Fallen Houses. [Tilted wooden-frame houses, Howard St. between Eighteenth and Nineteenth Sts.] [Now South Van Ness Ave.]
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The Bancroft Library

Sounds Citation:
Steinbrugge, Karl V.
Catalog of Earthquake-Related Sounds.
El Cerrito, CA: Seismological Society of America, 1985.

Room Two: The Day Our City Trembled

Sounds of an Earthquake

Reminiscences of the 1906 San Francisco disaster vary in description, especially when it comes to the sounds of the earthquake. Some people compared it to a rumble of thunder, others said it reminded them of a wave crashing against the shore. Still others described it as "Jolt-jolt-jolt, sway-sway, sway, rattle-rattle-rattle over big, age-like tens of seconds with a deep diapason of rumbling, and then a great ugly, last BANG," was how one survivor described the experience. Then there were those who slept right through the trembler.

Their slumber would not last much longer, however. The enduring sounds of the earthquake were household items crashing, walls crumbling, and the cries of the injured. Police Sgt. Jesse Brown Cook would later remember the scene downtown as one of total chaos:

> "All about us houses were tumbling, and falling walls and chimneys, and cornices were crushing men and horses in the street. The district at that hour was crowded with produce wagons, and through the uproar of the earthquake you could hear the cries of people and the whinnying of horses that were hurt or terrified."