

SAN FRANCISCO
PRESERVATION BULLETIN NO. 11

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEYS

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important historic preservation tools is the historic resource survey -- a process of identifying and gathering data on a community's historic resources. Historic resource surveys allow communities to better plan for the preservation and development of areas that contain historic resources by understanding what type of resources make up that environment.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, defines an historic resource or historic property as: "any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places; such term includes artifacts, records, and remains which are related to such a district, site, building, structure, or object."

Often referred to as a "building block" of historic preservation, data obtained from historic resource surveys has resulted in the inclusion of more than 5,000 historic districts across the country in the National Register of Historic Places, the federally coordinated list of buildings, structures, districts, objects and sites important in history.

Historic resource surveys have not always played such an important role in the historic preservation movement. Before the National Historic Preservation Act, most preservation efforts involved the restoration of isolated landmarks and houses where "Washington slept," to living history museums such as Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. In recent years, historic resource surveys have gained in importance as communities no longer limit preservation efforts to a single resource or site but instead, consider the context or neighborhood in which a resource is located.

With the passage of the National Preservation Act, state governments were encouraged to develop statewide historic preservation programs that included identification of historic resources through comprehensive statewide surveys, which grew into the introduction of local survey work. When the National Historic Preservation Act was amended in 1980, Congress formally recognized local efforts by mandating increased assistance to local governments whose preservation programs, such as the City of San Francisco, are "certified" as meeting high professional standards.

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY GOALS

In San Francisco, the goals of Historic Resource Survey work are:

- Assemble data pertinent to land use and preservation decisions. A resource's historic status, or lack thereof, can impact development proposals and review of building permit applications.

- The Planning Department will use survey information when reviewing building permit applications, projects under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), or projects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires federal agencies to consider potential impacts to historic resources on projects that receive federal funding.
- Survey findings will also increase property owner's potential eligibility for tax credits, grants and other preservation incentives such as the Mills Act (reduction in property taxes) by facilitating nomination of significant resources to local, state and national historic registers.
- Survey findings will make it possible for property owners to request that the provisions of the State Historical Building Code, which promotes a more sensitive approach to the rehabilitation of historic structures, be applied to the preservation of character defining features found on both the interior and exterior of the resource.
- Facilitate protection of significant resources using the provisions of Article 10 of the Planning Code.

TYPES OF SURVEYS

In general, two levels of historic resource surveys exist: **Reconnaissance** and **Intensive** level surveys. While both types involve research into a community's history, architecture and fieldwork, they differ in the level of effort involved. **Reconnaissance** level surveys are typically referred to as "windshield surveys," in which descriptive information about buildings, structures, sites or objects are analyzed primarily through architecture and date of construction. An **Intensive** level survey generally involves detailed research, thorough inspection and documentation of all historic properties within the survey boundaries. Intensive level surveys also provide an assessment as to the potential eligibility of the resource to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Prior to 1999, San Francisco had no structured system in place to identify and document cultural resources found throughout the city. In response, in 1999, the Planning Department unveiled its Citywide Cultural Resource Survey Program, a multi-year undertaking to document cultural resources (*including archeology*) found throughout San Francisco. The survey program was developed in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). All surveys are conducted according to the OHP's *Instructions for Recording Historic Resources* and resources are evaluated using the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

INTRODUCTION -- RECONNAISSANCE LEVEL SUREYS IN SAN FRANCISCO

For almost 35 years, a number of historic resource surveys -- both **Reconnaissance** and **Intensive** level -- have been undertaken in San Francisco. Often, these surveys were a combined effort between local government and special interest groups. Because the methodology for interpretation of historic resource survey data has changed over the years, it is difficult to "lump" San Francisco's historic resource survey work into one survey type or another. However, the majority of the City's early survey work, which is discussed chronologically, can be explained as **Reconnaissance** level surveys. These surveys deal primarily with architectural style and date of construction.

HERE TODAY

The historic resource survey and subsequent book were developed in response to a loss of historic resources in San Francisco through demolition or neglect. "Here Today" is a book published in 1968 by the Junior League of San Francisco, Inc. (Chronicle Books). The survey was adopted by the Board of Supervisors under Resolution Number 268-70 and contains information on approximately 2,500 properties within San Francisco County.

Note: Survey files compiled by the Junior League are available at the San Francisco History Room, 6th floor of the Main Public Library.

1976 CITYWIDE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Between 1974 and 1976, the San Francisco Planning Department conducted a citywide inventory of architecturally significant buildings. An advisory review committee of architects and architectural historians assisted in the final determination of ratings for the 10,000 buildings, which became an unpublished 60-volume inventory. Both contemporary and older buildings were surveyed, but historical associations were not considered. Typically, each building was numerically rated from a low level of importance of "-2" to a high rating of "5." The inventory assessed architectural significance, which included design features, the urban design context and overall environmental significance. When completed, the 1976 Architectural Survey was believed to represent the top 10 percent of the city's architecturally significant buildings.

MASONRY BUILDING (UMB) SURVEY

In November of 1990, the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (Landmarks Board) completed A Context Statement and Architectural/Historical Survey of Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Construction in San Francisco from 1850 to 1940. The survey examined more than 2,000 privately owned, unreinforced, masonry buildings in San Francisco.

The Landmarks Board prioritized the UMB survey into three groupings of buildings -- Priority I, Priority II and Priority III UMBs. The survey was also evaluated by the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and National Register of Historic Places determinations of eligibility were made by the OHP on many of the 2,000 buildings surveyed. A determination of eligibility results in the assigning of a National Register Status Code to each resource -- part of an **Intensive** level survey.

HERITAGE SURVEYS

For the past 30 years, San Francisco Architectural Heritage (Heritage) has commissioned a number of historic resource surveys. To date, Heritage has conducted a comprehensive survey, research and evaluation of the city's Downtown area, the Van Ness Corridor, South of Market, North of Market, Civic Center, Chinatown, and the Northeast Waterfront areas.

In 1994, Heritage also completed a Historic Context Statement on the Neighborhood Development of San Francisco from 1890-1920 for the Inner Richmond District. This comprehensive survey examined roughly 4,000 buildings in the Inner Richmond area.

The findings of the Downtown survey served as the genesis of the book *Splendid*

Survivors, which lead to the creation of the City's Downtown Plan and Article 11 of the Planning Code. Heritage developed a rating system for its surveys while conducting the Downtown survey. Heritage utilized an alphabetical rating system of A through D, with buildings of highest importance rated A and buildings of minor importance rated D.

This survey resulted in an inventory that assessed the importance of over 800 buildings surveyed according to a set of established criteria in four main categories. These include architectural significance, environmental significance (including visual prominence and importance as part of a row or cluster of buildings), and integrity (the degree to which the original design had survived later alterations). The ratings are defined as follows:

- A. Highest Importance** - Individually the most important buildings in San Francisco, distinguished by outstanding qualities of architecture, historical values and relationship to the environment. All A-group buildings are considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and are of highest priority for San Francisco landmark status.
- B. Major Importance** - Buildings that are of individual importance by virtue of architectural, historical and environmental criteria. The buildings tend to stand out because of their overall quality rather than for any particular outstanding characteristic. B-group buildings are considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and are of secondary priority for San Francisco landmark status.
- C. Contextual Importance** - Buildings that are distinguished by scale, materials, compositional treatment, cornice, and other features. These buildings provide the setting for more important buildings and add visual richness and character to the downtown area. Many C-group buildings may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or as part of future historic districts.
- D. Minor or No Importance** – Buildings that are insignificant examples of architecture by virtue of original design or more frequently, insensitive remodeling. This category includes vacant buildings and parking lots. Most D - group buildings are "sites of opportunity."

Not Rated: Buildings that have been built or suffered insensitive exterior rehabilitations since 1945.

EXISTING AREA PLANS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL PLAN

As part of the City's General Plan, a number of existing Area Plans contain a historic resource component, which identifies resources of note within that area. Area Plans that include this information include the Chinatown, Civic Center, Downtown, Northeastern Waterfront, Rincon Hill, South Bayshore, South of Market and the Van Ness Avenue Area Plans.

OTHER ADOPTED AND PROPOSED PLANS

Other adopted and proposed plans that feature information on historic resources include the Golden Gate Park Master Plan, the Port of San Francisco Waterfront Land Use Plan,

and the Presidio of San Francisco National Park General Management Plan. Redevelopment Agency area plans for Hunters Point/Naval Shipyard, Treasure

Island/Yerba Buena Island and Mid-Market also include a historic resource component.

RECENT EFFORTS

In 2001, the Planning Department began a **Reconnaissance** level survey in the Inner Mission North area, built almost entirely following the 1906 earthquake and fire. This survey effort, which advanced to the **Intensive** level, will be discussed at greater length in the following section.

INTRODUCTION -- INTENSIVE LEVEL SUREYS IN SAN FRANCISCO

As discussed, an **Intensive** level survey generally involves detailed research, thorough inspection and documentation of all historic properties within the survey boundaries. Intensive level surveys also provide an assessment as to the potential eligibility of the resource to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A determination of eligibility results in the assigning of a National Register Status Code to each resource.

CENTRAL WATERFRONT/DOGPATCH HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEYS

Beginning in 2000, the Planning Department began the program with an **Intensive** level historic resource survey in the city's Central Waterfront/Pier 70 area, one of San Francisco's earliest industrial complexes and nationally important for production of military vessels for the Spanish American War, World War I and World War II. As part of that survey, the Dogpatch neighborhood, significant as the oldest and most intact concentration of Victorian-era workers' housing, was also surveyed at the **Intensive** level by Heritage and consultant Christopher VerPlanck.

In June 2002, the San Francisco Planning Commission endorsed the Central Waterfront and Dogpatch Historic Resource Surveys. Also in June, San Francisco Board of Supervisor Sophie Maxwell introduced legislation to name the Dogpatch neighborhood as a locally designated residential historic district. Dogpatch represents the City's first locally designated historic district in 10 years.

The California OHP has supported San Francisco's historic resource survey efforts by awarding the Planning Department Historic Preservation Fund matching grants totaling \$60,000 for three consecutive years. In August 2000, the Department was awarded a \$15,000 grant to support the Central Waterfront/Pier 70 **Intensive** level survey. Then in August 2001, the Planning Department received a \$25,000 grant to support a **Reconnaissance** level survey of the Inner Mission North area. Finally, in July 2002, the Planning Department was awarded a \$20,000 grant to complete the **Intensive** level survey in the North Mission area.

INNER MISSION NORTH HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

The Inner Mission North Historic Resource Survey examined 420 residential and commercial buildings, structures and objects largely built following San Francisco's devastating earthquake and fire of 1906. The survey area included a variety of building types such as single-family homes, apartment buildings, hotels, churches and commercial stores. When completed, the **Intensive** level, Inner Mission North survey coupled with the **Reconnaissance** level, Inner Mission North survey will provide a comprehensive history, architectural description and analysis of each resource surveyed.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES/CALIFORNIA REGISTER OF

HISTORICAL RESOURCES

A number of projects, including Section 106 reviews and project EIR's (Environmental Impact Reports) have resulted in National Register of Historic Places determinations of eligibility on individual cultural resources or historic districts in San Francisco. A determination of eligibility results in the assigning of a National Register Status Code to each resource -- part of an **Intensive** level survey.

To date, approximately 3,500 buildings in San Francisco have been listed in or have been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) maintains the National Register listings as well as the California Register of Historical Resources. The OHP's Northwest Information Center located at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California (707) 664-2494, can also provide information about National Register and California Register listings in San Francisco.

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