



# Haunted

## The Dark Side of San Francisco: A City With a Past

by Erica Walsh

### **The Fatty Arbuckle Scandal**

#### **Westin St. Francis**

In 1921, Fatty Arbuckle was the highest paid actor in the world, receiving a \$3 million contract from Paramount Studios. His fame was widespread and he charmed audiences everywhere with his comedic genius. Like the Hollywood of today, it seemed that fame and wealth went hand in hand with partying and extravagance.

Labor Day weekend, 1921, Arbuckle threw a party at the posh St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco's Union Square. Among the first guests to arrive were Maude Delmont, a former clothing model and her friend, well-known party-girl Virginia Rappe.

As the party wore on, it was clear that Virginia was drinking too much. She passed out in Arbuckle's private room. Arbuckle sought help from her friends who took her home to sleep it off. However, after 2 days, her condition worsened. Maude insisted that Virginia be moved to the Wakefield Sanitarium, a women's clinic, but it was too late. Virginia died early the next morning.

For Arbuckle, the nightmare was just beginning. An official cause of death was never determined, and Maude claimed that before she died, Virginia revealed something awful to Maude -- Fatty Arbuckle had raped her the night of the party.

However, between Virginia's party-girl reputation and Maude's criminal record, the charges against Arbuckle got reduced from murder and rape to manslaughter. The jury finds Arbuckle not guilty after the defense introduces evidence that Virginia had received multiple abortions over the years. Her character is tarnished and Arbuckle goes free. The scandal, however, ruined Fatty's reputation. He lost his contract with Paramount, and no one else would hire him.

In addition to the Fatty Arbuckle scandal in rooms 1219-1220, the [Westin St. Francis](#) on Powell St. in Union Square, is the place where Sara Jane Moore tried to assassinate President Gerald Ford. On your next visit to San Francisco, consider staying at the landmark hotel that not only has a rich history -- it has a sordid past.