

July 23, 2021

Land Use and Transportation Committee  
Board of Supervisors  
City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244  
San Francisco, CA 94102

**Re: Landmark Initiation of Clay Theatre**

Supervisors Melgar, Preston, and Peskin:

San Francisco Heritage strongly supports initiation of city landmark designation of the Clay Theatre at 2261 Fillmore Street. The architectural style and integrity of the Clay, as well as its deep history and significance to the upper Fillmore Street neighborhood, combine to make the former nickelodeon and movie house a deserving city landmark.

The Clay is one of the oldest movie theatres in San Francisco and for years served as a cultural touchstone of the city, showing foreign films and midnight movie screening. Despite recently closing and having its seats insensitively ripped out, the theater building retains its elegant façade and marquee and should receive any protections possible to preserve its appearance and use as one of the last single-screen motion picture theatres.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,



Woody LaBounty  
Interim President and CEO

July 23, 2021

Members of the Board of Supervisors  
City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244  
San Francisco, CA 94102

**Re: Landmark Initiation of City Cemetery at Lincoln Park**

Supervisors:

San Francisco Heritage strongly supports initiation of city landmark designation of the former City Cemetery in Lincoln Park. The history of the cemetery and the unrecognized and un-memorialized presence of between 10,000 and 20,000 San Franciscans still interred on the land—Chinese, Italian, French, Japanese, Scandinavian, Jewish, Greek, as well as veterans from the United States Civil War—make it a significant site worthy of landmark status. Lincoln Park would also be the first archaeological San Francisco city landmark, a worthy designation for one of the largest collections of 19<sup>th</sup> century remains in the Western United States.

Heritage has worked closely with Supervisor Chan's office, the Planning Department, and representatives from the Recreation and Parks to craft language for a landmark ordinance defining the character-defining features of City Cemetery while being sensitive not to hinder or obstruct normal maintenance and operations of Lincoln Park golf course and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor museum. Landmark status should not change city procedures and handling of remains that are discovered during work in the park, but the research and recognition of plots connected with landmark designation may aid in identifying and sensitively reinterring individuals.

Despite its deep connections to San Francisco history and the city's diverse cultures, public recognition of City Cemetery's history and significance is almost non-existent. The thousands of San Franciscans resting at Lincoln Park deserve to be commemorated and a landmark designation would be an important first step.

I have attached more information on City Cemetery and two of its significant surviving features, as well as a recent article Heritage published on the landmarking effort.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,



Woody LaBounty  
Interim President and CEO



HERITAGE PHOTO

*The fifteen-foot-high bronze monument in Lincoln Park marks the burial ground established by the Ladies' Seaman's Friend Society in the 1880s. The society cared for indigent merchant mariners, especially those with disabilities, and took it upon themselves to give these sailors proper burials at what was formerly City Cemetery.*

## Landmarking City Cemetery

BY WOODY LABOUNTY

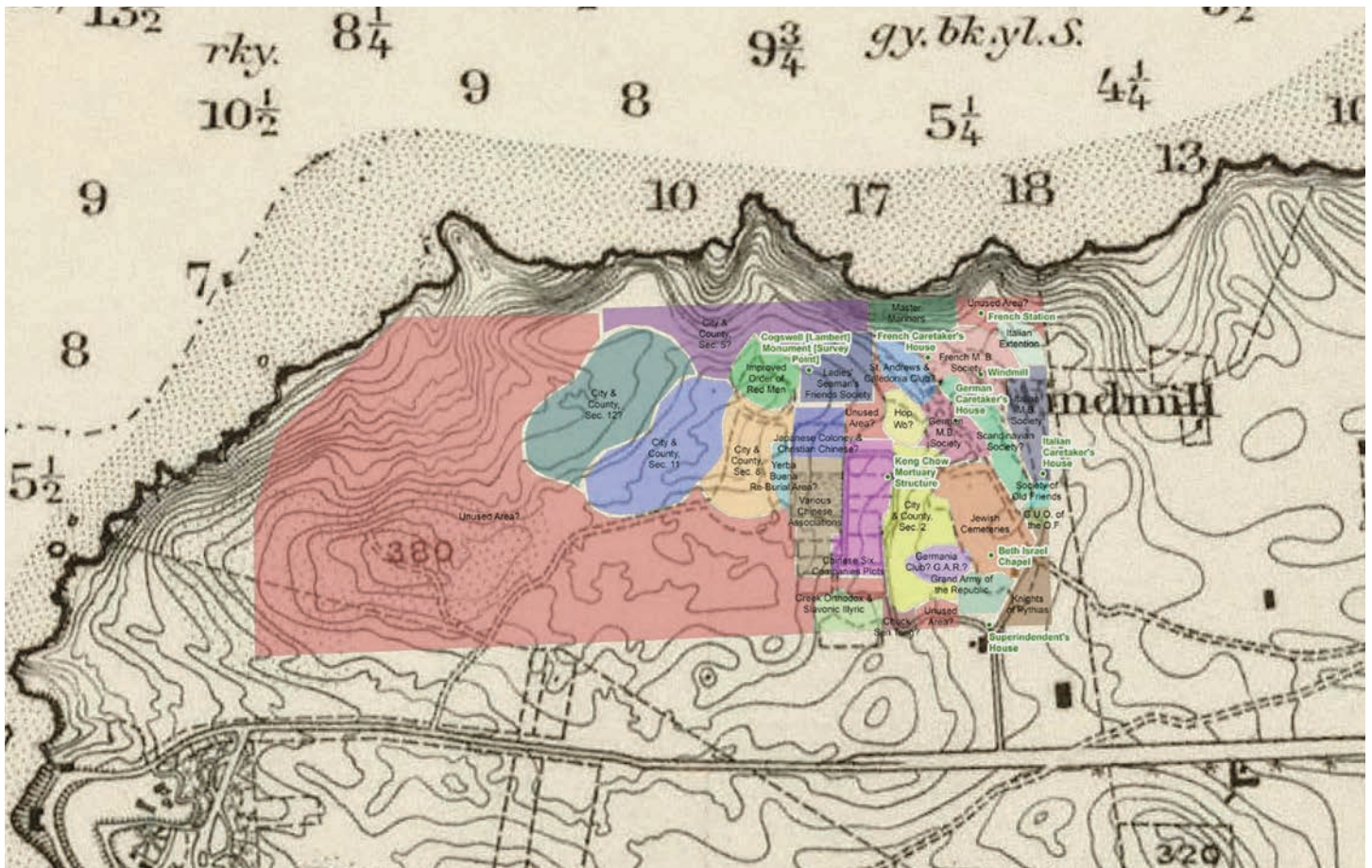
**L**incoln Park, in the northwest corner of San Francisco's Richmond District, is not lacking in commemorative plaques, interpretative signage, or memorials. A garden and marker behind the golf clubhouse remembers former city champion John Susko. The California Palace of the Legion of Honor museum is a memorial to the Golden State's fallen dead from World War I. On its east side are bronze tablets inscribed with the names of famous generals from that conflict who planted commemorative trees there. Nearby, the terminus of the Lincoln Highway is marked both with a 1920s concrete plinth featuring a profile of the president and also a more recent interpretive sign about the first transcontinental highway. The Holocaust Memorial stands a couple of hundred yards to the west, and a bit to the north is a monument to the Japanese ship *Kanrin Maru*. Benches all along El Camino Real Drive facing the Golden Gate are dedicated with small sponsored memorial plates. The tens of thousands of yearly visitors to Lincoln Park, drawn by the museum, the golfing, or the views, can read inscribed declarations, proclamations, and inspirational prose about a variety of topics

and events. But they will find no sign or tablet recording the most remarkable aspect of the park: some 20,000 San Franciscans lie buried beneath the turf.

### City Cemetery

In the late 1860s, San Francisco sought a new municipal burial ground to replace Yerba Buena Cemetery, which was inconveniently located where a new City Hall was planned for the corner of Market, Larkin, and McAllister Streets. In 1870, City Cemetery, also called Golden Gate Cemetery, was established on a distant, windswept hill miles away from the center of population and reached by a solitary road carved through the sand and scrub of today's Richmond District. Some of the first burials were probably bodies evicted from Yerba Buena Cemetery.

In addition to having areas reserved for San Francisco's indigent dead, sections of City Cemetery were leased by fraternal, religious, and ethnic communities for the burial of their members, including an African-American order of the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, the Italian Mutual Benevolent Society, a chapter of the Grand Army of



COURTESY OF ALEX RYDER

1882 Coast Survey map showing City Cemetery boundaries with an overlay of association plots identified to date.

the Republic (Civil War veterans), Jewish congregations Beth Israel, Schaare Zedek, and Sherith Israel, the German Benevolent Society, the Scandinavian Society, the French Benevolent Society, the Japanese Colony of San Francisco, the Greek Russian Slavonian Benevolent Society, merchant mariner associations, including the Ladies' Seamen's Friend Society, and a number of Chinese organizations, including the Hop Wo, Ning Yung, and Kong Chow associations.

Researchers consulting interment lists from municipal reports have estimated at least 20,000 bodies were buried in City Cemetery by the end of 1897, although gaps in the reports point to a considerably higher number.

The City of San Francisco halted interments in City Cemetery beginning on January 1, 1898, and in 1901 banned new burials anywhere within city limits, as large cemeteries created in San Mateo County became the final resting place for the majority of San Franciscans. After passing an ordinance directing any interested parties to disinter and relocate remains from City Cemetery, the Board of Supervisors in 1909 reclassified the land as a city park. Individuals and associations who protested the eviction of their relatives and members were dismissed as hindering progress, an argument reflected in one *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial headline: "The Dead Must Not Be Permitted to Injure the Living."

But comparatively few bodies were actually moved in the rush to create Lincoln Park. Most of the associations and organizations could not bear the financial cost of relocating their members. The city itself declined to move the indigent dead it had buried over the years, with one city supervisor saying, "It is no desecration to make drives and beautify the grounds with trees and flowers." Disinterments were done on a limited and ad hoc basis over a decade while a new golf course was laid.

## Remnants

As a municipal cemetery, City Cemetery lacked elaborate gateways or landscaping. The county provided pauper graves with simple numbered wooden headboards. The dues paid by members of different associations generally didn't cover expensive marble grave markers. In landscaping Lincoln Park the city mostly removed, razed, or buried any caretaker cottages, windmills, tombstones, curbing, and fencing left behind by the associations. By the 1920s, essentially no above-ground evidence of the cemetery remained, with two notable exceptions. Left in place on the Lincoln Park golf course were most of a structure used by the Kong Chow Benevolent Association and a bronze obelisk honoring the Ladies' Seaman's Friend Society. Perhaps it was easier to do so, or there was specific intention that the monuments made picturesque hazards for the golfers.

The far more significant remnant of City Cemetery is below ground, where tens of thousands of individuals still lay, some just a half-foot below the sod. Maintenance and infrastructure work in the park such as road and irrigation repairs often uncover human remains and burial materials. Most notably, the 1994 renovation and expansion of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor unearthed more than 900 burials, with 578 adults and 173 children excavated and reburied in Colma, California.

### First Archaeological City Landmark

Late in 2020, Heritage rallied support from a coalition of community organizations, some with historic connections to the use of City Cemetery, to advocate for a city landmark designation of Lincoln Park. The diverse group includes the Planning Association of the Richmond, the French-American Comité Officiel and la Société de Bienfaisance Mutuelle, the Chinatown Community Development Center, the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society, the Western Neighborhoods Project, and the Hop Wo Benevolent Association.

In response to the request, city supervisor Connie Chan announced in April 2021 her intention to introduce a landmark initiation. Heritage is now working with the Planning Department and the Recreation and Parks Department to identify the character-defining features for a potential landmark ordinance focused on the land's use as a cemetery. Twentieth-century elements of the park, such as the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, the golf clubhouse, and the Holocaust Memorial, would not be part of the designation. Surviving tree and vegetation boundary lines may be included, while the two monuments and the thousands of early San Franciscans still beneath ground will certainly be called out. Researchers recognize the site as one of the largest collections of 19th-century skeletal remains from the Western United States, and a designation of Lincoln Park would represent the city's first archeological landmark.

In a practical sense, landmark designation will not change much in the operation and use of Lincoln Park. The procedures the city follows in the discovery, handling, and respectful reinterment of human remains will not alter beyond a possible formalization of notification and consultation with descendant communities. Museum operations, golfing, and routine maintenance of the park, playground, roadways, and golf course should go on without any additional regulatory hurdles for city agencies or the organizations that use the park.

For more than a century the city turned away from the story of City Cemetery. A burial ground used primarily for immigrant communities and the poor, its existence was pointedly downplayed during the creation of Lincoln Park and publicly ignored in the decades since. A city landmark designation would represent an important first step by San Francisco to recognize a chapter of its history and honor thousands of pioneers still with us under winding cart paths and green fairways. ■

*Thanks to researchers Kari Lentz, John Martini, and Alex Ryder for their assistance.*



HERITAGE PHOTOS

*Kong Chow funerary structure (top) and an inscribed piece of broken curbing from the Ladies' Seaman's monument are both remnants of City Cemetery.*

## Kong Chow Funerary Chapel

The Kong Chow Funerary Chapel at Lincoln Park is the sole remnant of a sprawling burial ground used by San Francisco's 19th century Chinese community. Starting in 1877, over a dozen Chinese companies established plots at City Cemetery (also called Golden Gate Cemetery), flanked by the city's indigent burial grounds ("paupers sections") and various fraternal and ethnic plots.



The Kong Chow Funerary Chapel (John Martini)

Few Chinese who came to California in the 1800s wanted to remain in America, traveling here instead to make their fortunes and (hopefully) return home to China to live in comfortable retirement. It was an elusive goal, and the vast majority of these immigrants found themselves facing extreme racism and restricted to working at menial jobs. Many prepared for their demise by joining various Companies and paying ahead for their eventual burial and return to China.

According to customs of the time, the deceased individual was taken by representatives from their Company and prepared for burial. The remains were transported to City Cemetery and temporarily buried until a Bone Collector disinterred the remains and prepared them for transport to the deceased's home village. Surviving reports indicate

that thousands of Chinese were buried and disinterred at City Cemetery between 1877 and 1900.

Historic photographs of City Cemetery show large, arched gates marking the entrances to the various Chinese cemetery sections. Just inside these gates, religious observances took place before the deceased was buried: prayers were offered, incense burned, food offerings laid out, and burnings performed of symbolic paper money and clothes for the afterlife.

The Kong Chow funerary chapel is the only surviving example in Lincoln Park where these funerary activities took place.

The chapel is built in the shape of an open-air rectangle, with a high entranceway inscribed with Chinese characters that have been translated roughly as “Temporary Resting Place for Kong Chow Coffins Before Burial” and “Temporary Resting Place for Coffins Being Sent to Kong Chow Province.” Interior features include a small altar area for incense sticks and laying out offerings, and what appears to be a furnace pit for burning offerings.

Built of brick, concrete and iron, the chapel’s construction date is unknown. The 1914 *San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Handbook* described the structure:

Here the Chinese, also, gave their dead temporary interment, before shipping home the bones to lie in the soil of the Celestial Kingdom. West of the golf course are two [sic] curious structures of brick and cement, forming enclosures open to the sky, with high walls at the west ends. They look like stone beds for giants. These were the *mortuary chapels* where the Chinese held their final funeral rites, offering the sacrifices of roast pig and fowl, and burning the paper images whose ghosts were to attend the dead.

How the Kong Chow chapel escaped being demolished is something of a mystery, especially since all other funerary objects in Lincoln Park (except for the nearby Seaman’s Monument) were removed when City Cemetery was converted to a golf course. The answer could be as simple as that its stout construction made it a challenge to demolish, and that a long-ago landscape architect decided to incorporate it into the golf course design as a silent homage to the park’s funereal past.

## The Ladies' Seaman's Friend Monument

On a fairway of the Lincoln Park golf course stands an interesting bronze hazard for golfers: a fifteen-foot tall monument, decorated with nautical reliefs of an anchor and sailing ships. It is a remnant of the city's nearly-forgotten City Cemetery, and marks the burial ground established by the Ladies' Seaman's Friend Society in the 1880s for indigent merchant marine sailors.



Originally founded on the East Coast by Mrs. Rebecca Lambert, the Seaman's Friend Society established a branch in San Francisco after the Civil War to look after the needs of West Coast merchant sailors, especially those with disabilities. The Society operated a Sailors' Home on Rincon Hill and, in 1883, received a grant from the the City of San Francisco for a burial plot at City Cemetery.

That same year, Dr. Henry Cogswell of San Francisco donated money for a monument to mark the Ladies' Seaman's Friend section and also to acknowledge the good works of Mrs. Lambert.

Manufactured by the Monumental Bronze Co of Bridgeport, Connecticut, the monument was shipped in pieces around Cape Horn and re-assembled in San Francisco, much like a giant bronze model kit.

Literally a catalogue item, the tall monument was originally painted to look like granite with customized insert panels on three sides showing maritime motifs. On the fourth side, a dedicatory plaque was installed that reads:

Presented to the Ladies' Seaman's Friend Society by Dr. Henry D. Cogswell.

A landmark of the seaman's last earthly port and resting-place in which he awaits the advent of The Great Pilot for his Eternal Destiny.



Dedicated to Mrs. Rebecca H. Lambert, the founder of this society who, by universal consent, has merited the unqualified and lasting gratitude of the Seaman's Friend for her unselfish and lifelong devotion to their cause.

The monument was well-located for its purpose. The City Cemetery may have been the place where the poorer classes, such as sailors, were interred, but it also offered a magnificent and fitting view of the Pacific Ocean and Golden Gate. An article in the February 3, 1891, *San Francisco Examiner* described the scene:

The different societies and nationalities have plots on all sides, but they are generally well kept and decent. ... High on the hill there are clustered a few graves close to the edge of the cliff where it sheers into the water.

"Them's mariners," said the gravedigger, who stood dreaming on his shovel, and flicking a curly dog with a coffin rope. "They're put there so'st they can see the ships come in."

The mariners have decidedly the best of it, for though their little plot of ground is bare enough, in all conscience, it is not quite so miserable as the rest.

In 1884, Mrs. Lambert donated \$300 to the Friend's Society and in return requested four plots at City Cemetery, which she received. When she died in 1886, her obituary simply stated "Interment strictly private." Several periodicals later stated she was buried at City Cemetery alongside her sailors, and indeed, close by Cogswell's Monument are several granite funerary curb stones, one prominently inscribed LAMBERT.

It's not known how many sailors were eventually buried in the Seaman's Friend's section, or how many were disinterred when the City ordered the cemetery closed early in the 20th century. However, given the recent discoveries of undocumented burials on adjacent El Camino Del Mar, it is likely that many of the seamen are still there (and also perhaps Mrs. Rebecca Lambert) perpetually awaiting "the advent of The Great Pilot" to arrive at Lincoln Park.