

***TITLE SLIDE : Remembering Kate F. Austin***

Good afternoon, my name is Pam Tudor

It is wonderful to be here, back at The Heritage. And thank you for being here. And thanks to Tony. I have a feeling he is the individual who asked me to speak to you. And thank you to Patti and Katrina who have been so helpful.

I see many faces that I know. I served on the Heritage Board of Directors for 15 years and before that on the Board of Managers before the two boards merged. I go back a ways!

Kate F. Austin has been a mystery.

***SLIDE : The March 1922 minutes***

All we knew of her was a brief sentence in the Board of Trustees  
March 1922 minutes of Kate F. Austin giving Block 184 between Laguna, Octavia, Francisco and Bay Streets to the San Francisco Ladies and Protection Society.

***SLIDE: Repeated in two of our history books***

She is mentioned in two sentences in Carol Green Wilson's "A History of The Heritage 1853-1970":

"In March the generous owner of the property, a widow, Mrs. Kate F. Austin, offered it as a gift. The deed records that the Society paid a token fee of \$10.00 for this valuable land—the former site of the "Gay Way " at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition."

More about the 'Gay Way' later.

And one sentence in the book "Our Heritage" written for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:  
"Mrs. Kate F. Austin generously donated the empty block to the Society for a nominal sum of \$10.00."

That is it.

She, Kate F. Austin, the Heritage's most significant benefactor, is unknown.

So, off I went on a quest to learn more about her. The first occasion was the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and, again, to learn more for this presentation.

*SLIDE : Who was Kate F. Austin?*

Who was this woman? Her family? What of her life? How did she come to own this property?

First, I must digress a bit to understand the story. As you know the San Francisco Ladies Protection and Relief Society was formed in 1862 by a group of church women, who saw a need in this young, rough and tumble town—growing rapidly due to the discovery of gold. They saw women and children abandoned on the streets. They first formed an employment office to hire the women, then an orphanage. As the needs of the city changed, so did the work of the Ladies.

These women came from the East Coast where charities were formed with two boards as similar to those of the husband and wife in a traditional nineteenth century household. The Lady Managers carried out the daily operations, while the male Trustees managed the finances. When this group of women formed the SF Ladies they followed the same organization format they knew. They were visible in a quiet way in the community.

Back to Kate F. Austin: For brevity going forward. I am referring to her as Kate Austin.

*SLIDE : Side Paddle-wheel Steamer*

Kate Austin was born in Sturgis, Michigan, in 1846 (some sources say 1847) and came to California with her mother Lina Freese and sister Lillian in 1852, traveling through Panama.

At the time, Kate Austin was 5. It is quite possible that they traveled on one of these side paddle-wheel steamers operated by Pacific Coast Steamship Lines, common steamers on the West Coast at that time. The company was building new ships to serve the expanding California trade. It was 24 days from New York to San Francisco. The ships had accommodation for 750 passengers, 350 cabins and 550 in steerage. Cabin passengers had well appointed rooms and bathrooms with instant hot and cold water—a luxury for ships at the time. Steerage was a different story.

They had good timing, as the Panama Railroad was finished the year before and they crossed Panama in four hours by rail instead of the four days it previously took to cross the Isthmus. The years before it was four days by dugout canoe and muleback through mosquito-infested swamps. Another 11 days from Panama and they arrived in San Francisco.

The next record I found of Kate Austin, she was living in Calaveras County with her mother and sister.

*SLIDE: Henry Sanford Austin*

At the age 19 she married in Stockton a successful businessman, several years her senior. Henry Sanford Austin was 40.

Mr. Stanford was an early California pioneer coming from New Jersey in 1826. On arriving in San Francisco he worked with a cousin in a mercantile enterprise. He moved to Stockton where he was a member of a pioneer hardware firm of Thomas H. Selby & Co, the headquarters of the company was in San Francisco.

Historical records read:

“Henry S. Austin was a power in industrial and commercial affairs and a man whose gracious personality and sterling character gained him friends in all walks of life.” Another reads: “An intense devotion to the development of California was manifest in the life and deeds of Henry S. Austin. Through the forty years of his identification with the commercial history of the state, he was a factor in its material progress and a contributor to its permanent prosperity. While his memories of his old eastern home were pleasant, he had no desire to return thither for permanent location. The atmosphere of the west, its personnel of progressive pioneers and its prospects for future prosperity, won him from the calm of the settled east, and afterward he never swerved in allegiance to his new home.”

To sum it up, it looks as though he was a catch!

One other historical fact about Mr. Austin. In January of 1849 he was a passenger on the chipper ship *Greyhound* which rounded Cape Horn and arrived in San Francisco after a voyage of 119 days. With one exception, this was the fastest record made by any ship of 1849 in rounding the Horn.

I include these accounts because they give an historical context to our story and what was happening at the time. People were pouring into San Francisco not only from the East Coast but the world. The young city was the gateway to the gold fields.

Back to Stockton and Mr. and Mrs. Austin. They were active in the social circles, community and the Protestant Episcopal Church. Later they were founding members of the Church of Advent. They had three children: Florence , Mary and Henry Hanford.

The family moved to San Francisco in 1875. She was 29.

Mr. Shelby had died and Mr. Austin and his brother William bought the company. William headed the Stockton enterprise and Henry moved to San Francisco to head the San Francisco firm. San Francisco was bustling. The population had grown from under a 1000 to 50,000 in 1853 (a few years after Mr. Austin arrived) to 150,000.

*SLIDE: Store fronts on Mission Street*

According to a story published by the American Historical Society, "Mr. Austin built up a large and prosperous business".

Their San Francisco iron and hardware store was at 220-222 Mission Street. Altho I could find no photos of their specific store, these photos are of adjoining blocks.

*SLIDE: Salesforce Tower*

I couldn't resist including this photo. The new Salesforce tower is only a block from the Austin Brothers iron and hardware store. An intertwine of past and present.

*SLIDE: 1880 Census*

The 1880 Census records the family living in San Rafael. Kate Austin was 33. The couple lived with her mother, Lina Freese her sister Lillian, children Mary H. age 13, Florence age 11, Henry H age 4, and two others.

The family also may have lived in San Francisco at Maple and Sacramento Streets. Mr. Austin owned several lots here. This area of the city was beginning to be developed at the time and he was opportunistic, buying property as the city expanded.

In 1890 tragedy comes into Kate Austin's life.

*SLIDE: Railroad*

In May 1890, Mr. Austin and their daughter Florence were tragically killed in a railroad accident in Alameda, May 30, 1890. This is a photo of the train—a commuter running from Alameda to Oakland. Note the locomotive, tenders and passenger cars.

*SLIDE : SF Chronicle Article*

“Down to Death” reads the headline. “Many San Franciscans Among Those Who Perished”. Here is an account published by the American Historical Society, which was much easier to read and more brief:

“Our beautiful sister City of Oakland, just across the Bay was, at 1:45 this afternoon, the scene of the most terrible disaster that has ever visited the inhabitants of the Pacific Coast. At that time, and while going at the rate of probably 20 miles an hour, the engine, tender and first passenger coach of a crowded local train on the narrow-gauge road, running from Alameda into Oakland, were dashed headlong into an arm of San Francisco Bay, known as Oakland Creek, through an open drawbridge at Webster Street, a distance of 15 feet from bridge to Bay.” Many perished in this disaster by drowning, and among the number were Mr. Austin and his daughter Florence. The elder daughter, Mary H. having been with them and having been saved as by a miracle.”

Kate Austin was 44 years old.

*SLIDE : Henry S. Austin Estate (Drawbridge Disaster)*

This article describes the disposition of Mr. Austin's estate.

His will gave all his property to widow Kate F. Austin. A portion for the education and upkeep went to Mary H age 22 and Henry H age 14 at the time. Kate received \$500 a month from the estate and a sum for her two children's care and education.

Mr. Austin's estate included numerous properties in San Francisco, including the property we are standing on—Block 184 between Laguna, Octavia, Francisco, Bay streets. Maple at Sacramento Street, which Kate Austin later sells. Property at Folsom and Hawthorne, which she gifts to a hospital. And properties in Sonoma and San Joaquin Counties.

After this tragedy, Kate Austin and her family moved back to Stockton. Census records of 1900 indicated that the household included her daughter Mary, Henry, her mother Tina (74), sister Lillian (37) and two boarders. Kate Austin was listed as president of Austin Bros.

In 1904 her son Henry Hanford passes away. He was 27 years old.

*SLIDE: Hotel Stewart*

In 1912 Kate Austin had returned to San Francisco and lived at the Hotel Stewart, noted at the time as, "San Francisco's most popular hotel. Famous the world for its high class accommodations at moderate rates and for its excellent meals at reasonable prices."

But....more adversity was to enter Kate Austin's life.

*SLIDE : Refugee Cottages*

After the 1906 earthquake, displaced persons began building refugee shacks in the Marina, including on Block 184, her property. This photo shows the refugee shacks looking towards Laguna and Bay.

*SLIDE: Board of Health*

Under a resolution of the Board of Health on December 1911, the 75 refugee shacks on Block 184 were condemned and the chief of police ordered their removal. The rental value was given at \$75 a year. Kate Austin had gone to court along with Mr. Wooley who was leasing the property from her, stating they were equipped with modern sanitary conveniences. They lost and the refugee shacks were demolished.

More troubles come six months later—another lawsuit over her property, Block 184, in the Marina. This time it is the Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company.

*SLIDE: Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company vs Kate F. Austin.*

Kate Austin was served at 11:45 AM at the Hotel Stewart.

In 1912 the Pacific Panama International Exposition Company (PPIE) had begun buying and leasing land in the Marina for the 1915 Exposition Company. Much of the land was public or Bay wetlands but the land from Fillmore Street east was in private hands. Frank Morton Todd in his detailed history of the exposition wrote in the chapter "Getting Possession" ...

"It was a real estate problem wondrous in its intricacy. There were 81 city blocks or 320 acres that the Exposition wanted beyond the public lands. Over 175 different owners of 200 parcels of property had to be negotiated with. Among the owners were people of every conceivable disposition toward the community's undertaking."

*SLIDE: Summons*

Apparently, Kate Austin was not one to be easily persuaded to sell or lease her property. The Exposition Company took her to court on June 26, 1912.

I am paraphrasing the legalize:

An action commenced in the California Superior Court and for the city of San Francisco. A complaint filed and summons issued by the Panama Pacific International Exposition against Kate F. Austin and H.H.Wooley with the purpose of condemning a temporary easement of that real estate property.

Two days later she was served at 11:45 AM at the Hotel Stewart for an easement for public use, sought for PPIE. Kate Austin responds with a Demurrer, "PPIE does not state facts sufficient to constitute action for which the property is sought to be taken or authorized by law. The Court overruled the Demurrer."

*SLIDE: Summons/boxes of files including files labeled Kate F. Austin*

Kate Austin was not the only one of the 175 property owners that was not willing to lease or sell.

Sitting at the Bancroft Library are cartons of boxes with summons. Cartons 161 and 163 hold files containing Kate F. Austin's many summons. Kate Austin was overruled, and the Exposition Company was able to obtain control of Block 184 and proceed with its plans for the amusement area of the fair.

*SLIDE: An Error in Our history books*

In addition to learning more about Kate Austin's life, I found that a piece of our history as told in our history books is incorrect. The books state that the Heritage property was the site of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition "Gay Way". Wrong! The Gay Way was actually part of the 1938 San Francisco World's Fair held on Treasure Island.

*SLIDE: The Zone*

As part of this presentation, I wanted to show photos of what was on this site. I learned it was part of "the **Zone**" which stretched from Fillmore to Van Ness—concessions, refreshments, souvenirs and 25 theaters.

So to correct our history, the Gay Way is out and the Zone is in. More about the Zone to come.

*SLIDE: COLOR PANAMA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION (PPIE)*

The 1915 Panama Pacific Intl Exposition (PPIE) was considered as the most extravagant and memorable world's fairs on record. Over 18 million people attended during its nine months of existence. The exposition was the world's celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal and to showcase the rebirth of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. Its expositions reflected "The epitome of civilization".

Thirty-one nations and many U.S. states built exhibit halls. Visitors could stroll through California's "Big Trees" inside the Southern Pacific Railroad Exhibit or spend a night in the full scale replica of the Old Faithful Lodge in Yosemite.

Beyond impressive buildings, the PPIE showcased new technologies—all in their infancy in the early 1900s:

- cars (Henry Ford built a working Model T assembly line at the fair),
- a Transcontinental Telephone Theater where the audiences could listen to a phone call over new cross country lines (Thomas Edison was present)
- hand-built wood seaplanes did stunts in the air
- moving motion pictures



Back to Kate Austin and Block 184.

*SLIDE: The Zone (some references indicate the Joy Zone), Colored Map*

The PPIE built in this area the Zone, the exposition's huge amusement park.

The Zone stretched from Fillmore to Van Ness and was an important source of income for the exposition company. All the amusement concessions fronted on a single paved avenue, blocks long, with a curve in it at Laguna Street. The Exposition Factbook stated: "The Expositions Amusement Street is a living color page of the world with attractions drawn from the ends of the earth."

*SLIDES: Photos of Zone's Concession*

Among the most elaborate concessions were:

The Grand Canyon, a grand spectacle presented by the Santa Fe Railways—passengers in a full scale train observation car navigated a scale reproduction of the Grand Canyon

The Panama Canal, which riders encircled a five acre topographic model of the water. Viewers listened to a description of the canal's workings as tiny ships made their way through the working locks.

Other attractions:

Toyland Grown Up

A Chinese City and other exhibits showcasing exotic cultures

A reproduction of the famous Yellowstone Park

Exotic animals at an ostrich concession where you could see live ostriches for 10 cents—remember this was 1915!

*SLIDE: Parade*

Parades were common along the grand boulevard to attract customers to the Concessions and exhibits.

*SLIDES; Lights Out, Palace of Fine Arts*

The fair closed after 9 months and within another 7 months all the buildings had been demolished except one—the Palace of Fine.

*SLIDE: Empty field*

All buildings were demolished and the debris hauled away. Kate Austin's property, Block 184, was vacant and returned to her.

*3 SLIDES: Cliff Hotel and Interiors*

The San Francisco Directory shows Kate Austin moved to the Cliff Hotel as a boarder a few years after the hotel opened on February 1915. Designed by George Applegarth, who was the architect of Palace of the Legion of Honor, the Clift was built to be ready to serve crowds attending the Pacific Panama Intl Exposition.

The hotel was advertised as the first hotel in San Francisco to be fire and earthquake proof. It became the largest hotel in the state. It must have been popular at the time to board at hotels as the 1920 census when I found Kate Austin here, there were over 100 listed boarders.

*SLIDES: Market Street, the Rotunda, City of Paris*

The Cliff Hotel was in the middle of a bustling downtown.

*SLIDE: Clift Hotel*

I hope she was very comfortable here. For...

...more sadness enters Kate Austin's life. In 1921 her daughter Mary passes away.

A year later in 1922 she offered to give to the San Francisco Protection and Relief Society Block 184, for \$10.00, and the Board of Trustees approved. Half the block was sold for funds to build a new home. Julia Morgan was chosen as the architect and the first board meeting was held in the parlor three years later. The Julia Morgan building was built and \$30,000 was left over in the treasury.

We can only surmise the reason why Kate Austin gave the property to the SF Ladies for only a \$10.00. Was she tired of the headaches this property had given her? The sadness in her life, losing a husband and three children? And why the SF Ladies Society?

Again, I am surmising but she would have been aware of the San Francisco Ladies Protection and Relief Society. The names on the Ladies Board and the Trustees were names of the well known, well connected and wealthy San Francisco families. Surely, she knew them. Also, a Mrs. Paul Austin served as vice president of the Society for many years during the same time period. But, I am uncertain if any relationship.

*SLIDE: Kate F. Austin's Obituary*

Kate Austin passes away quietly October 7, 1931, at age 85 in Room 1127 at the Clift Hotel with only this mention in the paper.

"In this city, Kate F. Austin, wife of the late Henry Sanford Austin, mother of the late Florence M. Austin, Harry S. Austin and Mary H. Austin, sister of Lillian F. Russell of Pacific Grove, a native of Sturgis, Michigan. Funeral and interment strictly private. Please omit flowers."

SLIDE: THE HERITAGE

So passed the little known benefactor of this block, this beautiful Julia Morgan building, this unique community, your home.

My quest to learn more about her was only partially fulfilled. I had especially wanted to find photographs of her. As hard as I searched, I found none. Maybe one will appear.

I will close with two photos– the Heritage built on her property and...

SLIDE: Signature of Kate F. Austin

Thank you for having me. Questions? I will try to answer.

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