



THE WEBFOOTER

ESTABLISHED 1966

"Every subject known to man can be found on a post card" -- Club Motto

The official publication of The Webfooters Post Card Club in Portland, Oregon

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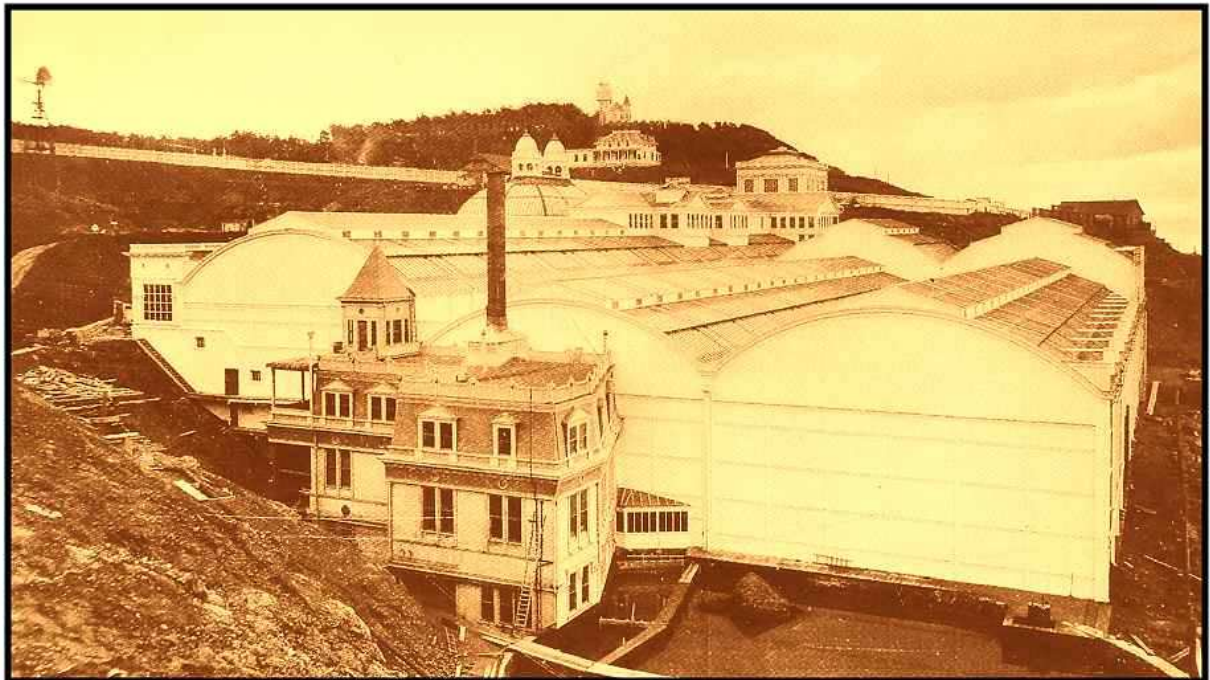
Issue Number 7

July 2012

EXPLORING SAN FRANCISCO'S



SUTRO HEIGHTS



Next Meeting – July 21, 2012

At Russellville Grange – 12105 NE Prescott Street

9 am to 3:30 pm



Located at:

FARMHOUSE ANTIQUES

8028 SE 13th Avenue in Historic Sellwood 503-232-6757

Tuesday thru Sunday: 11 to 5

(paid advertisement)

**THANKS TO OUR ADVERTISERS FOR THEIR
SUPPORT WHICH HELPS OFFSET OUR EXPENSES**

MEMBER NEWS

Word comes that Dave Elston, Webfooter #1592, was taken to the hospital on July 4 for a gallstone attack while enjoying the holiday at Seaside. At press time Dave was headed for a doctor visit. He's painting his house in Portland.

In Memorium

*Patricia Ruth Fuller-Kenney
July 13, 1944 - May 24, 2012*

*Small and frail with a knowing smile.
She said, I'm going home now.
Don't weep, don't wait and don't mourn for me.
You see, I'm finally home.*

*A memorial potluck
will be held on July 28, 2012
at Guy Talbot State Park,
Latourel Falls, Oregon
from 11:00am until dusk.*

*Please bring a hot dish, cold dish,
or something to share with others.
Also, bring your own beverages.*

*Hosted by Stephen Kenney Jr.
and Kimberly Kenney-Wolfer
Please RSVP to
503-695-5151 or 503-740-0080*



EXPLORING SUTRO HEIGHTS



San Francisco's famous Cliff House in the 1880s.

The area at the western edge of San Francisco which was to become Ocean Beach was one of the earliest amusement resorts on the West Coast. This area, which included once famous landmarks including the Cliff House, Sutro Baths and Museum and Playland-at-the-Beach, began as a 19th Century squatter's settlement known as "Mooneysville-by-the-Sea."

The Cliff House has been through five major incarnations since its beginnings in 1858. That year, Samuel Brannan, a prosperous ex-Mormon elder from Maine, bought lumber salvaged from a ship that foundered on the basalt cliffs below for \$1,500. With this material he built the first Cliff House.

The second Cliff House was built for Captain Junius G. Foster, but it was a long trek from the city and hosted mostly horseback riders, small game hunters or picnickers on day outings. The builders of the Point Lobos toll road constructed a two mile speedway beside it where well-to-do San Franciscans raced their horses along the way.

On weekends, there was little room at the Cliff House hitching racks for tethering the horses for the thousands of rigs. The growth of Golden Gate Park attracted beach travelers in search of refreshment and a look at the sea lions sunning themselves on the Seal Rocks.

Captain Foster oversaw the renovation of the Cliff House in 1868, adding a promenade and two new wings. It became known for scandalous behavior and it became the meeting place for local politicians as well as less savory citizens from the Barbary Coast. High society locals abandoned the Cliff House although it remained a favorite attraction for tourists and the less wealthy.



Adolph Sutro

In 1881, German immigrant Adolph Sutro began buying most of the western headlands of San Francisco. Sutro had solved the problems of ventilation and drainage at the mines in the Comstock Lode in Nevada and became a multimillionaire.

He acquired a cottage on the bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean for his private estate. He steadily added land all around it and eventually owned about 10 percent of the real estate in San Francisco. At his estate on the bluff, anyone was welcome to stroll through his elaborate gardens which were embellished with statuary, gazebos, topiary and dazzling designs. Sutro hosted presidents, writers, dancers and celebrities of the day.

After it operated for several years with declining revenue, Sutro bought the Cliff House in 1883. Always the visionary, Sutro, who would become the 24th mayor of San Francisco from 1894-1896, could foresee the growth of the city to the western shore. Sutro tried unsuccessfully to operate the Cliff House on his own, but gave up and leased it out.

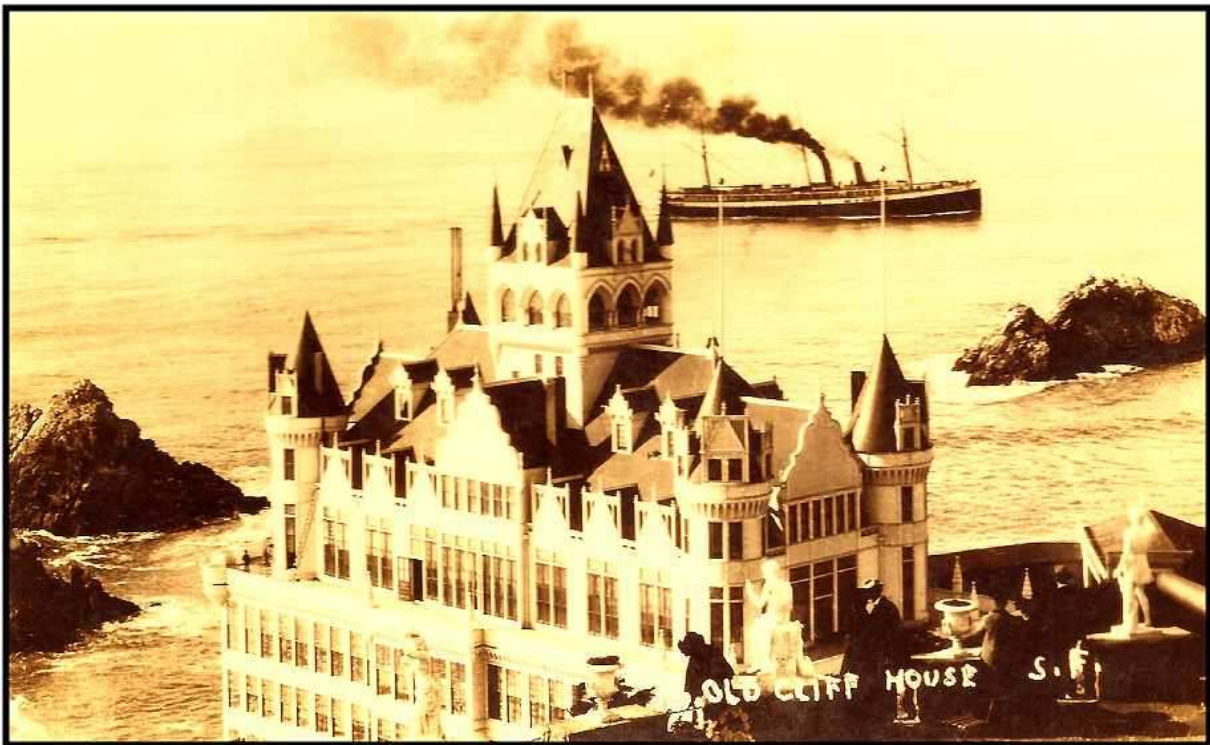


Adolph Sutro's Home is on the right with the Parapet Tower. His Photo Gallery is on the left.

By 1884, a steam railroad was in place to transport people to the Ocean Beach Pavilion for concerts and dancing. Sutro had noticed a small inlet that was protected from the flurry of movement created by the ocean waves at the base of the Seal Rocks near the Cliff House and he saw the potential for a development there. Demonstrating his skills as an engineer, Sutro opened an outdoor saltwater aquarium with a unique pumping and drainage system he designed utilizing a series of tunnels in 1887.

Three streetcar lines were built to Ocean Beach by 1890: the Ferries and Cliff House Railroad, the Park & Ocean Railroad and the Sutro Railroad. Sutro believed that the Southern Pacific's ten-cent streetcar fare to ride over the seven miles to his ocean side park was excessive. The enterprising Sutro built his own railroad and he only charged his passengers five cents.

The Cliff House was severely damaged by a dynamite explosion in 1887 when the schooner, *Parallel*, ran aground. The blast was heard a hundred miles away and demolished the entire north wing of the tavern. The building was repaired, but a fire caused by a defective flue completely destroyed the Cliff House on Christmas night in 1894.



In 1896, Adolph Sutro opened a new Cliff House, a seven story Victorian castle, called by some "the Gingerbread Palace", below his estate on the bluffs of Sutro Heights. Prior to that time, the Cliff House had a bad reputation and after Sutro's makeover, it became a respectable destination for families.

In the early 1890s, Sutro spent over a million dollars to build an amazing complex of public baths next to his Cliff House. It was christened Sutro Baths and Museum and it was operational by 1894 for special events, but didn't open for public swimming until 1896. The complex contained six large swimming pools filled with ocean water that was heated to different temperatures and pumped into the complex. They ranged from ice-cold to a steaming warm 80 degrees with 10-degree gaps.



Workers install a sign announcing the new Sutro Baths and Museum.

A favorite "dare" among the hordes of kids who frequented the bath house was to dive into the warmest pool, climb out and race down to dive into the small ice-cold pool. An additional pool, the plunge tank, was filled with unheated freshwater. The pools had a capacity of 1,685,000 gallons of water and they were accessed by slides, swings, diving platforms, seven toboggan slides, thirty flying rings and many ladders.

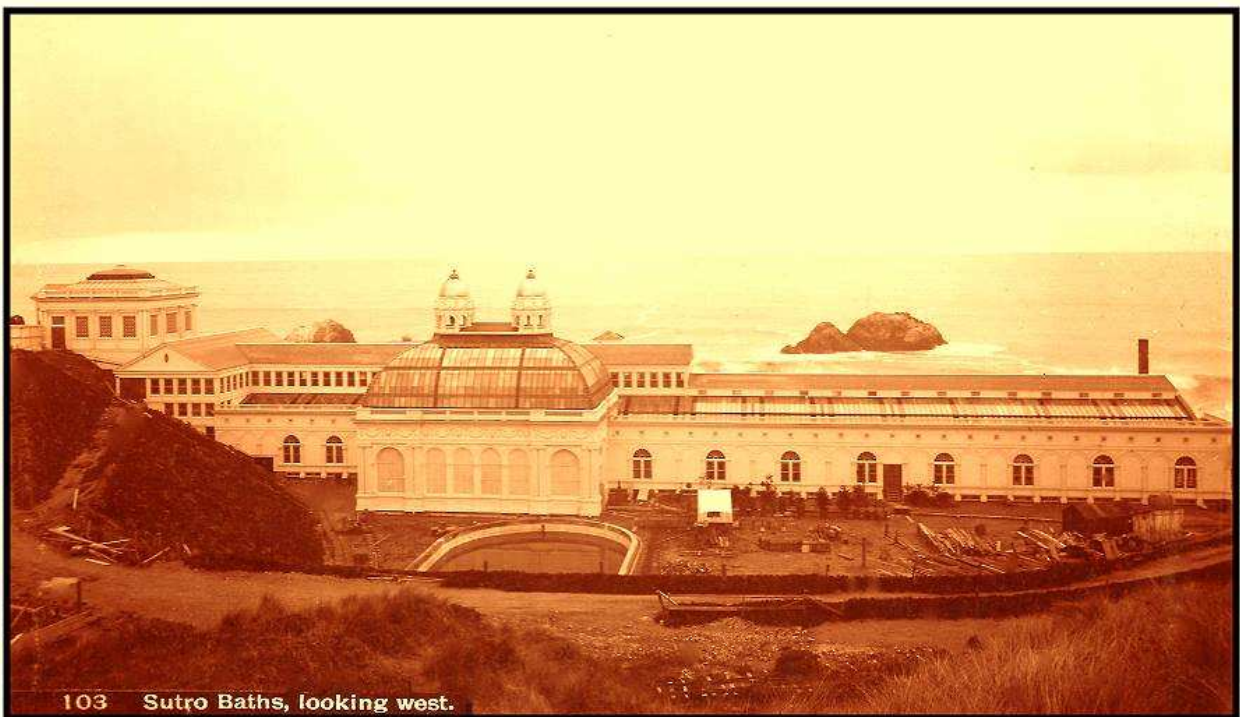
After a long fight with the Southern Pacific over railway access, a Grand Opening was finally held on March 14, 1896 at a cost of over a quarter million dollars. Great throngs of San Franciscans arrived on streetcars, bicycles and horse-drawn wagons to enjoy Sutro Baths and dining at the Cliff House. There were many shrubs and flowers flanking the halls and stairways. Sutro was a collector and he filled his bath house and museum of natural history with books, photos, totem poles, coin collections, stuffed birds and animals, armaments, Aztec pottery and art, beautiful fans, swords from China and Japan, and even mummies and other artifacts from ancient Egypt that he brought back from numerous trips around the world.

The enormous complex could hold up to 10,000 swimmers and 15,000 spectators. There were three restaurants with a total seating capacity of over 1,100. There were 517 private dressing rooms. All of the water in the bath house was discarded at the end of every day and replaced. The used water was piped several hundred feet away so that it wasn't used repeatedly.

Admission was 10 cents and swimmers paid 25 cents which included the rental of a swimming suit. Swimmers could not bring their own suits. For many years they had no one-piece bathing suits, just two-piece suits available in a variety of sizes for men, women and children. There were 20,000 bathing suits and 40,000 towels for rent requiring a huge on-site laundry facility.



The grand entrance to Sutro Baths.



103 Sutro Baths, looking west.

View of Sutro Baths shortly after completion in 1894.

See the full color version of this newsletter at www.thewebfooters.com



To help attract more people to Sutro Baths, the short-lived "Sutro Pleasure Grounds", also known as Merrie Way, opened with the Firth Wheel (Ferris Wheel) and two indoor attractions: the Mystic Maze house of mirrors and the Haunted Swing that Adolph Sutro had purchased when the Midwinter Fair of 1894 at nearby Golden Gate Park sold off its holdings. By 1898, Sutro's midway had grown to include a Scenic Railway and several other amusements as well as a cluster of chowder stands.



139 Sutro Baths Interior, looking northeast. May 1, 1896.

Sutro's short tenure as Mayor of San Francisco was remembered for what he didn't accomplish. His management style clashed with the politicians at City Hall. Always very generous, Sutro made many donations including land for the present-day University of California-San Francisco. When Sutro died on August 8, 1898 at the age of 68, the City didn't really appreciate what they had lost. His children had a quiet funeral and the newspapers of the day focused on the various minor scandals and his gifts to the city lay mostly unappreciated for decades.

Soon after his death, Sutro's heirs challenged his will and began a years-long struggle to break the land trust he created and gain title to his vast holdings. Eventually, a successful verdict allowed the heirs to sell the land to the west of Twin Peaks. Five neighborhoods were eventually created from the development of these lands.

When the great San Francisco earthquake struck on April 18, 1906, Sutro's Cliff House and Bath House survived with little or no damage. Then, on September 7, 1907, after extensive remodeling and just prior to reopening, the most ornate and beloved of all Cliff Houses burned to its foundation. This exquisite building had survived the 1906 earthquake only to succumb to a raging fire that destroyed it in less than two hours.

Dr. Emma Merritt, daughter of Adolph Sutro, authorized the rebuilding of the Cliff House on behalf of the Sutro estate at a cost of \$75,000. The new building was much more modest, neoclassical in design. They successfully carried on the tradition of sumptuous dining and great entertainment. The third version of the Cliff House opened on July 1, 1909. There was a ballroom for dancing as well as fine dining rooms and its breathtaking views. In the following decades, profits began to decline.

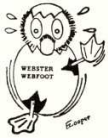
George and Leo Whitney, owners of Playland-at-the-Beach, bought the Cliff House in December 1937. They completed an extensive remodel of the Cliff House and it reopened in August of 1938. The National Park Service acquired the Cliff House in 1977 and they chose a concessionaire to operate the Cliff House and it is still in operation today.

After Sutro's death, his heirs struggled to keep the enterprises afloat and they tried unsuccessfully to sell the Cliff House and Sutro Baths in the ensuing years. A plan for the City to purchase Sutro Baths by bond measure failed in 1912. Another attempt to sell failed in 1919.

In an effort to keep the public coming to the baths, they held many events including fairs, competitions, beauty contests and swimming competitions. The Pacific Coast Swimming Championships were held at Sutro's in 1913 and 1914 when Hawaiian swimmer and Olympic gold medalist Duke Kahanamoku set several records.

Eventually, Sutro's grandson, Adolph G. Sutro took over the operation in 1934 and renovated the bath house with a "South Seas" theme. By 1937, he realized that the bath house operation was no longer commercially successful so he converted the large tank into a skating rink and he offered dancing, ping-pong, basketball and an "indoor beach" for rainy days.

After losing money year after year, the younger Sutro sold out to George Whitney, owner of Playland in 1952. Unable to keep up with the maintenance of the pools and pumping system, Whitney ceased all swimming activities. He closed the bath house in 1966 and the great complex was lost to a suspicious fire during demolition on June 26, 1966. The land was purchased by the National Park Service in 1980, designating it the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and some of the ruins are still visible.



Club Officers

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Treasurer.....Arne Soland
Membership Chair.....Krissey Durden
Member-at-Large.....Dave Elston
Historian.....Joe Macdonald
Librarian/Member-at-Large.....David Sell

Calendar

July 18 – Webfooters Board Meeting at Elmer’s Restaurant (no host)
10001 NE Sandy Blvd – 6:30 pm (Board meetings held every other month)

July 21 – Webfooters Post Card Club Meeting at Russellville Grange
12105 NE Prescott St near 122nd & Sandy Blvd – 9 am to 3:30 pm

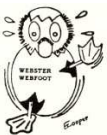
August 16 – Webfooters Post Card Club Meeting at Russellville Grange
12105 NE Prescott St near 122nd & Sandy Blvd – 9 am to 3:30 pm

For the latest news, visit our website:



www.thewebfooters.com

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WEBFOOTERS POST CARD CLUB

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