



Jefferson Square

— Jeanne Alexander

In the early 1900's, Jefferson Square was 11 pastoral acres of park — hilly contours, trees and shrubs. But on April 18, 1906, earthquake and fire reduced the city to rubble and smoking ruins from the waterfront to Van Ness Avenue, and "citizens driven from homes, moving aimlessly about, keeping in the open, camped in parks." (San Francisco Examiner). In charge of relief efforts, the Army organized a system of refugee camps on 31 parks around the city. Giving long term shelter to some 20,000 homeless residents, all the camps had tents; some also had wooden shacks. Jefferson had both. Families who obeyed the rules and presented a plan for rehabilitation were provided with food, clothing, tents, and aid from social workers to help them return to self-sufficient lives.



Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

Jefferson was one of the larger sites, better-equipped to house its colorful, often boisterous community of 1500-2000 people. It had a tent school, an emergency hospital, clothing distribution store, soup kitchen and social hall. Its central communications board helped find and reunite families. Residents were given to mass protests denouncing, among other targets, the soup kitchen, food rations, the quality of clothing donations, bathhouse facilities, and United Railway vehicles. Ordered to move to the large camps in Golden Gate Park, they refused to budge. Fifteen dissidents formed the United Refugees Corporation to start cooperative farming and real estate enterprises. There were summer band concerts and, at Christmas in 1906, a nearby neighbor gave each child in the camp five dollars. In one of the suicide attempts that crept into several camps, a 70-year old Jefferson Square resident took carbolic acid and swallowed safety pins and coins. He was treated at the emergency hospital.

When it was closed in October of 1907, "Jefferson Square became a meeting place for left-wing orators," a camp record reports.

Jefferson Square's life as a park was resumed and reduced by half in 1917. The Park Commission transferred jurisdiction over its flatter ground to the Playground Commission and the site became Margaret S. Hayward Playground. Records in 1924 describe Jefferson's now 5.6 acres as a "noteworthy example of landscape gardening, largely used by neighborhood residents, especially women and children." In 1946 two men shot a pigeon in the Square to make a pigeon pie. Fined \$25 each, they were also deprived of their pie and their kill, which went to the city disposal squad.

Fast forward to the Recreation and Park Department – Park Assessments in 1998-99 and the Strategic Plan and Capital Plan that followed in early 2000. Jefferson's assessment focused on installing a lighting scheme, improving pathways, walls and benches, adding a drinking fountain, litter receptacles, signage, and renovating the plaza overlook. The price tag was \$1.5 million. But the economy tanked, the city budget shrank, and downsizing was the mandate at Rec and Park. Jefferson Square was put on the waiting list. When a proposed Dog Play Area was shelved in 2003 by its \$100,000 price tag, the neighborhood work team installed some low tech practical features- signs for the play area, and boxes with recycled grocery bags for waste disposal.

Park representative Stuart Nachtsheim, who is also the District 6 representative for the Park and Recreation Open Space Committee (PROSAC), took over the lead two years ago when his predecessor moved away. He values the open space in his "overtaxed neighborhood" and sees a lot of potential for the park. "Our rudimentary, day to day needs," he says, "are keeping the park clean and safe and limiting overnight camping and drug use" by homeless visitors. He and his Saturday work team are looking forward to the return of the Rec and Park gardener they have been without for weeks. The main item on his priority list? "Adequate lighting," he says. A visitor enjoying an evening stroll around the walkways would definitely agree.

Source: "From Tents to Shacks: A Guide to San Francisco's 1906 Earthquake Camps" by Jane Crydan, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. 🌿

Location: Between Turk & Eddy, Laguna and Gough Streets
Bus: #31 Balboa; #5 Fulton
Contact: Stuart Nachtsheim | fuss2124@yahoo.com

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May 23th: Spring Awards Luncheon
June 24th: Imagine the Way
September 13th: 10th Anniversary Gala

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Convert Sharp Park: SF's next great nature center?

The case for conversion

New York is busy celebrating its recent Coyote sighting, but we've got something far more rare in San Francisco — our own endangered frog! The value of the California red-legged frog (*rana aurora draytonii*) residing at Sharp Park, (San Francisco's golf park in Pacifica), is substantial in several ways. Dramatic frog declines have been confirmed throughout the world in the last decade. The global loss of many species over a short time, including surprising population crashes in undisturbed areas such as national parks, provides clear evidence that frogs are experiencing more than a routine dip in population. It has been suggested that since frogs are very sensitive to environmental conditions, they may be likened to 'the canary in the coal mine', providing the first indications of a detrimental change in global environmental conditions.

The dilemma for our rare and endangered California red-legged frog is that it has chosen to make its home on a golf course. This year, the extra rain allowed the frogs to lay their eggs and complete their natural hatching cycle. Apparently the wet conditions prevented golf course management from vacuuming them up in advance, as is the usual practice. After all, we wouldn't want frogs jumping on the golf greens, endangered or not. One might ask how this practice meets the letter of the law — namely the Precautionary Principle adopted by the city in 2003 and the Endangered Species Act. The Center for Biological Diversity and NPC are looking into this apparent violation of legal intent.

The City could save itself a possible lawsuit and create a unique tourist destination and environmental education resource by celebrating this native (and threatened!) species and closing Sharp as a golf course. The course is a money loser, as in fact, are all the city's golf courses (and those of most other Bay Area cities as well). If Rec and Park partnered with the Academy of Sciences, we could not only have a fantastic amphibian conservation center and even research facility, but also develop far more extensive and creative uses of the 411-acre Sharp Park. Summer camp, beekeeping, and many other uses are possible — programs that would serve our children and families, and save our frog. Would the RPD Commission please step up to the plate here and get the ball rolling? 🌱

FROG FACTS



◆ This species inspired Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Today there are no remaining red-legged frogs in Calaveras.

◆ These frogs were considered a staple food for the 49ers during the California gold rush (the modern-day SF football team doesn't include them on its menu).

After the turn of the century, these frogs were considered a delicacy and were served at some of San Francisco's finest restaurants.

◆ The red-legged frog, the largest frog native to the Western U.S., was listed as a threatened species in 1996; this designation affords the same level of protection as an endangered species.

— Thanks to Brent Plater of the Center for Biological Diversity for help with these Frog Facts.

Parks in the News

RPD Management Audit

The Board Analyst, Harvey Rose, issued a 300-plus-page report (www.sfnpc.org; click on **MGMT Audit**) detailing over 100 recommendations for the improvement of Rec and Park's management systems. Many of the recommendations are identical to those made by NPC and SPUR in our Parks Plan of 1997. RPD's responses and implementation plan begin on page 320 of this pdf document.

\$35 Million Supplemental proposed for Park Improvements

In the wake of SF's \$100-plus million budget surplus (thanks to extra property taxes from transfers), Board President Aaron Peskin has put forward a supplemental request of \$35 million for parks to complete Phase 1 of the Capital Plan. Thanks to everyone who attended the March hearings and the 506 people who signed the petition that was presented to the Board!

Update: Still no City Park Surveys

Post 2003, Proposition C requires that the City Controller conduct an annual audit of park maintenance, using the newly-developed park standards to grade each park. Moving into year 3, only the surveys conducted by the Controller are posted on line http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/controller/csa/Rpt_Final.pdf. Those done by RPD's are not available because the department ran out of funding to input the data. The City has been given \$4 million to audit both RPD and DPW annually under Prop C. It's hard to see where the problem lies, but the taxpayers are being circumvented and abused. Do we turn this in to Chron Watch or the Attorney General? 🌱

From Tents to Text Messages

— Isabel Wade, Executive Director

San Francisco's parks played a central role following the 1906 earthquake as Jeanne Alexander's parks report (see page 1) vividly describes. This year, while we celebrate the San Francisco spirit that helped San Francisco rise from the ashes, we might also contemplate how park advocates can help our city prepare for the next 'big one.'

Your park group might plan ahead this year and find out what arrangements are being made so that parks can serve as disaster centers. We all need to be prepared to manage 72 hours on our own, but if our homes are unsafe or inaccessible, we will turn to our public spaces and we should be planning to coordinate with neighborhood leaders and relevant city agencies for this eventuality. Recent disasters in other cities indicate that people are still likely to go to parks and public spaces in any case, even if other sites such as schools are 'designated' for shelter. Schools alone will not be able to provide all the needed shelter in a devastating event; they will also need to reestablish their primary function if recovery in San Francisco takes many months. Each park group could help the city in disaster plan preparations at the neighborhood level by determining sites close to the park where essential food, water and medical supplies could be stored. There are also practical decisions: Where will the tents go, the canteen, the latrine?

The city is now developing a pilot Neighborhood Disaster Plan in District 5 as a first model for all districts of emergency preparedness. It is apparent that the essential element in saving lives and property is that each of us is prepared in our own homes. We all know this, yet people put off taking the necessary steps for many reasons. This is where organized neighborhood groups (such as your park group) come into play, because somehow getting together to work on preparation propels us to action. If each park group encouraged its members to take on the role of organizing the block where they live, we could move ahead exponentially in disaster preparations — and strengthen our community network at the same time. If every park group broadcast the availability of NERT (Neighborhood Emergency Response Team) training when it is available, all of our neighborhoods will benefit. Please see http://www.sfgov.org/site/sfnert_form.asp?id=24118

for details. This training, which requires several sessions, will ensure that your neighborhood will have critical information and skills to assist with emergency response and will be connected to a larger city network.

Park advocates can play another vital role in an emergency, one that would not have been possible 100 years ago. The missing link in our response planning, just as New Orleans discovered, is getting the city's first responders vital information on the ground conditions so that they can direct their resources first to where they are most needed. First responders need to know where to go and whether the routes to get there are clear. When phone communications are down, what is widely available (ham radios are not) that still works? SMS (short message service) communication — text messaging on cell phones! Park advocates, armed only with SMS-enabled cell phones, could send critical information to a data collection center that then transmits this information directly to designated first responders. Where are the gas and water mains broken? Where have the fires started? Where are collapsed buildings, and where are the immobilized injured?

NPC has discovered the power of motivated citizens armed with technology in our ParkScan program. Several hundred volunteers are now monitoring conditions in their parks on a regular basis and transmitting this information via the web or with web-enabled cell phones. To illustrate the potential of tech-savvy residents helping our city, we plan to host an exercise where volunteers will come to one or more parks (to be announced) where they will observe disaster "conditions" that are listed on poster boards, and text message them to our collection point. This information will be visually represented on a map and presented to the Office of Emergency Services and other city agencies. A program organized in this fashion could function as a lifesaving tool. Please let us know if you'd like to participate by contacting [Helen Johnson at 621-3260 or hjohnson@sfnighborhood-parks.org](mailto:hjohnson@sfnighborhood-parks.org). For the paper and pencil gang, let's at least make a pledge to take action this year to organize our blocks and our parks for disaster preparedness. You'll probably never make a better investment in time, and speaking from experience, you will also enjoy connecting with your neighbors. 🌱

