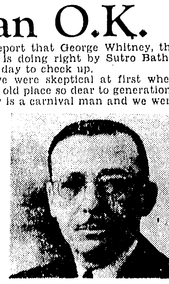
Newsbank
San Francisco Chronicle, February 22, 1953, page 2H
Copyright, 2012, NewsBank/Newsbank, Inc.Permission / Help/FAQ

Will Connolly

Modernizing Job At Sutro Baths Given an O.K.

It gives us pleasure to report that George Whitney, the Playland-at-the-Beach man, is doing right by Sutro Baths. We went out there the other day to check up.

We don't mind saying we were skeptical at first when Whitney bought the decaying old place so dear to generations of San Franciscans. Whitney is a carnival man and we were afraid he'd spoil the flavor by dolling up Sutro's like a shooting gallery.



GEORGE WHITNEY

Whitney has carpenters and painters crawling on the terraced levels. He is modernizing Sutro's in spots where it needed a face-lifting, but has the good sense to retain its Victorian charm.

The stuffed birds and dead monkeys have been removed from the entrance on Point Lobos. The facade is freshly painted, but in old-style lettering reminiscent of billboards when Lola Montez played the mining camps.

The museum is still there. The mangey animals have been tossed out and specimens in better condition moved in, from the Sutro collection which has been stored in Southern California these long years.

Egyptology Department Brought Up to Date

The mummified body of an Egyptian man who walked the streets of Luxor in 2400 B. C. has been replaced in a show case by the mummy of a little lady resident of Thebes, 2100 B. C. Thus, Whitney is bringing the Egyptology department up to date by 300 years in 20 centuries and adding feminine appeal as well. The Luxor man's grave wrappings were becoming shop worn.

We can't say that the Thebes gal looks any better. Her linen windings are in good shape but her teeth are bad. Her upper set are intact, though her lowers are missing. Probably from eating too much candy and neglecting to visit her dentist twice a year.

Sutro's ice rink has been closed since late September. The swim pools have been open, however, and open is the right word. Last month, an ocean storm knocked out 800 square feet of glass on the west wall. The big pool is dry while workmen are repairing the damage.

In the meantime, wind whistles through the plant. If you go swimming, stay in the warm tanks. Don't get out. The Pacific breeze chills you to the marrow.

Bob Bratton, manager of the place, has it on the word of Adolph Sutro that this was the first time the waves came up so high as to shatter the glass since 1914. A. D. The antiquity of Sutro's is such that we feel it necessary to distinguish between A. D. and B. C.

Tomato From Thebes Strictly Now Stuff

The Luxor mummy was at rest in an upper gallery, hard by the Seal Rocks, in 1914, but the Thebes tomato hadn't been moved in yet. She's new stuff.

There will be a grand reopening of the ice rink on March 5 under auspices of high society. This night Sutro's will be taken over by the Junior Auxiliary of the Stanford Convalescent Home for their "Frozen Frolics."

This will be a fashion show and ice skating review. The White House store will provide the clothes and models. The theme will be consonant with the gingerbread decor of Sutro's. First, the models will strut on a ramp built over the ice in elaborate get-ups of 1896—the year the baths was built. Then, slinkier models will exhibit 1953 spring and summer vogues. No mutton-leg sleeves and thinner hips.

You don't have to belong to the Junior League or the Sphinxes or the Bachelors to be eligible for buying a ticket. The convalescent home needs your buck. The tariff is about $3 a head. Ticket buyers will be encouraged to take part in the free skating after the show and to visit the museum.

We can say for Whitney that he is sensitive enough to the San Francisco tradition to preserve the museum character of Sutro's. For every person who goes out there to swim or skate, there are ten tourists who simply want to sight-see. The old Sutro Baths was known the world over as a "must" on a rubber-neck tour of Frisco.

Whitney has come up with hundreds of priceless photos of our town before The Fire. The walls of the divided staircase, just inside the turnstiles, are hung with authentic pictures of people and events of the long ago.

In the sports field, we never saw a better library of fight stills. Gans, Paulie, Nelson, Wolgast, Kilbane, Ritchie, Sullivan, Corbett, Attel, Jeffries, Johnson, Peter Jackson, Announcer Billy Jordan, Referee Eddie Graney, Spider Kelly and Keichel are visible under glass.

Also panorama shots of race tracks in the Bay Area 50 years ago. Apart from sports, the Whitney collection contains photos of hotels, banks, restaurants, office buildings, theaters, churches, synagogues, parades, festivals and memorials—such as the obsequies for Abraham Lincoln on Market street.

There is an exceptionally clear picture of the synagogue where the 450 Sutter Building now stands. The synagogue was a happier temple then than the skyscraper dedicated to pulling of teeth and removing of tonsils. There are half a dozen pictures of St. Ignatius College, where the Emporium now stands, and of the Emporium when it was the Golden Rule Bazaar.

There is also a tin-type gallery of Barbary Coast ladies in what is now the innocuous International Settlement. What the menfolk saw in the Pacific-street B-girls of half a century ago is beyond understanding. They look like old hags to us. Of course, photography wasn't flattering then. The subjects wore black cotton stockings and weighed 150 pounds. If they weighed an ounce.

Blue Area Is For Figure Skaters

Sutro's skating rink has done away with the curtain which heretofore separated it from the swim tanks. Manager Bratton has installed a colored area of blue in what passes for the infield.

"The blue is for the figure skaters," he explains. "The outfield around the rim is for the ordinary straight skaters. Figure skaters can trace their patterns on the blue ice and see what they're doing wrong."

Owner Whitney hasn't gotten around to improving the swim tanks, though he will in time. He promises to install heated cubicles in the dressing rooms. The basketball court where swimmers exercised has been ripped out. So has the squirrel cage or treadmill, known to thousands of San Franciscans.

The swim suit counter will be moved downstairs to the tank level for greater convenience. Heretofore, you picked up your suit and towel on the third story of Sutro's many terraces. Another tank will be opened where the treadmill used to be, making it five in all.

Mgr. Bratton tells us the cold tank is fresh water, of "building temperature." Not having tried it, we thought it was salt water, fresh from the ocean at 45 degrees.

Cold Tank Challenge To Masculine Type

The new tank will be heated salt water, in between the "hot soup" and the medium rare. The big tank is 80 degrees, Bratton says, and the best to swim in because it doesn't enervate you. The hot tank at 98 degrees is for women and children and beginners. You shouldn't stay in it too long, unless you want to soak.

The medum 85-degree is healthy for active swimmers and the 75-degree "cold" tank a challenge to masculine gents who wish to cool out.

"The warm tanks—but not the hot tank—are best to learn in," Bratton says. "You can't learn to swim when your muscles are cramped with cold. You should feel comfortable. Tight muscles make you sink like a rock.

"Salt water is best. It's more buoyant. And look what is does to your skin! Salt is the world's best cosmetic."

The lady from Thebes knew that in 2100 B. C. She had to be content with the tawny waters of the Nile. The Red Sea and the Mediterranean were too far away for two-weeks vacation. She looked well preserved, though, in Sutro's museum.

A cute kid under wraps. She's on the first floor as you come in.

Fishing, Hunting

Grant Matthews lists the best spots close to San Francisco. See Page 15, White Section.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17 FOLD
San Francisco Chronicle (online), 22 Feb 1953 12 - https://infoweb.newsbank.com.sqpnyw.sfpl.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WHNPES&docref=image/v2%3A1D2D1F6D2D2B6D80.168-1D8D2D1B8D5D2A0@0-1D2D1C1D8D2D8A0@0-1D2D1C1D8D2D8A0@0-1D2D1C1D8D2D8A0@0-1D2D1C1D8D2D8A0 - Text of this document may be subject to copyright. Terms and conditions apply.