

The Semaphore

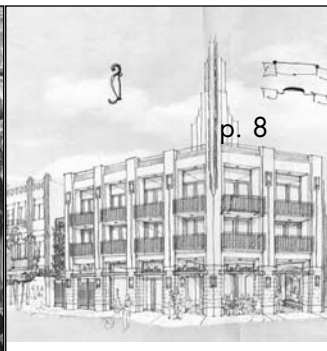
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Artists at Work: Coit Tower 1934

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Issue 186
Winter 2009





THE SEMAPHORE # 186 WINTER 2009

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Cover: Coit Tower artist Bernard Zakheim with assistant Julia H. Rogers, 1934, from Shirley Triest Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Pat Lusse

My husband, Mike, and I, moved to Telegraph Hill in 1978 and joined THD shortly after arriving. Becoming members helped us to familiarize ourselves with the neighborhood and to meet a few people. Neither of us became active as we were busy with our own lives and time slipped away. Two years ago I was interviewed for the Board and accepted the position of Membership Chair. I enjoyed the work and participation on the board. I would have continued in that position—actually was asked to continue—but was persuaded by last year's nominating committee to take on the presidency as no one else was willing to assume this task. I thought I could make a contribution by

helping to improve communication to the membership which I think was accomplished. I also wanted to reactivate some of the committees. For example, a drive to enlarge the general membership needed to be put in place, the social committee needed strengthening by involvement of more members, and one or two persons who had the knowledge and time to upgrade our webpage needed to be found. In none of these endeavors was I able to generate enough interest to move forward. However, it's my hope that our next president will continue these efforts.

In closing, as I complete my year as President, I want to thank those who did support me. ❖



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LIVING HISTORY, ONE DRINK AT A TIME OR 60 YEARS AND NO END IN SIGHT

By Robert Celli

Leo Riegler, part owner and “padrone” of Vesuvio Café on Columbus Avenue, once remarked, “You can’t be all things to all people.” While this is sage advice for most business owners, the truth is Vesuvio has been pretty much all things to the thousands that have called it home over the years.

“It’s the little boat that keeps cutting through the water.” That’s how managing partner and co-owner Janet Clyde describes the 60 year Vesuvio sojourn. The establishment continues to thrive when other neighborhood saloons have long since been wrecked, left to rot in the foggy ruins of San Francisco’s Barbary Coast,

Vesuvio has never been just a bar. It’s true that booze sales pay the bills but the place is also an art gallery, a museum, a living room for those of us in cramped apartments, a community meeting place, a support group headquarters, a literary Mecca, a mandatory stop on a tourist’s agenda, and a place to

try and get laid. Upon pushing past the heavy wood door, beneath the faux stained glass bearing the saloon’s name, you enter a world of whimsy and time travel. I realize this might sound like romantic drivel, but I need to be excused. Vesuvio was my first San Francisco bar. And in this I’m not alone, “Vesuvio is everyone’s first bar in San Francisco,” says Clyde.

Perhaps the most cited reason for Vesuvio’s success was captured by Danny Brannigan, former bartender and longtime inhabitant, “Location, location, location.” As bar manager Mike Manson notes, pointing out the window toward the entrance of City Lights Bookstore, “These two places have a symbiotic relationship for people searching for that ‘Kerouac thing.’ It’s one stop shopping.”

Lawrence Ferlinghetti opened his now venerable independent bookstore in 1954 and the two businesses have fed off each other ever since. At one point in the eighties, so the legend is told, Vesuvio was almost sold to a group that wanted to rename the bar

LET CITY GUIDES SHOW YOU THE NEIGHBORHOOD

By June Fraps

City Guides walking tours offer an easy and entertaining way to show you the treasures of our neighborhood. Every Saturday morning at 11, you have a chance to see the hidden murals of Coit Tower, controversial scenes of California in the 1930s created by 25 of the state’s leading artists. Later, the Telegraph Hill Hike, starting at 1 p.m., reveals the history of the old buildings on the Hill, and you’ll hear some stories about their early inhabitants.

Tours of North Beach are offered at 10 a.m. every Saturday and 4th Tuesdays, starting from the steps of Sts. Peter and Paul Church, and Fisherman’s Wharf tours are offered Mondays and Fridays at 11 a.m. The Guides offer 45 tours in all, covering most of the city’s neighborhoods. For a complete schedule, call 557-4266 or check www.sfcityguides.org.

Kerouac's. Thankfully, this never came to pass. But as Manson points out, "Kerouac is the key; he helped to romanticize drinking and writing like Faulkner or Hemingway did a generation before him."

The building that houses Vesuvio Cafe, 255 Columbus, is known as the Cavalli Building, former site of A. Cavalli & Co. bookstore. The structure dates back to 1913, with the second story added in 1918. Architect Italo Zanolini designed the structure in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. While not much is known about Zanolini, he was responsible for two of North Beach's other architectural crown jewels, the Casa Fugazi (better known as Club Fugazi on Green near the corner of Powell) and the Venetian Gothic Bank at Columbus and Broadway, now home to the restaurant E Tutto Qua. The facade of the building is adorned with murals, created with loving care and considerable toil by resident house artist, the late Shawn O'Shaughnessy, who died in 1998. Stained glass pieces adorn the bow of the bar. On the rim of the entrance to the Café, just above the window looking out on Columbus Avenue, a scrawl reads, "We are itching to get away from Portland Oregon".

The phrase originated from one of original

owner Henri Lenoir's antique postcards, which can still be seen on the screen directly above the bar-when the vintage turn of the century projector is turned on. It referenced a flea infestation that befell the city of



Portland sometime at the end of the 19th century. The words captured Lenoir's sense of whimsy and later seemed to embody the surreal use of language popularized by the Beats.

Lenoir opened Vesuvio in 1948. His vision was to create "a bohemian meeting place for artists to come to life." A devout art lover, he filled the interior with his friend's artwork. This is a tradition kept alive today by resident artist and curator Conrado Henriquez. Henriquez, who has been at Vesuvio since 1974, views his role as continuing

the legacy of Lenoir and later O'Shaughnessy. Local artists still regularly show at Vesuvio.

The one most responsible for the look of Vesuvio is the aforementioned artist, Shawn O'Shaughnessy. Originally from Los Angeles and a veteran of the Korean War, he attended San Francisco's Art Institute. Among his Vesuvio creations are the tabletops. These canvases, on which drinks are placed, often reveal the artist's work under the magnification rendered by an empty glass.

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O'Shaughnessy was also responsible for the tile effect that covers the interior walls and the bathrooms. This look was the result of a painstaking process O'Shaughnessy developed by lacquering and dyeing notebook paper used by the bartenders and cocktail waitresses. According to Clyde who witnessed O'Shaughnessy in action, it was not uncommon to go downstairs to use the bathroom and find the artist engaged in this tedious practice in the stall right next to you. This beautiful effect was also used to create the murals scattered about the bar. Long time morning bartender Josie Ramos has been dedicated to the restoration and preservation of O'Shaughnessy's work.

The bar has only had a handful of owners over the last 60 years. Lenoir, a Swiss immigrant, remained at the helm until the late 80's when the bar was sold to the Fein family who, along with partners Leo Riegler and Clyde—herself a thirty-year veteran of the café. There has been a conscious effort to stay true to the initial vision, providing a kind of balance that comes when the unemployed rub shoulders with downtown lawyers and bankers. Each bartender is allowed the freedom to exhibit his or her unique and considerable personality. It makes each visit special and different depending on who is walking the deck at that given time.

Vesuvio has a tidal quality that ebbs and flows throughout the course of the day. The day begins for Ramos when most are still sleeping, opening up the bar at 6am. Josie has been the morning bartender since 1989. "I guess I've always been drawn to the mornings," she reflected, "I love to watch the sun come up." She described the sensation of coming to set up the bar in the morning, "It's as if the ghosts of the night before are still here." The morning light filters through the stained glass and Tiffany lamps, hanging above the bar giving the place a peaceful serenity. The morning regulars assume their familiar

spots at tables and stools, heads bowed over morning papers and chessboards.

What those not intimately connected with the bar may not know is how special the connection is between the bar and its regulars. Josie cooks food every Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving for those with nowhere to go. For many, Vesuvio is their family home. Clyde commissioned Ramos to construct "Day of the Dead" shadow boxes to honor those regulars that have passed. The boxes contain pictures, fruit, coins, cigarettes, and little bottles of booze that will hopefully help fortify the deceased in the afterlife.

A large cement slab fastened to the wall at the entrance end of the bar serves as another kind of memorial. This piece of concrete headstone memorializes those whose drinking careers at Vesuvio have been given a cease and desist order, an "86". The slab is the handiwork of Leo Riegler who, one day in 1981, fervently carved into the wet cement in front of the establishment the names of the disinvented. The list contained the names of some celebrated writers like Gregory Corso and Bob Kaufman, a convicted murdereress Janice Blue, and other North Beach denizens, no longer welcome inside.

When the renovation of Jack Kerouac Alley was begun and the street was being dug up, Clyde rescued the etched 86 list. As recently as six months ago, Manson referenced the list, when a banished regular returned under the impression the statute of limitations had run out. In walked Dennis Crisp, after a twenty-year absence. He began again behaving in the fashion that had placed him on Riegler's famed list. It took Manson a while to place the face, but when he realized who it was annoying everyone at the bar, he took Crisp's drink from him.

"What are you doing?" Crisp asked

Manson responded ""You're Dennis Crisp?"

"Yes".

"You're 86'd."

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FROM THE DESK OF SUPERVISOR CHIU



Dear Semaphore Readers,

This past November, I was incredibly honored to be elected by the voters of District 3 to be your Supervisor. A remarkable and diverse group of volunteers representing every corner of District 3 helped to push our campaign across the finish line, and I am very grateful. I particularly want to thank former THD presidents Gerry Crowley and Vedica Puri for all their help.

I also salute my fellow candidates in the District 3 race. By all accounts, we had the most talented field of Supervisorial candidates in any district in the city. From my recent conversations with many of them, I am heartened that they are willing to work together to move our wonderful district forward in the coming years.

I also want to express my deepest thanks for the remarkable accomplishments of outgoing District 3 Supervisor and former THD President Aaron Peskin. Over the past 8 years, Aaron worked around the clock to protect our neighborhoods, to ensure that District 3 was well-served by city agencies, to pass more legislation than any Supervisor in recent history, and to adroitly lead the Board of Supervisors as its president for the past four years. I look forward to continuing to work with him in his capacity as chair of our San Francisco Democratic Party.

With the end of the campaign season, numerous challenges lie ahead.

San Francisco—indeed, our nation and the entire

world—faces a steep climb.

While our resilient local economy was able to stave off the impact of the global economic crisis for some time, in recent months, we have seen a steep decline in tax revenues and city funding for our most important governmental functions. From health and public safety services, to recreation, street cleaning and public transportation, every city agency will be deeply impacted by San Francisco's most significant budget shortfall in decades.

On the day I was sworn into office, I was also elected by my colleagues to serve as President of the Board of Supervisors. I am extremely humbled by this responsibility, and I look forward to working with each and every member of this Board and the Mayor in addressing our fiscal crisis and other citywide challenges. As we address these challenges, I will continue to be a zealous advocate for the needs of District 3 neighborhoods.

My campaign focused on empowering every corner of District 3. To that end, for my first meeting in my new office, I convened the presidents and chairs of neighborhood associations from throughout District 3, including Telegraph Hill Dwellers. In addition to working with individual residents and merchants, I plan to work closely with our rich network of associations to address issues of concerns specific to each neighborhood and shared across our neighborhoods.



HELP THE 'HOOD *Shop Locally*

THE SAGA OF THE PAGODA PALACE THEATER

by Nancy Shanahan

For almost 20 years, the Pagoda Palace Theater has been shuttered and closed. Located within in the nationally recognized Washington Square Historic District, facing Washington Square, itself a City Landmark, the Theater served as an anchor for decades until its demise in 1992. In the same way that Sts. Peter and Paul Church anchors and defines the northern edge of the perimeter of Washington Square, the Pagoda Theater has played a defining role on the western side of the heart of our community. That's why THD felt that, regardless of its proposed new use, the architecture was important to the character of our community.

The edifice has a storied history. Since its construction in 1908-09 following the great earthquake and fire, it has played an important place in the cultural history of North Beach as its theater on Washington Square. First known as the Washington Square Theater (from 1909 through the late 1922), this 1000-seat house showed live Italian theater, including opera. At the end of the 1920s it was renamed the Milano Theater and began showing motion pictures—it was the place to go for movies for all of North Beach and the surrounding neighborhoods. Sometime in 1938 or 1939 it was renamed the Palace Theater and continued to show

motion pictures. From 1967 to 1985 it became the Pagoda Palace Theater, showing Chinese films and occasional live Chinese opera. During this period (from 1969-1972), the Cockettes, a talented and uninhibited troupe of performers in drag created a sensation with their midnight shows attracting nightly crowds. In 1986, the Renaissance-Rialto theater chain took over the operation, refurbished the theater and took back the name Palace Theater, operating it as a repertory movie house. A half a dozen years later, it closed like so many other single screen theaters and the tortured on-again, off-again, sets of false starts to reuse the theater began.

Starting in 1995, a series of unsuccessful attempts

were made to convert the theater to retail use. First there was a proposal to convert it to a mini-mall (opposed by then Supervisor Angela Alioto). Then there was a proposal to convert it to a "dinner theater" (which never panned out) and a proposal to turn it into a 24-hour Rite Aid drugstore. Opposition to the Rite Aid on Washington Square brought the

entire community together—THD, North Beach Neighbors, Russian Hill Neighbors and the North Beach Chamber all joined forces to defeat this proposal. During this period the theater interior was gutted, along with significant parts of the exterior. Later, in 2000, a project to resurrect the theater and return



Rendering 1

continued on page 11

PARKS & TREES REPORT



by Robert Mattei

I am very proud to announce to Telegraph Hill Dwellers and the entire community that we had a successful tree-planting day that took place on Saturday, January 10, 2009. I would personally like to thank The Friends of the Urban Forest (FUF) who made this planting possible; especially Heidi Lakics, their planting manager, for all her hard work in helping me coordinate this planting. I would also like to thank all of the FUF volunteers, neighborhood volunteers, and property owners who helped us plant trees. We managed to plant new trees around twelve different properties in the neighborhood. The weather was on our side as it was beautiful, warm day in the middle of winter.

To all of the folks who passed by the planting site where I was working who were interested in getting trees planted, please contact me for further details at roxyrobert@comcast.net. I will provide you with all of the appropriate applications. Keep in mind that not everyone will be eligible to have trees planted due to the proximity of underground utilities and basements.

FUF has agreed to come back out and do a follow-up planting as soon as I have a tree count. Please hurry and email me your addresses and a count of how many trees you would like.

Our next order of business concerns the trees in Washington Square Park. In talking with The Friends

of Washington Square (FWS) it was brought to my attention that there had not been an assessment of the condition of the park's trees for more than 25 years.

FWS contracted a firm to assess the trees in the square. When the tree assessment was complete, the Rec. and Park Dept. (RPD) asked FWS to donate the report to the department. The department said it would accept the report as the tree management plan for the square. RPD suggested they were planning to plant new trees that Friends of Washington Square felt were inappropriate. They asked RPD to halt any new tree plantings until Friends of Washington Square could assemble a new long term tree design plan, RPD agreed.

FWS's main concern is that the square has never had a real landscape design that considers the long-term future of the trees. The current goal is to create a design that will suggest appropriate replacement trees that we can begin to plant so they will be established as the older trees die out.

FWS is working with a team of landscape architects to help design such a plan and has received donations to hire a grant writer to help raise the funds to pay for this phase of the project.

FWS would greatly appreciate any contributions to this effort to preserve the trees and the future of the square's appeal to the North Beach community as its outdoor 'living room.'

Tax deductible contributions may be sent to the Parks Trust, McClaren Lodge, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94117. Donations should be noted as a contribution to The Friends of Washington Square.

For more information about Washington Square tree planting contact Ken Maley of Friends of Washington Square at mediacons1@aol.com



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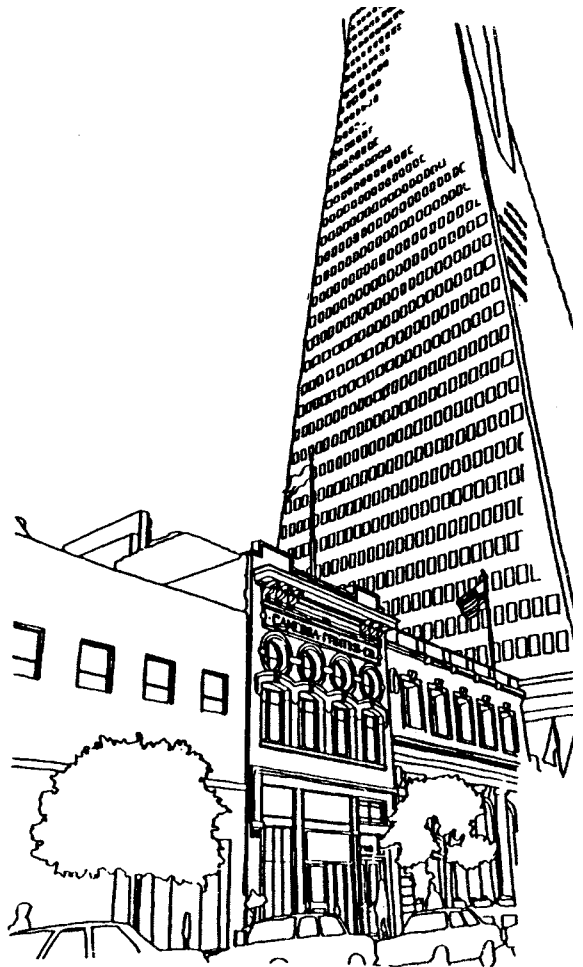
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Pagoda Palace Saga *continued from page 8*

it to its former use for live theater performances received wide spread community support—it seemed to be the perfect solution we had all been waiting for. THD supported special legislation to accommodate every aspect of this proposal. Unfortunately, this project fell victim to the dot-com collapse and by the end of 2001, the project was abandoned in mid-construction, after its front façade had been removed in preparation for a new façade. So, instead of the fine new theater façade which entire community had supported, it was covered in plywood.

In June 2004, the theater building was purchased by the current owner, Joel Campos and remained undeveloped by him for the next 3 years. In 2007, he sought to assemble the entire southwest corner of Columbus and Filbert, including the parking lot, the brick garage fronting on Filbert, and the building currently occupied by the Piazza Pellegrini Cucina Italian Restaurant, for an ambitious project, which was ultimately reworked into a smaller project. Also during this period, the owner rejected a proposal to locate the new North Beach Library in a portion of the theater building, which would have utilized voter-approved funds.

The conceptual idea for converting the building into high-end condominiums with a ground-

floor restaurant was first presented to THD in October 2007. According to the Department of City Planning, the early architectural design proposal (see **architectural rendering #1**, dated September 27, 2007) needed a significant amount of work to be remotely compatible with Washington Square and the surrounding neighborhood.

In the spirit of moving things forward and advancing the project, neighborhood residents and volunteer architects, including members of THD, created basic concept sketches to address the issue of a more appropriate architectural design. The idea was to visually convey an architectural solution consistent with neighborhood character, sensitive to its prominent location on Washington Square, and to illustrate possible alternatives for remodeling the building as condos and retail space. The schemes suggested retaining the original structure's basic art deco/moderne scale, massing and style, carried out in a more refined and contemporary way (see **architectural renderings #2**). These rough sketches, provided by neighborhood architects with the assistance of THD helped to influence the final design. It is simply not true, as some have claimed, that THD was not supportive of the development of the theater site. We have always felt that there was a way to achieve a satisfactory blend of form and function that

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Rendering 2



Pagoda Palace Saga *continued from page 11*

Rendering 3

would honor the architectural history of the Palace Theater and its important location on Washington Square, while also reflecting the needs of modern day North Beach.

To accommodate this project, THD supported a special provision in the new North Beach Neighborhood Commercial District legislation [*See last issue on NBNCD legislation*] to “grandfather” the project’s pre-existing application for a conditional use permit to authorize the use of the ground floor as a full service restaurant and bar.

A negative press campaign directed at THD notwithstanding, on January 8, 2009, fifteen months after the developer’s first presentation to THD, the Planning Commission approved a substantially improved project design (*see architectural renderings #3*) for the conversion of the theater into 19 market rate condos and a 3,900 square foot restaurant and bar— for a total of approximately 41,000 square feet in 5 stories of developed space—over and a 27-car garage. As approved, the project will require major demolition and alteration to the theater’s sidewalls and roof to provide windows and outdoor

balconies for the residential units. The Planning Commission’s approval requires that the theater marquee be retained and restored.

After serving almost 90 years as the community’s cultural gathering place on Washington Square, followed by 14 years of failed attempts to find a new use for the building, THD looks forward to a renewed life for the theater building, and hope we have positively influenced the exterior design for this prominent location on our town square.



WAITING FOR 2079

By Catherine Accardi

From his perch in Washington Square Park, Benjamin Franklin has plenty of time. He is silently waiting for the year 2079, the year that the time capsule beneath his feet will be opened.

In 1879, the prosperous San Francisco dentist Henry Daniel Cogswell gifted the statute of Benjamin Franklin to the City of San Francisco. (There’s a touch of irony here as Cogswell was a notorious teetotaler and prohibitionist and Ben was anything but.) It is written that the statue originally stood at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Kearney

Street near the site of the current Columbus Tower. The statue was moved to Washington Square in 1904. Looking deceptively bronze, historians insist it is actually made of tin, lead, and zinc. During the move to the current site, the statue was placed on a base beneath which was buried a time capsule to be opened in 1979. Six poplar trees were planted in a semi-circle as if to emphasize the spot for passers by to notice, stop for a moment, and enjoy their neighborhood park.

And so it was, that on a rainy day in 1979,
continued on page 26

BRIGHT NEW PACKAGE FOR COIT TOWER CLASSIC

by Art Peterson

Starting in 1983, just about every North Beach/Telegraph Hill maven worthy of the designation had tucked away in a book case a slim but essential volume of neighborhood lore.

This was *The 51/2 by 81/2 132 page Coit Tower San Francisco, Its History and Art* by Masha Zakheim,

Zakheim, for many years a professor of English and Humanities at San Francisco City College, is the daughter of Bernard Zakheim, one of the leaders among the 26 artists who created the storied Depression Era murals at Coit Tower in 1934.

Even though the 1983 publication never went out of print, it seemed not to be around the way it once was and existing copies were getting pretty tattered around the edges. So Ruth Gottstein, another of Bernard Zakheim's daughters, and her son Adam, the publishers at Volcano Press, made the decision to gift the neighbors and other Bernard Zakheim, 1983 lovers of the tower's murals with a new edition of Masha's book; this time to celebrate the tower's 75th anniversary. The new edition has taken on the dimensions and graphic elegance of a handsome coffee table book, and several features have been added, including new essays by experts on the art of the time and a brief biography of Arthur

Brown Jr., the tower's architect.

Ruth Gottstein, whose Volcano Press (located rather improbably in the town of Volcano, Amador County) had established a reputation as a publisher of books concerned with women's health and domestic violence issues,

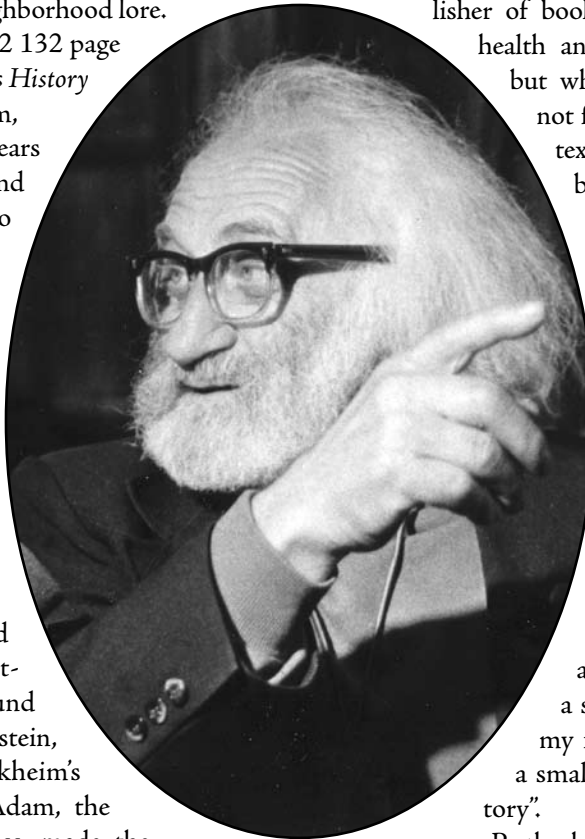
but when her sister Masha could not find a publisher for her 1983 text, Ruth decided this valuable book needed to be out in the world and published it.

Ruth, herself, has a very personal connection to the murals beyond her father's participation. She is depicted in one of them. She is the girl in the middy blouse in Bernard Zakheim's library scene (see reproduction). She says now "At the time the significance of Coit Tower and its murals was lost on a girl of twelve, but today it's a source of pride to be part of my father's mural and therefore a small part of San Francisco history".

Ruth, however, was less oblivious to other of her adolescent experiences. She remembers Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo coming to dinner at the Zakheim's Haight Ashbury District home. "Kahlo was just as striking a woman as she appears to be in her many self-portraits. She made quite an impression on a 12 year old."

Bernard Zakheim's politics also made an impression on Ruth. She remembers, on the first day of

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the San Francisco General Strike of 1934, walking with her father from her home to downtown San Francisco because he wanted her to see what the city looked like when the workers shut it down. Zakheim was one of four left leaning artists (the others were Clifford Wight, Victor Arnautoff and John Langley Howard) whose work seriously rankled the establishment press and some of the city fathers. The political sin committed in Zakheim's library was the conspicuous inclusion of a volume by Karl Marx as well as the works of assorted fellow travelers. Zakheim's political advocacy was, however, considerably less overt than Wight's depiction of the Soviet hammer and sickle encircled by the slogan "Workers of the World Unite." Wight's rendering became enough of an issue that the city ordered the tower closed down entirely for a while in 1934. Wight claimed the image was one of a group of symbols representing the political smorgasbord of the time. However, when the tower reopened Wight's handiwork had disappeared.

Ruth Gottstein believes that Wight's work was not demolished but actually covered up and plastered over. "I suspect this because there is a long-held superstition about destroying or removing art. Modern day technology could possibly detect whether Wight's panels still exist in their original location"

Radical politics aside, the four committed artists got along well enough with their less politically dedicated colleagues. Further, the whole group managed to impress Colonel Harold Mack, one of the local supervisors of the project who, according to Masha Zakheim told the funders in Washington, DC that "the artists

at Coit Tower were very moral and conscientious, not drunken promiscuous and orgiastic as some... had predicted a group of Bohemians would be."

In a recent interview Zakheim added, "Colonel Mack was part of the establishment and the artists,



The Library by Bernard Zakheim

being artists, represented the more fringe political elements. For the sake of working during a depression, they did what they had to do to become employed."

Coit Tower San Francisco provides portraits of these artists, explanations of the content and technique of their work, and an account of this most fascinating period in San Francisco history.

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WATERFRONT REPORT



by Vedica Puri

Didn't I just report that for the first time in a long time our waterfront was not under siege? I hereby eat my words. In a stunning display, developers are proposing to bust through even the tallest of height limits along the

Embarcadero. The building at issue, known as 110 The Embarcadero in District 6 is next door to the Audiffred Building (that houses the famous Boulevard restaurant) and is currently a 2-story office building. Developers are proposing raising the height limits from 84 feet to approximately 130 feet and converting the building into a 10-story office building. Because the entire area surrounding the building is also zoned for 84 feet, the developers are asking for a change in law to exempt just this one site for an increase in height limit.

The THD's Waterfront Committee's point? If you allow "just this one", it sets a dangerous precedent to allow other "spot zoning" and at the end of the day what is the point of the height limit when the exceptions swallow the rules? To our delight, Planning Department staff recommended AGAINST the height exemption. To our dismay, the Planning Commission voted 4-3 to reject their own staff's report in light of the fact that the proposed development had received the highest green building designation allowed.

Because the Commission rejected their own

staff's report, the entire project approval had to come before the Planning Commission again, this time with the requisite permits and changes in law required to accommodate spot zoning. So, on January 15th, the neighborhood appeared in force once again. Even though we lost (4-3), the Commissioners appointed by the Board of Supervisors (Commissioners Olague, Sugaya and Moore) all voted our way in support of maintaining the height limits on the Waterfront. The neighborhood was very well represented with many speakers and board members from THD as well as folks from other neighborhood associations including, Barbary Coast, San Francisco Tomorrow and Rincon Neighborhood Assn. Various Planning Commissioners specifically thanked us for our professional and intelligent testimony. In fact, Supervisor Daly, who represents the district that includes the site at issue, sent a separate letter to the Planning Commission opposing the height increase that was read into the record.

Maintaining a credible and forceful presence at City Hall on issues such as height limits on the Waterfront is what we are all about.

Now on to the next step — the Board of Supervisors has to approve the change in law to raise the height limits (*ie*, amending the General Plan of the City).

This our next big shot at preserving our current height limits.

We must all appear in force for that hearing as well — we will keep you posted and let you know as soon as it is scheduled. ✂

sem.a.phore

DEFINITION: *To convey information using visual signals, such as flags, lights and mechanical arms.*

In the 19th century, Telegraph Hill was a lookout spot. A man stood at the top and watched for ships arriving through the Golden Gate. He used semaphore signals to spell out ships' names to the people below who were waiting for goods and mail. Neighbors who formed Telegraph Hill Dwellers in 1954 named their newsletter to salute this early use of the Hill.

IN MEMORIAM HELEN HANNA

Helen Hanna, a North Beach resident since the late thirties, died on January 8th, 2009 just five days before her 94th birthday.

Helen's family story is in many ways the story of the "Little City." Her grandmother, Rosa Boitano, rode the immigrant train to San Francisco to join her brother in North Beach at his flat on Green Street across from the New Pisa restaurant.

There, Rosa met another recent immigrant Biaggio Giovanetti. The couple was married in the original Sts. Peter and Paul Church on Filbert Street above Grant Avenue. The couple raised eight children. Joseph, one of the oldest, went to work for the Bank of America in North Beach. Another brother, Emile, was a partner in Half Moon Fruit and Produce in the wholesale market at the foot of Telegraph Hill. Clorinda, Helen's mother, was working as an au-pair with the Figone family who lived at the corner of Green and Montgomery when she met Donato DeMaria, recently mustered out of the US Navy after touring as bandmaster with the Great White Fleet.

Their daughter, Helen, after graduating from University of California, Berkeley met and married Arthur Hanna who had made his way west from Detroit. Arthur and Helen lived on Edith and

Greenwich Streets and later on Filbert, where Arthur still resides today in a house built just after the 1906 fire. Many North Beach residents will remember 566 Filbert as the site of the Great Garage Sale that had enjoyed a forty-year run. Arthur opened his first furniture shop at 1450 Grant Avenue after WWII and later moved to 1706 Stockton before following the movement of craftsman and small manufacturers to larger and cheaper locations South of Market. Helen met many of her neighbors as the registrar at the Tel-Hi Clinic in the Maybeck building on Stockton Street. She also worked at the toy store "Happy Things" on Grant Avenue.

Helen studied weaving with Valborg Gravander and she and Arthur were friends with many North Beach Artists among them Imogen Cunningham, Sargent Johnson, John Magnani and his wife Margorie Livingston.

Arthur and Helen raised three children in North Beach. Their granddaughter Justine Kaltenbach, former owner of the Lilith boutique on Grant Avenue, now lives on Chestnut Street with her son, Arthur and Helen's great grandson, Max Rico who is an enthusiastic member of the Salesian Boys' and Girls' Club.



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PLANNING BEGINS FOR NEW NORTH BEACH LIBRARY

by *Julienne Christensen*

Once the Joe DiMaggio Playground Master Plan was approved last fall, the three components of the overall plan—the library, the park and playground design and the future of Mason Street—began marching down their separate, though still intertwined, paths. The new library, fully funded and mandated for completion in late 2010 or early 2011, was the first out of the gate with a kick-off community meeting on December 17, 2008.

Some aspects of the new library have been determined. It will be placed on the triangle site. It will be 60% larger than the current library. To avoid the loss of recreation and open space, some functions (staff offices and storage and the community meet-

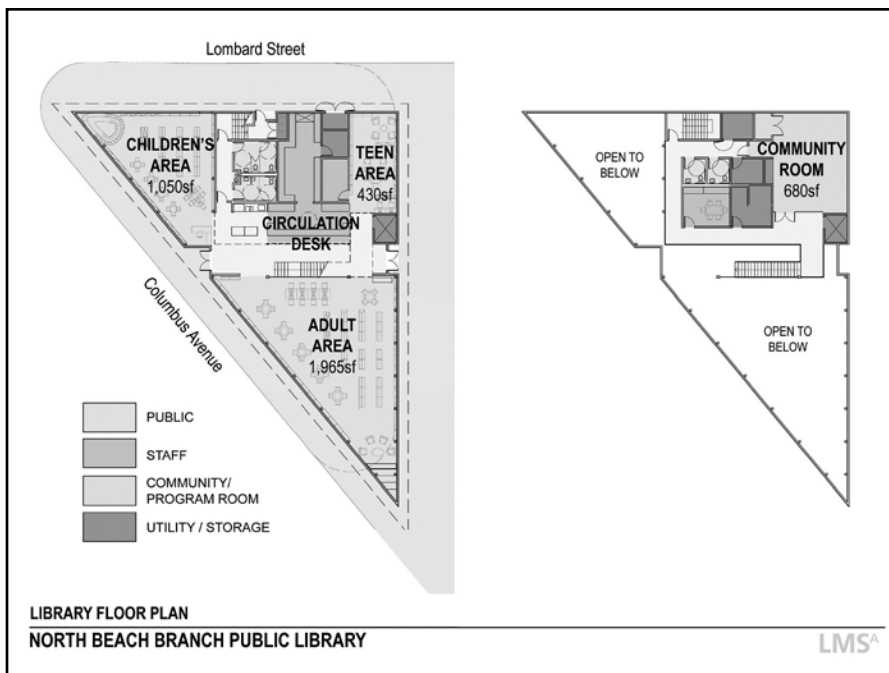
ing room) will be located on a second floor with the supervised stacks, reading areas and circulation desk on the ground floor.

Library staff elected to retain the architects that assisted with the master plan, Leddy Maytum Stacy, for the building design and they now have a number of challenges to face. The steep grade (a problem facing all of the final sites considered) makes both the building configuration and ADA compliance more difficult. The smooth functioning of the library relies on library areas being placed in precise order, adjacent to one another. The clustering of the majority of functions on the ground floor leaves little room for vestibules and other non-reading room amenities. And there are of course, budget limitations.

The new plan does allow for separate adult, teen and children's areas plus a community room for story time, readings and other performances. The happiest news in the presentation was that the library staff has determined that the new library can be accommodated on the selected site.

On December 17 the architects presented a single proposed configuration: three vertical sides with floor to ceiling glass at the corners, vertical windows along the sides, and clearstory windows all

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LIVE WORMS GALLERY REVIVES THE NEIGHBORHOOD ...AND THE SPIRIT OF THE BEATS

By Ernest Beyl

Retired international airline pilots are not particularly known for being razzle-dazzle free spirits. They're more likely to be buttoned-down, straight arrows who keep their sizable retirement nest eggs in solid money market accounts and sure-thing stocks—or, these days under the mattress. But that's not how Kevin Brown's life worked out when he retired in 1996 after more than 30 years as a 747 Captain with Pan Am and Delta.

With his feet planted firmly in mid-air, Brown executed a 180 degree turn from the cockpit control panel and, using the other half of his brain (left side: mathematicians, and airline pilots; right side: dreamers and artists) became—the Gertrude Stein of North Beach, if you will. How did this against-the-brain transition occur?

Now 71, Kevin has been exercising his creative juices with paint and brush since he was a child. His father was a Navy officer and the family moved around a lot—from Alton, Illinois where Kevin was born, to Washington D.C. where he finished high school. Then later he attended Arizona State University in Tempe on a scholarship and majored in Art. But, realizing he would have to earn a living, he also took pilot training and wound up spending five years flying for the Air Force. It was a logical step for a future airline pilot—but not for an artist.

Nevertheless, today, his abstract oils and acrylics sell for \$500 to \$7,000 and in recent years his work has been displayed in one man and group shows in the U.S. and in Europe. He calls his work “old fashioned modernism.”

“I have had many artistic influences. Quite often an earlier artist is going to make his or her presence known to me. Right now I'm experimenting and reaching out for something new, but I still can't jump

over shadows,” he says.

Something new for Kevin consists of large, bold canvases with a lot of built-in tension. Wildly leaping abstracts with heavy strokes and splashes of intense color streaking around here and there. Other paintings depict monumental black squares and rectangles angled against stark white backgrounds— somewhat reminiscent of Mark Rothko's highly-valued colored panels.

These days Kevin is justifiably proud of a painting he completed on the 50th anniversary of the death of Henri Matisse (November 4, 2004) that was purchased not long ago by a professor at Cambridge University in England and now hangs in a meeting room of that university's business school. If there was an influence on that one lurking back there somewhere it might have been Joan Miró.

Since we may have evoked a state of puzzlement earlier with the Gertrude Stein comparison, here's amplification: Kevin Brown has become an important benefactor of artistic expression in the North Beach neighborhood just as Stein was in Paris. Brown operates an art gallery—Stein would have insisted on calling it an *atelier*—on Upper Grant Avenue. He calls the gallery Live Worms and it's on the site of the old Figoni Hardware, a neighborhood landmark dating back to the early 1900s. Here, Kevin not only paints and displays his own work but offers the space for aspiring young painters to hang their work and for readings by local writers.

Kevin Brown is a modest and mild-mannered North Beach character in a neighborhood ripe with loopy characters that are frequently not modest or mild-mannered. And, he has added a high degree of

continued on next page



renewed excitement and color to Upper Grant Avenue—just the kind of pizzazz that complements nearby quirky shops, bars and coffeehouses. These few short blocks are beginning to remind us of the era of the Beats when North Beach celebrated itself and was a center for artistic expression that swept around the world.

So what was the route from international airline pilot to North Beach artistic benefactor? How did this happen? Well, back in 1971 Kevin and his wife Marianne—a former airline flight attendant—bought a house in San Francisco's Cow Hollow. They lived there off and on when they weren't traveling. Then, one day about six years ago, having settled down a bit, Kevin was strolling along Upper Grant Avenue in search of inspiration—what else?

And indeed inspiration appeared in the form of the empty Figoni Hardware space at 1345 Grant Avenue—adjacent to what is now Shinmin Li's custom cake shop, I Dream of Cake, at 1351. The old Figoni Hardware occupied both sites with an interior pass through.

"I'd been thinking of finding a place where I could paint and hang my work, and here it was," Kevin says. "I made a deal with the landlord Teresa Dunn and suddenly I had a studio and gallery. Later, when I was cleaning out the place I found an old slate blackboard with the words 'Live Worms' chalked on it. It was true serendipity. Figoni once sold live bait for local fishermen. What a great name for my gallery, I thought."

And so the former airline pilot opened Live Worms in 2003, hung some of his own paintings and sold a few. Soon he got his bright idea to make the space available for other artists—painters and poets came to mind. "I decided I would charge them a small fee for the use of the space and if they sold anything I wouldn't take a commission," he says.

Kevin established a modest scale of fees for use of the gallery—\$150 per day during weekdays, \$250 per day on weekends and \$750 for Friday, Saturday and

Sunday. The concept worked and soon Live Worms was busy. It began attracting those with art on their minds and a few bucks in their jeans. They came not only from the neighborhood but from around the city and from other strange places like Sausalito, Bolinas and even across the Bay in Gertrude Stein's Oakland. And, at least on days when Live Worms had a showing, foot traffic increased on Upper Grant. Since Live Worms opened, it has not only displayed the work of Kevin Brown but also of young painters from the nearby San Francisco Art Institute over on Chestnut. Also Ronald Sauer and Rebecca Peters, North Beach collage artists who consider themselves a community resource, take over the Live Worms space regularly for group shows and display their own work with that of local modernist artists George Long, Roger Strobel, Rosemary Manno, Jack Freeman Mery Bernard, Fanny Renoir and others. These have been highly successful and average more than 20 sales per show.

Still other artists—these employing the power of the printed word—like Jack Hirschman, San Francisco's Poet Laureate, George Tsongas, the poet whose home base is just down the street at Caffè Trieste and who has written an opus called *The Trieste Chronicles*, and Herbert Gold, prolific San Francisco-based writer of novels, memoirs and essays, have drawn enthusiastic crowds during readings at Live Worms.

It seems that what we may have here is a case of homegrown artistic mystique intersecting with the neighborhood bars and coffeehouses and sparking a renewed bohemian energy in North Beach.

Now, if we could only talk Allen Ginsberg's spirit into coming back and reading *Howl* at Live Worms things would really be looking up.

Ernest Beyl is a North Beach-based writer whose work has appeared in neighborhood publications as well as in national magazines. He is presently working on a book tentatively called Sketches from a North Beach Journal. This essay on Live Worms will find its way into that book.



POETRY KICKS OFF LAN

On Sunday November 23, Brian Goggin's and Dorka Keehn's site specific sculpture "Language of the Birds" was unveiled at a public ceremony on the corner of Columbus and Broadway. The work, commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission, consists of a flock of twenty-three sculpted, illuminated books which appear to have just taken flight from the plaza. Appearing to be in motion, the books take wing above the sidewalk suggesting birds on the move.

Passing under the flock, pedestrians will notice on the sidewalk words and phrases in English, Italian and Chinese selected from the neighborhood's rich literary history ranging from the Beats to Gary Snyder to Jade Snow Wong imbedded in the plaza...

Not everyone was equally enthusiastic about the new addition to the intersection. Representatives of THD's Art and Culture Committee wondered why "considering the significant number of artists who live and work in North Beach" local artists as "true representatives of the neighborhood" were not engaged by the planners in the selection of neighborhood art.

The committee also expressed concern that those engaged in future art projects scheduled for the neighborhood "have so far not considered the inclusion of North Beach artists."

On the day of the dedication poet Genny Lim recited the following work she had written for the occasion:

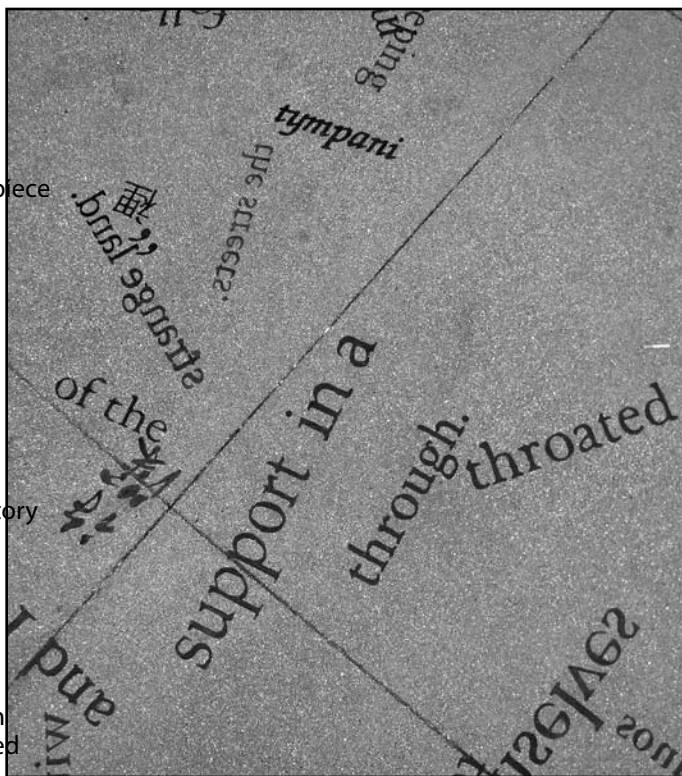


LANGUAGE OF THE BIRDS

BOHEMIAN UNIVERSE

This is the center of the universe
The Grand Central on Broadway
Where the past, present and future collide
Where freeways combust and go elsewhere
Like pigeons on statuary, folks come n' go
Businesses come n' go, Big Al's, Basin Street West
World Theater, Hungry I, the Jazz Workshop
This is where the old become the new
and the new become the old
Clinging to crumbling asphalt n' brick
the memories pull you in like gravity
Old Jean Parker n' Washington Irving on
Broadway sandwiched between Chinatown and
the International Settlement with its 'girlie girls'
long before Carol Doda hit with her topless tits and
the undertow of stale whiskey, beer n' puke flowed
Monday morning sidewalks enroute to fourth grade
with my pawn shop violin and baloney sandwich
I dodged the stench of garbage cans
the length of Broadway, past Finocchio and
Enrico like a downhill slalom racer
The old places on my block, memorized like veins
Little City News on Union, the old Italian grocery
where I bought black licorice sticks for a penny a piece
Bazooka gum for a nickel and my favorite splurge
Cho-Cho's push-up, chocolate malt ice-cream!
The old Sicilian couple argued out loud in
their old language, the way my folks'
argued out loud in their old language
indifferent to us kids, who would replace them
some day like Trattoria Contadina and
valet parking now serving their corner
I knew every smell by heart
The salami factory, the ravioli and cheese factory
The sourdough, focaccia bread and Spaghetti Factory
Where I caught my first breathless flamenco
with garlic bread and fresh Malvina espresso
On Sunday mornings I'd awaken to the
Sts. Peter and Paul and St. Francis steeple bells
proclaiming to the four corners of the earth
that all was well and all would remain as so
The old Rexall Drugs, the Five and Ten on Stockton
City Lights, Splendid soda fountain, where I ordered
peppermint candy and root beer float from

the limping, deaf old spectacled Italian with
his bald Mt. Fuji rim of white hair
solemnly sweeping out gentrification and its
Vesuvius of tin cans, produce markets and
crush of Chinese housewives and tourists
yakking like saxophones from the ol' Blackhawk
Oblivious to the archaic or what would one day
riff them out in the diaspora of midnight
A strange confederacy of birds we are
who are gathered here for a chance meeting
only to scatter, fleeting and seasonable as
stacked persimmons and Dungeness crab
sidewalk after sidewalk, face after face
in the debris of broken glass and rotting cabbages
in the glint of store-front windows
Italian coffee, roast duck, jazz and strip-tease
This is our archeology
the juice and the junk in our blood!



HIDDEN BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN



By Carol Peterson

Albona, 545 Francisco St., San Francisco,

CA 94133 415.441.1040 ★★½

Buried in the five hundred block of Francisco Street, is a small restaurant with a rich history. Daringly, 21 years ago Bruno Viscovi opened Albona, named for his home town on the culturally complex Istrian Peninsula and featuring the foods of that region located on the Northern Adriatic Sea near Trieste.

Viscovi was certainly taking a chance opening a restaurant across the street from some of the most dilapidated and crime ridden public housing in the city. (The projects have now been replaced by the spiffy subsidized housing of North Beach Place.) I visited this restaurant in the late 80s and was very impressed with the food and the intimacy of the space. Bruno came to your table and told you the tale of his family's history of food and how many of the recipes were drawn from Bruno's memory growing up in Albona. It was the restaurant's location, not the quality of the food that I worried about. They will never make it, I told myself after each satisfied visit. But the restaurant did make it, appearing regularly on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* list of 100 Best Bay Area Restaurants.

After twenty years of running this very successful restaurant, Bruno Viscovi retired. His nephew, Michael Bruno, who had worked every job in the restaurant but cook long before he began to shave, took over. Michael brought on as his partner Viscovi's chef, Samuel Hernandez, who had worked at many famous local restaurants, including Bix in our neighborhood. It was the freedom of being Michael's partner that expanded Samuel's ideas. The recipes

have stayed the same but the presentation has been brought to a new level.

In a way, Michael emulates his uncle as he talks to diners at each table, welcoming them. "Unlike my uncle, I didn't grow up in Istria, so my stories are different," Michael said. "Mine are of the history of the years I have worked and been around Albona."

Tasting the four different appetizers we ordered, the mushroom soup was the standout. It has a stock of chicken and prosciutto, reduced. Yellow onions and Yukon Gold potatoes are added to form this rich, creamy soup that surprisingly has no cream. If you are a mushroom lover, this is your dish. Michael tells me the most popular appetizer is a recipe from his grandmother, pan fried potato gnocchi, with a brown, cumin laced, sirloin sauce. When the dish arrived, the gnocchi were so brown, I thought the dish must be overcooked, but the crunchy outside split to reveal a soft potato inside. Michael said, "My girlfriend calls these Pillows of Heaven." Swirl them in the rich sirloin sauce and you'll get her point.

One of the signature pasta dishes at Albona is the strudel con pasta fatta in casa. This creamy dish speaks of Bruno's search for the perfect ingredients to replicate his ancestors' recipes. After trying many cheeses, he found that a Finnish cheese called Lappi worked the best for melting. In a 550 degree oven, the cheese never turns stringy or dry, creating a devine texture. The fresh pasta rolls are stuffed with Lappi and prosciutto and covered with a creamy, buttery tomato sauce. Toasted bread crumbs and béchamel are added prior to baking. This incredible pasta dish can easily be shared, as it is a generous portion for a dish this intense.

continued on page 26

LOWELL GROVES

Lowell Groves, Vice-President of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers during the organization's early years died September 17, 2008 at his home at 19 Child Street. In addition to a daily walk, Groves attributed his long life to his many year of residence on the hill. With his late companion Bill Varcoe, he moved to Child Street in 1955.

In an account by Judy Robinson, who did an oral history of him, he described the move:

"I stopped at a real-estate agent on Lombard Street. A nice, pushy lady And I told [her] 'I've got to find something' So she thought I wanted, you know, any old thing. I said 'No, you get in a car, we'll drive around and I'll show you what I want. I want east and west, and I want north and south [exposures] and I want a view, and I want garden, and I want a garage, and na-na-na na.' So she went to city hall and she found out who owned this building. Because this was not for sale. And she talked the Urminis into selling it to me"

As an interior designer, he created with local artisans Asian inspired pieces that he sold to Gump's and other high end retailers. His interest in things Asian

went back to World War II when he had served in the Army in India in a Research Communications unit..

Groves service with the Hill Dwellers dates back to early days when the organization was fighting to continue 39 bus service, establish height limits and stop freeway expansion. But as oral history interviewer Judith Robinson reminded Groves, these were also the days that a good time was had by all with "wonderful dinners, lots of martinis and good conversation and lively *contre temps*."

Among Groves many interests was an abiding interest in food. He would cook meals from scratch and enjoy them with friends on his garden deck overlooking San Francisco Bay and Russian Hill. On one occasion while fundraising for a foods of the world event he entertained Julia and Paul Child, and according to the *Chronicle*, "cleverly served them curry and beer so as not to be criticized by the food and wine experts."

Just one more example of the wit and panache with which Lowell Groves lived his life.



LA NUOVA PORZIUNCOLA

By Patricia Cady

The new chapel on Vallejo Street at Columbus Avenue is a replica of Francis of Assisi's Porziuncola, his word that means "my little corner of the world." He constructed it for himself and his friars from a ruined church which was old when he found it, in the thirteenth century. Then, it was simply a roof over their heads for a few men who embraced strict poverty. But Francis's death in 1226, followed by sainthood, drew pilgrims to the site for five centuries, as well as notable artists who embellished the humble dwelling with murals and frescoes. Structurally intact and decorated with masterworks at risk of deterioration, it was brought inside the local

basilica for preservation. San Francisco's Porziuncula is a near-mirror image of the original on view in Assisi and is the only replica in the United States.

Contractor Alfonso Rocciola of Nibbi Brothers supervised construction. He went to Assisi with Angela Alioto, a former Board of Supervisors president who conceived the project and raised money to fund it. They collected and shipped back stones from original sites and Rocciola hired workmen to cut by hand and match every shape and color on the circa 800-year-old building. In Italy 16 artisans faithfully reproduced the extant art, even to the graffiti scratched on a fresco fragment by "Sebastian" with the date, 1583, and his city's crest, a shield.

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FIRE STATION 28 PLANS COMMEMORATIVE SHINDIG

Captain Fred Walsh, who will be retiring from the San Francisco Fire Department soon, has only served at Station 28, 1814 Stockton Street, for a little more than a year, but during that time he has made lots of neighborhood friends.

"That's why I wanted to have an event that welcomes the neighbors and also honors in a dignified way the members of our unit who have died in the course of duty."

So between 3 PM and 5PM on Saturday April 18, Station 28 will welcome visitors. They be treated to refreshments, an exhibit of historic photos, and a display of antique and state of the art fire fighting equipment

The centerpiece of the afternoon will be the dedication of a plaque to the four fallen firemen of Station 28:

HENRY HEFFERNAN 1902

CHARLES MCCARTHY 1942

PATRICK BRANNIGAN 1963

GARY NISIDIO 1969

An open mike will be available for speakers to say a few words, and fire safety and earthquake preparation materials will be available.

"I think this event will provide a chance for the neighbors and our firefighters to come to know each other better at a dignified celebration that will also be a lot of fun.



La Nuova Porziuncola *continued from page 23*

Decorative work was done by Italian master craftsmen, just as was done for the landmark church next door, the National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, after the 1906 fire. Marble flooring, the famous "pietra rosa" from Mount Subasio, arrived on two flatbed trucks, then was seamlessly pieced together by Rocciola's crew.

A single plain rock used by Francis himself for his Porziuncola was a gift from Assisi's caretaking Franciscans and is highlighted in a corner of the chapel. The corresponding gift shop, "Francesco Rocks", is located at the corner of Grant Avenue and Vallejo Street, offering a generous selection of merchandise imported from Italy.

Thousands of visitors have been through the Porziuncola since it opened on September 27. Admission is free and all are welcome to come in and to contemplate the magnificent altarpiece inside. Open daily except Monday, volunteers will answer questions and let you take a self-guided tour.



RE-DISCOVERING SARGENT JOHNSON

by Sally Towse

Walk anywhere in North Beach and Telegraph Hill and you will stride in the footsteps of famous writers, sculptors, and poets. These are the streets, even today, trod by Laurence Ferlinghetti. Francis Ford Coppola worked on the screenplay for "The Godfather" at the Café Trieste. Diego and Frida Kahlo once lived on Calhoun Terrace. Janis Joplin bought beads at Yone, and Richard Brautigan hung out at Enrico's.

But not every major North Beach artist has been a household name locally. Such was the case of Sargent Claude Johnson who lived from the 1940s to the mid 1960s in the heart of North Beach in two cheap rooms at 1517 Grant next to the Italian French Bakery.



continued on page 28

Coit Tower *continued from page 14*

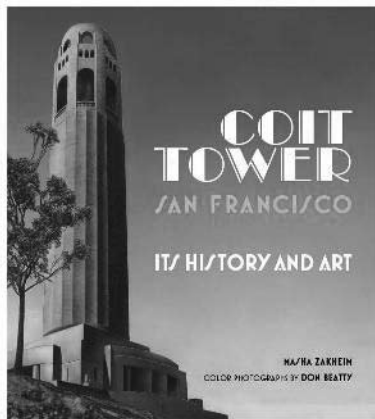
The author of the book was for 25 years a docent at Coit Tower. She no longer does this work, but she has provided us with this volume filled with her knowledge on the subject. Read her book with care and next time you take an out of town visitor on a tour of these wonderful murals it will be as if you have Masha Zakheim whispering in your ear.



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Library Plan *continued from page 17*

along the roof line topped by a sloped roof with skylights and photovoltaic panels. Attendees asked questions and voiced concerns related to the building shell itself as well as to functional issues. Community members suggested rearranging carrels and reading areas to the quieter Mason Street side and away from Columbus. There was some concern about the views from the slightly-below-grade adult reading area and the placement of the children's area on the busy and exposed Columbus/Lombard corner. The library staff and the architects promised to investigate options and make changes, where possible, before the next community meeting.

The Friends of the San Francisco Public Library has already launched fundraising efforts to pay for new interior furnishings for the library. The architects and library staff were scheduled to come back to the community with a revised design in late February. Community members are encouraged to attend the community meetings and participate! ♦

Waiting for 2079 *continued from page 12*

Benjamin Franklin was removed from his base and the time capsule opened at a ceremony attended by crowds of residents, visitors, press and then San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein. Found inside the metal box in the granite base were portions of 18 newspapers, an illustrated souvenir book of San Francisco, and a manual for streetcar conductors. The most unusual item uncovered was a tooth allegedly from Robespierre, perhaps a bobble placed there by dentist Cogswell. At the same ceremony, a new time capsule replaced the old. It contained several poems by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a pair of Levi's jeans, menus from several restaurants,



What Lies Beneath?

and a bottle of cabernet sauvignon wine.

I spoke to several fellow North Beach residents at the time and we shared our mutual awe at what was taking place. Here we were, in a timeless city, in a tranquil square, viewing an historic event. I remember thinking, my heart is beating a little faster here. This is quite a sight.

I know we will not be here in 2079 but here we are now so drink it all in. After the ceremony was over, we headed over to the U. S. Restaurant to reflect on the events of the day. The time capsule had been sealed for another century. ♦

Albona restaurant *continued from page 22*

One of my favorite dishes at this restaurant is the Fish of the Day. The evening we went, it was halibut. I was surprised at the generous portion of fish that almost filled the plate, a thick fillet cooked to perfection, the outside golden brown, the inside moist and flavorful. It was served with a delicate white wine, shallot and butter sauce. I liked the small platter of steamed vegetables served separately. Usually unembellished vegetables like this are not particularly tasty, but these were the perfect compliment to this wonderfully prepared simple entree.

One of my hard and fast rules about a restaurant is, "If the bread is no good, the food is not going to be good." Albona's dinner rolls pass my test. Made

fresh daily by Chef Samuel's wife, Beatriz, they are among the best I have had in the City. Beatriz also makes the desserts. One of her specialties—from an old Istrian recipe—is the apple strudel, served with vanilla ice cream. When it was brought to the table, its aroma arrived first. The dessert's apples and nuts are infused with sugar, cinnamon, lemon zest and rum, then tucked in a strudel,

Congratulations to Michael and Samuel (and Uncle Bruno) on the 21st anniversary at Albion. Thank you for having this unique, special restaurant in our neighborhood. Your little hideaway on Francisco Street may be easy to miss, but the locals who love great food aren't going to forget you. ♦

THE ALFA NOSE

By Kathleen Cannon

The fearless Alfa Romeo Spider 77 goes boldly into a new year and new age, top down in winter.

Ciao 2008.

The soft glow of the holidays (when everyone is *just nicer*) may be gone, but it left in its glittering wake memories of excellent parties. Enrico's rang in a glamorous 50th anniversary party, enhanced by the music of Mal Sharpe, where Dick Boyd and Mal exchanged 'did you knows' and 'do you recalls.' The elegant space that is Enrico's was packed. Attendees included Beat Museum neighbors, Ward Dunham and son, and State Senator Mark Leno—a benevolent endeavor by owner Christine Deeb, and Chef Seamus.

The THD Holiday party at Boudin offered a relaxing musical afternoon spiced with excellent crab cakes (*grazie*, Sarah Kliban). The Gold Rush museum room upstairs at Boudin is a 'strike,' wonderful views and history.

The celebratory party at Carol and Art Peterson's house to applaud the poets whose works were chosen for public display (THD Art & Culture Committee Poetry in Public Display) was a warm evening of mingling and mindful readings. Brava, organizer/artist Termeh Yeghiazarian! Aaron Peskin confided, in another life, he too penned poems...and not all of his works are on bathroom walls.

Party Animals.

The District 3 Democratic Holiday Party at Lou's (formerly Le Felce) was wall to wall Democrats (but not all donkeys), with a buff buffet compliments of Lou, and a special Obama cake by confectionary artist Shinmin Li of I Dream of Cake (who has her own little something in the oven—Shinmin is expecting a sweet delivery in March).

At the popular and wildly successful Cookie Crawl, Santa let children of all ages tell him what they wanted for Christmas. But for \$5 all your wishes came true—if they were mouth watering cookies, and Carol Peterson's was the best and the most. Santa was retired Fireman Alex King, who noted an annual drive for toys that is held at Bimbo's December 20th.

Multiple Santa Sighting

At Washington Square Saturday December 13. It was a Santa party: dress up like Santa or an elf and party hearty—SF Hot spots were the Haight, Mission and N. Beach, but party was worldwide. Santas, imbibing more than cookies and milk, were playing ball in the Square, dining at Café Divine and laid out on the sidewalk in front of Gino & Carlo.

The New Years Day poetic fest at Live Worms, a private, literary/artist tradition, organized by Aggie Falke and John Perino is an ongoing success of prophetic good news for the upcoming year—in the form of haikus.

continued on page 28



Artists Teremeh Yeghiazarian and Julie Jaycox

Sargent Johnsen *continued from page 25*

Johnson, a man of mixed race, was an internationally known sculptor, painter, lithographer, ceramicist, bas-relief artist, cast bronze artist, and porcelain-enamel artist. In San Francisco, his best known work is the huge molded-stone bas relief frieze at Washington High and his work at the Maritime Museum, where his green-slate bas reliefs frame the exterior of the Beach Street doors and his tile work decorates the outside veranda on the north side.

Despite his international reputation, Johnson lived in the voluntary poverty characteristic of San Francisco bohemian lifestyle at the middle of the last century. He shared a studio with ceramist John Magnani. Photographer William Abbsensenth had his studio in the same building.

In addition to Abbsensenth, Johnson, and Magnani, Upper Grant Avenue between Green and Filbert was home to woodworker Arthur Carpenter, metal jeweler and sculptor Peter Macchiarini, jewelry designer Gretchen McAllister, wood block artist

continued on page 38

THE ALFA NOSE

Urban Phishing:

Hungry for good food amid lively conversation? The Friday Night Feedbag has been meeting at Trieste every Friday for thirty years (per retired printer John Tansley). Those interested gather at Trieste at 6:00 pm. They decide on a restaurant, adjourn to it, eat and chat. Some are writers, like Tony Long (who had been telling me about the event). I joined them at Estia for excellent Greek food and local conversation. Next frontier is the ongoing ladies poker game above Trieste, where a group of ladies has met for decades.

Speaking of fish, did you know G.G. of Soto Mare formerly had a restaurant on Kauai? He lived in the Islands for 25 years and volunteered on Molokai where he cooked paia for the residents and taught them to play dice. (Now that is volunteering.) G.G. is happy that 'Coit Tower' is finally painted into the Benedetti mural. Take a look up at it—across from Gino & Carlo.



Poet Sasly Towse at Washington Square.

Writer Dick Boyd is now on the Program Planning Committee of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society (remodeling the old Mint)—2009 presentations will be on neighborhoods. January was on Chinatown. Consult www.sfhstory.org for the calendar.

Not The End.

While picnics at Coit Tower are tasty bonding experiences, Planning and Zoning is where the action is—where the battles are waged to preserve a neighborhood. Lose, and you get a Fontana Towers, another giant T shirt mall, a labyrinth of cabarets/after-hours joints on a boulevard once frequented by families. The future doesn't just happen. It is planned. The valentine that we call San Francisco, and especially the neighborhood, is a visual feast for all. The presidents—of THD and the U.S.—are calling for volunteers. Answer the call—embrace Spring and butterfly walls, but not over four stories.



POETRY IN THE MOST AMAZING PUBLIC PLACES.....!

by Candace Loheed

In Washington Square Park at 6:00 PM on a November Friday, Termeh Yeghiazarian, chairperson of THD's Art and Culture Committee, unveiled poet Sally Doyle's work "Confetti," one of nine winning poems in the committee's Poetry in Public Places Competition. Doyle's poem like the other winning entries was prominently displayed in the large illuminated space on the side of a JC DeCaux public lavatory. Doyle was presented with a bouquet and talked about and read her poem. It is printed below.

Following the reading those present retreated to Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store where many celebra-

tory toasts were offered. It was a great feeling to fill Mario's, an historic cornerstone of our neighborhood, with arts supporters, poets, visual artists, and THD Art & Culture Committee members. The camaraderie that evolved was one of the best parts of the whole project. Art and culture lives in our beloved North Beach.

On December 5th, Art and Carol Peterson hosted a fabulous party for the poets at the couple's home with its sparkling top-of-the city view. It was a delightful culmination, complete with lovely food, and a wonderful piano player. The poets detailed some of the origins of the poems and read them by the glow of the fireplace. It was a salon atmosphere, at its very best. ✂

CONFETTI

I live on a street with van Gogh's stars
that jump over apartment buildings,
over Coit Tower.

They write yellow on midnight,
they howl.

Bob Kaufman was a Buddha
beneath these stars.

I live on a dreaming street,
where the red confetti of firecrackers
mix with blossoms piling in the gutters,
and children shout my name,
and slam their windows shut.

I live on a street of hills,
of Brazilian pizza drivers,
of French Italian bread baking smells
floating through my window at 2:00 in the morning.
I live with a flock of squawking parrots.

Sometimes I love my street,
sometimes I hate it.

I live where a homeless woman
knows the pigeons by name,
mothers check the sandbox for syringes
before letting their toddlers play,
jazz drools near the corners
of broken furniture and garbage,
gray is hung

from the buildings at dawn
as kids roll their backpacks to school.

My street is an impulse,
a series of shiny dots,
of languages brought together
without definite plans.

I live the way all humans live,
on a street
that bleeds from my heart.

**More THD Poetry
Winners, p. 37**

ATTENTION PARK PEOPLE!

Do you have ideas for improving your local parks? Can you imagine creative ways to build new open space in your neighborhood? In the upcoming months, more than a dozen meetings will take place throughout San Francisco, hosted by the Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) as the community partner for the Mayor's Office of Greening, the Planning Department, and the Recreation and Park Department. The Council is working with neighborhood groups across the city to solicit the public's vision and priorities about the future of public open space.

Input gathered at the neighborhood workshops will help to inform the Open Space Framework, to be managed by the Mayor's Office of Greening. Those unable to attend a scheduled meeting are also encouraged to participate by either hosting their own meeting with neighbors at their convenience, or by

completing a brief survey at <http://www.openspacesf.org>.

A 'Meeting in a Box' is available for all those who choose to conduct their own meeting, providing a guide for the host to easily lead a conversation with friends and colleagues, and to garner important feedback about open space needs, challenges and ideas.

Results from all public feedback will be incorporated into the Action Plan for Open Space. In addition, a collective, ranked priority list on open space issues will be created and presented to the Mayor, Board of Supervisors, and relevant Departments and their Commissions.

The Russian Hill neighborhood meeting, to be hosted by the Russian Hill Improvement Association, will be held in March (date and location to be announced.) For more information, please contact Mike Kritzman, Open Space Program Assistant, mkritzman@sfnpc.org, 415-621-3260. To learn more about the meetings, and to see the complete schedule, visit <http://openspacesf.org/meetingpacket>. ✕

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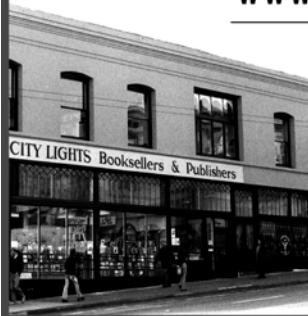
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Crisp was indignant, "That was twenty years ago!"

"Yes, but your name, it's written in stone," Manson said.

Vesuvio is part of a special triumvirate of bars that includes two watering holes on other side of Columbus: Specs-(that Lenoir managed in the 1940s) and Tosca Café. The three form a Bermuda triangle of sorts, where those that navigate between them, often find their memory of the night before has disappeared without a trace. The regulars call these excursions "North Beach roulette." One jaywalking voyager flatly states "You will get hit by a car at some point, some people more often than others."

It's these stories that make Vesuvio the treasure that it has been for the past 60 years. The connection to the Beat era, the movie stars, writers, and other notables that have walked through its door, while exciting, isn't going to sustain a bar. Rather it's the "history of stories," the devotion of the regulars, and the respect and care the staff take to preserve the integrity of Henri Lenoir's initial vision. He wanted to create a "gathering place for the people of North Beach". In the process it became a gathering place for people from all over the world.

The tourists will continue to make Vesuvio a thriving draw. It routinely ranks as one of America's



top bars. Young men and women, fortified with the poetry of the Beats will walk the well worn path beneath the scrawl reading, "Itching to get away from Portland Oregon." After all, we all have a bit of "Portland" we are trying to get away from, and as long as that is true, folks of every stripe will find a safe harbor at the Vesuvio Café. ✕

Sargent Johnsen *continued from page 28*

Emmy Lou Packard, and others.

City Lights Publishing was located at Filbert and Grant Leo Krikorian opened "The Place," a Bohemian hangout, at 1546 Grant, and the New Tivoli at 1434 Grant was packed with artists.

North Beach, in those days, embraced the multi-racial Johnson at a time when the rest of the city was still divided by segregation and discrimination.

Born in Boston in 1888, Johnson was the third of six children of Anderson Johnson, who was Swedish, and Lizzie Jackson, who was Cherokee and black. Orphaned by age fourteen, Johnson lived with

relatives who gave his emerging artistic talent scant encouragement. So he left for the West coast.

Arriving in San Francisco in 1915, Johnson attended the California School of Fine Arts (now SFAI on Chestnut Street), where he studied, at different times, under sculptor Ralph Stackpole and Beniamino Bufano.

From 1926-1935, the Harmon Foundation, established to support and promote the work of African American artists exhibited his works and he gained national and international renown for works featuring black themes, making him the first black West Coast

continued on page 38

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PARKING & TRAFFIC REPORT

By Gail and Paul Switzer Co-Chair, THD Parking and Traffic Committee

It's has been less than a year since the P&T committee has begun to meet again after a break of almost two years. So much is going on in our neighborhood and so much of what's going on is intertwined.

Now that MTA has agreed to retain the complete #39 bus route, we will be working with them to increase ridership. We will not, and cannot do this alone. We worked closely with Renew SF to "save" the bus. It will take the whole community to make this effort to increase ridership succeed. We have set up committees that include MTA liaison staff, to work on the different issues that must be addressed. These include public relations and marketing, as well as the reliability of the bus and congestion at Coit Tower.

How can you help?

If you would like to serve on one of these committees contact Gail Switzer at (415) 788-8667 or at switzer.gail@gmail.com.

In addition, leave your car at home and try the bus as an alternative way to get up the hill. It will get you to and from the North Beach shops, Fisherman's Wharf, Safeway, and Trader Joes.

Another issue that P&T has tackled is pedestrian safety and traffic in the neighborhood. This issue ties in with efforts by Renew SF and SF County Transportation Agency to modify the Columbus Avenue corridor and with the traffic flow issues related to the proposed Piazza on Vallejo in front of St. Francis' Shrine. Jonathan Weiner is representing THD in the development of a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood streets, sidewalks and traffic flow, rather than a patchwork of projects.

And tied into all of this is the eternal issue of

restricted use parking, its placement and misuse. Nate Baca heads our effort to rationalize placement and use of colored zones. We are planning discussions and meetings with business owners in North Beach as well as with affected residents. Part of the THD effort is a long-term plan for centralized valet parking as an alternative to the poorly used patchwork of white zones for valet parking. Anyone interested in working with Nate on this should call Gail Switzer at the above contacts.

Not dead yet is opposition to the Central Subway plans. Members of the P&T committee will be invited to an informational meeting that would provide information on the plans and the opposition to them. Our committee suggested that this meeting also include someone who supports the subway, so that we can understand why they are supporting it. We also feel it is important for neighborhood residents to learn more about the proposed plans and their impact on our community and hope to have more information available to THD members in the future.

And finally, we are collaborating with North Beach Neighbors and Russian Hill Neighbors to minimize abuses of permits that restrict parking in construction zones. An initial meeting has been held with staff of Department of Public Works and follow up meetings will take place in the spring. DPW is working on developing a uniform and enforceable construction zone signage and would like to take control of the whole process.

The THD P&T committee meets the first Saturday of each month, 10:30 to Noon at North Beach Citizens, 720 Columbus. All THD members are welcome to attend.



MORE POEMS

Here are the titles and authors of the winning poems in the Poetry in Public Places Contest sponsored by THD's Art and Culture Committee. They may be accessed through the THD web site at www.thd.org/arts

Boundaries by Sally Doyle

Confetti by Sally Doyle

Nothing Adds Up by Sally Doyle

Lost America by Arnell Brophy

On the Rooftop by Joe Shakarchi

Poet's Walk by Joe Shakarchi

Red Currents by Phillip Hackett

Russia by Barbara Alexandra Szerlip

Twelve Bells in One Mansion by Candace Loheed



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artist to gain a national reputation.

Johnson could have passed as white, which some of his sisters did, but instead embraced his black heritage.

"I aim at producing a strictly Negro art, studying not the culturally mixed Negro of the cities, but the more primitive slave type as it existed in this country during the period of slave importation. Very few artists have gone into the history of the Negro in America, cutting back to the sources and origins of the life of the race in this country. It is the pure American Negro I am concerned with, aiming to show the natural beauty and dignity in that characteristic lip, that characteristic hair, bearing and manner.

"And I wish to show that beauty not so much to the white man as to the Negro himself. Unless I can interest my race, I am sunk. And that is not so easily accomplished... Too many Negro artists go to Europe and come back imitators of Cezanne, Matisse, or Picasso. And this attitude is not only a weakness of the artists, but of their racial public." [SFChron 06Oct1935]

Johnson earned commissions, but during the Depression, things got tough for artists. He was on the verge of giving up art when he gained employment from the Federal Arts Project. "At the time, things looked pretty dreary and I thought I was going to be getting out of it because, you know, I came from a family of people who thought all artists were drunkards and everything else."

But the New Deal outreach to artists came to the rescue. His first project for the Federal Arts Project was a carved redwood organ screen for the California School for the Blind in Berkeley. Next he worked on projects for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exhibition on Treasure Island: two cast-stone sculptures for the Court of Pacifica and three statues for

the Alameda-Contra Costa building.

Then there was the Maritime Museum project, one of Johnson's most widely-known works. The green slate bas-reliefs on the Bay Street side and the tile work on the veranda are visible even while the museum is closed for renovation.

Another, and perhaps the best known, San Francisco work by Sargent Johnson is the huge (2500 sq ft) molded-stone bas relief athletic frieze across the back of the football field at Washington High at 32nd and Anza. That magnificent project caused the life-long split with Bufano, Johnson's teacher, mentor, boss, and fellow artist.

Bufano had won the job originally but was fired either because WPA officials deemed his proposed work too political (rumors had it that he'd used labor leader Harry Bridges and Stalin as models, which he denied) or because he was overbooked and too far behind on his projects or because he kept changing his design and the project was taking too long. With Bufano off the project, Johnson won the job, replacing Bufano, in 1940 and was considered a traitorous friend by Bufano ever after.

Johnson had several large commissions in the forties and fifties: the exterior entrance for Nathan Dohrmann & Company on Geary, a wall in the Richmond, CA, City Hall Chambers, some large commissions for Matson Line ships, work on an enamel mural for Harolds Club in Reno.

Johnson slowed down and concentrated on smaller works. He was dogged by severe angina in his later years.

Sargent Claude Johnson left North Beach in 1965 and died in 1967 of a heart attack, leaving behind a lot of history, abundant private and public art works, and footsteps for us to follow along the streets and byways of North Beach and Telegraph Hill. ♦





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PLANNING AND ZONING. Nancy Shanahan, 986-7094, Mary Lipian, 391-5652. Monitors and reviews proposed development projects for consistency with applicable City ordinances. Works with Planning Department staff and represents THD before the Landmarks Board, Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator and other regulating bodies to protect historic resources and maintain neighborhood character. Assists members to learn more about and participate in planning and zoning issues.

SEMAPHORE. Editor, Art Peterson 956-7817; artpeterson@writingproject.org. The editor and staff produce a quarterly magazine for THD members.

PROGRAM. Sarah Kliban. Arranges social events, including quarterly membership meetings and get-acquainted social functions.

BUDGET. Gail Switzer. gail_switzer@yahoo.com. As prescribed in bylaws for Treasurer.

MEMBERSHIP. Al Fontes, membership@thd.org. As prescribed in Bylaws for Financial Secretary.

ARCHIVIST: Rozell Overmire, rozell@ureach.com

SPECIAL COMMITTEES AND PROJECTS

PARKS AND TREES. Robert Mattei, chair. Information and projects concerning local parks, green spaces and street trees.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Rozell Overmire, 989-3945, rozell@ureach.com. Transcriptions of taped interviews provide historical documentation of living and working in the neighborhood. Available at North Beach Public Library.

THD WEB SITE. Webmaster, Al Fontes; webmaster@thd.org. Shared information about meetings, local concerns and events.

ART AND CULTURE, Termeh Yeghiazarian. Organizes events and projects that celebrate the history and humanities of our neighborhood.

LIAISONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

COALITION FOR SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOODS. Representative, Gerry Crowley, 781-4201; gerrycrowley@aol.com. City-wide organization interacts with other neighborhoods to discuss common problems.

NORTH BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION. Representative, Gerry Crowley. 781-4201; gerrycrowley@aol.com. Tel-Hi-sponsored group of residents, merchants and government agencies working together to address neighborhood issues.

N.E.R.T. Jack Oswald. jack@oswald.com. Energizes members to take emergency disaster response training program sponsored by the City.

WEB SITE = www.thd.org

Whether you want to catch up on THD's Oral Histories, see what the THD is up to, or submit old photos of the Hill, www.thd.org is the place to go. Use the Web site to discover or email information about upcoming meetings in the neighborhood and at City agencies, and ideas and concerns you want the rest of us to know about between *Semaphores*.

THD CALENDAR

SCHEDULES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

PLANNING & ZONING: First Thursdays. Call for time and location. 986-7070, 563-3494, 391-5652.

Look to the THD website for information on THD events.

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