In 1849, a large portion of today's South of Market neighborhood was within Yerba Buena Cove, part of San Francisco Bay. During the next decade, the cove was filled and much of the land was reclaimed. The 1853 photograph (above) and the 1859 map (right) depict the cove at this time.

The newly reclaimed land quickly became home to a dense concentration of industries. With proximity to the gold and silver mines of the West, San Francisco industries were uniquely situated to produce equipment for mining and later, ship building. The Salby Smelting Works, with its distinctive shot tower (left), as well as the Miners Foundry, Union Iron Works, and many other industrial enterprises quickly established themselves in the South of Market neighborhood. One of these companies, the San Francisco Gas Light Company, gave the neighborhood its infamous nickname "Tar Flat" from the effluent it discharged into the Bay. As part of the Transbay Transit Center project, archaeologists are studying the remains of several of these early industries.