

1906

EARTHQUAKE

REFUGEE

COTTAGES

Western Neighborhoods Project

Learn more about earthquake refugee cottages and efforts to save them at
www.outsidelands.org

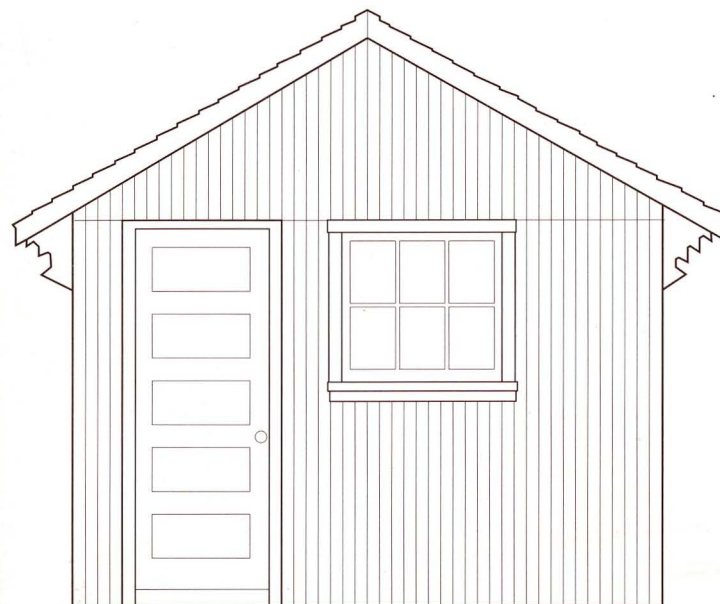
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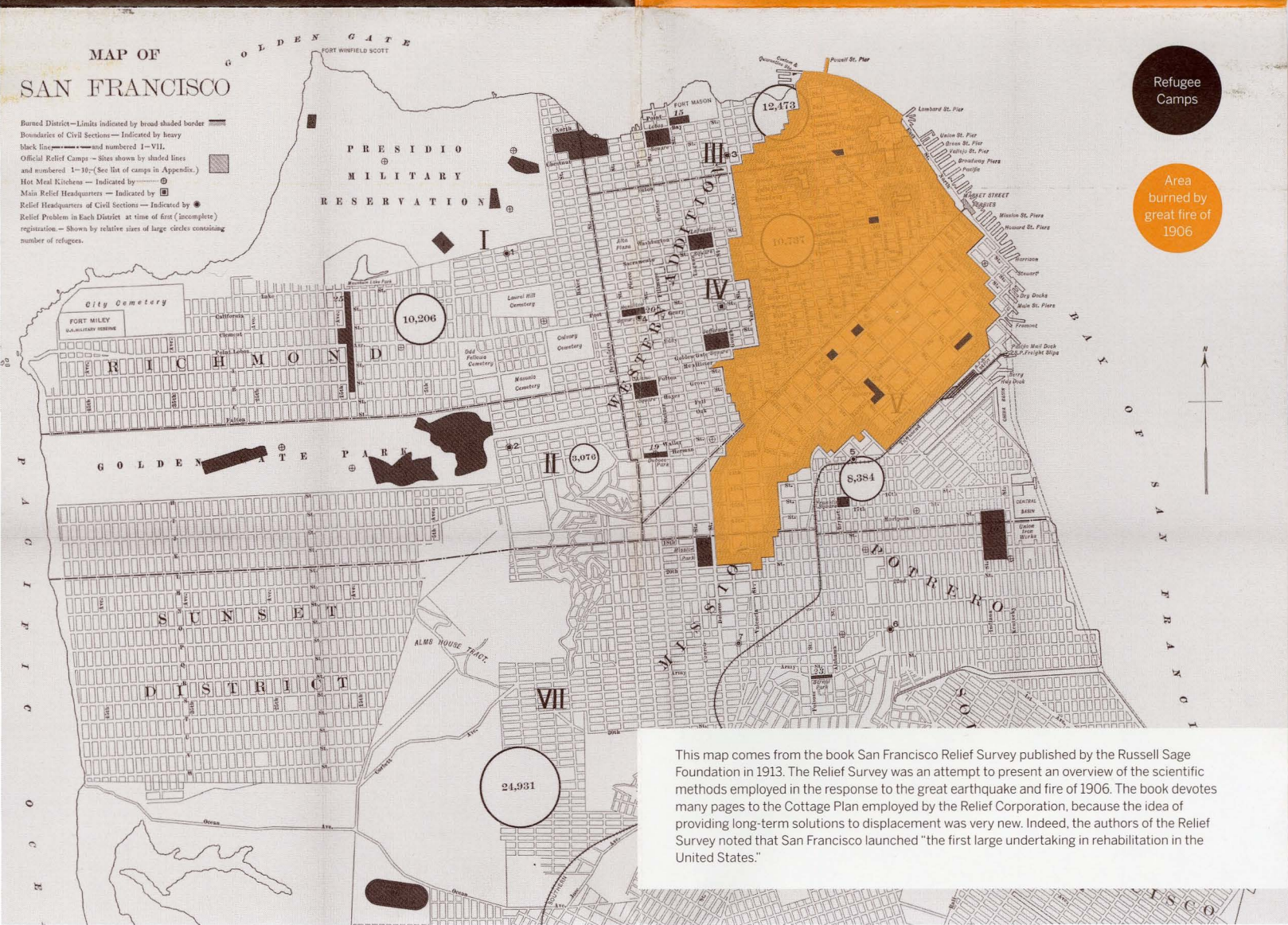


Camp Richmond (Park-Presidio Blvd.)

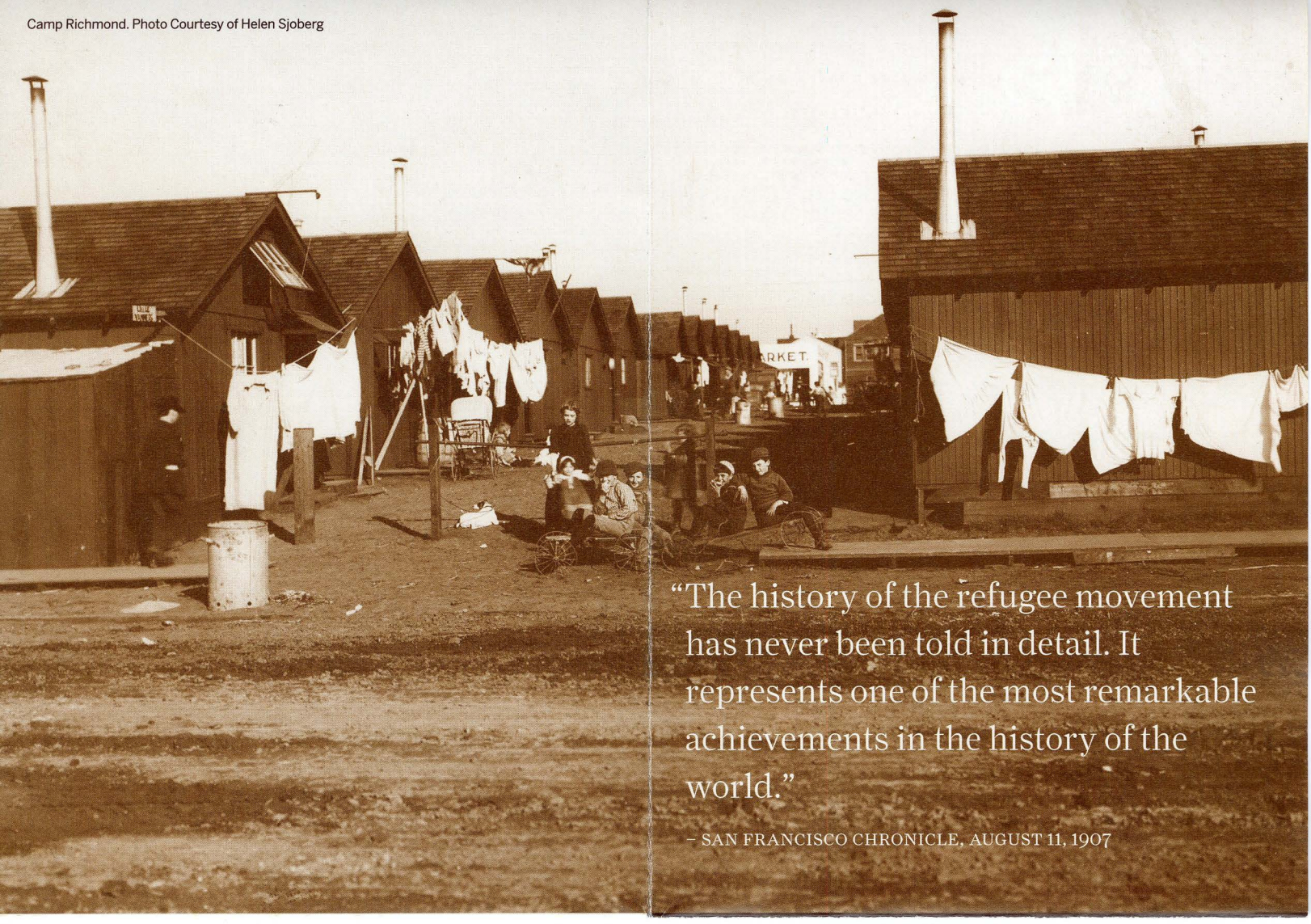
Earthquake refugee cottages, or “shacks” were built by the Department of Lands and Buildings of the Relief Corporation to house refugees from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire.

5,610 cottages were constructed to house over 16,000 San Franciscans in 11 refugee camps in locations including Dolores Park, Washington Square, Precita Park, Portsmouth Square, and today’s Park-Presidio Boulevard.

Union carpenters built three main sizes of cottages between September 1906 and March 1907. Cottages had cedar-shingle roofs, fir floors and redwood walls. All were painted green to better blend into the parks and public squares in which they were erected.



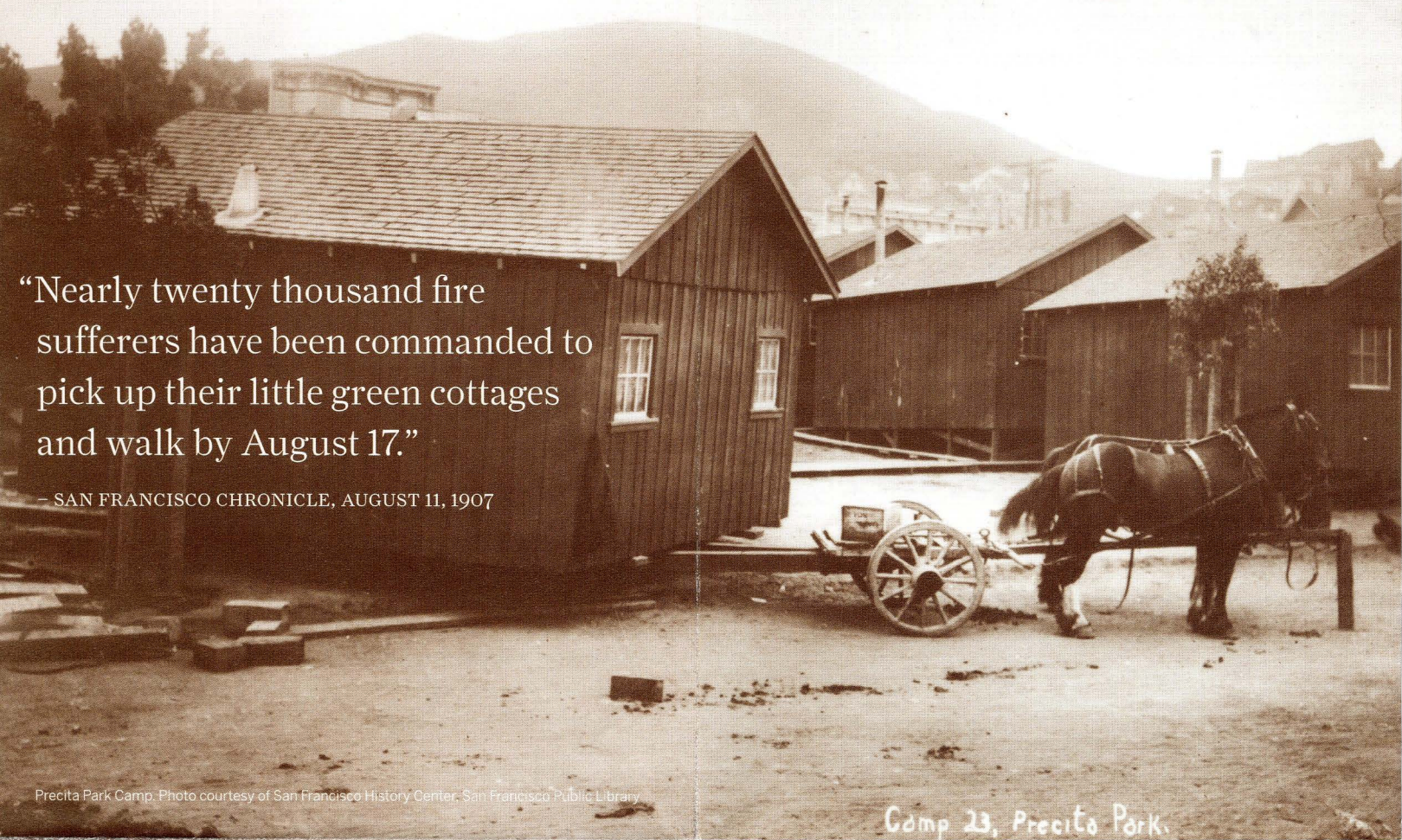
This map comes from the book *San Francisco Relief Survey* published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 1913. The Relief Survey was an attempt to present an overview of the scientific methods employed in the response to the great earthquake and fire of 1906. The book devotes many pages to the Cottage Plan employed by the Relief Corporation, because the idea of providing long-term solutions to displacement was very new. Indeed, the authors of the Relief Survey noted that San Francisco launched “the first large undertaking in rehabilitation in the United States.”



“The history of the refugee movement has never been told in detail. It represents one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of the world.”

— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, AUGUST 11, 1907

When the camps began closing in August 1907, refugees hauled cottages to private lots, and often cobbled together two or more to form larger residences. Of the 5,343 moved from the camps only a handful are certified to still be standing.



“Nearly twenty thousand fire sufferers have been commanded to pick up their little green cottages and walk by August 17.”

— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, AUGUST 11, 1907

Precita Park Camp. Photo courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

Camp 23, Precita Park.

“The refugee shacks are the last tangible evidence of perhaps the most important thing that ever happened in San Francisco.”

—DELL UPTON, UC BERKELEY PROFESSOR



“These cottages, which have been stealing away south and north and west at the rate of sixty a day represent many curious home adventures and new fortunes. People of the narrow streets of the tenements, who all their lives have lived in stuffy, dark rooms, amid noisome surroundings, have been given a chance to own their own homes, garden spots and free air, and [out in] the Mission and Sunset districts they have become hill dwellers and country-side folk, with an aspect of life such as Tehama street and the teeming alleys of the Latin quarter never afforded.”

— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, AUGUST 19, 1907

“Of all the work accomplished by the Relief from the time of the bread line to the breaking up of the camps nothing is of greater importance to the city than that of establishing 5,000 families in their own homes. On the roads leading to the suburbs moving trucks are trundling the little green houses that spell comfort, independence and happiness to these thousands.”

— HANNA ASTRUP LARSEN, OCTOBER 20, 1907

Earthquake cottages came back in the public eye in the early 1980s, when “shack activist” Jane F. Cryan began lobbying for their preservation. Her efforts created City Landmark #171, a complex of four shacks at 1227 – 24th Avenue, and helped rescue two others that are on public display in the Presidio of San Francisco.

When four cottages in San Francisco’s Outer Sunset district faced demolition in 2002, the Western Neighborhoods Project began enlisting aid from numerous individuals, corporations, and organizations to work with the owners to relocate and restore the cottages.

On March 5, 2005, the cottages were moved from Kirkham street to a temporary home in the back lot of the San Francisco Zoo. Volunteer carpenters then restored a cottage in time to be displayed for the April 18, 2006 centennial of the great San Francisco earthquake and fire.

A permanent home for the Kirkham street cottages is still sought.

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Kirkham Shack on the move, March 5, 2005

