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# THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ FEBRUARY 2019



## In the Room Where It Happened

From her living room,  
Gladys Thatcher has made  
the world a better place

"THE FOUNDER" | PAGE 8

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK WING






CINEMA FROM THE UK, IRELAND, AUSTRALIA, INDIA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NEW ZEALAND

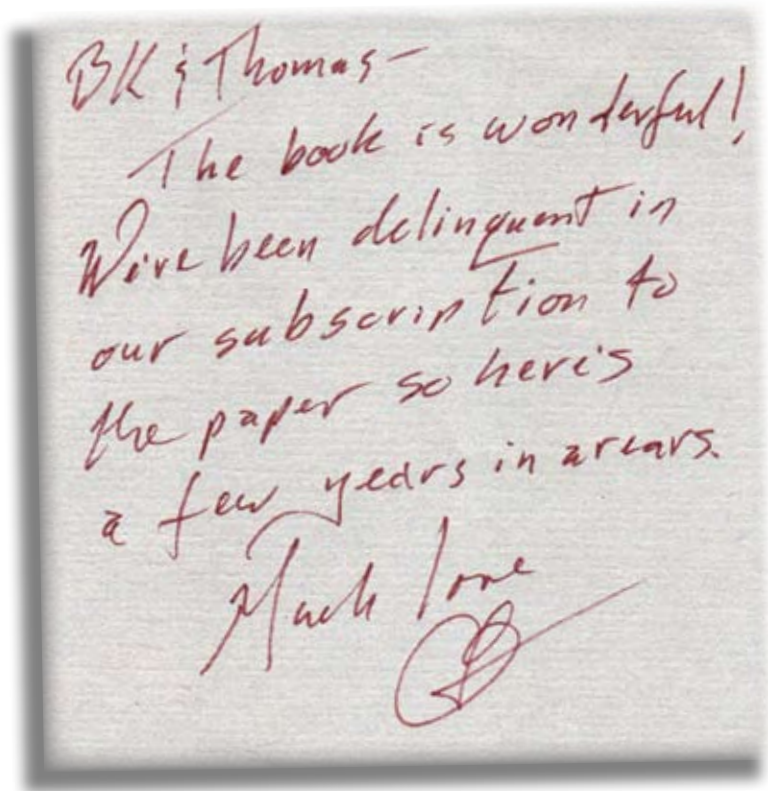

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VALENTINE



Love is in the air

THIS KIND NOTE arrived last month with a substantial check from a reader on Bush Street who has been an encouraging and enthusiastic supporter of the *New Fillmore*. Some years he sends a “subscription” for everyone in his building.

We welcome your support, too — and invite you to buy a copy of **OUR TOWN**, our new collection of neighborhood stories and photographs, available at Browser Books on Fillmore Street. [See historical novelist Nora Jackson’s generous review on page 6.]

This month we begin a series of house parties to celebrate the book and the neighborhood. If you would be interested in hosting a gathering of friends and neighbors, let us know at [editors@newfillmore.com](mailto:editors@newfillmore.com).


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**Connecting the neighborhood**  
 Every month, 20,000 copies of the New Fillmore circulate to homes and businesses in the Fillmore, Pacific Heights and Japantown. We thank you for your support and encouragement and welcome your ideas and suggestions.


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The curtain rises on Noosh this month

AT LONG LAST the new casual fine dining restaurant coming to Fillmore and Pine, NOOSH, is offering the public a taste — at least for delivery.

“This will give guests a first sneak peek at our fine casual menu,” says co-founder and CEO John Litz. And with a final health inspection now scheduled — “you have no idea how happy I am,” Litz says — an opening date is not far behind. “We now work through delivery and office catering” — probably beginning February 6 — “while we simultaneously interview, hire and train our staff, preparing for our soft opening very soon.”

During the year the restaurant has been in the works, Noosh has already blazed a new path by hosting dozens of private events as the restaurant was under construction and working through operational logistics.

“Many of our Pacific Heights neighbors comment daily to us they think it’s a smart strategy that has created more interest,” Litz says, as well as an early revenue stream. “We are excited to bring it to Fillmore.”

■ **ONE-OF-A-KIND FAREWELL:** For six years, the helpful staff has offered hundreds of tastes at SPICE ACE, the culinary boutique at 1821 Steiner named one of the world’s best spice shops.

But the flavor of the month in January was bittersweet. Early in the new year, owners and neighborhood residents Olivia Dillan and Ben Balzer announced they would be closing the shop. Then came an ourpouring of appreciation from fans who swarmed the shop to stock their spice racks.

“It was our biggest month ever — even with a 30 percent discount,” says Dillan. “The shop was a customer success and a culinary success, if not a financial success. That means a lot.”

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



Photograph by JONATHAN PONTELL

The thin red line

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi — much in the news during the recent standoff over the fight over funding a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border — came under fire for the “high perimeter wall” and “gun-toting security” around her home. A group called President Trump Fans posted: “Walls for her house are OK ... but not us.” In fact, there’s no wall around Pelosi’s longtime home in Pacific Heights, although the red curb prohibiting parking near her house does have a fresh coat of paint.



Join us for the 3rd annual Victorian Valentine Ball at the historic Haas-Lilienthal House in SF! Learn to dance vintage forms of the waltz and polka by professional instructors in our private salon, plus Victorian themed trivia games for fun prizes!

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Recommended costume: Late Victorian style or evening formal with leather sole or low heel shoes.

18+ to attend / 21+ to drink.  
Serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Proceeds benefit the continued maintenance and stewardship of The Haas-Lilienthal House under the direction of San Francisco Heritage.

2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109  
www.sfheritage.org | www.haas-lilienthalhouse.org



Victorian Valentine Ball

Feb. 09, 2019

8PM to 11PM





**Aggravated Assault  
Masonic and Haight  
December 27, 3:02 p.m.**

A man and a woman were assaulted on the street by a group of individuals. They called the police, who arrived to find the man with blood all over his face and hands. The officers rendered aid at the scene and called for an ambulance. The two people attacked gave descriptions of several of the people who assaulted them. Officers searched the area and found individuals matching their descriptions. All suspects were placed under arrest and booked.

**Robbery, Terrorists Threats  
Geary and Blake  
December 30, 5:30 p.m.**

Two men paying for gas and two bags of chips got into an altercation with an employee when they disputed the amount of change they received. During the argument, they grabbed the money tray and a struggle began as the men and an employee tugged it back and forth.

One suspect succeeded in getting away with the bags of chips. At the same time, his confederate tried to gain entry to the employee booth, but was unsuccessful. Both men then stated that they would return and shoot the employees who thwarted their robbery attempt, while one gestured toward his waistband, suggesting he had a gun. The suspects then fled in a car.

Arriving officers broadcast descriptions of the suspects and their vehicle. Additional units spotted the car nearby and stopped it. One suspect was arrested for robbery, probation violation and making terrorist threats. The other was also charged with those offenses, in addition to driving without a license.

**Assault, Attempted Robbery  
Eddy and Franklin  
January 5, 9 p.m.**

Officers received a call from a man who claimed that he had been sprayed in the face with pepper spray. They found him in the lobby of a building, screaming and shouting.

A short distance away, they located the woman who had sprayed him. She reported that she was walking on Turk toward Franklin when the man approached her and used both hands to push her into an alcove near Opera Plaza. She fell and scraped her finger. As her assailant grappled for her purse, she used the spray. An independent witness corroborated the woman's account. The woman who had been assaulted and the witness followed the sound of the man's screams and located him in a building's lobby. They called the police and waited until the officers arrived and arrested the suspect.

**Driving Under the Influence  
Masonic and Euclid  
January 5, 10:58 p.m.**

Officers observed a man driving a car without headlights, a flat tire and significant collision damage. They conducted a traffic stop and saw signs that the driver was drunk. He was argumentative during their investigation and resisted arrest. Officers placed him under arrest for driving under the influence and driving with no headlights when required.

**Outstanding Warrant  
Oak and Broderick  
January 7, 3:55 a.m.**

Officers were on patrol on Oak after receiving many citizens' complaints about homeless encampments along the street.

They spotted a large tarp draped across a garage posted with a no-trespassing sign. Police contacted the individual under the tarp and learned there was an outstanding warrant for his arrest. He was arrested and transported to county jail.

**Warrant Arrest  
Church and Duboce  
January 8, 3:40 a.m.**

Officers observed a group of individuals sitting on the steps of a building, surrounded by trash. The police had received numerous complaints from the neighbors about trash, discarded hypodermic needles and illegal drug use in the area. The officers found seven uncapped hypodermic syringes on the steps as they approached the individuals. There was an active arrest warrant for one of the men, and he was transported to county jail. The officers then ensured that the area was cleared of hypodermic syringes and other trash.

**Collision With Pedestrian Injuries  
Laguna and Geary  
January 12, 9:41 p.m.**

Two pedestrians, a man and a woman, were struck while crossing southbound on Geary. The driver who struck them claimed he had not seen them. The two were crossing Geary at a corner that has no crosswalk or traffic lights. The man who was struck sustained a head injury and a broken leg and was hospitalized in critical condition. The woman suffered a broken leg, among other non-life threatening injuries. No arrest has been made.

**Carrying a Concealed Weapon  
Broderick and Grove  
January 14, 11:09 a.m.**

Officers spotted a man they knew was

on parole as he walked east on Grove Street. When he saw the officers, he appeared to look around for an avenue of escape. The officers detained him and asked him if he had a knife. He answered in the affirmative. After a search, they located a dirk in the man's right pocket. They placed the suspect under arrest and notified his parole officer. He was booked for carrying a concealed weapon.

**Assault  
Geary and Polk  
January 17, 9 p.m.**

Witnesses called the police concerning an individual who had struck a man with a metal pole. A bystander shouted: "He's over there," as the police arrived. The officers summoned an ambulance for the man who had been assaulted. They located the suspect nearby, fleeing from the area while pushing a shopping cart. As officers were putting him in handcuffs, one of the witnesses identified him as the attacker.

The witness stated that he was looking out of his window when he saw three people, including the suspect, engaged in a loud altercation below. A physical fight broke out. A man who was not involved in the argument was sitting in a wheelchair nearby. As the physical fight wound down, the suspect grabbed a metal pole and poked the man in the wheelchair in the back. He then raised the pole over his head and forcefully swung it, striking the man in the head. The witness stated that the assault seemed to be completely unprovoked.

The suspect then left the scene, stopping once to toss the pole into the middle of the street. Officers seized the pole. The assailant refused to speak about the incident and was booked without incident.



# The Village Project & The Fillmore Center Present Mardi Gras San Francisco Style Fat Tuesday in the Fillmore



## Mardi Gras March 5, 2019



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Bernard Anderson



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# A Tasty Brew at Noosh

By CHRIS BARNETT

**W**ILD PISTACHIO COFFEE. Sounds delicious — and it tastes even better. **SAYAT OZYILMAZ**, co-founder and co-chef of the highly anticipated restaurant **NOOSH** recently brewed a preview cup. He says it will make its U.S. debut very soon when the long-awaited “Eastern Mediterranean inspired, California made” restaurant opens at Fillmore and Pine.

In the next breath, the Turkish-born Ozyilmaz admits the brew really isn’t “wild” or “coffee.” Pistachios don’t grow wild. And there are no coffee beans involved. Instead, the chef says the intensely flavorful brew is created from menengic — roasted pistachio tree seeds — that his dad sends him directly from Istanbul. They are cultivated and imported whole from Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, then ground after they arrive.

Served in a colorful cup, the hot stuff is priced at \$6. “Just don’t call it Turkish coffee,” Ozyilmaz says with a smile.

■  
**THIRD GENERATION:** Nicaraguan coffee patron **SERGIO GUERRERO** is passing the torch to son **DAVID GUERRERO** at **CUMAICA COFFEE**’s California and Divisadero outpost, and the heir just completed a total floor-to-ceiling renovation. The new boss-of-the-spot once known as Martha & Bros. will carry on the tradition of exotic beans and brews, powerhouse espressos, drips and cold brews starting at \$2.25. Sandwiches, salads, pastries and bagels lead the food menu. There’s plenty of room to hang out, read and sip.

■  
**GOING UP:** Final (promise) coffee item. **THE GROVE** on Fillmore has jumped its price for a cuppa joe up to a hefty \$3.99. The good news: It’s also pouring a huskier, tastier roast. Plus, refills are now free.

■  
**GOING UP-PRICIER, TOO:** The co-working company **SPACIOUS**, which takes over the reinvented **ELITE CAFE** during the weekdays before the bar and restaurant opens, is upping its prices after a year in operation. It started out as an office on the street with free coffee, tea and high-speed WiFi for \$95 a month. Now the monthly tariff is \$195, or \$25 for a day pass.

My empirical test of a day pass road-tested the experience: It’s library-quiet and productive, with 15 other co-workers glued to their laptops, sprawled about in booths, tables or at the bar.

■  
**THE HEAT IS ON:** Workers are hammering and sawing away inside the long-shuttered La Boulange storefront on Fillmore. A sign promises it will be the new



There will be Turkish coffee at Noosh — and also wild pistachio coffee, which is neither.

home of **APIZZA**, serving up “a pizza for everyone” that is fast and affordable — complete with organic dough and sauce. Details are scant, but the quintessentially French **PIERRE LAUGA**, in charge for owner **PASCAL RIGO**, promises pizzas will be priced reasonably, starting at \$2.75 for a 10-incher. There’s speculation the ovens will be fired up and serving in late March. In addition to pizza, beer and frozen yogurt will also be on the menu.

■  
**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY:** Up at 2418 Fillmore, **MURETA ANTIQUES** celebrated 36 years in business with a big New Year sale on its antique jewelry and other estate treasures. “We are making way for changes in the way we do business,” promised a sign in the window. Owner **GARY MURETA**’s very first customer was none other than novelist Danielle Steel, who was waiting outside when he opened and bought an entire set of Limoges china as a wedding gift for one of her staffers.

*The Beat goes on. Send newsy local items to [chris@cbarnmedia.com](mailto:chris@cbarnmedia.com) or call 415-921-5092.*



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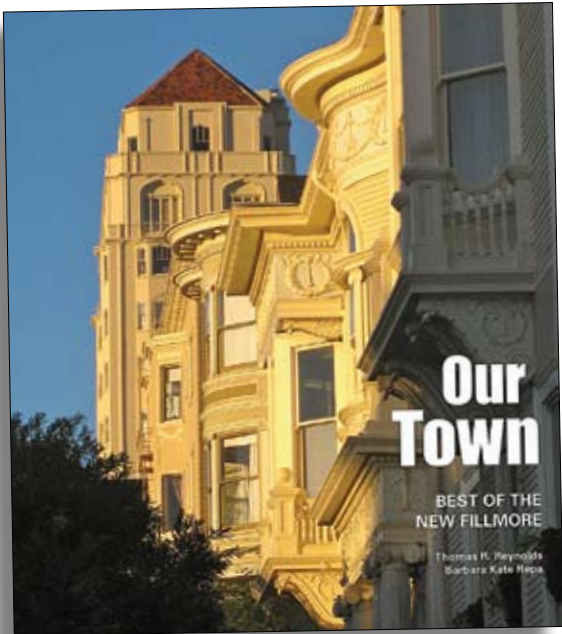
More restaurants available at [give.ioaging.org/dalh](http://give.ioaging.org/dalh)



# A Love Letter to Our Town

BY NORA JACKSON

WHEN YOU COMPILE a “best of” book from a neighborhood newspaper that’s outstanding to begin with, you’re bound to get an impressive result. *Our Town: Best of the New Fillmore* packs into one volume the



*Our Town* is available at Browser Books on Fillmore Street or by mail at [norfolkpress.com](http://norfolkpress.com).

*New Fillmore’s* shiniest nuggets, and the stunning final product leaves even a long-time resident like me feeling she never really knew the place.

It might seem an overwhelming task to capture the rich layers of history concentrated in this neighborhood, but this elegant, oversized volume covers it all nimbly and compellingly with first person stories, rare vintage photographs and striking modern images. Vanished eras come alive: the day electricity came to the street; the dark time leading up to World War II when the neighborhood’s Japanese citizens were taken from their homes and put in internment camps; the years when redevelopment leveled whole blocks and wiped out the Fillmore’s vibrant African American community. Here are

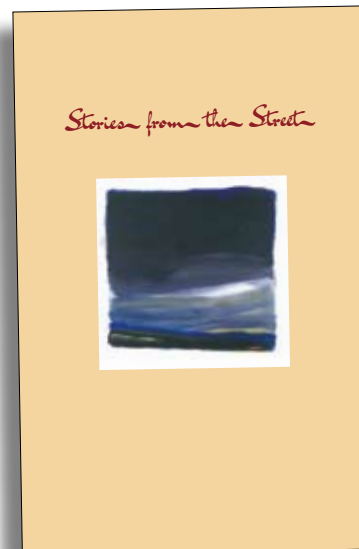
Bill Graham’s Winterland stories, and the saga of the rise of the Peoples Temple cult that ultimately led to the Jonestown tragedy in Guyana.

The Fillmore neighborhood was a root-place for so much that shaped culture through the decades, and this book does a masterful job of embracing it all: Etta James ran through these streets in a girl gang, Carlos Santana’s studio was here. In an apartment above Fillmore Street the artist Jay DeFeo created a painting deemed one of the 10 greatest of the 20th century. Just around the corner was the studio of the photographer Ruth Bernhard.

Much of the power of the book comes from its first person stories: You’ll hear from the local landlord who rented an apartment to the Black Panthers and from the Beat poet who describes what it was like to read at Minnie’s Can Do Club in the ’60s.

The book is further enriched by stories told by locals of our own era, who talk of neighborhood legends and the secret lives of the street: the culture that flourished at the Donut Hole, long since replaced by a taco bar; the enigma known as Sugar’s Broiler — was it ever actually open? There’s the beloved hardware store manager who retired but still delivers eggs to a select few; the poet who sold exotic birds; the personal story of a woman who founded a legendary store: Iris Fuller, creator of Fillamento. The book includes her “love letter” to the store, written after it closed, and it captures sentiments that apply equally to the world made so vivid in *Our Town*: “You were an amazing place where people grew, loved, cried and died.”

The authors have captured and preserved the essence of this place, with all its eccentricity and complexity. I was swept into another world as I read it, a magical place I couldn’t pull myself out of for days after I put the book down.



## Browser’s new journal

WHEN MEMBERS of the staff at Browser Books launched a successful Go Fund Me campaign last year to help assure the future of the beloved bookstore, they promised new efforts were coming to bring renewed life to the 40-year-old Fillmore Street fixture. Already additional staffers have come on board, book readings have begun and a monthly book group has been formed.

Now Browser Books has launched its own literary journal called *Stories from the Street*. The inaugural issue is available at Browser for \$12. It features poems, short stories, reviews, drawings and a photo essay.

“So many creative people walk through our doors every day,” says Catie Damon, editor of the journal, whose father Stephen Damon is the longtime owner of Browser Books. “We wanted to create an opportunity for our community to share their creative work. Fact or fiction, we’re interested in what our neighborhood has to say.”

Send submissions and inquiries to [browserstories@gmail.com](mailto:browserstories@gmail.com).



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# Music at the Market

They're jamming on Saturdays at the Fillmore Farmers Market



Budding young musicians from the SFJazz High School All-Stars are among those who perform on Saturday mornings at the Fillmore Farmers Market.

MIA SIMMANS, manager of the Fillmore Farmers Market since last May, is a true believer — both in farmers markets and in the music that makes the Fillmore market unique.

Her cred on both scores is impeccable: For the last seven years, she's been both a vendor and musician at several of the farmers markets in the area. "It's a great way for a musician to make a living," she says. "You get to play during the day, and then go home and sleep in your own bed."

In fact, two of the combos that regularly perform at the Fillmore market — the Dave Parker Sextet and the group now headed by Kenny Rhodes — have been playing at the Saturday morning market at Fillmore and O'Farrell for more than a decade.

But it can be a tough way to make a living. Most markets can't pay musicians anywhere near what they're worth. The mothership organization, the Pacific Coast Farmers Market Association, is a nonprofit and like many others is typically strapped for funds. The Fillmore market currently pays nothing at all; musicians only pocket the tips from grateful listeners and passersby.

But Simmans is determined to change that. She takes inspiration from the pluck and perse-



Stephanie Woodford playing at the market.

verance of Tom Nichol, who founded and managed the Fillmore market for a dozen years until shortly before his death in 2015. The two were friends.

"Tom was able to raise money to pay the musicians from within the community," Simmans says. "And I want to keep that going in his memory."

With some help from market headquarters, Simmans recently applied for two grants, and at least one of them looks promising. "If we get that grant, we may be able to pay something — maybe \$25 to each musician," she says. "And if we get that second

grant, well, then we could be talking about something real."

Simmans still makes music, playing and singing under the stage name Mama Mia d'Bruzzi when she's not out managing markets. She also manages the Castro and Alameda markets. "But the Fillmore is my favorite," she confesses. "It's got the music — and, really, some of the greatest vendors."

Says she: "I really believe in the farmers. These are the guys sweating in the fields. And I really believe farmers markets are an important way to take back the country from the big corporations. It's a peaceful revolution."



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By Fran Moreland Johns

SOON AFTER her graduation from Smith College in the late 1940s, Gladys Thacher took on the traditional roles of supportive wife and mother then mandatory for most women. But she quickly decided there was a loftier goal: reaching her full potential — and helping others reach theirs, too. As a result, thousands of women, and not a few men, have Thacher to thank for broadening and enriching their lives — mostly through organizations she nurtured and launched in her own living room.

She and Jim Thacher, who had finished Yale Law School after serving in the Army during World War II, moved to San Francisco from the east coast with their first child — she was pregnant with their second — in 1953. “I had loved San Francisco since the first time I visited, when I was 17,” she says. “I loved the life of freedom and spaciousness.”

Thacher was a painter in those mid-1950s days. “But it dawned on me that was pretty selfish, with a husband and two kids,” she says. “So I closed up the studio and made space for a ‘mother’s helper.’ I fell back to being just a mom, being a nonentity.”

There were eventually two sons and two daughters; today, there are also 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Along the way, her just-a-mom role morphed as Thacher took on multiple civic endeavors.

“My life changed toward a true vocation when I was asked to sit on the board of Conard House,” Thacher says of the nonprofit that provides resources for people living with chronic mental illness. “Founder Elaine Mikels had gotten a grant from the National Institutes of Health to create the first halfway house for young people with mental illness coming back from Napa State Hospital. I’d never been on a board before. We were in dire need of money, and I’d never even been a fundraiser before.”

A *Chronicle* story and a state grant got the nonprofit on its way, and the rest was up to the board. “Cissie Swig was on the board — she was so gorgeous,” Thacher recalls. “We would go up to Sacramento with another board member and beg for money.”

Thacher delights in telling how the three each committed to asking one designated person for \$1,000, and Swig — now widely renowned for her philanthropic and other accomplishments — was the only person who didn’t get the money. Thacher’s success confirmed her future as a dynamic fundraiser for organizations she created and supported.

# The Founder

Gladys Thacher started four nonprofits in her living room — and they’ve helped people live better lives

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK WING

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	<b>Reconciliation</b> Sat 5:00 pm, Sun 7:00, 9:00 & 11:00 am, 5:00 pm
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“A relative said I became ‘a legendary beggar,’” she says. “That made perfect sense to me: a beggar is a beggar.”

The causes Thacher was begging for would also become legendary. “What I was really interested in was why young adults should feel so unempowered,” she says. “So I went for a counseling degree at San Francisco State. This was in the late 1960s, when everything was in turmoil at S.F. State. The experience far outweighed the academics, opening my eyes to what others were going through.”

The Thachers had bought a house in Presidio Heights with a main room about half the size of a basketball court. A previous owner had knocked out some walls to double the size of the room, made even grander by its 12-foot ceiling.

“I looked at the size of this living room, and saw I could create an office where the students I’d been practicing counseling on could come,” she says now, sitting in the same spot. “I set up desks, a 3M copier on the piano and a card catalogue. Then I persuaded a number of parents to be on a volunteer board. Kids from 14 to 18 needed to learn what they could do and get paid for — to find out they were worth something.”

Enterprise for Youth was born to solve the problem that seemed obvious to Thacher: No one — neither parents nor teachers — was truly listening to the young people, asking them about their skills, interests and dreams. Initially, she paired questing high school students with friends of hers “who had training in non-judgmental listening skills.”

The nonprofit organization soon outgrew Thacher’s spacious living room, meaning more funding was needed. Board member Nancee Erickson spearheaded the creation of the San Francisco Art and Antiques Show, which recently concluded its 37th year as a major Bay Area event — and guarantees support for Enterprise.

Next Thacher wanted to share her path to empowerment with others of her generation. She began inviting other Smith graduates into her living room and counseling them about career choices. “I was intensely hated by their husbands,” she recalls. The Smith graduates soon expanded to the other Seven Sister colleges, and from there to college graduates in general. Eventually it became Alumnae Resources, which offered career counseling to hundreds of women — “until the internet came along,” Thacher says, and career centers were no longer needed.

She says her husband was not among the ranks of the naysayers. “I had a little

nest egg of my own,” Thacher acknowledges, “but I was blessed that Jim never felt women were inferior.”

Another Thacher enterprise is the San Francisco Education Fund, which she founded in 1979 to support public education and help those from underserved communities graduate ready for college, careers and civic responsibility.

Later her spacious living room would provide a place for the beginnings of yet another nonprofit, San Francisco Village, when Thacher and a group of other committed adults gathered to address concerns about aging and housing for older people in the city. Officially launched in 2009, San Francisco Village now has a staff of five, a volunteer corps of 175 and more than 375 members ranging in age from 60 to 96, located in 25 different neighborhoods.

Thacher’s contributions to the community and the wider world did not come without personal cost. “I was not a good mother,” she says in her usually direct manner. “When I graduated from college, women were on the cusp of emerging in their own time. But even the most educated wives were expected to drop everything and support their husband’s careers. Being a mother could not be a win-win; you were taking something out of the bank and away from your own children. My oldest daughter in particular felt gypped. We have had our ups and downs, but are now pretty much on the same page.”

The Thachers were never your ordinary family. Gladys — as she is known to one and all, although her given name is Gladys — was busy improving the world. The four children were growing up into their own distinct careers and choices. Jim Thacher was deeply involved in Democratic politics — local, state and national — and in a Marin sheep ranch he bought when the children were young.

“There were Christmas mornings when Jim was at the ranch,” Thacher recalls, “because sheep don’t observe holidays.”

He could be found walking the 40 or so blocks to his downtown law office every day, and elsewhere around San Francisco, often accompanied by his brother, Carter. It was on one such long walk that he suffered one of the two strokes that took his life in 2008. He was 83 years old. “We had a happy, stable marriage,” Gladys recalls with a contented smile.

“I’m still busy, and very happy,” says the octogenarian activist. Staying busy involves keeping her fingers in multiple community pies, reading, walking her dog, Brody, and spending time with “Dear David” Perlman, her companion.



David Perlman and Gladys Thacher

## A late-life romance

SEVERAL YEARS AFTER her husband Jim Thacher’s death in 2008, Gladys Thacher crossed paths with longtime *San Francisco Chronicle* science editor David Perlman, whose wife had died five years earlier.

“Jim and I used to go out to dinner at Osteria on Sacramento, and David and his wife were often there, too. We didn’t really know them, and they sat at a table on the other side of the restaurant,” she recalls. “But I knew who he was. A relative of mine wanted to be a journalist, so I corralled David to counsel her.”

That was the beginning of their friendship. Although Thacher says she was not interested in Perlman romantically at first, that slowly changed. “It took about a year,” she says. “A friend asked him to bring me to a birthday party, and I decided we should be boyfriend-girlfriend. I told people for a while that I had a boyfriend, but he didn’t know it yet.”

Perlman eventually reached the same conclusion, after a small incident of jealousy when Thacher went to another party in the company of another gentleman. The two have been a happy couple for half a dozen years. In her 80s and his 90s, they traveled to visit friends and family on the east coast, and to Paris and the south of France just for fun. At the end of last year, Thacher helped Perlman celebrate his 100th birthday. “All the family came,” she reports. “I made him a yearbook.”

Perlman, who has had a few recent health issues, now uses a wheelchair and has full-time help, but he “spends no time feeling down,” Thacher says. She walks the dozen or so blocks from her home in Presidio Heights to his home in the Inner Richmond to spend most weekends, and they enjoy dinners and quiet times together.

As with many late-life romances that follow long, happy marriages, not all of their children are enthusiastic. But most in their extended families simply appreciate the joy that these two legendary San Franciscans have found in one another.

“It is just a lovely romance,” says one longtime friend. “Sometimes I think late-life romances are the loveliest of all.”

— FRAN MORELAND JOHNS

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By Andrea Chase

THE 2019 Mostly British Film Festival opens at the Vogue Theater on Valentine’s Day, and it’s only fitting that one of this year’s highlights will be a 25th anniversary celebration of one of the quintessential Valentine’s Day films, **FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL** (February 16, 6 p.m.). The film that launched Hugh Grant’s career as a romantic lead on this side of the pond has held up, according to festival co-founder Ruthe Stein — not only cinematically, but also sartorially.

Stein is right. The outré fashions are as sublimely cutting-edge now as they were in 1994. She’s also right about the resonance between Andie MacDowell’s Carrie and another sexually free spirit of that name whose adventures were chronicled on HBO. Champagne and cookies follow at the Laureate Bar & Lounge nearby at 444 Presidio Avenue.

Opening night’s feature is Ralph Fiennes’ **THE WHITE CROW** (February 14, 7:30 p.m.). Fiennes works both sides of the camera as director and supporting actor in this gripping tale of iconic ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev’s early life and eventual defection to the West. Featuring the stunning dancing of Oleg Ivenko as Nureyev, the film explores the cultural revolution taking place during that time, as well as the difference between artistic passion and technical perfection. The filming is preceded by a reception at Laureate Bar & Lounge at 5 p.m.

If you’re waiting for your next Stephen Elliot fix, the time is near. The man who gave us **PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT** returns with **FLAMMABLE CHILDREN** (February 15, 9 p.m.), an impudent comedy about suburban Sydney in the 1970s. Guy Pearce is the polyester-sporting patriarch. Kylie Minogue is his mop-topped wife. The plot is light, focusing on the passive-aggressiveness of three couples toward one another and a beached blue whale. But it’s wildly funny, and, like *Priscilla*, produces some truly poignant moments amid the belly laughs. Co-star Radha Mitchell will be in attendance for a post-screening Q&A.

Witty, wry and wonderfully self-reflective, Michael Caine introduces us to **MY GENERATION** (February 16, 3:45



Cate Blanchett stars in *Elizabeth*, screening on February 18.

# The Brits Are Back

Mostly British Film Festival returns this month to the Vogue

p.m.) as he reminisces, along with Paul McCartney, Mari-  
anne Faithfull, Twiggy and a host of other 1960s luminar-  
ies, about the decade when London was the center of a  
post-war cultural shift that still influences us today. You  
couldn’t ask for a better guide. And you couldn’t ask for a  
better consideration of what made John Lennon the man  
and the artist that he was than Roger Appleton’s **LOOKING  
FOR LENNON**, which screens right before it (February 16,  
1:45 p.m.). Appleton pulls no punches as he uses the Liv-  
erpool of Lennon’s youth to uncover what drove the icon.

Fact and fiction mix it up in Jamie Thraves’ **PICKUPS**  
(February 17, 9:15 p.m.), in which Aiden Gillen, the man

you love to hate on *Game of Thrones*, plays an insomniac  
version of himself dealing with his (real-life) teenage  
daughter, while also sorting out the meaning of life. It’s  
a deadpan, dead-on comedy from Ireland that isn’t afraid  
to be silly to make its salient points. The flipside of *Pick-  
ups* — and shown just before it — is **BLACK ’47** (February  
17, 7 p.m.), a harrowing film about the Great Famine and  
the political and religious machinations that increased the  
suffering of Ireland’s most vulnerable. Not for the faint of  
heart, but a bold, raw film that deserves an audience.

If I had to pick one film I’m most excited about, it would  
be the digital restoration of Laurence Olivier’s ravishing  
1955 **RICHARD III** (February 18, 5:30 p.m.). Using a color  
palette that evokes the miniatures of illuminated manu-  
scripts and shadows that compare to anything in film noir,  
Olivier directs himself as the hunchback who murdered  
his way to the English throne. And despite the limp, the  
hunch and a nose that makes Olivier’s handsome face sin-  
ister in its angularity, he delivers a character giddy with  
delight at his nefarious doings, and irresistibly charismatic  
as the most interesting person in the story.

It’s preceded by Shekar Kapur’s **ELIZABETH** (February 18,  
3 p.m.), the equally ravishing story of Elizabeth I’s early  
reign. Cate Blanchett in the title role projects a scathing  
intelligence as an untested monarch navigating a politi-  
cally fraught time when a woman was considered only  
slightly more intelligent than the family dog.

The festival’s closing night features Mike Leigh’s **PETER-  
LOO** (February 21, 7 p.m.). Still using his structured improv  
style of filmmaking, Leigh recounts an infamous incident  
of British history, the Peterloo massacre of 1819, when  
British troops were ordered to fire on protesters demand-  
ing the right to vote. Leigh’s film, his highest-budget work  
to date, brings an immediacy to events of two centuries  
ago with a cinematic style that is viscerally intimate and  
uncompromising in its narrative. Its commentary on cur-  
rent events is nothing less than devastating. Co-star Max-  
ine Peake will be interviewed on stage after the screening.

The 2019 Mostly British Film Festival runs from Feb-  
ruary 14 to 21 at the Vogue Theatre at 3290 Sacramento.  
For more information go to [mostlybritish.org](http://mostlybritish.org).

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# A Pianist in Demand

The S.F. Symphony's Marc Shapiro moves at a march tempo

BY PAMELA FEINSILBER

MARC SHAPIRO has to be one of the busiest musicians in the neighborhood. He is principal keyboardist with the Berkeley Symphony and the California Symphony; plays regularly with the Sierra Chamber Music Society and other groups; and is now interim principal pianist with the San Francisco Symphony. This month he's performing in an S.F. Symphony commission and world premiere, "Portals, Scenes and Celebrations," by the eclectic Grammy-winning composer Steve Mackey (on a bill with Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1, with Gil Shaham, and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4), at Davies Symphony Hall from February 7 to 9.

## So how long have you lived in the neighborhood?

Since 1995 I've lived near St. Dominic's Church.

## You've been with the San Francisco Symphony even longer than that, since before Michael Tilson Thomas began leading the orchestra, also in 1995.

Yes, I started out as pianist for the S.F. Symphony Chorus. I did that for 19 and a half years, and as soon as I quit, I went on tour with the symphony, substituting for the principal pianist. I had been playing with the orchestra as a second keyboard player. But as soon as MTT came on, there were a heck of a lot more keyboard assignments, because the repertoire changed dramatically. He was definitely farming the 20th century repertoire, as well as new works.

## You're temporarily replacing the principal pianist these days, too.

Yes, since Robin Sutherland retired. But I think it's a position for a younger person — someone who'll be around for a really long time.

## How is it going?

This season has been absolutely insane so far. I'd already taken on responsibilities with the other regional orchestras I play with, and I had to cancel some of them. On top of that, we're often asked to play at events for donors. And I perform with the Sierra Chamber, which includes members of the symphony, too.

## Which S.F. Symphony program are you most looking forward to?

This month we're premiering a piece by Steve Mackey. I can't tell you anything about it because none of us have heard it, and we won't until we start

rehearsing February 5. I do recall playing a piece of his, "Eating Greens," with the symphony 20 years ago. It included a pizza delivery onstage.

## And you're about to release a CD.

It's a collaboration with Jeff Rathbun, who plays oboe with the Cleveland Orchestra. It's called *Endeavor*. When we met, we cultivated a repertoire that's off the beaten path, though now it's more mainstream. This is our second CD — *Color Factory* came out in the mid-1990s and was reissued maybe two years ago.

## How do you find time to do anything else?

I'm an avid walker — I walk over to Caffe Trieste in North Beach, though not as often as before. I started walking for my health, fanning out and looking for the best cappuccino. I used to try to set out on my walk to North Beach in various and sundry ways: going all the way down Post, all the way down Sutter. I love walking around Pacific Heights, too. I think in terms of the basic march tempo, 120 to the quarter note — that's what I associate with my particular walking tempo when going up and down those hills. I try to do everything on foot.

## Such as?

I go to the Korean store on Fillmore, Woori Market, for their vegetables and sushi. They do these seaweed-wrapped things with pickled vegetables inside. I like the rice bowls at the Vietnamese place, Bun Mee, too. A friend of mine who is Turkish told me that Troya is his favorite Turkish restaurant in the city, and I like it, too. And I love Browser Books, especially Fred Martin. I've been buying books there since I moved to the neighborhood, most recently *Harlem of the West*.

## You must be in great shape.

Originally we were pushing strollers up and down the hills. My younger son started college this year. My oldest plays guitar and drums and is in a metal band — they're making a recording, and I play on one tune. We're also working on a cover they might release as a single: "Failure," by a group called Swans.

## That would sound like a reach if you hadn't made a live album with Metallica.

I didn't even know who they were until we played with them in 1999. After MTT came on, it was just one of the many new things we were doing. Someone orchestrated a bunch of their songs, and they performed with us in Berkeley. The CD was called *S&M*.



Pianist Marc Shapiro



Marc Shapiro (right) with friends, neighbors and longtime landlords Suzanne and George Burwasser.

## Finding the Fillmore

AS MARC SHAPIRO and Tina Valverde were talking about getting married in 1995 and beginning to think about finding a place together, they were advised to check out the notice in the window of Richard Hilkert's fabled bookshop on Hayes Street. It was easy enough, since Valverde lived just across the street.

They made an appointment to see the flat on Bush Street, facing St. Dominic's Church, in a building owned by George and Suzanne Burwasser. Shapiro concedes he paid little attention as George Burwasser showed them around. "I still had three months left on my lease at the time, and Tina had one or two," Shapiro says. "I considered it a practice run for the future."

Still, since the notice specified "clean and quiet tenants," Shapiro thought he should mention that he played the piano — not necessarily music to a landlord's ears.

"All of a sudden everything changed," Shapiro recalls. "George immediately wanted to know: 'Where do you play?' " Shapiro replied that he played with the San Francisco Symphony.

"His energy totally changed," Shapiro remembers. "George became more interested in having us as tenants — and Suzanne, too, when we met her."

After some debate on the pros and cons, Shapiro and Valverde returned to walk through the flat again, this time with intent. "We decided, 'Maybe we should,' " Shapiro says. "George and Suzanne said they were more than willing to help us make the transition possible, even offering to help pay off our unfinished leases."

That was highly unusual, by any standard. Remembers Shapiro: "I asked him, 'Are you really a landlord?' "

They made the move, eventually learning that bookseller Richard Hilkert was now their upstairs neighbor — thus the notice in his window. Shapiro's piano was no problem for Hilkert. Laughs Shapiro: "He only had to turn off his hearing aids."

— THOMAS REYNOLDS

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# An Art Deco Exchange for Pacific Telephone

Switching station at Steiner and Pine changed from ‘the girl to the dial system’

By BRIDGET MALEY

THE IMPOSING and somewhat out-of-place building at the southeast corner of Steiner and Pine Streets was completed in 1932 as a Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. switching station, a function that continues today.

Designed by architect Edwin V. Cobby, the building both blends in to the streetscape, with its neutral terra cotta cladding, and also stands out for its scale and Art Deco-influenced architecture. It is especially radiant on sunny days when the terra cotta tiles glow in the afternoon light.

A few years earlier, in May 1925, Pacific Telephone had opened its majestic new downtown office building, the Art Deco tower at 180 New Montgomery Street designed by the partnership of James R. Miller and Timothy L. Pflueger. At the time, it was described as “the largest building on the Pacific Coast devoted to the exclusive use of one concern.” It had a devoted “women’s cafeteria,” a library, assembly hall, rooftop recreational space — and of course a maze of office spaces for telephone company workers. The downtown building consolidated offices from across the city and housed no equipment, and would become one of San Francisco’s most celebrated buildings.

The Art Deco flair, light-colored terra cotta and verticality of Miller and Pflueger’s downtown skyscraper clearly influenced Cobby’s neighborhood switching station at 1930 Steiner. Cobby’s three-story build-

ing, also of terra cotta, has three-over-three double-hung windows, with chunky span-drels and vertical pilasters that overshoot the roof, forming an undulating parapet. The parapet and entry both have decorative motifs that are somewhat Mayan in character, not unlike Pflueger’s famous medical building built in 1929 at 450 Sutter Street.

Cobby was an employee of Pacific Telephone for almost 30 years and designed a number of switching stations throughout California. These crucial switching stations housed switchboards and equipment, as well as offices for the telephone company.

The August 1911 edition of *Architect & Engineer* featured an article Cobby wrote that focused on the exchange stations. He described the design challenges involved in accommodating the essential equipment and cables, while also being mindful of the need “to so construct the building that, should additions be required, they can be made and additional space provided without inconvenience to the employees or injury to the original design.”

He also commented about the design and placement of exchanges within an existing urban setting, noting: “In general, the use of elaborate ornamentation is avoided, although in some cases it is the endeavor to design a building that will harmonize architecturally with its surroundings. This point is best brought out in the design of the Chinese exchange building in San Francisco . . . and again in the Riverside building . . . which is located in close proximity to the best examples of Mission architecture in California.”

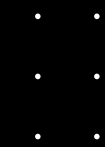
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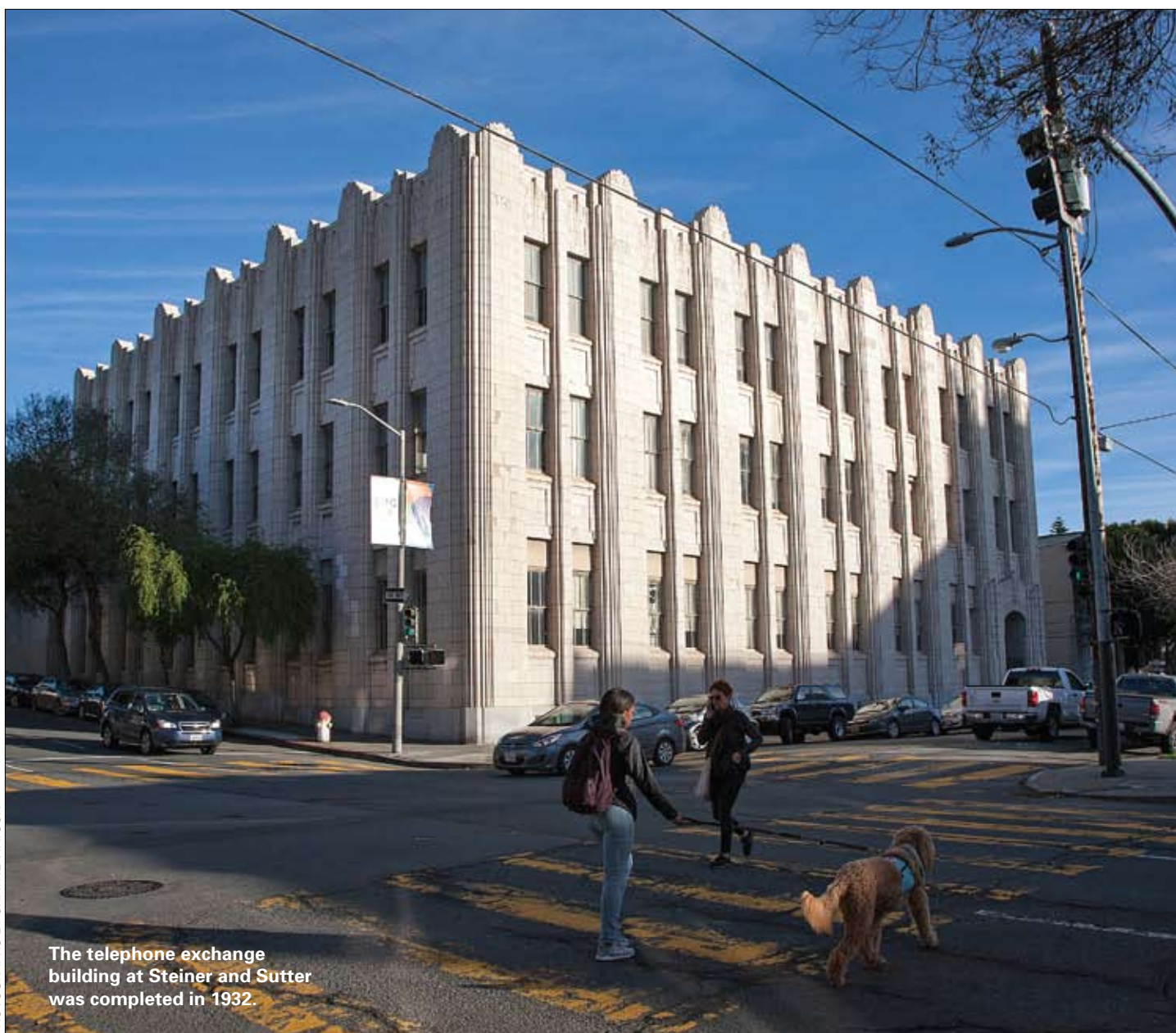
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The telephone exchange building at Steiner and Sutter was completed in 1932.

The exchange at Steiner and Pine was constructed in the midst of the Great Depression. A front page headline in the *Chronicle* on October 29, 1931, proclaimed: "Phone Company Speeds \$2,500,000

S.F. Building to Aid Jobless." The article reported that Cobby's exchange across from St. Dominic's Church would be built sooner than originally planned: *As a means of helping the unemployment*

*situation, the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company announced a "rush job" yesterday on a new \$2.5 million building at the southeast corner of Pine and Steiner Streets. Originally scheduled in the 1933 program, this work has*

*been put months ahead, with the expectation it will be completed next May.*

*The new building is part of a \$10 million Pacific Coast program, which has been similarly speeded up to relieve unemployment. . . . The new San Francisco building will house the Walnut, West and Fillmore exchanges. . . . This advancement of construction, which includes new and replacement projects, is a program dedicated not only to sound economic considerations, but to the telephone company's playing its full part to help in this time of slackened employment.*

A few weeks later, in November 1931, the *Chronicle* again focused on the project, reporting: "It will be a three-story Class A structure, combining all of the new features being installed by this company in its changeover from the girl to the dial system." The article suggested the new rotary dial phones had become immensely popular and that manned — or "girlled" — stations were no longer necessary. While the building program employed construction workers, the completed, updated switching station would reduce the number of onsite employees.

Other than his Pacific Telephone projects, few buildings by E. V. Cobby have been identified. By 1940, after his decades-long career with the telephone company, Cobby had his own architectural practice, sharing an office with his brother John, a building contractor. Cobby died in March 1961 at the age of 84, leaving the neighborhood a terra cotta architectural gem that also tells a story about advancements in telephone technology.



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2701 Van Ness Ave #302	1	1	1	801	62	1/7/2019	698,000	910,000
3382 Sacramento St	2	1	1	1,062	11	1/8/2019	995,000	1,185,000
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2902 Washington St	3	2	1	2,075	11	12/21/2018	2,150,000	2,150,000
2100 Pacific Ave #2B	4	3	1	n/a	161	1/11/2019	2,950,000	2,600,000
100 Walnut St	4	3	1	3,263	80	12/28/2018	3,695,000	2,700,000
2515 Sacramento St	3	2	2	2,555	45	12/20/2018	2,700,000	2,725,000
2121 Webster St #501	3	2	2	2,112	91	12/21/2018	5,900,000	4,900,000



A fifth floor condominium at The Pacific at 2121 Webster Street sold in December for \$1 million under the asking price.

More cooling is coming

ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER of mid-winter home sales in San Francisco's north-central neighborhoods was not wildly different from last year, the market has started to shift and there is likely to be even more cooling in the coming months.

Between mid-December and mid-January, there were 19 single family home and condominium sales in Cow Hollow, Lower Pacific Heights, Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights, compared with 24 at the same time a year ago, with 21 percent then selling for less than original price. Of the 19 sales a year later, 37 percent required the sellers to reduce their expectations and their prices.

Several factors may combine to further temper the housing market in 2019, both nationally and locally. First, the recent stock market volatility has shaken some buyer confidence. Also, the perceived threat of another government shutdown could both delay initial public offerings from some big Bay Area tech companies and force workers worried about receiving paychecks to postpone or cancel their home searches. Finally, while mortgage rates remained below 4.5 percent in mid-January, the California Association of Realtors projects they will hit 5.2 percent by the end of 2019 — further reducing the number of people who can afford San Francisco real estate.

— Data and commentary provided by PATRICK BARBER at Compass Real Estate. Contact him at patrick.barber@pacunion.com or call 415-345-3001.

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