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*This book is dedicated to the late Him Mark Lai,
Dean of Chinese American History.*

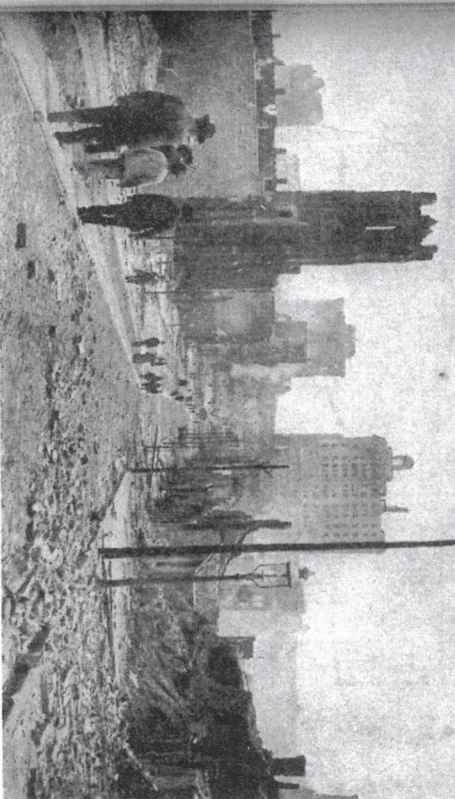
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system to entrap and expose fraudulent attempts. From 1910 to 1941, the center for housing and processing the new arrivals was located at the Immigration Station on Angel Island. Detainment took anywhere from a few days to a record of two years! Poems carved on the barracks wall by detainees are testaments to their anxiety, fears, frustrations, and disillusionment.

Before the 1906 Earthquake, various proposals were made to reclaim Chinatown. In February 1905, spokesman John Partridge for the United States Improvement and Investment Company boasted, "the City would be relieved of the continual menace. . . ." However, such plans would soon be thwarted by the Earthquake.

Earthquake

On Wednesday, April 18, 1906, at 5:12 a.m., a massive temblor, 8.3 by today's Richter scale, shocked San Francisco, sending thousands of panic-stricken people stumbling into the streets half-dazed and half-dressed. The 48 seconds that shook the earth seemed an eternity. But the worst was yet to come, as fires raged over parts of the city. The City's 585 firemen raced their teams of horses to the sites, hooked up hoses, and started pumping, only to realize—no water! The tremor had ruptured water lines from reservoirs that supplied the City; the underground water mains from cisterns were sheared apart. Assistant Fire Chief Dougherty concluded the only way to check the raging flames and save the City was to dynamite the buildings. Barrels of black powder came from the Presidio military base



The Great Earthquake and Fire, San Francisco, 1906. Looking down California Street from Nob Hill.

and dynamite came from Fort McDowell on Angel Island. Inexperienced soldiers began blowing up buildings under the supervision of a handful of military explosive experts. But the strategy of blowing up buildings ahead of the firestorm in order to create firebreaks instead sent flaming debris into neighboring blocks, starting new fires. Thousands of residents assisting policemen and firemen rescued the trapped and injured and searched for the missing, while hundreds of criminals and greedy civilians looted stores and buildings.

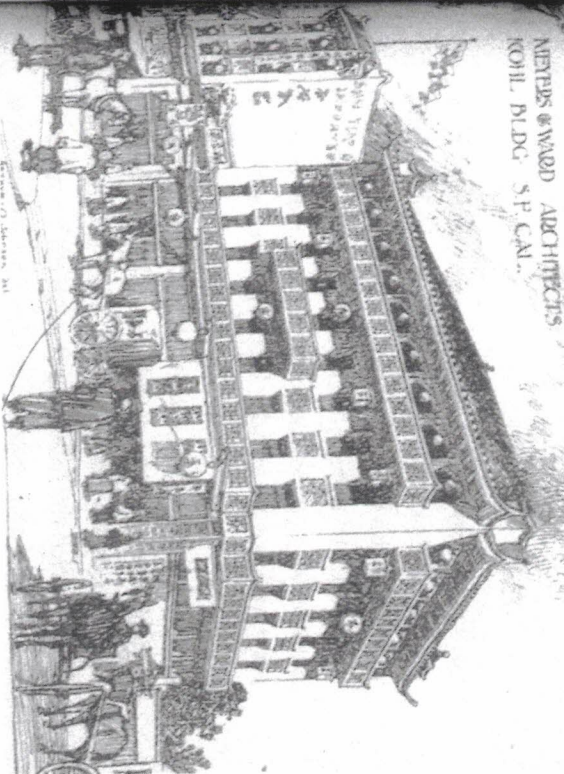
Mayor Eugene Schmitz, heretofore facing criminal and corruption charges with mentor Abe Ruef and the complete Board of Supervisors, rose to the occasion and gallantly took command, as a decent mayor should. He immediately drafted a proclamation authorizing federal troops and the police to shoot and kill all looters. Unfortunately, greed overcame "duty to protect," as some soldiers were among the looters. Ignoring his corrupt political partners, he summoned the leading citizens and



Chinese in segregated relief camp.

organized the "Committee of Fifty" to govern the chaotic city; the committee included two subcommittees, one to designate a location for a segregated relief camp, the other to designate a site for the relocation of Chinatown.

Another major figure who took charge of the City was General Frederick Funston, Deputy Commander of the Presidio; he deployed 1700 of his troops into the City, supporting firemen and police wherever help was most urgently needed. Soldiers with fixed bayonets were posted everywhere to discourage looting. Under his orders blocks of buildings were dynamited ahead of flaming buildings. In effect, martial law was unofficially declared. After four days of firefighting and dynamiting, an area east of Van Ness to the waterfront and south of Market to north of the Bay was a ruin of smoldering ashes. Within the burnt area, old Chinatown was gone forever.



Architect Clarence R. Ward's proposal for the southwest corner of Washington and Grant Streets.

Chinatown Post-Quake

On April 23rd, the subcommittee to relocate Chinatown proposed to move Chinatown to Hunters Point. However, the Chinese had plans of their own. Even before the 1906 Earthquake, while San Francisco was entertaining David Burnham's master plan for a new city, Look Tin Eli, secretary of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and other prominent merchants including Tong Bong and Lew Hing conjured visions of a new "Oriental City" to give greater San Francisco "veritable fairy palaces filled with the choicest treasures of the Orient..." While the City was occupied with earthquake reconstruction, the Chinese merchants wasted no time in executing their plans. Two imposing structures on Grant Street, Sing Fat on the southwest corner and Sing Chong on the northwest corner, demonstrate the pseudo-Oriental style with

the curved eaves of a pagoda tower. Today's Chinatown skyline was thus a direct response to half a century of the City's hostility.

This new attitude deliberately promoted Chinatown as a tourist mecca, in the hopes that its improved image would help ameliorate the relationship with the community at large. And to some extent, the plan was a success. The rebuilding of Chinatown into an Oriental City was heartily endorsed by the San Francisco Real Estate Board, which passed the following resolution: "... whereas ... the Chinese style of architecture will make it picturesque... and attractive to tourists... the San Francisco Real Estate Board does hereby recommend to all property owners, to have their buildings re-built with fronts of Oriental and artistic appearance." Architect Clarence R. Ward was requested by leading merchants in San Francisco to set an architectural example. Ward was concerned that the way the current architectural "aberrations" were being built would be a disaster. But Ward's proposal for the Southwest corner of Washington Street and Grant was not executed and the firm Ross & Burgren was credited with setting the "Oriental" style of construction with Sing Fat at the southwest corner and Sing Chong at the northwest corner of Dupont and California.

American architects at the turn of the 20th century were trained in the Beaux Arts tradition; they knew little and cared less about the architecture of Asia. Their exposure to Chinese architecture was limited to images of pagodas and temples with massive curved roofs with eaves curled at corners,

forms and expressions already centuries old. Their challenge was to transform these ancient forms into a new Sino-architectural vocabulary using Western methods of construction and local building materials in conformance with local building codes.

The size of the lots and their location were determining factors in the outcome of the design. Corner lots lent themselves to the adaptation of the multi-tiered eaves to simulate the multi-storied pagoda. Since the building code allowed 100% coverage of the lots, the middle lots left only the street facade for design. The ground floor was maximized for storefront usage, leaving minimal room for a front entry to the upper stories. Therefore fire escapes were necessary as secondary exits. These wrought-iron fire escapes were turned into balconies decorated with Chinese design motifs, such as the stylized "double happiness" character. The top-floor balcony was recessed, with the roof extended to create the illusion of the massive roof prevalent in Chinese architecture. Columns, indiscriminately surmounted by capitals, supported the roof, creating an "exotic" appearance. The eclectic use of standard classical building elements—brackets, cornices, papyrus, Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian capitals, antefix, and acanthus—combined with an oriental roofline, furthered the exotic image. But only the use of the colors red, yellow, and green was authentically Chinese. Where buildings abutted each other, the continuous pattern gave the illusion of an "Oriental" streetscape. Waverly Place, with its concentration of buildings, demonstrates this deception best. The illusion created is a masterful design solution, unique

and indigenous, for it is neither East nor West but decidedly San Francisco.

Not every property owner and tenant accepted the spirit of transforming post-quake Chinatown into an "Oriental City." Perhaps because of financial considerations, many of the buildings were basic austere brick commercial structures completely without Oriental or Western ornamentation. But the new "Oriental" spirit apparently met with success, not only in the imagery of its physical environment but in the social image of the population, as the *Bulletin's* "Pacific Progress" issue (May 1, 1909) lauded Chinatown as "one of the most noted places on the American Continent" and apologetically wrote: "we have . . . held up to the public gaze for too long the racial grief that separates the yellow and white people of the earth. . . ."

Such social gains, however, were limited. The passage of the Exclusion Act declared the Chinese could not become citizens, the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1923 ensured Chinese could not own property, and local real estate covenants confined the Chinese to Chinatown and restricted labor competition. Denied participation in mainstream America for over four decades, the Chinese embraced the politics of homeland China, while focusing on the domestic affairs of the community and earning the goodwill of San Francisco.

Politics of China in Chinatown

For over half a century, the politics of China profoundly impacted Chinese America. By the end of the 19th century, China under the Manchu rulers



Kang Yu-wei.

(1644-1911) was near collapse, incapable of repelling the onslaught of Western nations and Japan. Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao advocated saving the backward, archaic dynasty by reforms to bring China into the 20th century and keep pace with the industrial West. Emperor Kang Hsü supported the movement over the objection of his aunt, the Empress Dowager Tsü Hsi. The Empress Dowager engineered a coup d'état and Kang Hsü was arrested while both Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao escaped overseas with a price on their heads. In opposition to this reform movement was Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who plotted to overthrow the Dynasty and establish a republic. He also escaped with a price on his head. Both opposing parties sought support for their cause from the overseas Chinese community.

When Chen Lan-pin, an envoy who headed