

THE GREAT CITIES/**SAN FRANCISCO**

TIME-LIFE



SAN FRANCISCO

By Geoffrey Moorhouse
and the Editors of Time-Life Books

Photographs by Jay Maisel

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Cover: A section of the Golden Gate Bridge looms through the mist like a giant harp. The main span of the bridge stretches 4,200 feet across the entrance to San Francisco Bay—a length more than double that of any other suspension span in existence when the bridge was completed in 1937.

First end paper: Silhouetted against a golden evening sky, San Franciscans cross cable-car tracks on Nob Hill, the prestigious summit on which the city's 19th-Century railroad barons built their palatial homes.

Last end paper: Steel, weathered wood and fading yellow paint define the edge of a turntable in the powerhouse and repair shop for San Francisco's historic cable cars. The opening in the slot between the rails allows a grip mechanism to be raised above the constantly moving underground cable so that the grip can be checked for wear.



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City of Golden Dreams

The best way to see San Francisco is from the top of a hill. Within the city limits, there are no fewer than 43 to choose from; but the one that is known as Twin Peaks, with two summits more than 900 feet above sea-level, offers the finest panorama of all. Stand on the viewing terrace at the top and you understand at once how geography has helped to make San Francisco a mythical place.

To the left, the Pacific pours into the land through the spectacular gap called the Golden Gate. That is where San Francisco Bay begins, though to call it a bay is to misuse a serviceable little word. There are more than 400 square miles of water inside the Golden Gate, an expanse that ranks as nothing less than an inland sea. This sea, nowhere measuring more than 13 miles from east to west, extends at least twice that distance north and south of the Gate. The northern end is called San Pablo Bay, and even from the height of Twin Peaks, it can be detected only on a very clear day. The water that faces you as you stand with your back to the Pacific is San Francisco Bay proper, with the cities of Richmond, Berkeley and Oakland streaming along the eastern shore. Below Twin Peaks, as though at the centre of a stupendous amphitheatre, lies San Francisco itself.

Market Street, emerging from a nervous system of downtown skyscrapers, runs straight and wide towards you, a vital artery of commerce and big business. The area to its right is the nearest San Francisco ever gets to being an ordinary city: suburbs, interrupted by blotches of derelict land, dribble south along the shore of the Bay, past Candlestick Park—the windiest baseball stadium in the United States—and out towards the international airport. To the left of Market Street are the districts that have given the name of San Francisco such a lyrical ring. Here are Telegraph Hill and Nob Hill, Chinatown and North Beach, Fisherman's Wharf and the Haight district. Surveyed from this vantage point on Twin Peaks, it all cascades beneath you in undulating terraces and parklands, in metropolitan leaps and bounds.

The hills of San Francisco help to maintain both native and visitor in quite remarkable states of euphoria, for no one can travel very far without being presented with a view that is at least interesting. Get someone to drive you along any street running north of Market and sooner or later you will top a hill high enough and steep enough to offer the illusion that you are about to take off into space and splash down into the Bay somewhere just short of Alcatraz Island. It doesn't matter how many times you repeat this exercise and are instantly assured that the street continues

The setting sun burnishes a group of office blocks in downtown San Francisco, leaving the towering slab of the Bank of America and its pyramidal neighbour, headquarters of the Transamerica Corporation, in shadow. The buildings stand on the site of the old commercial centre, an area that was almost completely levelled in the 1906 earthquake.

down a couple of miles further before reaching the water: your breath is always taken away by the experience. And if you head downtown from the western side of the city, eventually you will seem to be dive-bombing the foundations of the skyscrapers.

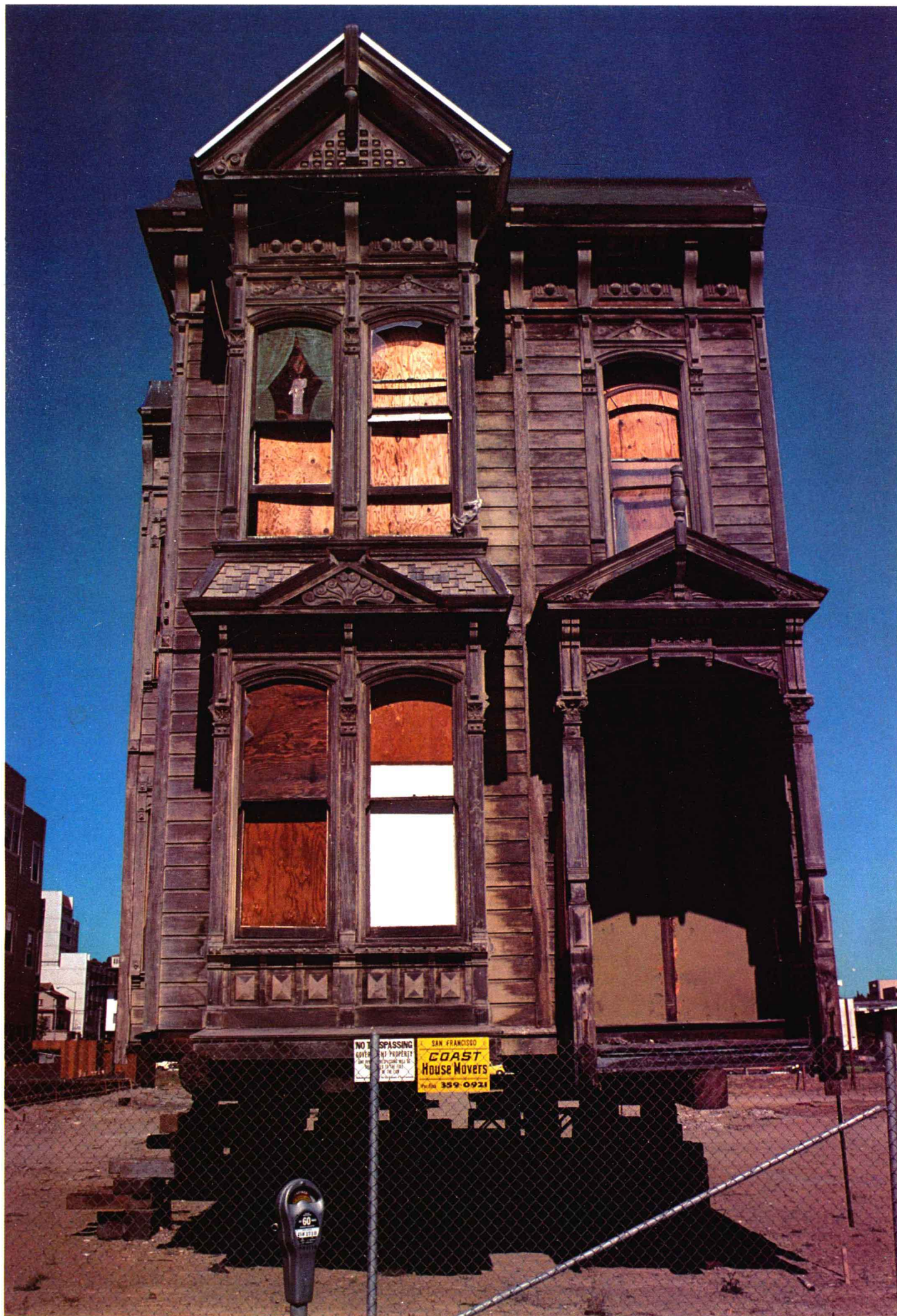
It doesn't do, of course, to linger over these impressions if you are sitting in the driver's seat yourself. You have much to concentrate on when driving up and down San Francisco's hills, which are so steep in places—and so abundant whatever their gradient—that San Francisco has devised a special signpost that intones on the ups and downs like a litany: "Prevent Runaways. Curb Wheels. Park in Gear. Set Brake." And parking is indeed a challenge when you have to struggle not only with a tight space, but with a feeling of being half way to heaven or hell. At first glance, it would seem that residents whose steep streets are wide enough for angle parking have it best. But one of them swore to me that once, in a high wind, his car was blown over on to the car just downhill—and I can almost believe it.

Presently, however, a driver becomes accustomed to travelling the hills of San Francisco, learning to take his foot off the accelerator at precisely the right moment before topping the rise, so that he doesn't either shoot wildly over the top or, more miserably, stall and roll back. When he masters that skill, he invariably feels confident enough to tackle the stretch of Lombard Street between Leavenworth and Hyde. Commonly called "the crookedest street in the world", it has eight switchbacks in the space of a couple of hundred yards; the motorist should attempt it only at walking speed, if he is not to finish up in some helpless householder's front window.

The hills not only lift the spirit of San Franciscans, but do their constitutions a power of good as well. Much of the population must spend a fair amount of time walking up and down those hills, if only to get home from the nearest bus-stop or cable-car stage. And for many other residents, the hills are there to be taken at a run—or at least a healthy jog. Jogging is something of an obsession in this city, for almost all ages and both sexes, and you can come across a jogger at any hour of day or night. When I lived on Chestnut Street, an elderly gent used to pound the pavements of Telegraph Hill every morning before dawn, making me deeply ashamed that I was only exercising my eyes on the speckle of lights around the Bay. At the close of any workday, take a stroll towards Fort Point—where a 19th-Century bastion guards the Golden Gate—and a succession of joggers will patter past, touch wall at the fort, and return whence they came, in the direction of the city centre nearly four miles away.

Some joggers clearly feel they aren't giving themselves their money's worth just by moving doggedly from one place to another. I have seen the most inoffensive-looking people shadow-boxing like pugs as they run. But my favourite cameo remains that of two men I saw twirling around Golden Gate Park together, crossing and recrossing each other's paths

A Victorian wood-framed house, boarded up and blank except for a humorously painted top window, awaits removal to a new site. San Franciscans take endless trouble to preserve mementoes of their 19th-Century past, when most houses were built of wood—one reason why the city burned down, wholly or in part, six times in its early rip-roaring days and suffered so badly in the holocaust of 1906.





An aerial view captures the city's spectacular setting. To the left is Golden Gate Bridge, to the right the Embarcadero, and north across the Bay, Marin County.



(and sometimes running backwards for a change) like a pair of windblown leaves. Somehow, San Franciscans manage to elevate the laborious old art of footslogging from the merely pedestrian to the positively racy, and it obviously keeps a lot of them in pretty good trim.

The only thing I have against the hills of San Francisco is that they cause you to linger too long at their summits, if you get half a chance, when you should be going about your business. Those sweeping prospects of the Bay are too seductive for anyone who is naturally pensive. Even on a gloomy day in winter, when rain sags over the Golden Gate Bridge and obscures most of the distant shores, you can lose a whole hour contemplating the way some trick of light has left the cliffs and the abandoned island prison of Alcatraz in the middle of the Bay luminous in the haze—a glowing vision that a painter might try for a lifetime to catch. But, then, this bay has always been an inspiration of dreamers, beginning with the Spanish adventurers who settled California in the 18th Century. Many other cities, in the Old World as well as in the New, have been founded by visionaries, but succeeding generations are apt to settle for a viable lifestyle that lies between an ideal and disillusionment. What distinguishes San Francisco is that here people have not yet stopped imagining a more perfect future; the baton of optimism has been passed on faithfully from one generation to the next; and though there may have been fumbling at times, nobody has actually dropped the thing yet.

I cannot claim this as a new thought, for it has been codified in oil paint on top of Nob Hill. There, in the very posh Mark Hopkins Hotel, is a rather forbidding reception area called (after the Spanish title for grandees) the Room of the Dons. A series of murals decorates its walls: a cluster of Indians here, a handful of sailors there, an imperious Spanish aristocrat by the mantelpiece and breastplated soldiery all over the place—the entire lot standing against a background (excessive to my mind) of gold leaf. The two artists who painted the murals in the 1920s named the work “Golden Dreams”. This title was intended to convey their feelings about the history and promise of California as a whole. But nowhere in the state—not even in Los Angeles, where dreams are packaged for the whole world—is it a more valid statement than in San Francisco.

The first of the dreamers to come wandering up this foggy and rugged coast were a pair of Portuguese sea captains in the pay of Spain, seeking the fabled Northwest Passage, thought to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed right past San Francisco Bay without noticing it, and a year later Bartolomé Ferrelo did the same. The next known European to arrive was Francis Drake, who also missed the narrow gap of the Golden Gate in 1579. But Drake did land 50 miles to the north and, calling the land “Nova Albion”, annexed it to the British Crown. According to a long-disputed version of California’s history, he is

said to have tacked a brass plate to a wooden post on the shore, with the legend "Bee it known unto all men by these presents . . . I take possession of this kingdome . . ." The plate was found by a roadside in 1933 and is exhibited, all tarnished and scratched, in the University of California's Bancroft Library. If genuine, it is the area's oldest archaeological trophy from Europe, but ever since its discovery it has been regarded by some scholars as a forgery, and the latest laboratory tests on the composition of the brass support this view.

A few years after Drake's visit, the Spanish sea captain Sebastian Cermeño found himself shipwrecked in 1595 close to the spot where the Englishman had staked the first claim. Cermeño promptly annexed the land in the name of his own king. He called it Puerto de San Francisco, in honour of St. Francis of Assisi, then sailed away to Mexico in the ship's launch, which had survived undamaged.

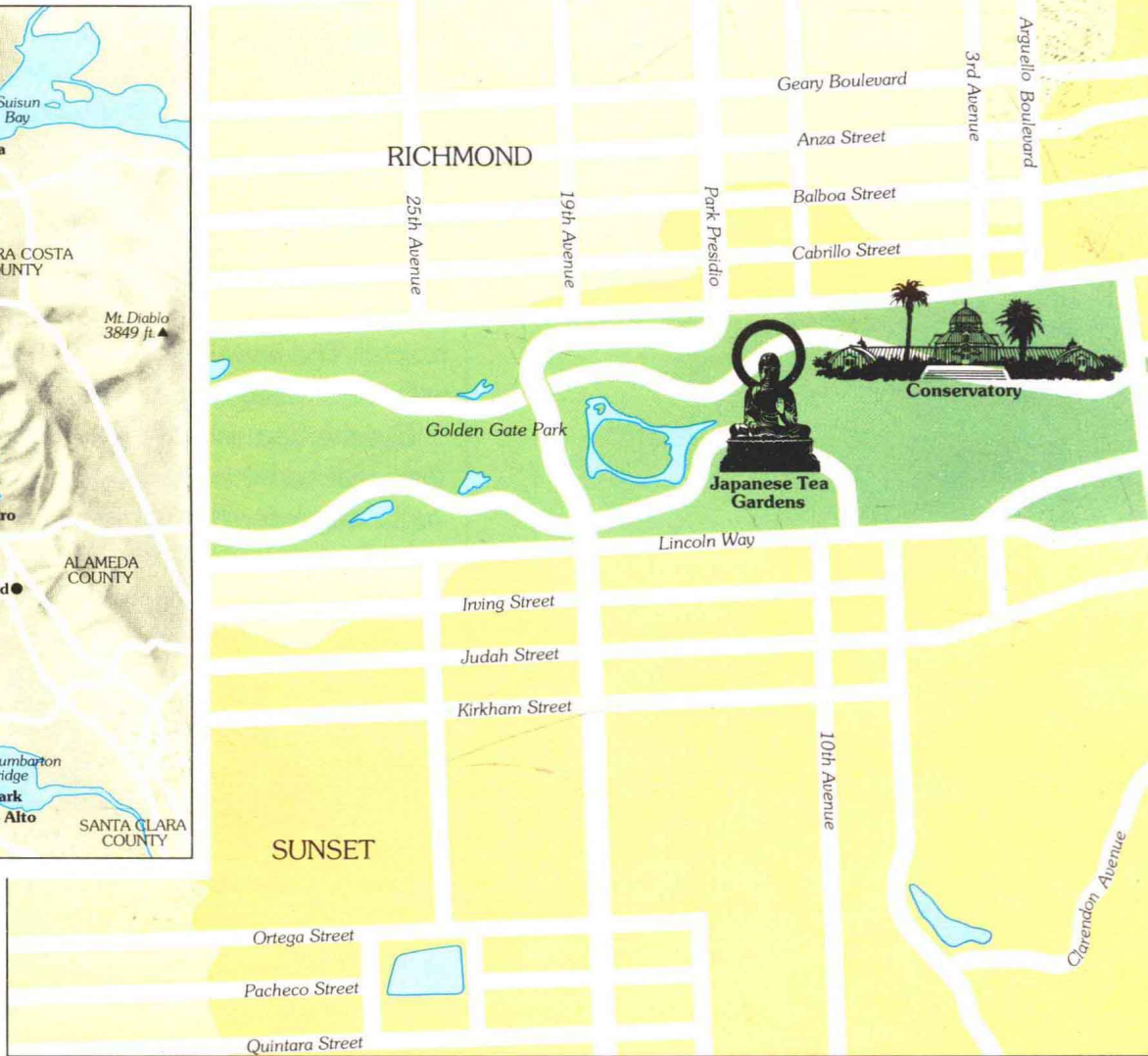
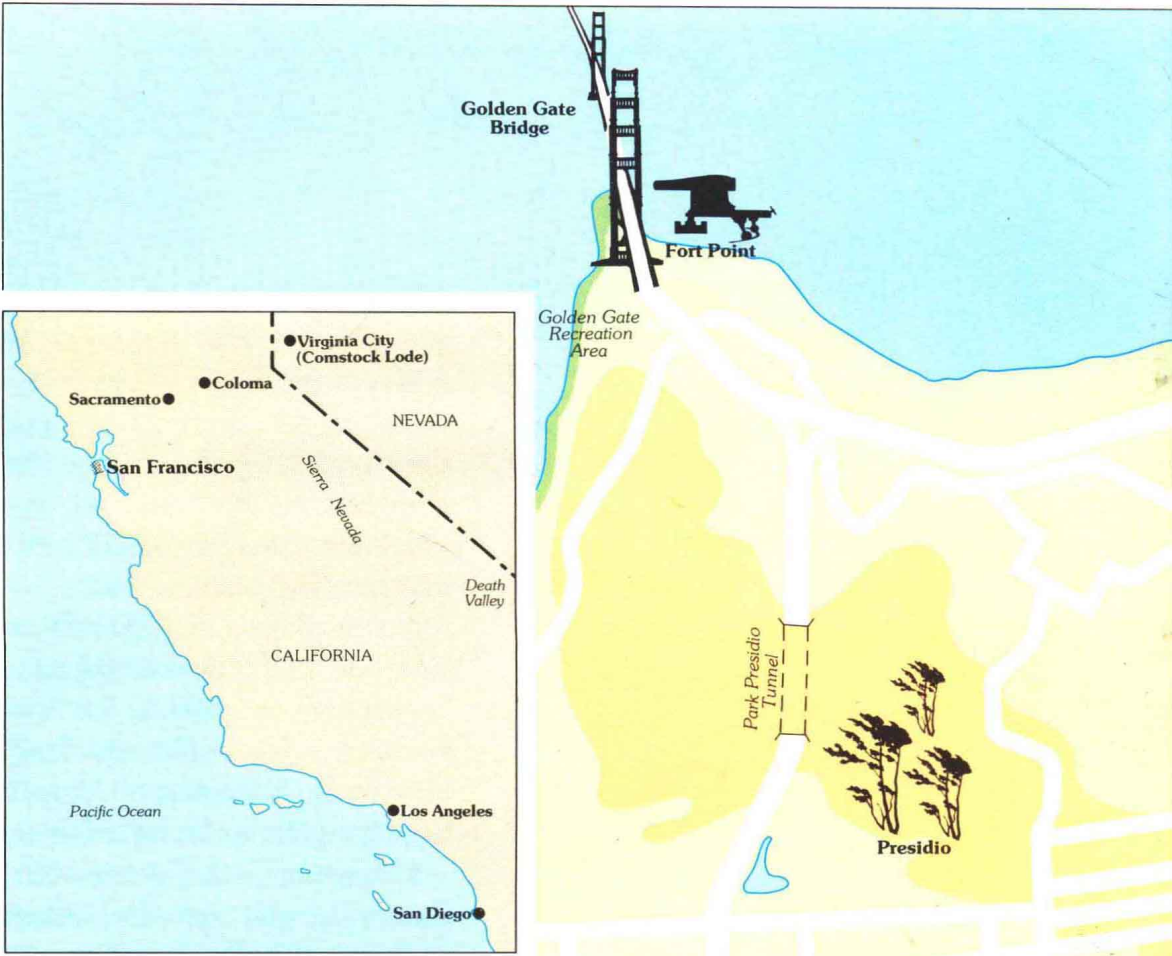
It was not until the late-18th Century that Spaniards discovered the elusive bay and started a settlement there. Their New World empire was well-established by then, with a viceroy in Mexico City, and in a new spirit of expansion they were beginning to extend their territories to the north. As part of this policy, an expedition led by Don Gaspar de Portolá travelled up the coast overland and, in November 1769, reached the inland sea for the first time. Actually, Portolá himself never saw the bay. A scouting party under a non-commissioned officer, Sergeant José Francisco de Ortega, made the find; and the only description of the discovery was written second-hand by the expedition's padre, Juan Crespi, who remained with the main party. The scouts had seen, he tells us, "an immense arm of the sea, or an estuary, which penetrated the land as far as the eye could reach". The entire expedition, beset by hunger and illness, retreated south without investigating further.

But the Spanish interest was thoroughly aroused when Portolá and his men reached their base in San Diego and made their report. No one was more eager for that "immense arm of the sea" to be properly explored than Padre Junipero Serra, Father Superior of the Franciscan friars in California, whose religious order had started to build a long chain of mission stations up the coast from the south. Anxious to add to that chain and to win yet more Indian souls to the Catholic faith, he sent out a new party, 14-men strong and led by Pedro Fages and Padre Crespi. They started from the mission at Carmel in the spring of 1772 to look for a new site on the shores of the bay. Arriving on the hills where Berkeley now stands, the missionaries were the first Europeans to look out to the Pacific through the famous gap in the cliffs at the Golden Gate. Then they, too, returned to their base in the south.

When the party confirmed that the inland sea could be reached from the ocean, the viceroy in Mexico City despatched Lieutenant Juan Manuel de Ayala in the ship *San Carlos* to investigate further. On

Pride of the Bay

Located 350 miles north-west of Los Angeles on America's West Coast, San Francisco occupies a stubby peninsula bounded by the Pacific Ocean, San Francisco Bay and the two-mile-wide gap of the Golden Gate, where the waters meet. The city got its start in the 18th Century as a Spanish outpost, fell into U.S. hands in 1846 and promptly exploded in size and vigour when gold was discovered two years later at nearby Coloma (inset map, right). Later, Nevada silver, Pacific shipping and the first transcontinental rail-road helped keep the city rich. Today, a host of other communities are prospering around the 450-square-mile Bay (inset map, below), but San Francisco—abounding in parks (green areas), spectacular views from its 43 hills (beige areas), and a still-venturesome spirit—remains the region's spiritual hub.





August 5, 1775, the *San Carlos* sailed between the cliffs and dropped anchor in San Francisco Bay. Lieutenant de Ayala and his crew then spent more than a week cruising the local waters before beating a passage home with the fantastic news: “It is not a port,” he reported, “but a whole pocketful of ports.” He was to return the following year to lend a hand to the first band of settlers, who set out from Mexico in October, 1775.

Under the leadership of Captain Juan Bautista de Anza and Lieutenant José Moraga, 240 souls left Mexico. But when births and deaths *en route* were taken into account, settlers numbered 244 when they arrived in the bay the following summer. Apart from 40 families who would form the nucleus of the new colony, there were three officers and their victualler, three priests, 18 veteran soldiers and 20 recruits, 29 soldiers’ wives plus their children, 20 muleteers, three cattle herdsman, four servants for the priests and three Indian interpreters. The colonists also brought along a thousand head of cattle.

On June 29, 1776—just five days before the people on the opposite side of the continent were disassociating themselves from another empire with their Declaration of Independence—the imperial standard of Charles III of Spain was raised over the commander’s quarters in the Presidio, the military garrison built among trees just inside the Golden Gate. Cannon fired exuberantly, a mass was said, and priests, settlers, sailors from the *San Carlos* and soldiery joined in singing the “Te Deum”. They called their settlement El Parage de Yerba Buena—meaning “The Little Valley of the Good Herb”—after an aromatic vine found in the area (*Micromeria chamissonis* to the botanists). Not until 1847, under American rule, did it become known by the name the 16th-Century mariner Sebastian Cermeño had bestowed upon the stretch of barren coast 50 miles to the north.

The Franciscan friars established their mission a mile or two to the south of the Presidio; it would become known as the Mission Dolores—meaning “Mission of Sorrows”—after a small lake in the vicinity called Lagoon of Our Lady of Sorrows. The mission was built, we should remember, with the prime object of converting the local Indians to Christianity. Convert many of them the friars did—without, it appears, resorting to the brutality we have since tended to associate with that process throughout the Spanish Empire. By 1800, some 30,000 Indians had accepted the Catholic faith handed down to them by the friars of San Francisco and the three other missions that had been set up in the Bay area. For more than 30 years after that, the fathers who manned these four Catholic outposts had almost unlimited authority over the lives of the Indians who submitted to their influence. But in 1833 the mission lands throughout California were secularized by the government of Mexico (which had become independent of Spain in 1821), with the result that the Bay area missions became no more than parish churches for the communities

around them. They remain intact and much-visited today—the most enduring testimony to the Spanish culture that once dominated this land.

Nearly half the people who live in the Mission District of San Francisco nowadays are of Hispanic background, though Catholicism no longer has the streets to itself. Just across the road from the Mission Dolores, beyond a belt of palm trees, is St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. Around the corner is the evangelical Lighthouse Full Gospel. And on the edge of the next block is a funeral home whose business is conducted on behalf of all denominations.

The mission itself is now identified as Californian Registered Historical Landmark Number 784. But it is still a living church as well, and a visitor cannot help but be moved by its spirit. In a part of the world where life-styles have changed more often and more radically than anywhere else, this tiny outpost of imperial Spain has not only survived, it has remained essentially the same, faithful to its old ways and deeply impressive for that. The pink-tiled roof juts deeply over white adobe walls four feet thick, made by the local Indians. The few small windows high up on those walls are glazed yellow to filter the sun, because the missionaries from the south were used to hot and glaring summers. Attached to the mission is a small museum where you can inspect some of the wooden pegs and hand-wrought nails that went into the building of the church. A breviary is there, too, its leather back scuffed and its metal clasps tarnished with age: it belonged to Padre Palou, the first priest in charge.

But the spirit of those times is most palpable within the mission itself. It drifts down like a blessing from the low, wood-beamed roof of the chancel and nave, which the Indians, using vegetable dyes, stained the colours of rust, grey and magnolia. It is in the fragrance of candle wax that floats within those white adobe walls. And its essence is captured on a tympanum above the font, where two Indians are represented offering a child to a Franciscan friar for baptism.

Faith may have been strong in this little community, but the garrison in the Presidio was not. When the English explorer Captain Frederick Beechey sailed into the bay in 1826, his professional eye was startled by the neglect of the military there; the fortifications apparently consisted of three rusty cannon and little else, and the troops were generally beholden to the mission priests for their food. The resources of Mexico were too stretched to maintain proper defences so far to the north. Yet, from the beginning of Mexican rule, it had been clear that military action would sooner or later be required if the Bay area was to remain in Mexican hands. The acquisitive gleam was in several eyes early in the 19th Century. President Andrew Jackson wanted an American footing in California. The British Hudson's Bay Company, whose trappers had spoken well of the area, was showing interest. And a hundred miles north of Yerba Buena, the Russians had a base from which they pursued the seal and the sea otter

A Sunny Citizenry

For countless Americans and migrants from every part of the world, San Francisco has always had a special mystique born of its charming setting and pleasant climate. In the mid-19th Century, dreams of easy fortune lured to the city the prospectors of the great California Gold Rush and today dreams still inspire a multitude of others to settle around the Bay in the hope of finding an El Dorado of the spirit. Of course, many high hopes are frustrated, but the smiling faces you so often notice in the streets suggest that, for a great many people, the quest for felicity has been fulfilled.

