

# THE TATTER

## JOURNAL OF DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE

### *Greetings from President Mark-*

We had another fabulous speaker to begin our 2025 lecture series, the always fantastic Perla Ibarrientos, who shared her personal Daly City historical experience along with that of the vibrant Filipino community that calls the city home. It is one of the largest Filipino communities outside of the Philippines.

Our speaker for March is a repeat favorite. Anne Evers Hitz is a Pacifica author and historian who has spoken to us in both person and most recently via Zoom in 2021 during the pandemic. She previously has written two Arcadia series books *Emporium Department Store* (2014) and *San Francisco's Ferry Building* (2017) --before penning her most recent work: *Lost Department Stores of San Francisco* (2020). This will be a fascinating talk on the iconic venues that once graced San Francisco's Downtown and which many of us still fondly remember. With the forthcoming closures of Macy's Union Square and Bloomingdale's--only Nieman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue to remain [for now] --we felt that hers would be a very timely talk. This is sure to be a most informative and nostalgic look back to a simpler and more genteel era. To borrow from Hitz's writeup:

*In the late nineteenth-century, San Francisco's merchant princes built grand stores for a booming city, each with its own niche. For the eager clientele, a trip downtown meant dressing up--hats, gloves, and stockings required--and going to Blum's for Coffee Crunch Cake or Townsend's for creamed spinach. The I. Magnin empire catered to a selective upper-class clientele, while middle-class shoppers loved the Emporium department store, with its Bargain Basement and Santa for the kids. Gumps defined good taste, the City of Paris*

*continued page 2*

### DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE



#### HISTORY LECTURE

**SUNDAY, MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup> 2 PM**

MERCED ROOM, PACELLI GYM, WESTLAKE PARK

145 LAKE MERCED BLVD., DALY CITY

**ANNE EVERIS HITZ**

*PRESENTS*

*LOST DEPARTMENT STORES*

*OF SAN FRANCISCO*



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*Continued from page 1*  
satisfied desires for anything French and edgy, youth-oriented Joseph Magnin ensnared the younger shoppers with the latest trends. Lost Department Stores of San Francisco looks back at the strong, colorful personalities who created six major stores that defined shopping in San Francisco before the days of the Internet. Native San Franciscans and former employees also share their memories of these beloved institutions.

I want to let you know that we purposely delayed sending 2025 renewals in January due to some paperwork with the state that had yet to be processed regarding our non-profit status. After submitting everything that was required, we finally received confirmation that it was accepted, and all is now in order.

A note about membership renewals/dues. I am very excited to announce that we now have credit card payment available on our website. Many of you have asked over the years if you can join or renew via credit card and unfortunately, we have never been set up for that. Thanks to advances in reasonable payment options for non-profits, we are now able to offer that feature. A GREAT BIG thank you to Clayton Koo of the Daly City Public Library Associates, who donated his time and talent to help make this digital payment option operational. I couldn't have done it without you, Clayton, and boy do I mean that! Also, we plan to keep the paper membership option available in the four *Tattlers* that we mail for prospective new members. I need to remind our loyal membership that this is not for those of you who are long-time members and currently paid. These newsletters are also used to attract new members and may be located in libraries, senior centers, and elsewhere. If you opt to pay twice in one year, we'll gratefully accept it as a donation on top of your regular membership. We ALWAYS mail Guild renewals in January; that won't change. [Please see remittance envelope included in this mailing.] The remittance envelope is how you know that it is time to renew; they are only used for current members who have opted not to use credit card payment but prefer to renew still by check. Also, as postage and printing costs continue to rise, some of you have

advised us that you are comfortable receiving the *Tattler* via email. We would like to go to an all-digital format but realize that some members might not use email or still prefer to receive a print copy. For those renewing by credit card, there is a section to comment on. Members still wishing a print copy, please let me know at [president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org](mailto:president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org) or by leaving a message at the museum, 650-757-7177. We will respect your wishes as we seek to move toward all digital with the understanding that this will save on time and rising postage and production costs.

I also want to point out that you will find the credit card feature on our website, [www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org](http://www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org). Simply click the "Donate" button in the top right-hand corner and it will take you straight to payment options. Finally, all payment processors, including Donorbox which is specifically for non-profits such as us, still take a percentage of each transaction. Stripe/PayPal, which are required sub-processors of Donorbox, also take a small cut. When renewing or joining, you will have an option to offset these fees--1.75% for Donorbox and 2.9%+.30 for Stripe/PayPal--with the ability to add these fees to your donation so the Guild receives the full amount; for example, on \$25, the fees would equal about \$1.34 rounded. You could therefore add \$1.34 to your \$25 renewal and that way the Guild would receive the entire \$25. Of course, that is purely the call of each donor to make. How to do this will be easily understandable and shown at the time you are renewing your membership. Whatever you decide, please know that we are extremely appreciative and dearly value your continued support.

We've learned that the Jefferson Union High School District will be demolishing the Jefferson High School gymnasium--the last vestige of the original campus and that was built circa 1923--and replacing it with a state of the art 21st century facility. Richard and Michael Rocchetta of our board and alums of 1968 and 1972 respectively, are attempting to arrange a tour so that we can photograph and document as much as possible before the scheduled demolition takes place this

summer. We also will look at preservation vintage artifacts and request that any noteworthy architectural elements be incorporated into the new design. These advocacy struggles for conservation in some form are always difficult due to time constraints and construction costs, but we'll give it our best.

Alex Gallegos, a longtime member of the Guild and regular Saturday docent in the early years of the Mission Street Museum, died at the end of January. He was a loyal friend and true of the Guild and will be greatly missed. Thank you, Alex, and rest well.

Finally, a reminder is that we're now once again open every Saturday from noon to 3 PM. Thanks to our board of directors and amazing repeat docent Emily Chen for making this possible.

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## **VAULT LIGHTS IN SAN FRANCISCO SIDEWALKS**

**By Shayne Jones**

*This article first appeared in SF Gate in 2024. We thought it would be of interest to those who have walked along San Francisco city streets and wondered what these strange things were located on the sidewalk.*

Next time you're shuffling to work on a misty San Francisco morning, your downcast gaze tracking the sidewalk as it passes beneath your feet, remember that someone could be looking up at you from below.

If you happen to be treading over one of the city's remaining sets of vault lights — small grids of purple or translucent glass shapes embedded in the concrete — a whole host of activities may be taking place underfoot. Joyce Slaton, a writer and SF resident who has an entire Pinterest page dedicated to the lights, says she's peered through the glass portals to see flocks of pigeons, piles of cabbage and even toilets.

"When there are vault lights, that usually means there was some activity happening in that basement," she says. "It makes me wonder what was going on down there."

The lights are a little-known San Francisco oddity that could soon disappear, much like the storied sewer vents hidden within the city

sidewalks. As a 19th-century solution to the absence of electricity, urban merchants were able to access their basement storage rooms or living quarters without other light during the day.

Inventor Thaddeus Hyatt patented the first vault light iteration in 1845, according to Paul Fisher, an architect who leads the SF City Guides free walking tour A Touch of Glass: Glass in San Francisco's Commercial Architecture. "Think of a manhole cover with lights in it," Fisher said about the original design. He said Hyatt drew inspiration from glass lenses popularly built into wooden ship decks at the time to provide their holds free lighting. The hack also bypassed the risk of a fallen kerosene lamp or candle setting the vessel ablaze.

Many of the first vault lights were flat-bottomed, but later 19th-century versions featured a prismatic tail that refracted the light as it streamed in from above and scattered its beams across the room. In 1893, Henry Haustein, an Austro-Hungarian immigrant living in San Francisco, licensed an improvement to the "illuminating tiles." Haustein's patent altered the lights' building materials so they would be simpler and less costly to manufacture. The slight redesign additionally fortified the panels that hold the lights, rendering them stronger but less bulky.

Vault lights were prevalent well into the 20th century, until electricity became more widespread and public necessity for the fixtures flickered. Today, those remaining are subtle reminders of a city in constant flux. "It's just a little remnant of another time," Slaton said.

JR Sandor is the managing director of Circle Redmont, one of the few remaining manufacturers of vault lights in the country. "Many of our clients are people trying to restore the luster of days gone by," Sandor said. His father purchased the Ohio-based company in the 1960s and expanded its small grouping of products to fill a steadily growing demand. He says architects would reach out wanting to preserve the classic look of a building but were at a loss for how to procure the means for the project. He noted the element about 20th-century vault lights that first draws people in — their noteworthy violet color was actually a happy accident. Manufacturers like San Francisco's Phoenix Sidewalk Light Company, which shuttered before the start of the 21st century, mixed

manganese dioxide into their glass composites to make it clear. What they didn't realize is that the compound turns glass purple when it reacts with ultraviolet light.

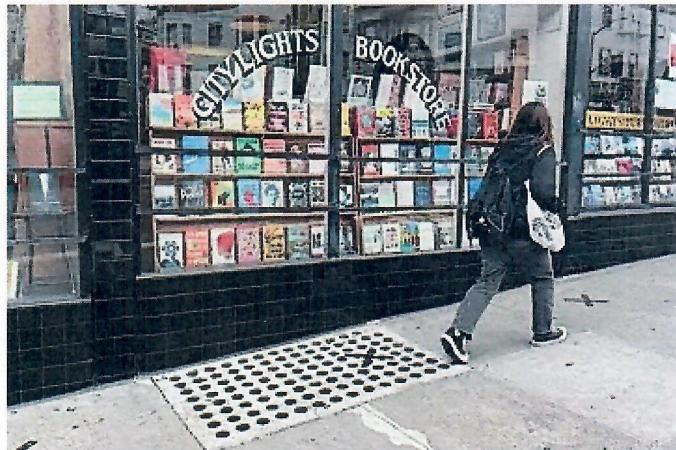
Sandor said Circle Redmont offers two historical vault light designs in various shades without manganese. Each are set into cast iron or concrete panels and built to support heavy loads, like trucks, while maintaining the delicate look people appreciate. If a set gets damaged, the company either sends an employee to fully replace it or parts for city architects to do a quick repair. He noted panels start at \$350 per square foot and go up from there, depending on the materials. "I don't understand why more projects don't use [vault lights]. The sun is for free," Sandor said.

In a 2011 vault light study conducted by Seattle University, researchers noted that vault lights are considered to have little historic value in San Francisco; public works officials see them as potential safety hazards for pedestrians. The city has removed or covered many of the panels, and the ones that remain are concentrated mostly in the Chinatown neighborhood, Embarcadero, Haight-Ashbury and near the Broadway tunnel.

In an email, San Francisco principal city planner Julian Bañales said the city's internal preservation staff has no future plans to study the lights.

Fisher said other cities with vault lights, like Seattle and New York, have taken the initiative to preserve and commission studies into their historical significance. He said municipal preservation is one of the only ways to protect the artifacts nowadays. When construction obliterates a sidewalk, the vault lights disappear with it, and the city is under no obligation to repair or replace them.

"It's too bad that people get interested in these things after they're all gone," Fisher said. But people like Slaton and Fisher still care about vault lights and have dedicated their careers to keeping them relevant. Slaton said it saddens her that people don't seem to care about this piece of history, but she hopes that'll change soon. "Here's the thing: San Francisco is an interesting city to walk around because it rewards close inspection," Slaton said. "Vault lights are beautiful and cool, and everyone should love them. They look like amethyst on the sidewalk."



*Shayne Jones is a freelance writer in San Francisco. Article used with permission from the author.*

## SAVE TIME PAY ONLINE!

To pay annual membership dues go to the History Guild Website:  
[www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org](http://www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org)  
Choose the "Donate" Button and use your credit card.

Did you know the cost of Daly City's first City Hall, built in 1914 at 75 Wellington Ave., was \$6,000.00.

The cost of the current City Hall at 90<sup>th</sup> street and Sullivan Ave. was \$3.5 Million in 1967.

## **Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday, OLPH!**

*By Perky Ramroth*

Congratulations to our good neighbors around the corner on Wellington Ave., Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, on celebrating 100 years! Established in 1925, the church was originally known as St. Maximus Parish. The name of the church was changed to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in 1929.

Visit the museum soon and see wonderful OLPH School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade graduation pictures dating back to the 1930's in our collection of Daly City school pictures. Many thanks to member Marianne Petroni for alerting us to their availability at the school!



## **Historic Photo Scanning Project Continues.**

*By Perky Ramroth*

Thanks to volunteer Amy Yip, over 400 of the approximately 2,000 historic photos archived at the museum have been scanned into the Guild's computer. Our hope is that eventually an index of the photos will be available online so that researchers and historians from all over the world can access our beautiful collection.

The scanning project continues as time permits. If you are interested in helping to scan more photos on a Saturday when the museum is open, please contact Perky Ramroth.



### **“APPLICATION TO JOIN” THE DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE**

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**Daly City, CA 94014-2012**



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## **FIRST CLASS MAIL**

**TWO VACANCIES ON GUILD BOARD**  
We have two vacancies on the board at this time. The office of Treasurer is vacant and also the position of Director. If you have an interest in either position and would like to learn about their responsibilities, please contact Mark at: [president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org](mailto:president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org) or leave a message at the museum, 650-757-7177. Thank you for your consideration.



**DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE**

## **GUILD OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

**Mark Weinberger, President**, (Facebook, programs)  
650/757-7177 [president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org](mailto:president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org)

**Richard Rocchetta, Vice President (Raffle), Tattler editor**

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

**Treasurer** – vacant

**Director: Michael Rocchetta**, (database, mailing labels, *Tattler* set-up, coeditor)

**Director** – vacant

Ken Gillespie (1924-2011) President Emeritus  
Bunny Gillespie (1926-2017) Secretary Emerita

Grace and Marcus Gonzalez, Hospitality Crew

Raymond Jue, photographer

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

**Daly City History Guild Museum & Archive is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.**  
**Membership begins at \$25 per year.**