

Exhibition Catalog from the San Francisco Public Library

SAN FRANCISCO NEON SURVIVORS AND ICONS

FROM THE ARCHIVES



All of the neon signs pictured in this 1950s postcard have disappeared from Market Street except for the Odd Fellows Temple sign, the lone survivor.

Photo by Ed Christensen, 1950s Market Street, San Francisco



This cherished icon with an existential statement was a landmark at 17th and Mission Streets from 1935 until 2002. It was removed despite protests from preservationists and neighbors. Luckily, the number 17 and letters from the sign were rescued from the dustbin by Stephen Parr of the San Francisco Media Archive. The fate of the exclamation point remains a mystery. 1978 photo by Al Barna.

The photos in *San Francisco Neon* [and in this exhibition] express all of the reasons why neon signs belong not in museums (and certainly not in scrap metal yards) but on the roofs of buildings, above doorways, in windows, and extending out over sidewalks.

Neon is best in context. It enhances a cityscape, keeps a city's spirits up in the wee small hours and in all kinds of weather, casts color on drab pavements, bounces crazy reflections off dark windows, draws the eye upward to where you might not otherwise be looking.

Turning the pages is like rounding corners, each new street view leading the eye towards colorful and irresistible neon. It's a book of photos of signs—but we get much more than the signs. With keen observation comes realization and a deepening appreciation... we are confronted with neon beauties we may never have noticed or duly appreciated... the blue-hued "D's" is a detail from a sign above David's Delicatessen on Geary,



which is actually hidden by a low-slung awning, lit up nevertheless as a reward for the neon connoisseur leaving no stone unturned.

[These photos] will teach you to peer around or beneath every accessory slapped onto a building in recent years, where finer accouterments may lurk. Photos can be studied at length for the clues they contain about our city's past and present.

—Tom Downs, 2014
Excerpt from Foreword to *San Francisco Neon: Survivors and Lost Icons*

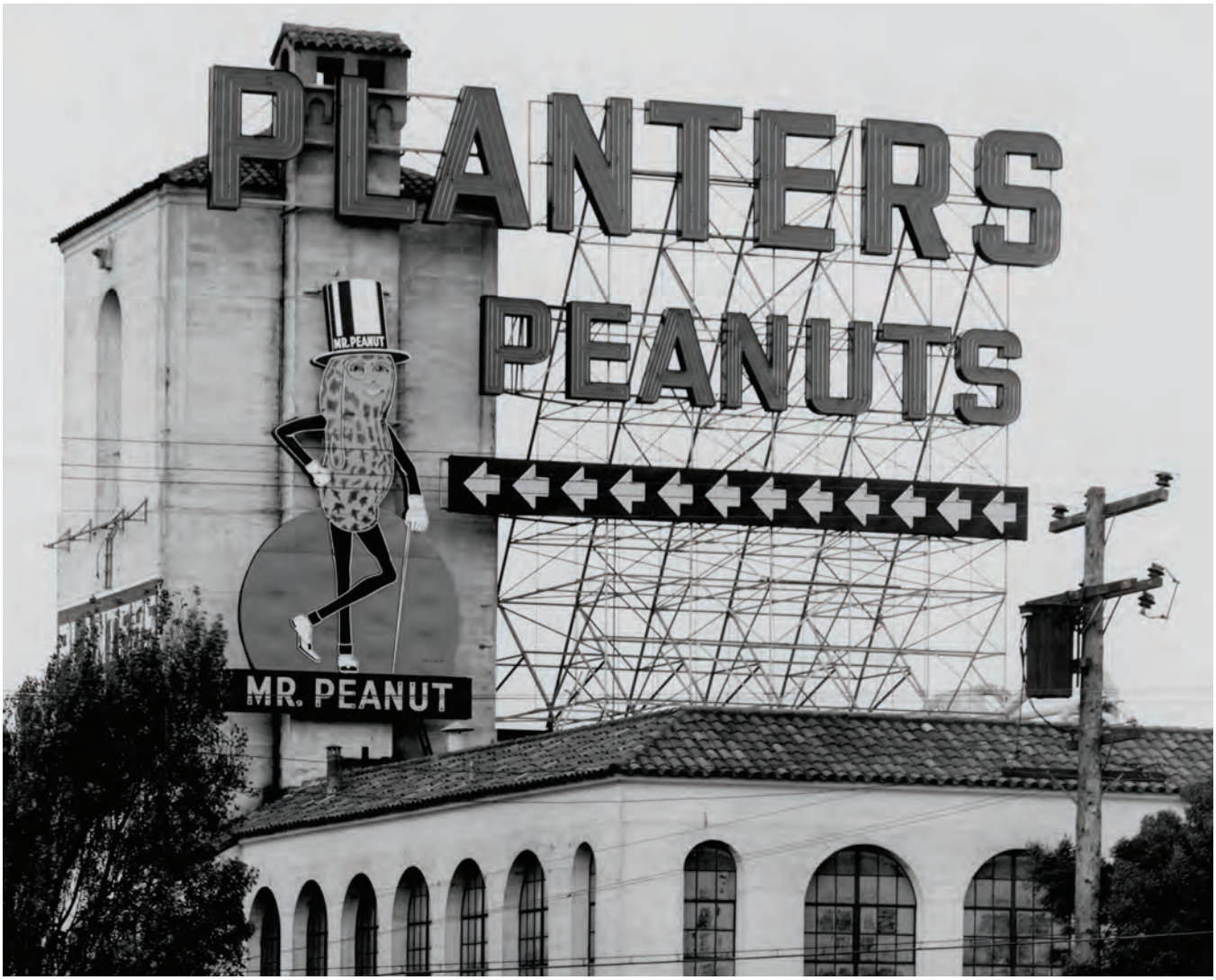


Plate 8. **Planters Nut & Chocolate Company Headquarters, Paul Avenue and Bayshore Boulevard**
1952 Photo by Moulin Studios
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center

From the *San Francisco Call Bulletin* newspaper: "MR. PEANUT KING OF ALL HE SURVEYS—Mr. Peanut, that top-hatted Beau Brummel of the goober world, surveys the area adjacent to the future office and factory location of Planters Nut & Chocolate Company's new San Francisco headquarters. He is 31 feet tall and completely outlined by a tube of tangerine neon. When the sign is lighted at night, Mr. Peanut winks his right eye and the arrows pointing to him flash on and off." Peter Hartlaub reports that the last sighting of Mr. Peanut was in this August 22, 1976, classified ad in the San Francisco *Chronicle* newspaper: "SIGN Mr. PEANUT for sale. 20 ft. tall as seen from Bayshore Fwy. Eves. 364-5005."



Plate 15. **Hamm's Brewery**
1550 Bryant Street
1954 Photo by Skelton Studios
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center

This 13-foot glass of beer filled and emptied with golden rings of neon. A favorite San Francisco landmark from the 1950s, the mayor flipped the switch for the official illumination. It could be seen from the freeway and from inside Seals Stadium. Sadly, it was removed without ceremony in 1975.

Plate 16. **Seals Stadium**
Bryant & 16th Streets
1957 Photo by *San Francisco Call Bulletin*
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center

Willie Mays stands in front of a Seals Stadium neon marquee prior to the start of the San Francisco Giants inaugural season in 1958. The stadium was built in 1931 and had been the home of the Pacific Coast League San Francisco Seals. The Giants played here for two full seasons before moving to the newly constructed Candlestick Park. In the first regular season major league baseball game ever played in San Francisco, the Giants defeated the Los Angeles Dodgers 8–0. Seals Stadium was demolished in 1959.





Plate 21. **All Star Donuts, 2095 Chestnut Street**
2011 Randall Ann Homan, from *San Francisco Neon*

Neon with flashing or animated parts has become a rarity in San Francisco. This sign is a clever example, with a sequence of donuts flashing down, dunking into a cup of coffee, causing a splash, over and over again. It was originally one of two Hunt's Quality Donut locations in the City. The other Hunt's, at 20th and Mission Streets, had the same sign but the business closed and the sign was taken down.—Tom Downs



Plate 22. **The 500 Club, 500 Guerrero Street**
2014 Al Barna, from *San Francisco Neon*

This ultimate ubiquitous martini glass is almost 10 feet tall. Bone, the bartender, says it was installed in 1953. This Mission District icon is always kept in good repair.



San Francisco columnist, Herb Caen, in a 1950s publicity portrait surrounded by neon signs of night spots in the City.
From the collection of Anne Schnoebelen, photographer believed to be George Grau.