Restoration Complete: Landmark McMullen House a Home for the Handicapped

The John McMullen House at 827 Guerrero Street, built in 1881, is a city landmark and a designated property on the National Register of Historic Places. Certainly other San Francisco landmarks are better known — Ghirardelli Square, City Hall, and Heritage’s own Haas-Lilienthal House — but none speaks more eloquently to the important contributions made by historic properties to the vitality and vibrancy of San Francisco than this house in the Mission District.

In 1978, Kathy and Leroy Looper bought the McMullen House, rechristened it the Chateau Agape (after their youngest daughter), and continued it as a state-licensed board and care home for 27 mentally-disabled adults.

Heritage helped nominate the McMullen House for the National Register and has been involved from the beginning in the rehabilitation of the property. The exterior restoration, following the strict guidelines laid down by the Secretary of the Interior, is completely authentic. Inside, significant spaces of great beauty have been retained; but in keeping with the building’s new function, the kitchen and storage areas were upgraded and improved, a wheelchair-accessible entrance provided, and handicap-accessible sanitary facilities added.

Heritage’s Preservation Loan and Technical Assistance Program staff prepared the architectural documents for the exterior restoration and interior rehabilitation work in coordination with Mission Housing Development Corporation, and obtained a $42,000 federal Historic Preservation Grant-in-Aid with the assistance of the California State Office of Historic Preservation. A unique partnership of public and private groups funded the project, a partnership formed largely through the efforts of Heritage. Public money came through the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Economic Development and the State Office of Historic Preservation, and Chevron U.S.A.’s grant to Heritage made our architectural assistance possible. The high quality of the restoration is due to the excellence and commitment of the Mission Housing Development Corporation and CK Constructions (the restoration contractors), working along with Transworld, Inc.

The staff of Heritage’s PLTAP is proud of these achievements and looks forward to assisting other nonprofits in restoring fine historic houses for low-income San Francisco residents.
The Downtown Plan: Will It Stay Intact?

Over the past year, since the draft of the Downtown Plan was released in August 1983, Heritage has been one of its strongest supporters. We were one of a few environmental groups to oppose Proposition "M," because we believed that the Downtown Plan has promised a better alternative for preservation of the city's architectural resources. We continue to be one of the few environmental groups supporting the Plan while others are seeking an annual limit on the amount of new office development as a more effective way to control the growth of highrise office buildings.

Heritage staff and consultants have invested thousands of hours of time in the extended architectural surveys that were initially used to identify buildings to be preserved, and in our "Preservation Strategy for Downtown San Francisco," which served as the conceptual basis for the preservation policies in the Plan. On November 29, 1984, the Planning Commission adopted the Downtown Plan and forwarded its implementing ordinance to the Board of Supervisors for their action. You would think we should now be celebrating a major victory.

However, a new section of the proposed ordinance, 1105, required by the City Attorney, threatens to wipe out all of the preservation benefits at the Downtown Plan that Heritage and the Planning Department staff have worked so hard for over the past four years. In spite of the years of detailed evaluation of buildings conducted by Heritage, using the Bay Area's most experienced professionals in building evaluation and nationally-accepted criteria; after the City Planning Department's own in-house staff reevaluation of these buildings, and after extensive property owner notification and thirteen public hearings on the Plan, the City Attorney is requiring an Ad-Hoc reassessment process that could allow many property owners to remove the buildings from the Plan's controls. This process would allow property owners to challenge the Plan's ratings before the Landmarks Board, the Planning Commission, and, on appeal, the Board of Supervisors. The code language would give the property owner the benefit of any doubt in the process, by requiring the Planning Commission to prove their existing ratings are correct.

The likely effect of this Ad-Hoc process will be a long period of uncertainty over the preservation requirements of the Downtown Plan, a substantial reduction in the number of buildings to be saved by the Plan, and an unreasonable burden on the Planning Department and Landmarks Board staff to further defend the value of protected buildings in protracted hearings after the Plan is adopted. Unfortunately, San Francisco's highly-touted Downtown Plan could lose its balance between economic development and preservation of the past.

The Downtown Plan in its current form, represents a substantial compromise on behalf of the preservation community for the sake of predictability, and in recognition of the need for continued economic growth. Of the 1200 buildings worthy of preservation in the C-3 zoning district (rated A, B or C by Heritage, or designated City Landmarks) only 209, or 17%, are required to be preserved intact by the Plan. An additional 42 buildings must be partially preserved, but development is permitted on the rear portions of these structures. Reduced height and bulk controls, a design review process and transferable development rights should lead to preservation of many of the 183 contributory buildings listed in the Plan, but these buildings are not required to be preserved.

What the Plan and the accompanying environmental reports fail to clarify is that 950 buildings of some architectural or historical merit may be demolished as a matter of law and city policy if the Plan is adopted in its current form. While we admit that prohibiting demolition of over 200 buildings at one time is a major step forward for San Francisco, the City should recognize that our support for a plan that will permit demolition of so many buildings is a significant and perhaps unprecedented step for a major preservation organization to take in the spirit of compromise.

We now face the difficult question of whether Heritage can accept further compromises in the Downtown Plan that may result from the City Attorney's reconsideration process. Should we oppose the Downtown Plan before the Board of Supervisors if this process remains in the proposed code language? Should we reexamine alternative ways to preserve significant buildings, such as a New York-style Landmarks Commission with strong authority to preserve buildings independent from the Planning Commission? Should we support legislation or an initiative to limit the annual growth of new office development based on criteria for allocating such growth to protect architectural resources and to encourage rehabilitation?

The Heritage staff and Board of Directors will be pondering these and other questions over the next few weeks, in preparation for hearings on the Downtown Plan ordinance. We would like to maintain our support for the Plan and for the Planning Department's valiant efforts to preserve the city's architectural heritage through it. But I don't feel we can maintain this support if the procedures implementing the plan erode the lists of buildings to be preserved.

In this case I believe that the City Attorney is attempting to impose matters of public policy on the Planning Department and Board of Supervisors rather than matters of law. In the words of the Acting President and General Counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Harrison Wetherill, Jr "The currently proposed amendment to this plan . . . would transform a progressive approach into something less than exciting and less effective than the approach that exists in most cities in the country today. From the Trust's perspective, the reconsideration process proposed as Section 1105 is not only legally unnecessary to meet due process requirements, but is highly unusual and inappropriate when compared to provisions in other preservation ordinances."

We would like to receive the advice and sentiments of our members during our period of reassessment of the Downtown Plan and its benefits to preservation. Call or write me at Heritage offices if you have an opinion on this matter.

Heritage Newsletter

From the Executive Director's Desk

Will It Stay Intact?

H. Grant Dehart
Preservation Doesn't Mean an End to Progress

Adapted from a talk given November 1st at Heritage by Didier Repellin, D.P.L.G., Architecten en Chef des Monuments Historiques

Mr. Repellin is one of the forty Chief Architects of Historic Buildings in France. He served Heritage as a volunteer architect for the past year.

Awareness of an architectural heritage worth protecting and maintaining is rather new. Not until almost 18 centuries of architectural expression had passed in Europe (and three centuries had passed in the United States) did countries in the western world begin protecting their historic buildings. The first real philosophies of restoration appeared in the 19th century -- in England, articulated by John Ruskin, and in France, by Eugene Viollet le Duc.

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was the most important British architectural critic of his century. He celebrated craftsmanship, was preoccupied with authenticity, and held the sentimental point of view that "it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture, impossible to restore the spirit which is given only by the hand and eye of the workman, and that can never be recalled," Viollet le Duc (1814-1879), on the other hand, wanted to give the public an idealized image of the enduring past and advocated a return to a "pure," unified style. "To restore an old building is not to maintain it, to repair or to rebuild it, but to put it back together in ideal form," which may or may not give a true picture of the original.

In the United States in the 1900s, restoration philosophies developed along two similar tracks. There were preservationists who held with Ruskin's anti-restoration point of view. Their sentiments were best expressed by the Park Service policy statement, "Better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than construct." The emphasis was on protection and preservation, rather than restoration and reconstruction.

There were also those whose interests lay in recreating a unified, idealized picture of the past. There is no doubt how much the romanticized view of Williamsburg owes to Viollet le Duc. Though the studies at Williamsburg set a new standard for research efforts and pioneered many preservation techniques, this philosophy of restoration emphasizes abstract ideals and an illusion of the past more than specific preservation goals and historical accuracy.

Historical accuracy is one of the guiding principles of restoration set forth in the Charter of Venice. The questions and problems which faced the field of preservation through the 1950s and into the 1960s prompted the 1964 conference on historic buildings in Venice. It was sponsored by UNESCO and attended by architects and preservation technologists from around the world. At that conference, ICOMOS,* the first international organization to promote and oversee the general principles of restoration, was founded. But the most important outcome of the conference was the Charter of Venice, which sets forth a philosophy of historic building restoration in the form of seven guidelines. The Charter advocates:

1. A scientific multidisciplinary approach to conservation and restoration.
2. A union of artistic and historical values.
3. An effort to balance the demands of historic preservation with the need to find practical and viable uses for historic buildings.
4. Special care in moving buildings or pieces of buildings, as well as sculpted or painted decoration.
5. The principle that every good restoration must stop where hypothesis begins, and that whatever new construction is added (whether for technical or aesthetic reasons) should be both a sensitive response to its historical surroundings and an original piece of design.
6. Respect for successive layers of additions and changes within buildings, with prime concern for the original underlying design.
7. The necessity of distinguishing new work from original work and of encouraging and maintaining only those additions which respect the composition of the original building and its surroundings.

Today, in the United States, from what I have seen, and heard, and read, it would seem that the philosophy of restoration held by the general public is closer to Viollet le Duc's doctrine of creating a purified picture of the past than to the Charter of Venice's emphasis on unswerving authenticity. We can see this today in the new fashion called facadism, where the facade of a building is all that is saved. This creates an artificial image, like a theater set, and like a set it is only an accessory.

Speaking as an architectural historian, I believe that three people are necessary for a well restoration: an historian or archaeologist for the historical background, a conservator for the analysis of materials, and an architect for architectural analysis and design.

(I was disappointed to find so few architects in preservation training programs, and surprised that the title of Historical Architect is almost always self-given, and not the result of special examinations.) An historic building can not just be a well-proportioned elevation; it has a life of its own, a soul. An awareness of the "state of mind" of an historic building can help us avoid many mistakes of interpretation, especially in the case of something as sensitive as a contemporary addition. One of my best architecture professors said at the beginning of his courses: "Remember, a restoration is an act of humility. The rules are not given by yourself, the latest new technique or the fashion "du jour," because that changes as often as the menu, but they are given by the building itself."

My personal approach to restoration is to try to respect as much as possible the wishes of the architect's design and the authenticity of the original techniques and materials. Every case is different, obviously, but if we really consider a building as having national importance, we should be very demanding in carrying out its restoration. And if our research is incomplete, or if the function is to change, let us avoid the temptation to create something "in the style of" the original or to guess at the intentions of the earlier creators.

There is always room for original design that respects the scale, proportion and general feeling of the older building. We have to remember that new buildings are our future historic buildings. Very often we place preservation and innovation in opposition to one another, but preservation doesn't mean an end to change and progress. If anything, historic architecture encourages and enlivens the ongoing cultural life of our cities; we need the old in order to appreciate the new. New work, in turn needs to build on the old. Between old and modern architecture it is really the same language, only two different pages of the same book.
The Hotel Arlington, “Home Port” to Seaman, to Also Offer “Safe Port” to Rehabilitated Alcoholics

Heritage’s Preservation Loan and Technical Assistance Program (PLTAP) is currently working with Asian Neighborhood Design (AND) under the auspices of the St. Vincent de Paul Society to study the feasibility of purchasing and upgrading the Hotel Arlington, to provide a supportive living environment for both current tenants and chronic inebriates who have graduated from detoxification treatment programs.

Partial financial support for the project would come from the San Francisco Department of Public Health as part of its innovative “Islands of Sobriety” project. The immediate goal is to provide safe, affordable, alcohol-free housing along with social support services in a non-institutional environment.

The PLTAP/AND design team is studying the upgrading of building services, improvements in fire safety and security, and the possibility of providing community kitchen and remodeled sanitary facilities on each floor of this historically-significant Tenderloin hotel.

The Hotel Arlington, located at the corner of Ellis and Leavenworth Streets, is a four-story brick and steel building. The 192-room hotel was built for an estimated $74,000 in 1907, and was opened on February 1, 1908, by Mr. F. J. Fallon. As described in the original brochure, the hotel, “situated on the northeast corner, enjoys an unusual amount of light, air, and sun. This location is quite central, being convenient to the new shopping district on Van Ness Avenue, and to the new downtown district rapidly rebuilding.” The hotel has been in continuous service and well-maintained over the years. Management provides storage for seamen’s personal possessions while they are away, and rents a returning seaman the same or similar room at the same rate as when he departed.

The Arlington Hotel project is an innovative addition to the rehabilitation activities of many non-profit development groups working to improve the living conditions of long-time Tenderloin residents.

Heritage Newsletter A quarterly publication from the Foundation for San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage, 2007 Franklin St., San Francisco, CA 94109

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Cheers to Holiday Open House Helpers

Many, many thanks to all of the volunteers (there were 80 of you!) who made the Holiday Open House so warm and inviting. Special appreciation goes to the committee chairs: Lorinda Clemens and Jane Pfereth, coordinators, Virginia Campau, Helen Jones, Sarah Landau, David Levin, Philip Partipilo, and Eleanor Sampson. Another round of cheers is raised for Charlotte Schmiedel, who bad charge of the house decorating for the holidays, and Dick Price, who decorated the tree so wonderfully.
You're more likely to read in these pages about San Francisco's most significant architecture, but this article is about a modest six-story building, the Sterling Building. An old furniture warehouse at 1049 Market, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, it was given a "C" rating by Heritage. "C" rated buildings add visual richness and character to the downtown area, and provide the setting for more important buildings.

The Sterling Building was built in 1907. According to Splendid Survivors, "the simplicity of the facade and its scale and proportions make it an important member of the Market Street loft group." The building is in excellent architectural condition, with four "A" and four "B" rated buildings lining the same block of Market.

Vacant for years, it was purchased in 1981 by the Rifkin Investment Company and is now being rehabilitated for office/retail use...a welcome project for such a deserving block.

The Haas-Lilienthal House, where Heritage has its offices, is a Victorian house museum, open to the public for guided tours on Wednesdays and Sundays. The guides are our house docents, and we're looking to expand the ranks. A docent training course will begin in February, 1984. If you are interested, please call Rosalind Henning, 441—3000, for an application.

We are in need of china cups and saucers or dessert plates in floral patterns and would be grateful for donations. Mismatched sets or single pieces are quite acceptable. Call Chris at 441—3011.

Thank You
Jim Mueller, of Kaplan McLaughlin Diaz, architects, who gave many hours of volunteer time doing the cost estimate for Heritage's design of ISHA-POLY's proposal for Poly High School.
Zachary Nathan, AIA, and Dan Warner, AIA, for their continuing assistance on PLTAP projects.

Welcome New Members
September, October, November

Shelby E. Allen
Alliance Capital Management
Susan Avery
Dr. Marcello A. C. Barccani
Mr. and Mrs. Frank A. Beering
Michael Paul Berline
Dr. and Mrs. John Brandes
Margaret Butters
Lee Wai Ching
Mitzi Crandall
Dean Witter Reynolds Inc.
Carol Difilippo
Maxwell Bruce Drewer
Jane P. Ellison
Embarcadero Benter Ltd.
Leslie J. Fiedler
Scot H. Graham
Harsh Investment Corp.
Kay Hill
James and Doreen Ho
K. Hunt
Mrs. Gerardo Joffe
Christ J. Kamages
Dennis Kellett/Linda Rowe
Scott Kepner
KQED Inc.
Diane L. Lapins
Marilyn Leonard
Lockton Insurance Agency
Lossing & Elston
Mark Technologies
John W. Mays
Molly L. Molander
Mary Murtagh
Napa Valley Vintners
The PBN Company
PC World Communications Inc.
Nina Pellar
Dan Phips
Lynda Pregelj
Robert Raffael
Mrs. Mary M. Ravlin
Roxann Reeve/Calvert Rutherford
Denaire Rigney
Safari and Tours
Caryl Shephard
Sohio Petroleum Company
South African Airways
Tania W. Stepanian
Stan Stratton
Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Suich
Susette Sutton
Cynthia Traina
Transamerica Delaval Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Tuller
William M. Wright
Heritage's Annual Soiree was held November 16th at the 1892 landmark Hibernia Bank, at Market and Jones. Over 400 guests attended the black tie evening that included dinner, gaming and dancing to Don Neely, Carla Normand and the Royal Society Jazz Orchestra.

Besides some wonderful prizes won by gaming, partygoers bid on a silver fox jacket donated by I. Magnin, a round trip for two to Puerto Rico donated by Delta Air Lines, and three days/two nights at the Dorchester Hotel in London donated by 600 Stockton Partners.

The Soiree appears to have raised approximately $40,000, which will be used to support our goals and programs. We are most grateful to Sue Honig Weinstein, chair of the event, the members of the Soiree Committee, the Heritage Board of Directors, and all the Heritage volunteers who contributed so generously to the success of the evening.

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1984 SOIREE MAJOR UNDERWRITER
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Joining Heritage

The pace of change and development in San Francisco has convinced many of us that action must be taken quickly if our unique and beautiful city is to maintain its special character. Many of San Francisco's finest buildings have already been lost to future generations because of mistaken notions of progress and redevelopment.

The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage (Heritage) is a publicly supported, non-profit membership organization. Its preservation efforts include a wide range of programs in conservation, rehabilitation and education to assist in the intelligent reuse of the most important elements of the city's urban and architectural heritage.

Heritage depends on membership dues and contributions to support our diverse activities. Members receive the quarterly Heritage Newsletter, reduced rates for lectures and tours, bookshop discounts and special event invitations. Gift memberships are available. All memberships and donations are tax deductible.

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Heritage Calendar

Heritage's EVENING PROGRAMS begin at 7:45 p.m. in the Ballroom of the Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco.

Admission is $2 for Heritage members, $3 for others.

... Evening Programs

Tuesday, January 8, 1985

“Learning from Venice”
Gray Brechin, architectural historian, lecturer

Sea-girt San Francisco has been compared to Venice for over a hundred years, despite the fact that one is bumpy and usually dry and the other is flat and wet. Mr. Brechin's slide show demonstrates geographical, aesthetic and commercial similarities surprising even to Venetians. But the similarities run deeper: Venice, more than any other major city in the world, depended for its existence on an exquisite balance with its environment. What has happened to Venice should serve as a warning to San Francisco and to every other city, while what Venice has been can serve as an inspiration to those who wish our city to be remembered for an equal civic magnificence.


Tuesday, February 12, 1985

“Between a Wok and a Hard Place: An Architectural History of San Francisco Chinese Restaurants, 1849-1984”
Tonia Chao

These talks will focus on different aspects of architecture in one of the city's most visible but least understood neighborhoods. Ms. Chao will discuss the changing design and function of Chinese restaurants in San Francisco from the Gold Rush to the present, with an emphasis on the social history of Chinatown. Mr. Sandweiss will speak on the Chinatown “look” as it developed in the decades after the fire. He will trace the various sources and intentions behind the drive to orientalize this inner-city neighborhood. Appropriate refreshments will be served.

Tonia Chao is a Ph.D. candidate in the social and cultural basis of architecture at UC Berkeley. She works at Asian, Inc.

Eric Sandweiss is a historian working on the Heritage Downtown Survey.

Tuesday, March 12, 1985

“Streets of San Francisco: The Origins of Street and Place Names”
Louis K. Loewenstein, Ph.D., author, city planner, consultant

San Francisco's colorful past is written into its streets and place names. Dr. Louis Loewenstein, Heritage member and former Stanford University professor, will tell some of the intriguing stories behind the names -- stories recently recounted in his book, Streets of San Francisco, which Herb Caen called "an endless source of education and illumination." Dr. Loewenstein will also answer questions about street names and autograph copies of his book, for sale after the lecture ($6).

Weekly Tours and Walks

Every Wednesday & Sunday


12 noon-4 p.m., Wednesdays
11 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Sundays
$3 general public
$1 children under 12, seniors
Free to Heritage members

Heritage Walks in Pacific Heights led by Heritage Walks Guides
Meet at the Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin Street.
12:30 p.m.
$3 general public
$2 Heritage members
Call 441-3046 for recorded information.

Do you know how Victorian houses are like old-fashioned valentines? Take a Sunday afternoon stroll with Heritage Walks guides around the neighborhood of the Haas-Lilienthal House and learn the answer, as well as finding out why the area changed from one of family mansions to the present district of apartments for single people (no, it wasn't because of the earthquake and fire). Discover San Francisco's newest bed and breakfast inn, originally a wedding present, near the unusual "half a house" on California Street. Did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle really live in San Francisco? Have you seen est's Queen-Anne style headquarters? And why did a city and county attorney build his mansion in the middle of a city park? Join us at 12:30 p.m. every Sunday to find out about these and other San Francisco stories.

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