The Story of the Market Street Hub Neighborhood

In the early years of the 20th century, San Francisco was still a small city, and most of the population lived close to downtown, with Market St. as the central corridor.

The area around Market St. between Van Ness and Octavia Streets was called “The Hub” for many years, and local shops had names like “Hub Pharmacy” (located where the frame shop at the foot of Haight St. is now).

The Hub neighborhood district was likely given the name because it was a key transportation artery through the heart of the city. The Municipal Railway had a strong presence in the Hub, with major rail lines that ran from Market St. out Haight St., Valencia St. and Gough St.

In 1906, San Francisco was devastated by a massive earthquake and fire. The city was reborn and rose from the ruins like a Phoenix. The city was rebuilt with more robust building codes.

Cover Photo: Market Street near Gough, before 1945. Photographer unknown.
For many decades beginning in the 1880s through the 1950s, the intersection of Market, Valencia, Haight and Gough Streets was popularly known as the “Hub,” because no fewer than four streetcar lines converged there either on their way downtown or outbound to outlying neighborhoods. The Municipal Railway and the Market Street Railway ran on four tracks on market Street; the 9 Valencia ran on Valencia and the 7 Haight on Haight Street. The intersection was a busy transit hub, with streetcar lines radiating out from it along Market St., Valencia and Haight Streets. Over the course of decades, the intersection and surrounding neighborhood remained a transit hub even as streets were reconfigured and streetcar lines were replaced with buses.

The name “Hub” eventually came to stand for the surrounding neighborhood as well as the intersection and was well-known to residents of the City. By the 1930s the neighborhood was alive with thriving businesses and a surrounding residential population. Many well-known businesses located here because of the ease of public transportation and the central location, including the Hub pharmacy (for many years San Francisco’s only 24-hour pharmacy), Hub Bowling and the McRoskey Mattress Company. McRoskey is the only business from the Hub area that survives to this day.

The name faded from public memory after the conversion of the Valencia and Haight street lines to bus service and the removal of two streetcar tracks from Market Street with the dissolution of the Market Street Railway, all in the 1940s. The neighborhood went into decline beginning in the late 1940s.

Today the reference to the “Hub” is largely forgotten except to history buffs, but a movement to revive the name in reference to a larger area with the intersection as its nexus has begun as the neighborhood becomes a part of the revival of the area in general and a reconfiguration of the intersection under the Market and Octavia Plan. Several landmark structures populate the neighborhood today as it is poised for revival.

This book explores the Hub neighborhood’s colorful and important past, its present and its promising future.
Woodward’s Garden was a large conservatory, amusement park, museum and zoo between Mission and Valencia at 14th St. It was open from 1866 to 1891.

In August 1883, the new firm, called the Market Street Cable Railway Co., opened its first cable line for service, eventually becoming the biggest cable traction company in San Francisco. The Market Street Railway served the Mission District, Golden Gate Park, and the Western Addition, from a main line on Market Street, the primary artery in the City, branching off into five other lines.

The heart of the Market Street Cable Railway Co. system was its main power house complex located on a large wedge shaped lot at the junction of Market and Valencia Streets. In 1883, a distinctive wooden two-story engine house was constructed at this location. The growing demands of the system caused this building to be replaced by an imposing brick building circa 1890 (right), which was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. (Cable Car Museum)

This transportation network is the likely reason the area became known as “The Hub.”

Written on back of photo: “2nd St. Ignatius Church & College at extreme left distance. (2 steeples) Hayes & Van Ness. New City Hall Larkin St. before erection of high dome. Mechanics Pavilion on 8th St. between market & Mission. Note the absence of the Market St. railway power house at Valencia & Market Streets.”

In 1883, photo looking down Buchanan St. to Market St. and toward the southeast.
In the late 1800s there were numerous horse stables around Brady Street and “South of the Slot.” The sidewalk fixture above still stands on Stevenson St. as a reminder.

Market Street near Gough, 1906 earthquake and fire

Valencia near 14th St. soon after the 1906 earthquake. Looking toward Market Street with the old City Hall in the distance.

Market Street looking toward Volunteers Monument at Van Ness Ave, between 1910 and 1925.
Pre-1906 San Francisco fire fighting equipment. Photo by Eadweard Muybridge. Before 1906, the SFFD had 450 horses to move fire fighting equipment.

1880s illustration on South of Market livery and carriage house. Illustration: SF Public Library

The San Francisco Fire Dispatch headquarters at 229 Oak Street, built in 1913.
Cable cars were developed in San Francisco because the many hills were too much for horse-drawn wagons, and several accidents resulted in horses being dragged to their death.

Photo: SF Public Library

Market Street near Van Ness, 1920. Note white building on left, Masonic Temple of California, 25 Van Ness Avenue, was built in 1911 and is still standing.

Photo: SF Public Library

Above: Market Street near Gough, 1920s showing post-earthquake temporary buildings.
Below: Market Street where Gough now runs to Mission Street, 1920s

Photo: SFMTA Archives

Photo courtesy McRoskey Mattress Co.
Above: McRoskey Mattress Co.
Market and Gough Street, circa 1925.

Left: Interior of McRoskey Mattress showroom, late 1920s.

"Path of Gold" street lights were installed on Market Street from Seventh Street to Valencia Street between 1916 and the mid-1920s.
Used car lot on Market Street where Gough now runs to Mission Street, circa 1939. Note the sign in background: Hub Bowling, 1675 Market Street

Photos: McRoskey Mattress Co.
Photos: SF Public Library


The 1954 San Francisco Phone Directory lists the following businesses:

- Hub Apartments 1670 Market St.
- Hub Bakery 1676 Market St.
- Hub Fountain Lunch 1684 Market St.
- Hub Pharmacy 1700 Market St.
- Hub Tavern 1680 Market St.
- The Hub Building 1675 Market St.
- Hub Bowling 1681 Market St.
- Hub Shoe Repair 69 Gough St.
- Hub Beauty Salon 76 Gough St.
Above: A procession of vehicles on Market Street at Gough, around 1940.
Below: ValMar Apartment building at Market Street and Valencia, late 1940s.

Above: Looking down Market Street from 12th, 1944.

Photos: SF Public Library
Market Street trolley cars near Valencia Street, early 1940s. Before 1945, Market Street had four street car lines, as seen below, and two sets of tracks were then removed.

In 2006, during construction of the Octavia Street freeway onramp, an ancient habitation site was uncovered. The area may have been inhabited from approximately 500 BCE to 50 CE.
The McCoppin Hub plan, at Valencia and Market Streets, features a quiet pedestrian area.