

April 18, 1906: Destruction of the Tenderloin

BY TOM CARTER

UNTIL April 18, 1906, San Francisco had a richly developing culture and was aptly known as the Paris of the West.

As one of the greatest cities on Earth and the ninth largest in America, it was thick with a melting-pot population of more than 350,000. Well-heeled denizens sported the latest fashions and toiled around in horseless carriages.

San Francisco craved the latest sensations from Europe and the East. It throbbed with classical and popular entertainments. Live theater — from plays to minstrels, from opera to burlesque — was king.

Playing a role in the city's vast theatrical scene was the Alhambra Theater on the northeast corner of Jones and Eddy streets, where Boeddeker Park now sits. It eventually was consumed by the fire, seen advancing in the accompanying photo.

Built in 1867, the first Alhambra was located at 325 Bush St., where it was called "the People's Playhouse," and simply "Bush Street." The theater was the harbinger of the entertainment movement west of Montgomery and away from the old established district.

About the turn of the century, the Alhambra moved to Eddy and Jones and opened March 11, 1900, with a flop called "Have You Seen Smith?" The Chronicle's reviewer wished he hadn't. "The performance is not worth commenting on," he wrote.

After pitiful box office sales, the Alhambra closed two weeks later. It reopened Sept. 6 with a smash hit, a nautical farce called "Ship Ahoy" with a cast of 40. The entrance was on Eddy Street and the stage faced south. Tickets were 15, 25, 35 and 50 cents; a box seat cost six bits. The Alhambra Café on the main floor sold Wieland's Lager for 5 cents a draught. Nearby, at 211 Eddy, the Paris Restaurant served meals for 15 cents, coffee and cake for a dime. The site is now the Franciscan Towers SRO and TNDC headquarters.

The Chronicle called "Ship Ahoy" "excellent entertainment."

On the eve of the 1906 earthquake,



PHOTO COURTESY SAN FRANCISCO PERFORMING ARTS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

The inferno caused by the Great Quake is seen sweeping toward the ornate Alhambra Theater in the lower left corner of the photo, where Boeddeker Park is now.

Theodore Kremer's "Queen of the Highlanders" was playing and apparently holding audiences "spellbound." The next week the theater was planning the premiere of Mrs. Lily Schlesinger's western melodrama "A Cowboy in Petticoats." Alas, it never happened.

The earthquake lasted a little less than a minute. It measured 7.8 on the Richter scale. The fire raged for three days and destroyed at least 28,000 buildings, almost everything east of Van Ness Avenue, the Alhambra among them.

Richard Livingston, co-founder of EXIT Theatre, remembers the bowling alley, Downtown Bowl, which occupied the Eddy and Jones site before Boeddeker Park was established in 1978, and that assassin Jack Ruby once lived across the street.

Entertainment has ruled the northeast corner since its recorded history, beginning in the 1840s when it was a picnic site dotted with

dwarf oaks and blackberry bushes, according to Peter Field, who leads historical City Guides' tours in the TL.

"In 1893, it was actually The National Theater," Field said. "Then it was Scheel's Auditorium and from 1898, up to the fire, The Alhambra."

As the Tenderloin was being rebuilt, a two-story entertainment hall went up at Eddy and Jones in 1920. It was a "dancing pavilion" that held various dancing schools through the 1920s, the start of the flapper era. From 1930-35 it was the Golden Gate Ballroom. The Jones Street cable car line ran by it.

But then the roller skating craze took over. The Golden Gate Roller Rink held forth from 1937-41 before being supplanted by another trend, bowling. It was the Downtown Bowl in 1942 and six years later added to its name, "Billiard Parlor," which was next door. ■

Arrested: Why N.Y. Justice Center defendants show up

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important to its success. "We have a great relationship with the cops. We spent a lot of time making sure everyone knew what was going on."

Albers and Moss say getting the word out about the CJC, from the street on up, is among their top priorities at the moment. They are still developing communications and procedures for working with the four police stations that will be funneling cases to the court, says Albers. For most of March, the court only processed cases referred by Tenderloin Station. Cases began flowing from Northern, Southern and Central stations at the end of the month, said Moss.

VIOLATORS FROM 4 POLICE PRECINCTS

Once all four police stations are regularly feeding into the CJC, the sheer volume of cases will improve the no-show rate, says Moss. Still, she rails at the media focus on the issue, saying, "The measure of success (of the CJC) shouldn't be primarily on no-shows." She contends that critics should focus instead on how well the new court serves clients who do show up.

The CJC is both a court and a social-service clearinghouse designed to create an entirely new system for dealing with crime in the Tenderloin by focusing on its underlying causes — poverty, homelessness, addiction and lack of education.

The Polk Street center consists of two facilities — the courtroom at No. 575, and an office suite at No. 555 where defendants can get referrals to shelter, medical care, job training and educational opportunities; be assessed for mental health and substance use issues; and receive counseling, therapy and case management.

You don't have to be in trouble with the law to benefit from the CJC; any San Francisco resident can tap its services. In fact, Albers makes a point of steer-

ing homeless people he meets in the neighborhood to the CJC to see what the center can do for them.

The court also handles all misdemeanors and felonies that occur within its jurisdiction — whether or not defendants show up.

A few who did appear during a mid-month Central City Extra spot check gave the court raves. Albers praised each defendant for coming to court; he believes positive reinforcement is key to getting people to use CJC services that could lead to changes in their behavior. He sentenced a few to community service, explaining that successful completion would result in a dismissal of charges. Other defendants were steered next door for services.

Homeless residents Shon Stewart and Jennifer Gomez were upbeat after leaving Albers' courtroom. They had been cited the week before for obstructing the sidewalk; Stewart said they were lying on a steam grate near the Main Library to keep warm.

Because they kept their court date, Albers discharged their case after helping them get access to shelter and medical care.

'THIS COURT IS HELPING PEOPLE'

Stewart and Gomez said they followed up on their citations because they didn't want the prospect of an outstanding warrant hanging over their heads. "Plus, this court is helping people," said Stewart. "I think it's a good thing." He added that the short turnaround — less than a week — between their citation and the processing of their case was helpful. At the Hall of Justice, by contrast, the time between citation and court appearance is typically 45 days. "We would have lost the paperwork if (the court date) had been a month from now," Stewart said.

Another defendant who asked to remain anonymous said he was pleased with the outcome of his shoplifting case. Albers had sentenced him to community service and, because he has a history of alcohol abuse — he says he was drunk when he decided to shoplift at Macy's — the CJC offered to

help him find a sobriety program. "I'm already in one, but I plan to keep it up," he said.

He said he followed up on his citation because he's an immigrant and doesn't want legal troubles to prevent him from becoming a citizen someday. "This is great — wonderful," he said of the new system.

REDUCING RECIDIVISM THE BOTTOM LINE

Brodick says nipping small-time crime in the bud is essential to moving the recidivism needle. He recalls the philosophy of a cop he's worked with. "He sees two guys drinking beer on the corner as a potential homicide — they're drinking, then they're drunk, then they're arguing and suddenly someone pulls out a knife. A citation for public drinking nips it in the bud."

Brodick says the Red Hook project shows that if courts adequately address issues that drive crime, repeat offenders who clog the system function more productively and eventually cycle out for good. That, says Moss, is the CJC's overarching mission, and its ability to reduce recidivism is the standard by which it should be measured.

But don't expect overnight success, she warns. "This is a complete system change. It takes years for systems like this to be functional for the people it's designed for."

Brodick said Red Hook planners spent five years setting up services before it began processing judicial cases. By then, the project had won support from the mayor's office, the City Council, the police and residents in the neighborhood it serves.

By contrast, San Francisco's CJC has been opposed — sometimes vehemently — by various supervisors, homeless advocates and even voters, although Mayor Newsom has been a tireless champion. As a result, the court is still struggling to forge relationships and work out logistics with relevant city departments. Albers estimates it will be six months to a year before the new court is operating smoothly. "We had a road map, but this is going to be a work in progress," he said. ■