This map revisits the history of Valencia Street from the decades when it was home to dozens of funeral homes (mostly Irish-owned) and when a streetcar line (dominated by Irish car men) ran up the street. Dolores Park was once a Jewish cemetery, and Mission Dolores still houses its cemetery. Along Mission and Guerrero Streets, special funeral streetcars carried coffins all the way to the cemeteries in Colma. From the early 20th century through the present, the impacts of Irish settlers on the Mission District and City can be seen through the lens of the funeral industry.

Irish-owned mortuaries and funeral homes along Valencia Street are among the most distinctive architectural imprints left on San Francisco by the Irish. Some of the buildings still stand, and Duggan’s Funeral Service still operates today. Businesses supporting funerals include florists specializing in funeral arrangements. Other Irish social gathering places like the Hibernia Hall and several bars dotted the corridor between Mission Street and Guerrero Street, from 15th to 26th Streets, offering other locations for mourning nearby.

The concentration of undertakers within this corridor was stimulated by the fact that after 1900, San Francisco’s deceased were to be buried outside of the City, and the chosen locale was the unincorporated area west of San Bruno Mountain called Colma. Starting with the Catholic Archdiocese establishment of Holy Cross Cemetery along old Mission Road, followed in the 1880s by the new Jewish cemeteries (replacing the one that had been in Dolores Park), by the turn of the 20th century there were more than a dozen cemeteries in Colma, some religious or nationally identified, and several non-denominational. Later the area was incorporated as a town.

Following the route of the original 1860s-era San Francisco-San Jose railroad, streetcar lines ran from the Mission District out to the Geneva car barn and up Mission Street all the way past Daly City to reach the cemeteries. For a few decades a dedicated funeral car service was provided, charging $5.00 for a coffin and $.50 per mourner. By the 1920s, the funeral streetcar service was discontinued as the motorized hearse took over the business.

The eventual removal in the 1940s of San Francisco’s cemeteries at Lone Mountain, Calvary, Oddfellows, and Laurel Heights led to the reinvestment of tens of thousands of remains in mass graves in Colma cemeteries. Thousands of buried Catholic dead at Calvary were relocated to Holy Cross, where the bulk of the once burgeoning population of Irish San Francisco now rests.