000 from Harmens, who was sentenced to three years at Folsom Prison for grand larceny.⁶⁰

In the meantime, next door at 223 Ellis, Miss Leonard was robbed in 1899 by Harry Wilson, a black man who specialized in robbing bordellos. He was admitted into her house on the pretext of being a rich cattleman from Arizona. He knocked Miss Leonard down, rifled through her bureau, and ran off with \$500 in paper currency.⁶¹ This incident seems to have hastened the 52-year-old madam's retirement, for the house is mentioned in the press as being run by Lavina V. Wettleson, also known as Olga Evans, in that same year.⁶² After 1899, Miss Leonard was no longer listed in the city directories.



A portrait of John P. Harmens that appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle on February 13, 1896.

Harmens was also known as Karl the tramp, Charley the Dutchman, and other names, after he was arrested by Wells Fargo detectives in 1896. He stumbled upon a cache of buried loot in 1894 from a railroad robbery that the thieves buried near his campsite near Sacramento the day before he found it. He proceeded to cut a swathe through the Tenderloin and quickly developed a reputation as a big spender.

Wettleson seems also to have had her share of troubles managing the brothel at 223 Ellis. For example, she sued the estate of Jessie S. Potter, a deceased heir of the Charles Lux fortune (Potter was Lux's stepson)⁶³ for \$1,210 from when he was given unlimited credit at the brothel while he was still alive.⁶⁴ The judge ordered Wettleson's attorney to submit an itemized bill, and when he produced it, "the judge remarked that there were some charges that required most delicate consideration on the part of the court." He managed to avoid ruling on the payment of the bill by noting the presence of a number of undated items, interpreting this to mean the lawyer had failed to comply with his order, in effect disallowing payment by the estate.⁶⁵

In 1898, Jessie Mellon, the "house favorite" according to Gentry, took over the brothel next

door at 225 Ellis from Mrs. Nina Hayman, the previous madam, as well as adopting her last name. From this point on the reader is referred to Gentry's excellent book for the rest of the building's history.⁶⁶

Later that year Ethel Le Roy, a prostitute who had recently moved from a Stockton Street parlor house into Jessie Hayman's brothel, was sued by the Stockton Street madam for \$600 for unpaid lodging bills.⁶⁷ The madam had Le Roy's trunks, packed with her expensive dresses, impounded by the police until the suit was settled.⁶⁸ Two months later Le Roy contracted with a collection agency to sue Conrad Hewson, a middle-aged remittance man who spent his quarterly allowance on her and then borrowed small sums of money back from her until his next check arrived. The suit was for \$650—the total amount of the loans she claimed to have made to him the previous spring or summer. The article said that Hewson lived at St. Mary's Hospital, "although not ill or disabled at present," implying that he had some sort of episodic illness, perhaps psychiatric.⁶⁹ He died two years later.⁷⁰

In 1905, another one of Hayman's girls, Alma Russell,⁷¹ as well as Hayman herself,⁷² were questioned in the matter of the San Francisco Tax Collector, an elected official who had absconded with a large amount of money from his office. The following month another one of her girls, Lillian Meredith, swore out a warrant for assault against a man named Charles "Jockey" Lew, a disbarred jockey and longtime crooked bookmaker,⁷³ who she said hit her on the face while she was entering Pratt and Tierney's Oriental Saloon on Mason Street with her pet dog.⁷⁴ The apparent cause of the assault was his attempt to collect on a \$10 debt.⁷⁵ However, the charge was called into question when Meredith failed to appear to testify. Moreover, the appearance of the alleged assailant, "Jockey" Lew, showed "a weazened (sic) and diminutive person of uncertain age . . . [with] a swollen jaw," and hinted that Meredith had actually assaulted him.⁷⁶

After Miss Leonard's departure in 1899, the parlor house next door at 223 Ellis managed to stay out of the newspapers until a 1905 article



*The St. Ann's Building on the northwest corner of Powell and Eddy Streets in 1880. The two-story structure next to it is the Carville Carriage Company factory. A corner of the Baldwin Hotel is seen just across the street.
Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

revealed that yet another madam, a woman named Roma Graham, was operating it.⁷⁷ The incident that brought this to light was the knifing of a former Olympic Club boxing instructor, James A. McGinley, at Miss Graham's. He was stabbed by William F. Hopkins, a grand-nephew of Mark Hopkins, one of the four Central Pacific Railroad barons,⁷⁸ who was the current majority owner of the St. Ann's Building on the northwest corner of Powell and Eddy Streets in the heart of the future Uptown Tenderloin. Hopkins had frequently visited the brothel over several weeks, apparently becoming infatuated with Miss Graham. At his last visit, he reportedly hit her during a jealous argument. McGinley, who was also there, intervened and prevented Hopkins from hitting her again.⁷⁹ Hopkins tried to assault McGinley, who refused to fight him on the grounds that Hopkins was a cripple.⁸⁰ McGinley then ejected him through the inner door into the vestibule, apparently locking the door after him. Hopkins hid there instead of leaving and waited for McGinley. When the latter stepped through the door ten minutes later, he was stabbed by Hopkins. McGinley managed to disarm him in spite of several wounds, and had Hopkins arrested for assault to murder.⁸¹ McGinley rebuffed a later attempt by the defendant's mother to bribe him into dropping the charges.

The case went to trial in 1906 and Hopkins was convicted by a jury of the lesser charge of simple assault. The judge, angry that the jury hadn't convicted Hopkins of assault to murder, remanded Hopkins into custody to await sentencing. Moreover, he refused a defense motion to release him on bail while the conviction was appealed, saying he wouldn't treat Hopkins differently than any other defendant of lesser means.⁸² Three days later the judge sentenced him to the maximum penalty of 90 days in jail.⁸³

Two weeks after this the judge threatened to investigate the Broadway Jail when he learned that Hopkins had been incarcerated there instead of the more customary County Jail (located far out of town, where San Francisco City College is today). It seems the judge heard that the jailers were letting him out every other day on the pretext

of visiting the dentist, for he was seen around town on the streets and in various saloons.⁸⁴ Three and a half weeks later he was pardoned by Governor Pardee during the aftermath of the earthquake and fire, presumably through the influence of his wealthy family.⁸⁵ There were no further mentions of 223 Ellis after this incident.⁸⁶

But what about Dolly Adams? If she wasn't the madam who started the parlor house at 225 Ellis, then why did Gentry's sources say that she was? The only primary source to offer a possible solution to this riddle is the city directory listings, where it was found that the original madam at 225 was Dolly Ogden. Thus, it would appear that Gentry's theater historian, as well as William Chambliss, confused one Dolly for the other. They were both well known inhabitants of the Uptown Tenderloin demimonde, and they both had the same first names.⁸⁷ However, it was Miss Adams who got all the press, even though Mrs. Ogden was in San Francisco over a much longer period of time.

PART 2

Who was Dolly Adams? She was born Ellen Loretta Callahan around 1860⁸⁸ in New York. She was the fourth of at least 10 children, all of them girls except one boy.⁸⁹ Her parents were from Ireland, and her father was a longshoreman who died when she was still young. Her mother had to go to work to support the family, so Miss Adams, who was reportedly willful to begin with, grew up with little supervision and became a wayward and independent young girl. She lost her virginity when she was 16 and became a prostitute in a New York parlor house.⁹⁰ Around two years later, the madam of this house introduced her to another madam, Mary Ellis,⁹¹ who along with Carrie Maclay (see footnote ³⁰), persuaded Miss Adams to come with them to San Francisco in 1878.⁹²

Sometime during her youth she had become a good swimmer and had developed the ability to hold her breath under water for very long periods of time.⁹³ While in San Francisco she swam at North Beach and was well known for her water



*Antique cabinet card circa, early 1880's, showing Dolly Adams "The Water Queen" of San Francisco (swimmer).
Courtesy of Google images.*

skills. Somewhere along the way, Adams developed an act in which she was known as the Water Queen. She appeared on stage in tights and dove into a glass-sided water tank to demonstrate diving and swimming techniques,⁹⁴ as well as eating food, drinking milk,⁹⁵ and smoking cigarettes under water⁹⁶—the latter feats presumably accomplished through legerdemain. A newspaper article mentioned photographs of her appearing in a mermaid costume as well as in tights, so there was apparently more than one version of her act.⁹⁷ Of course, at least some of her performances were an excuse for audiences to see the diminutive but unusually well proportioned blonde (in some accounts she had brown hair)⁹⁸ swim under water and stand around on stage in a wet, skin-tight bathing suit.

In 1879, Miss Adams became famous in San Francisco when she attended the annual fundraiser for the Policeman's Widows and Orphans Fund, called colloquially the Policeman's Ball. That year's event was special because former President Ulysses S. Grant had stopped in the city and had agreed to attend the fête, which was held at the Mechanics Pavilion at Eighth and Market Streets. He was marching at the head of the solemn processional entry of the guests of honor at the beginning of the first dance when:

"Suddenly, out of the gay throng, dashed a somewhat famous if slightly frail beauty of the period—Dolly Adams. She was attired in the conventional costume of Cupid. As well as the bow and arrow, which formed

two-thirds of that attire, she carried a lily—emblem of purity. And before the General could recover from the first shock of her greeting, she had pinned the delicate blossom to the lapel of his coat. It was said that the indomitable Grant, who had never flinched through the horror of 100 pitched battles, wilted like a wet dishcloth (sic) before this unexpected onslaught.”⁹⁹

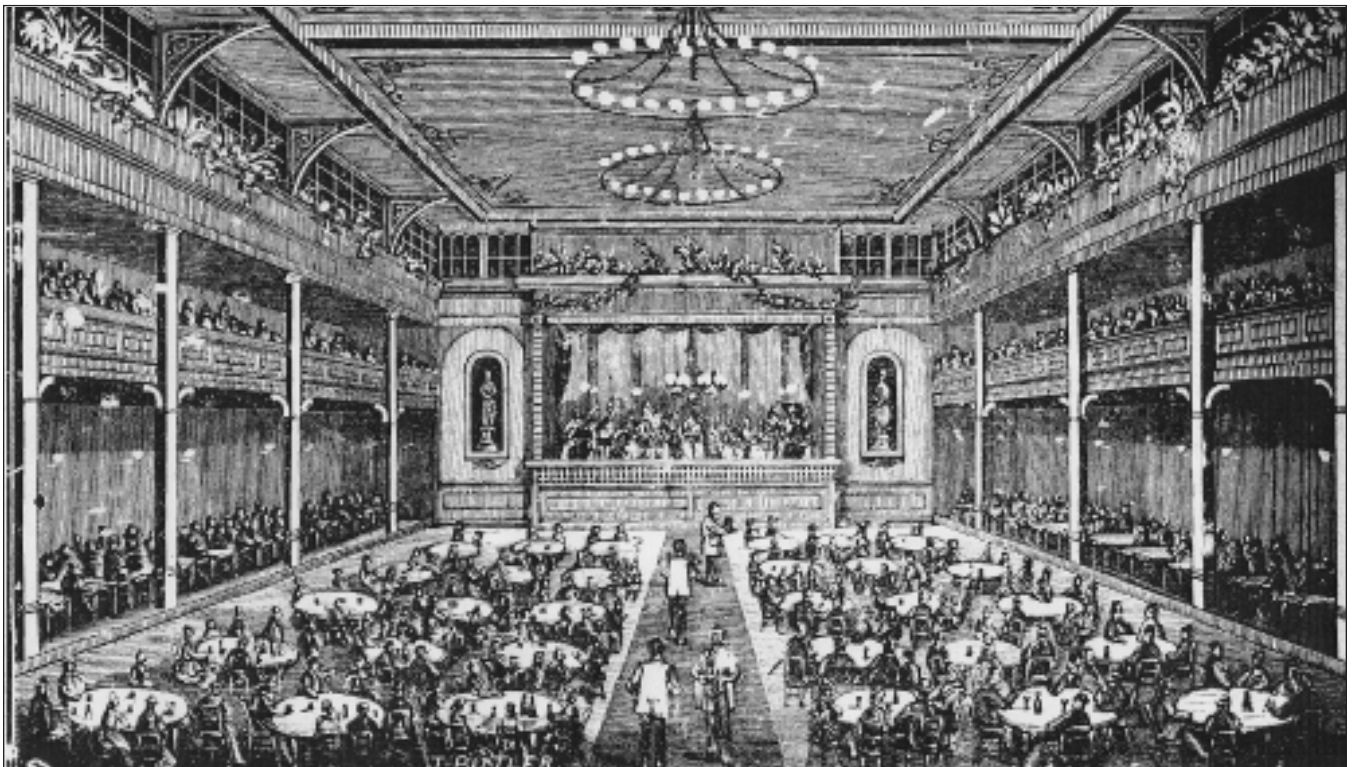
She won first prize for best costume.¹⁰⁰

Another part of her fame derived from “her laughing eye and pearly teeth, and magnificent hair of a brownish color which fell to her knees. She made many friends among the ‘bloods’ and dollars and diamonds were showered upon her.”¹⁰¹ Gentry wrote that she was introduced to San Francisco sporting life during this time, and it would seem this was done either by Ellis, who had brought her out to the West, or Maclay.¹⁰² One of them—it’s not clear which—was probably the unnamed madam who Gentry said persuaded Adams to perform an indecent exhibition in her

water tank. But the plan failed for lack of a male partner capable of performing with her under water.¹⁰³

Miss Adams seems to have first performed her Water Queen act in San Francisco, at the Bella Union and the Alhambra theaters, at least according to Gentry’s sources.¹⁰⁴ However, a search of the California Digital Newspaper Collection and California Historical Newspapers Web sites failed to find any advertisements, reviews, or other mentions of her performing in California.

When Miss Adams returned to New York, she reportedly worked at The Aquarium at Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street and at Bunnell’s Museum at Ninth Street and Broadway.¹⁰⁵ However, an exhaustive search of the hundreds of advertisements and reviews for The Aquarium in the New York newspapers failed to turn up any mentions of Dolly Adams,¹⁰⁶ though there were at least three other water queens advertised under their stage names during 1877, its second year of operation.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the performances of an



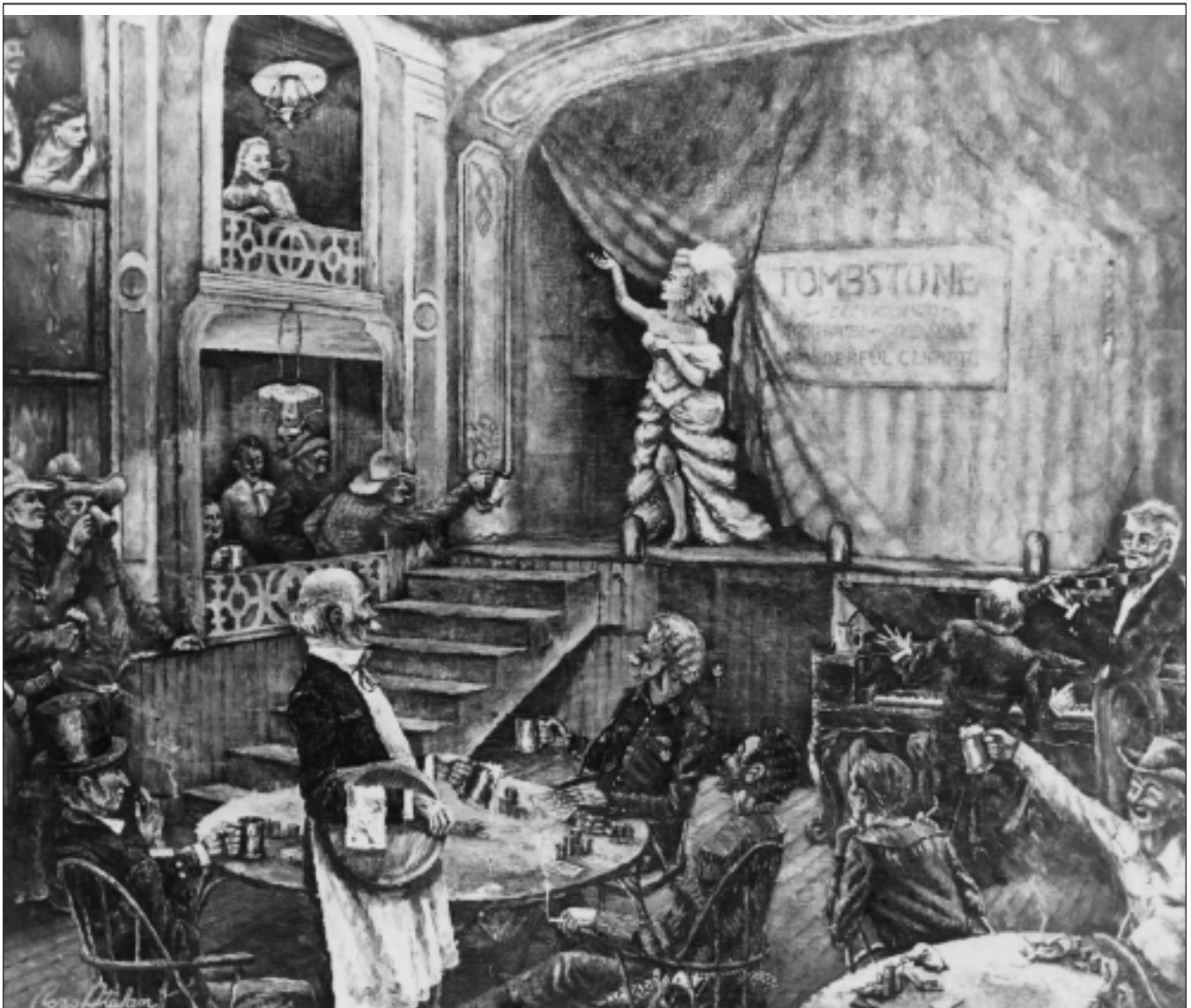
A drawing of the interior of the Tivoli Gardens beer hall shortly after it moved to Eddy Street, before it started presenting light opera. The drawing appeared in the Pacific Coast Musical Review on September 26, 1915.



The front of the Bird Cage Theater as it remains today in Tombstone, Arizona. Dolly Adams's performance reportedly precipitated a shootout between the Earp and Behan factions of the town. Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.

unidentified “Man Fish” and a “Water-Queen” were mentioned in several Aquarium advertisements and reports in 1880.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the Aquarium probably offered these performances as one of its stock attractions or as a periodic special attraction, hiring different nameless women over the years for the part, of who Miss Adams was apparently one. Either way, it didn’t seem to have been particularly salacious, at least as it was performed at The Aquarium, for columnists stated that the majority of its customers were children and that they would enjoy the show.¹⁰⁹ As for Bunnell’s Museum, there were only 22 newspaper advertisements and mentions of this venue. While they failed to mention either Miss Adams or any other Water Queens, the acts that were listed included the Tattooed Lady, the Rubber Man, the Electric Boy, and some snake charmers.¹¹⁰

While she was still living in San Francisco, Adams seems to have taken her show on the road from time to time, for there is a newspaper report of her performing one night at the famous Bird Cage Theater in Tombstone, Arizona Territory. This was during the height of the Behan–Earp feud. The Bird Cage was where everyone went at night. The Behan/cowboy/cattle rustler/Democrat faction would sit in the boxes to the right of the stage, while the Earp/gambler/stage coach robber/Republican faction would occupy the boxes on the left. If one side cheered the act, the other side booed it, and this frequently led to gunfire. The saloon was crowded the night Miss Adams performed, her reputation apparently having preceded her, and the cheering and booing were consequently lustier than usual. So was the exchange of gunfire, which left twelve men dead and seven more wounded.¹¹¹



*Drawing of a performer at the Bird Cage Theater in Tombstone, Arizona. Twelve men were reportedly killed and another seven wounded during an exchange of gunfire over the merits of Dolly Adams's performance there.
Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.*

By the 1880s Miss Adams's fame had become national. For example, a woman photographer in Boston who specialized in women's vanity portraits kept on hand a number of photographs of female celebrities, including "Mrs. Langtry and Bernhardt down to Maude Branscombe and Dolly Adams" so that her stage-struck customers could choose the look they wanted for their own portraits.¹¹² A Chicago swimming instructor cited Dolly as an example of the many actresses who are good swimmers.¹¹³ She was also cited as an example of women who have made their own

fortunes, though in Miss Adams's case the fortune was reported to be small, around \$15,000.¹¹⁴ There were also other women performing similar acts, like La Selle the Water Queen at the Standard Theater,¹¹⁵ and Lurline the Water Queen in Europe.¹¹⁶ But they weren't necessarily copying Miss Adams, for there had been other Water Queens before her.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately, Miss Adams had become addicted to opium while she resided in San Francisco,¹¹⁸ and was living a dissipated life that eventually drove off most of her friends and

forced her return to New York to see her mother, who she had been supporting.¹¹⁹ While there she invested her money, of which a considerable portion was in diamond jewelry,¹²⁰ (an apparent influence of Diamond Carrie Maclay, herself a great gem collector)¹²¹ in operating a theatrical lodging house in New York's Tenderloin District,¹²² then known as Satan's Circus,¹²³ for two years in the early 1880s. She also developed a certain notoriety. For example, Mrs. Emma Uhler, whose brother had killed Uhler's lover in New York, committed suicide in Miss Adams's lodging house, despite her attempts to get medical attention for the woman.¹²⁴

By 1886 Miss Adams had quit the boarding house business and needed medical attention herself, being desperately ill with bronchitis and pneumonia. She was cared for by her mother and eight sisters in her room at a cheap lodging house called the Oriental Hotel. These relatives also kept a close eye on Miss Adams's jewelry and other valuables to make sure that no one would get hold of them when she passed away. They kept her at the hotel in spite of, or perhaps because of, a doctor's prognosis that she would die unless she was taken to a hospital.¹²⁵ But they gave up and abandoned her when she hung on, after which she was finally admitted to a local medical institution.¹²⁶

By July 1886 she had recovered enough to track down a man who had absconded with a valuable bond belonging to her. The object of her search, Col. William H. Gilder, was about to leave on a five-year expedition to the Arctic in an effort to be the first man to find the North Pole.¹²⁷ At some point Miss Adams had obtained a thousand dollar elevated railroad bond. Just before one of her trips to San Francisco, she asked Gilder to ascertain if it was worth anything and gave it to him to hold for her while he did this.¹²⁸ He never returned it and Miss Adams couldn't find him when she came back. A year or two later she finally ran into him in Paris, where he told her he had given the bond to one of his cousins for safe keeping and promised to have him send it to her in Paris. But the bond was never sent and that was the last she saw of Gilder until 1886,



Colonel William H. Gilder, as he appeared in The Daily News on August 5, 1886. Gilder was the apparent absconder of Dolly Adams's \$1,000 elevated railroad bond.

Adams tracked him for three years in Paris and New York before Gilder finally made good on the bond through his sponsor, New York Herald publisher James Gordon Bennett.

when she found him again, this time back in New York. He now claimed that the cousin who had the bond had embezzled it, along with other funds, and had fled to Canada. By this time Miss Adams had had enough and promptly had Gilder arrested on the eve of his departure to the Arctic,¹²⁹ causing him to miss his ship¹³⁰ and forcing him to get his sponsor, James Gordon Bennet of the *New York Herald*, to make good on Miss Adams's purloined bond¹³¹ in exchange for dropping the complaint.¹³²

Miss Adams did not appear in the press again until 1888, when it was reported that she had died at age 26 on board the steamship *City of New York* from the cumulative effects of syphilis, opium addiction, and pneumonia. She had left five weeks before to tour the Orient and was sailing back to San Francisco on her way to New York because of her mother's death.¹³³ Her body was embalmed

aboard ship, and she was buried in San Francisco, though the newspapers didn't report where.¹³⁴ The Public Administrator applied to administer of what was left of her estate—a little tin trunk that contained 15 five-dollar gold coins, one English sovereign, \$10 in Hong Kong money, a Metropolitan Elevated Railway Company of New York bond worth \$1,000, six pieces of diamond jewelry, a gold watch, a chatelaine,¹³⁵ and several fans. Oddly, he was unable to identify any heirs.¹³⁶ The lawyer appointed to administer her estate used all of it to pay the expenses of administration,¹³⁷ presumably including his bill.

Thus ended the story of Dolly Adams. Her legacy was thousands of publicity photographs of herself that surfaced in strange ways after she died. In one example, a man named J. G. Crawford shot and killed his wife's ex-husband, who had been stalking and threatening her for years. At the morgue, the deceased ex-husband's pockets were found to be full of photographs of actresses and other well known women—including a photo of Dolly Adams.¹³⁸

PART III

As for the question of how the Tenderloin got its name, there are any number of theories. A sampling of them follows:

1. Neighborhood police officers were able to afford better cuts of meat for their tables by getting higher rates of pay for hazardous duty in a high crime area.¹³⁹
2. The neighborhood's geographic boundaries approximate the shape of a tenderloin steak.¹⁴⁰
3. The district was where all the restaurants or steak houses were.¹⁴¹
4. The district was where the "meat rack" was located, that is, where underage male prostitutes operated.¹⁴²

Unfortunately, these theories all share the same flaw—there is little documentary evidence to support them.

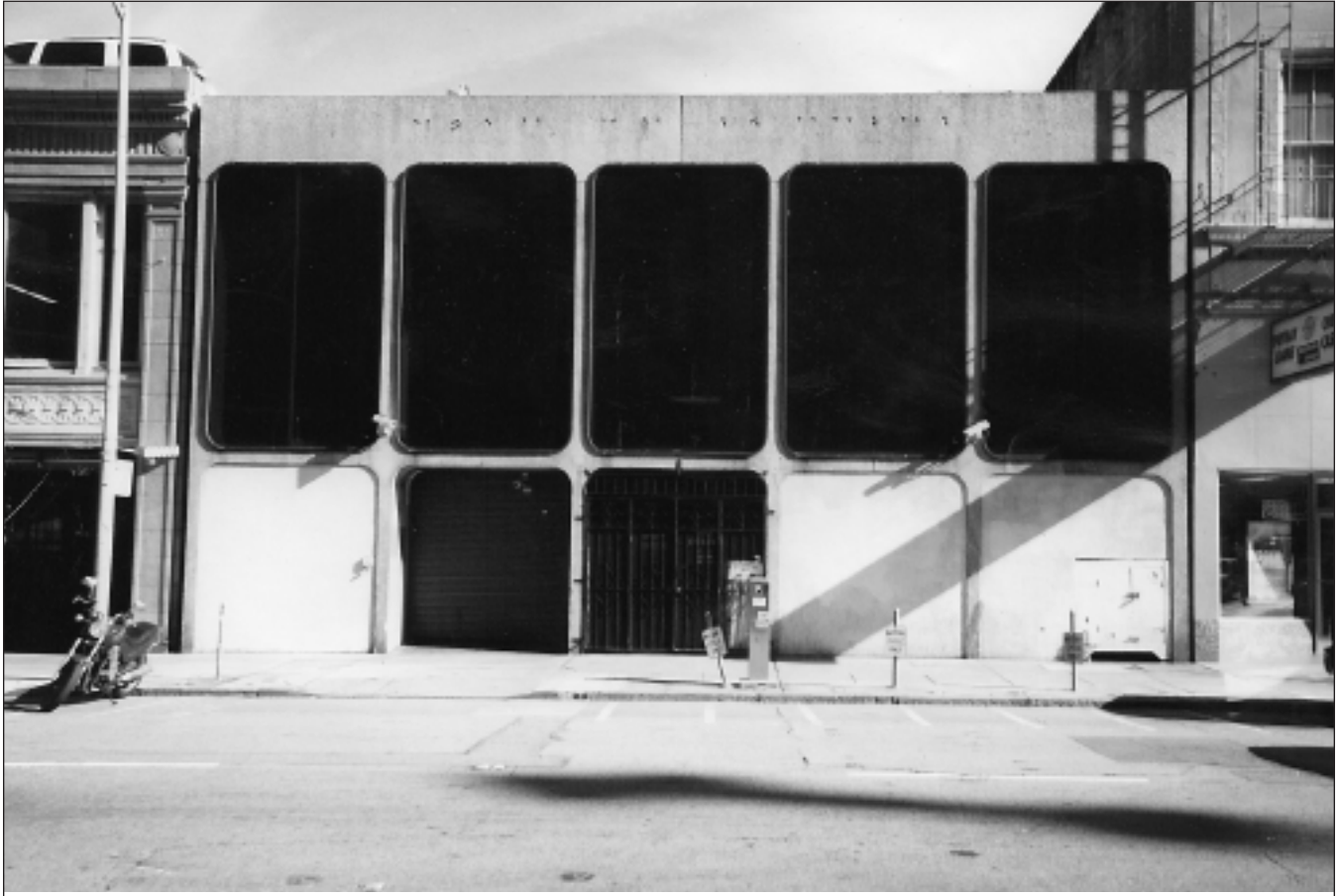
A more likely explanation for the origin of the name goes back to the days of New York's Tammany Hall. In the 1860s, a legendary police officer, Alexander "Clubber" Williams, got his start in Manhattan's Lower East Side, where he was assigned as a patrolman. Williams, a former shipyard carpenter who was a very strong man, developed a simple method of keeping the peace in his part of this famously violent neighborhood. Whenever he was assigned to a new patrol route, he spent the first two days learning who the neighborhood's toughest characters were. He then beat them into submission with his billy club, and continued almost daily in this fashion over the next four years. This earned him his sobriquet, and he seems to have relished the notoriety it brought him: he once said, "There is more law in the end of a policeman's nightstick than in a decision of the Supreme Court." As a demonstration of just how effective his method



Alexander "Clubber" Williams in the January 13, 1893 edition of *The World*. Williams rose steadily from the rank of New York patrolman to become chief of police. A possibly apocryphal story attributes the Tenderloin District's name to him. However, the name did originate in Manhattan's notorious "silk stocking" vice and entertainment district, apparently sometime around 1887, when the newspapers first started using the term.



Bird's Eye View Map (detail), 1896. Outlined in black is the area that was characterized as the "tenderloin."
Map courtesy of Nancy Pratt Melton.



*Today this rather unprepossessing building stands on the site of the former parlor houses at 223 and 225 Ellis Street. It was built in 1963 as a Bank of America branch office. It now houses several small businesses, including a surveillance equipment firm.
Courtesy of the author.*

was, he took a group of reporters for a walk around one of Manhattan's larger blocks after leaving his gold watch and chain dangling on a corner lamp post at Third Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street. When they returned to the corner, the watch and chain were still there, apparently untouched by human hands.

The newspapers protested this style of law enforcement, but it did little good. Williams, who was both Irish and connected with the Tammany political machine, received promotions with almost the same regularity as his pay envelopes. In 1876 he had made captain and was given the old Twenty-ninth Precinct, which included Satan's Circus, New York's "silk stocking" vice district, which ran from Twenty-fourth to Fortieth Streets between Fifth and Seventh Avenues,

where the most expensive parlor houses and gambling clubs operated. This new assignment was going to make Williams a rich man. Of course, he had always grafted while he was a New York cop, but the amount was never very high since neighborhoods like the Lower East Side—being poor—didn't generate nearly the amount of revenue that a rich neighborhood like Satan's Circus could provide. Williams was so grateful for the transfer that when asked how he liked his new assignment, he was alleged to have said, "I've been living on chuck steak for a long time and now I'm going to get a little of the tenderloin."¹⁴³ That brought the term into popular usage, which is probably how the press got hold of it. The name stuck. But exactly when did the term become popularized?



This three story red brick building on the southwest corner of Ellis and Mason is still standing in Tenderloin photographer Mark Ellinger's beautiful photograph. It was the Uptown Tenderloin location of two of gambling and prostitution boss Jerome Bassity's many illicit businesses. One of his brothels was run by his mistress, brothel madam Stella Hayes, on the second and third floors of this building. He opened his gambling venue, the Thirty-third District Assembly Club, in the basement after a heat wave forced the closing of the brothel. Many of these buildings from the Uptown Tenderloin days are still standing. Courtesy of Mark Ellinger.

The story of Williams's rise in the New York Police Department and the numerous investigations into his violence and grafting¹⁴⁴ are documented by many sources, though the tenderloin quote may have been apocryphal. But a search through the America's Historic Newspapers Web site showed clearly that the term *tenderloin*, as used to describe a neighborhood, appeared for the first time in a newspaper in New York in 1887¹⁴⁵ and then spread across the United States.¹⁴⁶ As newspapers in different cities started referring to their local entertainment and vice districts as tenderloins, the term became ubiquitous in the same way that words like Kleenex and Xerox morphed from upper to lower case. The term *tenderloin* had reached San Francisco by 1891.¹⁴⁷

This was when the San Francisco newspapers started referring to several different neighborhoods as tenderloins: the Barbary Coast, South of the Slot, the Chinatown alleys, the Dupont and Kearny Street corridors and their allies south of California Street, and their alleys, and the area south and southwest of Union Square.¹⁴⁸ After the 1906 earthquake and fire, the downtown retail and shopping districts moved first to Van Ness Avenue and then to the Western Addition along the Fillmore Street corridor between Hayes and California Streets until the downtown area could be rebuilt.¹⁴⁹ The vice and entertainment districts that had been located south and southwest of Union Square followed the retailers to the Fillmore Street area. Brothels, saloons, cafes, and gambling joints were opened on some of the side

streets between McAllister and Geary, causing San Francisco to start referring to this neighborhood as the Uptown Tenderloin to distinguish itself from its former downtown incarnation. The vice operators were quickly chased out of this middle class residential and shopping district and back to their former neighborhoods, but the name stuck.¹⁵⁰

Hence the Uptown Tenderloin's name came into being. The first two brothels to follow the new customer base provided by the first hotels, office building, theaters, and music halls in the future Uptown Tenderloin did so in 1884 and 1887, attracting complementary businesses (such as saloons catering to the demimonde and quasi-legal high stakes gambling clubs),¹⁵¹ as well as competing businesses (such as other parlor houses).¹⁵² Also moving into the area, for the same reason, were various classes of criminals, who preyed on each other as well as on visitors. In addition, support businesses such as hotels, lodgings, liquor stores, restaurants, and other concerns serviced the floating population of workers who followed the jobs created by these businesses.

Of course, this general trend toward vice chased many, if not most, of the neighborhood's original pre-1876 residents elsewhere. Thus, it makes sense that the area became referred to as a tenderloin (or the Tenderloin) during the 16-year period between 1876 and 1891. And so St. Ann's Valley, a hamlet near the edge of the Mission Bay marshes in the 1850s, became the Tenderloin of the 1890s and the Uptown Tenderloin of post-earthquake San Francisco. Over the decades the name kept changing—from the Uptown Tenderloin to the Tenderloin District after World War I, from the Tenderloin District to the TL in the 1980s, and from the TL to the 'Loin in the 1990s. At the time of this writing (2011) the old neighborhood is changing again, trying to transform itself from a central city slum into the legitimate entertainment, hotel, and restaurant district it used to be, when it shared the streets with parlor houses, gambling clubs, and concert saloons. Who knows what its next name will be?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter M. Field is a longtime San Francisco resident who is currently researching and writing a history of San Francisco's Tenderloin District. He also leads history walks of the Tenderloin and Richmond Districts for City Guides.

NOTES

1. This article is part of a research project by the author tracing the history of San Francisco's Tenderloin District from its origins in the 1840s to the present.
2. Curt Gentry, *The Madams of San Francisco* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964)
3. Curt Gentry, *ibid*, 166.
4. William H. Chambliss, *Chambliss' Diary; Or, Society As It Really Is*, New York, Chambliss and Company, 1895, Chapter XII.
5. Curt Gentry, *ibid*, 161–164.
6. This was the area's original name in the 1850s before development flattened out the valley that it was named after.
7. Baldwin's Academy of Music, in spite of its gorgeous architecture and interior beauty, was unsuccessful at first, primarily because the papers quickly labeled it a fire trap ("Danger Ahead," *Daily Alta California*, March 22, 1876, 1). Baldwin rushed it to completion so quickly that it opened a full year before the hotel that was supposed to house it was completed, giving its patrons the unique experience of going to a theater inside a building that was still under construction. But the hurried finish resulted in a less than optimally designed venue, so when patrons discovered for themselves that the newspaper warnings were correct, they stopped going. Baldwin immediately added the additional aisles and exits recommended by the papers, and patronage picked up again. ("The Alterations in Baldwin's Academy of Music," *Daily Alta California*, March 24, 1876, 1; "Baldwin's," *Daily Alta California*, May 29, 1876, 1.)
8. "Our Delmonico's," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 9, 1877, 8; San Francisco City Directories (San Francisco, various publishers, 1850 through 1982).
9. Anne Bloomfield, "David Farquharson: Pioneer California Architect", *California History*, 59, 1, Spring 1980, 16-33.
10. San Francisco City Directories, *ibid*.
11. "The stride of travel toward the Market-street outlet from the city has compelled the abandonment of the old and familiar locations for the new . . . theaters, hotels and places of resort have been compelled to withdraw from the old quarters and advance with the

- march of progression to the southwest.” (“Elegant Establishments,” *Daily Alta California*, September 23, 1877, 1.)
12. Nearly the same events occurred in 1963, almost a century later. That year Conrad Hilton finished building the neighborhood’s first major hotel since the Roaring Twenties, on the western half of the block bounded by Mason, Ellis, Taylor, and O’Farrell Streets, and then expanded the project to take over the rest of the block a decade later. This attracted several other large hotel projects, as well as several theaters. It also brought a new customer base to the area, triggering a flood of X rated movie theaters, bookstores, and massage parlors, as well as an exponential increase in the number of prostitutes and drug dealers working the Tenderloin. (“There’s big money made, straight and on the sly,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 20, 1977, 1.) In both centuries the principle was the same: the new legitimate businesses attracted the customers who attracted the illegitimate businesses.
 13. San Francisco City Directories as searched in sfgenealogy.com.
 14. The following websites were searched for mentions of the Ellis Street addresses, as well as for the names of the various madams and other historical figures involved with these brothels: the California Digital Newspaper Collection, Pro Quest’s *San Francisco Chronicle* data base, America’s Historical Newspapers, and California’s Historical Newspapers.
 15. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (Sanborn Map Co., 1886, 1899, and 1905), San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Center.
 16. Walter Rice, Ph. D. and Emiliano Echeverria, *When Steam Ran on The Streets of San Francisco* (Forty Fort, Pennsylvania, Harold E. Cox, 2002) 11–13).
 17. San Francisco City Directories (see note 13).
 18. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (see note 15).
 19. Schreiber was an importer of pulu, (“New Advertisements,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, November 29, 1856, 4) “a soft, elastic vegetable fiber of yellow-brown hue obtained from the young fronds of Hawaiian tree ferns, used for mattress and pillow stuffing” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1967 edition). Pulu is a Hawaiian word meaning “something wet” according to Random House’s dictionary. Schreiber was a president of the Board of St. Mark’s Church on the south side of Geary between Stockton and Powell in the 1860s before the area became a shopping district (“The German Lutheran Church,” *Evening Bulletin*, July 21, 1863, 3), a member of the Board of Managers of the Industrial School (a kind of boys reformatory) during the same decade (“Industrial School Officers,” *Evening Bulletin*, June 6, 1865, 3), a sometime candidate for Eighth Ward supervisor as a Democrat on the National Union Party ticket (“Miscellaneous,” *Evening Bulletin*, September 4, 1866, 2), and was bankrupt in 1870 (“Assignee’s Sale In Bankruptcy,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, December 12, 1870, 4). Later that decade he became involved in mining stocks (“Mining Incorporation,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, May 1, 1873, 3).
 20. “To Let,” *Daily Alta California*, February 23, 1867, 2.
 21. “Today’s Advertisements,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, April 11, 1870, 2.
 22. San Francisco City Directories (see note 13).
 23. San Francisco City Directories, *ibid*.
 24. San Francisco City Directories, *ibid*. A search of the census records showed that the downtown brothels were still located east and northeast of Union Square up to 1880, with none yet west of Stockton Street. Nor has the author’s extensive research into the Tenderloin’s history found any others in the 1870s or early 1880s that preceded either of these houses. However, see end-note 44 on next page.
 25. United States Census, 1880, as searched in Ancestry.com.
 26. *Ibid*.
 27. Oscar Lewis, *Silver Kings* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 276–277.
 28. “The Pacific Slope. A Divorce and Four millions for Mrs. Fair,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 1883, 8. Mrs. Fair was represented by Richard S. Mesick, a well known Virginia City lawyer who himself had an affair with another well-known San Francisco madam—Diamond Carrie Maclay (“The Wages Of Sin,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1893, 5). Leonard was escorted into the courtroom by Mesick’s partner, Richard V. Dey, who was the executor of Maclay’s will when she died (“Carrie Maclay’s Will,” *The Morning Call*, October 18, 1891, 10).
 29. Rand Richards, in his book *Historic Walks in San Francisco* (San Francisco, Heritage House, 2001, 266–267) characterized Fair as “self aggrandizing, with a huge ego, he thought of himself as the brains of the outfit, looked at his partners mostly with contempt, and loved gloating about how he took advantage of others in business deals . . . and had a reputation as a slumlord because he failed to pay for upkeep on any of his properties—lease agreements shifted the burden of maintenance to his tenants.”
 30. Marchand’s was next door to Diamond Carrie Maclay’s two parlor houses at 205 Post and 108 Morton Streets. The restaurant’s south side looked out over Morton Street during many of that thoroughfare’s most infamous years as one of San Francisco’s brothel alleys. The fanciest French restaurants—of which Marchand’s was a typical example—were a San Francisco institution. While respectable families could eat in their main dining rooms without compromising themselves, they were also meeting places for unrelated single men and women of a certain social class. Thus, dining in one of the screened off mezzanine rooms would jeopardize the reputation of the woman, and dining upstairs in one of the locked rooms made the matter of reputation moot.

31. San Francisco City Directories (see note 13).
32. For example, in Washington D.C. ("Senator Fair's Wife," *National Republican*, May 8, 1883, 1.)
33. Or Mrs.? Both newspaper articles and city directories were inconsistent on this point.
34. "Business Personals," *Daily Alta California*, August 1, 1884, 2.
35. "The Six Charities," *Daily Alta California*, November 23, 1884, 5.
36. In 1889, 1892, and 1896, the city directory printed her name in capital letters in large point, boldface type, a marked departure from usual parlor house practice, which normally emphasized discretion and anonymity.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (see note 15).
39. "A Girl Betrayed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 16, 1887, 6.
40. "He Was Too Kind," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 14, 1887, 6.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Seiler may have straightened out her life after this because the 1900 census showed her as living with her mother and several younger siblings in a house on Bush Street in Pacific Heights when she was 27. Two other significant pieces of information were listed on the census sheet: her father was no longer living with them, and her father and mother's last child was born the month before Julia ran away to 223 Ellis. A possible interpretation of these data is that Herr Seiler and his wife separated shortly after—or before—Julia was returned to her family.
44. "Abducted Julia," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 8, 1888, 8.
45. San Francisco city directories (see note 13); Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (see note 15). The city directories were published every April. However, five Japanese women were arrested in February of that year for running a brothel at 116 Ellis, the former home of St. Ann's Valley pioneer John O. Hanscom. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether Ogden's establishment was the neighborhood's second or third brothel. Since there is no evidence that the Japanese brothel stayed open very long, the author considers 225 Ellis to be the neighborhood's second brothel. See endnote 24 above.
46. Curt Gentry, *The Madams of San Francisco* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964) (164, 189-192).
47. "Passenger Lists," *Daily Alta California*, April 26, 1880, 4.
48. "Passenger Lists," *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, April 1, 1882, 8.
49. San Francisco city directories (see note 13).
50. "Mattie Overman In A New Light," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 1, 1896, 8.
51. United States Census, 1900; San Francisco City Directories; San Francisco phone books.
52. Ogden distributed advertising tokens from this house to likely referral sources for customers. Ogden's tokens had her name and address on one side, and the phrase *Tout Le Meme* (always the same) on the other. (Jerry F. Schimmel, "Frisco's Brothel Tokens," *Token and Medal Society Journal*, 43, 6, December 2003, 146-154.) These tokens were distributed to hack drivers, newsstand operators, bartenders, waiters, doormen, hotel clerks, house detectives, and anyone else who might send a customer. If the customer actually showed up and spent money, the referent would receive a little red envelope by messenger with a kickback—generally a gold coin representing 10% of whatever the customer spent. (see note 12, 164, 214).
53. Then called the Justice Court.
54. "Trifling Troubles," *Daily Alta California*, September 14, 1894, 7.
55. "That Revolver Race," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 19, 1893, 5.
56. "Wants To Be Free," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 21, 1893, 12.
57. "Mattie Overman in a New Light," *ibid.*
58. "The Cash Found by a Roving Tramp," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 13, 1896, 11.
59. "He Was a Modern Monte Cristo," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 14, 1896, 9.
60. "The Cash Found by a Roving Tramp" (see note 58); "The cursed good luck of Charley the Dutchman," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 10, 1949.
61. "Wilson No Strangler But A Bold Thief," *The San Francisco Call*, September 27, 1899, 7.
62. "Says Potter Was Not Ill," *San Francisco Call*, November 28, 1900, 12; "Kershow Will Case in Court," *San Francisco Call*, November 19, 1901, 5; "Miss Wettleson's Suit Dismissed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 26, 1900, 7. Miss Evans (also known as Miss Wettleson) herself started out as a prostitute at a brothel at 17 Stockton Street between Market and O'Farrell at least as far back as 1893 ("Olga Was Wicked," *The Morning Call*, May 25, 1893, 10).
63. "Gets a Million," *The Evening News*, December 23, 1897, 2.
64. Up to the beginning of WW I, newspapers reported a number of incidents in which rich parlor house patrons—who were routinely given credit at these establishments—died while still owing money to the brothels, forcing the madams to sue their estates in order to collect.
65. "Jesse Potter's Fun Was of the Expensive Kind," *San Francisco Call*, May 5, 1900, 9.

66. Curt Gentry, (see note 2), 183–208 & 213–214.
67. There was an earlier prostitute, also named Ethel Leroy, who was killed in 1894 by a jealous lover. Her real name was Effie King, hence the punning alias (“A Deed Of Blood,” *The Morning Call*, August 8, 1894, 10).
68. But Le Roy’s attorney managed to get her trunks returned through a court clerk’s error (“Trouble Over Trunks and a Clerk’s Mistake,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 22, 1900, 14).
69. “Sues Former Lover to Recover a Loan,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 16, 1900, 9.
70. “Deaths,” *The San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1902, 11.
71. “Jury Probes Tax Office Methods,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 11, 1905, 16.
72. “Believe Money Was Hidden Here,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 19, 1905, 16.
73. “Better Racing is in Prospect,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 2, 1896, 4; “Semper Lex Wins in the Handicap,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1896, 34.
74. “Strikes Woman on Face,” *The San Francisco Call*, December 30, 1905, 5.
75. “Tout Uses Force to Collect from Woman,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 30, 1905, 5.
76. *The San Francisco Call*, December 31, 1905, 35.
77. “Capitalist Jailed for Wielding Knife,” *The San Francisco Call*, July 18th, 1905, 14.
78. “The Eastern Shore,” *Daily Alta California*, March 2, 1888, 8.
79. Hopkins had a history of impulsive and conflicted relationships with women. He fell in love with a nurse of an apparently different social class who was caring for the wife of the owner of the hotel that Hopkins was staying in during a visit to Highland Springs in 1899, The married her a month later, taking up residence with her at the springs. But he seems to have been a bit of a philanthropist (“He Dined with the Servants,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 9, 1901, 16). They went through several years of on and off divorce proceedings (“Hopkins Scores the First Point,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 28, 1901, 7; “Says His Wife Harasses Him,” *San Francisco Call*, February 22, 1902, 7; “Betrothals Are Abroad in the Air,” *San Francisco Call*, May 23, 1904, 5) while Hopkins tried to hide his wealth by transferring it to his sister (“Real Estate Transactions,” *San Francisco Call*, January 11, 1901, 11; “Mrs. Hopkins’ Suit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 1, 1901, 14) and to his investment company (“Real Estate Transactions,” *San Francisco Call*, June 27, 1901, 11; “Hopkins Divorce Case,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 1901, 10).
80. The newspapers didn’t explain what this meant. However, during divorce proceedings initiated by his wife, Hopkins was reported to have responded in part by saying, “that he being crippled and lame, needed attention from the servants” (“He Dined With The Servants,” *ibid.* While there was a William Hopkins who lost two of the fingers of his left hand when he was ten years old in 1869 (“Local Matters,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, July 6, 1869, 3; “Accident to a Boy,” *Daily Alta California*, July 4, 1869, 1), this was a different person than William F. Hopkins, who wasn’t ten years old until 1888 (*Daily Alta California*, March 2, 1888, 8).
81. McGinley also seems to have been an Uptown Tenderloin habitué. He brought charges against a police officer two years later for assaulting him inside a saloon at the southeast corner of Golden Gate and Hyde (“Says Patrolman Assaulted Him,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 16, 1908, 52).
82. “Jury Finds William Hopkins Guilty of Simple Assault,” *San Francisco Call*, March 15, 1906, 4.
83. “Wealthy Youth Sent to Jail,” *San Francisco Call*, March 18, 1906, 34.
84. “Favors Shown Rich Prisoner,” *San Francisco Call*, April 1, 1906, 45.
85. “Governor Grants Reprieve,” *Los Angeles Herald*, April 27, 1906, 2.
86. 223 Ellis madam Roma Graham went on to open another brothel in the Fillmore District after the 1906 earthquake and fire (“Mooney Blames Police Judges,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 14, 1907, B33) until she was chased back into the Tenderloin and reopened at 162-164 Turk (*San Francisco Chronicle*, September 20, 1908, reprinted in “The Wayback Machine,” in *Datebook, San Francisco Chronicle*, September 21, 2008).
87. Thus, Gentry’s assertion that the madam under whose sway Adams often found herself—presumably Carrie Maclay—arranged trysts for her in French restaurants with wealthy admirers, makes more sense when she is viewed as a courtesan instead of a madam. Another assertion of Gentry’s, that Adams kept the richest customers to herself, may have confused Adams with Maclay or Leonard. These latter two women did indeed keep at least some of their richest customers to themselves. In Maclay’s case this was Judge Richard Mesick. “The Wages of Sin,” (see note 13). In Leonard’s case this was James G. Fair. “The Pacific Slope: A Divorce and Four Millions for Mrs. Fair” (see note 28).
88. United States Census, *ibid.*; “Dolly Adams Found Dying,” *The Sun*, April 3, 1886, 5.
89. United States Census (see note 25); “Dolly Adams Found Dying,” *ibid.*

90. "The 'Water Queen'", *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 28, 1888, 8. She was listed as Dolly Adams, instead of Ellen Callahan, on the passenger list of the train she took to San Francisco two years later, ("Overland Passengers," and since this was before she developed her stage act, it is inferred that Dolly Adams was her house name when she was a prostitute.
91. "Morton Street: The Real Story," Peter M. Field, MS.
92. *Ibid.* The article says this was in 1877, but this is apparently incorrect as the first mention of her coming to San Francisco with Mary Ellis is in 1878 ("Overland Passengers," *ibid.*). She made the same trip again with Miss Ellis the following year ("Overland Travel," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 22, 1879, 3).
93. Gentry (see note 2); "The Water Queen's Story," *The Sun*, March 20, 1881, 3.
94. "Death of Dolly Adams," *The Morning Call*, January 28, 1888, 7.
95. "Colonel Gilder Arrested," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1886, 1.
96. "Dolly Adams Found Dying" (see note 85).
97. *Ibid.*
98. "Feminine Corsages," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, May 8, 1886, 11. Or was she a brunette? ("The 'Water Queen'" see note 94).
99. "San Francisco's Thoroughfares," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 8, 1920, E6.
100. "The 'Water Queen'" (see note 94).
101. "The 'Water Queen'," *ibid.*
102. It may well have been Maclay. She was an opium addict, and Gentry writes that the madam who introduced her into San Francisco sporting circles is also the one who introduced her to opium, on which Adams also became dependent (Gentry see note 2).
103. (See note 2).
104. See note 2).
105. "Dolly Adams Found Dying," (see note 94).
106. This was done by an online search through the America's Historical Newspapers website.
107. "Amusements," February 13, 1877, 3; "Amusements," *New-York Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1877, 3; "Amusements," *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 27, 1877, 3.
108. "Tom Thumb at the Aquarium," *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1880, 8; "Music And The Drama," *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 23, 1880, 4; "The Aquarium," *New-York Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1880, 4. The Aquarium opened in 1876 and closed in 1881 ("Amusements," *New-York Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1876, 7; "Home News," *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 28, 1881, 8). Her dates there were mostly likely sometime during its last two years, given that her first performances were in San Francisco and that there is no evidence that she was in San Francisco before 1878.
109. *Ibid.*
110. "Amusements," *The Sun*, April 2, 1882, 7
111. "A Tragic Tale of Tombstone," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 20, 1888, 3.
112. "Bazarre (*sic*) Boston Beauties," *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 8, 1883, 2.
113. "How the Girls Swim," *National Republican*, July 20, 1883, 7.
114. "Queens of the Ranch," *Daily Alta California*, June 17, 1887, 6.
115. "Standard Theater," *Daily Alta California*, January 1, 1884, 8.
116. "Notes," *Daily Alta California*, December 23, 1886, 8.
117. Ads show Lurline the Water Queen performing at the Olympic Theater at 624 Broadway when Dolly would have been only 14 or 15 years old ("Amusements," *New-York Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1875, 3).
118. "Sentence of Opium Smokers," *Evening Bulletin*, March 27, 1882, 2.
119. "The 'Water Queen'" (see note 94).
120. *ibid.*
121. "The Wages Of Sin" (see note 28).
122. "By Poison in Poverty," *The Sun*, February 15, 1884, 1
123. Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York* (New York, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), 161-162; Luc Sante, *Low Life* (New York, Vintage Books, 1991) 113; Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995), 1161.
124. "By Poison in Poverty" (see note 122).
125. "Dolly Adams Found Dying" (see note 88).
126. "No Hope For Dolly Adams," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 16, 1886, 3; "Nearing the End," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, April 15, 1886, 3.
127. He had made two previous Arctic expeditions ("The North Pole," *The Daily News*, August 5, 1886, 3)
128. This is born out by a newspaper item listing Miss Adams as a train passenger on her way to San Francisco shortly after the date she said she gave the certificate to Gilder. (*Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, February 24, 1883, 4.
129. "Going to the Pole on Bail," *The Sun*, July 14, 1886, 1.
130. "Colonel Gilder Gets Left," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 15, 1886, 8.
131. "The North Pole Expedition," *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, July 20, 1886, 1.

132. "Col. Gilder May Go North After All," *The Sun*, August 12, 1886, 4.
133. She may have stopped by to see her old friend Diamond Carrie Maclay at Maclay's parlor house at 205 Post. As ill as she apparently was, one wonders if this trip may have been in the nature of a final journey. Another hypothesis is that she went to China to seek a cure for her opium addiction. Or perhaps she went to seek a more stable opium supply.
134. "Burial Of Dolly Adams," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 11, 1888, 8. The location of her body is still unknown.
135. A clasp or chain worn at the waist for holding keys.
136. "The Probate Court," *Evening Bulletin*, February 13, 1886, 3; "The Probate Court," *Evening Bulletin*, February 15, 1886, 3.
137. "The 'Water Queen's' Estate," *Daily Alta California*, August 14, 1888, 1; "Dolly Adams' Estate," *Evening Bulletin*, August 14, 1888, 1.
138. "A Bullet Ends It," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 3, 1888, 8.
139. Louis K. Lowenstein, *Streets of San Francisco* (Berkeley, Wilderness Press, 1996), 118.
140. Taken from the author's notes of conversations with participants in his historic walking tours of the Tenderloin District for San Francisco's City Guides.
141. *ibid.*
142. *ibid.*
143. Luc Sante, 17 and 373; Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York*, 161-162, 217-219, and 230-232.
144. During one investigation he was asked how he could afford a country estate on a policeman's salary. He answered that he had made some successful real estate investments in Japan, where no one was likely to go to verify his claim.
145. "At Republican Headquarters," *The Evening World*, November 8, 1887, 1.
146. The telegraph had been around for more than four decades by then.
147. "Runyon's Diamond," *Daily Morning Call*, February 26, 1891, 6. A search of the California Digital Newspaper Collection, California Historical Newspapers, and the America's Historical Newspapers websites, as well as ProQuest's *San Francisco Chronicle* database in the San Francisco Public Library, showed that this is the earliest use of the term *tenderloin* to be used by a San Francisco newspaper to describe San Francisco's vice districts. The term was used frequently after this.
148. The California Digital Newspaper Collection et al; *ibid.*
149. *Ibid*; "Gives Bad Checks to Saloon Men," *San Francisco Call*, January 30, 1907, 16.
150. Before the 1906 earthquake and fire, it wasn't always clear which neighborhoods the newspapers were referring to when they wrote about the tenderloins. The term *tenderloin*, when used in the lower case, could mean any of several disreputable areas where prostitution, gambling, and crime were known to flourish. Or, the terms *tenderloin* or *Tenderloin* could refer to all these neighborhoods together. While the origin of the term Uptown Tenderloin is obscure, one wonders if some enterprising early 20th-century madam, gambling czar, or cafe owner came up with the name as a way to set this particular tenderloin apart from the others.
151. All of which started showing up in the district during the last half of the 1880s. See San Francisco City Directories.
152. San Francisco City Directories. (see note 13).