



Irish Hill is a bluff. The bluish serpentine rises twenty-four feet out of an unpaved parking lot. Pale grass covers the rock. Derelict factories, the color of mud, linger nearby. The surrounding tracts of flat land are new. When Americans arrived in the region, steep, barren hills made the area uninhabitable. In the 1870s, a few wealthy entrepreneurs thought it would be a good location for industry, and began to flatten some of the hills. They dislodged the serpentine with dynamite and dumped the fragments into the Bay. They built factories. Neighborhoods sprung up to house the workforce. Several hundred Irish immigrants lived on Irish Hill—then four times its current size. In the plants, they made railroad spikes, engine forgings, and later, great warships for the Allied powers. The companies prospered, and continued to chisel away at the hills to make room for new buildings. Year by year, Irish Hill diminished. By 1917, the last residents had been pushed off. When no more war ships were needed, the industries left and the factories closed, leaving Irish Hill to its new proportions.

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City Notes: San Francisco is a book. The slender volume offers brief accounts of twenty-five sites that currently exist in San Francisco. Composed of a photograph and short text, each entry illustrates the contemporary conditions of the subject and reports on its historical formation. Waxed thread binds the pages to a pair of stained plywood panels. An illustration of the Golden Gate Bridge is engraved on the front panel. The bridge is depicted out of context: without the swirling waters of the strait, the soft lines of the Marin Headlands to the north, the city to the south.

No single theme unifies the contents of *City Notes*. Among the sites chronicled are an electrical substation, a car ferry-cum-house boat, a water fountain disguised as a statue, a taxi driver, and a tiki bar. The places are at turns incongruous and peripheral, outlandish and obscure, extraordinary and banal. They bear traces of things that have long ceased to be. This quality could be found in the locales of any city. The subjects of this volume, however, are unique to San Francisco.

By some measures, *City Notes* resembles a guidebook. The sites are legally accessible to the public and, in the author's opinion, worth visiting. Nearly all of them are free. In other respects, *City Notes* defies the parameters of the genre. Far from the unifying perspectives offered by most tourist literature, *City Notes* assembles twenty-five points of unresolved meaning into a tenuous and shifting constellation, which floats somewhere outside of the San Francisco that most know or imagine. It is of the city, but suggests another.



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by Jesse Coburn

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