



SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING
DEPARTMENT

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Brief History of the Historic Preservation Movement in the United States and in San Francisco

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Relevant Topic(s):

HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

The Antiquities Act of 1906, Historic Site Act of 1935, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) have contributed significantly to the historic preservation movement in the United States and in San Francisco.

THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, the concept of preserving a community's architectural past emerged during the decades preceding the Civil War, with efforts to preserve resources associated with significant figures and events in American history. Public concern over the possible loss of historic sites and buildings prompted Congress to adopt the Antiquities Act of 1906, offering protection to prehistoric and historic sites located on Federal properties.

A national policy of preserving historic resources of national significance for public use was established by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which established the National Historic Landmark Program. This legislation empowered the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the National Park Service, to use the Historic American Buildings Survey to survey, document, evaluate, acquire and preserve archaeological and historic sites. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) established the National Register of Historic Places as a list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture.

CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The State of California also maintains preservation programs, through the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) within the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This office is administered by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and overseen by the governor appointed State Historical Resources Commission.

The SHPO's duties include administration of both state and federal preservation programs. There is an official register of California Historical Landmarks, which "must be of statewide significance and have anthropological, cultural, military, political, architectural, economic, scientific or technical, religious, experimental, or other value..." Some 48 buildings or sites in San Francisco have been named as California Historical Landmarks. The OHP also maintains the California Register of Historical Resources.

The California Register of Historical Resources is the official guide to California's significant architectural, historical, archeological and cultural resources. The California Register includes:

- Resources formally determined eligible for, or listed in, the National Register of Historic Places;
- Individual historic resources and historic districts;
- Resources identified as significant in historic resource surveys that meet certain criteria;
- Resources and districts designated as city or county landmarks when the designation criteria are consistent with California Register criteria; and
- California Historic Landmarks number 770 and higher.

THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT IN SAN FRANCISCO

Over the past 50 years, San Francisco has lost a significant number of architectural, cultural and historical resources. Federally sponsored urban redevelopment projects cleared large areas of older buildings in the Western Addition and South of Market areas. Some older buildings were demolished as a result of highway projects. Concern over demolition of older buildings and disruption of neighborhood fabric helped lead to the "freeway revolt," which halted the city's freeway program. Development pressure in the downtown resulted in the loss of a large number of historic structures, including the Montgomery Block, the Fox Theater, the Alaska Commercial Building, the Fitzhugh Building and the City of Paris Department Store.

Private, residential development in the postwar years was concentrated in undeveloped sections west of Twin Peaks. By 1960, however, most vacant land had been developed. Most subsequent development occurred within the historic city fabric and involved demolition of existing buildings. In the inner neighborhoods east of Twin Peaks, the 1920s pattern of replacing one- or two-unit houses with large apartment buildings continued. Many important 19th-century buildings were demolished, including the Greek Revival-styled Humphrey House, constructed in 1852.

By the early 1960s, it was clear that the city's architectural heritage was being eroded through demolition, careless alteration, unsympathetic additions and new construction. In 1963, at the inspiration of local architectural historians, the Junior League of San Francisco undertook an architectural and historic survey of San Francisco, producing the book *Here Today* (1968). The Planning Department's 1966 study, "The Preservation of Landmarks in San Francisco," outlined goals for City legislation to protect architectural and historic resources.

A landmarks ordinance - *Preservation of Historical, Architectural and Aesthetic Landmarks* (Article 10 of the Planning Code) - was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1967. Article 10 resulted in the creation of the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, an advisory board to the Planning Commission.

In the mid-1970s, San Francisco Architectural Heritage undertook the completion of a survey of resources found in the City's downtown area. The findings of the downtown survey served as the genesis of the book *Splendid Survivors, San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage*, which resulted in the creation of the City's Downtown Plan and Article 11 of the Planning Code - *Preservation of Buildings and Districts of Architectural, Historical, and Aesthetic Importance in the C-3 (Downtown) Districts*, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1985.

For many years a number of California preservation boards and planning departments, including San Francisco, used the Kalman Methodology to determine whether a resource was considered "historic" and worthy of designation as an individual landmark or as part of an historic district. The Kalman method utilized a ratings system to provide an evaluation of a resource's potential landmark eligibility. However, at the state and federal levels, historic resource evaluations were determined by using the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect historic and archeological resources. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The National Register Criteria for Evaluation are:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

Criterion A: That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

Criterion B: That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

Criterion C: That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

Criterion D: That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

In 2000, the San Francisco's Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board adopted the National Register criteria as the official measure to determine eligibility for local designation to allow for a more consistent level of evaluation and review. While the methodology for determining whether a resource is considered "historic" evolved from the Kalman Methodology to adoption of the National Register of Historic Places criteria, the overall goal remained constant: to preserve the architectural, historical, and cultural heritage of San Francisco.

In November 2008, the City's electorate adopted a Charter Amendment creating a Historic Preservation Commission to replace the former Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. The amendment transferred the functions of the advisory board to the new commission and conferred additional authority to make recommendations directly to the Board of Supervisors on the designation of landmark buildings, historic districts, and significant buildings. (Please see Preservation Bulletin No. 01 - Jurisdiction and Procedures of the Historic Preservation Commission - for more information concerning the functions of the commission.) The decision to create an independent commission responsible for the management of San Francisco's rich collection of historic properties reflects the City's continued dedication to pursuing best practices in the field of historic preservation.



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