



# **Guide to Historic and Scenic Sights Along the City Attorneys' Conference Power Walk**

**Distance: 2.2 miles (about 50 minutes walking time)**

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## Segment No. 1: Union Square Northbound to California Street

Gathering in Union Square you will be facing our Conference hotel, the Westin St. Francis. One of the City's premier hotels for over 110 years, the original hotel was destroyed by the 1906 Earthquake and Fire and rebuilt in an extravagant style. Over the years the hotel has hosted legendary celebrities, royalty and 10 United States Presidents. In 1975, an assassination attempt by Sara Jane Moore against President Ford failed at the Mason Street entrance to the hotel. Ms. Moore had been arrested the day before on an illegal handgun charge. The gun and 113 rounds of ammunition were confiscated, but she bought another gun the next day which fortunately had faulty sights on it resulting in her missing the President by just 6 inches.

Union Square is one of the oldest squares in San Francisco. Originally a massive sand bank, the City's first American Mayor John Geary donated the land to the City for a public plaza. The sand bank was leveled with the sand used to help fill in Yerba Buena Cove, which is now the nearby Financial District. The first buildings around and near the new square were places of worship and private clubs, including 5 Protestant Churches and a Jewish Synagogue.



Although California was admitted to the Union as a free state with slavery banned, when the Civil War broke out, there were Southern sympathizers in the City that were advocating for California to secede from the Union. Across the street from the square was the first Unitarian Church whose pastor Thomas Starr King was a spellbinding orator. King held numerous rallies in the square attended by very large crowds who listened to his speeches in support of the Union and against the evils of slavery. He went on to deliver rousing speeches throughout the state during the Civil War and tragically died of exhaustion and pneumonia in 1864. However, his rallies in the square led to its name, Union Square.

We will leave Union Square, turn right and head up Powell Street. Along the way we will see cable cars going up and down this steep section of Powell Street. The first cable car line (the Clay Street line) was built in 1873 by its inventor Andrew Hallidie, the Powell-Hyde line was built later in 1891. Although it is hard to imagine San Francisco without cable cars, in the 1940's there was a plan by City Hall to replace the antiquated cable cars with modern diesel buses. In 1947, the City ordered buses to replace the cable cars. Soon thereafter, a major public outcry and campaign to save the cable cars occurred that went on for many years.

On the June 1954 ballot was a cleverly worded ballot Measure E that purported to save the cable cars in response to the public uproar but actually authorized the City's PUC to make the cuts in service it desired. Measure E was passed with the voters believing they were saving the cable cars. When they realized that they had been deceived, 75,000 voters signed an initiative petition to restore service. The initiative was placed on the November 1954 ballot as Measure J. A well financed campaign was conducted against Measure J based on the alleged financial losses of the system. A month before the election a taxpayer's suit was filed against David Jones who had been hired by the City's PUC General Manager. The complaint alleged that misleading, deceptive, confusing and untruthful arguments were circulated on behalf of the City to the voters.

After Measure J was defeated, the Superior Court found in favor of the taxpayers suit finding that City funds were used illegally to back Proposition E and oppose Proposition J.



The battle over the future of the cable cars continued, but two events then occurred that finally guaranteed the preservation of an historic and operating cable car system. In 1964, the U.S. Department of the Interior declared the cable cars a national landmark, the first moving landmark in the United States. In 1971, the voters adopted

Proposition Q which amended the City Charter and prohibited any further service cuts in the system as it existed on January 1, 1971. These steps have preserved the three cable car lines that operate today after the system was substantially rebuilt in 1982-1984.

### Segment No. 2: California Street Westbound to Taylor Street

When we get to California Street, we will have arrived at Nob Hill described by Robert Louis Stevenson in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as the “Hill of Palaces.” These palaces were owned by the City’s wealthiest and most powerful residents—the Big Four railroad tycoons (Stanford, Hopkins, Crocker and Huntington) and one of the four Nevada silver mining Bonanza Kings (Flood). Today, the palaces are gone (except for the Flood Mansion), but the spectacular views remain and the grand homes have been replaced by grand hotels.

Across California on the right side of Powell is the University Club which was built in 1915 on land that formerly was the horse stables for the Leland Stanford mansion. The Italianate style building was designed by the firm of Bliss and Faville who also designed the St. Francis Hotel. Although founded by the then President of the Harvard Club in 1890, its membership was not limited to any particular university, but membership was not opened to women until 1988.

On the north side of California between Powell and Mason is the Fairmont Hotel. The hotel is named for James Fair, a mining partner of Flood and another one of the Bonanza Kings. He originally wanted to build a large mansion on the property but died before anything was built. His oldest daughter inherited the property and began the construction of the original hotel in 1902 but sold the not quite finished hotel to the Law Brothers only a few months before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire which decimated the structure. Ironically, the unfinished hotel was used as the Fire Department headquarters for fighting the Great Fire until it also was engulfed in flames. The hotel owners hired Julia Morgan as the architect to design the reconstructed hotel and the hotel was opened on the first anniversary of the 1906 disaster as a symbol that the City could be rebuilt to its former glory. Only 4 years before her hiring as the architect on this large project, Julia Morgan graduated from the highly prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris as its first female graduate. Julia Morgan later gained fame as the architect of the Hearst Castle and other notable buildings throughout the state. The Fairmont is one of the City’s grand hotels with a very impressive lobby and like the Westin St. Francis has had its share of famous guests. In 1945, the Garden Room off the lobby was used for the drafting of the United Nations Charter which was signed by 50 nations on June 26, 1945 at the Herbst Theater in the San Francisco Civic Center.

At the corner of California and Mason, on the right, is the also famous Top of Mark Hotel, known for its views from the cocktail lounge on the top floor. The large white building on the west side of Taylor is the Masonic Center, a popular venue for concerts and special events. This Mid-Century Modernist building was constructed in 1958.

On the north side of California at Mason is the Pacific Union Club which is housed in the Flood Mansion. James C. Flood's mansion, was built in 1886 with a Italianate Victorian design by the architect Willis Polk who designed a number of notable commercial and residential buildings in San Francisco until the First World War. The Flood Mansion was the first Brownstone structure constructed west of the Mississippi and was the lone survivor of the 1906 firestorm on Nob Hill (although its interior was gutted by fire). The Pacific Union Club is a highly exclusive men's club. The club's rules prohibit its members from publicly disclosing anything about club activities so I cannot say what goes on there, but most likely gender and income equality are not part of its strategic plan.

At 1021 California between Mason and Taylor is a residence known as the Jewel Box which was built in 1910 for Herbert Law, a patent medicine and real estate millionaire (when being a millionaire made one very wealthy), who briefly owned the Fairmont Hotel when it was reconstructed.

### **Segment No. 3: Taylor Street Northbound to Broadway**

We will take a right turn at Taylor. On the west side of the street is the very impressive Grace Cathedral, the third largest Episcopal Church in the nation. The cornerstone for the Cathedral was laid in 1910, but construction did not begin until 1928 and was not completed until 1964. The design borrows from 13<sup>th</sup> century French Gothic architecture and was influenced by the Norte Dame and Chartres Cathedrals in France. In the front of the Cathedral is a walking labyrinth (not part of the walk but a fun thing to try someday). The Cathedral is famous for its front doors which were made in the early 1950's from molds of the original Lorenzo Ghiberti doors which adorn the Baptistry across from the Duomo Cathedral in Florence. Each of the two doors weighs 2,750 pounds. The doors depict scenes from the Old Testament with highly detailed figures.

Grace Cathedral was constructed on the site of the former Crocker Estate. The Crocker Estate covered an entire City block except for one small parcel. In 1877, Charles Crocker built a huge Second Empire style mansion facing California near Taylor. The small parcel he did not own faced Sacramento and was owned by a German undertaker, Nicholas Yung. Crocker made numerous offers to buy this parcel, but Yung refused to sell and what ensued was a neighbor dispute that we have all witnessed in various forms over the years. To spite his neighbor, Crocker constructed a 40-foot high wood fence around three sides of the Yung lot blocking natural light to the house. At the time, the City did not have a zoning ordinance regulating fence heights (San Francisco did not adopt its first zoning ordinance until 1921). Yung retaliated by erecting a 10-foot high coffin, adorned with a skull and crossbones, on the roof of his house facing the Crocker mansion. This dispute did not end until both men died and the heirs of Yung sold the lot to the heirs of Crocker. This is yet another story of money not buying happiness which is a good thing for City Attorneys to keep in mind when a City Council citing budget constraints turns down a desired salary or billing rate increase.





Across from the Cathedral is the pleasantly landscaped Huntington Park with a very attractive fountain in the center. This was the site of a Renaissance-style mansion built by David Colton who made a fortune from an Amador County gold mine. The house was bought by one of the Big Four railroad tycoons Collis Huntington whose widow donated the land to the City in 1915 for a public park.

As you walk down California to Taylor, you will see another cable car line with cable cars of a different design and longer length than the Powell-Hyde line (outside seats on both sides of the enclosed interior). This line was established by Leland Stanford who with his competitive zeal wanted to outdo Andrew Hallidie's Clay Street cable car line and refused Hallidie's technical assistance (later owing him \$30,000 in royalties). The line proved popular

and today is the oldest cable car line in the City as the Clay Street line was not rebuilt after the 1906 disaster.

We will proceed down Taylor, a quiet quintessential San Francisco residential street with small neighborhood cafes, grocery stores and cleaners which seems far removed from the hustle and bustle of Union Square and the Financial District.

#### **Segment No. 4: Broadway Eastbound to Mason Street**

At the top of Broadway, pause and take in a spectacular view of the San Francisco skyline and Bay Bridge over to the East Bay. Please enjoy the view before heading down Broadway as this is a steep downhill with an uneven sidewalk. Keep your eyes on the sidewalk and not the views as you head one block down to Mason and take a left.

#### **Segment No. 5: Mason Southbound to Vallejo Street**

No notable sights on this segment as we are going down this street to avoid a congested intersection at Broadway and Stockton.

#### **Segment No. 6: Vallejo Eastbound to Stockton Street**

We are now on the edge of North Beach. This street is a transition between Chinatown and North Beach. To the North and East lies the heart of North Beach with many Italian restaurants, delicatessens and bakeries. Italian immigrants first came to San Francisco in the wake of the Gold Rush but the peak immigration occurred between the 1890's to the 1910's. The early arrivals settled on Telegraph Hill, the later site of Coit Tower, as it reminded them of their native hill towns in Italy. Look to the northeast and you will see this well-known landmark. As North Beach further developed along Columbus Avenue, the Italian community expanded to this area in close proximity to Fisherman's Wharf where many of the immigrants worked as fisherman. On this walk we do not have time to venture into North Beach.

## Segment No. 7: Stockton Southbound to Washington Street

We are now entering Chinatown, one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the United States. Stockton Street has an amazing stretch of Asian markets with a most unusual and extensive selection of vegetables, meats, fish and herbs. The fish markets are particularly interesting. This is not the touristy part of Chinatown but a very authentic part of the neighborhood. In the early morning, these markets will be getting ready for large number of daily shoppers.

Chinatown remains one of the most popular parts of the City for dining, shopping and just walking around. But the history of Chinatown reflects decades of discrimination and intolerance. Although the first Chinese immigrants were welcomed in the early 1850's, this attitude abruptly changed as more immigrants came to San Francisco from China and the California economy faltered in the 1870's with high unemployment. These economic woes were blamed on the Chinese immigrants. Chinese children were denied a public education and in addition to the harshness of the federal Exclusion Act (severely restricting Chinese immigration), the Board of Supervisors adopted a number of discriminatory and punitive ordinances.

One of these local ordinances was the subject of the United States Supreme Court decision in *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356 (1886), a seminal equal protection case that many of us read an excerpt of in our Con Law class in law school. At issue in *Yick Wo*, was an ordinance that prohibited anyone from operating a laundry in a wooden building unless permitted by the Board of Supervisors. No standards were provided by the ordinance for granting exceptions. At the time, most structures in San Francisco were made of wood. Over 200 laundries were owned by Chinese inhabitants of the City with 80 owned by white persons. Although the ordinance was not discriminatory on its face, it was applied by the Board of Supervisors in a clearly discriminatory manner as only the 80 white owned laundries were granted a permit by the Board. Yick Wo and many other Chinese owners of laundries were prosecuted for violating the ordinance and imprisoned when they did not pay the mandated fine. The case first went to the California Supreme Court which found the ordinance to be a proper exercise of the police power to protect public safety.

The United States Supreme Court disagreed, with Justice Matthews writing the opinion of the Court. The court noted that Yick Wo had operated his laundry for over 20 years and had passed building and health inspections conducted by the City. The Court first held that although Yick Wo was not a United States citizen, he was entitled to the equal protection of the laws both under a U.S. treaty with China and under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. The court held that the Fourteenth Amendment applied to all persons within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States without regard to any differences of race, color, or nationality. The Court then addressed the merits of the ordinance and found the ordinance, which lacked any standards for the exercise of the Board's discretion, to be contrary to the nature and theory of our institutions of government which do not leave room for purely personal and arbitrary government power. The Court concluded that there was no reason for the ordinance to exist except hostility to the race and nationality to which the petitioners belong. The Court found this discrimination to be an unlawful denial of equal protection prohibited by the Fourteenth Amendment and Yick Wo was ordered released from prison.

Upon reaching Washington Street we will turn left and walk down Washington to a very special alley called Waverly Place which will be a right turn. As we walk down to Waverly Place you will see a narrow alley across the street called Ross Alley. In the 1880's, this alley was known as the Street of Gamblers with 22 fortified gambling parlors. Thick wooden doors provided entry to the parlors that were clad with iron plates that slowed the police long enough to transform the illegal gambling into legal domino games. A historical note before making this turn. The following section of Washington Street between Grant and Kearny is considered the birthplace of Chinatown where in the early 1850's Chinese merchants first started to congregate and establish grocery, dry goods and other businesses.

### Segment No 8: Waverly Place



In the latter 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this alley was called 15 Cents Street due to the large number of barbershops. Like most of Chinatown which was built originally with wood structures, the buildings on this alley were destroyed by the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. This alley was rebuilt with a beautiful collection of colorful and ornate buildings. Note the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese flags interspersed on the roofs of these building. You will see at 133, 125 and 39 Waverly Place signs for benevolent associations (the building numbers descend as we walk). These associations are part of a number of associations that formed in Chinatown to help immigrants with the social, cultural and political isolation they faced in their new country. The associations were organized on the basis of family name, district of origin, occupation or some cases criminal activity. In the 1860's, six major benevolent associations banded together to form the Chinese Six Companies which

acted in many ways like a local chamber of commerce, job placement firm, travel agency, lobbyist and local government. At 125 Waverly Place (on the fourth floor) is the Tin Hou Temple, the first and oldest Buddhist temple in the United States with its alter brought to San Francisco from China in 1848 and the temple completed in 1852. The temple will be closed at the time of the walk and in any event is too small for a large group to visit.

### Segment No. 9: Grant Avenue Southbound to Maiden Lane

For tourists, Grant Avenue is the heart of Chinatown with a variety of souvenir and better quality gift shops, camera stores, tea shops, art galleries, home furnishing stores, and jewelry shops. The wood structures along this street that were destroyed in 1906 were replaced with brick and stucco buildings with an Asian look. Edwardian style buildings designed by American architects were adorned with upturned eaves and pagoda style roofs in vibrant reds, greens and yellows. These decorative touches were modeled after imperial palaces and temples in China.

Two prime examples of this new architecture are the Sing Chong and Sing Fat Company buildings located on Grant Avenue on each side of California Street and both were designed as shopping bazaars. Both of these buildings have very distinctive, tall pagodas on their roofs.

After the earthquake, real estate speculators and some downtown businessmen had a plan to widen Grant Avenue and expand Montgomery Street's business district into Chinatown and relocate its Chinese residents to the southern edge of the City which is now Hunter's Point. These two buildings were quickly built along the existing narrow width of Grant, interfering with the relocation plan. When other buildings also were quickly rebuilt along Grant, the relocation plan was abandoned.

The manager of the Sing Chong building was Look Tin Eli, a promoter of the new Chinatown. Look with his brother founded the Canton Bank, the first Chinese run bank in the United States. Earlier in 1884, Look was the plaintiff in a significant federal court case. He was born in Mendocino County to Chinese immigrant parents. Returning to the U.S. from a trip to China, he was denied entry under the Exclusion Act. He filed suit and prevailed when the U.S. Circuit Court ruled that a Chinese person born in the United States was a U.S. citizen and could not be denied entry to the country under the Exclusion Act.

Across from the Sing Chong building is Old St. Mary's Church consecrated in 1854 and the first Roman Catholic Cathedral on the West Coast. The design is Gothic Revival and it is one of the oldest surviving structures in Chinatown, although it was badly damaged by fires in 1906 and 1966. When the church was constructed, it was the largest building in San Francisco and dominated the skyline. Compare it today to the truly towering Salesforce Tower under construction which has become the most prominent building on the San Francisco skyline. Beneath the clock face on the tower of the church you will see a sign that reads: "Son Observe the Time and Fly from Evil." This sign was directed at the patrons of the brothels that were located across the street from the church during the later 1800's.

Finally, a few words about the Chinatown Gate located at Grant and Bush. This Gate is distinctive but not historic as it was erected in 1970. Mythical Foo Dogs sit at the base and the dragons on the upper green tile roof represent fertility and power, the fish symbolize plenty and prosperity, and the ball represents truth and the world. The sign hanging from the center of the gate is an axiom by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who lived in Chinatown before leading the revolution against the Qing dynasty in 1911. Translated, it reads: "All under heaven is good for the people."

### **Segment No. 10: Maiden Lane Westbound to Union Square**

Note that when you pass through the Chinatown Gate at Bush Street, Grant Avenue widens to a typical downtown commercial street as you enter the downtown business district. We will pass by a number of retail stores and then take a right turn on the charming Maiden Lane. A narrow alley, this lane is lined with cafes, retail stores and art galleries. Its past, however, was not so charming. Prior to its destruction in 1906, Maiden Lane was called Morton Street and was a red light district tacitly approved by City Hall. The police reportedly would enter this street built with narrow wooden shanties called cribs only when serious crimes were committed. After it was leveled by fire in 1906 and with the corrupt Mayor "Handsome Gene" Schmitz removed from office and his political boss Abe Ruef sentenced to San Quentin State Prison, Morton Lane went through a couple of name changes, becoming Maiden Lane in 1922 and a very respectable part of the fashionable downtown business district. Hermes, Chanel and Jimmy Choo are some of the luxury stores currently located on this alley.



We look forward to seeing you at Union Square on the Friday morning of the Conference for our walking adventure. For anyone wanting to do a shorter walk without the steep hills (but also without the great views), the walk can be done in reverse to the end of Segment No. 6 at Vallejo and Stockton and back to Union Square.

*Walking San Francisco on the Barbary Coast Trail (Second Edition), by Daniel Bacon*  
*Historic San Francisco, A Concise History and Guide, by Rand Richards*  
*Historic Walks in San Francisco, by Rand Richards*  
*San Francisco's Cable Cars, Riding the Rope Through Past and Present, by Joyce Jansen*  
*Infinite City, A San Francisco Atlas, by Rebecca Solnit*

