

Signals from Telegraph Hill

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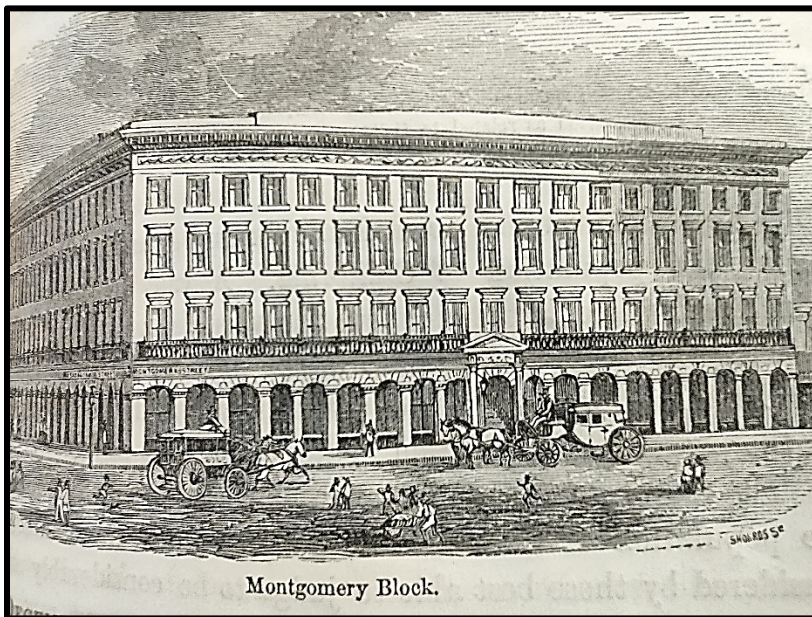


San Francisco Corral – Westerners International

EMAIL: westernerssf@gmail.com

Please join us on Tuesday, **May 20** at 5:30 p.m. for Lorri Ungaretti on the Amazing Story of San Francisco's Montgomery Block!

This program was initially scheduled for our April meeting, but has been re-scheduled for May.



The Montgomery Block (affectionately called the “Monkey Block”) was the largest building in the West when it opened in 1853. At first, it was populated with prestigious law offices, publishing companies, and financial institutions. Later, when rents went down, it became famous for its many “bohemian” residents—writers, painters, sculptors, and other artists, including Bret Harte, Jack London, George Sterling, and Gertrude Atherton. Before long, the prestigious tenants worked alongside the artists. In 1906, because of its unusual construction, it was one of the few downtown buildings that survived the earthquake and fire. Unfortunately, the Montgomery Block was demolished in 1959.

Lorri Ungaretti is a native San Franciscan who has written six books and various articles on San Francisco history, mostly about the Sunset and Richmond Districts. Lorri's most recent presentation to the Westerners was on her latest book, *Vanished San Francisco*.

Meeting Location: Fior d'Italia, 2237 Mason Street, San Francisco

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

See final page for information.

The Montgomery Block

Lorri Ungaretti's presentation to the Westerners will focus on the Montgomery Block, one of the most important buildings in San Francisco's history. One year after its completion, the authors of *The Annals of San Francisco* (1854) described the Montgomery Block as "the largest, most elegant, and imposing edifice in California, and would attract especial attention in any city, though it occupies a site that was partially covered by the waters of the bay as late as 1849." The Montgomery Block housed a venerable tavern called the Bank Exchange, where Pisco punch was first invented by bartender Duncan Nicol. He would serve no more than two to a customer, because he believed that two were as many as any proper gentleman could handle.



The Bank Exchange Saloon, site of the invention of the famed Pisco punch. Image courtesy of alcademics.com.



Coppa's restaurant. Courtesy of restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com.

The Montgomery Block also housed Coppa's Italian restaurant, which catered to San Francisco's writers and artists. The latter adorned nearly every inch of the restaurant's walls with baffling nonsensical murals. The artists and writers had their own special table in the center of the room, which pre-dated New York's Algonquin Round Table of the 1920s. Regular folk would come just to witness the shenanigans of San Francisco's bohemian denizens. As photographer Arnold Genthe said in his autobiography, "If one had no money one could eat at Coppa's anyway. He was generous with credit, knowing that when better days came the debt would be paid. And there was space on the walls which a painter could decorate in payment for food and drink.... Song and laughter and good talk ran on at Coppa's, and a visitor ceased to be a stranger once he had entered the door."

Many writers had offices and/or residences in the Montgomery Block, and Adolph Sutro even housed part of his extensive library there at one time. Don't miss Lorri Ungaretti's fascinating talk on the Montgomery Block!

– Kathryn Ayres, *Inkslinger*



Noteworthy Events and Exhibits



The San Francisco Historical Society: Lincoln Mitchell on George Moscone. Lincoln Mitchell will discuss his new biography, *Three Years Our Mayor: George Moscone and the Making of Modern San Francisco*, focusing on how Moscone was influential in shaping San Francisco during his tenure as legislator and later as the city's mayor. **Tuesday, May 13 at 6:30 p.m., in-person and Livestream. 608 Commercial Street, San Francisco.** The event is **FREE**, but you must register to attend. More information at sfhistory.org/events.



The San Francisco History Association: Paul Drexler on the Little Frog Girl. Jeanne Bonnet was born into a family of French actors. She was a very popular performer, often playing the role of a young coquette on the stage. Then tragedy struck; her mother passed away, her sister was committed to an insane asylum where she died, and her devastated father moved to Oakland. Bonnet assumed a male identity, and earned her living by catching frogs to sell to San Francisco's French restaurants. Presenter Paul Drexler is an author and was once a columnist for the San Francisco *Examiner*. **Tuesday, March, at 7:00 p.m., Congregation Sherith Israel,**

2266 California Street, San Francisco. SFHA members may attend free in-person or via Zoom. There is a \$10.00 fee for non-members, which may be used toward membership. More information at www.sanfranciscohistory.org.



The Legion of Honor at 100. The Legion of Honor is celebrating its centennial, having opened on November 11, 1924. A special exhibition features some of the first additions to the museum's collection, including sculptures by Auguste Rodin donated by museum cofounder Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, and highlights the museum's early exhibitions. **Through November 2, 2025. Tuesday through Sunday, 9:30 a.m. through 5:15 p.m. Legion of Honor, Lincoln Park, 100 34th Avenue (at Clement Street), San Francisco. More info at <https://www.famsf.org/visit/legion-of-honor>.**



The Oakland Museum of California. Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California. This exhibit focuses on the diverse voices of California's indigenous peoples. Aguilar's work, spanning from 1982 to 2018, defies colonial narratives. His powerful images document a rich array of indigenous experiences, including gatherings, ceremonies, and the artistry of basket weaving. The exhibition brings these images to life through video, audio, and narratives from indigenous artists, activists, elders, and community members. **Through June 22, 2025. Wednesday through Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. 1000 Oak Street, Oakland. More information at www.museumca.org.**

SF Westerners Posse: 2025

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We need your input!

Please show your appreciation of the San Francisco Corral of Westerners International by attending more meetings!

Would it help to move our meetings to a lunch during the weekend?

Also, do you know of a speaker who would be interested in presenting to the group? Any subject on Western history will do. Please send ideas for speakers and for approving attendance to Sheriff Bob Lawhon at westernerssf@gmail.com.

Meeting Location: Fior d'Italia, 2237 Mason Street, San Francisco

Date: May 20, 2025

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

We must get a head count to reserve a table at the restaurant!

*Please note that our meeting date has changed to the **third** Tuesday of the month!*

The restaurant provides us with a private room. We gather at 5:30 and **dinner seating begins at 6:15 p.m.** A three-course selection is available and costs **\$45.00**.

RSVP: Send checks and dinner reservations by **May 16** to Judy Van Austen, KOC, 1789 Northwood Court, Oakland, CA 94611, or contact Judy at (510) 339-1298 or vanausten@att.net to let her know you are coming.