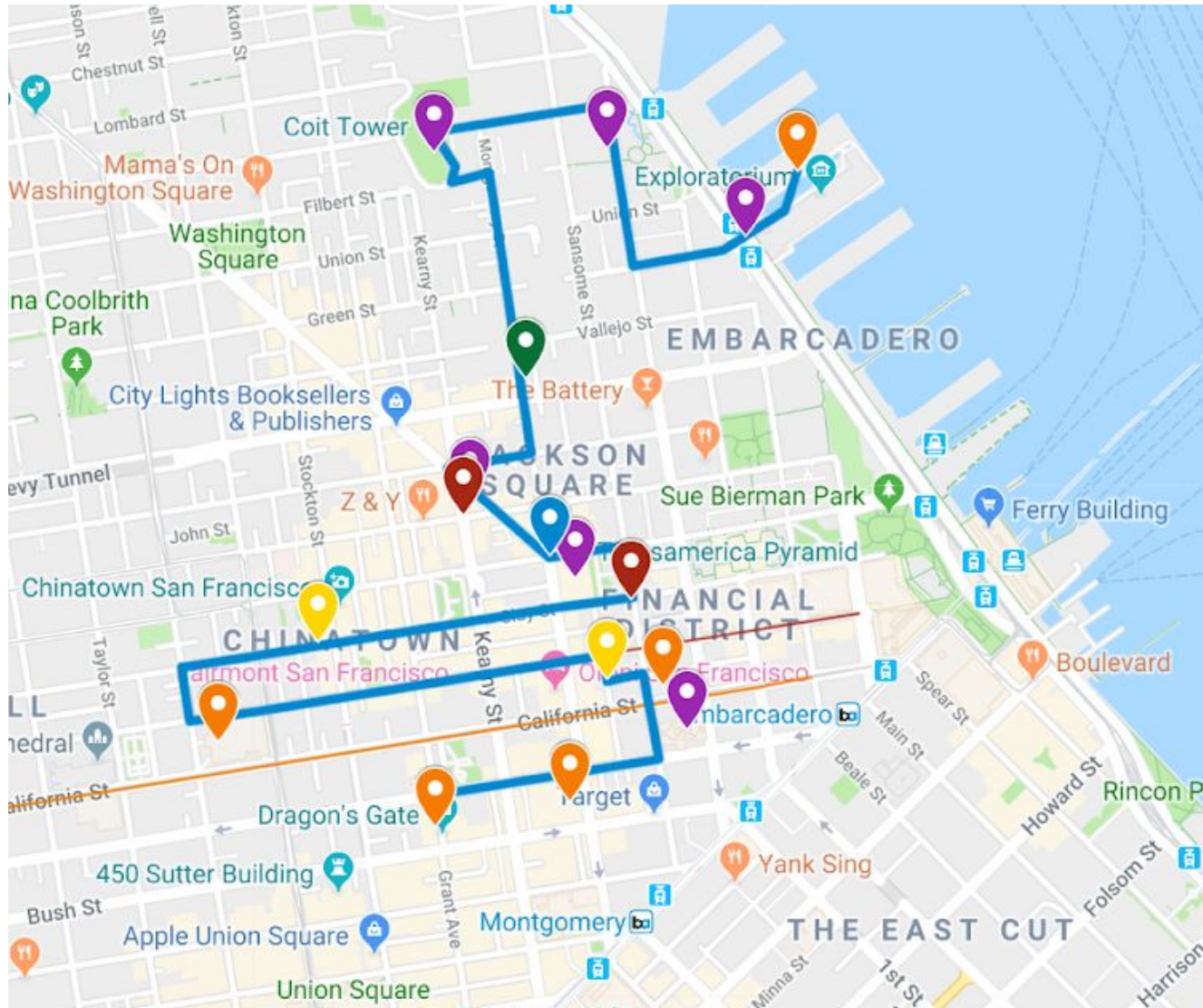


Jewish Sights from the Financial District to the Embarcadero: A Walking Tour



Begin at **Sabra Grill**, 419 Grant Ave. Sabra, a Mediterranean restaurant, is the only glatt kosher restaurant in San Francisco. Along with Frena Bakery and Cafe, it is one of the only two kosher restaurants left in San Francisco.

Walk **north** on **Grant Ave**
500 ft

The intersection of California and Grant holds the dubious distinction of being where one of San Francisco's most colorful characters met his end.

Joshua Abraham Norton, better known as **Emperor Norton**, and more formally Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, arguably stands as San Francisco's most famous indigent resident. Born in England and raised in South Africa as part of the British Empire's efforts to resettle Jews, Norton moved to San Francisco in about 1849. Bolstered by his inheritance, he fast became a successful and wealthy dry goods merchant. By 1855, he owned much of the land that is now Cow Hollow and was one of San Francisco's most prominent businessmen. In that year, after learning from an insider of a Chinese rice shortage, Norton attempted to corner the rice market. When Chilean shipments flooded the market, Norton was ruined. He disappeared from public life, only to reappear in 1859, apparently mad, and dressed in old-fashioned military regalia.

From this point on, Norton styled himself "Emperor of the United States" and "Protector of Mexico." In a city known for its colorful characters, Norton stood out even more. Although by this point he had no money, restaurants and businesses served him for free

because of the publicity he brought. The city and state gave him all-access rail passes. He even issued his own currency, which many in town honored, less for the monetary value than the value of owning Norton's signature. In this state, Norton inspired countless writers and artists—the King of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is one famous caricature. On January 8, 1880, Norton collapsed and died at this intersection, then the corner of California and Dupont. His funeral was attended by over 10,000 people.

Turn **right** onto **California St**
1000 ft

In 1876, robber-barons Leland Stanford and Mark Hopkins established the **cable car** line that now runs along this street—in tandem with the Jewish Michael Reese, Louis Sloss, and Isaac Wormser.

Turn **right** onto **Sansome St**
200 ft

345 California Center, the double-spined skyscraper on the left and now the fifth tallest building in San Francisco at 695 feet tall, was designed by architect Marc Evan Goldstein through Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. Goldstein also designed the headquarters of the Jewish Community Federation on Steuart St.

Turn around
600 ft

Across California St, look closely at the Union Bank Building. This site was once home to the **Alaska Commercial Company**, a trading company focused on the extraction and trade of Alaskan resources. Four of the company's five members were Jewish, including Louis Sloss and Lewis Gerstle. Although the building no longer stands, the Union Bank incorporates its balustrade. The walrus gargoyles found along the eaves remain as proof.

Turn **left** on **Leidesdorff St**
400 ft

Leidesdorff Street holds the distinction of being one of only a few streets in San Francisco named for a Jew. William Alexander Leidesdorff was a mixed-race businessman in early San Francisco, the son of a Jewish Danish plantation owner in Saint Croix and his common-law wife, a woman of African and Carib heritage. Leidesdorff emigrated to San Francisco, where he became one of California's first black citizens. By 1845, he was the president of the San Francisco school board as well as the city treasurer. He died of brain fever in 1848, having become one of the richest people in California.

Turn **left** on Sacramento St
½ mi

Although neither built nor founded by a Jew, the **Fairmont Hotel** that stands at 950 Mason, for much of the twentieth century, was owned by a Jew. When easterner Benjamin Swig bought the hotel in May 1945, it was run-down and in desperate need of repairs. Over the next four decades, the Swig family transformed the Fairmont into one of San Francisco's most well-known landmarks. Indeed, in the very first year of Swig's ownership, the United Nations was formed within the building. (European powers did not allow San Francisco to remain the UN's home because they

thought it was too far for them to travel). The Swigs owned the hotel until they sold it in 1994. Besides his work on the Fairmont and other hotels around the country, Swig was known for his Democratic Party activism. His commitment to fundraising led politicians to dub him and three other San Francisco Jews their "green machine."

Turn **right** onto **Mason St**
300 ft

Turn **right** on **Clay St**
½ mi

When you reach 916 Clay St, look at the brick wall of the building to see one of San Francisco's many "ghost signs," reading simply, "MJB: why?" **MJB**, a popular coffee company in the Western United States, was founded by Max J. Brandenstein in 1899. MJB was one of San Francisco's first coffee companies, helping popularize the area's coffee culture that continues to this day. Brandenstein's father created the German Hospital several decades prior; its name later changed to the Franklin Hospital to avoid anti-German sentiments. The hospital was not the only family product that changed names—Max abbreviated the company's name from his own to avoid anti-semitism. He later changed his own name to Bransten for the same reason. MJB still exists, although the larger firm Massimo Zanetti now owns it. The faded "ghost sign" on this building, a remnant from MJB's heyday in the mid-20th century, remains a symbol of MJB's influence on the city.

Turn **left** onto **Sansome St**
200 ft

At this intersection, Clay and Sansome, once stood the **first brick building in San Francisco**. Samuel Figel, a clothing merchant, came to San Francisco in 1850. The following year, after a fire destroyed his shop, he built the first brick building in the city at this site for his business. It remained here until the 1906 earthquake leveled it.

Turn **left** onto **Washington St**
400 ft

On your left is a San Francisco icon, the **Transamerica Pyramid**. For many years, this 1972 building was the tallest in San Francisco—and on the West Coast. Its architect, William Pereira, aroused substantial controversy at the time, but the building has become an icon of the city and its skyline. The company that lends the building its name, Transamerica Corporation, epitomizes the ties between Jewish history and city history. Bank of America founder A. P. Giannini founded Transamerica in 1928, but within a year the Jewish Hellman family, owners of Wells Fargo, had purchased the company.

For many years, this intersection, Columbus and Washington more specifically, was thought to be the site of the **first Jewish services on the West Coast**. Although evidence now suggests the event occurred a few blocks away on Jackson Street, a plaque remains here commemorating the event.

Turn **right** on **Columbus Ave**
700 ft

The pointy green building at Columbus and Kearny is the **Sentinel Building**, also known as the Columbus Tower or "San Francisco's Flatiron Building." It dates to just after the 1906 earthquake. French Jewish political boss Abe Ruef developed the

building, hiring the Jewish firm Salfeld and Kohlberg and intending to use it as his headquarters, but legal charges against Ruef meant he did not move in until 1915, at which point he was nearly broke.

Turn **right** on **Pacific Ave**
400 ft

Turn **left** on **Montgomery St**
 $\frac{1}{2}$ mi

After crossing Broadway, look to your right. The North Beach apartment complex at 1010 Montgomery, according to myth, is the location where Beat poet **Allen Ginsberg** wrote his masterpiece, the epic poem "Howl." Ginsberg was a close associate of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the writer and owner of North Beach institution City Lights.

Turn **left** onto **Filbert St**
Take the stairs
300 ft

Sharp **right** onto **Telegraph Hill Blvd**
300 ft

Coit Tower itself does not bear the name of a Jew, nor was the building built by a Jew. Yet, beyond its famous (and once highly controversial) appearance, the tower's most significant feature would not have been possible without close ties to the Jewish community. The famous **Coit Tower murals** were the brainchild of socialist muralist Bernard Zakheim, who designed and oversaw the art's construction. Zakheim often came into conflict during the project with another prominent San Francisco Jew, the conservative Herbert Fleishhacker, who controlled access to public

works funding, and sought, often unsuccessfully, to reduce the radical subtext of the murals.

Continue onto **Greenwich St**

Take the stairs

1000 ft

Turn **right** onto **Battery St**

1,000 ft

The large complex on your right on this block is the headquarters of Levi Strauss, Co, and one of the city's few corporate campuses. In addition to bearing the name of San Francisco's most famous fashion export, **Levi's Plaza** has a less obvious Jewish connection. Architect Lawrence Halprin designed the plaza, built atop a sunken ship's remains, for the Levi Strauss Company when the company took over the site in 1978.

Turn **left** onto **Green St**

800 ft

As you cross the Embarcadero, notice the glass and concrete strip that runs along its length, the **Embarcadero Ribbon**. Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, Stanley Saitowitz, and Vito Acconci collaborated to design this 2.5-mile-long strip of lights along the Embarcadero. At night, the 1996 sculpture used to light up, but due to logistical issues the ribbon has been dark for years.

At Pier 17, just across the street, is the **Exploratorium**. Many know J. Robert Oppenheimer as the "father of the atomic bomb," active at UC Berkeley while working on the Manhattan Project. Yet Oppenheimer had a less famous brother, also a physicist, Julius Oppenheimer. Both Oppenheimers belonged to a circle of left-wing intellectuals active in the East Bay at midcentury, many

of whom were Jewish. To avoid persecution, they remained covert about their commitments to communism. Still, the efforts of radical Jewish intellectuals in the Bay Area should not go overlooked. Julius left a less political legacy of his own in the Bay Area as well: he founded the Exploratorium in 1969. Its first location, little advertised at first, was the Palace of Fine Arts in the Marina District. In 2010, the museum moved to Piers 15 and 17 on the Embarcadero.