

Upper Noe History Project

This initial phase of this project provides an overview of the valley's topography and early development.

We invite you to participate in this project so that we might continue to expand our knowledge of the past, and embrace it, even as we move forward.



Upper Noe Valley Associations

- **1920** - The **Upper Noe Valley Improvement Association** (UNVIA) was organized to improve transportation and obtain civic improvements. The 29th and Castro Club merged with it.
- **1923** – UNVIA brought the need for a playground (Upper Noe Recreation Center) before the Board of Supervisors.
- **1958** - **Upper Noe Valley Neighborhood Council** forms with the slogan, *Neighbors In Cooperative Effort*. The History Committee presents a 53 page report in 1959 that details local history.
- **1988** - Present-day **Upper Noe Neighbors** (UNN) formed when residents Sue Bowie and Janice Gendreau decided that Upper Noe needed its own voice in the neighborhood landscape and warranted its own representation to the City.
- **2000** - UNN elected its first officers. Vicki Rosen, who participant at that first UNN meeting, was elected president and served until she passed away in June 2015.
- **2022** – UNN incorporated as A 501c3

Where Do You Live?

Upper Noe, Fairmount, Noe Valley, Glen Park, Horner's Addition

The administrative line that runs down 30th Street dividing Noe Valley and Glen Park is a recent fabrication of the **Planning Department**:

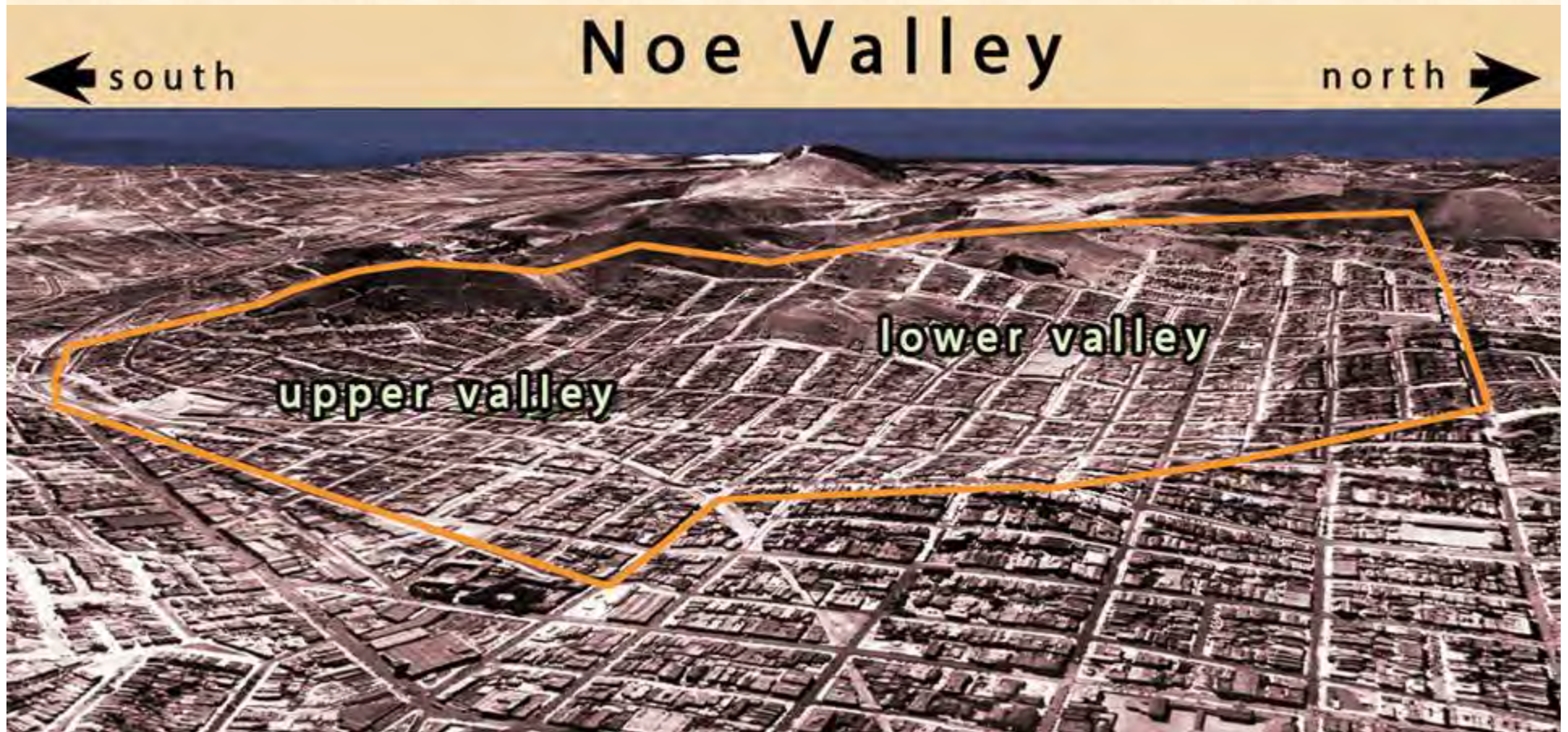
"San Francisco neighborhoods are a product of history, geography, and culture and have no official boundaries. However, the Planning Department established 37 distinct neighborhoods in order to implement neighborhood notification requirements that were adopted by the Board of Supervisors in the 1990s. The boundaries of these neighborhoods may not conform to neighborhoods and boundaries defined by other sources."

Upper Noe Valley Association, 1959

Clipper & Douglas
to Dolores
over Dolores to 25th St.
Down to Mission
out Mission to San Jose
San Jose to Miquel
Miquel to Laidley Street
Laidley to 30th St. to
Castro
over Castro to Valley
Valley to Diamond
and back to Clipper.

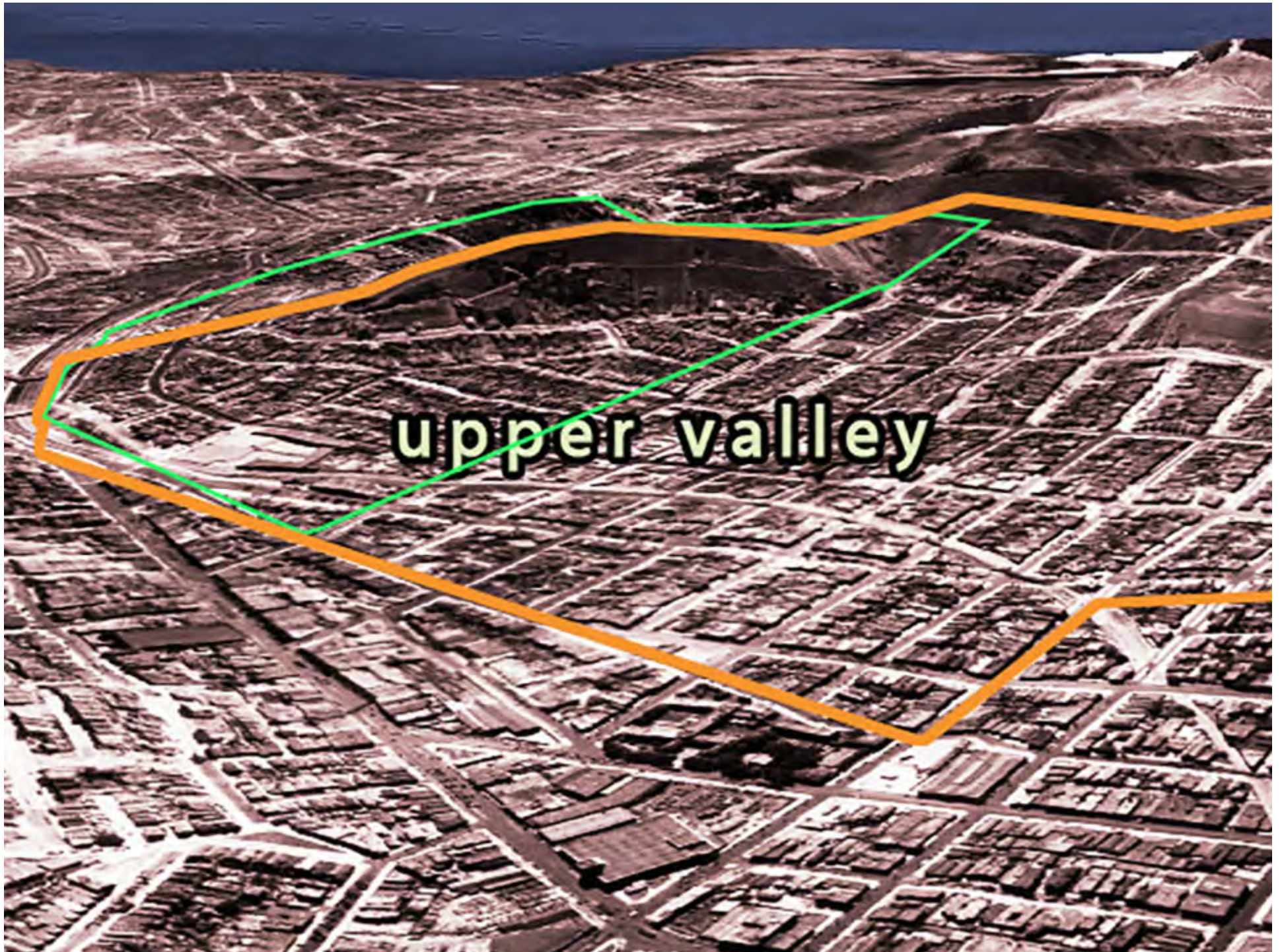


Topography

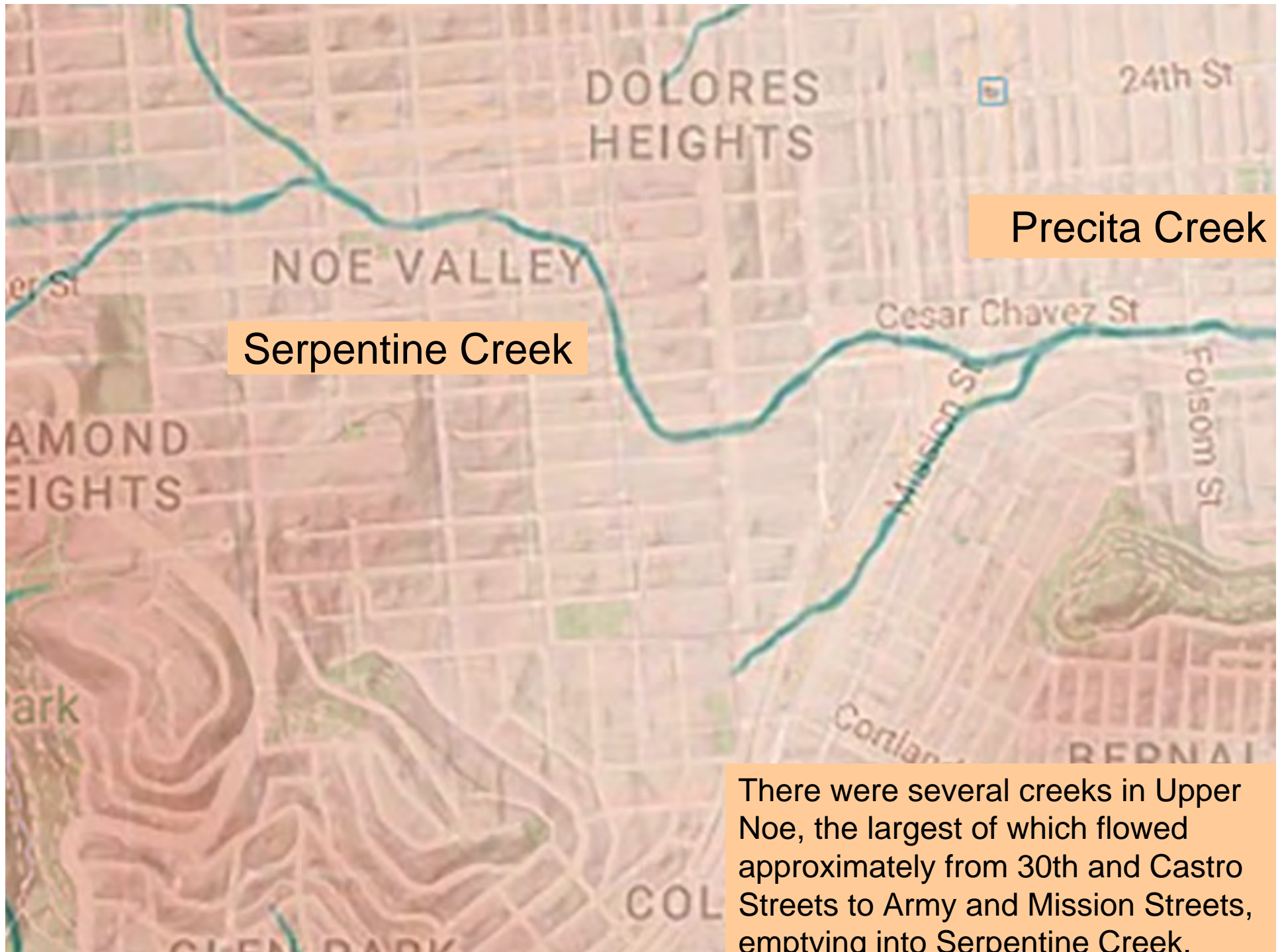


Upper and lower are typically in reference to a city's center. Upper Noe Valley is away from downtown. Note how the ridge at 27th Street divides the valley.





Fairmount Tract (green) is geographically almost entirely within the upper valley.



Precita Creek

Serpentine Creek

There were several creeks in Upper Noe, the largest of which flowed approximately from 30th and Castro Streets to Army and Mission Streets, emptying into Serpentine Creek.

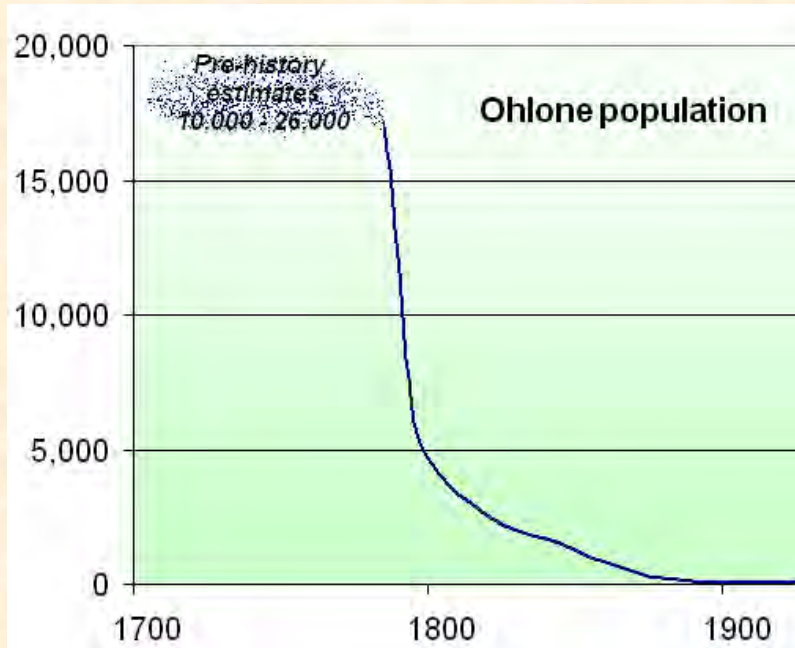
First People

The Yelamu – an independent tribe of the Ramaytush (western) Ohlone inhabited the SF peninsula down to just past the San Mateo Line. They lived nomadically in small villages, moving as the seasons dictated. On the bay, they harvested mussels, clams, abalone, ducks and other shorebirds. Inland, they foraged edible roots and hunted rabbits and other game in areas with freshwater streams and springs like Precita Creek.



First People

When the Spanish arrived in San Francisco in 1776, 10,000 to 20,000 Ohlone inhabited the area from Santa Cruz to the Golden Gate within a peninsula abundant with food. About 160 to 300 **Yelamu** were living in San Francisco. In just 25 years, foreign diseases, mating disruptions and slavery had decimated their culture and physical health. No known living descendants of the Yelamu exist today.



Spanish

- **November 4, 1769 – San Francisco Bay “Discovered”**
Captain Juan Gaspar de Portolá and members of his overland exploration expedition climbed to the top of Sweeney Ridge in Pacifica and looked out upon the great bay.
- **March 28, 1776, Juan Bautista de Anza picks the Presidio site**
- **June 29, 1776, Presidio established**
Lieutenant Jose Moraga (Spanish King's Representative) and 193 colonists from Monterey constructed the Presidio of San Francisco at the Golden Gate. He and Father Francisco Palou raised the flag of Spain on the Lagoon at Mission Dolores..
- **October 9, 1776 - Mission Dolores established**
Padre Francisco Palóu (a companion of Junípero Serra) and co-founder Fray Pedro Benito Cambón establish Mission Dolores as the 6th Mission in California. They had been charged with bringing Spanish settlers to Alta California and evangelizing the local indigenous Californians.

Mexican-California Period

(1822-1846)

- Known as Yerba Buena, the city had a population of about 250.
- 1834, José de Jesús Noé (1805 – 1862) a soldier, arrives with his wife with the Hija-Padres Colony. He was elected as the 7th Alcalde of Yerba Buena, a combination of mayor and magistrate.
- 1845, Jose de Jesus Noe petitioned Governor Pio Pico for **Rancho San Miguel** and it was granted in 1846.
- April 25, 1846 – February 2, 1848, Mexican–American War. U.S. military occupation of Yerba Buena began at the onset of war. Noé was appointed in 1846 by the U.S. military commander as the 12th alcalde.
- July 31, 1846, Yerba Buena doubled in population when about 240 Mormon pioneers from the East coast arrived on the ship Brooklyn, led by **Sam Brannan**. On board that ship was 25-year-old **John Meirs Horner**.

Rancho San Miguel

- Noé knew what he was asking for. He carved out of the center and most beautiful parts of San Francisco. The ranch covers one Spanish league (4444.34 acres), one-sixth of San Francisco.
- Noe Valley was pretty remote and demand for housing was low. The Spanish had introduced cattle and Noé likely continued to maximize grazing opportunities.
- After his wife died in 1848, leaving three sons, Noé began selling Rancho San Miguel. In 1854, he sold a large part of it to John Meirs Horner.
- The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo provided that land grants would be honored. A claim for Rancho San Miguel was filed with the Public Land Commission in 1852 and the grant was patented to Noé in 1857.
- By 1895, the people of Noe Valley formed the San Miguel Defense Association to counter the suit by heirs of José de Jesús Noé.

Rancho San Miguel

- 4444.34 acres
- Northern boundary ran diagonally across Mt. Sutro
- southernmost tip went beyond the county line.
- Eastern border was almost entirely San Jose Avenue.
- Western side was Junipero Serra Boulevard.
- Noé's homestead was between Guerrero and Valencia and 23rd and 24th Streets. Likely Noé owned the house on the northwest corner of 24th Street at San Jose Ave. An earlier home was off Grandview between 22nd Street and Elizabeth.



Rancho San Miguel

Twin Peaks, 1903

Cattle sleeping - Twin Peaks - cattle digesting - South (Noe)

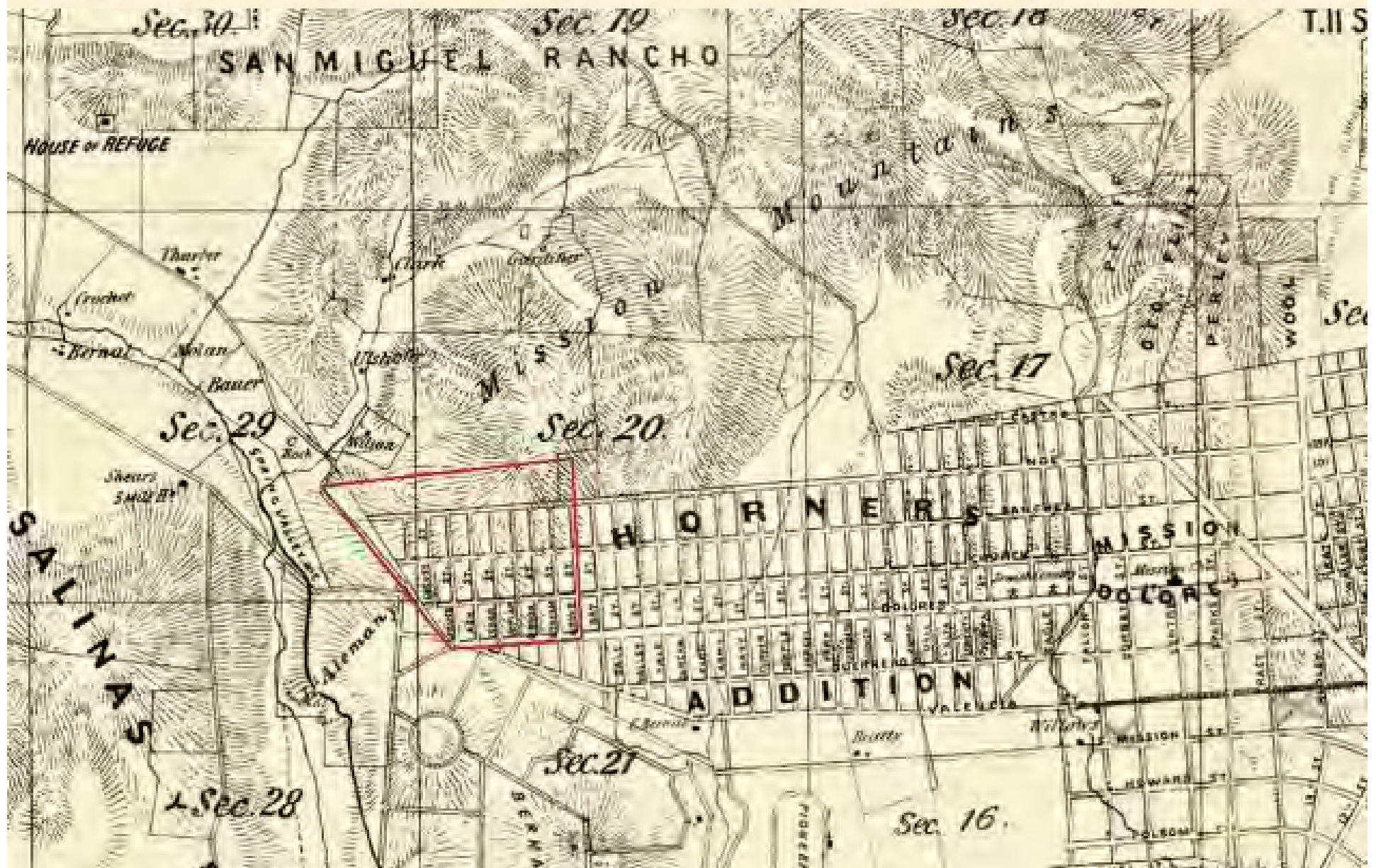


John Meirs Horner (1821-1912)

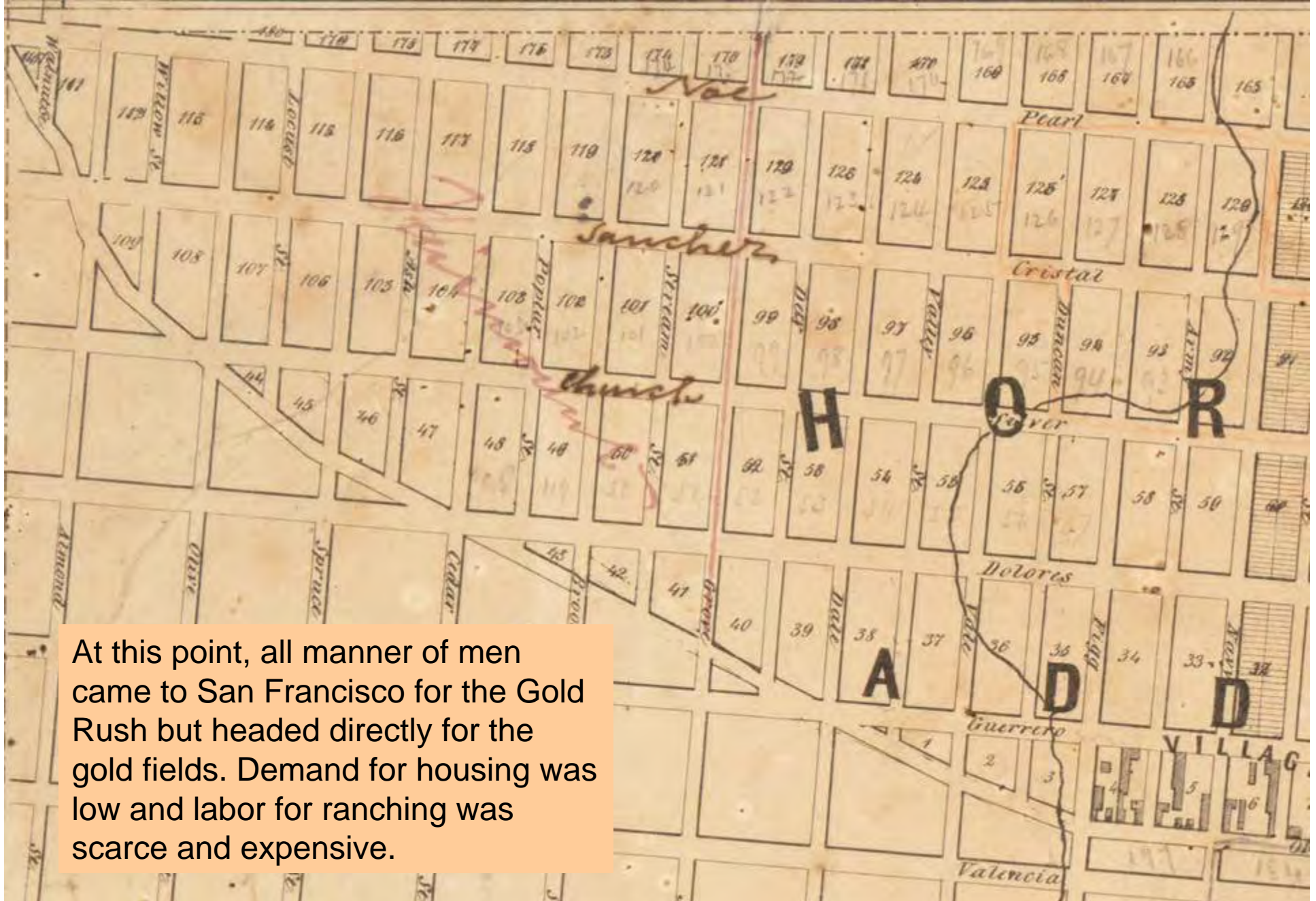


- 1846, arrived from **New Jersey** with his bride of six months, a six-shooter pistol, and no money. Traded the pistol for a yoke of oxen and plowed his first crop of vegetables.
- Had a **knack for planting** and contracted out to sow crops for others
- 1849 - the **Gold Rush** produced huge demand for fruits and vegetables
- 1850 - Established **J. M. Horner and Co.** to sell produce
- 1851 - Established **Union City** and developed it
- Purchased the **steamer Union** from New Jersey and shipped it in pieces to California to move produce to market
- 1852 - Earned the **highest award** in San Francisco's first agricultural fair
- Saw the need for a **flour mill** and build one.
- Established a **stagecoach line** from Union City to San Jose
- 1851-52 bought 1600 acres of **Rancho San Miguel** for \$200,000
- Surveyed, improved and laid out **Horner's Addition**
- Hit hard by the **Financial Panic of 1857** and had to sell almost everything
- **Moved to Hawaii** and found success again planting pineapples

Horner's Addition



Horner's Addition



At this point, all manner of men came to San Francisco for the Gold Rush but headed directly for the gold fields. Demand for housing was low and labor for ranching was scarce and expensive.



Street names:

Some reflected Horner's family ties and his Mormon faith. Many of these remain but some changed to numbers by 1870.

24th Street was Park Street.

22nd St, Alvarado, and 23rd St were "John," "M," and "Horner".

Elizabeth Street, named for Horner's wife, remains.

25th was Temple.

Church, Sanchez, Noe, and Castro were Silver, Cristal , Pearl, and Diamond.

When Horner's Diamond became Castro Street, the present Diamond Street was added one block west.

Fairmount (Tract / Heights)

Area from 30th St along San Jose Ave to Castro St and back to 30th St.

Unique in its terrain-following streets rather than the using the grid laid out by Horner.

This development predates Glen Park and Sunnyside by about 30 years.

The first Fairmount lots went for sale on March 19, 1864

“**In 1864**, if you took a buggy ride over the dirt roads of San Francisco from downtown to **Fairmount Heights**, you go out the country road or Mission Street. You would pass Park Street (24th Street), Yolo (25th Street) and Navy (26th Street). At New Market (Army), you would cross a wooden toll bridge that crossed Serpentine Creek and then proceed on to Vale (28th Street), Dale (29th Street), and Grove (30th Street) and end at Palmer (Randall) Streets.

You could get your milk at **Snowdenhouses' Dairy** at 30th and Dolores, at the **Del Monte Dairy** at 30th and Sanchez, or at **Mitchell Dairy** at 29th and Noe Streets.”

Mitchell's Dairy

An Upper Noe family
Since 1865.

Mitchell family farm
circa 1895 at 29th and
Noe Streets

Mitchell's Ice Cream at
San Jose Ave. and
29th St started by Larry
and Jack Mitchell in
1953.



Red Rock Hill, 1903

Cattle grazing on future Diamond Heights - looking southwest



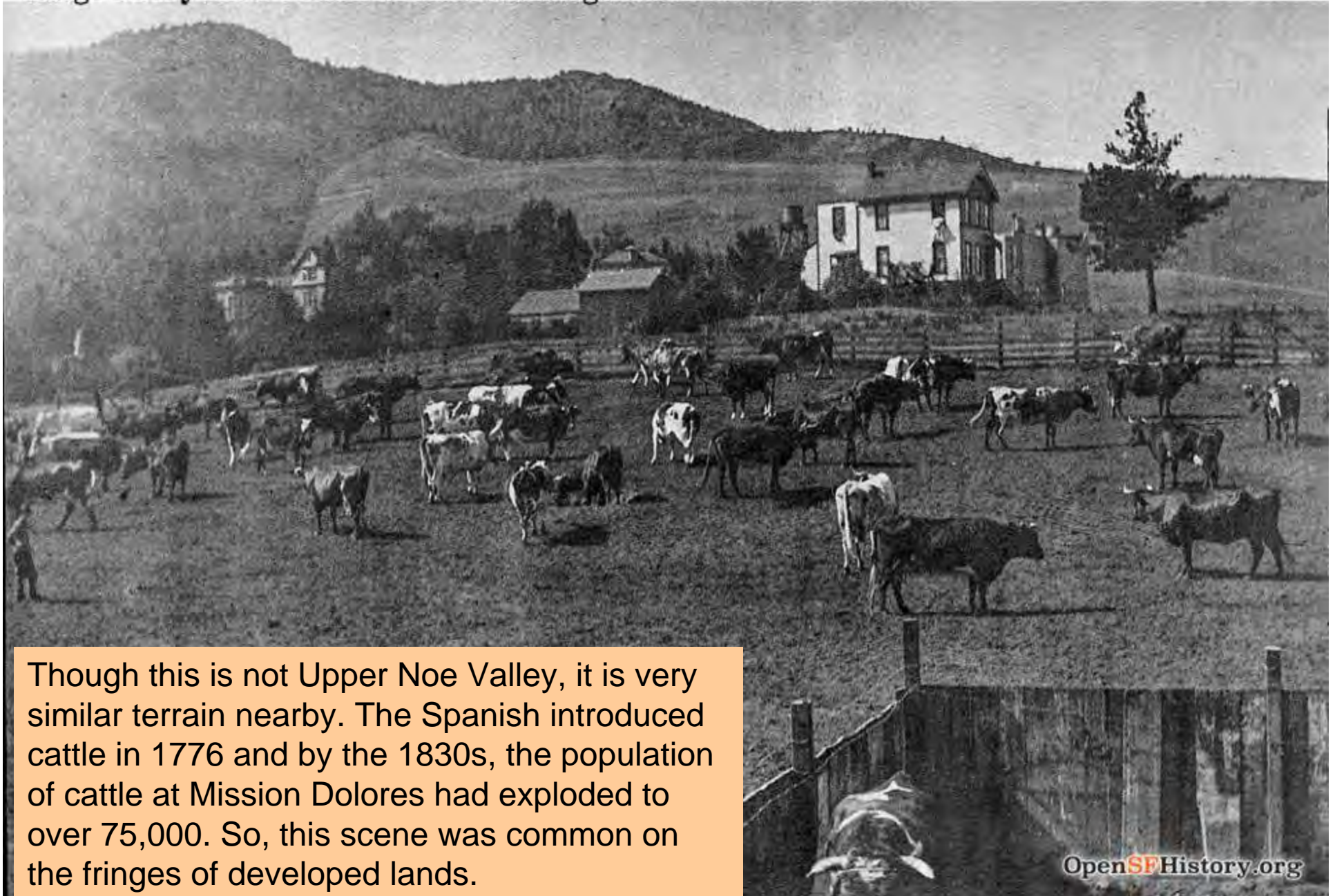
View from Mt. Davidson, 1903

Looking North from Mt. Davidson to Twin Peaks



Cole & Carl, circa 1894

Lange Dairy from Cole and Carl looking southwest to Mt Sutro



Though this is not Upper Noe Valley, it is very similar terrain nearby. The Spanish introduced cattle in 1776 and by the 1830s, the population of cattle at Mission Dolores had exploded to over 75,000. So, this scene was common on the fringes of developed lands.

A Sleepy Backwater with a Train Running Through It

- While **dairy continued to thrive**, access to the valley was poor, stifling development.
- Up to about **1888**, Noe Valley had no graded streets.
- **El Camino Real** (San Jose Ave) was **just a dirt road** running east of the valley and out of the southern end over what is now Chenery Street.
- **The train** was built through the valley in the 1860s but ran through the southern end of the valley while the population was in the north. **The train station was at 25th and Valencia.**
- **The path to the city** from the northern end of the valley was **a mile long walk** through chaparral between **Valencia Street to Castro Street**, which was the thoroughfare that bisected the district.

Noe Valley, circa 1870

View east from about Corbett near Hopkins today. Cropped from

In 1887, less than 50 houses dotted the entire Noe Valley.

The houses in the background are on the other side of San Jose Ave.

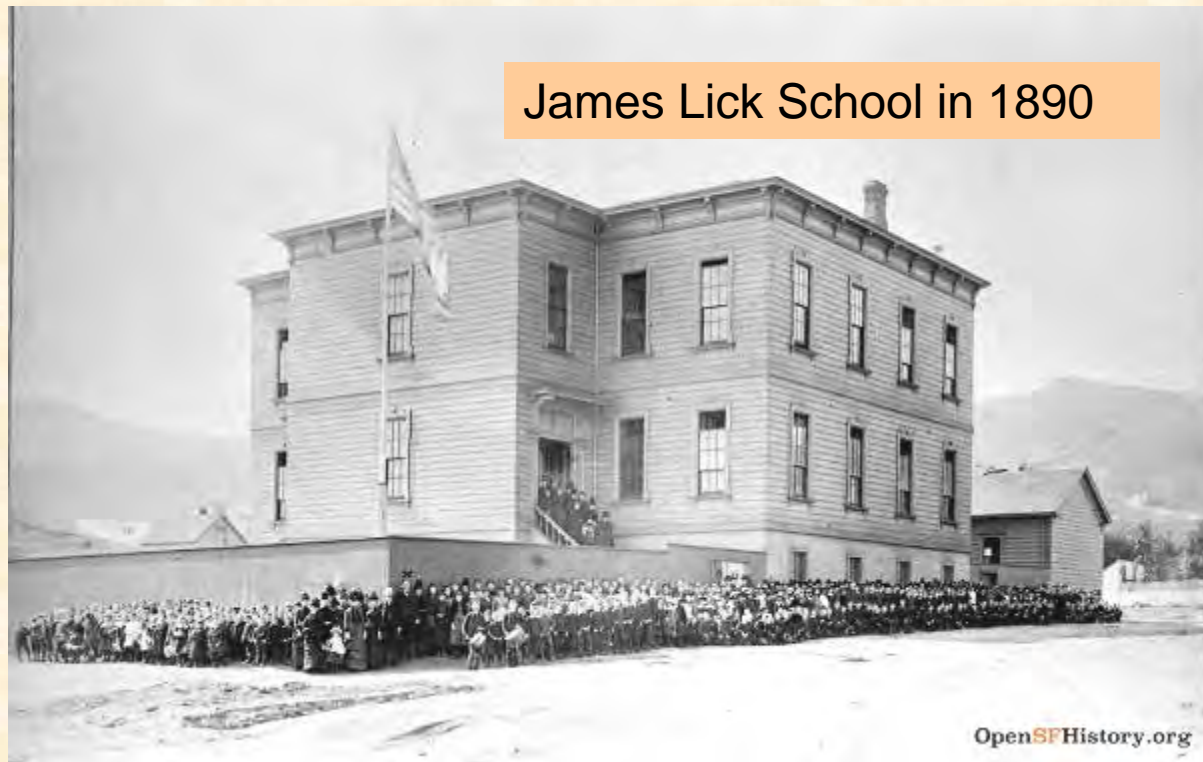


M. B. COLL

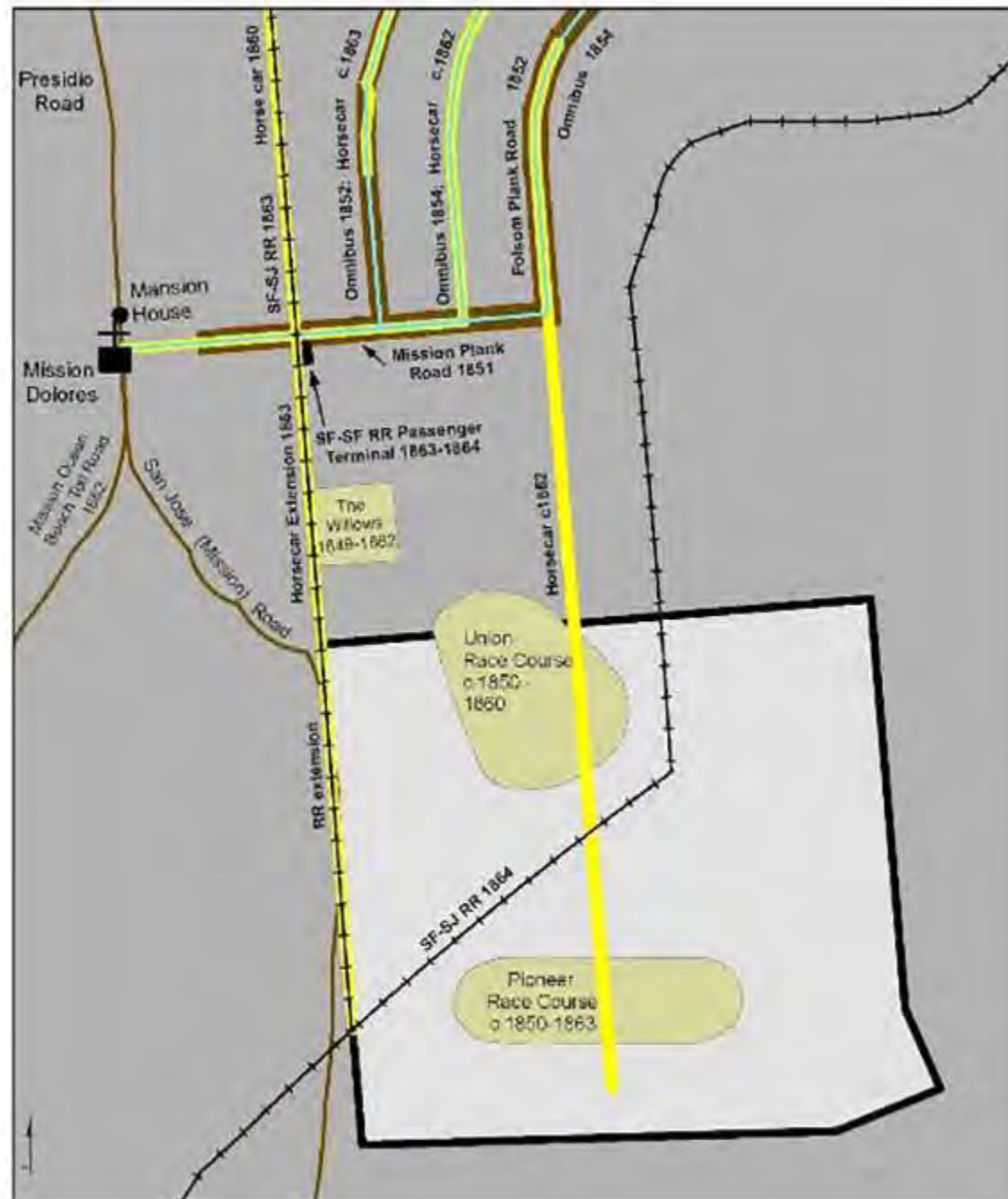
SAN FRANCISCO
FROM OCEAN HOUSE-
ROAD
OpenSFHistory.org

Education

- **1870s** - Two **small wooden shack schools** were built in **Upper Noe Valley**. The original **Fairmount School** was located at Randall and Chenery streets. The **Clement School** was located on the northeast corner of Noe and 30th. This became the Kate Kennedy School, now the Mission Education Center.



Early Roads and Transit 1848 - 1865



Sources:
Woodbridge, 2006; SF Transportation Technical Committee, 1948; Corporation of the City of SF 1852; Langley, 1861; San Francisco Railway Map, 1864

0 0.25 miles

Mary Brown 2007

San Francisco-San Jose Railroad

- **1861** - construction began in earnest on San Francisco's first rail line.
- The new line would carve out the **Bernal Cut** (today's San Jose Avenue) between the Bernal and Fairmount hills.
- **1863** - In anticipation of the new route, a new homestead, **Fairmount**, was planned just west of and a short distance from a planned stop near what is today Randall Street and San Jose Avenue.

Bernal Cut, Mar 24, 1915
View South of Bernal Cut Path (San Jose Avenue) from Charles



Passing through in 1905



SP Train near 30th Street, circa 1905

View South along Southern Pacific Old Main Line, Holly Park in



OpenSFHistory.org

Market Street Railway Changes Everything

- **1887** – A **Noe Valley volunteer committee** formed an assessment district and raised voluntary contributions to grade over Liberty Hill and open **Castro Street**.
- **1888** – **Market Street Railway** begins construction in the spring of a **cablecar** line from Valencia St up Market to Castro and south to 26th St. The road and line opened in the fall.
- **Housing boomed**. While no paved roads existed in **1888**, every street was graded, macadamized, sidewalked and sewerred in **1896**. They then went about securing a better water supply.
- **Church Street Improvement Club** fought for a cable line along Church Street. Those hopes faded as the Market St Railroad Company, aided by City officials, wrested control of the franchise only to abandon it when there was no more danger of a competing line entering Noe Valley.
- **1917** - The J Church started service from the Ferry Building to 30th street.

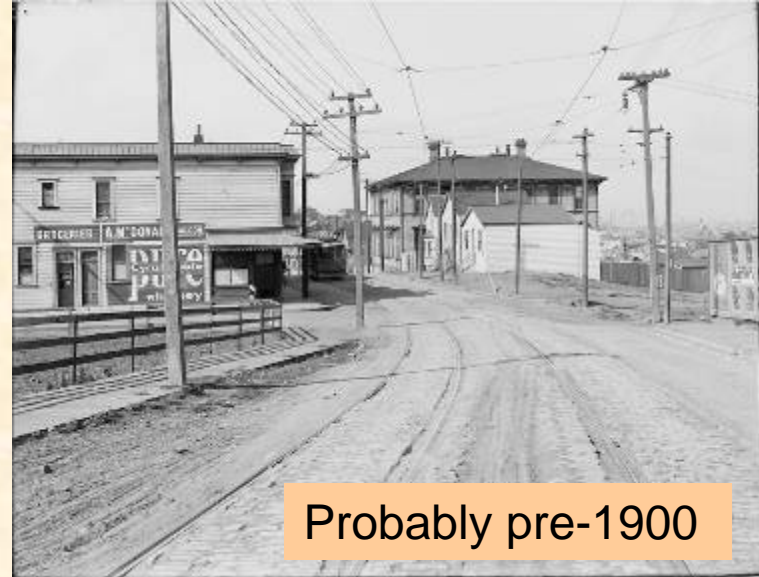


San Francisco – San Mateo Railway

- **1892** - Behrend Joost constructed the San Francisco – San Mateo Railway to transport residents to downtown San Francisco.

- The city's **first electric railway**

- Started at the **Ferry Building**, made its way via Steuart, Harrison, and Bryant to 14th Street, then to **Guerrero Street to 30th Street** before turning south on **Chenery Street** headed for Holy Cross cemetery in Colma.



Probably pre-1900

30th & Chenery, 1939

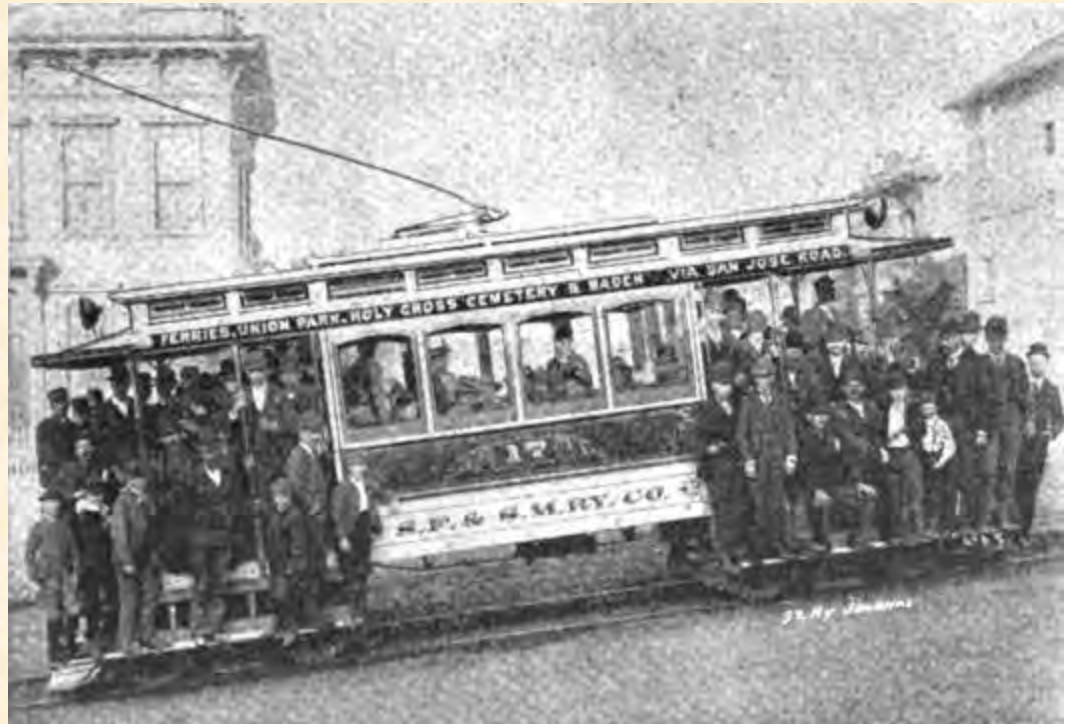
View northeast across intersection to Market Street Railway (MSRy)



San Francisco – San Mateo Railway

Chenery Street Hill between Randall and 30th, originally a very steep grade, quickly became a railway trouble spot.

Overloaded cars, passengers with “barely a foothold,” “hanging on to the ends of the car wherever they could find anything to grasp.”



Upon descent from Randall, the car would become “unmanageable,” essentially popping wheelies and strewing passengers about; or, at 30th, would “round the curve with a heavy list to starboard.” Sometimes, cars left the tracks altogether and crashed. While there were many injuries, only three in 1894 were life-threatening.

A Village forms

- While the lower valley progressed rapidly into a in the early 1890s, Upper Noe's pace was more leisurely. In 1896, only 20 neighborhood residents even had a phone.
- The development of transportation and housing prompted shops to open along Church Street.
 - Stellings Grocery 1897
 - Drewes' Butcher Shop 1898 (now Baron's)
 - Star Bakery 1899 – 1998 (now GetzWell Pediatrics)



Church Street at Duncan 1916



- **1906 - Coleman's Candy and Ice Cream**
- 1504 Church Street
- Said to be the first Jewish family in Upper Noe.

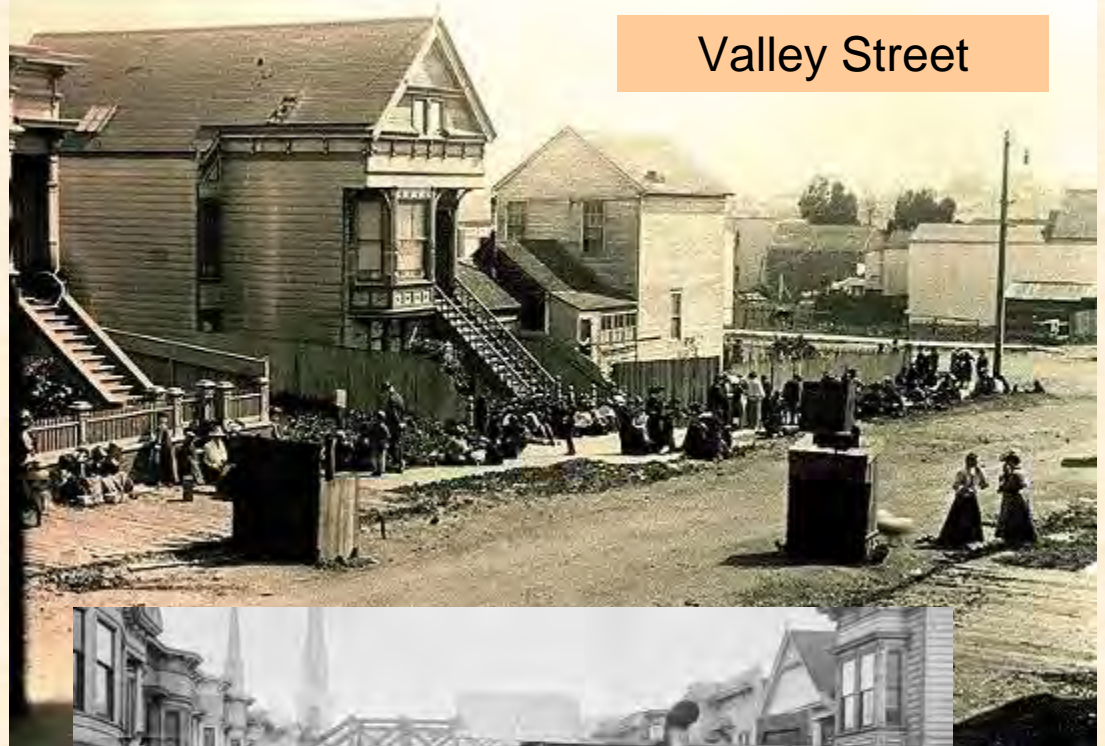


Earthquake 1906



30th St & San Jose Ave

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Valley Street



Upper Noe Valley from Bernal 1906



St Paul's Church

- **1876** - George Shadbourne calls for a new parish and raised \$2,800 for 4 lots facing Church Street.
- Initially used an abandoned hospital on **Noe Street** between 29th and Valley Streets
- **1880** - the cornerstone was laid. The church seated 750 with approximately 200 families in the parish. Total cost of construction was \$18,000.
- **1897 to 1911** – construction of the current 1400-seat English Gothic style church.



St Paul's Church

- Pastor Connolly is said to have recruited every able-bodied person in the parish, including himself, to work on the project. Parishioners, including the Saturday morning religious education students, "tended to end up at the Thirtieth and Castro Streets quarry hauling rocks down to the church".
- Rev. **Breslin** 1880-1890
Rt. Rev. Msgr. **Connolly** 1891-1932
Rev. **Kennedy** 1932-1951
Rt. Rev. Msgr. **Falvey** 1951-1968
Rev. Msgr **Dwyer** 1968-1978
Rev. **Gaffey** 1978-1983
Rev. **Cloherly** 1983-1990
Rev. **Greenlaw** 1990-1993
Rev. **Farana** 1993



Fairmount School

- **1867** - First Fairmount School
- **1877** – Dedicated school building at Chenery & Randall
- **1977** – New award-winning structure
- **2018** - Name changed to Dolores Huerta Elementary School.



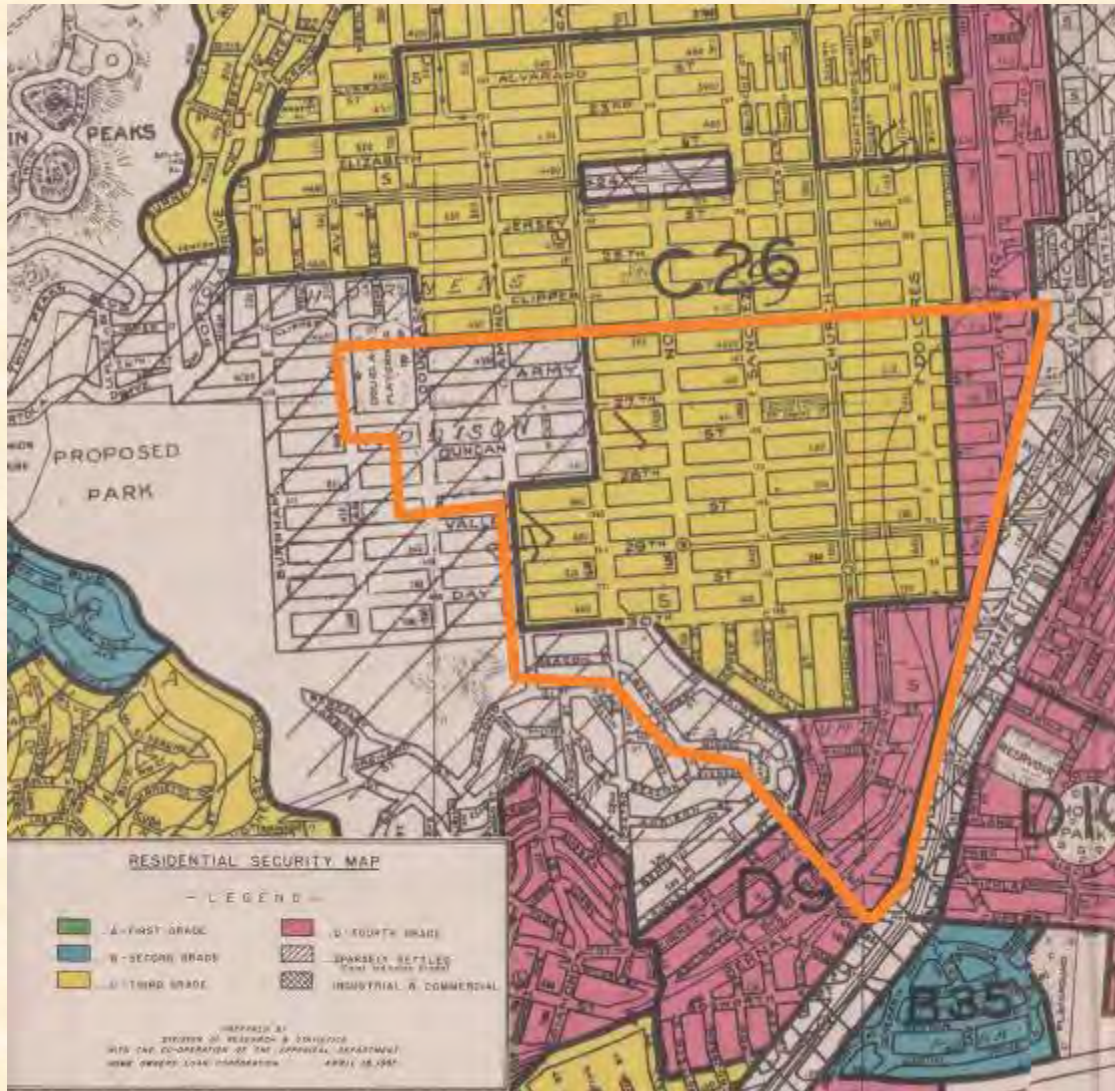
Chenery near Randall, Dec 5, 1917
Chenery bet Randall & 30th. View south across Chenery to new



Randall near Arlington, Jun 10, 1918
Elevated view northwest over new schoolyard and school building,



Is This a Great Neighborhood?



Upper Noe Valley was not always the desirable neighborhood it has come to be.



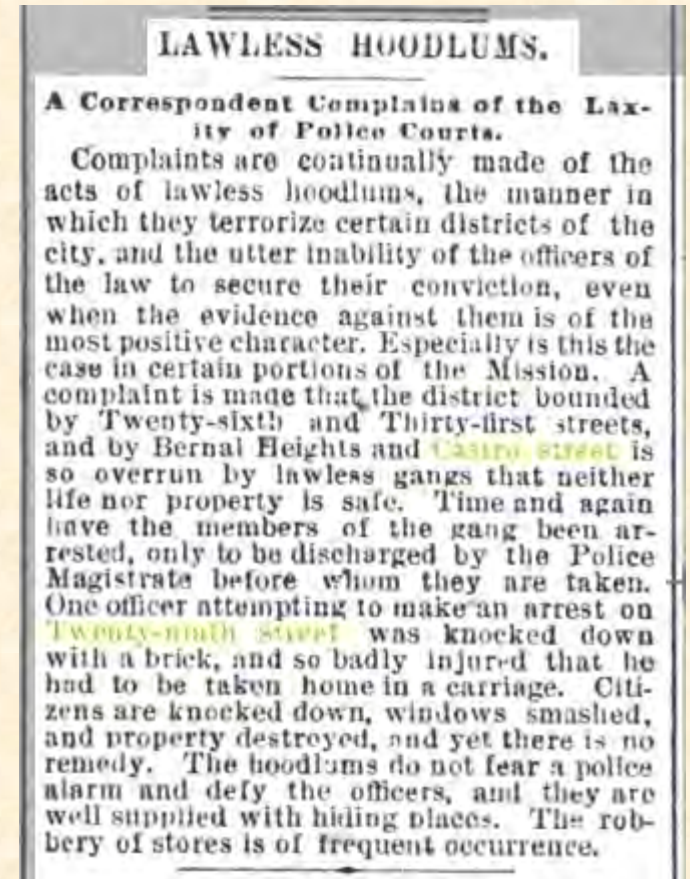
Is This a Great Neighborhood?

- This working-class neighborhood of mainly German and Irish immigrant families had its share of difficulties.

1890 – San Francisco Call article “Lawless Hoodlums”

1896 - Noe Valley residents often complained to the city about the homeless population. Local transients were drinking beer, playing cards, and causing fires and other property damage in the neighborhood. Eventually the neighbors petitioned the Board of Supervisors for increased police protection.

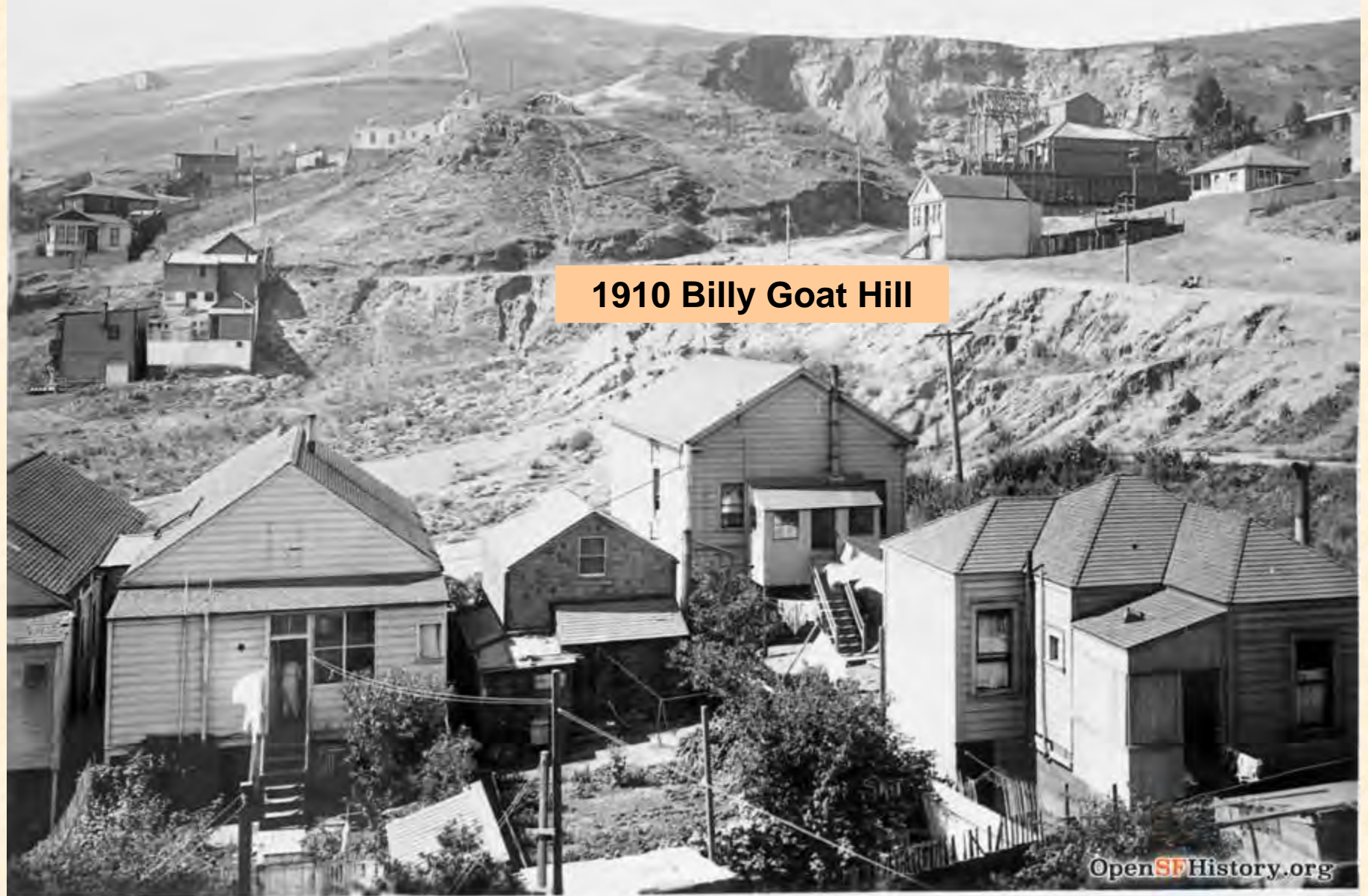
Day Street Boys – notorious ruffians who hung out at “Day Park”, a local nickname for Upper Noe Rec Center.



SF Call 1890

Gray Brothers

- **1890s - George and Harry Gray** opened their first quarry on the eastern side of Telegraph Hill to provide construction materials and ballast for shipping. Began dynamiting the rock face without any regard for the people living nearby.
- **1895** - judge issued a permanent injunction. Moved the operation to 26th and Douglass, and to Billy Goat Hill, and continued indiscriminate blasting.
- **Totally corrupt**, cheating everyone and **bribing officials**.
- **1914 - Joseph Lococo**, a desperate worker, approached George Gray near Billy Goat Hill to ask him for \$17.50 in back wages. He was ill, had not eaten for two days, had a wife and two babies who were starving, and was about to be evicted from his house. Gray, a millionaire, laughed in his face. **Lococo shot Gray dead**. Lococo was **acquitted** by reason of temporary insanity and walked out of the courtroom a free man, cheered by 100 supporters.
- **1975 – Billy Goat Hill** officially became a city park.



1910 Billy Goat Hill

Looking north on Castro from 30th Street in 1915



Too Many Trains

In the early part of the 20th century, tracks crisscrossed the neighborhood. Most of them were removed in the 40s.

The Southern Pacific right-of-way made land available for **On Lok Senior Center** and the **Chenery House** as well as many more homes.

30th & Chenery, circa 1941
Looking east, streetcar tracks removed from street (Or paved)



27th & Dolores, circa 1937
View northwest toward SF & San Jose (Southern Pacific Old Main)



Neighborhood Past and Present?



Saved by the Nuns



The movie *Sister Act* starring Whoopi Goldberg was filmed at St. Paul's Church in 1991. The neighborhood was briefly trashed for the storyline.

Upper Noe Recreation Center

- **1926** - Upper Noe Valley Improvement Association request a playground be built near Noe and 30th
- **1932** - a similar call was made by the Central Council of Civic Clubs
- **1935** – the commission made its first move, budgeting \$25,000 to purchase property for the park at its current location.
- Mostly occupied by buildings, properties were purchased or moved year after year until the last in **1950**
- **1953** - Plans for the new recreation center approved by the Recreation and Park Commission, estimated price tag of \$390,618
- **July 1, 1957** - Mayor George Christopher dedicated the new park
- **April, 2006 - Sept. 6, 2008** - major renovation of the entire facility, cost \$11 million (plus)
- **Friends of the Noe Valley Recreation Center** (Friends of Upper Noe Recreation Center) raised \$75,000 for extras, such as toys, a sound system, art supplies, and sports equipment



Upper Noe from Bernal 1930





The End