

HISTORY 1960-

HAIGHT ASHBURY VF

The hippies ... free concerts in the Park ...
Jefferson Airplane ... Grateful Dead ...
Big Brother and the Holding Company ...
the Charlatans ... Family Dog ... psychedelic
posters and underground newspapers ...
Jimi Hendrix ... the Human Be-In ...
Neil Young and Pearl Jam

- 1 Polo Fields Concert
2 Jerry Garcia
▼ Grace Slick

2

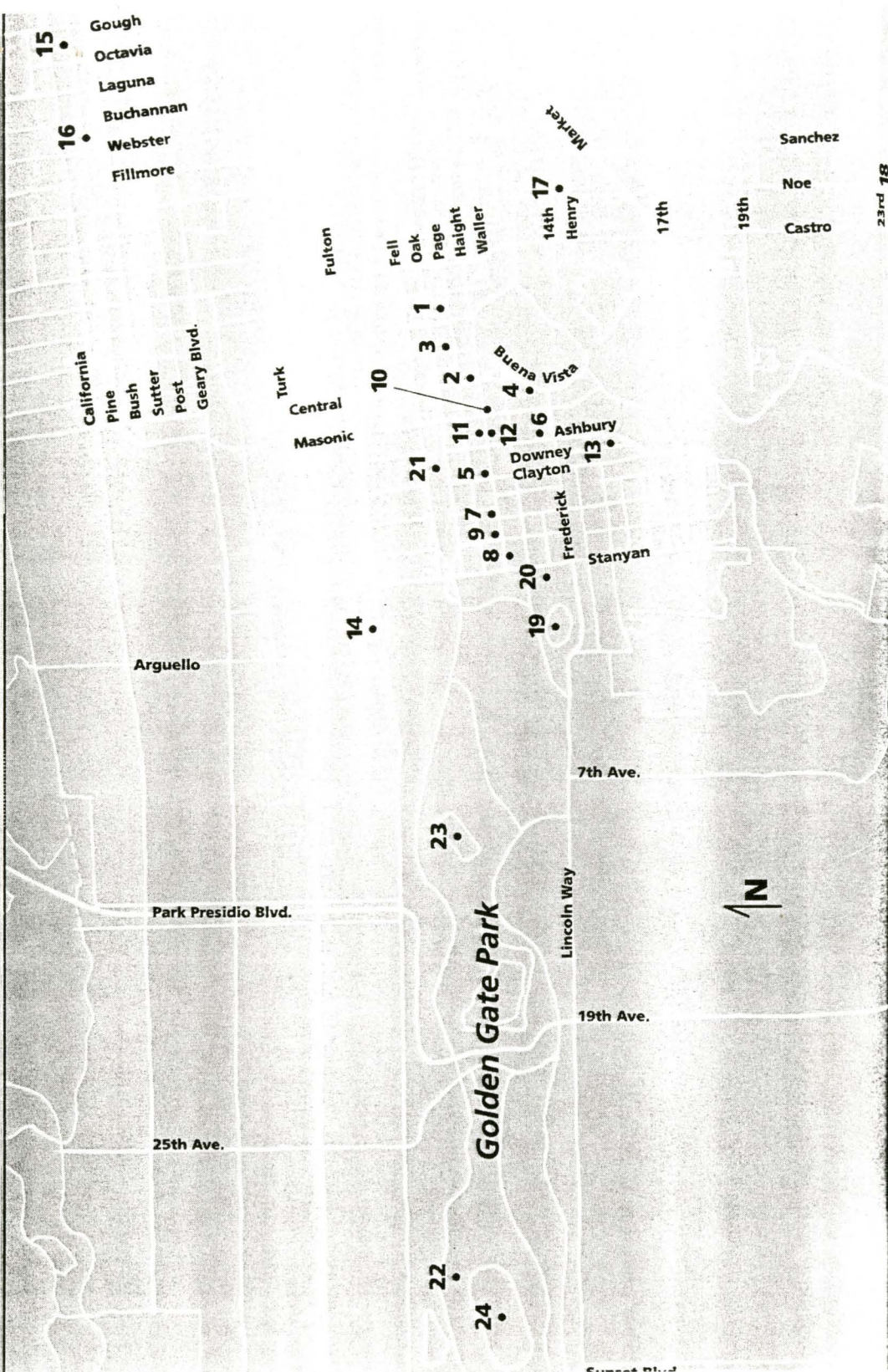
Haight-Ashbury

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Selvin, Joel.

San Francisco, the
musical history tour :
c1996.





Ashbury

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Albin Rooming House

1090 Page Street

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Rodney Albin talked his uncle into letting him run the huge Victorian, sprouting bay windows and peaked gables, as a rooming house in 1964. His uncle and some partners had bought the giant house on the corner as an investment, and nobody minded young Albin bringing in a little extra money to help with the payments. Built in 1898, the six-bedroom house had been converted somewhere along the way to accommodate twenty-five Irish-American workers. Albin and his brother, Peter, both bluegrass musicians who attended S.F. State, soon filled the place with students.

In the basement was a rosewood-paneled ballroom, complete with proscenium stage, where Chet Helms, a regular on the weekend party circuit, began to throw Wednesday night jam sessions, charging fifty cents for admission. The house band that grew out of these free-for-alls eventually took the name Big Brother and the Holding Company, although the original members of Quicksilver Messenger Service also jammed at 1090 Page. Sopwith Camel also got its start here. Big Brother moved on, but Rodney Albin continued to operate the rooming house for several years, quitting long before the house fell prey to the wrecker's ball to make way for the condominiums that stand on its former site.

Funky Features

142 Central Avenue

Jack (Funky Jack) Leahy intended to build a private recording studio in the basement of this Victorian, but he spent so much money that he had to open it for business in 1969. With members of Big Brother and the Holding Company living across the street, he quickly attracted a clientele. Producer David Rubinson began bringing some of his Fillmore Records acts such as Cold Blood into the studio. When the Hoodoo Rhythm Devils, a band Leahy managed, landed a contract with Capitol Records, they spent their advance loading a sixteen-track board into the studio. Steve Miller cut his vocals for "Fly Like an Eagle" here. In 1976, a handyman whom Leahy let sleep in the basement stabbed his secretary to death and attacked Leahy and his wife with an axe while they lay sleeping in bed. Leahy had just released his latest album with the Hoodoos, the cover picture taken in his living room upstairs, ironically titled *Safe in Their Homes*. In 1979, Leahy moved his operation uptown to his new Russian Hill Recording; the Haight-Ashbury Victorian was taken over by the Jimi Hendrix Electric Church, an eccentric museum run by a rabid fan and briefly open to the public in the seventies.

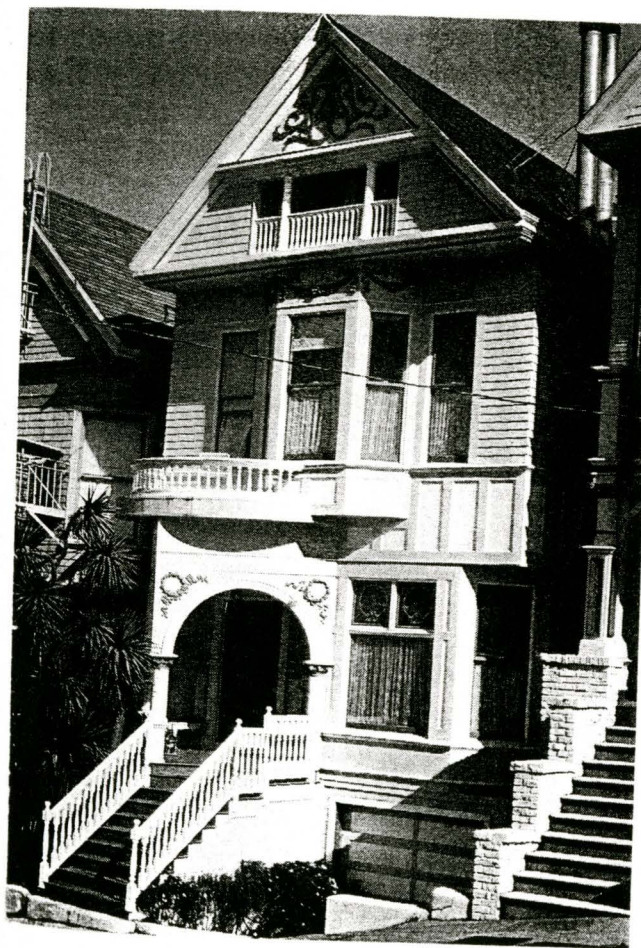
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Janis Joplin Apartment

112 Lyon Street, No. 3

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When Big Brother and the Holding Company moved back to San Francisco from Lagunitas in early 1967, manager Julius Karpen found this apartment for the band's vocalist, a small one-bedroom with a sunny, curving balcony off the front room. Joplin shared the apartment with Country Joe McDonald during their brief affair that spring and was living here when the band made its breakthrough appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival. She was evicted more than a year later because the landlord discovered she owned a dog, George, after spending most of the winter of 1968 in New York recording the band's first album, *Cheap Thrills*.



Janis Joplin's apartment where she lived with Country Joe. (1995, photo by Keta Bill Selvin)

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Graham Nash Home

737 Buena Vista West

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Through the seventies heyday of Crosby, Stills and Nash, vocalist Graham Nash quietly resided in this Victorian mansion, built in 1897 for Richard Spreckels, nephew of the sugar magnate. Previous residents included journalist Ambrose Bierce and writer Jack London, who wrote his classic *White Fang* in the rambling house. In the sixties, the landmark Victorian housed a small recording studio, run by Gene Estabrook, where many local bands made experimental recordings. Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Steve Miller Band both made their earliest-released records for the soundtrack to the film *Revolution* at the eight-track studio. After Nash sold the house, it was operated for a while as a bed-and-breakfast before actor Danny Glover purchased it as a private residence.

Graham Nash Home.
(1995, photo by Keta
Bill Selvin)



Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic

558 Clayton Street

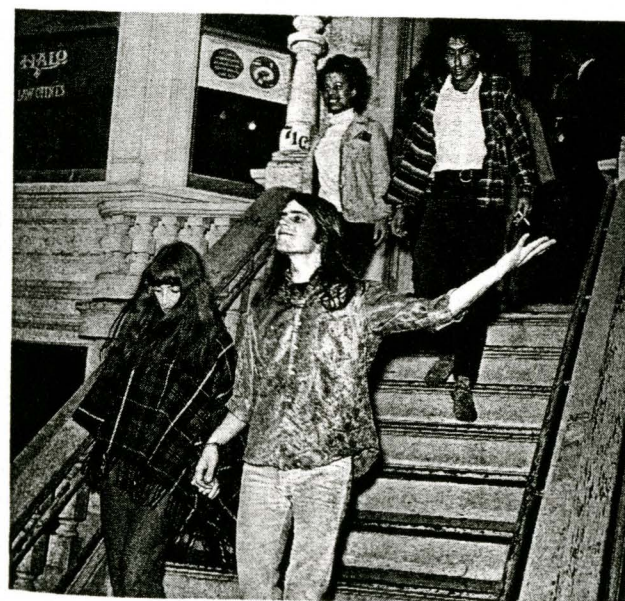
A fixture on the street since the sixties, not to mention a presence at every Bill Graham Presents rock concert, the Free Clinic treated members of Nirvana for the flu during their visit to the city in 1989. Band members noticed the clinic's citywide campaign urging drug users to "bleach your works," and decided to name the album the band had recently finished recording *Bleach*.

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Grateful Dead House

710 Ashbury Street

The unofficial City Hall of Haight-Ashbury, the Dead House served not only as home to band members Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Pigpen, and managers Rock Scully and Danny Rifkin, along with assorted other associates, but contained the office of H.A.L.O. (Haight-Ashbury Legal Organization) as well. Rifkin was the first to move into the house. He managed the building while living in the basement apartment of the three-story Victorian and attending S.F. State. One by one, during the fall of 1966, after the group returned from a brief exodus to Los Angeles and spent the summer in the wilds of Marin's Rancho Olompali, he moved members of the band into empty rooms as they became available, starting with Pigpen to encourage vacancies. The huge house became a kind of community center. In October 1967, police swooped down on the dwelling in a drug raid that netted only a small amount of marijuana. Cops arrested everybody on the premises (Garcia and his girlfriend eluded capture because they were out shopping at the time) including band members Weir and Pigpen, the only non-pot smoking members of the Dead. In March 1968, as a kind of farewell gesture to the neighborhood before the band retreated to Marin, the group sauntered down the hill and played a gig from a flatbed truck stretched across Haight Street, power lines running out of the Straight Theater supplying the electricity.



Guitarist Bob Weir
under arrest at the
Grateful Dead House.
(1967, photographer
unknown)

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Straight Theater

1702 Haight Street

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Converting the old neighborhood movie palace originally built in 1910 took more than a year. But for a brief spell beginning in fall 1967, the Straight provided the Haight with its own dance hall, a hippie-owned and -operated venture, a community-minded alternative to the Fillmore and Avalon that was as hapless as it was well-intentioned. Three hippie partners raised the money for renovation from a variety of investors, including drug dealers, reprobates, miscreants, even Jay Ward, producer of TV's "The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show." One of the partners was the stepson of actress Dame Judith Anderson, who lent her eminence on behalf of the enterprise at one point, testifying before a city permit board. Volunteer labor, worth every penny, did much of the work. Speed freaks behind power sanders smoothed the dance floor until there were ripples in the surface. Acid king and sound engineer Augustus Owsley Stanley installed a state-of-the-art public address system. The Dead used the place as a neighborhood rehearsal hall long before it opened and played during the opening weekend in July 1967. Also appearing that first weekend were Quicksilver Messenger Service, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Country Joe and the Fish, and The Charlatans. For a period, the Straight lost its dance permit, so they offered dance lessons with the Dead as one of the "instructors." Drummer Mickey Hart sat in with the band during a show in September 1967 and never left. One of the up-and-coming bands of the era most associated with the theater was the Santana Blues Band, whose rough-and-tumble mix of blues, rock, and salsa got its real start at the place. The venture ran out of steam in less than a year-and-a-half and closed. Ten years later, the boarded-up derelict theater fell victim to the wrecker's ball.

Nightbreak

1821 Haight Street

Chris Isaak returned to this tiny club on many occasions to hammer out material he planned to record. Prior to both his second and third albums, he booked several nights at the club, strung his plastic tiki lights across the stage, and tried out pieces he was taking into the studio in coming weeks. He also played several nights here following the release of his 1985 debut album, in what was a sentimental return to a place he no longer needed to play. The club also played a large role in the forming of 4 Non Blondes and offered an impromptu stage for jam sessions featuring members of groups like Primus, Metallica, and Faith No More.

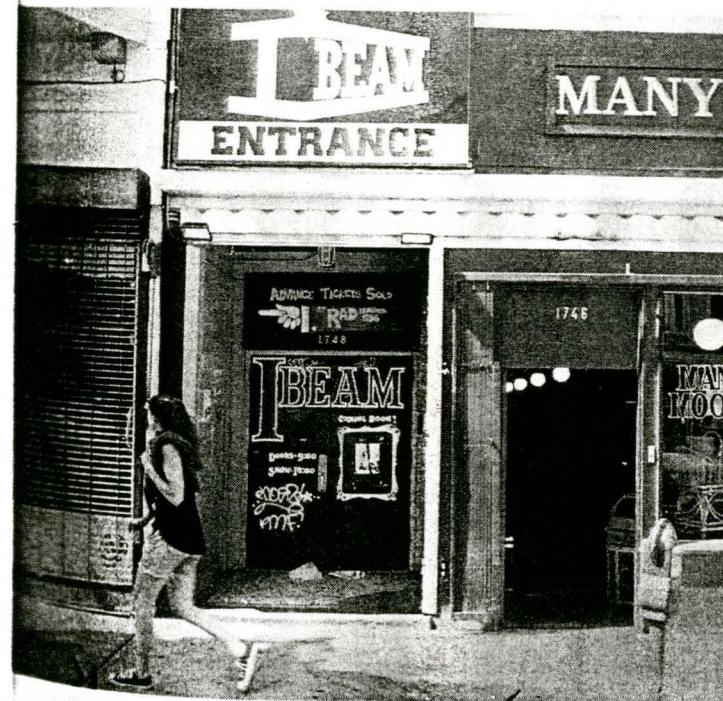
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I-Beam

1748 Haight Street

Housed in the old Masonic Temple, the I-Beam originally started life at the height of "Saturday Night Fever" as a popular gay disco, run by former astronomer Dr. Sanford Kellman. The spot also ran a series of Sunday afternoon tea dances. But beginning with Monday night shows in 1980 promoted by deejay Alan Robinson, the upstairs room surrounded by pillars grew to be the city's top outlet for imported modern rock through the eighties. The list of new-wave bands that worked the room reads like a Who's Who of the genre—Duran Duran, New Order, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Cure, R.E.M., The Ramones, Gang of Four, The Buzzcocks, Hüsker Dü, The Replacements, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Terence Trent D'Arby, Living Colour, Jane's Addiction, and 10,000 Maniacs. Faith No More inaugurated the weekend live-music series. Dr. Kellman, dispirited over the death from AIDS of his longtime lover, sold the place in 1990 and the club staggered on for another couple of years. Counting Crows made a notable 1991 appearance at the club in one of the band's first live performances, attended by a number of record-company executives in town for a radio convention. The bidding war for the band started the next morning.

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The I-Beam entrance on Haight Street. (1992, photo by Eric Luse)

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The Oracle

1371 Haight Street

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As much a philosophic treatise as a news broadsheet, the rainbow-colored underground tabloid, *San Francisco Oracle*, was published out of these offices sporadically from 1966 to 1968. Editors Allen Cohen and Michael Bowen were accorded a status of community leaders in the new hippie uprising and helped produce the great Human Be-In on January 1967 at the Polo Fields. More than just another underground rag, the *Oracle* was such a treasured relic that a hard-bound twenty-fifth anniversary collection of facsimiles was published and is still available at bookstores along Haight.

Pall Mall Lounge

1568 Haight Street

"For me, the Haight died the day I saw this sleazy, greasy little restaurant advertising 'Love Burgers,'" said Bill Graham. As was often the case, Graham didn't know half the story. The short-order grill concession in the old Pall Mall bar was leased to a flamboyant redheaded Iranian woman who knew nothing of the neighborhood when she arrived. She quickly fell in with the new community and her new customers renamed her Love. She picked up the beat, calling her six-stool counter "Love Burgers" and sold her grease-splattered concoctions for twenty-five cents, or a dime, or nothing, if you were really hungry. On holidays, the burgers were always free and people lined up for blocks to get them. She housed unwed mothers and held Easter Egg hunts, but outsiders like Graham simply saw the sign and assumed it was another sleazy rip-off. Alas, "Love Burgers" is no more, although the Pall Mall itself continues as it did before, during, and after the height of the Haight.

The Psychedelic Shop

1535 Haight Street

The daringly named head store opened January 3, 1966, owned by brothers Jay and Ron Thelin, natives of the neighborhood whose father once managed the Woolworth's across the street. The brothers—psychedelic seekers who thought a store that pulled together in one place literature, records, incense, posters and, of course, tickets to rock concerts, was just what the Haight needed—may not have originally envisioned their store as the street's primary hangout, but it soon became exactly that. In fact, when the Straight Theater ripped out the old theater

Haight-Ashbury

seats to make way for a dance floor and placed them on the sidewalk outside to give away, the Thelins promptly installed a pair in the store's window so people could sit and watch the parade go by. The most celebrated incident in the store's colorful history took place in October 1967, when police burst into the shop, seized copies of an obscure book of poetry titled *The Love Book* by an equally obscure Lenore Kandel, and arrested *Oracle* editor Allen Cohen, who happened to be working the cash register that day, on charges of selling obscene literature. The book had sold some fifty copies prior to the bust. Afterward, sales went through the ceiling and Kandel eventually announced she would donate one percent of her royalties to the police retirement fund as a way of saying thanks. Sometime the next year, the Thelins' answer to the unrest on Haight was to set aside half the store as a meditation room called the Calm Center.

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George Hunter Apartment

200 Downey Street

A former architectural model maker fascinated with rock bands since discovering the Rolling Stones, George Hunter actually began designing his own rock group at a drafting table in his apartment in early 1965. He envisioned a group that encompassed his obsessions with Victoriana and the Wild West (an avid collector of antiques, Hunter stocked his apartment like a museum). He recruited some members, and the band held rehearsals daily at his apartment until, by chance, they landed an audition as house band at the Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nevada, a Silver Rush dance hall being restored by some crazed hippies. At the band's first public performance, the group won the job and The Charlatans launched the acid-rock era of San Francisco music high in the Sierra Nevada. When the group returned triumphant to town, The Charlatans headlined the first Family Dog dance-concert at Longshoremen's Hall in October 1965.

Airplane Mansion

2400 Fulton Street

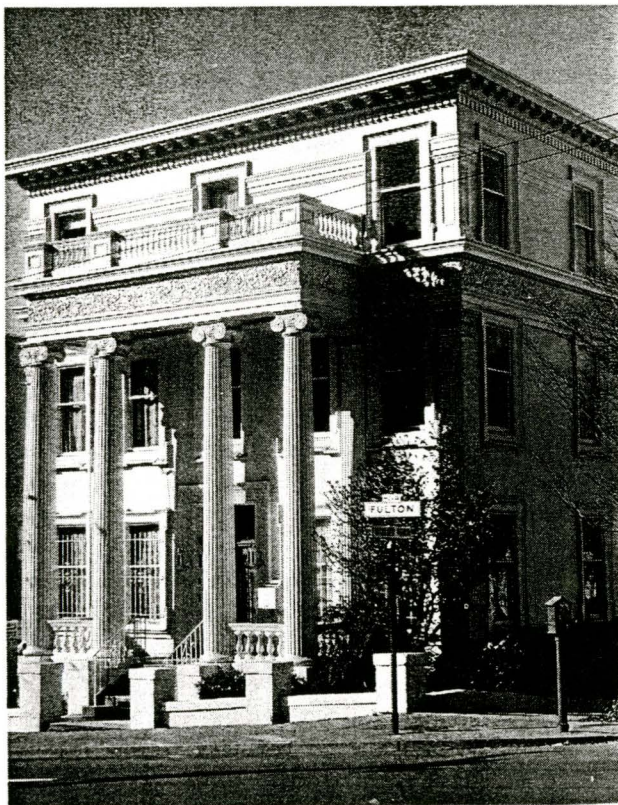
Based in a manor built at the turn of the century by a lumber baron said to have provided refuge to opera singer Enrico Caruso on the night of the 1906 earthquake, the Jefferson Airplane reigned as the uncrowned heads of state on the San Francisco rock scene in the late sixties. In May 1968, the band applied a \$20,000 down payment toward a total purchase price of \$70,000 and took possession of the enormous four-story mansion with a grand staircase and mahogany banister that had been shipped around Cape Horn. The place served

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as a combination office, rehearsal hall, and home to band members through the seventies, until the defunct group cashed in its real estate investment for a generous profit. But throughout their tenure here, the Airplane presided over much madness. One epic bash staged in September 1968, after the band returned from a European tour with the Doors, was immortalized on the cover of the live album, *Bless Its Pointed Little Head*, a title taken from a remark made by Grace Slick when she was shown the cover photo of bassist Jack Casady passed out, his hand still wrapped around a bottle.

The Blues Brothers repaired to the mansion following their performance at the final Winterland show, New Year's Eve 1979, for a party that truly rang out the decadent decade in a lavish, degenerate style. With the imposing black facade, the Airplane mansion served as a kind of underground landmark for many years. Then-Mayor Dianne Feinstein, invited to participate in a press conference, walked into the foyer with a surprised look on her face. "I always wondered who lived here," she said.

*Airplane Mansion.
(1995, photo by Keta
Bill Selvin)*



Pine Street Commune

1836 Pine Street

Light show artist Bill Ham managed these apartments for an absentee landlord and filled the premises with every woebegone miscreant he could find. With artists and musicians crammed into every available room, the place became a beehive of activity during the early days of the Fillmore/Avalon years. Ham perfected his nascent psychedelic light show each night in a basement room. He eventually mounted the show at the Avalon Ballroom. Some of The Charlatans lived there, as did some members of Big Brother and the Holding Company. These apartments were the first place Janis Joplin lived in San Francisco when she returned to town to join Big Brother.

Dog House

2125 Pine Street

When they were planning their original concert at Longshoremen's Hall, the members of the first acid-rock concert production troupe all lived at Dog House, so called because of the tenants' propensity for owning pet dogs and to commemorate the many who lost their lives to Pine Street rush hour. The Family Dog became the name for the members' concert production company.

Kelley-Mouse Studios

74 Henry Street

An old dairy, long ago torn down to make way for condominiums, that served as headquarters of prolific poster artists was where Big Brother and the Holding Company first met Janis Joplin in 1966. In town from Texas at the suggestion of Avalon Ballroom proprietor/band manager Chet Helms, Joplin showed up for rehearsal, her hair in a bun, her blouse knotted at her midriff. Nobody remembers being too impressed. Eventually, however, they were. Her practiced howl and startling vocal power, on at least one occasion, convinced neighbors that some poor woman was being assaulted. They summoned the police.

Janis Joplin Apartment

892 Noe Street

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While Big Brother and the Holding Company were finishing the band's Columbia Records debut, *Cheap Thrills*, Janis Joplin and roommate Linda Gravenites hastily found this apartment, Joplin stashing boxes in the hallway before heading off for recording sessions in Los Angeles. She lived at this address from spring 1968 to December 1969, when she bought a spacious house in the woods of Marin County that was more suited to her new rock-star lifestyle. For most of the period she was quartered at the Noe Street apartment, she spent little time at home, touring, first, with Big Brother (whose album *Cheap Thrills* hit number one on the charts in November 1968) and, later, with her own band.

Kezar Stadium

Frederick and Stanyan streets

Built in 1924 and named for Mary Kezar, who left \$100,000 in her will to the city for construction, the stadium served as the home of the San Francisco 49ers football team until 1970, when it was deserted except for the annual East-West Shrine game each fall. Producer Bill Graham inaugurated his "Day on the Green" series in May 1973 at the former football field with a bill featuring the Grateful Dead, New Riders of the Purple Sage, and, in his first performance at a rock concert, country singer Waylon Jennings. Asked if his noon set time was unusual, Jennings cracked a smile. "Hell, son," he said, "on the hillbilly circuit, they'll book you at seven in the morning for a chicken fight, if they can git ya." The following month, Graham brought Led Zeppelin to the Kezar for an epic performance, even if the band arrived two-and-a-half hours late. The Tubes opened the show, with lead vocalist Quay Lewd tossing giant styrofoam pills into the crowd and shoveling fake "cocaine" onto the front rows. In 1975, Graham returned to the Kezar for his mammoth SNACK concert to benefit after-school athletic programs, a one-day concert broadcast live on K101-FM and featuring Bob Dylan as the surprise guest with Neil Young, actor Marlon Brando, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Starship, Joan Baez, Tower of Power, The Doobie Brothers, Santana, and others. The day after the benefit, an accounting error turned up the funds missing from the budget for the canceled programs anyway.

Kezar Pavilion

Frederick and Stanyan streets

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The Clash stormed the former home of USF basketball and roller derby with one rock concert at the tile-roofed building on the edge of Golden Gate Park in October 1979. The band's second appearance in town more than compensated for the sorry show the British politico-punkers played the previous February at the Berkeley Community Theater, even if the performance was delayed for an hour while one of the musicians found his way to the hall.

Panhandle

Golden Gate Park, between Oak and Fell streets

This strip of green stretching beyond the park's entrance, just a few blocks north of the Haight, was the site of many impromptu free concerts during the height of the sixties scene. The Grateful Dead and Big Brother and the Holding Company played a notable concert near the Cole Street intersection on October 6, 1966, to celebrate the outlawing of LSD. Fugitive Ken Kesey made a clandestine appearance at the event and escaped before FBI agents could catch him. But the most famous free concert here occurred on a June weekend in 1967, when, with equipment borrowed from the Jefferson Airplane, the Jimi Hendrix Experience played.

Lindley Meadows

Golden Gate Park

Although billed as Jerry Garcia and Friends, the Grateful Dead returned from a year-long "retirement" in September 1975 to this sylvan glade for a free concert with the Jefferson Starship before a crowd of more than thirty-five thousand people. The Starship had played a free concert at the site the previous summer to a slightly smaller crowd and returned a couple of years later as the surprise guest on a radio station-sponsored event headlined by the Greg Kihn Band. The long, narrow corridor lined by trees made Lindley Meadows a particularly commodious setting for outdoor concerts.

Bandshell

Golden Gate Park

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Despite the visual obstructions caused by the trees in the seating area, this old-fashioned bandstand between Steinhart Aquarium and the de Young Museum has been the scene of numerous free concerts over the years, including the annual Comedy Day marathon. The Kantner-Balin-Casady Band brought free music back to the park after a lengthy absence in a 1985 concert. The Jerry Garcia Band and an acoustic performance by Grace Slick and Paul Kantner, reunited after she left the Starship, celebrated the end of the 1988 U.S./U.S.S.R. Peace Walk here. In 1973, Todd Rundgren recorded vocal overdubs from the audience at the Bandshell while singing "Sons of 1984," which he mixed with a similar recording from New York's Wollman Rink. The result appeared on his album, *Todd*.

Polo Fields

Golden Gate Park

On January 14, 1967, "A Gathering of the Tribes—Human Be-In" attracted a crowd of one hundred thousand to hear Allen Ginsberg, Tim Leary, and Gary Snyder hold forth between rock bands like Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and Sir Douglas Quintet. Jazz flautist Charles Lloyd sat in with the Dead, and Hell's Angels served peacefully as security guards. Years later, more than three hundred thousand people filled the enormous playing field in October 1991 for "Laughter, Love and Music," the free memorial concert for Bill Graham the week after he died. Appearing on the daylong concert were Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, the Grateful Dead, John Fogerty, a reunited Journey, Santana, Robin Williams, and Bobby McFerrin. Peter Gabriel appeared in a paid performance the following year, headlining his multicultural WOMAD Festival for the final date on its first U.S. tour before the largest crowd in the ten-year history of the moving festival. Pearl Jam canceled the band's remaining tour dates in June 1995 after vocalist Eddie Vedder, suffering from stomach flu, left the stage after six songs. Neil Young took over the show and played two hours with the remaining members of the band. The Polo Fields also served as the site of the public memorial service for Jerry Garcia in August 1995.

*Crosby, Stills, Nash
and Young play the
Bill Graham memorial
concert at the Polo
Fields. (1991, photo
by Scott Sommerdorf)*

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