

CHARLES D. CUSHMAN:

Nob Hill Pioneer

by Hudson Bell

In 1984, Louis K. Loewenstein published *Streets of San Francisco*, a slim dictionary-like volume exploring the origins of street names within the city, and while an update in 1996 included the supposed origins of 1,300 of San Francisco's 1,735 "non-numbered and non-lettered streets,"¹ nowhere to be found was the origin of Cushman Street: a one-block, one-way street that runs through the heart of Nob Hill, between Huntington Park and the Pacific-Union Club.²

While mostly elusive to the 20th century,³ Cushman Street's origin is actually a subtle signpost to the history of Nob Hill, before it was known as Nob Hill, when it became a post-Gold-Rush suburb at the western edge of the city in the early 1850s. Furthermore, the study of Cushman Street is a window into the life and times of Charles D. Cushman, California and Nob Hill pioneer, who in 1853 built a home at the northwest corner of California and Mason Streets.⁴

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Born on May 1, 1817, in New Bedford, Mass., Charles Davenport Cushman was the son of a sail maker and a descendant of Pilgrim Robert Cushman.⁵ After "seeing the light" at the age of 12, Cushman was a licensed Methodist Episcopal preacher by the age of 18. However, once graduating from college and working for some time as a teacher, in 1840 he stepped away from church duties. Like many others his age from New Bedford, he became involved in the mercantile business at the docks, supplying stores to ships. While initially a clerk for someone else, in February 1844, Cushman opened his own wholesale

clothing and dry goods store with the aid of an old Quaker named Phillip Anthony. Five years later, in the wake of President James K. Polk's December 1848 State of the Union Address confirming large supplies of gold in California,⁶ Cushman said to Anthony, "I believe I will box up these goods and take them to San Francisco."

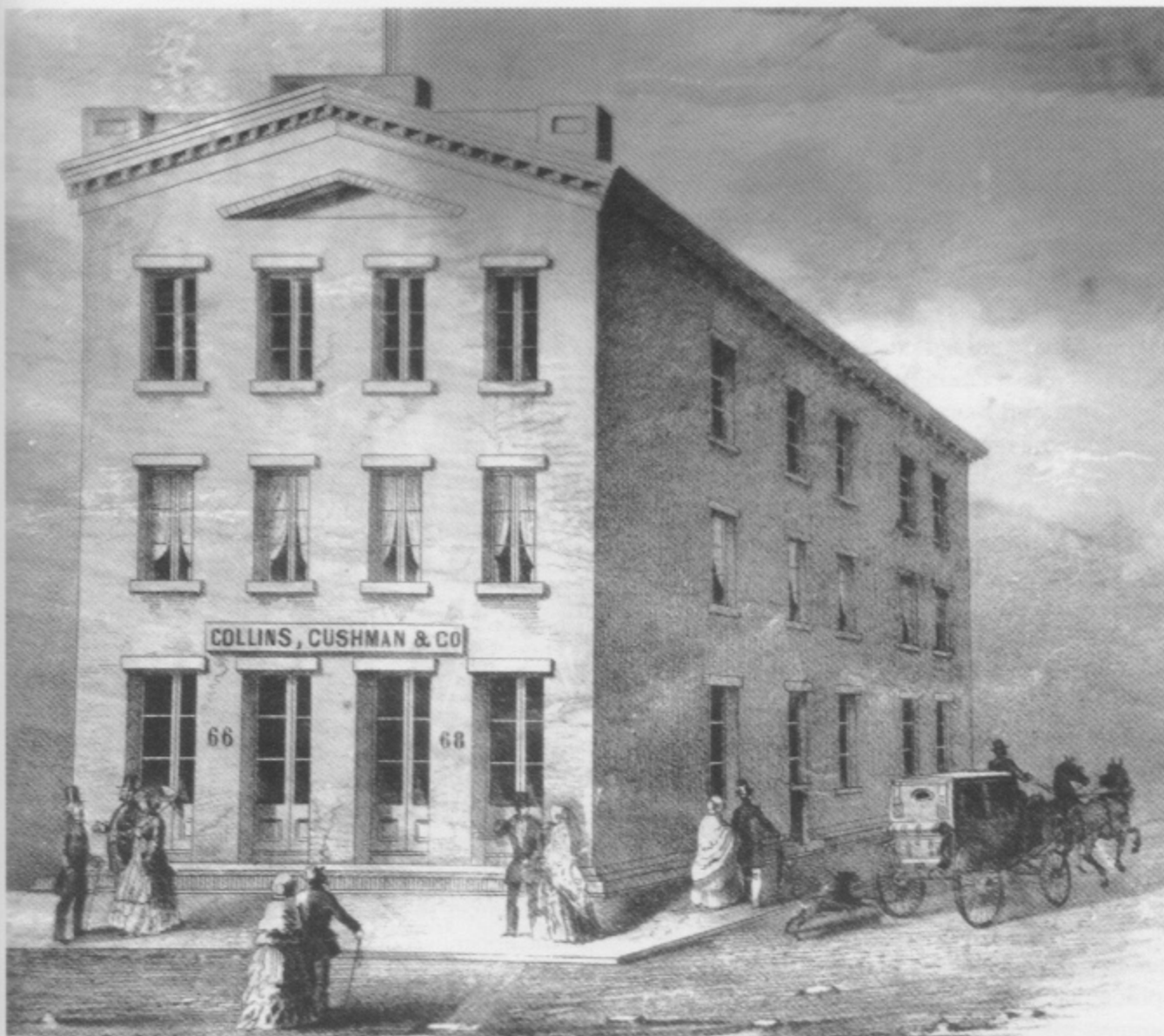
"All right, Charles," said Anthony, "do as thee thinkest best."

"But I shall want \$60,000, too," said Cushman.

"Thee shall have it," said Anthony.⁷

With Anthony's blessing, Cushman joined up with one Captain David Collins. After purchasing the A-1 schooner *Tremont*, on February 9, 1849, loaded with passengers and goods, they set course for San Francisco, around Cape Horn, arriving in Yerba Buena Cove on September 16, 1849.⁸ Unloading their goods for amazing profit, Collins, Cushman and Co. soon operated out of a storefront on Sacramento Street, just east of Kearny.⁹ An ad from the *Daily Alta* on July 4, 1850, lists their recently received merchandise as:

50 boxes pearl starch; 700 tin cans soda; butter and water crackers and gingerbread; 40 doz preserved clams, meats, pickles, preserves and fruit cake, 12 doz lemon sugar, a very desirable article for making lemonade; cases of clothing and dry goods, a variety; goods suitable for lining buildings and for bagging; 70 kegs cut nails, assorted; pickled onions, limes, and a few of those terrapin, said to be the most delicious eating in the world.



Collins, Cushman & Co. building, northeast corner of ^{Battery} Sansome and Halleck Streets, circa 1853-54.
 Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

In addition to the selling of merchandise, Collins, Cushman & Co. operated an exchange for those from the Boston and New Bedford locales, plus offered insurance on treasure shipped to New York.¹⁰ It was an extremely successful banking, shipping, and commission business, and was considered one of the most trustworthy houses for business on the Coast.¹¹ Likewise, Cushman became a well-known and respected man about town, and in April of 1850,

along with other prominent business men, including banker William M. Burgoyne and real estate broker Theodore Payne, Cushman was among a dozen men, "that for themselves and in behalf of the citizens of San Francisco," filed an injunction against the 'Ayuntamiento.'* Cushman and the others stated that said officials "[had] not properly carried out the Mexican laws, [had] squandered the property of the city and performed other illegal acts."¹²

* The name for city officials still organized around the Mexican political system.

On September 9, 1850, California was ratified as the 31st state in the Union, and in October, Cushman was elected to the executive committee of the local New England Society, whose first task was to petition the state for observance of Thanksgiving Day. Also, the New England Society moved to work with city officials in aid of uniting laity during the official celebration for California's admission into the Union.¹³ It was around this time, as the city of San Francisco was rapidly moving into Yerba Buena Cove upon wharves and landfill, that Collins, Cushman & Co. started operating on Battery Street, between California and Sacramento Streets, where they erected two large brick buildings on original water lots, a block south of Central Wharf†: one was a 36 x 110 three-story brick building at the northeast corner of Battery and Halleck streets; the other was also a three-story brick edifice, located at 55 Front Street, just east of the other building, occupying the northwest corner of Front and Halleck. These two buildings filled the entire Halleck frontage from Front to Battery,‡ on the north side, and were two of the largest brick buildings of San Francisco's early days. No expense was spared in their construction, and they were still standing 45 years later, "as sound and solid as when first built."¹⁴ As many similar building projects were underway throughout the city, in addition to foodstuffs and clothing, Collins, Cushman & Co. moved furniture and massive amounts of building materials as well, such as bricks, spruce planks, joists, pickets, and shingles. While business was lucrative for Collins, Cushman & Co., on June 16, 1852, old Phillip Anthony pulled out of the business.¹⁵

It is likely that Cushman lived out the Gold Rush in one of the Collins, Cushman & Co. buildings or in a residential hotel. In April of 1853, he purchased property at the head of California Street, between Mason and Taylor Streets.¹⁶ As the planking of Clay Street neared Taylor later that year, Cushman hauled materials up Clay, turned south on Yerba Buena Street (known today as Sproule Lane), crossed Sacramento Street, and therefore initiated Cushman Street, the best-proven access to his new property for horses, wagons, and other conveyances.¹⁷

† An extension of Commercial Street, Central Wharf was later known as Long Wharf.

‡ This block of Halleck was known as Richmond Street at the time.

FOR PANAMA DIRECT.—The splendid, new A 1 schooner **TREMONT**, 350 tons burthen, will leave for the above port on the 28th instant, weather permitting. For passage apply to **COLLINS, CUSHMAN & Co.**, Sacramento street, below Kearny street, or to **THOS. GOIN**, Mellus & Howard's building, head Central wharf. 6-3*

This notice appeared in the Daily Alta newspaper on December 21, 1849. Courtesy of California Digital Newspaper Collection, University of California, Riverside.

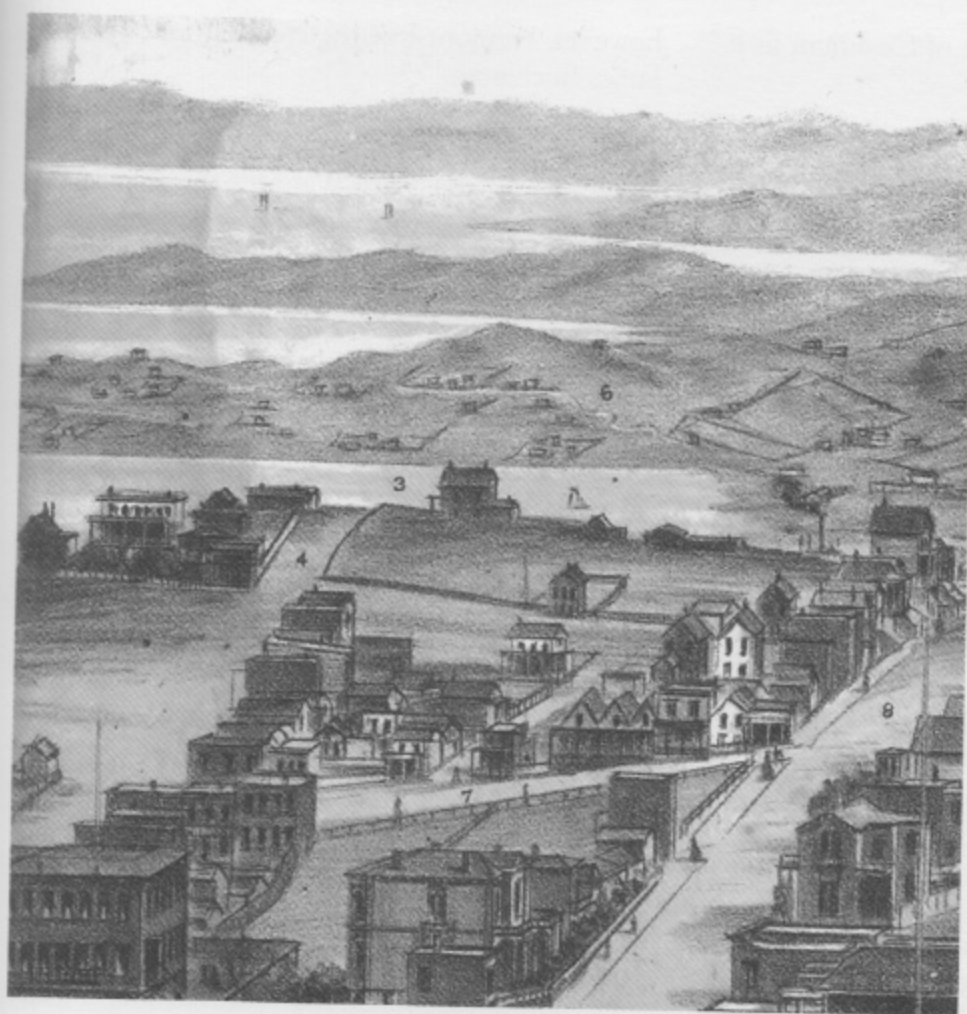
There, on a hillock east of Cushman Street, 70 feet north of California Street and facing the east side of Mason, Cushman put up a wooden-frame New England-style farmhouse of simple Greek Revival architecture, made up of two stories and an attic, with a first-floor veranda that extended out from the south and east sides. The house was 24 x 32, with a 12-by-14 one-story extension in the rear.¹⁸

Up the hill, improvements to the Central District, which surrounded Clay Street at the time, brought on an 1853–55 real estate and building boom. In fact, the authors of San Francisco's first history book, published in 1854, hoped to dub the burgeoning neighborhood Fern Hill.¹⁹ However, the name *Fern Hill* never caught on, and all surviving references to the neighborhood generally refer to the upper part of the city,²⁰ a specific street, or Clay Street Hill.²¹

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During 1853, Cushman's business successes led to political opportunities as well, and the *Daily Alta* endorsed him on the county ticket as an Assembly hopeful in the summer,²² though he wasn't elected.²³ Around this time, Cushman was listed as the 25th wealthiest man in the city, with an estate valued at \$77,500.²⁴ It was a high time for Cushman, both literally and figuratively, residing in his perch above the city; however, the high times proved short-lived, for Cushman's pecuniary position was soon to change.

More and more, merchants around the city were feeling the economic downturn that followed the booming times of the Gold Rush. By 1854, Collins,



Looking south to Nob Hill from Russian Hill. The Cushman house, on Mason and California Streets, is to the right of the number 3. The numbers correspond to the following: 3, Mission Bay; 4, Mason Street; 6, Potrero Nuevo; 7, Clay Street; 8, Taylor Street. Image part of a panorama by A. Rosenfield, 1862; courtesy of Library of Congress.

Cushman & Co. were leasing more floors of their buildings to other businesses, including boot-and-shoe operation Knight, Mitchell & Childs and grocers Arrington & Co.²⁵ By 1855, the post-Gold Rush depression had fully set in, and on February 10, 1855, Collins, Cushman & Co. were among many businesses meeting at the Merchants' Exchange with hopes of expressing their overall confidence in the bankers of the community. However, what they learned that day was that the banking house of Page, Bacon & Co. was not in a safe financial position at all, and though a "vote of confidence was passed coldly,"²⁶ 12 days later, on February 22, Page, Bacon & Co. suspended business.²⁷

Financial panic gripped the community; folks flooded the banks demanding their money.²⁸ While some banks, such as Wells, Fargo & Co., were able to suspend business for a time and survive, others, like Adams & Co., were forced to close their doors for good, ultimately ruined. Unfortunately for Cushman, as one of Adams & Co.'s creditors, he was suddenly met with major financial reversals.²⁹ "This monied calamity is unexampled in the history of California finances," wrote the *Sacramento Union*, "and must inevitably produce a vast amount of distress and hardship among multitudes beyond the borders of this State, as well as in almost every hamlet of our immediate communities."³⁰

In the wake of Adams & Co.'s collapse, Cushman stepped in as a leader to help organize efforts in sorting out the chaos.³¹ Though some tried to disparage his efforts as selfish, others in the community backed him, pronouncing Cushman a man of "sterling integrity."³² When a special Sixth Ward election was held in March of 1855, after the resignation of Assistant Alderman John Perry, Jr., Cushman's neighbors urged him to run as the Know Nothing Party candidate. Not only was Cushman once again supported by the *Daily Alta*, but this time he won the election, defeating Democrat Frank Turk. The *Daily Alta* wrote: "Mr. Cushman is the man to realize the ideal of the people as a good Alderman. We know him well and feel safe in what we say. ... Fancy and sporting men have quite long enough managed affairs in San Francisco. We want men of a different class to govern and represent us."³³

Likewise, in regard to the upcoming July 1855

elections, the *Daily Alta* wrote of Cushman as a hopeful for mayor:

Many good men among the various parties have been mentioned as candidates for the different offices, but there are some who are exceptionable. Among the candidates for Mayor we have heard the name of Charles D. Cushman. ... a nomination, for many reasons, greatly to be desired. It indicates that the people are demanding men of the right stamp. ... He is in the prime of life, fearless in the discharge of duty, and well known to all business men in the community as a man of high principles of honor, and second to none in the purity of his morals and the excellence of his character.³⁴

However, Cushman wasn't nominated for mayor in 1855, nor was he nominated again for assistant alderman.³⁵ In fact, his final contribution to the city's government came in June of 1855, before his term as assistant alderman was over, when he made amendments to and facilitated the passage of the Van Ness Land Ordinance, which aimed to quiet land disputes in the Western Addition of the city.³⁶

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On September 5, 1855, Collins, Cushman & Co. dissolved,³⁷ and Cushman moved his office to 177 Washington Street.³⁸ Furthermore, by the spring of 1856, Cushman had distanced himself politically from the crumbling Know Nothing Party, and was newly aligned with the upstart Republican Party, becoming a delegate for the Sixth Ward.³⁹ Also in 1856, Cushman acted as fourth orderly sergeant for the Vigilance Committee, which reformed after the May 14, 1856 murder of Cushman's colleague, James King of William. The committee formally disbanded after a grand parade on August 18.

During this time, Cushman was appointed vice president of the Fremont Bear Club, a California Republican movement in support of John Charles Fremont for president of the United States. At the heart of Fremont's platform was the push for a Pacific railroad, as well as the prohibition of slavery in new states.⁴⁰ As the November election neared, Cushman was appointed to the Republican Finance Committee for the Sixth Ward.⁴¹ Come November,

however, Fremont lost the election to Democrat James Buchanan.

Though Cushman remained involved with the Republican Party throughout 1857, and became a delegate for the Sixth Ward for the Republican county convention that year, he also became heavily involved in the local Methodist Episcopal (ME) community, to the extent that he started preaching again for the first time since his early 20s. When the annual ME conference took place that year in San Francisco, Cushman attended and was appointed to serve in the Marysville District, north of Sacramento, namely in Iowa City (today called Iowa Hill), though ultimately he also wandered into and preached in the mining communities of Yankee Jim's, Michigan Bluff, Dutch Flat, and Lone Hand Bluff.⁴² As for the ME community-at-large, the *Sacramento Union* reported, "the affairs of this denomination are in a very prosperous condition in nearly every locality to which its efforts have been directed. The total membership is now 3,182, including an increase of 532 during the past year, in the course of which a large extent of country has been supplied with stated preaching, and numerous churches have been organized."⁴³

In April of 1858, Cushman became pastor of a newly erected church in Iowa City,⁴⁴ and when the annual ME conference took place later that year in Sacramento, Cushman was voted to remain "on trial," along with a number of other men who were also "licentiates, actively engaged in preaching, while pursuing a regular course of theological reading."⁴⁵ In 1859, at a conference in Petaluma, Cushman was ordained as a deacon and reassigned to the community of Centerville in Alameda County (now part of Union City). By the close of that year, this appointment was parlayed into Rev. C. D. Cushman's becoming pastor of a new ME church in the town of Alvarado (also part of present-day of Union City), which was dedicated on December 11.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in San Francisco, Cushman's old New England-style frame house at the corner of California and Mason Streets went up for auction.⁴⁷

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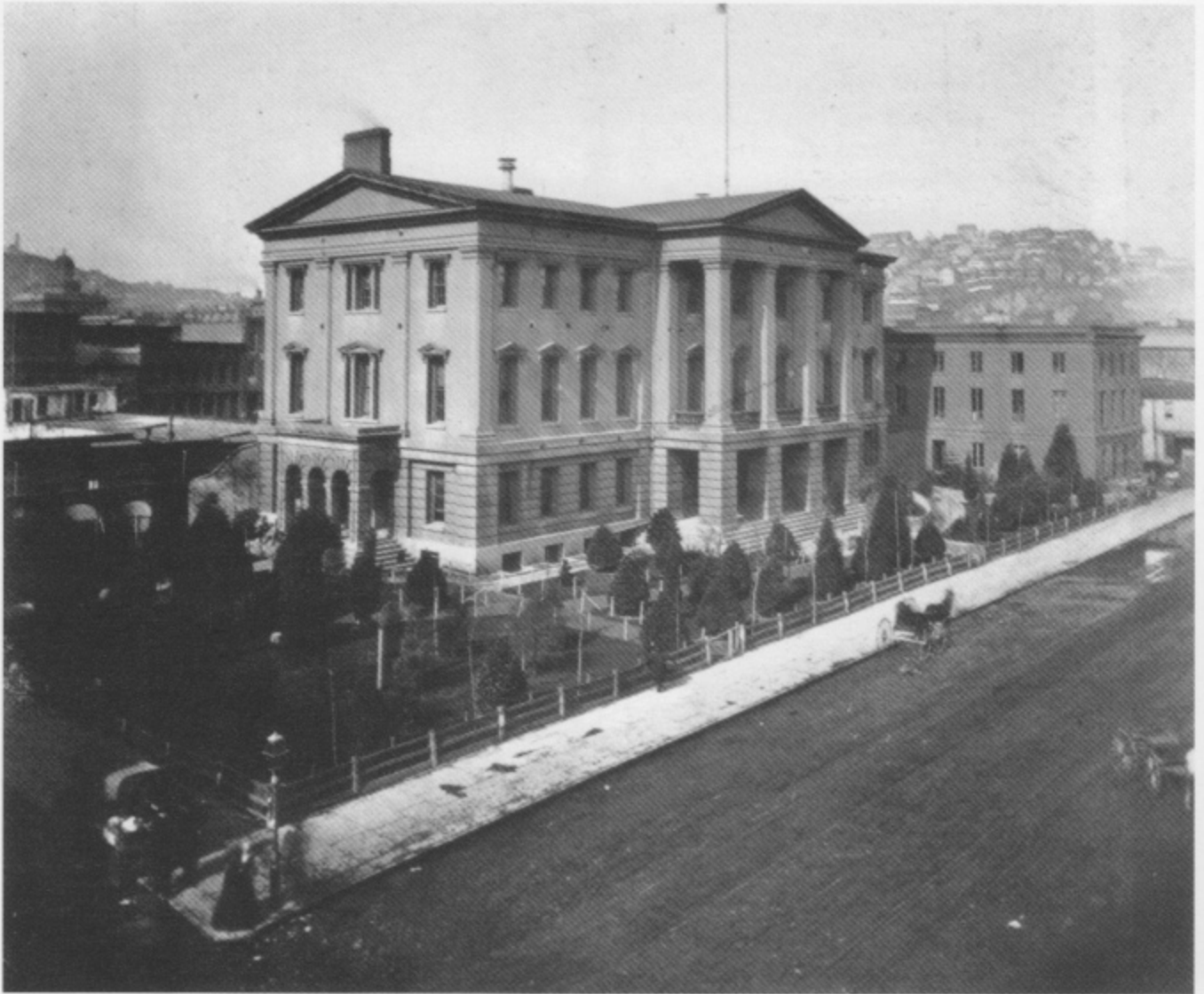
During 1860, Cushman preached at the ME church in Alvarado, while also spending considerable time working with the Republican Party on the



View from the Nucleus Hotel, corner Market and Third Streets, looking west, San Francisco, circa 1866, with the old Temple Emanuel at left. The circle highlights Cushman's house. Photo by Lawrence & Houseworth; courtesy of Society of California Pioneers.

approaching U.S. presidential election. The party's candidate was Abraham Lincoln. Cushman's ties to Lincoln were strong; when Lincoln was elected, Cushman was offered the job of deputy collector, under collector Ira P. Rankin, for the port of San Francisco. Accepting the opportunity, Cushman left the church and moved back to San Francisco. The *Sacramento Union*, mentioning Cushman and others, announced the new appointments on June 1, 1861, with this headline: "Sons of the Pilgrims Supplant the FFVs [First Families of Virginia]." The article went on to say:

"[the] faithful to Abraham Lincoln receive their reward to-day. The conquered Democracy, until 1865, will be unrepresented in the places which have known them ever since California came into the Federal family. . . . The army of 'Confederates,' who have proved themselves tried and true servants of the retired public functionary of Wheatland, abandon their posts to the favored children of the Presidential incumbent, and with more regret than dimes, turn over their 'counters' to the winners."



U.S. Post Office and Custom House at Battery and Washington Streets, circa 1860s.
Cushman worked here for a spell at around that time. Courtesy of Society of California Pioneers.

With his new office on the second floor of the U.S. Custom House at the northwest corner of Washington and Battery Streets, Cushman and his wife, Sarah, lived near the old neighborhood, on the east side of Auburn near Jackson Street. By 1862, however, they were near the apex of the hill, on the south side of Clay between Jones and Leavenworth.⁴⁸ As for Cushman's work at the Custom House, he became frustrated because Collector Rankin was bestowing business favor on his brother, who in a roundabout way had become the official drayman for the Custom House. Furthermore, excessive rates were being paid to him: 20 cents a package

at a time when regular drayage fees were around 8 cents per package.⁴⁹ Unsurprisingly, when Cushman remonstrated this operation, he fell out of Rankin's favor and wasn't re-appointed in 1862. Distraught, Cushman appealed to the Secretary of the Treasury, who called for an investigation into the matter.

Coming to fruition in the spring of 1863, with the Civil War raging in the East, the investigation indeed uncovered that "excessive frauds upon the Government [had] been committed in the matter of drayage, that fruitful field for speculation." Rankin was promptly removed from office, having spent at least \$20,000 more a year on drayage than necessary.⁵⁰

Cushman was appointed auditor and deputy of the port for a time, but it was a brief recompense, as J. Frank Miller replaced him a few months later.⁵¹

At this time, Cushman started work as manager for shipping and commercial merchants Charles Walcutt Brooks & Co. at Sansome and Merchant Streets, conducting business between China, Japan, the Hawaiian Islands, and San Francisco.⁵² Also at this time, Cushman became involved with presiding elder of the San Francisco district of the ME church, Samuel D. Simonds, who appointed Cushman as a trustee of the German Mission Societies of the German ME Church within the San Francisco circuit.⁵³ Likewise, when Simonds came under church scrutiny in 1864, Cushman found himself ostracized at conference by association, and the church attempted to change his status to "superannuated."⁵⁴ Cushman protested. Later that

day, charges were presented against Simonds for "errors in doctrine and immoral conduct." By the end of conference, Cushman was able to salvage his relationship with the church, but just barely, being re-determined a "supernumerary relation,"⁵⁵ appointed as assistant counsel for Simonds in regard to Simonds's upcoming trial with church leaders.⁵⁶

In 1865, still working for C. W. Brooks & Co., Cushman moved from Clay Street Hill to the Western Addition to briefly live at the northwest corner of Steiner and Fulton Streets on Alamo Square.⁵⁷ In 1866, however, he was back in the Sixth Ward living at the northeast corner of Taylor and Sacramento Streets,⁵⁸ a half block from the street named after him 13 years earlier. It is highly likely that Cushman witnessed the dismantling of his old house on the northwest corner of California and Mason Streets at this time.⁵⁹ (Almost 20 years later,

§ This generally means discharged from service, or forcibly retired.

** Cushman kept his relationship with the church, but was considered superfluous.



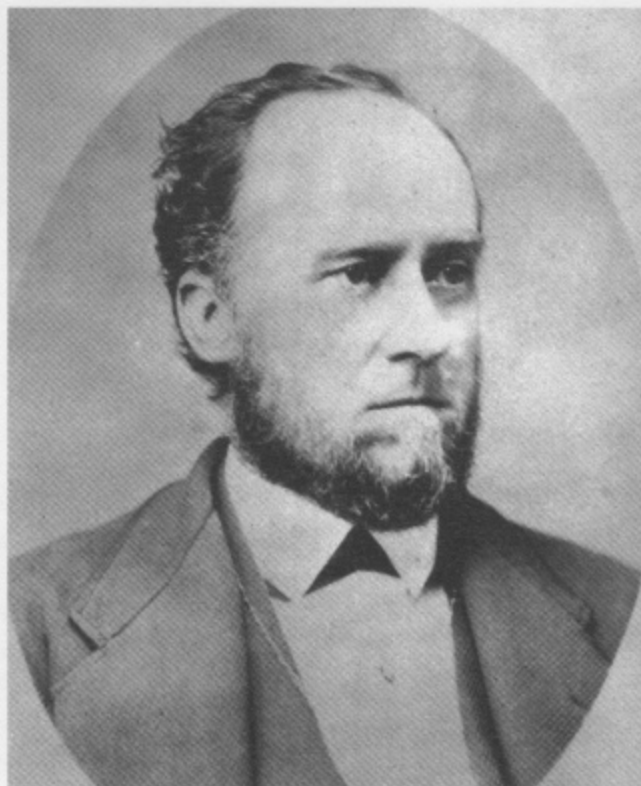
Mason Street between California and Sacramento Streets in 1877, showing the ruins of the old Cushman lot and hill.
Photo by Eadweard Muybridge; courtesy of California Historical Society.

in 1885, after grading the entire block, forty-niner and silver king James C. Flood erected a brownstone on the old Cushman property, which stands today as the Pacific-Union Club).

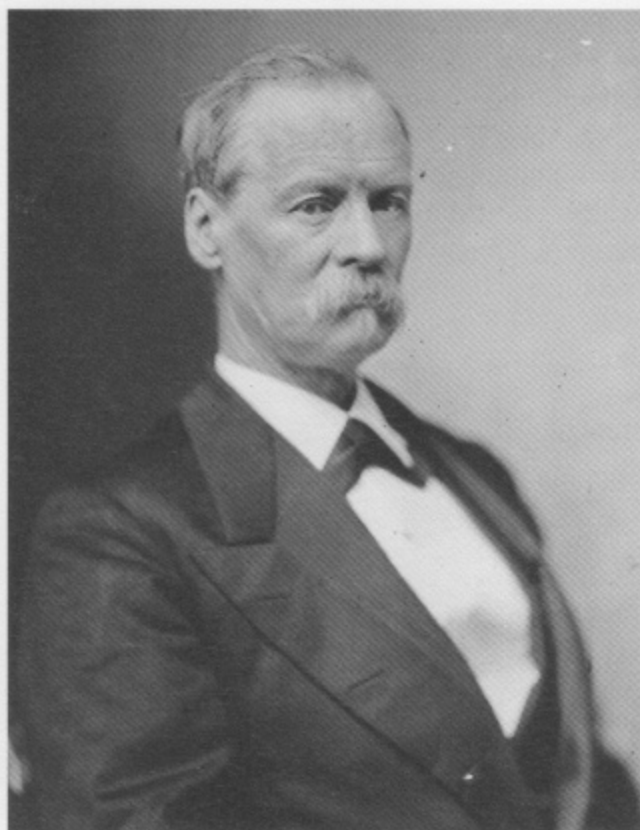
Not staying at any address for too long, when C. W. Brooks closed down operations circa 1868, Cushman was living in North Beach at 1305 Stockton Street near Broadway.⁵⁸ Cushman finally regained favor within the ME community at this time, and he was “granted a location at his own request.”⁵⁹ Choosing the Alvarado church, Cushman preached in Alameda County once again, where he remained until around the death of his 47-year old wife, Sarah, on October 3, 1869.⁶⁰

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Back in San Francisco in 1870, Cushman pursued the business of banking, and on April 25 became president and director of a newly incorporated firm called Improved Order of Red Men's Savings and Loan Company, located at 340 Bush Street near Kearny.⁶¹ While many people had amassed substantial wealth over the previous ten years by



*William Ralston (1826–1875) was a San Francisco businessman and financier, and was the founder of the Bank of California.
Courtesy of Wikipedia.*



*William Sharon (1821–1885) was a United States Senator from Nevada who profited from the Comstock Lode.
Courtesy of Wikipedia.*

investing in the Nevada silver mines, Cushman was not among them.⁶² Aside from initially unsuccessful investments, looming on the horizon was the Panic of 1873 and the “Long Depression.”

There was a silver lining to Cushman's banking pursuits, however, as the nature of the business reacquainted him with a man he'd met back in April of 1855, a man who now welcomed his employ.⁶³ The man's name was William Sharon, and he was one of the wealthiest men on the West Coast. Known as the King of the Comstock, Sharon had amassed a fortune as Bank of California's Nevada agent with regard to silver mining stocks surrounding the Comstock Lode.

During 1872 and 1873, while living in a house on Howard Street,⁶⁴ Cushman oversaw some of Sharon's real estate, and in 1874, after meeting William Ralston, founder of the Bank of California, Cushman was hired as financial agent for the construction of Ralston's new pet project, the Palace Hotel, located at New Montgomery and Market



The "Grand Court" of the original Palace Hotel circa 1895.
Courtesy of Wikipedia.

Streets. The "architectural delight of Victorian California and long the most luxurious hostelry in America,"⁶⁵ the Palace's grand opening took place on October 2, 1875. The hotel was something to behold, having cost a cool \$5 million. Seven stories high, with 800 rooms, 16 million bricks, 575 tons of cast and wrought iron, 30 miles of gas, steam and water pipes, the Palace Hotel utilized seven tons of locks and keys, four thousand doors, and covered an area of 96,250 square feet. It featured a turnaround for carriages in the middle of the building with balconies circling above.⁶⁶

Illuminated throughout on opening night, a rejoicing crowd called for a speech, but when someone stepped to the railing, it wasn't William Ralston. It was William Sharon, now a Nevada senator. "I miss, as you do," spoke Sharon, "the proud and manly spirit of [Ralston], who devised this magnificent structure."⁶⁷ Five weeks earlier, on August 26, 1875, in the wake of a run on the Bank of California that suspended operations,⁶⁸ Ralston was found drowned off the North Beach.⁶⁹ Given that Sharon had assumed Ralston's debts and assets to save the bank, when Sharon came into possession of the Palace Hotel, he moved in.⁷⁰



Bird's Eye view of the Palace Hotel and Nob Hill, circa 1880. Courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Cushman remained in his role as cashier of the hotel until July 1, 1879, when Sharon moved him to the West Coast Furniture Company, another one of Ralston's former assets. Cushman worked there as an agent for a few years, until the business closed on January 21, 1881. Signaling the end of Sharon and Cushman's business relationship, Cushman asked for a letter of endorsement. Sharon told him to write something up and he would sign it. Cushman's first letter got lost in the shuffle, but, on June 13, 1881, he dictated a letter to former West Coast Furniture accountant Alfred Elford, which was later signed by Sharon.⁷¹

In May of 1882, Cushman was at Emerson's Theatre with his new wife, Nina Stewart,⁷² and his two daughters to see *The Widow Bedott*, when William Sharon and a young woman sat down next to them.⁷³ This was the first time Cushman laid eyes on Sarah Althea Hill, who the following year publicly proclaimed that she was married to Sharon and had a contract to prove it. She declared that during Sharon's re-election efforts for Nevada senator in 1880, she'd agreed to marry him in secret, as there was a woman in Philadelphia Sharon said would "raise a row and spoil [his] chances"⁷⁴ if she found out. Eventually, Sarah and Sharon had a falling out, and Sharon moved on; however, according to Sarah, per said contract, they were still legally man and wife, and if divorce was imminent, she had a right to half of his estate. Press and legal mayhem ensued.

Initially, Cushman doubted Sarah's claims, considering Sharon "too shrewd a man to do such a thing." However, after being invited to Sarah's home at 18 Laurel Place on Oct. 20, 1883, and examining the contract for himself, Cushman became "so satisfied that [Sarah] was married to Mr. Sharon that [he] felt [he] ought to call her Mrs. Sharon."⁷⁵ This realization by the "venerable" Cushman,⁷⁶ who'd seen no less than a hundred of Sharon's genuine signatures, instantly made Cushman Sarah Althea Hill's most important witness.⁷⁷

On Jan. 18, 1884, though scheduled to depart for Portland, Oregon the following day, Cushman took a deposition that turned into a two-day affair. The first day lasted ten hours, with Cushman pacing the room, hands in his pockets, frequently drinking water. He confirmed Sharon's signature on all documents presented, and as the questioning ran



Sarah Althea Hill (1850–1937) was a socialite in San Francisco in the 1880s. She became a national celebrity when she sued millionaire Senator William Sharon for divorce in 1883, claiming to have secretly married him three years earlier by private contract.

Courtesy of Wikipedia.

into the evening hours, he told those in the room not to fear, for he was a "tough old man and could keep it up all night." Though it didn't go all night, when questioning resumed the next day, according to the *Daily Alta*, "there was not the faintest trace of toughness about [Cushman]. He looked tired, weak, and at times was nervously hysterical, yet all through he maintained a stern, uncompromising hostility of manner towards Mr. Sharon's counsel, answering them with set phrases and with a redundancy of explanation which had the appearance of disguised contempt."⁷⁸

Though Cushman considered his testimony for Sarah “just and proper,”⁷⁹ apparently at times he was so “oppressively” cross-examined by Sharon’s lawyers that “even reporters were scandalized.”⁸⁰ When the second day of questioning was finally over, Cushman was indeed not well, and asked to go home without reading over the transcript. It was agreed that it would be sent to Oregon for him to look over. “My love of truth and justice,” said Cushman, “and a careful examination of all the papers, convinced me. I could not resist the conviction of my own conscience. I testified accordingly.”⁸¹

While Cushman’s testimony indeed aided in the trial’s decision in favor of “Sarah Sharon” at the end of 1884, it wasn’t the last of Cushman’s involvement in the whole imbroglio. Cushman subsequently found himself on the stand in various other trials surrounding the affair.⁸² And, when he wandered into the Palace Hotel on June 7, 1885, to meet an old friend, he was “forcibly ejected” from the premises under orders from Sharon.⁸³ Offended, Cushman returned to the Palace later that day to be ejected again in the same manner. He promptly filed charges against “special officer” John A. Jackson, but when *The People vs. Jackson* was finally heard in the Police Court on October 6, 1885, with a large crowd in attendance, the letter of endorsement Cushman had dictated back in 1881 was used against him, and the judge immediately dismissed the case.

“Your Honor, don’t pretend to say that,” said Cushman’s lawyer.

“You can’t argue this case after I have decided it. I do pretend to say that,” said Judge Pennie. “Hearty” laughter and applause from those in attendance followed.⁸⁴

While the initial Sharon-Hill trial was determined in December of 1884 in Sarah’s favor, by the end of 1885 decisions in the myriad trials and appeals surrounding the affair started shifting the other way. In 1890, the initial ruling was overturned; Sarah’s marriage contract was pronounced a forgery. With this reversal on the heels of the 1889 death of Sarah’s lawyer and “new” husband David S. Terry (William Sharon had died on Nov. 13, 1885), Sarah became mentally unhinged, and in 1892 was admitted to the insane asylum in Stockton, where she remained until her death on February 14, 1937.⁸⁵

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Circa 1888, at the age of 71, Cushman moved down the coast to the town of Soquel, in Santa Cruz County, where his son Zacheus was working as a carpenter. Once in Soquel, Cushman started preaching again. Being a “devout and conscientious worker,” his “energies and talents were freely given” to the ME community there; in fact, using his experience in finance, Cushman was the director responsible for incorporating the Soquel ME Church in 1892.⁸⁶

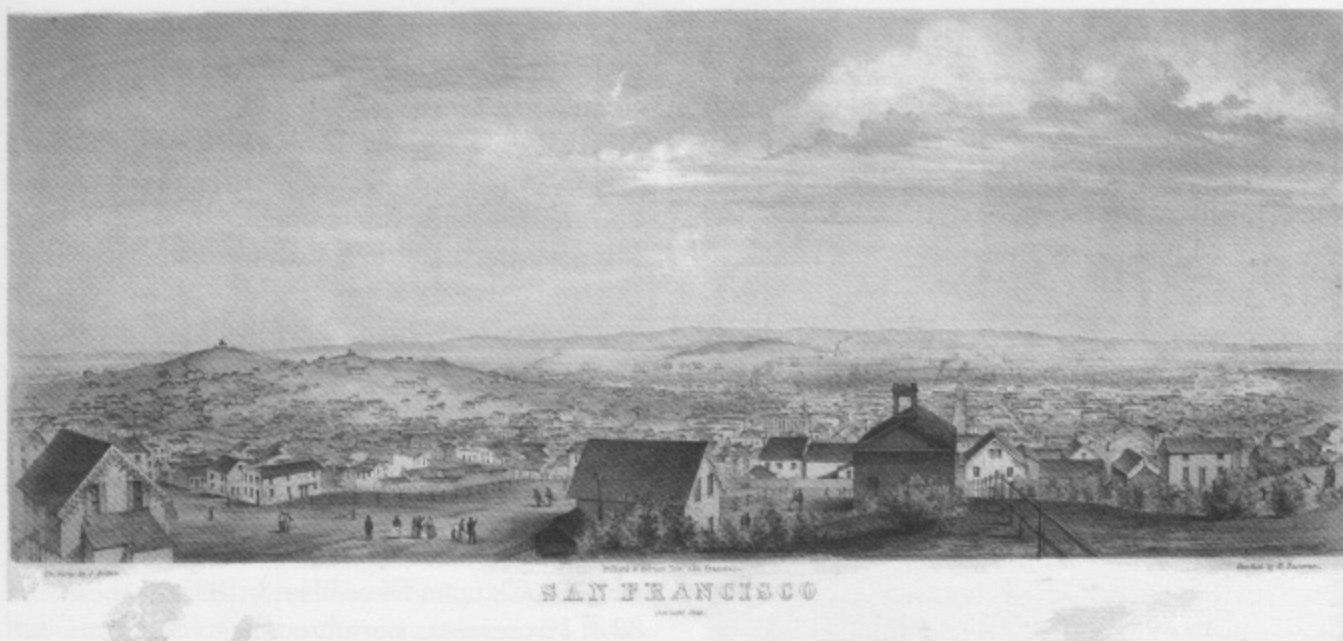
Due to his health, Cushman returned to San Francisco around 1895 to live at the Old People’s Home at 2507 Pine Street, on the southwest corner of Pierce Street.⁸⁷ In his final years he suffered many maladies, particularly severe asthma.⁸⁸ Standing 5’ 8” with blue eyes and white hair,⁸⁹ Cushman died in Santa Clara on December 8, 1897, at the age of 80.⁹⁰ His remains were brought to San Francisco on December 10, and he was interred at Laurel Hill Cemetery.⁹¹

Tucked between California and Sacramento Streets in the heart of Nob Hill, amid a host of well-known landmarks, Cushman Street is easy to miss. Modest and unpretentious, this one-block street holds the quiet legacy of one of San Francisco’s early pioneers.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hudson Bell is a singer-songwriter who has lived in Nob Hill since 2001. He has been working on a book titled Fern Hill: The Lost History of San Francisco’s Nob Hill for the past few years, and is currently the historian of the Nob Hill Association. In addition, Hudson leads walking tours throughout San Francisco for his company, Fern Hill Walking Tours (fernhilltours.com).



San Francisco, 1868: Mason, California and Sacramento Streets. Courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
1854

NOTES

1. Louis K. Loewenstein, *Streets of San Francisco* (Berkeley: Wilderness Press, 1996), 1.
2. Going back to the early 1850s, Huntington Park was a residential block, mostly on its north side; eventually the south side of the block is where the Colton Mansion was built in 1872, later owned by railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington, whose wife donated the entire block to the city in 1915 with the request that it become a park. The Pacific-Union Club was originally a winter house built for the James C. Flood family in 1885. Notably, it was the only residential building on Nob Hill to survive the 1906 earthquake.
3. It should be noted that Michael D. Lampen, Grace Cathedral Archivist, made the connection between Cushman Street and Charles D. Cushman in 1998 when researching his document, "Nob Hill Street and Alley Names," which is available for perusal at the S. F. History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
4. LeCount & Strong's City Directory of 1854 lists Cushman at the corner of Mason and California Streets. On November 28, 1853, Theodore Payne & Co. auctioned off two lots: one on the southwest corner of "Sacramento and Cushman streets," the other on the south side of Sacramento, "75 feet west from the corner of Cushman street." In other words, it can safely be assumed that Cushman was established on the hill by November of 1853 (*Daily Alta*, November 23, 1853).
5. Year: 1850; Census Place: New Bedford, Bristol, Massachusetts; Roll: M432_309; Page: 244A; Image: 70; *Daily Alta*, June 26, 1855; A Cushman monument was organized during a Massachusetts celebration in 1855 (erected in 1858) that C. D. had hoped to attend, though due to duties in San Francisco he sent his wife, Sarah L. Cushman, to represent California. C. D.'s relation to Pilgrim Robert Cushman made him a strong favorite of the local Know Nothing Party. Though instrumental in the sailing of the *Mayflower*, due to ill health, Robert Cushman didn't arrive in Plymouth, MA until a year later, arriving aboard the *Fortune* in 1621. Robert didn't stay in the colony long, however, soon returning to London to act as mediator between England and the colony. However, his son, Thomas, did stay on and married Mary Allerton, the daughter of Isaac Allerton.
6. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, December 6, 1848.
7. *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 24, 1897.
8. *Daily Alta*, Jan 20, 1884; The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 50.
9. *Daily Alta*, Dec. 21, 1849.
10. *Daily Alta*, June 28, 1850.

11. The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 50.
12. *Daily Alta*, April 19, 1850.
13. *Daily Alta*, Oct. 20, 1850.
14. The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 50.
15. *Daily Alta*, October 25, 1850; July 26, 1860; July 26, 1852; The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 50.
16. *Daily Alta*, April 4, 1853. Theodore Payne & Co. advertisement: "building lots on California, Mason and Taylor streets. Subdivisions of 50-vara Lots No. 597, 649, 632, each lot in size 277 feet front by 120 feet in depth."
17. By 1853, Clay Street was the only other street planked this far west other than Pacific Street (today Pacific Avenue); *Daily Alta*, August 25, 1853; October 15, 1853; Advertisement for lots near Clay, Jones, and Taylor reads, "N. B. - The Plank Road on Clay street runs within a few feet of these lots, rendering them very easy of access"; *Daily Alta*, November 23, 1853; for help in visualizing the institution of Cushman Street by way of Clay, see "San Francisco, 1862," a panoramic sketch from the vantage point of Russian Hill, published by A. Rosenfield.
18. *Daily Alta*, July 13, 1859.
19. Frank Soulé, John H. Gihon, M. D., & James Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), 20 & 159. To my knowledge, these are the only mentions of pre-Nob Hill as Fern Hill. It's my assumption the authors' real-estate connections may have had something to do with the *Annals* being printed as such. For example, real-estate broker A. G. Randall, who built homes along Taylor Street during this time, is thanked in the preface of the book.
20. *Daily Alta*, August 28, 1852; *Sacramento Union*, June 14, 1853.
21. *Sacramento Union*, Aug. 28, 1854.
22. *Sacramento Union*, Sept. 6, 1853.
23. *Sacramento Union*, Oct. 1, 1853. Cushman received around 1,431 votes, according to the *Daily Alta*, though within these numbers there must be a misprint somewhere as adding up the numbers across the board comes to 1,449. That said, not surprisingly, Cushman's best showing was in the Sixth Ward, though still only 238 votes.
24. *Sacramento Union*, October 14, 1865.
25. *Sacramento Union*, March 18, 1854; March 30, 1855.
26. *New York Times*, March 20, 1855.
27. *Ibid.*; *Daily Alta*, Feb. 8, 1855.
28. The financial panic of 1855 was brought on by three key events: the January 1854 run on Adams & Co.; the late 1854 disappearance of well-known Henry Meiggs, who owed massive amounts of cash to just about everyone in town; and then in mid-February 1855, when the steamer *Panama* arrived in San Francisco with news that the paper of Page, Bacon & Co.'s parent company in St. Louis (Page & Bacon) wasn't honored by bank Duncan, Sherman & Co. in New York City (*California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, Feb. 22, 1855). With this news, a frenzy of folks crowded into Page, Bacon & Co. demanding their money; this dominoed to other banking institutions, etc.
29. While Cushman was one of San Francisco's most wealthy men in 1855, with an estate valued at \$77,500, the Federal Census of 1860 has his estate valued at \$1,500; The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 51.
30. *Sacramento Union*, February 24, 1855.
31. *Daily Alta*, March 13, 1855.
32. *Daily Alta*, March 15, 1855.
33. *Daily Alta*, March 18, 1855; March 17, 1855.
34. *Daily Alta*, May 22, 1855.
35. The Know Nothing candidate for mayor remained incumbent Stephen Palfrey Webb, though he lost the election to rising political star, Democrat James Van Ness. The Sixth Ward assistant alderman candidate was a man named Howell who lost to Democrat Robert J. Vandewater by 40 votes.
36. *Daily Alta*, June 21, 1855; Nov. 13, 1855.
37. *Daily Alta*, Sept. 25, 1855.
38. Harris, Bogardus & Labatt's City Directory of 1856, p. 40.
39. *Daily Alta*, April 25, 1856.
40. *Sacramento Union*, July, 24, 1856; It was during the next presential cycle when Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidency that the West finally gained federal support for building a Pacific railroad. Those Republican men in Sacramento involved in securing said funding and going about the business of building said railroad would make millions doing so. Eventually they would all build mansions on the hill in the 1870s.
41. *Daily Alta*, August 20, 1856.
42. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1856, 1857* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 528; *Daily Alta*, Jan. 20, 1884.
43. *Sacramento Union*, September 28, 1857.

44. *Daily Alta*, May 7, 1858.
45. *Sacramento Union*, September 17, 1858.
46. *Daily Alta*, Nov. 26, 1859; *Sacramento Union*, December 24, 1859; It appears that the Union misreported the 11th, as the 17th, given that the 17th was not a Sunday, and the 11th was mentioned in the previous article.
47. *Daily Alta*, July 13, 1859.
48. Langley's City Directory of 1861, p. 112; Langley's City Directory of 1862, p. 120; Langley's City Directory of 1863, p. 115; Langley's City Directory of 1864, p. 124.
49. *Daily Alta*, April 6, 1863.
50. *Daily Alta*, June 13, 1862; April 6, 1863
51. *Sacramento Union*, September 7, 1863.
52. The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 51.
53. *Daily Alta*, August 14, 1863.
54. *Sacramento Union*: September 23, 1864; September 30, 1864; September 26, 1864.
55. Langley's City Directory of 1865, p. 140.
56. California State Library, California History Section; *Great Registers, 1866-1898*; Collection Number: 4-2A; CSL Roll Number: 40; FHL Roll Number: 977096.
57. This determination comes from the careful study of two photographs taken by Lawrence & Houseworth circa 1866. Given the appearance of the Cushman house, the earlier of the two is definitely Plate 558, "View from the Nucleus Hotel, corner Market and Third streets, looking West, San Francisco," which can be dated to circa March 1866 due to recent completion of Congregation Emanu-El Synagogue on Sutter between Stockton and Powell streets. The second is Plate 164, "San Francisco from cor. Market and Sixth Sts., Looking North to corner California and Taylor streets," which shows the Second Congregational Church on Taylor Street, south of Geary, and while there appears to be scaffolding around the middle of the steeple, it was completed in 1865. This second plate helps date the first plate, for in it the Cushman house is clearly being disassembled, as the eastern half of the roof is absent, and it appears it's being removed methodically. Likewise, the removal of the house in early 1866 coincides with the fact that in May 1866, Maurice Dore & Co. is selling a building-less lot at the northwest corner of Mason and California, in what is a sliver of the old Cushman property now divvied up (*Daily Alta*, May 22, 1866).
58. Langley's City Directory of 1868, p. 167.
59. *Daily Alta*, Sept. 19, 1868.
60. *Daily Alta*, Oct. 5, 1869.
61. *Daily Alta*, April 26, 1870.
62. On October 28, 1872 for instance, the *Daily Alta* re-reported Cushman as a trustee of Silver West Consolidated Mining Co. and having 7,300 shares of stock, with the bulk valued at \$3,650, up for auction to anyone that would spend money on it.
63. *Daily Alta*, January 19, 1884.
64. Various sources around this time have Cushman located at 1828 Howard, 1829 Howard, and 2017 Howard. While it's possible Cushman was hopping about the street, it's most probable that development on the street had his address changing.
65. Harold Kirker, *California's Architectural Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1986), 95.
66. *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 1, 1874; *Indianapolis News*, June 23, 1874; *Helena Independent Record*, June 27, 1874; *Iola Register*, May 29, 1875.
67. *Daily Alta*, October 3, 1875.
68. *Sacramento Union*, August 27, 1875.
69. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 1875.
70. Langley's City Directory of 1876, p. 731.
71. *Daily Alta*, January 19, 1884.
72. *Daily Alta*, April 30, 1884.
73. *Daily Alta*, January 20, 1884.
74. *Los Angeles Herald*, October 7, 1883.
75. *Daily Alta*, January 20, 1884.
76. *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 20, 1884.
77. *Daily Alta*, January 19, 1884.
78. *Daily Alta*, Jan. 20, 1884.
79. Ibid.
80. Robert H. Kroninger, *Sarah & the Senator* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1964), 75. This book is the best overview of the Sharon-Hill imbroglio.
81. *Daily Alta*, January 20, 1884.
82. Cushman's stint in Oregon appears to have been a short one, perhaps due to his second wife's death on April 29, 1884 (*Daily Alta*, April 30, 1884).
83. *Daily Alta*, June 11, 1885.
84. *Daily Alta*, Oct. 7, 1885.
85. Kroninger, *Sarah & the Senator* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1964).
86. California State Library, California History Section; *Great Registers, 1866-1898*; Collection Number: 4-2A; CSL Roll Number: 127; FHL Roll Number: 978581; The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record

Vol. 6, p. 51; The church they built at this time was used until 1915, "when it was abandoned, torn down, and the wood was used in the construction of the relocated Pennsylvania Avenue Methodist Church in Santa Cruz" (*Santa Cruz Sentinel*, December 8, 1957).

87. Crocker-Langley's City Directory of 1896, pp. 473 & 1212.
88. The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 51.
89. California State Library, California History Section; *Great Registers, 1866-1898*; Collection Number: 4-2A; CSL Roll Number: 127; FHL Roll Number: 978581.
90. The Society of California Pioneers, Mortuary Record 1892-1906, p. 89.
91. The Society of California Pioneers, Obituary Record Vol. 6, p. 51.