

SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO IN THE 1930S

By Jacquelyne Kious

Despite the fact that businesses continued to locate in SSF during the great depression of the 1930s, the city was not immune to the crash of the financial market. As the economy slowed factories began to lay off workers. Many workers asked to job share working two to three days a week which gave everyone a chance to earn money.

Many SSF residents were put to work on WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects which included improvements to Orange Park, moving dirt from surrounding hillsides to use as bay fill for SF International Airport, the construction of the Linden Avenue post office, and Coit Tower. A local company, Edwards Wire Rope, supplied all the wire cable for the Golden Gate Bridge. And many residents participated in preparing for the 1939 World's Fair on Treasure Island.

“One of the main things local residents remember about the 1930s is how much people helped each other. With only 5,000 residents, SSF was a close-knit town very much like a family.” (*SSF website, SSF in the 1930s*). Vincent Mager, long-time editor of the Enterprise Journal, wrote “Our Miller Avenue neighbors were generous... There were plenty of good hearts and green thumbs. Chickens, eggs, rabbits and lush produce were proffered” (*My Reminiscences of South San Francisco and the Enterprise Journal*). And with little money for entertainment, residents staged talent shows and vaudeville and minstrel shows.

Controversy erupted in 1933 when Baden Kennel Club, a dog racing track, opened on a 75-acre site across from Orange Park in what is now Mayfair Village. Wagering was illegal. The track was raided on several occasions. Even though the race track provided jobs, many residents were concerned over the criminal element associated with betting. Tanforan and Bay Meadows horse racing tracks were equally unhappy with the competition from the dog track. Petitions and meetings abounded, further dividing the town. Due in part to lobbying by the horse racing association, the state outlawed greyhound racing forcing the closure of Baden Kennel Club in 1938.

The 1920s came to a close with opening of Bayshore Highway, from San Francisco to San Mateo, in October 1929. Though it was deemed by engineers as so perfectly planned it virtually eliminated the danger of serious accidents, the highway was quickly dubbed “Bloody Bayshore.” Few motorists heeded the speed limit of 20-45mph. The combination of increased traffic and speeders led to big problems for the police department in the 1930s.