

## REFERENCE

# Michelangelo Park

## A History of the Site, from Before the Gold Rush to the Creation of the Park

Part I: 1847 to 1932 by William Kostura

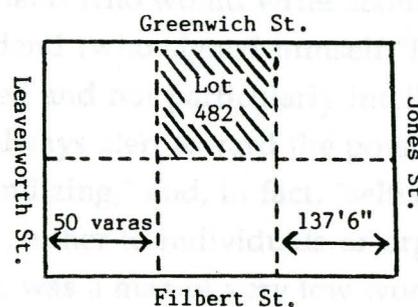
Part II: 1932 to 1992 by Catherine Mutz

Six years of effort have culminated in the creation of Michelangelo Park, on the eastern slope of Russian Hill, just above North Beach. The site has been owned by the city for 135 years and during this period was used as, or intended for, a hospital, three schools, a playground, and a community garden. The earliest history of this site has little in common with this tradition of civic benefit. Instead, its origins involved private ownership, a mysterious building, and a hint of public scandal.

#### The First Owner, Thomas Manchester

This part of the city was first surveyed in March, 1847 when Jasper O'Farrell expanded the boundaries of San Francisco from a small area around Portsmouth Square out to Francisco, Leavenworth and Post streets. This area was far larger than was needed by the pre-gold rush village, and so it was not until March, 1848 that 50-vara lot #482 was granted by the city to one Thomas Manchester.

In O'Farrell's survey, each block north of Market Street was divided into six lots which measured 50 varas square. (A vara is the Spanish yard, which is 33 inches in length. 50 vara lots accordingly measured 137'6" to a side.) Manchester's was the middle lot on the south side of Greenwich, between Jones and Leavenworth. It has never been subdivided or added to, and so Michelangelo Park has the same boundaries as Manchester's original lot.



Thomas Manchester was born in Ohio in 1824 and worked on a Mississippi River steamboat during his youth. In 1846 he crossed the

plains with a company of settlers, and on his arrival in California he participated in the Mexican War with John C. Fremont. Afterward he happened to be in San Francisco during a sale of town lots, and saw no reason why he shouldn't acquire one. The property was so distant from Portsmouth Square that it seemed impossible to foresee the time when it would be worth anything, but the price was nominal -- sixteen dollars plus a recording fee. And so on March 14, 1848 Manchester purchased the lot on Greenwich from the city.

When news of the gold discovery in the Sierras became public two months later, Manchester joined the general exodus from San Francisco to mine for gold. Naturally, he had an advantage over the mass of "49ers" who arrived a year later, and he did fairly well, gathering over \$5,000. He then returned to San Francisco, and with a portion of his earnings purchased two or three pre-fab corrugated iron houses which had been shipped around the horn. These houses were one story in height, of small dimensions, and simple to put together. He erected them on his Greenwich Street lot in c. 1849 -- the first structures to be built on the Michelangelo Park site. Manchester and a man named William Richardson (a friend who may have traveled to California with Manchester in 1846) lived in these houses far from the built up portion of the city.

At a slightly later date Manchester returned to the mining area on the Yuba River to search for gold again. Fortunately for this history, he was accompanied by a friend who would write about him many years later for the *Examiner*. This friend (who signed himself "Fides") described Manchester as uneducated and not particularly intelligent, but with an active mind which was always alert toward the possibilities for profit. He was "acquisitive," "aggrandizing," and, in fact, "selfish to the last degree." He never gave in charity, either to individuals or organizations. He "... had very few sympathies, was a man of very few words, made but few acquaintances, and his friends were ... few and far between." "He was taciturn and frequently morose. And yet with all this we had a high regard for him, for his integrity was undoubted and inflexible."

"Fides" returned to San Francisco and stayed with Manchester in his iron houses on Greenwich Street. Manchester now, in late 1850, began to purchase more land in San Francisco, including a group of nineteen 50-vara lots on Russian Hill just north of Greenwich Street. Manchester had high hopes for these and his Greenwich Street lot, for North Beach was expected to become the business district, and the adjacent hillsides to rise in value accordingly.

They never did, but while he was waiting Manchester cleared and fenced some of the land and planted peas and other vegetables on it. It is unclear from "Fides's" account whether the Greenwich Street lot was part of the cultivated area. When the produce was harvested, William Richardson peddled it at the gold rush rate of seventy-five cents to a dollar a pound. "This may appear astonishing to those recently arrived in California," "Fides" wrote in 1869, "but not to early settlers in the country."

Manchester sold off his northern Russian Hill lots in 1851-3, disappointed in the appreciation in their value. Perhaps this was a means of raising funds for his next project. He cleared the Greenwich Street lot of the iron houses, and sometime during the period 1852-4 built a two story brick building, 63' wide by 58' deep, at the northwest corner of the lot. What the purpose of this building was is entirely unclear. In its size and materials it resembled a warehouse or factory building, but Russian Hill was an unusual location for such uses; all warehouses and most factories in San Francisco were located on flat ground, on or near the waterfront, for easy transportation. It could have been an apartment building, but this would have been a major gamble on Manchester's part, for virtually all dense housing was located close to downtown at this time. All the other buildings in this neighborhood were frame houses of modest proportions, and there were still very few of these in 1854. Manchester's building stood nearly alone, overwhelming its neighbors by its dimensions.

As we shall see, Manchester sold this building and lot in 1855. His history ends soon afterward. About the time of the sale, or a little later, he fell into "very intemperate habits." On the night of May 23, 1856, a

watchman found him asleep at the end of Meiggs' Wharf, his limbs dangling over the edge. Apparently he had been drinking. Fearing for Manchester's safety, the watchman instructed him to leave, but as he walked back toward the city, Manchester fell over the side of the wharf and drowned before he could be rescued.

### The City and County Hospital

During the first half of the 1850s one of the most expensive and vexing problems facing the city of San Francisco was the establishment of a hospital for the indigent sick. Prior to 1855 the city had contracted with various individuals and institutions to provide this service. Its worst experience was in 1850-1 with Dr. Peter Smith, who soon rang up a bill of \$64,000. The city was broke at the time, and to pay off the debt, the courts forced the city to auction off its waterfront and other property. As the Legislature was passing an act to pay off such debts through less drastic means, it declared the auctions illegal. Few therefore attended, property was auctioned for a fraction of its true value, and city property worth millions was sold to retire the debt. All these "Peter Smith titles" were subsequently held to be valid.

In December, 1853 the Kremlin Hotel on Stockton Street, between Broadway and Vallejo, was converted into a hospital to be run on the contract system at city expense. The building was clean, and physicians attended the patients on a regular basis, but care was still inadequate. In competition for the contract, the owners of the hospital agreed to take a sum of money per patient per diem. This sum was inadequate for life-threatening cases.

It became clear that San Francisco needed its own hospital for charity cases, and on May 22, 1855 the Board of Supervisors resolved the matter by deciding to buy Thomas Manchester's 50-vara lot and brick building on Greenwich Street, and to convert the building into a hospital. The cost of the purchase was not to exceed \$24,000. Authorization was also given to continue operations at the Kremlin Hotel through the end of

June while the new hospital building was being remodeled for the reception of patients.

Two days after the Board of Supervisors meeting, Thomas Manchester deeded his property to the city, presumably for the full \$24,000.

Work proceeded on the Hospital building, but over two months later it was still unoccupied. The Grand Jury's semiannual report on the state of the city commented on the situation (July 31st):

"We examined the building lately purchased and fitted up for a County Hospital, and find it unfit in every particular for hospital purposes -- the purchase and alterations being a gross imposition -- the property not being worth one half the money paid for and expended on it."

(The Grand Jury was not out to criticize everything related to city government. It had praise for the schools and Orphan Asylums.)

Citizens of San Francisco added their voices in a mounting criticism. A letter to the *Alta* newspaper (August 11) said that some Supervisors were becoming wary of the expense needed for "enlarging and occupying the newly purchased building on Greenwich Street," and the author of the letter hinted at municipal corruption.

In mid-August the city took over operation of the "Kremlin Hotel" hospital on Stockton Street, putting an end to the contract system. Unfortunately the building was becoming dilapidated, and repairs were deferred because of the prospects of removal to the Greenwich Street site as soon as alterations were completed.

Nearly a year later the brick building on Greenwich was still unoccupied, its fate in limbo. At least one person decided the situation called for levity, and we reprint his letter to the *Evening Bulletin* of July 18, 1856 in full:

"Squatters Wanted!"

"Several families can be accommodated with airy and comfortable rooms, in the buildings purchased by the Common Council for the City

Hospital, on Filbert st. [sic]. The situation of these buildings is pleasant, and the air salubrious. The rooms have never been used for hospital purposes, and there is no taint of disease about the walls.

"Persons owning horses can be furnished with stabling, the city making no charge for anything on the premises.

"There is also a good well of water in the yard, and a fine place to dry clothing in the balcony.

"Timid people can be assured that the building is every way adapted for a comfortable residence, and that they need not be suspicious of it, because the County Supervisors rejected it for hospital purposes. The Supervisors had no objections to the building itself, it being in every respect better adapted for the purposes of such an institution than the one now rented by the city; but the building on Stockton street, at present used as a City Hospital, being owned by a friend of the Board who received funds, it was hired to accommodate him. Parties may be assured, then, that the building now lying idle is, in all respects, good and servicable, and wanting tenants, the few there having no objections to an increase, as the premises are roomy.

#### CAUTION

"The Superintendent of Public Buildings cautions occupants not to use the partitions for firewood, until the doors and windows are all burned.

"Parents, especially the city Fathers, are invited to view the premises.

"For further particulars call at an empty treasury."

#### The Greenwich Street School House

San Francisco seemed determined now not to use the Greenwich Street building and lot as a hospital, possibly due to the Grand Jury's stinging report of 1855. The city did eventually find a solution to its problems -- through an absurd and costly maneuver which created problems for years to come.

The Board of Education had (in 1854) built a fine school house at the southwest corner of Francisco and Stockton streets. Now, in mid-1857, the Supervisors made a trade with the Board of Education: the Francisco and Stockton school would be converted into a hospital, and the empty "Hospital" building on Greenwich would become a school. On July 18, 1857 the City and County Hospital -- the first owned and operated by the city -- was opened at Francisco and Stockton streets. It received 53 patients from the rented hospital building seven blocks to the south and served for fifteen years. The hospital then moved out to its present location on Potrero Avenue at 23rd Street.

On Russian Hill, Thomas Manchester's brick building finally found a use, but not until \$16,291 (by one source) was spent to alter it for schoolrooms. Classes began in January, 1858. The building served technically at first as two schools of different grade levels. For the record, Mrs. R. D. Bird was the principal of the Greenwich Street Primary School, and Miss M. S. Morgan was principal of the Greenwich Street Intermediate School. No doubt some of the students were those who had previously attended the school at Francisco and Stockton streets.

Not long after the Board of Education acquired the Manchester site, it paid \$1,500 to grade the balance of the lot to a level surface, probably as a playground. It would seem that only the ground the building stood on had previously been graded.

Attendance figures for the year 1860 show that they were by far the lowest of any of the city's public schools. Only 88 pupils were registered, and the average daily attendance was 42. These figures rose as the neighborhood was built up, and in 1862 the enrollment was 192. The four main rooms were furnished with 190 seats and 23 benches. The annual tuition fee was \$13.58.

When attendance peaked in 1865-6 at 364 students and seven teachers, conditions were crowded and uncomfortable. One problem was that when Greenwich Street was graded in 1864, the grade of the street was apparently raised, not lowered. The fill material raised the sloping street higher than the first story windows of the school, blocking light and

ventilation, and causing dampness. The School Department's own reports called the building "untenable" and described it thusly: "The building contains four rooms not very suitable for use; two are good. There are also two basement rooms, quite habitable in good weather." This wasn't good enough, and to its credit the Department closed the Greenwich Street School in April, 1867.

Initially the city had proposed demolishing the building and replacing it with a new structure, but a cheaper solution was found when a lot on the north side of Filbert, between Taylor and Jones, was donated to the city. A new, wood frame school house was built here, and the students from Greenwich Street were transferred. Despite the high quality of the new school house, this was not a permanent solution, for the population of the district had increased so much the new school was overcrowded soon after it opened.

As a result, in 1869 the Greenwich Street building was once again pressed into service after standing vacant for two years. It was considered to be a subsidiary branch of the new school on Filbert. The lower grades attended the Greenwich Street Cosmopolitan Primary School, as it was now called, and the higher grades went to the North Cosmopolitan Grammar School on Filbert. The term "cosmopolitan" was highly significant; these schools were an experiment in a new kind of education in San Francisco, one with a very strong emphasis on teaching foreign languages (German, French, and Spanish). Such a course was opposed by many at first, but, in the words of the Superintendent of Public Schools, John C. Pelton, the system "is now exceedingly popular in the community, and enjoys a very intelligent and excellent patronage. Most of its former opponents are now its advocates -- some its warmest supporters" (1867). In 1869, when the old building on Greenwich was reopened, 480 pupils crowded into eight classes. (635 students attended the grammar school on Filbert.)

### The New School Building

The children of North Beach and Russian Hill endured five years of enlightened instruction in a poor building; then, in 1874, the city demolished Thomas Manchester's old building to make way for a new building on the site. Everyone must have breathed a sigh of relief. This district, said the Superintendent of Public Schools in his 1875 report, "has so long suffered for want of a suitable building."

The new building, completed in July, 1875, was more than just suitable; it was commodious and handsome. It stood three stories and a basement in height and was cross-shaped in plan. The main block measured 52' wide by 80' in depth, with side wings measuring 13' by 35'. The Superintendent's report mentioned the "large and cheerful rooms" and the emphasis given to ventilation in the design. The third floor rooms were connected by sliding doors. Janitors' and storage rooms were located in the basement. The school was built by the contractor Thomas Noble and Co. at a cost of \$29,500.

The architect was John P. Gaynor, who is still famous as the architect of the first Palace hotel in San Francisco and the extant, cast-iron Haughwout Building in New York City. He gave the building Italianate features -- rounded and triangular pediments over the windows, and a bracketed cornice. This was to be expected, as San Francisco was in an Italianate phase, and virtually all buildings built here in 1875 were in that style. In fact, the design of the school was not very original. It closely resembled the North Cosmopolitan School on Filbert Street, designed nine years earlier by William Patton.

The question arises as to whether the fine stone retaining walls which now line the western and northern boundaries of the park date from the construction of the school house. 1875 seems to be the most likely date for the walls, but it is possible that they were built later. They were probably in place before the earthquake and fire of 1906, because concrete was generally used for such walls after that date.

The new Greenwich Street Primary School was a very busy place, for it was built with a capacity for 720 students -- a density which was probably reached, for the neighborhood continued to build up between the 1870s and the turn-of-the-century. Fortunately the Board of Education was diligent in its upkeep of school buildings, and lavished funds toward repairs of this school building in 1896.

In 1892 the name was changed to the Sarah B. Cooper School, named after the founder and president of the Golden Gate Kindergarten Association. This was the largest of San Francisco's free kindergartens established for poor and neglected children, and was part of a nationwide movement of such kindergartens at this time.

#### 1906-1932

The Sarah B. Cooper School was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906 along with most of the rest of San Francisco, including almost everything east of Van Ness Avenue. Two fire breaks - at Washington Street, and then along Green Street - very nearly stopped the spreading fire, but bad luck prevailed, and the school building burned on the third day of the fire, April 20th.

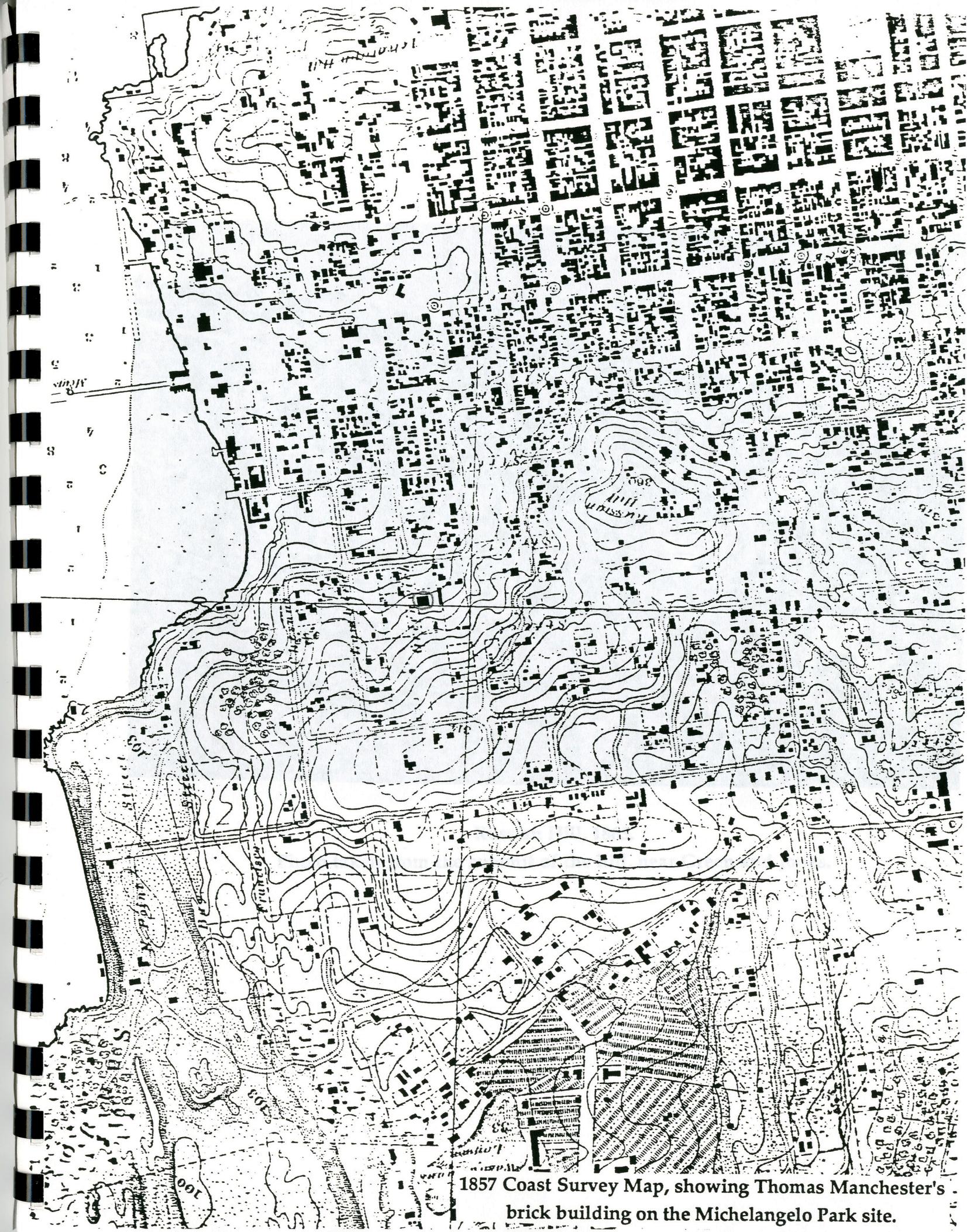
There was need for an early replacement. Over a hundred homes did survive on Russian Hill, mainly the area north of Lombard or Chestnut streets and west of Leavenworth, and a few doughty homeowners in the burned district rebuilt in the year after the fire. The children of these families could not hike over the hill to the unburned schools in the Marina district.

Accordingly, the Board of Education built a "temporary frame building" of six rooms on the Cooper School site in 1906, at a cost of \$1,200. Three class rooms were added in 1908, and a third "temporary" building of fifteen rooms was built on the lot in 1911.

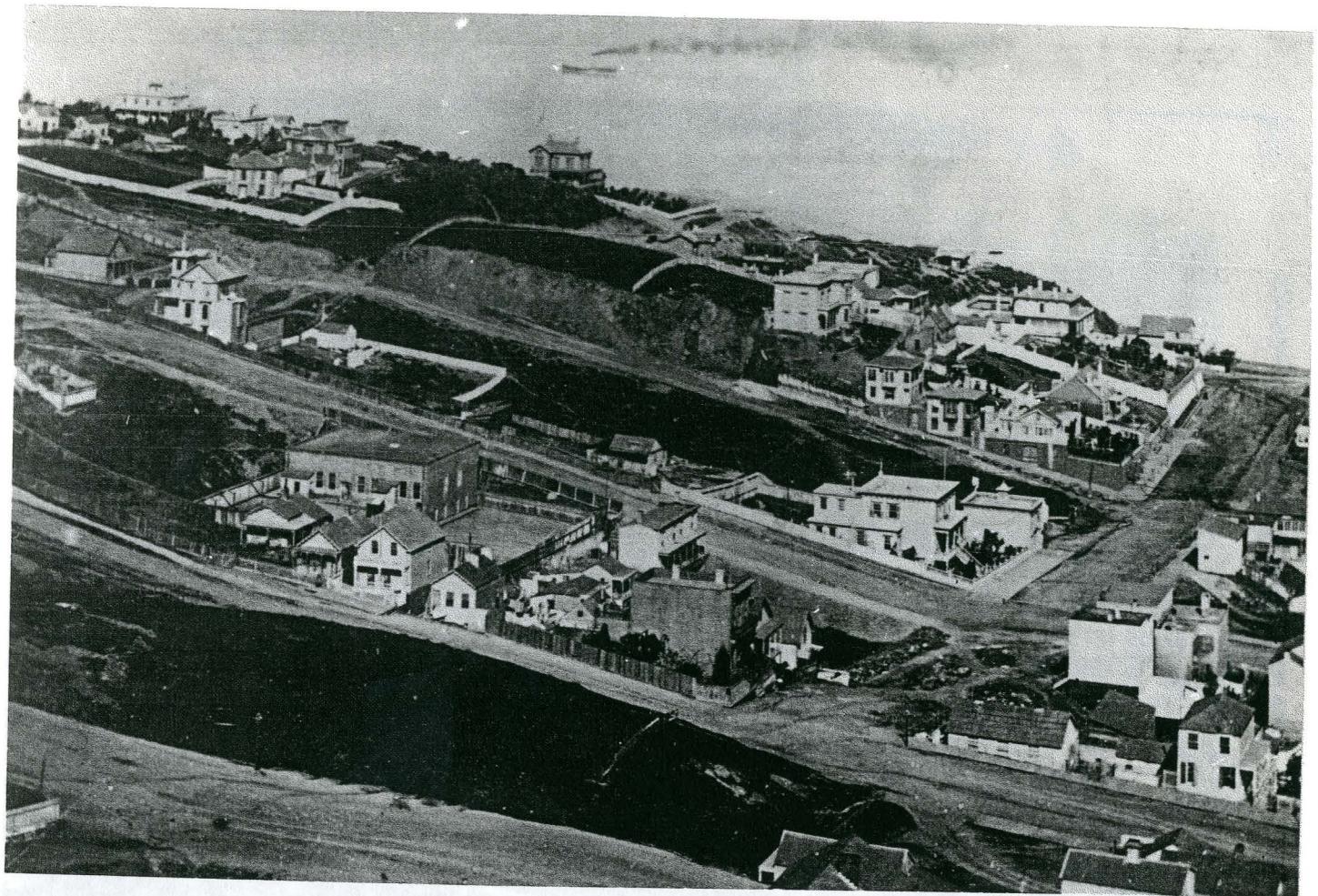
By this year the neighborhood was about half rebuilt, and not with single family dwellings, as before the fire, but with flats, which greatly increased the density of Russian Hill and North Beach. Therefore, in 1917,

a new school was built at the southwest corner of Lombard and Jones, where Yick Wo School now stands. This new building became the Sarah B. Cooper School, and the "temporary" buildings on Greenwich continued to be used as the "Sarah B. Cooper Annex." In 1922 this name was dropped, and the school on Greenwich became known as the Michelangelo School, after the great Italian artist and sculptor. This was a fitting name, since much of the area had been Italian since the turn of the century.

Use of the Michelangelo School began to wind down after that date. In August, 1926 the city decided to "sell at public auction all buildings at the Michelangelo School except for one, which is along the west side of the property and is now used as an open air classroom." It is unknown whether anyone bid on the buildings and removed them from the lot, whole or piecemeal, or whether the city had to demolish them. In 1928 the nearly empty lot was converted into a playground operated by Recreation and Park, while the Board of Education continued to own the property. The 1929 Sanborn Map shows the lot as a playground and the last building on the site as a "Club house," so it seems doubtful that classes were held there after 1928. Nevertheless, city directories continued to list Michelangelo School at 1055 Greenwich until 1932. After this date school activities ceased on the site forever.



1857 Coast Survey Map, showing Thomas Manchester's brick building on the Michelangelo Park site.



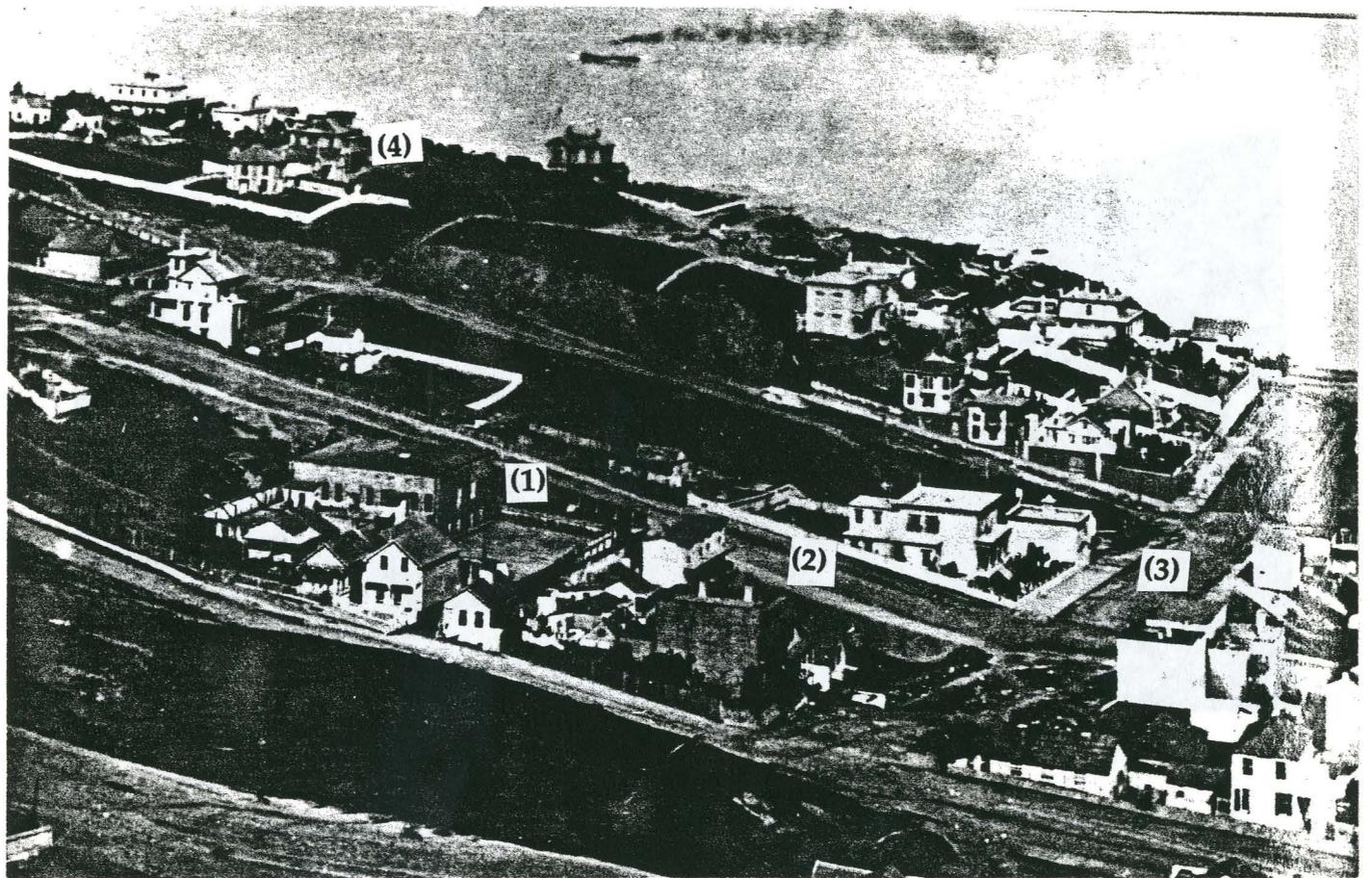
**Russian Hill, 1865.**

**Photo taken from the summit of the hill, near Green and Jones.**

121 - Green and Jones

122 - Jones Street

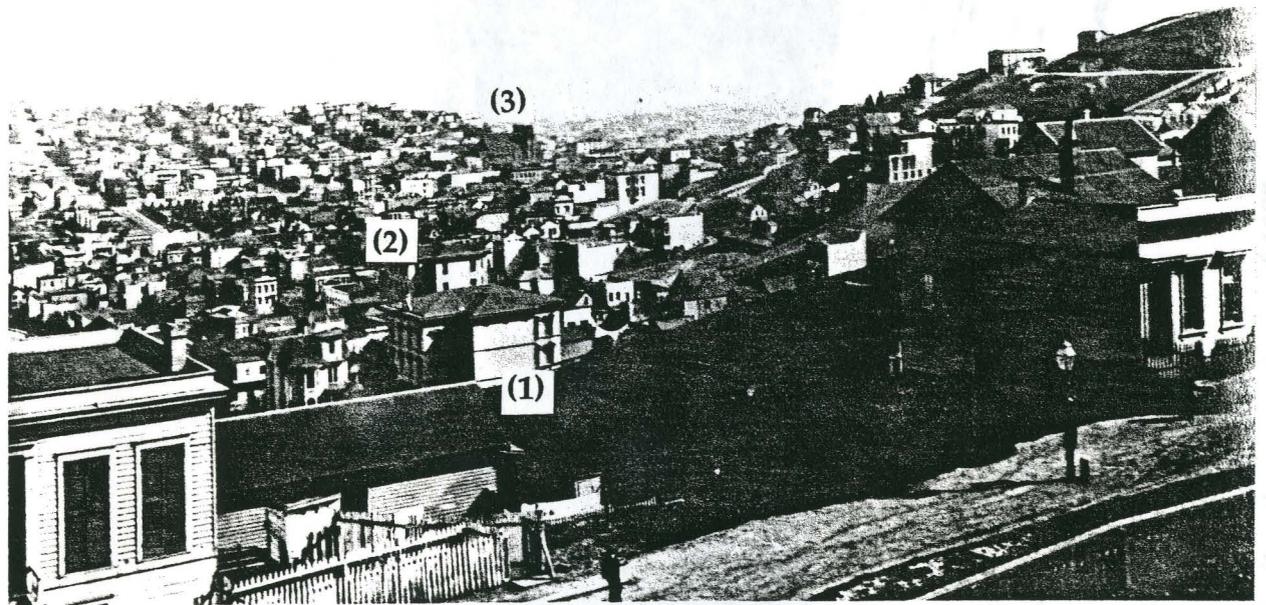
123 - This house at 904 Chestnut is the only building in the  
photograph which still stands.



- (1) Greenwich Street Primary School
- (2) Greenwich Street
- (3) Jones Street
- (4) This house at 944 Chestnut is the only building in the photograph which still stands.



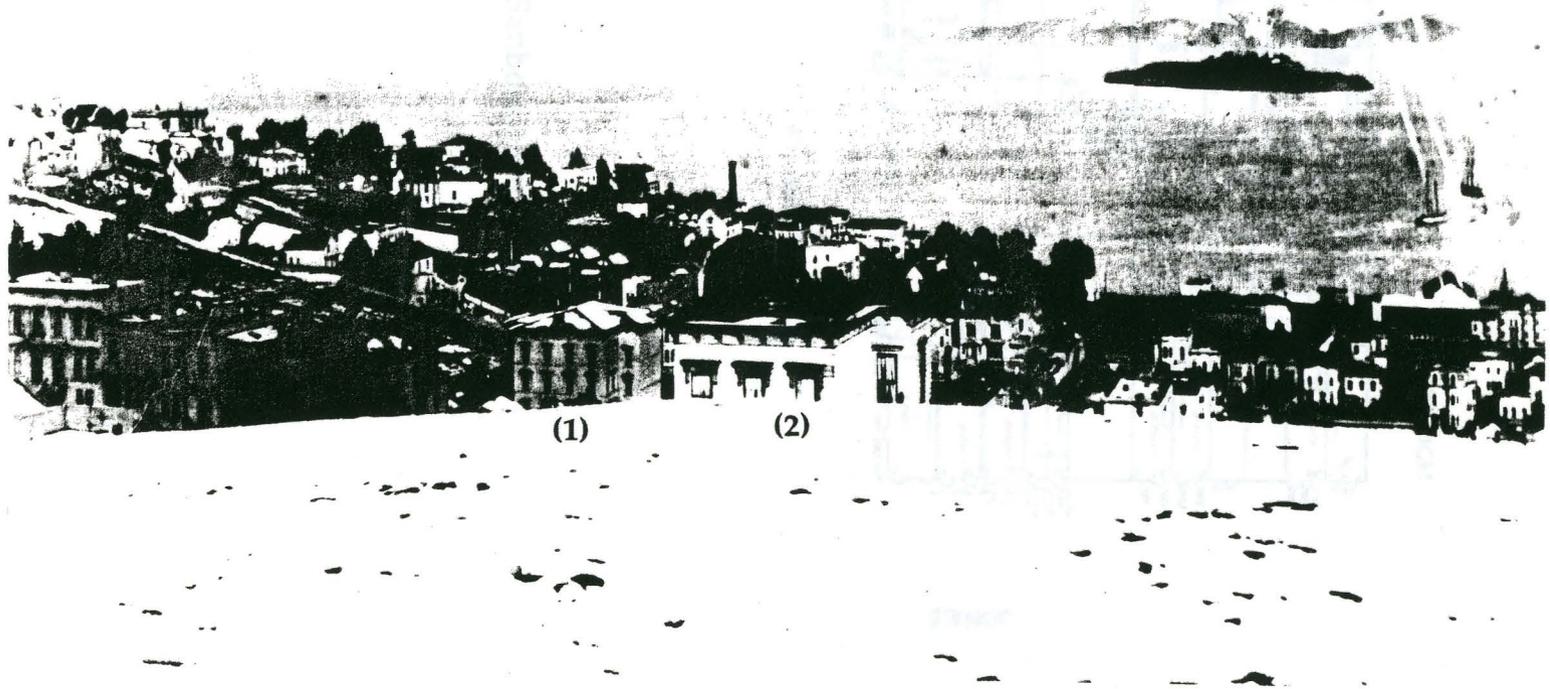
Photo taken from Hyde Street, between Greenwich and Lombard,  
about 1880.



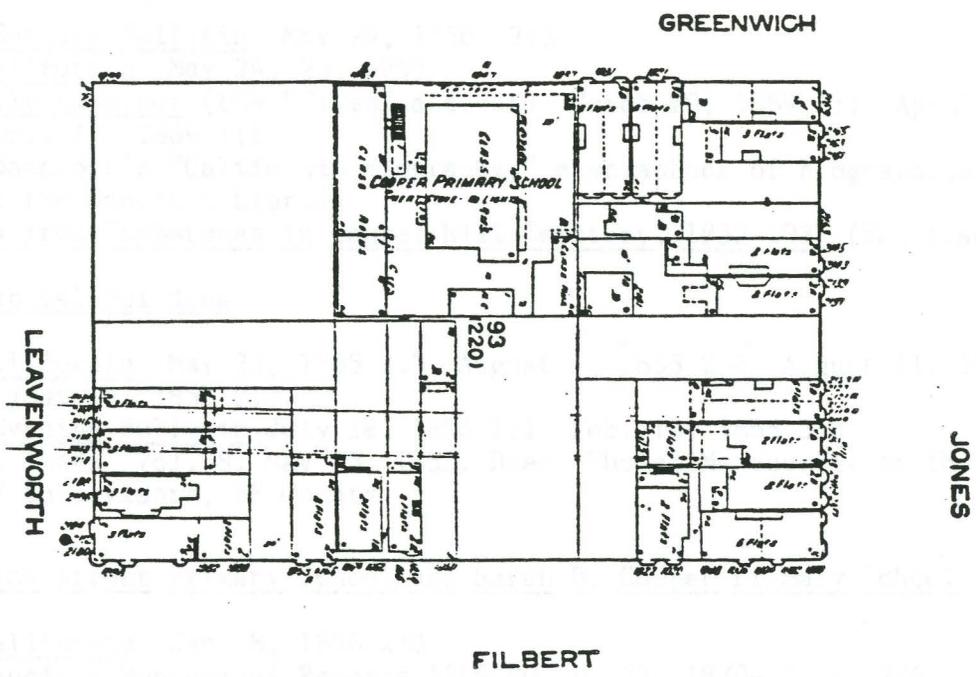
- (1) Greenwich Street Cosmopolitan Primary School
- (2) North Cosmopolitan Grammar School, on Filbert between Taylor and Jones.
- (3) St. Francis Church, which still stands on Vallejo Street, at Columbus Avenue.



Russian Hill after the snowstorm of 1887



(1) Greenwich Street Cosmopolitan Primary School  
(2) 982 Green, which still stands



1913 Sanborn Insurance Map

City of San Francisco, California  
 San Francisco City Directory, 1870, p. 77  
 Annual Report of the Board of Education of San Francisco, 1870-71, p. 20, 23  
 1876, p. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22  
 A Statement of the Location and Area of the Public Schools of San Francisco, 1876  
 p. 5  
 The Real Estate Record and Guide, San Francisco, California, 1876  
 Intelligence Section, San Francisco, California, 1876  
 The School Buildings, 1876-1877  
 Voluted, unadorned, etc., etc., of 1876, showing that school buildings  
 were built on the site of 1876 and 1877  
 San Francisco City Directory, 1876, p. 77  
 Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1913 and 1914

## Sources

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Daily Evening Bulletin May 24, 1856 2:3

Alta California May 24, 25, 1856

The Daily Examiner (the "Fides" account) March 29, 1869 1:1 April 7, 1869 1:1  
April 13, 1869 1:1

H. H. Bancroft's "California Biography," a scrapbook of biographical clippings  
at the Bancroft Library

Records from Tombstones in Laurel Hill Cemetery, 1853-1937 (San Francisco: 1935)

### The Hospital Building

Alta California May 23, 1855 2:3 August 1, 1855 2:4 August 11, 1855 2:3  
August 16, 1855 2:3

Daily Evening Bulletin July 18, 1856 1:1 Feb. 10, 1865 3:3

General Index, Vol. 8. May 25, 1855. Deed, Thomas Manchester to the Board  
of Supervisors, SF County

### Greenwich Street Primary School and Sarah B. Cooper Primary School 1858-1896

Alta California Jan. 8, 1858 2:3

San Francisco Municipal Reports 1859-60, p. 72 1870-71, p. 276  
1881-2, p. 622

San Francisco City Directories 1858, p. 37 1859, p. 31 1860 1875, p. 19  
1876, p. 17-18 1892, p. 77 (re: Sarah B. Cooper)

Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools 1861-2 1866, p. 20, 23  
1867, p. 30, 43-5 1870 1875, p. 32-3, 124

A Statement of the Condition and Wants of the Public School Department, 1866  
p. 8, 40, 63, 64

The Real Estate Circular (San Francisco) Nov., 1872, 1:3

California Architect and Building News May and October, 1896 (Building  
Intelligence Section for repairs to the school).

### The School Buildings 1906-1932

Undated, handwritten notes, files of SFUSD, showing that school buildings  
were built on the site in 1906 and 1911

San Francisco City Directory listings 1911-1932

Sanborn Insurance Maps 1913 and 1929

Department had agreed to open the area for a trial period. At the same time, a group of mothers formed a club to assist in operation. A celebration--a children's New Year's party on December 31, 1953--marked the success of the petition drive, the efforts of the community, the organization of the mothers, and the cooperation of the City: the playground reopened.

In January 1954, interested mothers formed a guild out of their club. Working with representatives of the Recreation and Park Department, the guild saw to the revitalization of the playground. Chairs, tables, play equipment were installed. The area functioned from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mondays through Saturdays. Organized activities (paper craft, knitting and sewing, dancing and singing, creative arts, storytelling) took place from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Organized games occurred on Saturdays. Programs operated during the school year and in the summer.

The Recreation and Park Commission minutes in 1955 and 1956 indicate that a bond issue passed that included the Michelangelo Field House (formerly called the "Club House," and referred to as the "open air" classroom). \$50,000 was set aside for construction and repairs. Sometime in the early 1960s this building was demolished (another structure, a shed, had been built in the 1950s and remains at the site today), but the property continued to function as a playground, especially busy on summer afternoons.

Information is scanty about the 1970s and the early 1980s. The property served as an additional school yard to nearby elementary schools (Sarah B. Cooper and John Hancock), but the playground ceased to function as a site for organized recreational activities by the early 1980s. Ruth Asawa, under CETA auspices, started gardens which were tended in the mid-1970s by neighbors and students from the Sarah B. Cooper School. Looking at the area in May 1984, a small group of North Beach Neighbors' members saw the possibility of planting community gardens in the west end of the property. With the help of the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG), the Trust for Public Land, and the San Francisco Conservation

Corps, twenty gardeners prepared the soil and planted flowers and vegetables. They negotiated a lease with the Board of Education. While attending School Board meetings, the neighbor-gardeners became aware of possible plans for a new use for the Michelangelo property. Concern was generated that private developers might be interested in the site. To retain this 18,934 square feet area as open space, North Beach Neighbors (NBN), a community organization, developed a proposal to create a new public park on the site of the old playground and adjacent to the community garden plots. To interest neighbors, to attract members to NBN, and to raise money, the organization sponsored two hoedown festivals at the playground (1984, 1985). Finding sufficient interest among neighbors, Nan McGuire, board member of NBN, one of the gardeners, and a concerned resident near Michelangelo Playground, presented a proposal (along with a site-design developed by Kitty Croucher, another gardener) to the San Francisco Open Space Committee on October 16, 1984. The response for funding the proposal was favorable but conditional upon the transference of the property from the Board of Education to the City for the Recreation and Park Department, so that it could be considered for open space status.

The property transfer became part of a complex package involving not only Michelangelo Playground but also the Polytechnic High School site and property at 7th Avenue and Lawton Street. In February 1985, the Board of Education passed a resolution to effect the transfers. Final action was on May 28, 1985; however, the actual transfers did not occur until August 4, 1986, and only after considerable lobbying efforts by neighbors.

What took place in the complicated package was this: The Board of Education leased the Polytechnic High School site to the City and County of San Francisco (in consideration of a prepayment of \$2,500,000) for a 75 year term, to be used for affordable housing. The City leased (at no cost) to the School District, for a term of 75 years, property at 7th Avenue and Lawton Street for the construction of a school. Upon execution of the lease, the School District then transferred clear

title to Michelangelo Playground to the City for open space/recreational purposes.

Meanwhile, in April 1985, the Open Space Committee allocated a \$150,000 grant, contingent on the property transfer, for the planning and development of what was to become Michelangelo Park. In September 1985, Nan McGuire made a second presentation to the committee. An additional allocation of \$134,000, given in the spring of 1986, made the total Open Space grant \$284,000. Planning for the park commenced in the fall of 1986. First, the staff of the Department of Public Works prepared a site analysis. What was there? Two swings, a slide, a play area with no play value or amenities, an unsightly fence, two basketball standards, and cracked asphalt. Second, volunteers completed a demographic study of the surrounding neighborhoods to look at potential users of the park. Next, local architect Michael Olexo articulated a concept of using volunteers and "in kind" contributions to complement the funds already allocated for the park. He presented his ideas to the staff of the Recreation and Park Department, members of the Open Space Committee, and various community organizations.

In January 1987, an organization called The Friends of Michelangelo (FOM) formed to oversee the development of the park. Members were local architects Michael Olexo and Scott Perry; Nan McGuire, Bill Pruzan, and Carolyn Gates from North Beach Neighbors; and Jerry Dunphy who was one of the regular users of the site for his tai chi exercises. In February, the first of six public workshops took place to involve the community in the design process and to enlist volunteer commitment. Deborah Learner, Park Planner of the Recreation and Park Department, and Edward Janelli, Senior Architect of the Department of Public Works (DPW), joined the sessions, led by Michael Olexo and Scott Perry. On June 18, 1987, the Recreation and Park Commission approved (Resolution #14743) the conceptual plan. When the planning was completed, organizers realized that construction would require an additional \$100,000. The budget was now at \$384,000. FOM decided then to formalize an agreement with the Friends of

Recreation and Parks, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, making the Friends the fiscal agent for FOM and allowing FOM to raise the additional \$100,000 as a contribution from the community. FOM used a three-pronged approach: traditional fund raising from individual residents of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and Russian Hill, and the business and foundation community; "in kind" contributions from the professional landscape and construction community; and recruitment of neighborhood volunteers to help with fund raising efforts and to undertake landscape work under volunteer professional supervision.

The fund raising campaign began on May 15, 1988. Parties, bulk mailings, endorsements, publicity, and recruitment of volunteers continued through 1988. Because of a newspaper article by Jon Carroll in The San Francisco Chronicle (June 16, 1988), contributions came from all over the Bay Area and from Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. A ground breaking fund raiser took place on September 18, 1988, with Mayor Art Agnos in attendance. He called the park a model for neighborhood activism: "What started as a collective dream is turning into a living monument to the San Francisco spirit. It's going to be more than just trees and grass. It's going to be a reflection of the neighborhood's talent and resourcefulness." This event included a silent auction of donated works by local artists, a raffle, food sales, entertainment, and a used-book corner. The event was held in anticipation of the beginning of construction. The project had gone out to bid that same month; however, only one contractor made a submission, and it was far in excess of DPW estimates. The bid had to be reformulated and readvertised. The project went out to bid a second time in January 1989. In April, the contract was awarded to Cuevas-Mannion Construction. Work began on May 31, 1989. The final fund raiser, which took the effort "over the top," occurred on June 11. On March 12, 1990, the Recreation and Park Department officially took over the maintenance of the park, following a final inspection by DPW. On June 21, the Recreation and Park Commission formally accepted the "gift in place" from FOM in the amount of

Recreation and Parks, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, making the Friends the fiscal agent for FOM and allowing FOM to raise the additional \$100,000 as a contribution from the community. FOM used a three-pronged approach: traditional fund raising from individual residents of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and Russian Hill, and the business and foundation community; "in kind" contributions from the professional landscape and construction community; and recruitment of neighborhood volunteers to help with fund raising efforts and to undertake landscape work under volunteer professional supervision.

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\$103,870 for the renovation of the park. \$58,870 had been raised in cash; \$45,000 in "in kind" contributions.

Volunteers played an important role in bringing the project to fruition. All the community organizers volunteered their time. The San Francisco Conservation Corps not only did the demolition work but they also installed the playground equipment. Contractors donated parts of the irrigation system. A significant "in kind" contribution was the labor of forty-two adults and four children who planted the landscape materials on February 3, 1990. Supervising the planting were: Jon Huttinger of Recreation and Park Department, Michael Olexo of Olexo Architecture, and Myron Grossman of Frank and Grossman Landscaping. Mr. Grossman also ordered plant materials and secured a donation of sod for lawn.

As completed, Michelangelo Park retains 21 community garden plots (with three of the original members), but the rest of the area has been transformed: a half basketball court adjacent to a tennis backboard; a small stage/sitting area; lawn spaces surrounded by shrubs and flowers; trees and pathways; a sundeck with picnic table on the roof of the gardeners' shed; wooden stairs that can double as amphitheater seating for the stage; and a play area for children with a tire swing, slides, and climbing equipment in a sunken sand enclosure.

The park is well used by residents as well as by the teachers and children from the nearby Yick Wo Elementary School, the Sarah B. Cooper Children's Center, and the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Center. Upkeep of the park is by Marilyn Cassol, Recreation and Park gardener, who has maintained the area since its opening.

Neighbor and community involvement continues. For example, shortly after the park opened in March 1990, several mothers gathered a petition asking for installation of restroom facilities. The petitioners appeared before the Open Space Advisory Committee the following September to request funds. The Friends of Michelangelo (FOM) augmented the funding by offering funds remaining from its

original fund raising activities. The Recreation and Park Commission approved a design rendered by architect F. Joseph Butler who as a parent-user of the park donated his services. The restroom facility will be constructed in late 1992 or early 1993: it will be located in the gardeners' shed which will be modified.

Neighborhood involvement also takes the form of tradition. Each Halloween, children from the Yick Wo School carve pumpkins (provided by North Beach Neighbors), light them, and place them throughout the park. The occasion is a party where children and adults gather in costume and gardeners provide treats, continuing a celebration begun by Marsha Garland and others before the park was constructed.

Michelangelo Park is truly "a model of what community grass roots efforts can achieve in tandem with the City." (Susan Herbert, San Francisco Independent, February 15, 1989) The park also shows that "Community gardens can coexist within the playground environment and become a very important element of the urban playground experience." (Ron DeLeon, Superintendent of Parks, San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, California Parks and Recreation magazine, 1991). The popularity of these gardens at Michelangelo Park is attested to by a waiting list (averaging 20) of people who wish to join this ongoing community effort.

## SOURCES

Files of Nan McGuire (correspondence, newspaper articles, grant proposals, fund raising literature, brochures, invitations; list of milestones: 1984-1988)

Files of the Planning Office, San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (copies of resolutions, photographs, correspondence, architectural drawings)

Files of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco

## APPENDICES

List of contributors (individual; business, foundation, and organization)

List of volunteers who planted

Brochures

Photographs

Newspaper articles

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Falkenstein, Hilda  
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Fay, Leslie  
Fay, Mary  
Faye, Chuck & DeDe  
Feldman, Rhoda & Arthur  
Firenze, Joya  
Foster, Thorne & Dennis  
Fox, Tami  
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Francis, Paul & Doris  
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Frank Phil  
Frankenberg, Joyce  
Friedlander, Judith  
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Geiger, Angie  
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Le Roe, Ellen  
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Meyer, George & Amy  
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Milligan, Jeanne  
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Oberly, Erin  
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Olmsted, Barney & Jerry  
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Reed, John  
Reina, Salvatore  
Rendon, Armando  
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Rodgers, Mary  
Rosen, Marsha  
Rosen, Marty  
Roth, Mr. & Mrs. Nathan  
Rotner, Philip  
Ryan, Charles  
Salpeter, Terry  
Saltnes, Norman  
Salvi, Steve  
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Schroeder, Janet M.  
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Selix, Leah  
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Simonn, Mr. & Mrs. Harold  
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Stewart, Augusta & John  
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Strauss, Francis  
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Strong, Dwight  
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Summers, Jean  
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Talley, Elsie  
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 Toby, Frances  
 Tom, Ella Mae  
 Tong, Shirlene  
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 Witte, Karen  
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 Young, Patricia  
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BUSINESS, FOUNDATION, AND ORGANIZATION CONTRIBUTORS

A. Cavalli & Co.  
 Alioto's Restaurant  
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 The Anchorage Shopping Center  
 Biordi Art Imports  
 Andre-Boudin Bakeries  
 Cafe Jacqueline  
 Caffe Malvina II  
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Thomas, Yoshiko  
Thompson, Andrew

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MICHELANGELO PLAYGROUND--1988

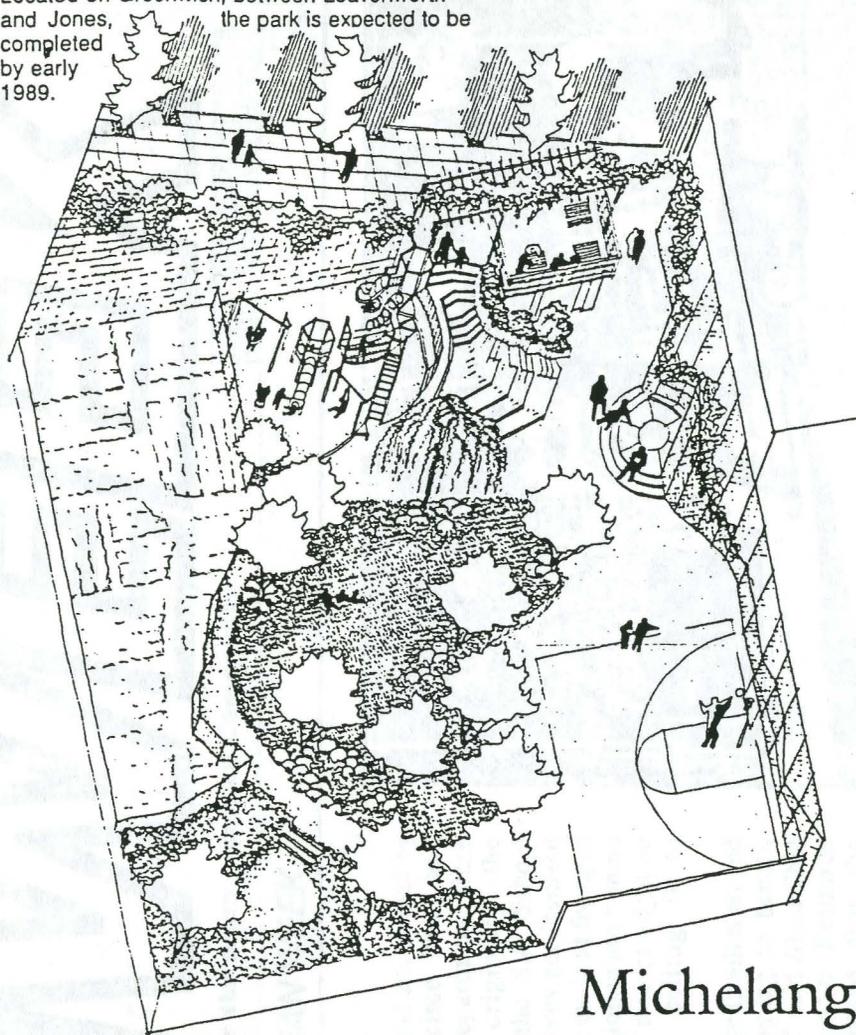


PLANTING OF MICHELANGELO PARK--February 3, 1990



MICHELANGELO PARK TODAY

Located on Greenwich, between Leavenworth and Jones, the park is expected to be completed by early 1989.



## Michelangelo Grows Roots on Russian Hill

**T**his fall, Mayor Art Agnos will shovel the first load of dirt for Michelangelo Park, on Greenwich between Leavenworth and Jones. San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department, with the help of some area residents known as the Friends of Michelangelo park, plans to build the 18,000 sq. ft. park on the site of a former Russian Hill Elementary School playground.

According to the Friends of Michelangelo Park, the design will include a playground,

community gardens, a basketball court, a small stage area and comfortable benches. They hope to complete the project by early 1989. Nan McGuire, who coordinates fund raising for the project, said the idea for the park came about because local residents wanted the site to remain open.

The site became expendable to the San Francisco School Board when Yick Wo School, located at 2245 Jones Street, opened in the neighborhood. Yick Wo, with a playground

of its own replaced Sarah B. Cooper School, which was demolished in 1982. Until Yick Wo was built, Michelangelo Park was the only playground available for students of Sarah Cooper and nearby John Hancock School, which has since become the Chinatown North Beach Community College Center.

Residents in the area feared that, given the school board's budget crisis, they might be inclined to sell the site to condominium developers. They proposed public gardens for the rectangular shaped parcel in 1984. The school board relieved their fears by responding to a request by the residents to put the land to immediate use.

*Continued on page 16*

## Michelangelo Park *continued from page 4*

McGuire said her group wanted to use the playground for public gardens so they could at least claim possession of the property while pushing to get the park completed. "We said we'll take the risk," McGuire said. "We figured a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

A transfer of the playground from the school district to the Parks and Recreation Department in August of 1986 assured that the park idea would get proper consideration from the city. Beginning in February 1986 local residents got directly involved in the park's planning in a series of meetings at the North Beach branch of the public library. Three volunteer landscape architects then worked together with the Landscape Architecture Department at the Department of Public Works to draw a final design for the project.

Total cost of the project will be \$374,000.

Initial funding came from the City's Open Space Committee, which allocated \$284,000 to get the project started during 1984 and 1985. An ongoing pledge drive and successful fundraiser held this spring have raised about \$33,000 so far.

McGuire says Friends of Michelangelo still needs to raise about \$57,000 to complete the park's construction. The group is planning a direct mail campaign to area residents, Bay Area businesses and foundations. In addition, Friends of Michelangelo park will host a fundraiser complete with live entertainment, food and a raffle featuring a variety of items donated by North Beach merchants. "Sunday in the Park with Michelangelo" will take place on Sunday, September 18 from noon to 4 pm.

Residents and businesses interested in the project can make donations or volunteer their services by calling McGuire at 673-7074.

# ASIAN WEEK

An English Language Journal for the Asian American Community

September 30, 1988

ASIAN WEEK

11

## Miracle In San Francisco: New Park Due Near C-town

By Judith A. Lyons

SAN FRANCISCO -- Efforts are currently underway to transform a graying Russian Hill former school playground site into a green, flower-dotted park with plenty of recreation equipment and space to boot.

"This will be an oasis in the middle of concrete," said Nan McGuire, who is an active force behind the push to find funds for the soon-to-be Michelangelo Park. "There's a high density of people in the area and a lot of tall buildings. There is very little greenery and trees are not in super-abundance."

Located on Greenwich Avenue between Leavenworth and Jones, Michelangelo Park, which organizers say will be of great benefit to the Asian American community in the neighborhood, is expected to be completed by early 1989.

"It will be a multi-use park," stressed McGuire. She said the park will include a *tai chi* exercise area, community garden, basketball court, performing arts stage, picnic tables and a tennis backboard.

In addition to providing open space for neighborhood residents, the park will also serve Asian American students at nearby Yick Wo School on Jones Street and Sarah B. Cooper Nursery and School-Age School on Filbert.

Shirlene Tong, principal at Yick Wo, which has a student population of 200 kindergarten through fifth grade students, said she is happy about the addition of the park to the area; her students will take advantage of it.

"So far our space has not been limited, but we would like to use the park for our P.E. (physical education) time. There will be a basketball court and amphitheater that we will be able to use," said

Tong.

The playground site, owned by the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department since 1986, was originally the possession of the S.F. School District. Neighbors got involved with preserving the land for open space in 1984 following rumors that the school district might be interested in selling it to developers.

"Obviously the families around this area are going to benefit from the park," said Alton Chin of the Chinatown Resource Center. He noted that the demographics of the area have changed recently.

"Now there is a balance between single professionals and families. I think both will benefit."

The City's Open Space Committee has allocated \$284,000 as of 1985 toward the total cost of \$384,000 for the project, which leaves the non-profit Friends of Michelangelo Park with additional fundraising to do.

"We have prospects for several



Mayor Art Agnos breaks ground at Michelangelo Park as Jim Lew with the North Beach Neighbors and City representatives look on.

foundation (grants), but we will not know answers until the fall," said McGuire. As of Sept. 20, \$61,000 had been raised. However she emphasized more contributions and volunteer help are needed.

Endorsers of the project include the Chinatown Resource Center, Committee For Better Parks and Recreation in Chinatown and

individuals Frances Lee, Ben Tom and James Lew, president of North Beach Neighbors.

Businesses and individuals interested in making a contribution or volunteering their services for Michelangelo Park are asked to contact McGuire at (415) 673-7074.