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HOUSING RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE CATASTROPHE: THE FAILED PROMISE OF SAN FRANCISCO'S 1906 "EARTHQUAKE COTTAGES"

by Marie BOLTON and Nancy C. UNGER

At the turn of the twentieth century, San Francisco's most striking physical feature was the great multitude of boats and ships crowded along the city's waterfront and extending far into San Francisco Bay. Communication, transportation, and above all trade and commerce had been the key ingredients in transforming barren, wind-swept hills and sand dunes into a bustling metropolis. Although the nature of trade goods changed, the movement of commodities and people in and out of the city grew constantly and rapidly in the nineteenth century, shaping San Francisco's social stratification, its labor market, and the city's political power structure. By 1900, San Francisco had also joined with other major American cities in developing a progressive social reform movement and in the first decade of the twentieth century it distinguished itself with a strong Workingman's political party that briefly dominated city politics. The utter devastation of the 1906 earthquake and fire interrupted the path of San Francisco's social, political, and economic evolution, leaving in its wake a scramble for reconstruction. An exploration of some of the tensions resulting from conflicting visions of reconstruction in San Francisco provides an illustration of

some of the enduring issues involved in many American post-catastrophe urban scenarios.

PROLOGUE: GROWTH OF A WESTERN OUTPOST

As early as the 1790s, Yerba Buena village (present-day San Francisco) was an outpost for New England fur traders, specializing especially in seal and sea otter. The 1830s brought rapid change to the region as the fur-bearing sea mammal population plummeted while the Mexican Revolution brought about the secularization of California missions and encouraged the expansion of private landholdings. With the simultaneous increase in demand from expanding shoe manufactories in the Boston area, Yerba Buena's trade shifted in the 1830s from furs to the hides provided by the extensive Californio cattle ranches. San Francisco's role as California's coastal warehouse was made permanent with the 1849 gold rush and the extended silver boom in the 1860s. Trade continued to be the economic center of the city well after the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869. Aided by the rapid expansion of railroads, California industrial agriculture

developed in the 1870s and 1880s with immense wheat farms, rapidly diversifying into vegetable and fruit crops, along with the accompanying drying, canning, wine-making, and beer-brewing industries. The majority of exports left the state through San Francisco¹.

San Francisco's economic growth came not only from trade and commerce, but from local industrial development as well. Logically enough in the context of the gold rush, one of the first industrial plants located in San Francisco was Donahues' Union Shovel Works, established in 1849 at Mission and First Streets, south of Market Street. Other manufactories followed, and by 1875 San Francisco was a major supplier for the worldwide market in mining machinery and equipment. Iron foundries and machine shops were located especially in the south of Market Street area, as well as west along the bayshore to the Presidio. Foundries continued to expand south of Market and by the 1880s were producing heavy equipment, engines, locomotives, and other machinery to equip not only mining, but also transportation and agricultural firms. By the late 1880s, the Donahue brothers' shovel manufactory, renamed the Union Iron Works, had grown into a major plant employing over 1,200 workers. Only one of many heavy industrial plants and iron and steel mills along the southern bayshore, Union Iron Works occupied fifteen acres and included a shipyard, rolling mill, foundries, pattern shops, machine shops, and a large hydraulic lift dock (Vance, 1964, 26; Issel and Cherny, 30; Blum, 1989, 13, 16).

A constant influx of capital from mining and agriculture, along with San Francisco's industrial development and

population growth, stimulated a long-term building boom in the city. Beginning in the 1850s, the sand hills that were the most prominent feature of San Francisco were gradually cut through or levelled, with the sand used to fill in shallow bayshore coves and mudflats². Streets were laid out and paved with redwood planking. The gold rush prompted the need for a stock exchange, and in the 1860s this was located at Montgomery and Washington Streets, in what is still the heart of the city's financial district. To the east of this area, across Sansome Street, a produce district had by the 1870s expanded onto the now filled Yerba Buena Cove. A wholesale and warehouse district developed south of Market Street between China Basin and Mission Streets, and Mission Bay was gradually filled in. Businesses building, repairing, and supplying the ships that made the San Francisco harbor a forest of masts also established themselves in the city. Other smaller industries were increasingly present in San Francisco as well, as was a healthy service sector. Inexpensive hotels and restaurants, saloons, and laundries all thrived as the city's population grew. In the 1880s and 1890s, the financial district underwent a rebuilding, and ornate steel-frame highrises were erected. Small manufactories, especially cigar and garment makers, expanded, located especially in or near Chinatown. Toward the port were housed the many import and export firms and the vast warehouses needed to store goods before shipment (Lewis, 1980, xiii, 136, 172-173; Vance, 20, 27; Issel and Cherny, 29; Tygiel, 1992, 85).

Although overall employment in all sectors greatly increased from the 1870s into the twentieth century, the proportions of workers in different areas slowly

shifted from manufacturing and service to professions, trade, and transportation. In 1900, San Francisco was firmly situated both as Pacific coast warehouse and trade center, as well as financial and corporate capital of the west, but its position as the leading west coast manufacturing site was beginning to decline. In 1890, over half the manufacturing businesses in California were located in the city, producing almost two-thirds of the total output. In 1900, this had declined to less than one-third of the production sites, and only 44% of the output. This was due in part to the general growth of California, which allowed access to advantageous physical sites for industrial development. It was also due to rising competition from other west coast urban areas (Issel and Cherny, 54-55; Tygiel, 86-87).

A CITY OF ETHNIC AND CLASS DIVERSITY

San Francisco experienced rapid population growth, beginning with gold rush fortune-seekers in 1849 and continuing with job-seekers attracted by the dramatic expansion of the city's economic base. In 1847, fewer than five hundred people lived in Yerba Buena village. This exploded to approximately five thousand by 1849. Exponential population growth continued into the twentieth century, with about 57,000 people living in the newly rebaptized city of San Francisco in 1860, 343,000 in 1900, and 417,000 in 1910. An initially disproportionate ratio among white San Franciscans of 85% men to 15% women in 1852 had by 1900 settled to a more balanced ratio of 55% men to 45% women. While in 1900, 65% of white San Franciscans were born

in the United States, 70% were either foreign-born (30%) or with foreign-born parents (40%). Of the San Franciscans with foreign-born parents, 27.5% were of Irish origin, 22.9% German, 10.1% British or English-speaking Canadian, 6.2% Italian, 5.9% Scandinavian, and 27.4% from various other regions of Europe. Chinese and Japanese residents made up 4.6% of the city's population in 1900, and black Americans 0.5%. Although the 1900 census does not provide information about Mexicans or other Latinos, the 1930 census estimates that 1.2% of the city's overall population was Mexican (Tygiel, 17; Issel and Cherny, 12-13, 24, 55-56; Ethington, 1992, 425).

As shown by these figures, San Francisco at the turn of the century was predominately white American, with a high percentage of immigrants. The Irish had been the first to arrive after the gold rush and remained the largest single ethnic group in the city. The next largest group was a mix of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Germans. Until the outbreak of World War One, the fastest rate of population growth was among Italians, who began arriving late in the nineteenth century (Issel and Cherny, 1986, 55-56). Along with native-born white Americans, working class residents belonging to these European groups were all regular recipients of social assistance from a variety of charity groups³.

The smallest ethnic group in San Francisco was the city's African-American population, numbering 1,642 individuals in 1900. Black San Franciscans did not live in enclaves, but were dispersed throughout the city. In spite of this residential integration, African-Americans appear to have been largely

excluded from the efforts of the major official charity organizations in the post-1906 period. The largest, Associated Charities of San Francisco, prided itself on being the only large charity that helped all residents of the city regardless of ethnicity or religion, but black San Franciscans were not included⁴.

Nor were Asians. In contrast to the city's black community, San Francisco's Chinese population of 13,954 people in 1900 was highly ghettoized and with few exceptions forbidden to live or work anywhere in the city outside of Chinatown. Chinatown was an almost autonomous zone in the city, governed and administered by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and various kin-based and district associations. A flourishing vice and prostitution industry was the most porous commercial aspect of Chinatown, drawing customers from all of San Francisco's male population. Although some Christian missionaries fighting against prostitution worked in Chinatown, larger charities did not aid Chinese individuals or families. Generally, if agencies made any mention of Asian San Franciscans, it was in the form of anti-Asian agitation⁵.

As in other American cities of the late nineteenth century, San Francisco's working class population experienced significant employment and housing instability, aggravated by the city's position as a great port and the only major urban area servicing a huge western hinterland. San Francisco provided a winter haven for the many thousands of seasonal workers employed in western extractive industries, such as mining, lumbering, fishing, and industrial farming. The accompanying processing plants also operated largely on a seasonal basis. Seasonal employment was common too for resident San Franciscans

employed in the sizeable local building and construction industry, as well as for more mobile construction workers on California road and railroad projects. In winter many unemployed workers joined their families in their city homes. Others lived off their scanty savings, renting rooms or beds and paying for inexpensive meals in the neighborhoods along the waterfront and south of Market Street⁶.

Residential districts bordering early business and manufacturing areas demonstrated substantial fluidity. A French neighborhood along Dupont Avenue gave way to Chinatown, centered on the renamed Grant Avenue. South Park was an early upper-class enclave, but with expansion of the warehouse and industrial district south of Market Street, wealthy San Franciscans moved their homes north toward Nob Hill and Pacific Heights. The silver profits of the 1860s and 1870s brought a solid base of capital which allowed banks to finance the city's continued rapid growth. Streets were repaired and graded and wooden sidewalks installed. Substantial brick and wood buildings were erected, including schools, libraries, churches, hospitals, and asylums. The city's expanding industrial base provided for the new streetcar lines that crisscrossed the growing city, opening residential and industrial zones up to development (Vance, 19-21, 114-115, 117).

The largely Irish and German working class neighborhoods on and around Telegraph Hill, located north of Market Street, began shifting to outlying areas with the increased arrival immigrants from southern Europe. Working and middle class neighborhoods stretched to the south in the Mission, Potrero, and Visitacion Valley districts, and north of

Golden Gate Park to the west in the Richmond district. From the 1870s to about 1900, building associations brought large tracts of land in the outer portions of these new streetcar suburbs, and built hundreds of houses. These were made available to stably employed families for moderate down payments and mortgages provided by local banks. Heavy fogs and steep hills in central San Francisco still blocked residential construction in the southwestern quarter of the city (Vance, 1964, 31, 174; Issel and Cherny, 1986, 27-30; Tygiel, 1992, 38).

ON THE EVE OF DISASTER

The majority of working class San Franciscans continued to live closer to the center of the city in 1906, in the neighborhoods just south of Market Street. This area was crowded with many small wooden frame buildings. Apartments and lodging houses were often located above small shops and saloons along main thoroughfares, and houses and flats lined the smaller streets and alleys cutting through the blocks. Many residential hotels provided additional inexpensive housing. The other most densely inhabited area of San Francisco was Chinatown, which housed almost all of the Chinese population of the city in an area three blocks long and seven blocks wide. The disaster would hit these neighborhood the hardest⁷.

DISASTER RELIEF AS A NEW HISTORICAL LENS

Historians of San Francisco have long asserted that the earthquake and fire of April 1906 were merely blips on the timeline of the city's history, dramatic

but relatively unimportant events that in no way changed the course of San Francisco's economic, social, or political development⁸. This perspective may have its roots in the disaster's immediate aftermath. In the effort to encourage investment and rapid economic recovery, the San Francisco municipal government systematically underestimated death rates and other indicators of loss in order to minimize the devastation (Fradkin, 2005, 189). This paper, using post-disaster housing as a historical lens, demonstrates the fallacy of this view. The failed promise of post-disaster housing reveals an overlooked yet highly significant chapter in San Francisco history. What might seem to be a blueprint for disaster has unrealized potential to suggest possibilities for recovery and rebirth⁹.

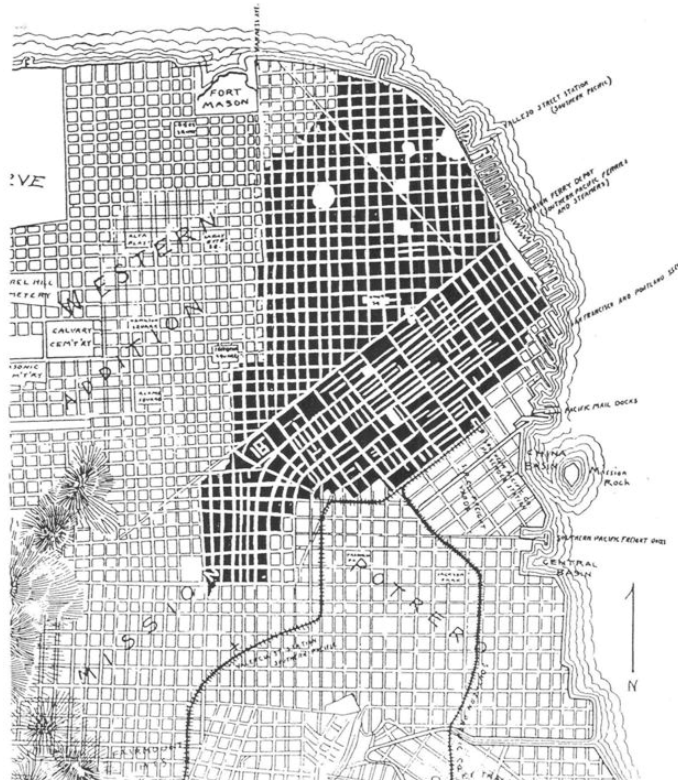
TABULA RASA

The earthquake struck the still slumbering city at 5:12 the morning of Wednesday, April 18, 1906. Qualified as "moderately large", it caused the immediate collapse of countless buildings, including the home of the San Francisco fire chief, who was killed almost instantly while asleep in his bed. Even more ominously, the earthquake broke the natural gas and water mains laid in the built areas of San Francisco, mostly in fragile land-fill that tended to liquify when jolted by earthquakes. Within hours countless fires spread into a conflagration that without water, firefighters were unable to contain. In a four-day period the city was largely consumed. Up to 4,000 people were killed and thousands more injured¹⁰. The disaster's combined forces destroyed almost all of the infrastructure and physical plant at the base of San Francisco's

economy. All streetcar lines were out of operation and streets were piled high with masses of masonry and iron. The telephone system and the telegraph and telegram offices were destroyed, as were the banks, hotels, apartment buildings, thousands of houses, and all but a scattering of outlying bakeries and stores. Most commercial districts were levelled and the general upheaval created a tremendous setback to San Francisco manufacturers striving to maintain their competitive position. The disaster also destroyed most of the city's housing stock, especially in the densely inhabited older working class neighborhoods. Only a few small pockets of the burned district escaped destruction,

including the wharves and dock areas up to two blocks into town. While the fire burned, refugees gathered in city parks with what belongings they managed to take with them. At the end of the three-day fire, about 250,000 people were living without food in makeshift tents and shacks in parks and scattered lots outside the burned area¹¹. The scale of the need experienced by all social classes and groups was astounding, making all the more impressive the speed with which the city rebuilt itself. Lost in the story of that rebuilding have been the efforts of poor San Franciscans to establish control over their lives as they fought for basic rights to housing and jobs¹².

Fig. 1 Burned district in San Francisco, 1906*



Source: Lewis, 1980, 190.

*The white spaces on the map indicate the few spots within the burned district that escaped destruction.

DREAMS OF A NEW MODEL CITY

Following the 1906 disaster, progressive reformers saw a golden opportunity in the “great purification by fire” of San Francisco’s vice and prostitution districts as well as residential working class neighborhoods¹³. Ambitious social reforms were put into practice to take advantage of the vast destruction of the city’s neighborhoods and infrastructure. Nature had indeed created a *tabula rasa*. Out of the ruins, reformers anticipated the rise of a new model city, one harmoniously designed to eliminate social tensions, and modernized to avoid public health problems. Above all, the new San Francisco would eliminate ancient vices by transforming a city of apartments, lodging houses, and hotels into a paradise of small homes. Each lot would allow men and women to carry out the roles prescribed to their gender: As wives lovingly cared for the home, husbands would tend to the vegetable garden. These gardens would produce wholesome food for the family, and provide plenty of fresh air and room in which children could engage in healthy play. In living out the American dream, the proud laboring owners of these modest, single-family homes would work hard and cultivate independence, self-reliance, and all the other democratic virtues and values touted by the middle class.

The goal of recreating working class neighborhoods in post-1906 San Francisco ultimately fell victim to class and race-based prejudices fueled by commercial opportunism. But such results are not inevitable. San Francisco’s original recovery effort featured a vibrant and initially quite successful program to serve the housing needs of

low-income residents displaced by the earthquake. The story of the creation of a flourishing working-class housing development that allowed for dignity and self-reliance reveals the possibilities for real post-disaster recovery. It also highlights the power of the opposition to such developments and suggests ways to identify and combat those forces.

THE ROLE OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE DISASTER’S IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

The earthquake and fire hit the poorest San Franciscans the hardest. On the eve of the quake, the poorest workers lived in old, run-down boarding houses and apartments. Employment was scarce and poorly paid. Working families, especially those living in the south of Market Street neighborhood, often stretched their incomes by taking boarders into their already crowded homes¹⁴. The flimsy construction of these neighborhoods guaranteed their destruction by the quake and fire. With most housing burnt to the ground, rents immediately soared 350%, and in 1910 were still 71% higher than pre-fire rates (Kazin, 1987, 125). Women faced especially severe problems, as their manufacturing and service employments disappeared along with the income they had received for cooking, cleaning, and laundering for lodgers. Asian San Franciscans faced additional barriers to survival. In the weeks following the disaster, Chinese refugees remained segregated and were relocated four times by city and military officials in response to whites who refused to share space with the much-despised Asians. Although ultimately unsuccessful in their efforts, city developers seized upon

the destruction of Chinatown, located on some of the most valuable property in the city, as the perfect solution to ridding the city of Asians once and for all. Asian San Franciscans were totally excluded from official relief efforts¹⁵.

**THE EARTHQUAKE COTTAGE
AS SOLUTION:
“A BENEFICIAL EFFECT...
FOR THE COMING GENERATION”**

Measures to remake the city began even as the fires still burned. The U.S. Army organized San Franciscans into refugee camps and imposed martial law. Mayor Eugene Schmitz appointed a flurry of committees drawn largely from the city's business elite. James Phelan incorporated his powerful finance committee as the San Francisco Relief and Red Cross Funds, known as the Relief Committee, in July of 1906 (Kahn, 1979, 137-138); President Theodore Roosevelt sent the influential Dr. Edward Devine to oversee the initial operations of the Red Cross, which coordinated the work of local charities, including the most prominent, the Associated Charities of San Francisco (ACSF), headed by Katherine Felton¹⁶. Pursuing their objective of fundamentally reforming San Francisco's housing for the benefit of the working poor, the Relief Committee constructed 5,610 two and three-room wood frame cottages. Although Kevin Rozario suggests that the quality of the cottages was deliberately kept minimal by business leaders unwilling to “interfere with the private property market”, they were enthusiastically described by Devine as “attractive, sanitary, safe, and yet comparatively inexpensive dwellings which will have a beneficial effect not

only in the immediate future but for the coming generation”¹⁷.

The small green transportable “earthquake cottages”, as they came to be known, were placed in parks and on other public lands. The U.S. Army, under the leadership of General Adolphus Greely, presided over these refugee camps immediately following the disaster. Residents initially lived under “the most rigid [military] supervision”¹⁸. After the withdrawal of the military on 30 June 1906, Felton and F. W. Dohrmann, vice-chairman of the Relief Committee, managed the camps, helped relocate the cottages onto lots throughout the city, and eased the refugees' transition into non-supervised city life¹⁹.

The ultimate goal of the cottage-lease system was single-family home ownership. The cottages were leased for one year at \$2.00 a month. The monies collected were later refunded to the lessee. At the end of the year the cottager became a homeowner, although he or she still had to secure a private lot on which to move the cottage. After losing their homes and often their jobs in the 1906 disaster, many families found respite and recovery in their new houses as they worked successfully to reconstruct their lives. ACSF caseworkers identified especially worthy families that owned or were buying the lot on which their earthquake cottage was placed. For instance, the Hamlin's' small two-room cottage provided inadequate space for the family of eight, but it was on a lot that they owned. Impressed by their self-sufficiency, the caseworker recommended that the ACSF give the family a rare building grant of \$300.00, “as this family has not applied to us for assistance”²⁰.

Earthquake cottages relocated to residential districts of the city came to social workers' attention nation-wide as bright spots in the years of the stubborn recession that began in 1907, aggravated in San Francisco by the lingering effects of the earthquake and fire as well as a prolonged streetcar strike. In 1909, some observers recognized the beneficial influence of these single family homes: out of the "unlikely heritage of the calamity [...] a miracle was wrought". Hundreds of families "are to be found in many of the residence districts of the city [...] learning the art of home making"²¹. That same year, an observer commissioned by the Red Cross noted the durability of the earthquake cottages and reported approvingly on improvements made to the original structures: "It was very nice indeed how the little cottages seem to endure the rigors of the rain and hot sun of the Pacific Coast [...]. As a rule they have been somewhat rebuilt; have been raised off the ground; front porches and rear kitchens have been added; they have been shingled and painted and set in the midst of gardens of blooming plants and shrubs and form beautiful little suburban homes, in which anyone would be content and happy. The wood work as far as I observed was in good state of preservation. There did not seem to be any rotting of the sills; the roofs seemed tight and altogether the wisdom of issuing these houses has been more than proved"²².

As the most ardent supporter of cottage living, the ACSF regularly sent social workers to foster its experiment. They encouraged vegetable gardens and proudly reported families weathering hard times by living off their own produce. The modest size of the cottages

was praised for encouraging healthy outdoor living. The Associated Charities concluded that even the most humble cottage was "infinitely better than the best tenement", providing the beneficial "influence of a comfortable home upon men and women"²³. Those fortunate enough to live in the earthquake cottages enjoyed all the benefits of single-family home life so celebrated by the experts as being conducive to establishing proper values and good citizenship.

THE EARTHQUAKE COTTAGE AS OBSTACLE

Although more than half the cottages had been moved out of camps by the spring of 1907, the Relief Committee came under constant attack by many middle class San Franciscans. Complaints centered around two themes: the camps in city parks were depriving deserving citizens of much-needed open space, and the camps were creating a class of idlers and paupers²⁴. San Francisco's business elite led the critical chorus, seeking to exploit the *tabula rasa* left by the disaster by maximizing real estate investments on land made vacant, and potentially valuable, by the earthquake and fire. The working class families living in earthquake cottages or other modestly built homes—so celebrated by social reformers—were viewed by business interests as obstacles to be overcome.

Once the initial housing emergency was resolved and some of the city's parks restored to open space, San Francisco's cultural elite joined the chorus of critics. Working class homes set in centrally located neighborhoods were inconsistent with their city beautiful movement.

Leaders of this movement, including Phelan and sugar baron Adolph Spreckels, had always been reserved in their support of the cottage housing plan championed by reformers. While they tolerated the cottages that had been moved to outlying areas of San Francisco, they did not want them in neighborhoods close to the city center. Shared interests created a new alliance. San Francisco's upper middle and wealthy classes united with the business elite and engaged in a series of aggressive efforts to raze entire working-class residential neighborhoods. While the reasons cited ranged from cultural and social concerns to economic priorities, the primary method was the proclamation of a series of public health emergencies requiring the destruction of working class homes, including the reformers' cherished earthquake cottages. San Francisco is hardly the only city to have used questionable claims of public health risks to dictate urban planning favourable to the business and social elite, but it leveraged those assertions especially aggressively²⁵.

**THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH:
REAL, EXAGGERATED,
AND IMAGINED**

Immediately following the 1906 disaster, risks to public health were very real. The lack of clean water supplies, the broken sewage system, and accumulating garbage and debris led to high rates of typhoid and smallpox. To avoid a panic that could harm relief efforts, health officials dealt with the problem of disease discreetly. Those disease outbreaks were controlled by late 1906. However, in the following year a new and even more frightening health threat

appeared: the bubonic plague. San Franciscans had an ongoing preoccupation with the plague. An outbreak in 1900, largely confined to Chinatown, killed 285 people, with 401 more ill, resulting in health officials ordering the extensive demolition of Chinatown housing. In its wake, many Californians augmented their anti-Asian bias with the fear that the disease would reappear, arriving on the Pacific Coast on trade ships from Asia, where the plague remained active. In April 1907, a case of plague was reported to health officials, who expressed no concern publicly. By June, fourteen persons had contracted the disease but city officials still did not declare a public health problem. In spite of the Board of Health's rising concern, business interests (who controlled the press) opposed any wide scale campaign against the disease because a panic would threaten the economic recovery of the city. The annual report of the Board of Health reflected the frustration of its officials: "A very serious obstacle to [prevention] efforts, however, was encountered in the attitude of the press, which with one notable exception, either did not print any news on the subject at all or was openly antagonistic to the efforts of the Health authorities." This changed when physician and law professor Dr. Edward Taylor became mayor in July. Taylor had been appointed in the midst of the notorious San Francisco graft trials. In his efforts to restore health to the municipal administration, he took immediate and vigorous action to stamp out disease (Fradkin, 221-223; Craddock, 2000, 139, 147-148; Lewis, 1980, 204; Issel and Cherny, 1986, 157).

When fifty-five plague cases were reported in July, Taylor appealed to the

US Surgeon General for assistance. Sixteen public health officers were dispatched to San Francisco to carry out what one observer called the “most intensive rat hunt in history” (Lewis, 1980, 204-205). More than 400 paid workers, joined by thousands of volunteers, trapped or poisoned rats. Over the next several months, over 150,000 rats were examined and exterminated. With the deaths of the rats, human plague cases declined sharply. In October 1907, forty-four new cases were reported, then thirty-four in November, down to ten in December. In 1908 the rate dropped quickly to four cases in January, and a single last case in February. The rat extermination program continued until November, when the U.S. Public Health Service officially announced the end of the disease—and their campaign²⁶.

The city government’s approach to the problem posed by rats infected with bubonic plague reveals more than just an effort to protect public health. Its measures to control the disease rationalized the massive destruction of working class homes, especially and precisely in those neighborhoods with the most real estate potential. Some of its actions flew in the face of the known facts of the epidemic. It was well established, for example, that the disease did not originate due to a lack of sanitation in working class neighborhoods. San Francisco’s Health Board reported that sailors, contaminated in other parts of the world, were responsible for the original outbreak. Its initial spread was confined not to the residents of earthquake cottages and other low income housing, but to patients and workers in the City and County Hospital. The Board also revealed that a variety of factors inhibited or enhanced the spread

of the disease. This fact rendered ineffective the city’s “one size fits all” remedy of destroying working class neighborhoods. For example, the disease disappeared in the winter months due to cold and wet weather that interfered with its means of transmission²⁷. Nevertheless, the fear of plague generated a wave of panic directed primarily against neighborhoods in which refugee cottages were concentrated. In an echo of San Francisco’s vigilante past, merchants formed the Citizens Health Committee and patrolled working class neighborhoods, trapping rats and reporting to the Health Board where those found to have the disease were caught²⁸.

CLEARING THE RELIEF CAMPS

The most aggressive measures to “clean up” the city began with those cottages still situated in parks. According to the Relief Committee, in April 1907 about 20,000 people were paying leases in order to live in cottages in the remaining refugee camps. Frederick Dorhmann, the Relief Committee’s camp organizer, pointed out that it would take “many months and much effort before the families that lost all they had in the fire will have [alternate] accommodations”²⁹. Rudolph Spreckels, head of the Relief Committee’s Camps Department, and friend and business associate of James Phelan, led the push to close the camps. No sites for the relocation of the cottages were secured, investigated or even suggested by Spreckels or other members of the Camps Department. His lack of concern for the welfare of their residents is reflected in his declaration that he would have the cottages “all removed from the camps within the next two

months if he [had] to have the buildings torn down over the heads of refugees”³⁰. Articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in late August 1907 confirm the hostility towards both camps and refugees alike. The Relief Corporation was quoted as saying, “some [refugees] show signs of settled stubbornness, but for these there will be an especial fate meted out in time, for everybody must move”. On a single Sunday in August, fifty-seven cottages were removed from eleven camps, and over 700 cottages were moved in that month alone. The parks were rapidly cleared, not because they had been centers of disease, but to make them, as the *Chronicle* put it, “once more at the disposal of the public at large [...] to obtain a wholesome outing”³¹.

Some camp residents organized themselves into groups and petitioned the Relief Committee to delay clearing the parks. They were supported by Dohrmann, who submitted to the national Red Cross headquarters their resolution for a one-year removal moratorium to allow residents time to find vacant lots on which to move their cottages. Dohrmann praised “the spirit which prompted these people [...]. It seems to me to show the right feeling of self-help, which does not exist among paupers”³². The Relief Committee did not grant the cottagers’ petition. Residents obtained a temporary restraining order which stopped evictions until the court overturned it and ordered all city parks cleared³³.

Over the summer of 1907, the ACSF moved approximately 3,000 cottages, installing them on private lots with the plumbing paid. This orderly dispersal of cottages turned into a panic when Spreckels, with strong backing from San

Francisco’s business and social elite and the courts, ordered all camps closed by the end of the year. Many people were injured and cottages and belongings damaged in hurried moves. Teamsters raised their prices. The ACSF was unable to fund all the applications for aid. The *Chronicle* reported that one “old woman, has offered every known pretext for remaining in the park [...]. Yesterday, the Park Commission ordered the cottage torn down, and this was done in the afternoon, the woman’s goods being left on the ground”³⁴. The war against the earthquake cottages, ostensibly waged out of concerns for public safety, appeared to be quickly degenerating into a race to clear the land, heedless of the human cost.

Genuine concerns about public health provided an excellent rationalization for those who sought to destroy the cottages for development purposes. The largest number of plague cases were found in Lobos Square Park, also the camp in which the most cottages remained³⁵. The Board of Public Works, acting on Board of Health instructions issued in September 1907, refused to issue the permits necessary for the transfer to privately owned lots of the refugee cottages remaining in city parks. The Relief Committee finally negotiated terms with the Health and Public Works Boards so that the relocation of the cottages could resume. These terms included new sanitation regulations requiring the installation of foundations, fire-resistant roofs, and plumbing facilities. These requirements slowed the rate of movement considerably³⁶. Also beginning in September 1907, the Boards of Health and Public Works, without evidence that the cottages harbored disease, systematically burned

those without plumbing that were located outside the parks and in neighborhoods in which a case of the disease had been reported. Once a cottage was slated for condemnation, only twenty-four to forty-eight hours notice was given to its occupants. In a cruel repetition of the 1906 disaster, homes were often burned with furniture and belongings still inside³⁷.

THE ROLE OF LOCATION IN THE WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION OF HOMES

The following year a vastly expanded program of destruction resulted in the mass demolition of 2,190 working class homes, including 1,512 identified as “refugee cottages”³⁸. In October 1908, the Health Board, working with the U.S. Public Health Service, began systematically reviewing housing inspection reports, condemning and destroying housing deemed “substandard”. Significantly, in a parallel action, the Health Board in November 1908 declared bubonic plague eradicated

from the entire San Francisco peninsula. Earthquake cottages and other refugee homes were nevertheless destroyed in quick order, followed by lodging houses, hotels, and apartment buildings. The Health Board issued three possible orders for a building found to be in violation of the health code. Very rarely, the Board gave the owner time to make improvements and pass a reinspection. More often, the Board ordered the building torn down within sixty days. Most common by far, even without the threat of plague to justify such severe action, was the order that the building be torn down within thirty days³⁹.

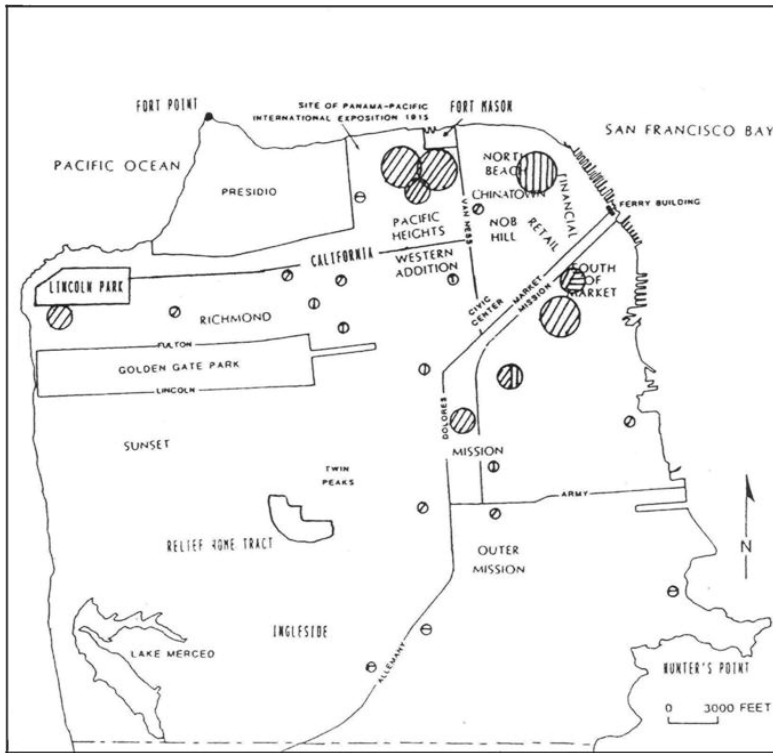
Location, rather than condition, increasingly dictated a cottage’s fate. Housing condemnations rose to a climax in 1911, with a total of 1,056 residences condemned in that year alone, before tapering off and finally stabilizing in 1915 (Table 1). Most condemned homes were located in clearly defined clusters, the largest of which was the Harbor View district (the present-day Marina district), followed by the neighborhoods south of Market

Tab. 1 *Dwellings Condemned by the San Francisco Board of Health, October 1908-December 1915*

Year	Unspecified Residence	Refugee Cottage	Lodging/Hotel/Tenement	Total
1908	112			112
1910	165	240	6	411
1911	25	1,023	8	1,056
1912	248	117	3	368
1913	47	66	6	119
1914	21	25	12	58
1915	13	41	12	66
Totals	631	1,512	47	2,190
Total number of single-family homes condemned	2,143			

Sources: *San Francisco Board of Health Meetings reported in the SFMR, 1908, 1910-1915; “Memorandum on the Charity Needs of San Francisco”, October 22, 1910, RCP*

Fig. 2 Houses Condemned by the San Francisco Board of Health, 1910-1915



YEAR CONDEMNED:
 1910 (circle with horizontal lines)
 1911-12 (circle with diagonal lines)
 1913-15 (circle with vertical lines)

THIS MAP ONLY INDICATES THE LARGEST CONCENTRATIONS OF CONDEMNED HOUSES. THE SCALE OF DESTRUCTION IS APPROXIMATE AND MANY INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUPS OF HOUSES ARE NOT SHOWN.

Sources: Base map from Isel and Cherny, 59 (modifications by authors); housing data derived from Board of Health Meetings, SFMR, 1910-1915.

Street and on Telegraph Hill, with significant numbers in the Mission district, as well as outlying working-class areas to the west and south. The Health Board often reviewed houses *en masse*. For instance, in a single meeting held on 9 March 1911, it condemned as public health hazards 118 homes in the south of Market district, most of them refugee cottages⁴⁰.

In the wake of the housing destruction, the ACSF conducted eighty-two case studies in the summer of 1912. They document the disruption losing their homes brought to many poor San

Franciscans. One-third of the eighty-two families studied were suffering ongoing housing crises, indicating the general chaos and insecurity that the Health Board's policies created. For instance, when Mrs. Owen and her two baby girls and four young boys found themselves homeless while Mr. Owen was in the hospital, the ACSF was only able to arrange temporary housing for them in a cottage scheduled to be torn down within sixty days. Another case involved the Page family, described by the case workers as a "blind peddler, his palsied wife", and their

young son, all unemployed and only able to survive “because they have lived since the fire in a shack on ground on which they pay no rent”, and in which they now nervously awaited discovery by the Health Board. Not only the destitute suffered from the Health Board’s actions. By living in a house made of two refugee cottages, the Andrews and their six children had managed to save \$400.00. With an additional \$200.00 borrowed from a friend, they purchased a lot. They were arranging to move their home when the Board of Health had one of the cottages torn down, leaving the family crowded into the remaining two rooms. To help build a house on their lot, they applied to the ACSF for a housing grant in March 1912, but the agency was so overwhelmed with cases that in June the Andrews family still waited for an answer⁴¹.

MAKING WAY FOR THE 1915 PANAMA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION

South of Market Street and Telegraph Hill were among the oldest neighborhoods in San Francisco. Despite their proximity to the central commercial and financial districts, their residents were among the city’s poorest. But the largest concentration of condemned residences by far was in the Harbor View district, located between Fort Mason and the Presidio. Between April and December 1911, wholesale condemnations emptied a strip of land two blocks wide by thirteen blocks long. Other condemnations occurred nearby. The Board condemned 151 refugee cottages at their 30 November meeting alone. One hundred and nineteen of those condemned were within a

single block adjacent to Lobos Square Park (the present-day Moscone Playground). With other empty lots, this added a six by two block long rectangle of land to the strip already razed. Between 1911 and 1912, four hundred and fifteen homes were condemned within this area, comprising about one sixth of the total number condemned in San Francisco from 1908 to 1915⁴².

Why was such intensive attention paid to the Harbor View district? Was it really driven by concerns for public health? Before the fire the district was of mixed use. It was the site of industries such as Pacific Ammonia and the Fulton and Risdon Iron Works, all major employers until the earthquake forced their closure. Harbor View had also been the site of many working class homes and undeveloped lots⁴³. Harbor View’s Lobos Square became the site of the largest camp with the poorest refugees, with at one time a density of 1,496 earthquake cottages. It was the last camp to be closed⁴⁴. Cottagers frequently moved their homes into the immediate neighborhood, onto readily available lots in large tracts of undeveloped land owned by some of San Francisco’s wealthiest families⁴⁵. In modern terms, Harbor View, with its sunny, bayside location, and undeveloped lots was ripe for urban redevelopment. In early 1911 the U.S. Congress confirmed San Francisco as the host city for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition (Rydell, 1984, 217). Only working-class renters and cottagers stood in the way of Harbor View becoming the fair site.

It is no coincidence that housing condemnations peaked in 1911 following San Francisco’s win in the contest to host the Exposition. Preparations for the

Exposition began in 1904, but they intensified after the 1906 earthquake and fire. In sharp contrast to the small sums local businesses donated to relief and charity efforts, Exposition organizers easily raised vast amounts. In just under one hour, 2,000 participants at a meeting held in 1910 at the San Francisco Merchants' Exchange purchased over \$4 million in Exposition Company stock. Over \$250,000.00 of this amount came from the city's largest hotels. By the end of 1910, the Exposition Company had more than \$6 million in cash, plus \$5 million to be raised from a city bond issue, and an additional \$5 million pledged from a state subsidy (Issel and Cherny, 1986, 167-168).

This outpouring of support reflects the business community's uniting with the city's cultural elite, professional, and middle classes in support of the Exposition on the Harbor View site. When James "Sunny Jim" Rolph, business leader and the fair's most enthusiastic booster, was elected mayor, this alliance was cemented. At the same time that Rolph, as Issel and Cherny put it, "smothered partisanship with his hearty conviviality and effusive love for his city", he also ran his administration, in his own words, as "a business corporation of which the citizens are the responsible shareholders" (Issel and Cherny, 1986, 168; Hicke, 1978, 25). But these shareholders did not include poorer working class San Franciscans.

In early 1912, the Exposition Company had completed surveys of the 425 acres of city land and the 260 acres in the Presidio army base that comprised the Harbor View fair site. The Company awarded contracts for filling the land along the bayshore, repairing the seawalls, and building railroad tracks

onto the site⁴⁶. Demonstrating eager civic participation, the San Francisco Board of Public Works provided \$60,000.00 raised from a bond issue to extend sewage systems through the fair site into the bay, significantly increasing the land's value for future sale⁴⁷. By 15 March 1912, the Exposition Company had arranged the purchase or lease of 70 per cent of the site, mostly through payment of taxes owed on it. The Company worked feverishly to negotiate terms for the remaining 30 per cent. These were largely properties owned by the Pacific Realty Company and a few individuals and families. Included in the land total were many twenty-five foot lots, upon which, according to the Exposition Company, "some poor people [had] homes". By June 1912, the Company had acquired most of the land it needed to stage the exposition⁴⁸.

The final element necessary was the removal of the many small houses and refugee cottages remaining on the Harbor View site. The Exposition Company purchased the houses, and sold them singly to the highest bidder on the condition that they be removed within thirty days of the sale. In the process, the Company made what its Director of Works termed "quite a considerable sum" on these sales⁴⁹. Cottage removal was achieved by tactics rather less honorable. Although there had been no new plague outbreaks for more than three years, the Exposition Company Building and Grounds Committee reported its successful effort to enlist the aid of the Health Board in late 1911 and 1912 to remove the cottages, charging that they posed a general health risk: "The Board of Health [...] at the request of this Committee, is insisting upon the property owners in the Harbor View District removing the

unsanitary refugee shacks that are on their property". The demolition of buildings not promptly taken down by their owners was ordered by the Board⁵⁰. Employing the same tactics used earlier to clear city parks and neighborhoods of undesirable cottages and the poor families living in them, the Board of Health ordered refugee homes destroyed—ostensibly for health reasons, but clearly to empty the fair site prior to its redevelopment⁵¹.

COTTAGE OWNERS RESPOND: RESISTANCE AND LOSS

The extent of the combined pressure by city government and fair organizers to force property owners to evict refugee families is further illustrated by city and Exposition Company reaction to resistance to their plans. The owner of about 100 cottages located on two blocks near Lobos Square secured a temporary restraining order on January 30, 1912, prohibiting the Health Board from removing or destroying the structures. The Exposition Building and Grounds Committee, aided by San Francisco City Attorney Percy V. Long, joined forces with the Health Department to prevent the order from being made permanent. The fight dragged on. On July 11, 1912, Public Health Service housing inspector, Dr. T. G. Howe wrote to Fred L. Hansen, a builder working with the Exposition Company, ordering the removal or destruction of these and other cottages. In this letter, which was forwarded to the Exposition Director of Works, Howe acknowledged receipt of an Exposition map of the Harbor View district detailing the areas to be cleared. In a statement that had nothing to do with public health, Howe assured Hansen that with

the backing of the Exposition, the Golden Gate Valley Improvement Association of Property Owners, and the San Francisco Attorney's office, "every effort will be made in having the shacks removed"⁵². These exchanges provide unequivocal evidence that the city's elite used public services to disappropriate poor working families of their homes in the interest of development. They also provide evidence to support Rozario's argument that the "logic of creative destruction [...] helps to explain why so many well-positioned Americans at the turn of the last century expected conflagrations to produce material benefits, even if those benefits were not shared by all" (Rozario, 2007, 98).

The 1911 case studies made by the ACSF reveal the disruption and hardship experienced by families whose Harbor View cottages were condemned by the Health Board. Entire blocks of homes were condemned in April 1911, including that belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Tonari and their four children. The family's income was irregular, but they had managed to live independently. Their eviction made this doubtful. Just a couple of blocks away, in a row of cottages condemned in May 1911, lived Mrs. White, recently deserted by her husband. According to the caseworker, Mrs. White "[could] not support [her three toddlers] independently". She had lost all the male support on which she had previously relied: her husband had left, her brother no longer boarded with her, and her father provided no assistance. The San Francisco Children's Agency placed her children in foster homes, to which Mrs. White was expected to contribute from her meager earnings from occasional house or factory work. She awaited the destruction of her

home, which would leave her with nothing at all. The ACSF did not expect that these or any of the many other families evicted from their cottages would be able to pay the high rents demanded elsewhere in San Francisco⁵³.

The Exposition Company's plans went forward and Harbor View was emptied of its people and houses. The city's business and political elites, seeking to ensure their own economic recovery and profit, dismantled working class neighborhoods on the pretext of public health protection. Poor people fought to keep their homes, but they were powerless against the combined forces of city government and private developers whose plans to revitalize the city did not include provisions for the poor.

OPPORTUNITIES SQUANDERED

The full story of the initial promise and ultimate tragedy of the earthquake cottages has been ignored by most scholars. In the most extensive survey to date of disaster-era San Francisco, Fradkin plays scant attention to them and focuses rather on presenting a city in total ruin. Yet even in his determinedly grim presentation of post-earthquake San Francisco, a few glimmers of hope appear. Two photographs including earthquake cottages appear in Fradkin's richly illustrated book, although they are not acknowledged or identified. In one photograph, three of the small, sturdy houses are clearly visible on former street-fronts amid the ruins. In a caption of another photo he writes, "a young girl on the swing attached to the leafless branches of a dead tree, the only sign of life in a scene of utter desolation". Yet next to the bare but clearly still living tree, only halfway within the frame of the photo, is the tidy earthquake cottage that

is home to the swinging girl (Fradkin, 2005, 344-a, 344-c).

The vision of thousands of these single-family homes proudly dotting the neighborhoods of San Francisco failed to materialize when it was most needed, in the years immediately following the earthquake. It was quashed by desires for commercial gain in the post-disaster city, carried out to varying degrees under the ruse of public health concerns. The ultimate failure of the "short but successful experiment in self-sufficiency for the less affluent" noted by Fradkin should not be viewed by urban planners and disaster specialists as inevitable (Fradkin, 2005, 215). The story of San Francisco's earthquake cottages offers a blueprint for disaster recovery for the poor, if corruption and the desire for profit overshadow the need for modest, affordable housing. It also suggests some possibilities for hope, if support and space for safe, affordable housing for low-income Americans become significant components in contemporary recovery plans for disaster-struck areas.

EPILOGUE: HONORED IN HINDSIGHT

More than a hundred years after their original construction, and despite the many efforts to destroy them, a surprising number of earthquake cottages have survived to the benefit of future generations (Henderson, 2005, 188). Their humble origins obscured by added porches, bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms, earthquake cottages still house San Franciscans, and stand as a testament to the effort in a time of great loss and suffering to create simple, decent housing for people in

need⁵⁴. Motivated in part by family histories in which the cottages played a critical role in helping survivors recover from the 1906 disaster, a group of San Franciscans successfully campaigned in the 1980s to have some surviving cottages declared city landmarks. The group formed the Western Neighborhoods Project and, as part of the 2006 commemoration of the earthquake, restored four cottages to their original form. These have been displayed in public spaces. In recognition of the importance of the Western Neighborhoods Project's work in bringing the earthquake cottages back into the public eye, in 2007 the organization won the prestigious Governor's Historic Preservation Award⁵⁵. One hundred years after the earthquake

cottages were denounced as health hazards, they have been celebrated as testaments to the city's tenacity and its commitment to decent, affordable housing in the wake of disaster.

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NOTES

1. For pre-20th century San Francisco, see for example, Vance, 1964; Issel and Cherny, 1986; Tygiel, 1992; Ethington, 1992; Dreyfus, 2008.

2. Land-fill creates notoriously unstable land, liable to sudden collapse and shifts during earthquakes.

3. Associated Charities of San Francisco (ACSF) case studies, 1912, carton 2, ACSF, San Francisco Labor Council Papers (SFLCP), Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

4. Daniels, 1990, 17, 21, 99; ACSF case studies, carton 2.

5. Issel and Cherny, 1986, 70-73; Shumsky and Springer, 1981, 74, 76; Rosen, 1982, 122; SFLCP carton 2, Asiatic Exclusion League, Anti-Jap Laundry League. See also Tong, 1994; Yamato, 1986.

6. U.S. Committee on Industrial Relations, "Unemployment in California", vol. 5, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1915; U.S. Committee on Industrial Relations, "The Seasonal Labor Problem in Agriculture" (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office,

1915); Tygiel, 1992, 24-25; Saxton, 1971, 143-144; McWilliams, 1935, 26-27, 65-72; Averback, 1973, 201-203.

7. Tygiel, 1992, 38-39; Thomas and Witts, 1971, 249. For a study of residential hotels focusing on San Francisco, see Groth, 1994.

8. For instance, in Issel and Cherny's classic work, city politics continue as usual and almost the only reference to the 1906 disaster is passing: a "decade of conflict, dramatically punctuated by the earthquake and fire of 1906" (Issel and Cherny, 1986, 155). The reduction of the 1906 disaster and its aftermath to a dramatic punctuation persists as well in works devoted entirely to the earthquake and fire. Henderson insists on the continuity of social relations in spite of unresolved contradictions over whether or not the 1906 disaster brought any significant change to San Francisco (Henderson, 2005, 4-6, 159).

9. Post-disaster housing issues in 1906 San Francisco also shed significant light on the evolution of housing in more recent post-disaster American cities, most particularly New Orleans during the

- lengthy housing crisis following the Hurricane Katrina disaster in August 2005. See, *Journal of American History Special Issue*, 2007.
10. Fradkin, 2005, 70-73, 190. Estimates of fatalities in 1906 have been highly controversial. The municipal government issued initial statistics that showed 322 "known dead". Energetic work by San Francisco librarian Gladys Hansen in the late twentieth century is responsible for the striking upward revision of these statistics (Fradkin, 2005, 189-191).
 11. A. W. Greely, *Report of Major General A. W. Greely on San Francisco Relief* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906, 214-15); Lewis, 1980, 191; Cherny and Issel, 1981, 37.
 12. Classic histories of San Francisco do not mention housing reconstruction. The most recent journalistic treatment of the 1906 disaster, published in 2005, tells it as a story of "manipulation and abuse of power". A modern day muckraker, its author does not ask if the 1906 disaster brought about change. Rather, he examines a wide range of errors, incompetence, and abuse committed before, during, and after 1906, only briefly mentioning the housing solution in the immediate aftermath of the disaster as "a short but successful experiment in self-sufficiency for the less affluent" (Fradkin, 2005, xvii, 215.).
 13. *Charities and the Commons* 16 (2 June 1906) 285. Urban regeneration has been explored most recently in Rozario, 2007; Vale and Campanella, 2005.
 14. Nancy Quam-Wickham, "'The Right to Board and Lodge Where and with Whom We Please': Dimensions of Boarding and Lodging in a Working-Class District, San Francisco, 1880-1900", unpub. mss. in authors' possession, May 1988, 8.
 15. See http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/earthquakeandfire/exhibit/room04_item04.html; Fradkin, 2005, 224.
 16. Boyer, 1978, 224; see Katherine Felton, "Work of the Associated Charities in Connection with the Clearing of Camps and the Permanent Housing of Refugees", *Annual Reports of the Associated Charities*, 1907.
 17. Rozario, 2007, 97; Edward Devine to James D. Phelan, "Recommendations submitted to the Finance Committee, July 10, 1906", in Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey* (NY: Survey Associates, Inc., 1913) 394-95.
 18. A. W. Greely, *Report of Major General A. W. Greely*, 129.
 19. See Fradkin, 2005, 224.
 20. ACSF Case Studies 1912, carton 2, SFLCP, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. In accordance with Bancroft Library guidelines, names have been changed to protect the privacy of families.
 21. Anna Simpson, *The Story of the Associated Charities since the Fire of 1906* (San Francisco, 1909), 9-10.
 22. Joseph A. Steinmetz, Pennsylvania Branch Red Cross, to Mabel T. Boardman, National Red Cross, August 11, 1909; August 20, 1909, Red Cross Papers (RCP), National Archives, Washington, D.C.
 23. Simpson, *Story of the Associated Charities*, 14-17, 19.
 24. Felton to Major General George W. Davis, National Red Cross, September 21, 1907, RCP.
 25. See for example, Boyer, 1978.
 26. "Contagious Diseases Reports", and "Board of Health Reports", *San Francisco Municipal Reports (SFMR)*, 1905-1910.
 27. "Board of Health Report", *SFMR*, 1907-1908, 481-83.
 28. R. Briones to Dohrmann, September 23, 1907; Kelton to Dohrmann, September 24, 1907, RCP; "Board of Health Report", *SFMR*, 1907-1908.
 29. Dohrmann to Boardman, National Red Cross, April 30, 1907, RCP.
 30. Felton to Major Gen. Davis, National Red Cross, September 21, 1907, RCP.
 31. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 1907; August 23, 1907.
 32. Forward Movement, "Resolution to Executive Committee, Relief Corporation", April 29, 1907, RCP; Dohrmann to Boardman, National Red Cross, April 30, 1907, RCP.
 33. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 1907.
 34. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 1907.
 35. "San Francisco Board of Health Meeting Minutes", *SFMR*, 1907-08 to 1915-16; see also Fradkin, 2005, 222.

36. R. Briones to Dohrmann, September 23, 1906, RCP; Felton to Dohrmann, September 24, 1907, RCP; SF Board of Health Reports, *SFMR*, 1907-1908.
37. Letters and reports in Merchants' Association of San Francisco, Civic League of San Francisco, and Citizens Health Committee, cartons 6 and 12, SFLCP; Rehabilitation Committee, "Report to American National Red Cross", September 28, 1907, RCP.
38. Data compiled from San Francisco Board of Health Meeting Minutes, *SFMR*, 1907-08 to 1915-16. For the razing of much of the wooden infrastructure in San Francisco's working class neighborhoods, see also Craddock, 2000, 126, 153-155.
39. SF Board of Health Meetings reported in the *SFMR*, 1908, 1910-1915; "Memorandum on the Charity Needs of San Francisco", October 22, 1910, RCP.
40. Data compiled from San Francisco Board of Health Meeting Minutes, *SFMR*, 1907-08 to *SFMR*, 1915-16.
41. SFAC case studies, 1912, ACSE, carton 2, SFLC Papers, Bancroft Library.
42. SF Board of Health Report, *SFMR*, 1911-1912.
43. Lucile Eaves, "Where San Francisco Was Sorest Stricken", *Charities and the Commons* 16 (May 5, 1906) 161.
44. Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 85; San Francisco Relief Committee, Department Reports to Board of Directors, March 19, 1907, RCP.
45. Buildings and Grounds Committee to Directors of PPIE Co., March 15, 1912, Buildings and Grounds folder, PPIE Papers (PPIEP), Bancroft Library.
46. Unfortunately, this recovery effort created fragile landfill that guaranteed the intensification of damage during the 1989 Loma Prieta quake.
47. Buildings and Grounds Committee to Director, PPIE, March 15, 1912, Building and Grounds folder, PPIEP.
48. Buildings and Grounds Committee to Mastick and Partridge, June 10, 1912, Lease of Property folder, PPIEP.
49. Director of Works, PPIE Company, to Harry Bogart, April 9, 1912, Removal of Houses, Harbor View Site folder, PPIEP.
50. Buildings and Grounds Committee, PPIE Co., to Directors of the PPIE Co., March 15, 1912, Buildings and Grounds folder; Director of Works, PPIE Co., to W. Chatfield, March 29, 1912, Removal of Houses, Harbor View Site folder, PPIEP.
51. San Francisco's experience defies the argument presented by Christine Meisner Rosen that poor people exercise a "passive" power in simply occupying space with their homes. See Rosen, 1986, 333. Instead, poor people's home were readily condemned and removed from desired space.
52. Buildings and Grounds Committee, PPIE Co., to Directors of the PPIE Co., March 15, 1912, Buildings and Grounds folder; R.G. Brodrick, SF Health Officer, to Harris D.H. Connick, Director of Works, PPIE Co., September 27, 1912; Connick to Brodrick, October 1, 1912; Dr. T.G. Howe to Fred L. Hansen, July 11, 1912; Hansen to Connick, July 15, 1912; Connick to Hansen, July 17, 1912; Removal of Houses, Harbor View Site folder, PPIEP.
53. ACSE, case studies 1912, ACSE, carton 2, SFLCP.
54. Kathleen Sullivan, "Saving the Cottages that Saved San Francisco in 1906", *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 2004.
55. http://www.outsidelands.org/kirkham_shacks.php.

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SUMMARY

The utter devastation wrought by the 1906 earthquake and fire interrupted the path of San Francisco's social, political, and economic evolution, leaving in its wake a scramble for reconstruction. An exploration of tensions resulting from conflicting visions of the city's rebuilding provides an illustration of some of the enduring issues involved in many American post-catastrophe urban scenarios. Immediately following the earthquake and fire, 5,610 two and three-room wood frame, transportable "earthquake cottages" were placed on public lands to house the working poor. Despite their initial success, the cottages were deemed by business interests as obstacles to be overcome. The limited threats the cottages posed to public health were exaggerated in order to eliminate or move whole communities of the economically disadvantaged. Those efforts intensified when

the space many remaining cottages occupied was chosen as the site for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. The vision of thousands of single-family homes proudly dotting the neighborhoods of San Francisco was quashed by desires for commercial gain. This failed promise of post-disaster housing reveals an overlooked yet highly significant chapter in San Francisco history. The story of the earthquake cottages offers a blueprint for disaster for the poor, if corruption and the desire for profit overshadow the need for modest, affordable housing. It also suggests some possibilities for hope, if support and space for safe, affordable housing for low-income Americans become significant components in recovery plans for disaster-struck areas.

RÉSUMÉ

Le tremblement de terre et l'incendie dévastateurs qui frappèrent San Francisco en 1906 marquèrent une cassure dans l'évolution sociale, politique, et économique de la ville, laissant le champ libre à une compétition féroce pour sa reconstruction. L'exploration des tensions qui résultèrent des visions conflictuelles de la reconstruction servira à illustrer ici une partie des problèmes qui ont souvent caractérisé les suites des catastrophes naturelles dans les villes américaines. Aussitôt après le tremblement de terre et l'incendie, 5 610 « earthquake cottages » de deux à trois pièces, construits en bois et transportables, ont été établis sur les terrains municipaux pour loger les familles modestes. Malgré leur succès, les cottages ont été rapidement la cible d'intérêts économiques et considérés comme des obstacles à surmonter. Les très faibles risques que ces habitations engendraient pour la santé publique ont été exagérés, de manière à autoriser leur délocalisation ou leur élimination de

plusieurs quartiers habités par les classes populaires. Ces efforts d'extirpation se sont intensifiés lorsque le quartier qui accueillait le plus grand nombre de cottages a été choisi pour devenir le site de la « Panama Pacific International Exposition » de 1915. Le rêve des milliers de foyers modestes disséminés dans les quartiers de San Francisco fut ainsi détruit par les intérêts commerciaux. Cette promesse trahie du logement après le désastre s'avère un épisode très significatif, quoique peu connu, de l'histoire de San Francisco. L'histoire des « earthquake cottages » illustre comment la corruption et le désir du profit ont porté préjudice à la satisfaction des besoins en logements modestes mais décentes. Elle offre cependant quelques lueurs d'espoir puisque la création de maisons abordables et saines a réussi à s'inscrire, au moins dans un premier temps, dans le débat sur la reconstruction de la ville après la catastrophe.