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## San Francisco Chronicle

### Resurrection of I-Hotel Site / March, building plans to mark 20th anniversary of evictions; [FINAL Edition]

*Benjamin Pimentel, Chronicle Staff Writer. San Francisco Chronicle. San Francisco, Calif.: Aug 1, 1997. pg. A.21*

#### Abstract (Summary)

Dust stirred underneath Felipe Daguro's feet as the 91-year-old Filipino American took slow, labored steps across a vacant lot in San Francisco where the International Hotel once stood.

On Sunday, members of the Bay Area's Filipino American and Asian American communities will remember the evictions and subsequent destruction of the "I-Hotel" with a 4 p.m. march from the Ferry Building parking lot to the site at Kearny and Jackson streets.

They will also celebrate plans for a new residential building that should break ground on the site later this year. It will include some low-income units for those evicted two decades ago in one of modern San Francisco's ugliest episodes.

#### Full Text (946 words)

*Copyright Chronicle Publishing Company Aug 1, 1997*

Dust stirred underneath Felipe Daguro's feet as the 91-year-old Filipino American took slow, labored steps across a vacant lot in San Francisco where the International Hotel once stood.

It has been 20 years since Daguro lived there, but he still carries the same question he had the day he and dozens of other elderly people were forced from the building:

"When is the International Hotel going to rise again?" asked Daguro in his native Tagalog. "I couldn't do anything then. I was just a tenant."

On Sunday, members of the Bay Area's Filipino American and Asian American communities will remember the evictions and subsequent destruction of the "I-Hotel" with a 4 p.m. march from the Ferry Building parking lot to the site at Kearny and Jackson streets.

They will also celebrate plans for a new residential building that should break ground on the site later this year. It will include some low-income units for those evicted two decades ago in one of modern San Francisco's ugliest episodes.

The early morning evictions of about 50 elderly tenants, mostly Filipino and Chinese seniors, and their supporters on August 4, 1977, drew national attention as old people were dragged from rooms by police.

"I still feel a lot of sadness -- it never leaves you," said Emil de Guzman, former president of the tenants' association, as he gazed around the lot now surrounded by a chain-link fence.

Small piles of concrete and other rubble are what's left of the building that once was part of 10-block Manilatown, a predominantly Filipino neighborhood stretching down Kearny Street.

The dispute began in the late 1960s when the owner, Walter Shorenstein's Milton Meyer Co., wanted to demolish the building to build a parking lot on what was becoming prime real estate.

The tenants, supported by Filipino American youth activists and human rights groups, fought back and got their lease extended. But in 1974 the building was sold to Four Seas, a Hong Kong-based company that advanced plans to tear it down.

The case ended up in court, where it dragged on for several years.

De Guzman, then 29, remembered how the "manongs" -- as the elderly Filipino men who came to the United States as migrant workers were called -- became immersed in the legal battle. Daguro, then a longshoreman in his 70s, found himself at seemingly endless meetings with lawyers and youth activists.

"He never dabbled in politics, but he knew his house was being threatened," De Guzman said.

No compromise could be reached.

On the morning of August 4, 1977, San Francisco police officers and deputy sheriffs moved in to enforce a court order evicting the tenants and their supporters. What unfolded filled thousands of I-Hotel sympathizers with horror and rage.

"It was like the Roman Legions coming after the Christians," De Guzman recalled. "It was incredible humiliation. We had these elderly men who had to drag themselves to the street, and they were suddenly homeless. A lot of the manongs didn't really live much longer. It's like their hearts were broken."

Two years after the eviction, the boarded-up building was razed.

Ironically, the site has remained undeveloped since the late 1970s, a gaping hole in the heart of downtown San Francisco.

The eviction pushed affordable housing to center stage of San Francisco politics and led to a law that bans the conversion of residential hotels.

Partly because of the emotions that surrounded the event, the developer's plans for site never reached fruition. Other plans that included low-income housing also fell through.

Then, about three years ago, the Catholic Church began making plans to relocate the St. Mary's Chinese Catholic Center, which was heavily damaged during the 1989 Loma Prieta Quake.

The Archdiocese of San Francisco got an option to purchase the old I-Hotel site and now plans to build a new school, a community center and a church, said Dana Coe, coordinator for the project's fund-raising campaign.

The project would also include a federally funded 15-story building to be called the International Hotel Senior Housing Center. It is being spearheaded by an alliance of San Francisco housing and community groups, including the Chinese Community Housing Corporation, the I-Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee, the Kearny Street Housing Corporation and the Manilatown Heritage Foundation.

Rolando Barlaan, one of the architects on the I-Hotel project, said the building will feature 104 affordable housing units and a Manilatown Cultural Center for exhibits, forums and cultural shows.

Each floor will be named in honor of prominent former tenants, and a granite or glass wall will list the names of the evicted residents, he added. The \$10 million project may be completed in 1999, Barlaan said.

The developers also plan to give former I-Hotel residents first option to occupy some of the housing units.

De Guzman laments that there are only a handful of them left. Still, he said, he is excited about the project and hopes it will give him and others who went through the I-Hotel experience a sense of closure.

On the abandoned lot, De Guzman, now a 49-year-old civil service employee, shook hands heartily with Daguro. "How are you, manong? It is good to see you," De Guzman said.

"Finally, justice is being served," De Guzman added. "The souls of our tenants would finally rest when the new building is built."

**[Illustration]**

PHOTO (3); Caption: (1) S.F. Police stand guard in front of the International Hotel on Jackson Street / BY THE CHRONICLE 1977, (2) International Hotel protesters picket in front of the Milton Meyer Co. on Pine Street / BY THE CHRONICLE 1968, (3) Emil de Guzman looks forward to a new residential hotel on the old I-Hotel site / BRANT WARD/CHRONICLE

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