

## HOW TO DOCUMENT A BUILDING'S HISTORY

In order to complete the environmental evaluation of proposed project, the Planning Department will, in certain cases, request additional information from the project sponsor. One such request could be for information regarding aspects of certain properties that may have historical significance under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), either as an historical resource in and of itself or as a contributor to an existing or proposed historic district.

CEQA historic criteria are based on eligibility for the California Register. To be eligible for the California Register, a property must be significant in at least one of the following areas:

1. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.
2. Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history.
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values.
4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

As an example, if a building was constructed prior to the 1906 earthquake or is a building that was recognized during the Planning Department's 1976 Architectural Survey, you as the project sponsor will most likely receive a form entitled *Historical Resource Evaluation – Request for Information* from the Planning Department. Some project sponsors prefer to hire an outside consultant to complete this work, however, it is also possible that the needed research can be done by the project sponsors themselves.

Outlined below are some of the steps required to do research and a partial listing of the local resources available to applicants/project sponsors. An appendix to this document lists General Reference Sources. These steps and resources can substantially aid individuals and interested parties preparing the responses to a request for additional information

Please be aware that over time the address or Block and Lot for a property may have changed. So before you begin your search, please obtain all address(es) and lot(s)/block(s) that have been used for your property.

### 1. **Start at the beginning.**

In 1906, most official San Francisco documents were lost to fire. The Water Department, now a part of the PUC was able to preserve their records. This department located at 1155 Market Street is a place to check the original Water Tap turn-on applications which list the date of connections to buildings. These records may reveal the original owner, architect/builder and date of construction. Because the records are fragile and not readily available, it is suggested that researchers use the microfiche of these records at the San Francisco Main Library. (You can take Muni or BART to the Civic Center Station.)

## 2. Building Permits

The Department of Building Inspection (DBI) Records Management Division maintains building permits, post 1906 earthquake and fire, on microfiche for the City. Research on building permit history on microfiche can be requested from in the Microfilm Section of the Department of Building Inspection at 1660 Mission Street, First Floor at (415) 558-6080.

The Housing Inspection Services (HIS) located at 1660 Mission Street, 6th Floor of the DBI at (415) 558-6220 maintains housing inspection records of all apartment buildings and hotels in the City.

## 3. Sales Records

The City and County of San Francisco, Office of the Assessor-Recorder at City Hall, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, has records about owners and the actual room counts of buildings as well as information about the estimated date of construction. Sales ledgers from 1906 to 1990 and Block books from 1913-1976 are on microfiche. McEnery cases from 1906-c.1913. Building contract notices to the general record, as well as building completion notices to the general record, extant from 1906 to the present may be helpful. Deeds of property transactions located in an Index of Real Estate Transfers from 1906 to the present, as well as Map Books from 1846 to the present, Subdivision and Homestead Maps from 1850 to the present are also available for review. All of these resources can be of use in the research and documentation process.

## 4. Primary Research

The San Francisco History Room and other departments of the main branch of the Public Library are excellent resources for primary research on a potential historic structure.

Reference materials include:

- San Francisco Block Books; Handy Block Books of San Francisco, Municipal Reports;
- Business Directories: the California and Architect and Building News (1897 to 1900), and John Synder's Index; the Architect and Engineer (1905 to 1945), the Gary Goss Index (1905 to 1928); Western Architecture and Engineering (1945 to 1961).
- Real Estate Circulars: the Daily Pacific Builder; the California Builder; Edwards Abstracts (1906 to 1977).
- San Francisco, Our Society Blue Books (1890-1931),
- Index to the Great Register of Voter Records, (1900 to 1928).

Other resources include:

- Historic Photographs;
- Newspapers & Indexes (San Francisco Call Index 1893-1903, San Francisco Newspaper Index 1904-1950, San Francisco Chronicle Index 1950-current);
- Biographical Index Cards;
- Here Today: Junior League research files;

- Anne Bloomfield's description of How to Work with the 1906-1913 Sales ledgers, located in the Office of the Assessor-Recorder;
- City Landmark and District Case Reports and context statements;
- Water Department Tap Records which are on microfiche.

The San Francisco Main Library also has a collection of Census Records (1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930) and City Directories that are located on the sixth floor San Francisco History Room and City Archives.

Other sources for information include:

The National Archives  
1000 Commodore Drive  
San Bruno CA  
(650) 876-9001

Rare Books and Family Histories  
Sutro Library of the California State Library  
San Francisco State University  
(415) 731-4477

The Labor Archives  
Sutro Library of the California State Library  
San Francisco State University  
(415) 564-4010

Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley  
(510) 642-3781  
Documents Collection  
College of Environmental Design,  
Wurster Hall, Room 232  
University of California at Berkeley  
(510) 642-5124

San Francisco Architectural Heritage  
2007 Franklin Street  
San Francisco, CA 94109  
(415) 441-3000

**5. Sanborn Maps**

Find and copy (or trace) or print from microfilm the earliest Sanborn Fire Insurance Map that shows evidence of the building's existence. Sanborn Maps show block by block what buildings were built at various times throughout the City's history. The 1886-1893, 1899-1900 and 1913-1914 Sanborn Maps are available in the San Francisco History Room of the Main Library in Civic Center. Sanborn Maps are also located within the Office of the Assessor-Recorder located at 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place. The California Historical Society Library located at 678 Mission Street has an extensive collection on San Francisco and California history and artifacts including San Francisco Sanborn Maps. (Please note that the CHS Library is open on Wednesdays only from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., by appointment).

**6. Cultural Resources Database and Existing Survey Information**

The Planning Department maintains a Cultural Resources Database. It is integrated into the land use database of the City and contains existing survey information for the City. This database can assist applicants/project sponsors with some background material relevant to a potential historic building. The database contains summary information for all the designated individual City Landmarks as well the Historic Districts listed in Article 10 of the Planning Code. Some 435 individual buildings as well as six Conservation Districts that were designated as part of the Downtown Plan (Article 11) of the Planning Code are also listed. Buildings designated under other Area Plans of the General Plan of the City and County of San Francisco such as the South of Market, Chinatown, Rincon Hill and the Van Ness Area Plans are listed. Architectural resources contained in the Planning Department's 1976 Citywide Survey (which identified over 10,000 buildings citywide) and the Board of Supervisors adopted book entitled Here Today (which contains survey information on over 2,500 buildings) are also listed. A thematic study of Unreinforced Masonry Buildings (UMBs) that identified approximately 2,000 buildings, (many of which were determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places) are summarized in the Cultural Resources database. Access to the database can be obtained on the public computer at the Planning Information Counter at 1660 Mission Street on the first floor.

To date, approximately 3,500 buildings in San Francisco have been listed in or have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The State Office of Historic Preservation maintains and updates periodically the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places listings. The Northwest Information Center located at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park; CA. (707-664-2494) can provide applicants/project sponsors with information on California Register and National Register listings for the City and County of San Francisco.

Finally, a resource that appears in one or more of the above mentioned surveys might indicate that it is a potential landmark or a contributory building in an historic district. When a designation is being considered, existing survey information will be considered as one component in the overall evaluation of the resource. Lack of existing survey information does not mean the resource is not significant; it simply means that the resource or area has not been surveyed.

Many of the City's existing adopted surveys are now ten to thirty years old and are not standardized in terms of their format and content. A review, update and evaluation of the City's cultural resources are underway and will take many years to complete. In general, the Northeastern quadrant of the City has the most survey work, much of which recognized pre-1930s buildings.

As a general rule, resources that are considered historical for purposes of CEQA should be at least fifty years of age. National Register of Historic Places utilizes the fifty-year rule as a reasonable span of time that makes the professional evaluation of the resource feasible. In recent years, many properties in San Francisco have achieved significance due to the passage of time, (i.e. they are now fifty years of age or older).

Research and evaluation on these undesignated resources may indicate that these properties are, in fact, landmark sites or contributory buildings to historic districts. Many resources that are now fifty years of age or older may be significant on local, state or national levels. A thorough understanding of the architectural, historical, physical context of the resource and its integrity is essential in the evaluation of a resource that is either considered "exceptionally significant" (i.e., less than fifty years) or is now more fifty years of age and has not be surveyed.

## GENERAL REFERENCE SOURCES

A Companion to California by James D. Hart, Berkeley, CA., University of California Press, Second Edition, 1987.

A Field Guide to American Houses by Virginia and Lee McAlester, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California by David Gebhard, Roger Montgomery, Robert Winter, John Woodbridge and Sally Woodbridge, Salt Lake City, Peregrine Smith Books, 1985.

Here Today, San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. Text by Roger Olmsted and T. H. Watkins, San Francisco, CA, Chronicle Books, 1968.

Historic City Directories and Census Records are located on the 5th Floor of the San Francisco Main Library, Civic Center.

"How to Research Your San Francisco Building" by Jean Kortum, former Landmarks Board President and Member, Copyright 1992, Revised 1993 (Available at the Planning Department).

"How to Complete the National Register Registration Form," National Register Bulletin No. 16A (Available at the U.S. Government Printing Office, San Francisco, CA).

"How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form," National Register Bulletin No. 16B (Available at the U.S. Government Printing Office, San Francisco, CA).

In the Victorian Style, Text by Randolph Delehanty, San Francisco, CA., Chronicle Books, 1991.

"Regulations for the Nomination of Properties to the California Register of Historical Resources", Office of Historic Preservation, Sacramento, CA, May 31, 1996.

"Researching an Historic Property," National Register Bulletin No. 39 (Available at the U.S. Government Printing Office, San Francisco, CA).

The Ultimate Guide, San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, Chronicle Books, 1989.

Splendid Survivors, San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage. Prepared by Charles Hall Page and Associates, Inc., for the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage, California Living Books, 1978.

Street Address File, Biographical Index Cards, Landmark Case Reports and Historic Photographs are located in the San Francisco History Room, 6th Floor of the Main Library, Civic Center.

## WEB SITES OF INTEREST

Planning Department homepage: <http://www.sfgov.org/planning>

California Office of Historic Preservation: <http://www.ohp.cal-parks.ca.gov>

California DPR 523 forms: <http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/chris/publicat.html>

National Register homepage: <http://www.cr.nps.gov>

National Register Bulletins: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrpubs.html>

San Francisco Public Library – History Center:

<http://sfpl.lib.ca.us/librarylocations/sfhistory/sfbuilding.htm>

*(This information was compiled from various Planning Departments Preservation Bulletins published January, 2003)*