

THE TOWN GOD SPANKE D

1906 - 1940

RECOVERING FROM DISASTER

*If God, they say, spanked the town for being over frisky,
Why did he burn the churches down and save Hotaling's whiskey?*

ANYONE EVEN SLIGHTLY informed about San Francisco history knows that at 5:13 a.m. on April 18, 1906, citizens of the gayest, most pleasure-loving city in the world were jolted from their beds by the strongest earthquake ever measured in North America. (A stronger one occurred in 1811 in Missouri, changing the course of the Mississippi River, but no one was there to measure it.) The shaking, which lasted little more than a minute, seemed an eternity to those who lived through it. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, much briefer and not nearly as strong, was sufficient to make us all understand what it feels like when our world threatens to disintegrate around us.

Facing Page: By the second day of the 1906 fire, buildings on Market Street were burning, as helpless firemen struggled to find water for the empty hoses. The interior of the Spreckels building is ablaze, with glowing fires visible in the lower windows, and clouds of smoke billowing from the upper floors. The frame and exterior of the building survived, but the interior was gutted, and had to be rebuilt. Today, with the bulbous dome removed and a sleek Art Deco sheathing, the building is hard to recognize as the same one. (Author's collection)