

# THE TATTER

JOURNAL OF DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE

## GREETINGS FROM MARK

We hope that everyone is doing well, but we still must remain vigilant with the new covid strain that is out there. We had planned to open the museum in August and have an in-person meeting at the Doelger Center for September, but those plans have been postponed for a bit longer. Our September meeting will have to be on the computer using Zoom again. Please make sure that we have your latest and up to date email address and send to: [events@dalycityhistorymuseum.org](mailto:events@dalycityhistorymuseum.org)

Due to the prevalence of the new strain of coronavirus, some of our docents understandably felt reluctant to open the museum due to possible exposure. We will continue to monitor health mandates and take every precaution to ensure the safety of our docents and visitors. Please continue to check our Facebook page for updates as to when the museum will reopen:  
[https://www.facebook.com/DalyCityHistoryMuseum.](https://www.facebook.com/DalyCityHistoryMuseum)

For our September Zoom meeting, Terry Hamburg and Richard Hansen will be our featured speakers. Both are longtime historians who will share their latest work, *Quotable San Francisco: Historic Moments in Memorable Words*. To borrow from their writeup:

*San Francisco surged from hamlet to boomtown overnight--the most meteoric "instant city" in history. From the Gold Rush to the Tech Rush, it's been the site of daring innovations, counterculture upheavals and social rebellions that shaped generations. Over the decades, residents have offered unique perspectives through journals, letters and newspapers, their words bringing another time to life. Discover San Francisco through the eyes of miners and "ladies of the night." Relive the experiences of robber barons and beatniks who flourished in a tiny corner of the world with fewer than one million souls. With commentary, background and extraordinary images, historians Terry Hamburg and Richard Hansen guide you through these colorful quotes, showing the city as it once was and what it aspired to be.*

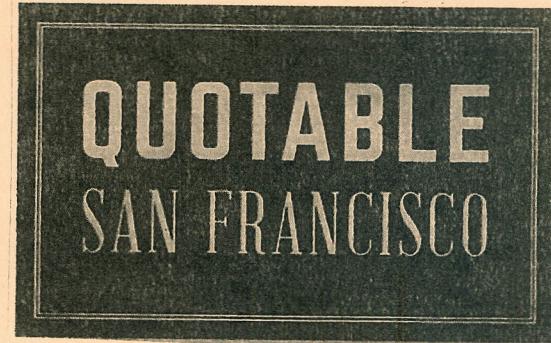
Terry Hamburg was trained as a historian, completing graduate studies at the University of Michigan and Cambridge University. After a brief foray as a hippie and political activist, he became an antiques dealer in  
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## HISTORY ZOOM LECTURE

**Wednesday, Sept. 15 @ 7 pm.**

Terry Hamburg and Rich Hansen will be our speakers with a slide presentation:

"Quotable San Francisco: Historic Moments in Memorable Words"



Note: Mark Weinberger will send an email invitation a week before this zoom meeting. Please save his instructions on how to view and participate. If you are not sure if he has your email, please inform Mark at:

[events@dalycityhistorymuseum.org](mailto:events@dalycityhistorymuseum.org)

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All memberships will be continued through 2021 at no charge. However, many members have voluntarily contributed. We continue our **Gratitude Report** with recent donations:

\$0-\$50 George P. Prescott, \$100-150 Lynne Tondorf, \$150-250 Gary and Lynn McLane in memory of Marian J. McLane (9/10/1923 - 12/25/2020). Thank you for your generosity!

San Francisco. Historian and photographer Richard Hansen has been doing 1906 photographic shows since 1970. He co-founded the website [www.sfmuseum.org](http://www.sfmuseum.org), which covers San Francisco history with a focus on the earthquake and fire of 1906, with David Fowler in 1990. [His late mother, Gladys Hansen, was the longtime official historian and archivist for San Francisco.]

You might already be familiar with the Western Neighborhoods Project [WNP], also known as Outsidelands, in San Francisco. They are a history organization which works to preserve historical items unique to the western end of the city. [Last month, I detailed how they recently saved much of the Cliff House memorabilia which was put up for auction.] Our two organizations plan to work collaboratively to showcase many of the Guild's original photographs that are of San Francisco. There are a great many photos in our collection of Playland during its final days; Cliff House; Fleishhacker Zoo; Ocean Beach; Lake Merced; and more. We received this collection from the Daly City Public Library many years ago. While the Guild will retain ownership, we will loan much of the collection for an exhibition in their San Francisco office. They might also help us to digitize the collection, something we desperately need to do, and which is very intensive and time-consuming. Stay tuned for further developments both in the *Tattler* and on our Facebook page. To view their incredible archive of San Francisco photos, visit the WNP website at: <https://www.outsidelands.org/>.

Finally, in July we lost one of our longtime members, Elsa Ramos. She and her late husband, Max, were loyal friends and true of the Guild from its earliest days. Elsa had been ill in recent years and slowed down. She lived a full and remarkable life in all of her almost 92 years, and will be missed. Both she and Max were featured in our centennial video. In mid-August we also lost Ruth Chandler, the wife of the late retired city librarian [from 1958 to 1983] Sam Chandler whose photograph collection we received. Mr. Chandler worked with a citizen's committee to seek out and archive historical photographs of the area for Daly City's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. His definitive history book *Gateway to the Peninsula* was published by Daly City in 1973. Ruth and Sam were married for 64 years and had six children. Ruth worked as a secretary for SFSU, *The Daly City Record* (our now defunct local newspaper) and for the Jefferson School District.

(*Gateway to the Peninsula* by Sam Chandler is out of print, but can be found online at: <https://www.dalycity.org/DocumentCenter/View/4326/Gateway-to-the-Peninsula-PDF>)

(Editor's Note: A recent article appearing online at SFGATE, here excerpted, highlights the history and demise of Playland at the Beach. The Guild's SF collection depicts the actual demolition in progress.)

## 'WE KIND OF TOOK IT FOR GRANTED': THE STORY BEHIND SF'S ICONIC AMUSEMENT PARK, PLAYLAND AT THE BEACH

Amanda Bartlett, SFGATE Aug. 8, 2021

...The crowd, spanning an estimated 10,000 people, may have been the largest that Playland-at-the-Beach had seen in months. It was an uncharacteristically sunny Labor Day weekend in 1972, and everyone — young pigtailed girls, elderly couples, curious families with cameras — was there to take one last look at the place.



The crowds at Playland's last day. Photo Dennis O'Rorke

Now, there were paint-peeling signs and empty pinball machines. The merry-go-round whirled with only a handful of riders. The Diving Bell — a submarine-style ride that promised a deep-sea adventure with views of real fish that had originally debuted at the 1939 World's Fair on Treasure Island — was rusted and covered in algae, and beer cans bobbed on the surface of the water. The Big Dipper roller coaster was gone...

Playland-at-the-Beach began in the 1880s as a series of food stands located south of the Cliff House. By 1921, there were 10 attractions including a now-famous carousel created by Charles I.D. Looff, which was allegedly intended for a Coney Island-inspired theme park on Market and 8th streets called Steeple Chase Park, which was destroyed in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake. The merry-go-round then found its home on Ocean Beach alongside Shoot-the-Chutes, an offshoot of the original water ride on Haight Street that entertained thousands of thrill-seekers from 1895 to 1902. It was the namesake for what would become Chutes at the Beach, a park run in partnership by Charles' youngest son Arthur Looff and John Friedle, who started out as a candy

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concessionaire on the waterfront. George Whitney joined the pair in 1923, following the installment of the wooden Big Dipper roller coaster — arguably the park's biggest draw — as well as a new-and-improved fun house... As time went on, he and his brother Leo acquired more and more of the park... By 1928, it had been renamed Whitney's Playland, but most referred to it as Playland-at-the-Beach, and the name stuck. Leo Whitney retired in 1939, and by 1942, George Whitney owned all 10 acres of the amusement park.

After World War II, its popularity boomed. Playland was open from noon until midnight every day... Every weekend, thousands of people spilled out of streetcars and buses at the end of the line... Dennis O'Rorke, a former gardener at Golden Gate Park who previously resided on 48th Avenue, his living room window overlooking the park [remembers] "You could get into the fun house for nine cents as a kid and spend your whole day there." Today, he's an administrator of a Facebook group dedicated to memories of the park with 5,800 members.



Shoot the Chutes was torn down to make way for more rides at the growing amusement park in 1950, and four years later, Walt Disney visited Playland in search of inspiration for Disneyland. He ended up hiring Whitney's son, George Whitney Jr., as his seventh engineer, and it was the ride consultant's insistence that Disney could not use real animals on his Jungle Cruise attraction that eventually led to the invention of audio animatronics, suggests the 2010 documentary,

"Remembering Playland at the Beach." Whitney went on to become the Manager of Fantasyland. [Tom Wyrsh's documentary was presented at a past Guild meeting.]

But Playland's glory days were waning. The Big Dipper was razed in 1955 due to rising costs to keep the ride in operation, Whitney died in 1958, and his son left his job at Disneyland to take over the park. Two months later, a fire of undetermined origin... took more than two hours to contain, in addition to causing over \$400,000 in damages and injuring five firefighters... In 1960 he sold his family's controlling interest in Playland to developer Robert Frazier... The salty air was taking its toll on the corroding rides... Families stopped showing up as frequently as they once did as muggings, vandalism and petty crime grew rampant — not to mention the public's interest was shifting to newer, shinier forms of entertainment [including just staying home at night watching TV].

The Whitney family sold the contract for park management to Martin "Marty" Davis in 1968, and Playland subsequently took on more of a tawdry, carnival-like feel... With the park's downfall imminent, developer Jeremy Ets-Hokin received unanimous approval from the S.F. Planning Commission in 1972 to convert Playland into a \$50 million apartment complex, with plans to include a shopping center and a parkway connecting Sutro Heights and Golden Gate Park. The plan was fervently opposed by the Outer Richmond Neighborhood Association and other local groups... With the exception of Laffing Sal, purchased by Ets-Hokin, the iconic Looff carousel, which was secured from an auction for a single \$45,000 bid by MaryAnn Stevens, and a few other miscellaneous objects salvaged from people who broke into the park after its closure, much of the park's memorabilia was lost on the weekend of Playland's demolition.

... However, Ets-Hokin's project never saw the light of day... and the area sat empty for years. According to the *Examiner*, the deal fell through because Ets-Hokin lost his financing "in the collapse of the San Diego-based money empire of C. Arnholt Smith," and was later arrested in connection with a multimillion-dollar securities theft in 1979. He died after a six-week illness in 1981, and was identified in his obituary as "the man who razed Playland." Two other developers — Tef Kutay and Zev ben Simon's Taldan Investment Co. — built condos over the site in the 1980s, with the last 1.7-acre fragment of land approved for development in 1993. Still, some aspects of Playland were preserved after people went into the wreckage of the demolished park, salvaging what they could. Some of these

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mementos were displayed at Playland-Not-At-The-Beach, a museum in El Cerrito run by Richard Tuck and Frank Biafore. But after a decade in operation, it too faced a similar fate: The facility was razed for housing in 2018, and nearly all of its antique oddities were auctioned off once again. But other traces of Playland are still celebrated today at the Musée Mécanique on Pier 45, which holds many of the park's arcade games as well as a back-up Laffing Sal (the original now lives at the Santa Cruz boardwalk)... The Looff carousel still spins at the Children's Creativity Museum in SoMa.

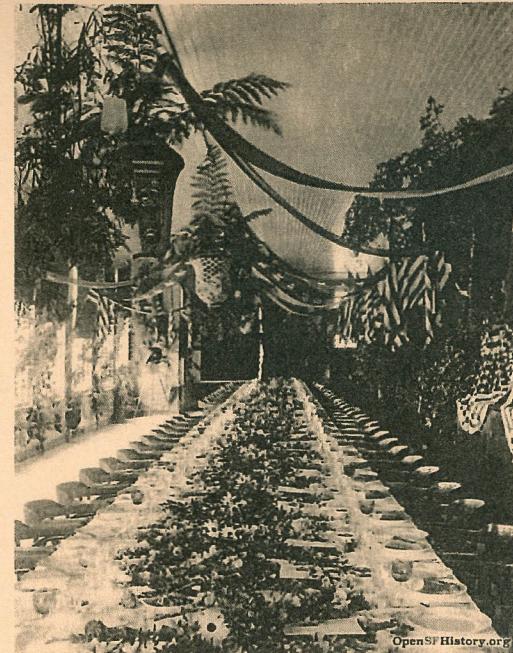
## AN UPDATE ON CLIFF HOUSE HISTORICAL COLLECTION

Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez, Aug 9, KQED online, excerpts

A collection of memorabilia saved from the closure of the much-beloved Cliff House restaurant in San Francisco has a new home — right back in the Cliff House. The collection's future wasn't always certain.

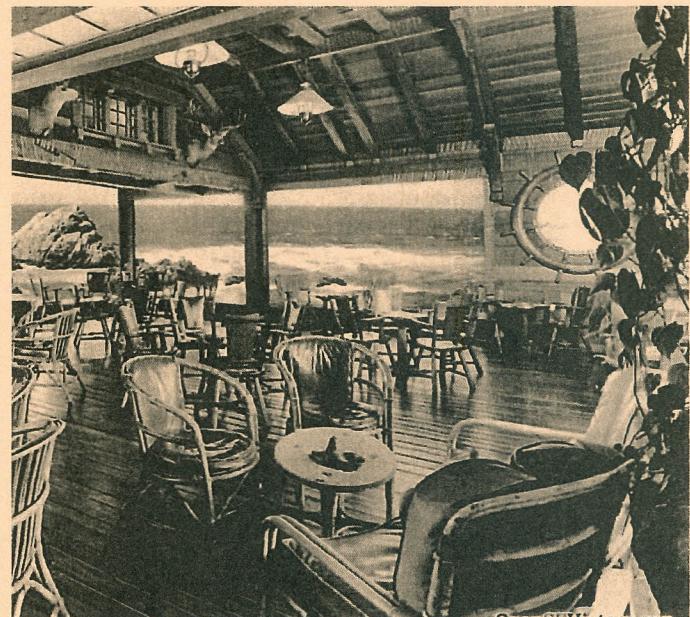
When the more than 150-year-old restaurant that's perched above Ocean Beach closed last December, many in the Bay Area mourned. But when it was announced that the eclectic items kept at the restaurant would be sold at auction, the mood swung to alarm. What would happen to those precious pieces of San Francisco's west side history?

Historians, arts groups and everyday Bay Area folk stepped up to save more than 60 artifacts, raising \$180,000 to buy them from the Cliff House's last operators, the Hountalas family, and showcase them so San Franciscans and people from across the bay can keep a piece of Cliff House history close to home. The collection includes artifacts from the Sutro Baths, an ocean-water swimming pool that once stood at Lands End. The pieces are now in the care of the Western Neighborhoods Project, a group dedicated to San Francisco's west side history; Alexandra Mitchell of the ACT Art Conservation group; and John Lindsey, director of The Great Highway Gallery. The items were on display in a small gallery on Balboa Street in the Richmond District (where they remain for now), because a larger space for them hadn't been secured. That changed last week. Nicole Meldahl, a historian and executive director of the Western Neighborhoods Project, told KQED the group signed the special-use permit to house the Cliff House collection in the Cliff House again. The collection will live in the former gift shop, starting in September or October and lasting through April 2022, courtesy of the National Park Service.



In May 1903 the Cliff House banquet room was set for a visit by President Theodore Roosevelt.

[Nicole] "...the fun pieces for me are ones where we can show you a photograph of them in situ, in the Cliff House, decades and decades ago. So, for instance, we have a wonderful photograph on our website of what was called the [Sequoia] Room in the Cliff House in the 1930s.



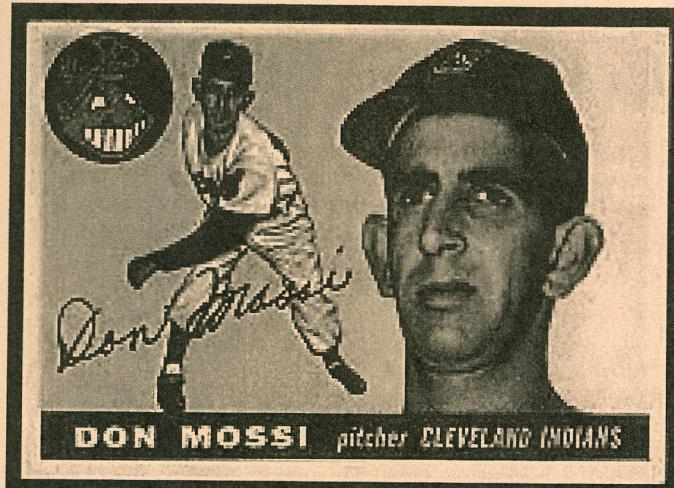
A ship's wheel allegedly from the tanker vessel Frank H. Buck, which wrecked off Lands End in the 1930s, once hung in the Sequoia Room at the Cliff House, which can be seen in the photo on the right.

... Right now we have pieces on display in our office and gallery at 1617 Balboa Street, and of course, you've got the Cliff House pop-up coming. But really we have to send these pieces on the road after both of these exhibitions close, because we have a teeny-tiny office... we want them to get out there and get on the road... email me at [nicole@outsidelands.org](mailto:nicole@outsidelands.org) if you have ideas on places for us to display these artifacts in the future."

## DON MOSSI, MAJOR LEAGUE PITCHER AND JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

By Richard Rocchetta

In the previous *Tattler* we introduced everyone to former Daly City resident and Jefferson High School graduate Ken Reitz, Major League Baseball player who played third base and had a notable career with the St. Louis Cardinals, San Francisco Giants and Chicago Cubs. We will now look at the baseball career of another Major League player, a pitcher, who also grew up in Daly City and graduated from Jefferson High, but earlier than Reitz did—his name is Don Mossi.



Don Mossi was born on January 11, 1929 in St. Helena and moved to Daly City at an early age. At Jefferson in the late 1940s he was a star football player who earned All-Peninsula League honors as a quarterback. During summers in Daly City, Mossi would play youth-league baseball. As seen in the photograph below, in 1948 he played for the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) team called the Colma Boys Club (BC). The team was sponsored by Joe Sarto, owner of the Villa Sanitarium in Colma/Daly City.



From top left: Coach Mossi, Tito Sarto, Ben Parada, Don Wohl, Howard Hefferson, Al Lagomarsino, Don Mossi, Joe Sarto. From bottom row, left to right: George Perata, Leland Michelleei, Don Lunghi, John Olcese, Rico Ottonello, Jim Salacci.

After leaving Jeff in 1949 he was signed as a left-handed pitcher by the Cleveland Indians of the American League and assigned to Class A Bakersfield. In 1951 he was pitching for the Wichita Indians and Wilkes-Barre (both A League), Dallas in 1952 and Tulsa in 1953 (both AAA). By 1954, Mossi was in the Majors. With a starting rotation that included Early Winn, Bob Lemon and Bob Feller (all members of Baseball's Hall of Fame) it would have been difficult for Mossi to crack the starting rotation on that team, even though he had been a starter all his previous career. So he became a relief pitcher for that team and had his Major League debut on April 17, 1954. That year he had a 1.94 ERA in 93 innings pitched. An excellent record. That year the Indians went to the World Series after winning a Major League best 111 games. Mossi pitched 4 innings in three games in that series, not allowing any runs. Unfortunately, the Indians were defeated for the championship by the New York Giants in four games (Giants wouldn't win another series until 2010 and the Indians wouldn't be in a World Series until 1993!).

In 1957 Mossi moved to the starting rotation, finished the season 11-10 with an ERA of 4.13 and was named to the American League All Star team. He did appear in that game which the American League won.

During his 12-year Major League career, he won 101 games and lost 80 with an ERA of 3.43. He had 55 complete games, 8 shutouts and 50 saves. His career fielding percentage of .990 was the best ever recorded by a pitcher when he retired in 1965. He pitched for the Indians from 1954-1958; for the Detroit Tigers from 1959-1963, Chicago White Sox in 1964 and finally for the Kansas City Athletics in 1965. In 2014, he was named by the Cleveland Indians as one of the Top 100 Greatest Cleveland Indians. In 1989, Mossi was a member of the first group of athletes, along with John Madden another Daly City raised and Jefferson High grad, to be inducted into the Peninsula Sports Hall of Fame (San Mateo County). Mossi moved to Ukiah after retirement from baseball. He died on July 19, 2019 at the age of 90.

According to an article in the *Detroit Free Press* at the time of his death, he was "...remembered as 'The Sphinx' or 'Ears,'" because of the distinctive facial features of his "prominent nose and ears." He had great success in Detroit and according to the article led the Tigers in ERA in 1954 (3.39) and 1961 (2.96) and tied for the team leader in victories in 1959 with 17.

Daly City raised Don Mossi was one of the finest baseball players to graduate from Jefferson High School.



## DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM

### & ARCHIVE

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CLOSED DUE TO PANDEMIC

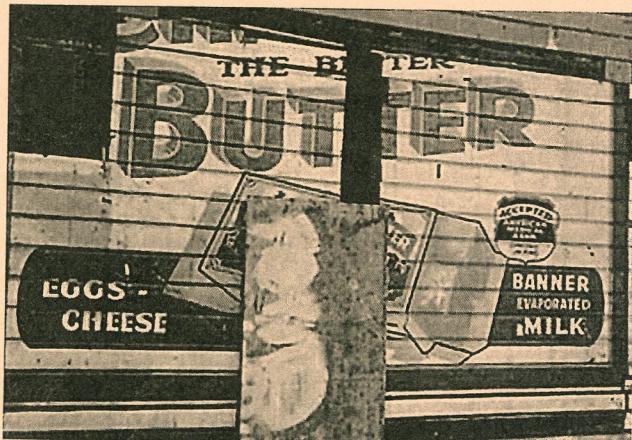
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Museum & Archive"

[www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org](http://www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org)

### FIRST CLASS MAIL

**Message from Guilder and author Bob Calhoun:** I'm going to be doing an author talk for San Mateo County Libraries on Oct. 20th at 7 p.m. It's a virtual Zoom event and you can sign up <https://smcl.bibliocommons.com/events/610c2a3b70af0f3600b81b6e> The SMCO Libraries are also giving away copies of my new book *Murders That Made Us* in October and I signed every one of them, so please let people know that they can get a free copy of the book at the Daly City Libraries starting on Oct. 4th.



What a great advertisement I found today on Mission and Liebig St. in Daly City. A property was bulldozed and a very old advertisement came to light after many years.  
- Danilo D. Gonzalez

### GUILD OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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**Marcus Gonzalez, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President/Museum Director**

**Judith Christensen, Treasurer**

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**Directors: Michael Rocchetta, Dana Smith**

Ken Gillespie (1924-2011), President-Emeritus, Bunny Gillespie (1926-2017), Secretary-Emerita, Grace and Marcus Gonzales Hospitality Crew

*Board meetings are held quarterly and are open to the membership. Please contact Mark for further information.*

Daly City History Guild Museum & Archive is a

501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization

Memberships begin at \$25 per year.

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