

Fracchia Prize Winners 2019



ART ACTIVISM:

San Francisco's History of Counterculture and Its Impact on the Mission District

by Sofia Herron Geller

To quote the 4 Non Blondes, a San Francisco-originated, all-women rock group:
*"I realized quickly when I knew I should
That the world was made up of this brotherhood of man."*

My family's third-floor flat rises far above the traffic and shouts of 16th Street, on the northwestern edge of the Mission District. Over the years, I've seen how brotherhood, and sisterhood, truly is central to my neighborhood. In a community of such diverse heritages, backgrounds, and experiences, a sense of shared purpose and values ties us together. For those who remember the Hippies, celebrate their Aztec heritage, busk at BART, play the cajon and steel drums, and paint murals, unity comes from art. Their children, including myself, have grown up with this unity and appreciation for diversity. The distinctive arts culture of the inner Mission is rooted in San Francisco's history of counterculture movements, as local poets, musicians, and muralists continue to express dissent from mainstream society and politics, and advocate for liberal change.

San Francisco's counterculture first began in the late 1800s, with the emergence of the bohemian literary movement. With the rise of industrialization in eastern and midwestern cities, a new materialist culture developed, bringing

corruption and a powerful federal government along with it. Many artists, especially writers, were among the first to criticize American society's increasing emphasis on wealth and status, and instead chose to focus on the purposes of human existence and relationships. Many of these artists were drawn to the West, where a whole new civilization was being formed, one with greater personal freedom for women and more ethnic diversity.



*Members of an early labor union, these waitresses congregated at Mission Dolores.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*



*The Roxie Theatre, located at 16th and Mission Streets, has shown independent films since the 1970s.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

With tens of thousands of immigrants and white Americans moving to the West Coast, San Francisco developed as a major hub for culture and the arts, literary and otherwise.¹ In San Francisco, communities of free spirits, with antigovernment and anti-materialist belief systems, or “bohemians,” began to form, including groups such as the Bohemian Club. It was during this period that the northern Mission neighborhood blocks around my apartment at “Sixteenth Street and upper Valencia Street developed a bohemian flavor, with cafes, art houses, independent theaters, and bookstores.”² These bohemian meeting places were prototypes for some of today’s beloved institutions on 16th Street,

including the Roxie Theater and Manny’s Café, where locals meet to explore inequalities and relevant political movements. Many authors frequented these meeting places, and used fictionalized works to question society and satirize American involvement in imperialistic wars. Authors such as Jack London and Mark Twain wrote of a different America than the traditional American writers back East, inspired by a freer life out West. Twain himself is quoted as saying, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect,” which accurately sums up the disillusionment that these late-19th century thinkers felt toward the increasingly industrialized and imperialistic United States.

Practices that developed in the 19th-century bohemian organizations, such as examining mainstream culture, discussing deeper meanings about humanity, and expressing these meanings through art, reemerged in the 1950s. Continuing the legacy of Twain and his contemporaries, artists of the Beat Generation promoted freedom from what they saw as a flawed American society, through their visual art and poetry. The San Francisco Beatniks, including writers Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, rejected the materialism, conservative views, and conformity of post-World War II America. Like the “bohemians” before them, the Beatniks also established organizations and locations, such as City Lights Bookstore in North Beach, where they could discuss and debate societal issues.

Throughout the 60s and 70s, San Francisco’s counterculture evolved, as free speech demonstrations and Beatnik disillusionment were replaced by protests against the Vietnam War and conservatism. These protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations inspired a mass-migration to San Francisco from around the U.S., resulting in the Hippie Era. Culminating in the 1967 Summer of Love in Golden Gate Park, more than 100,000 young Hippies flooded into San Francisco. Like the bohemians of the previous century, the Hippies “did not agree with most of the ideas of mainstream society, and through their writing, music, and clothes, expressed their new ideas.”³ Art and music were central to the spread of Hippie ideas, and musicians from Jerry Garcia to Janis Joplin wrote hit songs with lyrics promoting the



*A small child dances at a drum circle on Golden Gate Park's Hippie Hill.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

free love and anti-war ideals of the Summer of Love. Today, these ideas have “evolved into ‘San Francisco values’—left-wing or rigidly liberal politics, social tolerance, gender and sexual freedom, a shared sense of community, concern about the planet’s inherent fragility, and an embrace of change.”⁴

The Hippies, Beatniks, and bohemians were centered in different locations of San Francisco, but their ideas are reflected in the Mission today, in art forms from drum circles in Dolores Park to bandas de samba to bright, beautiful murals. These creative outlets all serve

to bind the community together, and can also be used to make political statements. From Clarion Alley to the Women’s Building, the “Mission tradition of public murals has expanded from individual oases of political art in the urban landscape, predominantly identified with Latino culture, to rivers of vibrant and powerful expressions of all kinds.”⁵

I live in the Mission, and these accessible and bold works of art remind me to be active in my community, to volunteer to help others, to learn about current events, and to attend public hearings and demonstrations that tackle “everything from ongoing free speech issues to environmental activism, workers’ rights, civil rights, the student loan crisis, and America’s growing income gap.”⁶ We’ve learned from the past that unity is strength, and only by taking action together can we come up with solutions.

In particular, Mona Caron’s WEEDS series (mural project) exemplifies the use of art as activism in the Mission. Throughout my life, I’d always noticed a mural of a biker at Ocean Beach, visible



One of Mona Caron’s WEED murals on Church Street. Her work is very colorful. To see her work, visit MonaCaron.com. Image used by permission of Mona Caron.

just when the J train emerges above ground, at Church and Duboce Streets. The entire back wall of Safeway portrays scenes of San Francisco and Critical Mass, and also numerous native poppies and lizards. A few weeks ago, I read an interview—in the print *SF Chronicle* that my parents still insist on getting—of the artist Mona Caron. Although I’d never heard of her before, I learned that Mona has designed and painted not only the Duboce bikeway mural, but also many of the other large, beautiful murals that I pass every day. Intrigued, I did some more research and discovered her global Weeds Project, “a series of paintings of urban weeds, created as a tribute to the resilience of all those beings who no one made room for, were not part of the plan, and yet keep coming back, pushing through and rising up.”⁷

The resilience and importance of nature that Caron advocates for in her murals of weeds, are realized in the Dearborn Community Garden. Wedged between 17th and 18th Streets on a little alley across from the Women’s Building, the garden used to be



Winter at the Dearborn Garden. Photo taken by author.

a parking lot for employees of a PepsiCo factory, before the factory closed in 1991. The plot of land was sold to “the City and County of San Francisco, which subsequently built a police station that stands there today. At the same time, PepsiCo donated the land that held its parking lot to the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG).”⁸ In 2001, the young Dearborn Garden faced having its land seized by the City, for various illegalities. In contrast with the large, multinational Pepsi Corporation,

the small, independent Dearborn Garden wasn’t generating revenue for the city, and therefore was “not part of the plan.” But SLUG stood up. That is to say, when the deed-less land donation to SLUG was challenged by the City, a handful of motivated community gardeners resisted the attempts, and decided to officially organize. They elected a board, set up dues for members of the garden, and began to pay taxes on their use of the land.

Today, Dearborn gardeners, including my family, have the opportunity to cultivate crops in the middle of urban San Francisco. Dearborn Garden was always a fun place for me to climb trees as a kid. I realize now that the garden also taught me to appreciate where our food comes from and to take time to be in nature whenever possible. In the garden, plots feature a variety of vegetables and flowers, and are recognizable by unique birdbaths, tall sunflowers, and blossoming lemon trees. But despite small variations, there is a communal element that

makes Dearborn Garden a microcosm of the Mission. The bi-annual garden meetings are led by a mixture of original and newer members, and feature the most direct democracy I’ve ever seen, with all members voicing suggestions and concerns for the garden, and all members voting on the decisions. The meetings, which always culminate in a liberal or pro-union parody of some popular song, demonstrate a uniquely San Franciscan mindset, based on equality, environmental sustainability, and community.



In the Mission District, the legacy of love is visible even on doors. Photo taken by the author.

Many of these “Hippie” ideals originated with long-time garden members who have lived in the Mission for decades. I’ve tasted the kale quiches, seen the photos of communes, and heard the ’60s protest songs enough to understand the strong influence of San Franciscan counterculture on many residents of the Mission. These family members, friends, and neighbors have become pillars of our community, loud voices calling for equality for underrepresented women, immigrants, homeless, LGBTQ people, and everyone in between.

Literary geniuses of the bohemian crowd, contemporary poets of the Beat Generation, musical groundbreakers of the Hippie era, and spray-paint wielding muralists today have all taught us the importance of activism, togetherness, and creativity.

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sofia Herron Geller is senior at Lowell High School and is excited to graduate soon. She plans to study sociology and environmental science at UC Davis next year. Her hobbies include listening to and playing music, reading, filmmaking, and spending time in nature. She thanks the San Francisco Historical Society and Mayor Breed for this opportunity to be published!

NOTES

1. United States Congress, National Park Service, *City within a City: Historic Context Statement for San Francisco’s Mission District*. City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, Nov. 2007: ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1054/files/mission_district_nov07.pdf.
2. Sydney Cespedes et al., “Community Organizing and Resistance in SF’s Mission District,” *Institute of Urban and Regional Development, Center for Community Innovation*, University of California Berkeley, June 2015.
3. Courtney Hopfe and Leslie Kogan, “Bohemianism and Counter-Culture: The Need to Rebel.” *Les Miz and Les Media*, Mount Holyoke College, Feb. 2001: www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255-s01/boheme/hippies.htm.
4. Judith Miller and *City Journal*, “Bohemia’s Strange Trip,” *City Journal*, Sept. 18, 2017: www.city-journal.org/html/bohemia-strange-trip-15335.html.
5. Cespedes et al., “Community Organizing.”
6. Robert Hurwitt, “Free Speech Movement at UC Sparked Change across U.S. Beyond,” SFGate, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 3, 2014: www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Free-Speech-Movement-at-UC-sparked-change-across-5769930.php#photo-6882781.
7. Mona Caron, “Weeds Series”: www.monacaron.com/weeds.
8. Tam Tran, “Dearborn Garden” *Guidelines* newsletter for SF City Guides and sponsors, San Francisco City Guides: www.sfcityguides.org/public_guidelines.html?article=1055&submitted=TRUE&srch_text=&submitted2=&topic=Neighborhoods.

FRACCHIA PRIZE SECOND PLACE WINNER

More than 25 students submitted essays. Below is the essay by the second-place winner.

Living on the Edge

By Allison Dummel

When I was in third grade, my parents sold our condominium in the Western Addition. During the many Sunday open houses before it sold, my aunt would take my three siblings and me to Royal Ground Coffee, a coffee shop and laundromat on the corner of Fillmore and California Streets. All four of my siblings and I loved the place. However, by the time we moved to just up the street from Fillmore and California, Royal Ground Coffee had closed and been replaced with rag & bone, an upscale clothing store that sells t-shirts for \$250 and jackets for upwards of \$1,000.

Over the years we've rented our new house, I've seen the rest of Fillmore Street go through a similar change. Expensive shops and hipster eateries have replaced mom-and-pop stores. Back in third grade I moved only three blocks away, but that was enough to enter an entirely different neighborhood. The Western Addition has a grimy, cracked-sidewalk feel to it. Lower Pacific Heights (often called "Lower Pac Heights"), where I live now, is full of upper-middle-class hipsters and public parks without homeless people in them. The difference in atmosphere is incredible. When I used to practice soccer at Kimbell Playground, my dad would warn me about "dangerous" people, and when the sky darkened I would look at the street outside the fenced-off field and shiver without even realizing it. I had no such qualms, however, about walking down to Mollie Stone's Market at 9 p.m. for a gallon of milk, and neither did my dad. Before I had even known the neighborhoods had names, I knew to associate the Western Addition with danger and Lower Pacific Heights with relative safety.

Since my childhood, I have developed a more nuanced view of both places. I knew that the distinctions weren't as cut and dry as my parents had made them out to be. However, what I didn't know until a few months ago was how closely intertwined

the Western Addition and the Lower Pacific Heights actually are. In fact, Lower Pacific Heights actually used to be part of the Western Addition.¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Western Addition was a large, sprawling neighborhood full of middle- and upper-middle class people, many of them native-born children of immigrants. After the historic 1906 fire, the



In 1960, the Fillmore-Geary intersection was demolished to begin work on the new Geary Expressway as part of the redevelopment of the Western Addition. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

neighborhood became much more densely populated, as remaining houses were split up into rentable rooms and apartments. The community experienced influxes of several ethnic groups over the first half of the twentieth century. Japanese immigrants and their native-born children took up residence in the neighborhood, only to be forced into internment camps in the early 1940s during World War II. This left a significant number of vacant houses. Many African Americans, who had jobs at the shipyard but were overcrowded in neighborhoods such as

Hunters Point, moved into these houses. Within a year, the area was predominately Black.

During the next fifteen years, part of the Western Addition called the Fillmore became a hub for African American culture, helped along by its huge jazz scene. Clubs playing jazz, R&B, and blues music populated the area. This particular piece of history still has echoes in present day: every year my siblings and I go to the Fillmore Jazz Festival. Ever since I can remember, I spend at least one day each summer looking through handmade craft vendors and enjoying delicious food with live jazz music as my soundtrack.

After World War II ended, half of the original Japanese American population decided to resettle in San Francisco (many feared discrimination and decided to move to other areas). Despite these decreased numbers the Western Addition soon became populated with many Japanese American families.



The Clay Theatre on Fillmore near Clay was built in 1910 and is the only building on its block that has remained ungentrified. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Japantown existed adjacent to the Fillmore, and the two communities continued to thrive for years.

Japantown is a big piece of my childhood. Before they got married, my parents had a ritual Friday night date at a sushi restaurant, a place they frequented so often that the owners gave them custom pairs of chopsticks. We would go to Benihana for birthdays and play in the Peace Plaza; I have a distinct memory of looking up from the bottom of the Peace Pagoda and imagining I could climb up to its top. In middle school, my friends and I started seeing movies at the Kabuki Theater (before it was bought by AMC) and taking photo booth pictures at Pica Pica inside the Japantown Mall. I bought my friends Pokémon stickers or anime posters, and was always sneaking into Daiso to buy some sort of new-fangled snack for

myself. My parents would see me trot home and pretend not to notice my bulging pockets, either because they wanted me to have a little fun, or because I did it so often that they didn't try to stop me.

While the United States was celebrating the end of World War II, San Francisco officials were already thinking about changing the Western Addition. Unfortunately, their next actions proved to be the most destructive. In the late 1940s many San Francisco officials started talking about urban renewal. Both the state and federal governments started setting aside money for the redevelopment of inner-city neighborhoods. Despite the protests of neighborhood residents, in 1948 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors designated the Western Addition for redevelopment.

In the years that followed, many longtime residents of the Western Addition found themselves pushed out of their homes as the neighborhood started to gentrify. Houses were destroyed in order to build better ones, but the residents could no longer afford the rent of the new places. Much of the poorer population was forced to leave the area. In the 1960s, several housing projects were built to try to provide places for economically disadvantaged people to live. But the implementation of such buildings was largely ineffective, with one article calling the buildings “far more efficient petri dishes for growing crime and social pathologies than the crumbling old Victorians they replaced.”²

As people were forced out of the Western Addition, the area opened up for others to move in. And that is what happened: richer, whiter residents started to populate the area, especially the blocks between Geary and California Streets, the latter being the boundary between the Western Addition and Pacific Heights. In the 90s, these newcomers dubbed this stretch the Upper Fillmore in an attempt to distance themselves from the reputation of the Western Addition. This is when the neighborhood started to morph into the place I know today. With richer people came trendier shops and more expensive restaurants. However, not long after the Upper Fillmore got its new name, it was changed once again. This time, residents and real estate agents alike tried to capitalize on Pacific Heights’s reputation by calling their neighborhood Lower Pacific Heights.

The tactic worked. One of the biggest indicators of this is the cost of living in each neighborhood today. The median home value in Lower Pacific Heights is \$860,000, and the median rent is \$2,000 per month.³ These numbers are significantly higher than those of the Western Addition, with a median home value of \$670,000 and a median rent of only \$1,400 per month.⁴ Houses for sale in the Western Addition rarely are listed at over a million dollars, but in Lower Pacific Heights they often cost upwards of \$1.5 million.⁵ The atmosphere has also markedly changed, and on the surface, Lower Pacific Heights seems to have little connection to its Western Addition neighbor.

This kind of gentrification is not at all unique, which in itself speaks to the magnitude of the problem today. Neighborhoods in San Francisco, like the Mission, are undergoing similar changes as the poor are pushed out and the rich move in. UC Berkeley’s Urban Displacement project tracks the levels of gentrification and exclusion in Bay Area neighborhoods. It has found that almost all of San Francisco is either experiencing or at risk for gentrification, exclusion, or displacement.⁶ Lower Pacific Heights is just another neighborhood caught up in a citywide epidemic of gentrification and the systematic exclusion of low-income residents.

Because I wasn’t alive while the Western Addition was undergoing much of its dramatic change, I can’t speak with the same emotional context as someone who lived here twenty, forty, or sixty years ago. I must also acknowledge that my family is not economically disadvantaged and would not be affected by many of the exclusionary tactics used to push poorer people out of the Western Addition. But I would be lying to myself if I said I don’t feel sorrow when I consider the people

this neighborhood has left behind. If you had asked me about gentrification two months ago, I would have said that sure, it was a problem in other neighborhoods, but it didn’t affect me directly. Now I see how widespread the issue really is. I could write a dozen essays about gentrification alone.

When I walked down Fillmore street this morning to catch the 22 bus, all of the designer shops and vegan cafés seemed much more surreal in the early-morning light than they had in years past. The storefronts are shallow exteriors that hold none of the rich historical context of the Western Addition. I know that neighborhoods and cities grow and change; that is only natural. But I wish that people in years past had decided to hold onto a little more of the history of this place when they began building a different future.

Allison Dummel is a senior at Lowell High School and plans to study conservation biology at the University of British Columbia in the fall. At Lowell, she is co-president of the Spoken Word club, opinions editor for the newspaper, and outreach coordinator for the literary magazine. Allison says she is honored to receive this award and is thankful to the coordinators of the Fracchia Prize contest for such a wonderful opportunity.

Sources

- ¹ Emily Landes, “SFAA: If You Rename It, Will They Come?” Archive.is, San Francisco Apartment Association, Apr. 15, archive.is/yRuB8.
- ² Gary Kamiya, “Western Addition: A Basic History.” FoundSF, Foundsf.org: www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Western_Addition:_A_Basic_History. Also, see Walter Thompson, “How Urban Renewal Destroyed The Fillmore In Order to Save It.” Hoodline, Jan. 3, 2016: hoodline.com/2016/01/how-urban-renewal-destroyed-the-fillmore-in-order-to-save-it.
- ³ “Living in Lower Pacific Heights,” Niche, Niche, Feb. 21, 2015: www.niche.com/places-to-live/n/lower-pacific-heights-san-francisco-ca/.
- ⁴ “Living in Western Addition,” Niche, Niche, Jan. 28, 2018, www.niche.com.
- ⁵ “Western Addition Real Estate & Homes for Sale,” Realtor.com®, Realtor.com: www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Western-Addition_San-Francisco_CA. See also “Lower Pacific Heights Real Estate & Homes for Sale,” Realtor.com®, Realtor.com: www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Lower-Pacific-Heights_San-Francisco_CA.
- ⁶ “Urban Displacement San Francisco Map.” UC Berkeley Case Studies | Urban Displacement Project: www.urbandisplacement.org/map/sf/.

FRACCHIA PRIZE THIRD PLACE WINNER

Last fall, the San Francisco Historical Society announced a new program for all San Francisco high school students: the Fracchia Prize. Named for SFHS founder and President Emeritus Charles Fracchia, the Fracchia Prize asked students to write an essay answering the question, "How does the history of my neighborhood affect my life today?" The first-place winner received \$2,500 and publication of her essay in the summer issue of *The Argonaut*. The second-prize winner received \$1,500 and publication of her essay in the third-quarter issue of *Panorama*. The third-prize winner received \$1,000; her essay begins below. The 2020 contest will be announced this fall.

Mission Bay

By Yanzhu Gong

Someone told me that in San Francisco if you live in the Marina, you are probably the descendant of a lighthouse keeper. If you live in the Sunset, you might be the offspring of Chinese workers who came here and took part in the railway construction of the last century. If you live in North Beach, then you are likely to be the progeny of fishermen. However, what if I live in Mission Bay? Am I from the family of butchers?

In fact, I am not part of the family of butchers from the 19th century, and I just moved to the United States and San Francisco two years ago. Arriving, I was full of curiosity about my neighborhood. Some said that it was still farmland not so long ago, while other people said that it was always bustling and extraordinary. What kind of "bustling and extraordinary"? Did it use to be like Times Square?

Most of today's Mission Bay was still a bay until about 150 years ago when the city began its southward expansion. At that time, this place was also far from prosperous, and it was called "Butchertown," later revised into "Old Butchertown."¹ It was a place where pigs and cattle were killed. The poor pigs and cows that were about to be slaughtered were bellowing every day; this was definitely not the kind of "bustling and extraordinary" I expected!

Indeed, these slaughterhouses were not a pleasant sight. Without any effective regulations, the slaughterhouses and butcher shops along the bay produced a massive amount of waste. Some slaughterhouses would even pour the animal blood and body parts into Mission Creek, down which they would ooze to the bay.³

San Francisco officials said Butchertown was a "nuisance" through which "a large amount of blood and offal is thrown directly into the bay, rendering its waters, the mud beneath, and the marshes adjoining, inky black with filth, and odoriferous

with the putrefying animal,"⁴ Yuck! The rapidly expanding population in San Francisco only worsened this issue, turning Butchertown into a nasty place with poor sanitation and infectious diseases.

Fortunately, the city government soon realized the severity of this problem and took actions to prevent it from becoming worse. In the late 1860s, San Francisco passed several laws regulating slaughterhouses, largely removing them from Butchertown.

From then on Butchertown became Old (i.e., former) Butchertown; it detached from its former route and began a whole new chapter.

From the 1860s all the way to the 1910s, Mission Bay was gradually filled in. Some of the filling materials might have been the debris of buildings destroyed by the 1906 earthquake.⁵ The filling of the bay took a long time, and its economic benefit would not be fully realized until much later.

In the mid-nineteenth century, following the construction of the transcontinental railroad, San Francisco expanded its

railroad lines. Located just south of downtown and having open land from the filling of the bay, Mission Bay was the obvious place for railroad yards.

However, after the Second World War, the train traffic into San Francisco was gradually displaced by air and truck transport, and the port of Oakland started to displace San Francisco as the main site for loading and unloading ships. Mission Bay's decline became much worse in the 1960s with the completion of the two major freeways, 280 and 101, which cut Mission Bay off from the rest of the city.⁶ It became deserted, and its major industries—rail yards and docks—gradually disappeared. For the next several decades, Mission Bay remained a wasteland, with obsolete rail yards and abandoned piers, ignored and unknown by the rest of San Francisco.



Mission Bay in 1863.²



Left: Cattle being rounded up in Butchertown, 1929. Right: Aerial view of Bayshore Freeway with Third Street overpass in foreground, 1957.

A turnaround for Mission Bay started in 1983 when the Santa Fe Pacific Realty, an affiliate of the railroad, presented a redevelopment proposal for Mission Bay. This gave Mission Bay the dream of a rebirth. Comprehensive planning of Mission Bay was not produced until the 1990s when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors announced that the area was a redevelopment project.⁸ The proposal, written under Owner Participation Agreements in 1998, included plans for new residential areas, parks, a commercial zone, and a new University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) campus. The extraordinarily ambitious plan laid out thirty years of construction, all the way to 2025.

Although some work is still in progress, that dream of a new Mission Bay has largely become a reality. In 1998, Caltrain extended to Mission Bay and established its Metro connection with Muni, revitalizing railroad transit, especially south to Silicon Valley. On the northern edge of Mission Bay, the baseball park, opened in 2000 was not only the new home of the San Francisco Giants, but also the symbol for this neighborhood. Through the establishment of the ballpark, Mission Bay has brought new vigor and vitality into this part of the city. In 2002, as the first affordable family building under the plan, Rich Sorro Commons, opened.⁹ With its proximity to downtown, the bay, and public transportation, Mission Bay also met the residential demands of the growing population, attracting the first people to settle in the new neighborhood. Apart from residential development, businesses such as Uber and Dropbox have spread into the new area, and the density of downtown San Francisco continued to expand into South of Market and Mission Bay, hopefully alleviating congestion downtown. The newly designed district has become the most modern area in the city. The neighborhood's towers show a stark contrast with those traditional Victorian buildings throughout the rest of San Francisco.¹⁰

The image of Mission Bay suddenly changed from a deserted wasteland to the newest neighborhood, full of shiny buildings, a symbol of advanced technology and a fast-growing economy. Among the companies moving in, many are environment-related, such as Controlled Environmental Services and SWCA Environmental Consultants. When we watch the incredible development of environmental protection in this area, it might be hard to imagine that this area of the city was once a creek and bay polluted by animal carcasses. People back then often ignored the environment, but the long course of history taught people to learn to worship the natural environment.

Probably the most notable feature of Mission Bay is the huge presence of the healthcare industry. In 2001, the City of San Francisco and a real estate developer Catellus donated 43 acres of land in Mission Bay to UCSF for the establishment of a biomedical research campus and hospital. As UCSF's original campus on Parnassus Avenue was full, it expanded to Mission Bay in 2003 and rapidly grew into another highly professional and innovative institution with a six-story building housing laboratories, three hospitals, and outpatient services. Attracted by UCSF Mission Bay, other healthcare companies moved in, such as Kaiser Permanente and Saludem Healthcare. These newly established healthcare centers brought in researchers, doctors, nurses, and patients to discover this new neighborhood.

Walking down the street, I can feel a strong emotional connection with this neighborhood. Mission Bay is the youngest neighborhood in San Francisco, and nearly all the residents have arrived in the past few years. There are 6,000 new residential units with people from all kinds of backgrounds. Sundry



Mission Bay today. Photo courtesy of San Francisco Housing Action Coalition.

restaurants and stores also add hospitality to this area. Even though I was a newcomer, along with everyone else who moved in during recent years, I was able to integrate into this community quickly. This newly developed area has so much potential. Its innovative and creative spirit has attracted more and more people to move in.

However, the danger of climate change is a threat to the otherwise bright future of Mission Bay. San Francisco was built before we learned to take into account how climate change could challenge the city. Many parts of Mission Bay are built on low-lying or even reclaimed land and are in danger of flooding from sea level rise.¹¹ This reminds me about when the city addressed the environmental pollution caused by the slaughterhouses. It may be more difficult, but that same spirit is needed to adapt to rising sea levels to protect San Francisco's newest neighborhood.

Time has taught a lot to people here: whether we live under the lighthouse or near the piers, we all are the descendants of earthlings. For our environment, everyone should protect it, purify it, ameliorate it, and cherish it. Indeed, Mission Bay is an example in this regard, and I believe it will be an example in the future. The process from "Butchertown" to Mission Bay is mainly a story from abandoned to populated, from nasty to sustainable, and from killing to healing. The story has not ended yet, but we can expect it to achieve the "bustling and extraordinary" and to grow its own culture and contribute its special flavors to this fascinating city.

Yanzhu Gong is a senior at Lowell High School. She founded the World Focus Club in school; cofounded a multimedia design company, Fishdragon, Inc., to develop a live streaming platform; and interned in an architecture firm, Chiasmus Partners, Inc. Yanzhu moved to Mission Bay four years ago and loves it. She is excited to share what she knows about this neighborhood.

Note: All black-and-white photos courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Sources

- 1 Andrew Robichaud and Eric Steiner, "Trail of Blood," [web.stanford.edu](http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=31). Accessed 01/10/2019: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=31>.
- 2 "San Francisco Peninsula, United States Coast Survey, 1869," United States Coast Survey. Accessed from David Rumsey Maps, 01/11/2019: <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps407.html>.
- 3 Andrew Robichaud and Eric Steiner.
- 4 *Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1874-5*. San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 1875.
- 5 Richard Walker, "Industry Builds the City: The Suburbanization of Manufacturing in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1940," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2001.
- 6 David Prowler, "From Railyard to Neighborhood: The Rise of Mission Bay," www.spur.org. Accessed 01/11/2019: <https://www.spur.org/publications/urbanist-article/2005-08-01/railyard-neighborhood-rise-mission-bay>.
- 7 Monty J. Worth, "The History of San Francisco." Lecture, Lowell High School, San Francisco. 1963.
- 8 David Prowler.
- 9 Marc Slutzkin, Telephone interview with author. February 15, 2019.
- 10 Monty J. Worth.
- 11 "San Francisco Builds on Land Most Vulnerable to Sea Level Rise," YouTube video, "posted by Link TV," May 10, 2018. [linktv.org/shows/earth-focus/city-planning-san-francisco](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=linktv.org/shows/earth-focus/city-planning-san-francisco).

Other Resources

- Nancy J. Olmsted, "The Silver Era, 1860-70," [foundsf.org](http://www.foundsf.org). Accessed January 10, 2019: http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_Silver_Era,_1860-1870.
- State Highway Map," cahighways.org. Accessed February 27, 2019: <https://www.cahighways.org/maps/1963sf.jpg>.