Hibernia Bank: The Rewards of Resilience

After standing mostly vacant for three decades in the heart of Mid-Market, the triumphant return of the Hibernia Bank building is one of the city’s most anticipated preservation projects in a generation. STORY ON PAGE 6
This simple line from *Anna Karenina* (Leo Tolstoy) captures nicely the current energy within San Francisco Heritage and at the Haas-Lilienthal House.

As I mentioned at the semi-annual membership meeting in late January, the Heritage board is concluding a year-plus process to develop a new board-level strategic plan. Under the expert guidance of Talem Advisors, the board has identified five key “outputs” to track and measure Heritage’s success over the next five years. These desired results include:

- Important historic and cultural resources are preserved
- The city’s policy decisions reflect the significance of historic and cultural preservation
- The Haas-Lilienthal House is a celebrated and popular architectural and cultural icon
- Residents and visitors learn about their culture and the many cultures of the city
- The constituency for historic and cultural preservation is broad and diverse.

The plan will transform the board’s governance practices, including new board committees, policies, and budgeting practices, and enable Heritage to be more targeted and effective in its efforts to preserve San Francisco’s unique architectural and cultural identity.

The venue of the membership meeting, in the Bank of California Building (now Union Bank), provided a superb backdrop to Mike Buhler’s overview of Heritage’s recent activities and a thought-provoking presentation by John King of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on what historic buildings say about the city today. King stayed long after, graciously signing copies of his new book *Cityscapes 2: Reading the Architecture of San Francisco*.

Following the public launch of the *Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House* in November 2015, planning is now underway to commence restoration and construction work at the House. Heritage has retained Steven Doctors, Ph.D., AIA, of The CM+ Group, LLC, to act as construction manager, starting with the second phase of exterior restoration and repainting (to be completed by summer). Seismic strengthening and accessibility improvements, among other projects, will soon follow.

None of these projects would be possible without the generous support of contributors to the campaign. As I write this column, the campaign has just received an anonymous matching gift of $100,000. If you make a campaign contribution or pledge between now and the challenge deadline on June 30, 2016, your gift will be matched dollar for dollar!

Finally, preparations are underway for what promises to be an extraordinarily fun Soirée on April 30 at the Armory Events Center at the San Francisco Armory, Mission at 14th Street. We hope to see you there!
In February, the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House received a welcome, anonymous challenge grant of $100,000, building on momentum generated by the public announcement of the campaign late last year. The dollar-for-dollar challenge starts immediately and concludes on June 30, 2016. Heritage must raise the full $100,000 in gifts and pledges within the next four months in order to match the challenge grant of $100,000. Eligible matching funds include contributions and pledges to the campaign from individual donors, businesses, and corporations.

Now is the time to make a campaign gift or pledge, when your contribution will be doubled to make twice the impact toward (1) upgrading and restoring the Haas-Lilienthal House, the city’s only Victorian-era residence regularly open to the public, and (2) expanding Heritage’s ability to fulfill its mission to preserve and enhance San Francisco’s unique architectural and cultural identity.

The campaign has raised more than $3.6 million in gifts and pledges, 84 percent of the $4.3 million goal. Now it is your turn to join the generous supporters who have brought the campaign to this point. We need your help to meet the challenge and catapult fundraising efforts to their conclusion.

We hope you will consider making a gift or pledge today. If you have already made a gift, please consider making an additional contribution or pledge to the campaign. Your contributions will be matched dollar for dollar.

Please use the enclosed envelope to make a credit-card payment, or mail your check made out to San Francisco Heritage, with a note designating it for the “Campaign.” For information about making a pledge for future payment and other forms of payment, please contact Carolyn Squeri, Director of Membership and Development, at csqueri@sfheritage.org or at 415-441-3000 x14. ■

In February, San Francisco Heritage welcomed Suzanne Lemardelé, a French Historic Monuments trainee-curator, for a seven-week internship at the Haas-Lilienthal House. Suzanne graduated in History as well as History of Arts from the École du Louvre (France) and the University of Heidelberg (Germany) and is curious to learn about the American system of historic-monuments preservation.

She sought out Heritage in particular to learn about the role played by private, non-profit-sector initiatives and projects. Suzanne will be conducting research on the controversial practice of “façadism” in San Francisco for a policy paper to be released by Heritage this year, including case studies, design guidelines, and alternatives from around the world.
Triumph of the White Elephants

This edition of Preservation Notes chronicles the miraculous return of the New Mission Theater, fifteen years after being targeted for demolition, plus updates on three other projects that will soon reactivate long-vacant, threatened, or underused neighborhood icons.

NEW MISSION THEATER

More than two decades after going dark, the New Mission Theater reopened as a movie house with “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” on December 17, 2015. The meticulously restored theater is the latest edition of the Alamo Drafthouse, an Austin, Texas-based company. The resurrection of the New Mission Theater is a true preservation miracle, restoring not only an architectural landmark but also a piece of the neighborhood’s heritage as a once-thriving theater district.

Located between 21st and 22nd Streets, the original Mission Theater opened in 1907. In 1916, the Reid Brothers firm repurposed the original theater as an entrance lobby to a new auditorium constructed immediately behind it. In 1932, Timothy Pflueger was hired to transform the lobby, marquee, and 70-foot blade sign into an Art Deco-style movie palace.

After closing as a cinema in 1993, the building was acquired by City College of San Francisco (CCSF) which leased the space to a furniture store. In 2000, CCSF proposed to raze the theater to build a new Mission District campus, ushering in a protracted and divisive debate over the site’s future. In coordination with the grass roots group “Save New Mission,” Heritage successfully nominated the theater to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. Aided by a small grant from the National Trust, Save New Mission worked with architect Alice Carey on a preservation-friendly reuse scheme and spearheaded the theater’s designation as City Landmark No. 245 in 2004, prompting CCSF to relocate its new campus around the corner.

In 2012, Alamo Drafthouse announced plans to reopen the New Mission as a five-auditorium cinema. The project was infused with a commitment to restore the theater’s original appearance. Removed decorative cast plaster was replicated based on molds of the original. The neon marquee and blade sign were repaired, and historic light fixtures that had been removed were refabricated based on historic photos. Sections of a 1932 mural were restored with a swath of recent graffiti left for equal exposure. Even the old projection booth has been repurposed and is now a focal point of the bar area.
GENEVA OFFICE BUILDING AND POWERHOUSE

One of the few City Landmarks in the Excelsior, the “Geneva Car Barn” complex was constructed in 1901 for the San Francisco and San Mateo Electric Railway Company. Having sat vacant since the Loma Prieta Earthquake, the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), the complex’s current owner, has partnered with the Friends of the Geneva Car Barn and Powerhouse to forge a historically sensitive and dynamic vision for its future as a youth-arts center, theater, restaurant, and community assembly and retail spaces. Historic features, such as original wainscoting and a secret door used by strikebreakers during the bloody carmen’s strike of 1907, will be preserved.

With the support of Supervisor John Avalos, RPD, the Mayor’s Invest in Neighborhoods initiative, and the San Francisco Arts Commission, the renovation project is now moving forward in a phased approach. To be completed in fall 2017, Phase One will include renovation of the Powerhouse, a 3,000-square-foot sunlit space with 35-foot ceilings. Phase Two will address the Office Building, although no construction timeline has been established.

OLD U.S. MINT

Six months after the Mint was named to the National Trust’s annual list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Places, the Mayor’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) issued a Request for Proposals in December seeking a partner to help develop a plan to reactivate the Mint as a “destination cultural facility.”

During Phase One, the city will collaborate with the partner entity to commission “a series of technical assessments critical to the restoration project, and on the development of a long-term programming-and-operations plan for the Mint.” The California Historical Society and Orton Development both submitted proposals before the February 3 deadline, with OEWD expected to make a decision by mid-March. The city hopes to announce a full rehabilitation-and-reuse proposal for the building in 2017.

Meanwhile, OEWD has contracted with a local event-production company, Activate SF, to ready the building for short-term rentals and community events. Completed improvements include cleaning of exterior sandstone cladding, new landscaping, and repair of the elevator.

HARDING THEATER

Another Reid Brothers gem, the Harding Theater, at 616 Divisadero, will soon see new life as a “barcade.” Completed in 1926, the Harding has served as a neighborhood vaudeville house (1920s), a single-screen movie theater (1950s), a music venue (1960s-1970s), and a church and community center until 2003. Plans to partially demolish the theater for a mixed-use project were abandoned in 2005 after preservationists rallied in opposition, with the building languishing vacant ever since.

In late 2015, Chicago-based brothers Doug and Danny Marks received city approval to lease the theater as the next location for their chain of arcade-style bars called Emporium. The project will maintain the theater’s historic features, including the stage and fly-loft, storefront, marquee canopy, and balcony. Ceilings, woodwork details, and damaged plaster grill-work in the auditorium will be restored. A seven-unit, five-story residential building is also proposed for the adjacent parking lot. Construction is currently underway with doors expected to open in fall 2016.
Hibernia Bank: The Rewards of Resilience
Mid-Market survivor returns amid neighborhood’s tech-fueled revival

After standing mostly vacant for three decades in the heart of Mid-Market, the triumphant return of the Hibernia Bank building is one of the city’s most anticipated preservation projects in a generation. Constructed in 1892, the banking temple has been a constant fixture at the intersection of Jones, McAllister, and Market streets amid waves of prosperity and adversity over the past 125 years. Purchased by the Dolmen Property Group in 2008, the now-complete rehabilitation of San Francisco Landmark No. 130 includes a total seismic overhaul and restoration of historic features of the previously dilapidated building.

The building was designed by San Francisco’s first known Latino architect, Albert Pissis (1852-1914), who was born in Mexico to a Mexican mother and a French father. Significantly, Pissis was the first American to attend the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and Hibernia Bank is the city’s earliest example of the style that would come to define civic architecture in San Francisco’s post-1906 reconstruction. Other local landmarks designed by Pissis include the Flood Building (1904), Temple Sherith Israel (1905), and the Mechanics’ Institute (1911).
Hibernia Bank was commissioned through a design competition sponsored by the Hibernia Savings and Loan Society, established in 1859 by prominent local Irish-Americans including John Sullivan, William McCann, Myles D. Sweeney, and Richard Tobin, among others. ("Hibernia" is the Latin name for Ireland.) By 1870, the society had amassed over $10 million in assets — twice the size of its nearest competitor — reflecting the emergent financial power of the Irish community in San Francisco.

Befitting the society’s status at the time, no expense was spared on its flagship headquarters at One Jones Street. The south and east facades were clad in white granite from the Sierra and the rotunda was capped by a burnished copper dome (gilded over in 1907) that rose 75 feet above the sidewalk. The wainscoting of the main hall was comprised of four different types of marble. The skylights were amber bevelled plate art glass while the exterior windows were stained art glass. The teller counters were carved mahogany with brass grilles, and the vaults in the main banking hall were framed in red Cork marble. The building’s footprint nearly doubled in size with a $200,000 addition in 1904-1905, with the last interior alterations made just three months before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

All four vaults were designed to be “fire- and burglar-proof,” their walls and ceilings lined by two-and-a-half inches of steel encapsulated by three-foot-thick brick walls. While the building was determined to be fire-resistant, it suffered extensive interior damage due to the intense heat generated by the Great Fire. A full month passed after the fire before the main vault was cool enough to open. When it was opened, all of its contents were intact and unaffected. The recent rehabilitation uncovered original structural steel members that had been warped by the intense heat of the fire.

Repairs to the building began immediately after the fire under the direction of Pissis. The granite facades which had cracked due to the intense heat were repaired and two new Tiffany-style art-glass skylights were installed. In order to make the bank truly fire-proof, all interior finishes were fire-resistant (i.e., no wood trim) and metal fire-shutters were installed that would become an essential security measure to protect the building and its opulent finishes from vandals and looters as it lay vacant in recent decades. Historic features survived miraculously intact throughout the entire building. The bank continued operating at One Jones Street until 1985, when declining profitability led to its closure and eventual sale to Security Pacific in 1988. It remained mostly vacant for the next three decades, except for the Tenderloin police substation located in the basement from 1991 to 2000.

The Hibernia Bank building was purchased by Dolmen Property Group in 2008 with a commitment to restore and strengthen the forlorn landmark. Heritage enthusiastically endorsed the rehabilitation plan in 2012, noting that seismic, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and safety upgrades were especially respectful of the building’s historic fabric. A new staircase and restrooms have been strategically placed away from critical historic areas. To avoid damage to the ornate plaster interior and exterior granite, the seismic retrofit scheme utilized surgical core-drilling of the walls — vertically, from the roof to the foundation — leaving the building interior and exterior virtually untouched. At the recommendation of the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission, disassembled portions of the teller counters have been carefully documented and stored on site.

As the oldest and one of the most exceptional of San Francisco’s temple-form banks, Hibernia Bank reflects the city’s early role as a center of commerce and finance. Appropriately, the building now finds itself located at the center of Mid-Market’s burgeoning tech hub, bearing witness to a new century of prosperity.

As this issue goes to print, Hibernia Bank is being marketed by Dolmen Property Group for a range of possible tenants, including office, retail, event, restaurant, or other creative space over three floors, plus mezzanine and penthouse areas. For more information, see http://thehiberniabanksf.com.

Special thanks to Christopher VerPlanck for contributing to this article, Jeremy Blakeslee (www.jeremyblakeslee.com) for donating professional photography, and to the Dolmen Property Group for granting access to the building.
Soirée 2016 at the Armory

A Fundraising Gala for San Francisco Heritage and the Haas-Lilienthal House

On Saturday, April 30, Soirée 2016 will celebrate the San Francisco Armory, City Landmark No. 108, located in the heart of the Mission District. This fortress-like building was completed in 1914 and designed in the Moorish Revival style. It has seen many incarnations over the past century, serving as a training facility for the National Guard, a prize-fight venue, a film lot for the original Star Wars, and a set-construction space for the San Francisco Opera. Abandoned and under threat of demolition, the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 but remained largely unused until its purchase by Armory Studios, LLC in 2007.

Formally known as the California State Armory and Arsenal, this 200,000-square-foot structure retains original period details including wainscoting, stone staircases, sweeping corridors, cavernous access to Mission Creek, and a gigantic drill court that will serve as the backdrop for Soirée. The sprawling court is reputed to be the largest unsupported enclosed volume in San Francisco, featuring a dramatic exposed-roof structure composed of curved-steel, 170-foot-long open-web trusses. The building’s exterior evokes a heavily armored and forbidding fortress, with crenellated parapets, towers, and narrow lancet windows suggesting gun emplacements.

As an exceptional example of the work of San Francisco architectural firm Woollett & Woollett, the Armory departed from the dominant Gothic- and Romanesque-style armories in the Northeast and Midwest in favor of features and materials that reflected California’s regional Mission Revival and Arts and Crafts movements.

By the late 1960s, the facility was deemed obsolete, and in 1973, the California National Guard announced plans to move to Fort Funston. After the State of California declared the Armory surplus property in 1978, a series of development proposals came and went — from a New Age spa to a neighborhood “mercado” — leaving the Armory as the city’s most conspicuous “white elephant.”

The presenting sponsor for Soirée 2016, Armory Studios, LLC, purchased the property in 2007 for film-production use and has prioritized its restoration and revitalization. Today, Armory Studios leases the drill court to the Armory Events Center for the purpose of creating a thriving community center for business, educational, sporting, entertainment, and other community uses.

Enjoy this uniquely San Francisco venue at our black-tie event that will feature cocktails, a silent auction, fine dining, dancing, and casino gaming. Individual tickets are $350 or $500 (Premium). For information about underwriting a table, to make reservations, or to receive an invitation to Soirée 2016, contact Director of Membership and Development Carolyn Squeri at csqueri@sfheritage.org or 415-441-3000 x14. For information on table underwriting levels, see sfheritage.org.
Heritage wishes to thank our generous 2015 supporters, and those who have contributed to the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage / Haas-Lilienthal House.

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More info at sfheritage.org