INTRODUCTION: THE SOUTH OF MARKET NEIGHBORHOODS

Three geographic features molded the development of the neighborhoods of the West Approach Project study area. Two of these, Yerba Buena Cove and Mission Bay, are entirely gone now, and the third, Rincon Hill, has been substantially reduced in size; all fell victim to human modification of the natural landscape in the century following the Gold Rush. The six project area blocks are associated with three South of Market neighborhoods. In the north, Tar Flat evolved from the former shoreline and filled-in waters of Yerba Buena Cove, and is represented by Block 4. A little to the south, the Edges of Rincon Hill—comprising remnant residential areas around the pared-down rocky hill that now supports the western landing of the Bay Bridge—takes in Blocks 5, 7, and 9. At the south end of the study area, Blocks 10 and 11 represent the Shore of Mission Bay neighborhood, consisting of land built up over the former shorelines, salt marshes, and estuaries of the now-vanished Mission Bay.

COLONIZATION TO GOLD RUSH, 1776–1850

Pre-contact Native Americans, attracted by the fresh water and profuse resources, created two villages in the West Approach Project vicinity. Sitlintac was their summer home on Mission Bay, while the winter village of Chutchui was a couple of miles upstream on Mission Creek. In 1776 Spanish Sonoran settlers under Lt. José Joaquín Moraga arrived from Monterey to found the Mission San Francisco de Asís near Chutchui; Moraga also established the Presidio of San Francisco as a military reserve near the Golden Gate to the northwest. As colonists increased around the fort, the Spanish government converted the four California presidios to pueblos, each with four square leagues of land for distribution to soldiers and nonmilitary colonists. What was to become the South of Market district was part of the Pueblo de San Francisco grant, but it was likely used for little more than grazing land through the Spanish period and most of the subsequent Mexican period. Over the next 40 years, virtually all of the surviving native people in the Bay Area became attached to the missions (Milliken 1995:1, 53, 61). By 1817 a thousand native “converts” lived in squalid conditions around the San Francisco mission (Beechey 1831[II]:20). That population declined along with the political power of the Franciscans, and as secularization of mission lands began in 1833, there were but 204 native converts living near Mission Bay (Hittell 1878:70). After the mission breakup, another grant, Potrero Nuevo, was created from former church lands a little farther to the south.

As American and other foreign commercial interests in California grew in the mid-19th century, a small settlement sprang up near the north end of Yerba Buena Cove, where deeper
Figure 2.1. "View of San Francisco, formerly Yerba Buena, in 1846–7. Before the Discovery of Gold." This early view of San Francisco is north of what would later become South of Market. (Illustration courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-pga-00251)
water provided a better anchorage than the shallow south end. The first recorded development in the village of Yerba Buena occurred in 1840 and 1841, when Jean-Jacques Vioget built a cluster of one-story buildings and applied for a license to operate a saloon and billiard hall. This village of perhaps 50 residents, including 16 foreigners—mostly British and Yankee sailors who had jumped ship—was north of present-day Market Street (Figure 2.1). While access to the South of Market area was blocked by 80- to 100-foot sandhills, villagers and maritime visitors would likely have made the trip to collect firewood, a scarce commodity by the shore. By the time of the U.S. takeover in July 1846, the village population had grown to 200, with 50 buildings; two years later it had become a town of 850 residents and 200 buildings (Soule, Gihon, and Nisbet 1855:173, 200). The original name of the settlement, taken from nearby Yerba Buena Cove, was officially changed to San Francisco in 1847. During this period the shoreline of the cove was reported as the scene of various diversions—including picnicking, clam digging, and mussel collecting—while horse races were run on the beach below the south cove bluff in the project area. Farther south, the rich wildlife resources of the Mission Bay marshes and estuaries would also have attracted nearby settlers.

Early on during the American era, temporary military governor General Stephen Kearny gave the town the right to sell beach and water lots between Fort Montgomery (near present-day Broadway and the Embarcadero) and Rincon Point for its own benefit (Bancroft 1884, V:563–564), paving the way for future sales of submerged tidal lands near the present project area. Years later, in 1868, the Tidelands Act established a commission to sort out ownership claims to squatter-occupied watery lots, primarily in and around Mission Bay, and to legally sell the lots to successful claimants. Physical possession was one requirement, resulting in some violent skirmishes among rival occupants. The Tidelands Act also paved the way for the entry of the railroad into the area, setting aside 150 acres, mostly Mission Bay water lots, for a freight terminal.

The South of Market was given much of its identity as a separate place within the city when surveyor Jasper O’Farrell created Market Street in 1847. By then the Yerba Buena townsite consisted of about 40 acres surrounding Portsmouth Square that functioned as the commercial center for much of the sparsely settled Pacific Coast. O’Farrell cut off the established (roughly north/south) town grid of Yerba Buena diagonally, laying out what he envisioned as a broad future boulevard across what was then an uninhabited sandhill wasteland. Streets to the south conformed to this diagonal layout: historian John S. Hittell observed that O’Farrell “correctly appreciated the importance of making the main streets in the southern part of town agree in general direction with the route followed by people going from Yerba Buena Cove to the Mission” (1878:116). Other defining features of this survey were larger blocks and lots, and wider streets in the lands to the south of Market Street. The view in those pre-Gold Rush times that the area was of limited value resulted in the oversized blocks, each containing six 100-vara lots (each lot about 1.7 acres in size). The broader grid of streets also reduced the amount of grading necessary to access the lots.

By the summer of 1848, just months after discovery of gold at Sutter’s Fort, most able-bodied San Franciscans had dropped everything to set off for Sacramento and the mines. With President Polk’s authentication of the finds in December of that year, the rush was on, bringing gold seekers from every region of the U.S. and its territories, and from countries around the globe. The fledgling city on Yerba Buena Cove was soon teeming with new arrivals. As 1849 came to a close, San Francisco’s population had risen to between 25,000 and 30,000 (Soule, Gihon, and Nisbet 1855:215–216). The only surviving 1850 view of the shore of Yerba Buena Cove, called
Happy Valley by the artist, is the painting by August Ferran (Figure 2.2) that depicts chaotic tent camps along the shoreline, in what would become Tar Flat.

**CUT AND FILL: CITY EXPANSION**

**AS THE GOLD RUSH RUNS ITS COURSE, 1850–1859**

Survey of San Francisco in 1852 by the U. S. Coast Survey resulted in the first accurate map, published in 1853, of the streets, buildings, and underlying natural topography of the young city (Figure 2.3). In the South of Market district, it shows the grid of city blocks aligned with Market Street, running into the edge of Yerba Buena Cove in the north and across the tidal marshes of Mission Bay to the south. In the northern part of the project area, what would become Blocks 1, 2, and 13 was submerged under the waters of Yerba Buena Cove. The cove itself was shallow, with an extensive mud flat laid bare at low tide. As the first protected anchorage on the bay, it had become the port of choice for vessels of all sizes, with the largest moving in only on high tides. The shoreline from Mission Street to Rincon Point became known as Happy Valley, an area of “free land” where the early gold seekers of 1850–1852 could put up their tents at no fee, and stay in the convivial society of new arrivals on the move to the mines. Pleasant Valley, whose name appears on only a few maps in the 1850s, lay between the 60-foot-high sandhills that blocked Howard Street and the slopes of Rincon Hill just to the south. The sandhills traced by the 1852 topographic contour lines would soon be largely leveled into the low spots and small valleys, and into the bay waters and marshlands as city real estate pushed outward.

The radical changes necessary to convert the South of Market area from sand dunes and wetlands into a vital part of the new city happened quickly and efficiently. O’Farrell’s 1847 survey had laid out the theoretical framework for this development, and the 1852/53 Coast Survey map shows that by that time substantial construction was already underway along the streets in the district regardless of the topography. Nonetheless, planners were not content to grow the city
Figure 2.3. San Francisco, 1852/1853, U.S. Coast Survey map showing project blocks.
on the natural landscape of steep sandhills and valleys, and began to transform the landscape to better suit urban use and growth. Before long, existing terrain was flattened and new land was created by filling in the edges of the bay.

Initial response to South of Market real estate had been tepid at best, but Gold Rush population growth soon spurred development. By 1852 the Mission Dolores Plank Road Company, franchised to collect tolls for seven years, had built planked roads on Mission and Folsom streets, each over two miles long. A City-funded, toll-free planked road authorized in 1853 was built on Brannan Street, at the time more of a causeway along the northern edge of Mission Bay than a road. The planked roads were only part of a temporary solution. City-owned streets as well as private lots needed permanent filling and grading. With marshy wetlands to be filled and steep hills north and south of Market to be leveled, all that was lacking was the means to move the sand. The answer was provided by David Hewes, who combined a steam shovel with movable tramways for hauling the sand. The resulting system was dubbed the “Steam Paddy,” a reference to the ubiquitous Irish workers who provided much of the non-mechanized earthmoving labor of the time. From 1852 to 1854, and from 1858 to 1873, Hewes’s steam paddy was at work shaping the terrain of San Francisco (Hittell 1878:438). An upscale townhouse development on the block immediately south of Rincon Hill and project Block 9 was opened in 1855. The slowdown in the steam paddy cut-and-fill operation from 1855 to 1857 reflects a general local depression that began in 1854, brought on by the dishonest dealings of lumber and real-estate speculator “Honest Harry” Meiggs. Eventually, the city’s real-estate market rebounded, and both Yerba Buena Cove and Mission Bay soon disappeared under the relocated sand fill.

The 1850s saw the establishment of the upper part of Rincon Hill as an upscale neighborhood of semi-countrified mansions and cottages for San Francisco’s social elite. This trend continued into the 1870s and lingered longer. Adjacent to the hill, just to the south of project Block 9, South Park—a planned development of tony townhouses built around an oval park—was created in 1855, reinforcing the area’s identity as an enclave of the wealthy.

The 1857/59 (Figure 2.4) Coast Survey map recorded the South of Market District as the massive and rapid transformation of the landscape led by Hewes’s steam paddy was underway. In the north, substantial advances had already been made in the filling of Yerba Buena Cove, visible in the amount the shoreline had crept out into Blocks 1, 2, 3, and 13 since the 1852 survey. In the south, the portion of Block 10 mapped as Mission Bay marshland is half the size shown in 1852. Over the same period, the overall number of buildings in the South of Market appears to have increased geometrically. The 1857/59 map also shows the three planked roads connecting to downtown via the Third Street thoroughfare, as well as by a wagon road on the Sixth Street alignment. The Brannan Street free road was the preferred corridor for development: the 1857/59 map shows most lots accessible by this road as already filled and graded, while marshes, pools, and sandhills remained on many lots along the toll roads. Much of this substantial Brannan Street traffic would have flowed along Third Street between West Approach Project Blocks 9 and 10.

Mission Bay marshlands remained largely isolated during the 1850s, with lands such as Block 11 used primarily for hunting and fishing. Shellfishing and market hunting of waterfowl—to supply the city’s many boardinghouses, restaurants, wholesale markets, and street peddlers—were still profitable trades. The southwestern third of Block 10 also remained a marshland, with the 1857/59 Coast Survey map showing a rectangular structure that suggests a hunter’s blind at its edge. While largely vacant, the rest of the block exhibited some development along Third Street.
Figure 2.4. San Francisco, 1857/1859, U.S. Coast Survey map showing project blocks.
COMSTOCK BOOM PROSPERITY, 1859–1875

While the rush was over in the California goldfields, the discovery in 1859 of the Comstock Lode and the ensuing silver boom in western Nevada set the tone of the decade of the 1860s. It was a time of increasing high hopes for progress and development in San Francisco and resulted in further changes in the landscape South of Market. Comparing the bird’s-eye views of 1864 and 1868 (Figures 2.5 and 2.6); the most striking change is the presence of Long Bridge. The construction of the bridge as a continuation of the Fourth Street horse-car route, across Mission Bay and beyond to Potrero and Hunter’s Point, was a major stimulus to South of Market development; in the West Approach Project area, Blocks 10 and 11 near Mission Bay were most directly affected.

As the steam paddy chugged away through the 1860s, San Francisco grew steadily southward into an increasingly homogeneous South of Market cityscape (Figure 2.7). The area was a focal point of a building and real-estate boom in the city that continued to expand until the
Chapter 2: A Brief History of the South of Market

1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad. Several factors spurred growth in the district, including the final clearance in 1867 of land titles on the Potrero Nuevo grant just to the south, the nearly completed work of the steam paddy, the labor needs of growing industry, and advances in transportation and its infrastructure.

Public transportation in San Francisco’s early years took the form of omnibuses and cabs. The Omnibus Road, which ran large, stagecoach-like vehicles from South Park in the South of Market district to North Beach, converted to tracked horse cars in 1862 to become the city’s first street railroad (Hittell 1878:182). The 1860s saw the building of horse-car lines on many South of Market streets. The Sixth Street horse-car line, running from north of Market Street down Sixth to Brannan, then down Brannan to Mission Creek, started in the mid-1860s and operated with horses until it became one of the city’s earliest electric lines around the turn of the 19th century.

One undated view (probably taken ca. 1860–1861) looks southeast from the 600 block of Harrison Street (Figure 2.8). The smoke from a sugar refinery down at Eighth Street would place this view in the 1860s. Blocks 10 and 11 still show virtually no development. One large, two-story building sits in isolation mid-block on Block 10; another isolated, one-story building faces Harrison Street on Block 11 and appears to have washing hung out near the street, as well as a fenced yard above a marshy area in the backyard. More than anything else, this photograph emphasizes the continued isolation of Blocks 10 and 11, in sharp contrast to the considerable number of homes and commercial buildings on the northwest side of Harrison (in the 700 and 800 blocks), which face the marshland to the south.
Figure 2.7. David Hewes and the Steam Paddy at Eighth and Harrison. David Hewes poses with his workmen and associates in front of the steam shovel and train system that spread the sandhills north and south of Market Street into Yerba Buena Cove and Mission Bay in the 1860s. George Gordon’s sugar refinery was located in the six-story building on the right. This building was damaged by the 1868 earthquake. (Photo courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: 1905.17500 v.10:82--ALB)

Figure 2.8. View down Harrison Street from Rincon Hill, looking southwest, ca. 1860/61. This undated view was taken from the 600 block of Harrison looking west as far as Eighth Street. Third Street has just been crossed by a horsecar from South Park. Undrained marshes account for the low level of development on the left, or south, side of Harrison that encompasses project Blocks 10 and 11. (Photo courtesy of the California Historical Society)
NEW POVERTY SOUTH OF MARKET, 1875–1890

Post-Gold Rush San Francisco had enjoyed 15 years of prosperity, from the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859 to the crash that occurred in 1875. The long-anticipated completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, which was behind much of the speculation of the period, was expected to usher in a new, even greater era of prosperity for San Francisco. While the four proprietors of the Central Pacific reaped spectacular rewards, for most other segments of the economy the railroad had an opposite effect. By directly tying California to the national economy, the railroad brought East Coast industrial competition, and with it falling wages and the effects of distant speculative busts. Along with cheap eastern goods, the railroad brought in a wave of new European immigrants needing jobs. Overall, the city's population increased from 150,000 to 235,000 between 1870 and 1880. Much of the increase was concentrated in the South of Market, where living conditions grew more congested as the district absorbed numerous German, Irish, and English immigrants. The Chinese, while competing for the work with the South of Market laborers, lived in the Chinese enclave of Chinatown. Another group whose origins were tied to the development of the nation's rail systems also began arriving in significant numbers: transient single men following seasonal work, later to be stigmatized as hobos.

From 1876 to 1877, in a modest two-story row house on Harrison, lived Block 9's most famous resident: Henry George, the radical economist. George supported his small family by writing articles for the *Overland Monthly* and *Alta California*. Later he moved to 417 Second Street, on West Approach Block 7. It was while he lived on these two blocks that he wrote *Progress and Poverty*, the only 19th-century American book on economics to sell over two million copies and to be appreciated for its original ideas several generations later. While in the neighborhood, George worked as a meter reader for a gas company, a job that would have given him ample opportunity to move through the back streets of San Francisco, like Perry and Silver, and observe the conditions of family and business life. George identified the unique character of life in California: “a certain cosmopolitanism, a certain freedom and breadth of thought and feeling, natural to a community made up from so many different sources . . . a feeling of personal independence and equality, a certain hopefulness and self-reliance, and a certain large-heartedness and openhandedness.” All these characteristics contrasted with the highly structured Victorian urban world. In San Francisco, individuals rose or fell according to ability and the revolutions of circumstance; the latter so often shifted dramatically that a person's fortune might suddenly collapse, and not too much later be restored in some novel form, just as unexpectedly. In short, it was a much more human-centered society than that of America's more established, socially stratified cities. George predicted that the railroad would change all of this, first bringing on an economic crisis, and then steadily and ruinously undermining the independence and freedom of the individual, which was San Francisco's most valuable characteristic. The importation of the class struggle was one expected result of contact with the East Coast. George, it appears, was right.

The sharp depression of the mid-1870s marked a watershed in the social and economic history of the South of Market. Outside of the wealthy enclave of Rincon Hill, most residents of the project area lived payday to payday, working for wages. San Francisco had grown so rapidly from the Gold Rush right up through the Comstock boom because unemployment was usually low and wages relatively high in comparison to the nation as a whole; much of the city's economy had been driven first by local and then by regional demand. This favorable labor situation had its roots in the Gold Rush-era settlement of San Francisco and California as a whole. Dependence on wage labor could provide an adequate income in good times, but in bad times
the inherent insecurity of wage-labor income spelled disaster for many, dramatically shifting the balance of power in the labor market toward the employer. After 1875 a labor surplus in San Francisco continued to prevail, to varying degrees, for three decades—keeping wages down and unemployment up until the 1906 fire created an insatiable demand for hands to rebuild the devastated city.

An example of the desperation of 1875 is this advertisement taken out in a San Francisco newspaper: “ Wanted: 100 men to work as day labor for $1 a day, bring your own pick and shovel” (Alta California 16 April 1875). Over a thousand men, a significant proportion of the city’s white male population of 50,000—were desperate enough to show up for a backbreaking day of cutting a railroad grade through the rock at 10 cents an hour. Fights broke out between the desperate men, and a riot was narrowly averted by promising more work the next day for the disappointed.

With the depression of the 1870s, many speculative enterprises built in anticipation of the railroad folded or barely stayed afloat. Most dramatic in the West Approach Project area was the Kimball Carriage Works on Block 11. Opulent carriages for railway cars—costing $20,000 per car while holding only 11 passengers—were in limited demand in an economy on the skids. The company soon experienced financial disaster, ending in the presumed suicide of its chief investor, Bank of California manager William Ralston, in 1875. The shops closed in 1876.

In addition to the large-scale losses when industries went under, small businesses were often hard-hit, especially those whose operation depended on credit. The family grocery stores that characterized the South of Market sold food on credit to their regular local customers. When enough of his customers lost their jobs, the grocer could lose his business. For every big business that failed, there were countless individual enterprises that slowly drained away any assets that their proprietors possessed.

With devastating unemployment in the South of Market, an intricate network of social clubs and benevolent societies gave formal organization to the principle of mutual aid. Fraternal orders, trade unions, and neighborhood religious and social groups had regular meetings: who could have known better if someone failed to show up because of illness or personal tragedy? Outside charitable institutions were also moved to respond to the despair, in tune with a diverse nationwide, social-reform movement. Block 9, the southernmost of the Edges of Rincon Hill blocks, became a magnet for schools: Silver Street Kindergarten, Longfellow School, and Rincon Grammar School covered large parcels between Perry and Silver streets. This concentration of schools was the result of the social work undertaken by dedicated workers devoted to improving the lot of area children. Silver Street, one of Block 9’s interior streets, became locally famous in the late summer of 1878, when a group of well-educated young women led by Kate Wiggin promoted the kindergarten movement from the Silver Street Kindergarten, the first of what would grow to 66 kindergartens in San Francisco by 1880.

Nearby on the steep northeast corner of Block 7, the Sisters of Mercy order built St. Mary’s Hospital in 1861. Here the Sisters also operated an employment office and shelters for at-risk young women and older women. Our Lady of Mercy Academy was built along the north end of the hospital property in 1871; by 1886 it enrolled 435 students.
THREE NEIGHBORHOODS

The three neighborhoods in the West Approach Project area—industrial Tar Flat, marginally prosperous Edges of Rincon Hill, and the working-class homes and industry of the Shore of Mission Bay—had each developed its own unique personality; there was also a degree of internal division within those neighborhoods. Below, brief histories of the neighborhoods—from their beginnings to the eve of the 20th century—give a sense of how the broad-scale events described above played out at the local level. Detailed histories of the neighborhoods and the blocks that comprise them are provided in the three Block Technical Reports for the West Approach Project (Praetzellis, ed. 2007).

TAR FLAT

The Tar Flat neighborhood developed in the late 1840s in the area of Happy Valley and the subsequently filled blocks that grew out into Yerba Buena Cove. The chaotic campground of would-be miners soon evolved into an area of scattered residences and small workshops and stores. Isolated from the industrial east and Europe, local industry had to be created to supply needed machinery to the mining and milling that drove the West Coast’s economy, as well as to make the domestic items required by a growing population. This ironworks industry developed in the only real city on the coast, San Francisco. The construction of the San Francisco Gas Works in Happy Valley in 1854 set the stage for that area to become the center of the first heavy industry in the coastal West. Perched on the original shoreline at Howard and Fremont streets, the plant discharged the residual coal-tar byproduct of gas generation directly into the as-yet-unfilled tidal mudflats of Block 3 to the east. The smelly dumpsite that grew there as new wharfs were built on open waters to the east gave a name to the neighborhood: Tar Flat. The degraded environment made it suitable for little else than industry. The combination of level ground, access to shipping and a labor force, and cheapened real estate attracted the metalworking and related industries to Tar Flat, a specialty that defined its character well into the 20th century.

The Miner’s Foundry, later known as the Golden State and Miners’ Ironworks, opened its doors in 1860 on First Street near Folsom Street on Block 4, operating there for about 75 years (see sidebar). Following soon were the Aetna Ironworks, Eureka Foundry, Mechanics’ Foundry, Metropolitan Ironworks, Western Ironworks, and Union Ironworks, as well as a range of other heavy industries. Tar Flat became the acknowledged world leader of precious metals mining technology during the 1860s, and had begun to export its machinery to new and expanding markets throughout the world. The financial panic of 1875, however, deprived the mines of the speculative capital they needed to grow, and the resulting depression began to erode Tar Flat’s industrial prominence. Some foundries moved to the Potrero, where they increasingly specialized in shipbuilding and repair; others successfully found export markets in the Pacific. The Miner’s Foundry remained, continuing in the mining machinery business on its original First Street site through the construction of the Bay Bridge in the 1930s, but its technological leadership had ended by the 1880s.

Although industry was dominant in Tar Flat, a dense and fairly diverse residential component developed in the alleys and along portions of the main streets. The metals industry of Tar Flat required entrepreneurs and inventors, skilled craftsmen and laborers. The top-level workers generally lived in the adjoining neighborhoods of Pleasant Valley and Rincon Hill.
Block 4, situated on the original shoreline of Yerba Buena Cove, early on attracted iron foundries due to abundant beach sands suitable for making molds for iron casting. In 1859 on the eve of the Comstock Lode discovery, William H. Howland, Horace B. Angell, and Errin T. King established the Miner's Foundry on Block 4, eventually extending from 237 to 257 First Street. By the mid-1860s, 150 workers were using 2,600 tons of iron a year to turn out an amazing array of products, including steam engines and boilers, grain- and sugar-milling machinery; monitors and other hydraulic-mining equipment; stamp mills and replacement shoes for the ore stamps; circular, Muley, and sash saws, and planers for the lumber industry; rail-car wheels, and hundreds of other items. Ownership changed over the years, and when Wales Palmer, a partner in the nearby Golden State Iron Works, acquired an interest in Miner’s Foundry in the early 1870s, it became the Golden State and Miners’ Ironworks. The 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed the foundry’s complex of earthen-floored frame buildings, but the firm rebuilt on the same site and continued there into the 1930s.

Although the Miner’s Foundry produced machinery for a broad range of industries, as the name suggests, it was most closely linked with mining. The foundry was conceived as a cooperative venture, with individual inventors working under the same roof while still competing against one another. With this unusual approach the company played an important role in the rapid development of mining technology. Many of the foundry’s craftsmen had been miners themselves in the 1850s, giving them a practical familiarity with mining and ore processing. The Miner’s Foundry represented a one-stop, mining-machinery emporium, where visiting miners could compare different existing designs or have machines made to their own specifications, and even test machinery on their own ore samples in an on-site assaying room. The enterprise presents a picture of competitive innovation closely engaged with the industries it served, a bustling place where a steady flow of customers in from the mines, forests, and farms interacted with machinists and mechanics to continually refine evolving technologies.
(Blocks 5 and 7), while residents of Block 4 ranged from Irish day laborers, living in the Miner’s Hotel on First Street, to families of skilled craftsmen and shopkeepers living on Baldwin Court. There were also the people who catered to the workers’ needs—grocers and saloon keepers—as well as a Jewish tailor who lived and worked on Folsom Street for nearly three decades. Census data reveal a surprising diversity of ethnic groups, including substantial numbers of Swedes and Portuguese. Often, families of different nationalities shared the same crowded tenement house.

**The Edges of Rincon Hill**

The second neighborhood, the Edges of Rincon Hill, was in sharp contrast to Tar Flat. The rocky prominence of Rincon Hill—reaching 120 feet above sea level (amsl)—became San Francisco’s first residential neighborhood for the moneyed elite, starting in the early 1850s. With lofty views and apparently far enough removed from the smoke and noise of Tar Flat, the upper parts of the hill became a bucolic island attracting residents ranging from successful to very wealthy; along its quiet streets and lanes they built genteel cottage- to mansion-sized homes. Kimball Carriage Works investor and Bank of California manager William Ralston was one early resident. Steeper side slopes were more suitable for institutional development: in 1861 the Sisters of Mercy acquired four 50 vara lots on Block 7, where the hill drops from 120 to 40 feet amsl above First and Bryant streets. Here they built St. Mary’s Hospital, facing the bay to the southeast. Block 5, on the lower edge of the northwestern slope of Rincon, was an area of more modest homes transitioning into the flat lots of Block 12 to the northwest and the Tar Flat industrial zone to the northeast (Figure 2.9). To the southwest, Block 9 comprised the easy southern slope toward the Mission Bay marshland.

Within the Edges of Rincon Hill district was a good deal of socioeconomic variety. The division between major and minor streets expressed relative degrees of importance and wealth: in Block 5 the Folsom Street frontage had a distinctly middle-class character, while houses located on the secondary streets were plainly working class, drawing residents from the industries of Tar Flat. The development of Block 9 was related to the 1855 establishment of the upscale South Park townhouse block just to the south, which brought the horsecars down Third Street to Brannan. Like Block 5, the houses on Block 9’s exterior streets of Harrison and Bryant reflected middle-class residency, while the interior streets were working-class in nature, albeit a little better-off economically than was the case on Block 5. Block 7, while also evidencing this interior/exterior economic divide to a degree, was generally representative of the tonier neighborhood on the top of Rincon Hill.

Eventually, with the 1869 re-grading of Second Street where it crossed the hill, the high-end character of upper Rincon Hill real estate literally began to erode. The project was pushed through the State legislature and benefited not only the bill’s author, who owned a lot at Second and Bryant, but the Southern Pacific Railroad, which thus obtained better access to a new railroad ferry terminal at the foot of Second Street. The re-grading resulted in lowering the roadbed 70 feet by carving an unstable canyon through the center of Rincon Hill. High above the gaping chasm, Harrison Street was routed across an iron viaduct. Before the cut was stabilized, more than one house was said to have slid down its steep banks. The unsightly Second Street Cut irreparably altered the character of the hilltop neighborhood, contributing to a growing general movement of wealthy residents away from the city center. Improved rail transport, including the innovation of the cable car, made living farther down the peninsula and in the hilly districts north of downtown more attractive. The slow exodus of the city’s elite away from the once-
Figure 2.9. Panoramic drawing by Dr. F. N. Otis, looking north from Rincon Hill, 1855. Drawn from the middle of Block 6, the artist encompassed a 180-degree view that took in Blocks 1-6 and much of the adjoining area. About 200 feet southeast of Folsom, the artist stood on a rise at least 60 feet above the street. He detailed Tar Flat, where Main and Beale streets can be seen as long wharves on pilings, stretching from Folsom to Mission and Market streets. (Illustration courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: 1963.002:0576–F)
fashionable Rincon Hill continued through the turn of the century. The hill itself would continue to be whittled down over the years to accommodate new development—the last episode being the construction of the West Approach to the Bay Bridge in the 1930s.

**SHORE OF MISSION BAY**

Blocks 10 and 11 represent the third neighborhood in the West Approach Project area: the Shore of Mission Bay. Formed by filled marshlands and their former margins, this part of the South of Market was entirely at sea level around the former Mission Bay. The SF-80 Bayshore Project area is a continuation of this neighborhood to the southwest. In 1852/53 none of Block 11 and only the northeast third of Block 10 could be considered dry land; the rest waited to be filled in gradually over the years. Third Street, running along the southeast base of Rincon Hill, became the physical dividing line between that more upscale area to the north and the only partially reclaimed Mission Bay marsh lots starting on Block 10. In the early years of the city, this area was mostly the province of market hunters and shellfish foragers. The removal of sandhill barriers on Third Street and the construction of the Brannan Street free, planked road in the mid-1850s opened up the Shore of Mission Bay blocks to eventual complete filling and development. By the 1880s a busy working-class neighborhood of densely packed, two-story row houses had sprung up along the long outer sides of the blocks and the streets/alleyways that now divided block interiors. Third and Fourth streets, cutting across the ends of the blocks, were more highly commercial, lined with shops, and with grocery stores and saloons strategically occupying every corner. On the upper floors were a variety of hotels and less formal lodging houses.

An exception to the general pattern of residential use was in the northeastern quarter of Block 11, where the Kimball Carriage Works operated its carriage and rail-car factory from 1868 to 1876. The 1887 Sanborn map shows the former Kimball premises filled with a busy complex of manufacturers, including the West Coast Furniture factory and two other furniture makers, a Chinese cigar-box factory, a marble works, a sausage factory, a blacksmith, and a plating shop. In the adjacent lot is the yard of the Spring Valley Water Company. Despite this roughly quarter-block of industrial use in Block 11, and a few other exceptions in other parts of the neighborhood beyond the West Approach Project area, the predominant character of the Shore of Mission Bay was one of crowded blocks of working families and supporting retail businesses. This remained true through the end of the 19th century.
THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW URBAN PATTERN, 1890–1906

A new urban pattern developed in the late 1880s as the economy began to grow again, linked to two emerging technologies: telephone service and electric power. Telephones allowed businesses to function without face-to-face communication, both internally within departments and at a distance from other businesses. For manufacturing processes, electric power eliminated the need for individual steam power—with its boilers, engines, belts, and pulleys; the attendant smoke and fire danger; and the required fuel supply and storage space for fuel. Along with telephone communication and electrically powered machinery, the innovations of electric lighting and elevators all combined to make multistory, multiple-use buildings more prevalent. The improved communications and increased flexibility of manufacturing processes made concentrated neighborhoods of like heavy industries, such as the foundry district of Tar Flat, less necessary. Although a national depression in 1893 affected the city sharply, this trend toward a different type of city continued, becoming very evident in the late 1890s and the first years of the 20th century. From the late 1880s to 1906, a tension developed between the growing, dynamic parts of the city—notably the Market Street corridor—and the static, slowly decaying, residential streets (tenement and Rincon Hill mansion alike) and Victorian-era industrial clusters south of Market. The density of the South of Market neighborhoods, combined with relatively homogeneous structures built to conform to the standards of the 1860s, made the area more resistant to change than were less dense and more heterogeneous neighborhoods north of Market. Nonetheless, during the 1890s, technically modern urban architecture began to rapidly spread throughout the downtown area and into parts of the South of Market closest to downtown, such as Tar Flat and Pleasant Valley. Electrically equipped industrial loft buildings serving new and expanded light industries came to characterize the South of Market, with its printing factories, ink works, and paper fabricators.

Although the new technology of the 1880s and 1890s changed the pattern of industrial development in the South of Market, it had much less immediate effect on working-class domestic life. By the turn of the century, the houses on Blocks 10 and 11 were mostly over 30 years old. Though often cheaply built as rental units, and substandard compared to, much rental housing in 1900, they might have housed new waves of immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe and endured for decades more. Instead, they were fated to be reduced to piles of kindling for the great fire of 18 April 1906.

THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE AND ITS AFTERMATH

In the South of Market neighborhoods, initial seismic destruction from the earthquake of 18 April 1906 was variable, ranging from light to severe. In areas of sand-filled bay lands, damage was considerable. On Rincon Hill, despite the 8.2 Richter intensity of the tremor, damage was relatively minor, with St. Mary’s Hospital structurally unscathed but soon overwhelmed with the injured from surrounding neighborhoods. The fires that began to race across the city soon burned over the entire West Approach Project area, ultimately destroying the hospital (its patients evacuated in time to Oakland on the sidewheeler Modoc) along with nearly everything else.

The City Beautiful movement, which had arisen near the end of the 19th century as part of the general climate of Progressive social reform, found many supporters among San Francisco’s
Catherine McAuley, a resident of Dublin, Ireland, inherited a substantial fortune around 1818 at the age of 40; interested in charity work, she decided to start a lay Catholic social-service organization of like-minded women. McAuley opened a young women’s shelter, the House of Mercy, in one of Dublin’s better neighborhoods. Local clerics and churchgoers alike looked askance at this community of uncoveted and unregulated females, and by 1831 McAuley and her associates took vows and founded the Sisters of Mercy order so that their work could continue in perpetuity (Sisters of Mercy Regional Community of Dallas 2007).

At the request of San Francisco Archbishop Alemany, eight Sisters of Mercy led by Sister Mary Baptist Russell traveled to California via the Isthmus route in 1854 to establish a ministry for the city’s sick. They began working at the State Marine and County Hospital on Stockton Street, and were soon asked by the County to assume control of the hospital under contract. The Sisters eventually bought the building and, when the County defaulted on contract payments, they renamed the facility “St. Mary’s Hospital” and began running it on their own. The building was inadequate for the growing city’s needs, and in 1861 the Sisters built a new state-of-the-art hospital on the edge of Rincon Hill on Block 7, where they cared for the city’s sick and poor until 1906 (Sanfilippo 2003).

Sister Mary Baptist became Mother Russell; during her long tenure a number of other social enterprises joined the hospital on the Rincon Hill site: a House of Mercy for young women, Our Lady of Mercy School for Girls (Academy), Our Lady’s Home for the Aged, and an employment agency (Sanfilippo 2003). The 1887 Sanborn map also shows a Church of the Passion, a Mortuary Chapel, and a three-story “Lacallette Home” of unknown purpose. Mother Russell died in 1898.

The earthquake on the morning of 18 April 1906 did no damage at all to the well-built brick hospital. But as it filled with the injured from the surrounding city, it soon became apparent that it would not escape the inferno that followed. The patients and staff were evacuated to the sidewheeler Modoc between 1:30 and 5:00 to be taken to Oakland; and later St. Mary’s burned to an empty shell. An unidentified Sister recalled:

Many an eye was turned to St. Mary’s as they sat on the deck. A sudden change in the wind had driven the smoke from the hill, and the building stood clear against the
evening sky while the dense pall
of smoke covered the whole City.
For some of the Sisters it had been
their home for half a century, and
as they saw it intact amidst the
surrounding desolation they cried:
“It is saved! We shall be in our old
home tomorrow.”

About 11 o’clock at night the fire
touched the old Home. The hospital
burned slowly. A blue whirlwind
of flame seemed to pass over the
hill. The cross on St. Mary’s glowed
to the last like a beacon, and fixed
forever on the eminence the title
of The Red Cross Hill [The Catholic
Voice 2006].

social elite. Proponents believed that complete reorganization and rebuilding of American cities
along Beaux-Arts lines would cure their social and moral ills and make them the equals of the
great cities of Europe. Chicago architect and City Beautiful proponent Daniel Burnham began
to design a plan for San Francisco in 1903, delivering the finished plan literally on the eve of the
earthquake of 18 April 1906. The plan’s completion, just as much of the city was leveled by the
quake and ensuing fire, would have seemed to be ideal timing for City Beautiful promoters.

In the end, however, the individual property rights of small businessmen and householders
camping in the ruins of their businesses and homes won out over the Progressives’ desires
for a complete aesthetic remodeling of the city grid. Starting with sheds and shacks, new
buildings sprang up on the old lots, with San Franciscans rolling up their sleeves and beginning
reconstruction before the Burnham plan could be implemented. Costs to rebuild the infrastructure
to accommodate Burnham’s vision would have been far too great in any case; the planned
rebirth of San Francisco as a City Beautiful was a futile exercise from the start. Nonetheless, local
architects associated with Burnham enjoyed more than two decades of profitable commissions
rebuilding downtown San Francisco and the Civic Center into a scaled-down approximation of a
Beaux-Arts City Beautiful, perhaps the closest practical version that was possible in a democratic
society.
Surviving in the South of Market

Individual shanties built of salvaged sheet metal and lumber were common housing solutions for those who came back to live in the ashes of the South of Market neighborhoods. A view of shanty life is found in Figure 2.10, looking west from Hawthorne Street from a point just northwest of Block 9. On an abandoned houselot, an army tent is visible on the far right, its flaps kept closed by a salvaged rocking chair. In front of it stands a group of low-roofed sheet metal shanties, surrounded by assorted salvaged detritus. In the South of Market in 1906, the choice for many of the very poor was between closely policed barracks or shanties such as these. Given the choice, many ranked the dignity of their freedom ahead of any comforts gained by assuming an institutional lifestyle.

A step up from the salvaged material shanties were earthquake cottages: city-built emergency homes for refugee families modeled on the portable bunkhouses used in western railroad logging camps. Earthquake cottages were mass-constructed during the fall of 1906; the frame cottages replaced army tents in refugee camps located on public land throughout San Francisco. These simple cottages were designed from their inception for eventual removal to privately purchased individual houselots in 1907–1908, where they became the permanent property of the refugee families who occupied them. A third housing option consisted of hotels or boardinghouses and tenements that provided homes for many, especially the large portion of the South of Market population that was single and male. Except for a flurry of construction soon
after the fire—most of it focused on the large lots of Rincon Hill—little, if any, new housing was built in the South of Market after 1913.

The great rise in wages and full employment in the several years following the fire allowed many South of Market refugees to move to outlying neighborhoods, especially to the adjacent Mission District. The middle class had all but vanished from the project area with the destruction of individual family dwellings. The 62,000 South of Market population of 1900 had dropped to 24,500 by 1910—and of those, 80 percent were single males [Averbach 1973:203].

After 1906 the character of Tar Flat changed from the low, crowded foundry and heavy industry district toward a new emphasis on light industry. It was in this part of the West Approach Project area that the 20th-century South of Market first appeared. Clean businesses such as furniture manufacture, electrical equipment production, printing, and paper products moved into the area, housed in new two- to six-story buildings, lit by electricity and equipped with elevators. In post-fire Tar Flat, brick and less-costly corrugated sheet metal were the materials of choice, defining a new more homogeneous look for the neighborhood. In the post-fire period the Shore of Mission Bay Blocks 10 and 11, already part of a largely uniform and artificial flatland, changed from a crowded working-class residential neighborhood to a largely open, light industrial zone.

In contrast, for almost 30 years following 1906, the summit of Rincon Hill remained a quiet and lonely place, its apartments and infrastructure slowly decaying. When major remodeling of the hill’s topography finally occurred, it was not for more level industrial lots—this time it was to clear a broad path for the building of the bridge across the bay.

**THE BAY BRIDGE COMES TO THE SOUTH OF MARKET**

By the late 1920s, so many transbay bridge schemes were being proposed that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors appointed a commission of prominent experts to work with the Chief City Engineer William O’Shaughnessy to assess them. A suspension design was ultimately chosen for strategic military reasons. Suspension spans require strong land anchorages, and San Francisco’s waterfront hills were ideal for this purpose. Although Telegraph Hill was considered, Rincon Hill became the preferred western anchorage for reasons of local urban economic geography. As the city’s major industrial service district, the South of Market and the industrial sections of the Potrero and Mission would be the destination of much of the bridge’s truck traffic; looking toward the future, close and direct access to East Bay suppliers and markets would be a necessity for the continued prosperity of San Francisco’s remaining industries. Perhaps most importantly, Jaspar O’Farrell’s large street grid and broad thoroughfares South of Market were well suited to transmit and diffuse the volume of traffic that the bridge would carry.

Bridge construction destroyed the remaining Rincon Hill community (Figure 2.11). In 1934–1935 bulldozers leveled the tenements on Block 7, the earthquake cottages on Block 8, and most of the flats on Block 9. The elementary school on Block 9 also lay in the path of the bridge approaches and was demolished, no longer needed by a neighborhood that had ceased to exist. Only small residential enclaves remained on Rincon Hill by 1936: a little community clustered around South Park, one block southeast of the project area; a few flats near Third Street on Block 9; and a group of tenements along the truncated minor streets of Block 6.
While still rare in 1906 San Francisco, the automobile was hailed as one of the heroes of the fire, connecting the city when the established communications infrastructure broke down. Although the bridge came 30 years later, the reasons for its construction were already in motion by then. The rise of the automobile had made the bridge and freeways inevitable, just as it doomed the interurban railways and severely curtailed the streetcar systems. The earthquake and fires of 1906 cleared large parts of the South of Market, but it was the timing of those events, coinciding as they did with a period of great technological change, that reshaped the district and molded its modern character.

Figure 2.11. Grading on Block 7 for the San Francisco–Bay Bridge (SFOBB) West Approach, October 1935; looking northeast. The bridge is under construction in the right background, and the newly graded Harrison Street is in the left background. Sterling Place is in the foreground with a caterpillar crane sitting on it; Rincon Place is in front of the large white warehouse building toward the top of the photograph. The leveled area between Sterling and Rincon had been cut down by as much as 10 feet on the Rincon side and 2-4 feet on the Sterling side. The raised area in the background, to the right of the white warehouse building, is the site of the St. Mary’s Hospital complex. Part of this rise was graded to accommodate the lower deck of the bridge and a wide, at-grade off-ramp. (Photo courtesy of Bay Bridge Archive, Caltrans District 4)