

Shades of the City

Librarians ask Western Addition residents to share photos in the name of posterity

By Teresa Moore
Chronicle Staff Writer

There are 250,000 photographs in the San Francisco History Center at the Main Public Library, but the city archivist says they don't begin to tell the private history of the city.

The library is looking for thousands of stories within the pages of family albums.

"We have newspaper morgues with pictures of important events and famous people, but we're looking for pictures of everyday life," said Susan Goldstein, city archivist. "We're looking for personal, casual pictures."

"These kind of pictures help you do a different kind of history and tell a different story."

SUSAN GOLDSTEIN,
City Archivist

The San Francisco Public Library has a grant to document the social history of the Western Addition for a project called "Shades of San Francisco."

The project, modeled on a successful program at the Los Angeles Public Library, is an attempt to fill gaps in the official history of one of San Francisco's most vibrant neighborhoods.

Besides adding the pictures to the city archives, at the end of the year the library plans to exhibit them at the Main and Western Addition branches. Fresno and San Bernardino are the other two cities in the "Shades" project.

Tomorrow, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., library volunteers at the Western Addition branch will copy family photographs and record the stories behind the pictures for the project.

People are asked to bring their whole collections, rather than selecting the images they like best. Gold-

PHOTOS: Page A20 Col. 1

San Franciscans that have contributed photos include Ella Fitzgerald, in forefront of top photo at left side of table, and violinist Yehudi Menuhin, bottom photo



PHOTOS: San

From Page A13

stein said that historians are most interested in scenes that the owners might think too ordinary: parties, backyard baseball games, trips to the beach, kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, workplaces.

"These kind of pictures help you do a different kind of history and tell a different story," she said. "Having your history available to you is really important for a sense of community and identity and shared history. It also says something about a city to be able to collect its history."

Over time, the boundaries of the Western Addition have shifted but for the purposes of the project, Goldstein defines the region as Van Ness Avenue to Masonic Avenue and Fell Street to California Street.

"The Western Addition was hit hard by big events," Goldstein said. "A lot of the city relocated to Fillmore after the 1906 earthquake. The Western Addition was already fairly built up and it hadn't been destroyed by earthquake and fire."

Two of the earliest communities to settle in the area were Russian Jewish and Japanese immigrants. During World War II when Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps, African Americans, who came to San Francisco for jobs in the naval industry, moved into the Western Addition.

"We're interested in photos from anybody who lived in the Western Addition but we certainly don't mean to exclude anyone," she said.

Project Could Expand

Goldstein said the \$10,000 grant from the Durfee Foundation was only enough money to cover the documentation of one neighborhood. But if there is significant public interest, she hopes to develop similar projects for other parts of the city, including the Mission District, North Beach and Chinatown.

Most of the images of life in the Western Addition in the library's archives come from the files of the Call Bulletin newspaper.

Goldstein said that not only do these pictures raise serious questions about journalistic objectivity, but they underscore the need for alternate visions of time and place.

A 1962 photograph of shoppers and boulevardiers strolling past a theater carries this caption: "Rapidly Deteriorating Block in Vicinity of New Fillmore Theater on Fillmore Street."

"Does this street look like it needs to be revitalized?" Goldstein said, while flipping through the photo files. "This is propaganda."

Fact-Filled Albums

A 1942 photograph taken in front of the Japanese American Citizens League shows a group of white people gathered to watch the first busload of Japanese Americans leaving for World War II internment camps. The back of the photograph is labeled "Enemy, Jap, Aliens."

A faded brown leather family photo album that Hatsuro Aizawa brought to the history center on Thursday offers a very different view of Japanese American life in the Western Addition.

Aizawa, who was born in San Francisco in 1924, lived with his family in the Western Addition until they were sent to an internment camp.

His album is filled with scenes

dition
3/28/98

☆☆

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 1998

BAY AREA

San Francisco Wants Family Photos

of his family, usually dressed in elegant suits, hats and dresses, picnicking at Ocean Beach or at Mount Tamalpais.

In a picture from the 1920s, he and his brother are roly-poly toddlers perched on the running board of a car. In another shot, the little boys are dressed in soldier outfits and holding sticks.

"People always say, 'Oh, you wouldn't be interested in things

like this,'" Goldstein said. "They don't think their ordinary lives are important, but these kinds of photos are wonderful historical documents."

Exhibit Discussions

One private collection of photos from a Fillmore Street barber shop is already the subject of an exhibit at City Hall. The photographs document social life among African Americans from the 1940s

through redevelopment in the Western Addition.

At 6 p.m. Thursday at the Main Library, Goldstein and curator Lewis Watts will discuss the exhibit from the Red Powell-Reggie Pettus Collection.

When Powell died several years ago, his friend and fellow barber Pettus inherited the photographs that used to adorn his shop walls.

Besides several shots of the jazz stars who made the Fillmore a legendary music scene, there are pictures of a wedding, a fashion show, birthday parties, dinners and friends hanging out at a lunchroom and at a bar.

"One of the consequences of redevelopment was the severing of architectural and social connections," said Watts, a photographer who teaches visual studies at the University of California at Berkeley. "The photographs become the vehicle through which the story can be told."

PHOTO DAY TOMORROW

Tomorrow from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. library volunteers at the Western Addition branch at 1550 Scott Street will copy family photographs and record the stories behind the pictures for the "Shades of San Francisco" project. For more information, call (415) 437-4852.