Embarcadero Historic District named to 2016 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places

Heritage nominated the Embarcadero to highlight two major physical threats facing the district: earthquakes and sea-level rise that present enormous challenges to the future of the historic waterfront. STORY ON PAGE 6
The previous issue of Heritage News unveiled Heritage’s new five-year strategic plan, recently adopted by the board. Through a series of five measurable outputs, the plan aims to develop a culturally vibrant, diverse, engaged, and economically strong local constituency that values and promotes the preservation of architecture and culture in their own communities. Recognizing that historic designation is the most proactive way to safeguard historic places, the plan states that Heritage will author or fund 20 local or national landmark nominations, and submit another 100 applications to the Legacy Business Registry, by the end of 2020.

As 2016 draws to a close, I’m very pleased to report concrete progress towards these benchmarks. Over the past year, Heritage has prepared or funded nine nominations for City Landmark, National Register, and Legacy Business Registry designation. Several of these nominations have been approved or completed within the past month, including:

- On November 22, Ingleside Presbyterian Church and The Great Cloud of Witnesses mural collage was declared San Francisco’s newest City Landmark. The nomination was a collaborative effort between Heritage, architectural historian Erica Schultz, Architectural Resources Group, and the Planning Department.
- On December 7, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recommended designation of the El Rey Theater as a City Landmark. The nomination was funded in part by Heritage through the Alice Ross Carey Preservation Grant Fund.
- In November and December, the Small Business Commission officially added Sam’s Grill, Britex Fabrics, and San Francisco Heritage itself to the Legacy Business Registry based on applications prepared by Heritage (see story on p.5).

Additionally, Heritage has just completed the draft City Landmark nomination for George Washington High School, co-authored by Christopher VerPlanck and Donna Graves, and National Register nominations for the Casa Sanchez Building and Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts. We look forward to announcing more Heritage-sponsored nominations in 2017!

Also on December 7, the HPC unanimously approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for improvements to the Haas-Lilienthal House, including accessibility, seismic, and fire-life safety upgrades funded by the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House. With 92% of the $4.3 million campaign goal raised, major construction is scheduled to begin at the house in March 2017, or as soon as permits are secured.

Heritage is especially grateful this holiday season to all those who have contributed to the campaign’s success and to the year-end appeal. It is only through the generosity of our members, foundations, sponsors, partners, and friends that we are able to advance Heritage’s mission and bring many of our ideas to life.
Sofar Sounds: Live Music at the Haas-Lilienthal House

On the evening of Friday, October 14, Heritage hosted a pilot program with Sofar Sounds (Sofar) in the parlors of the Haas-Lilienthal House. Founded in London in 2009, Sofar curates secret gigs in unique spaces across 278 cities around the world to bring an intimate live-music experience to all music-lovers. Every lineup is carefully curated with the best new local artists to give a diverse show. A Sofar event is akin to a musical-speakeasy that can only be understood by experiencing the magic first hand.

Reaching out to a new millennial audience, Heritage welcomed over 50 guests as the crowd eagerly found their seats on the floor of the front and middle parlors. The lineup for the evening featured Marty O'Reilly, Azuah, and Brett Hunter Band. Mixing blues, R&B, jazz, folk, and gospel, the artists ushered in a soulful night of music that echoed through the walls of the Haas-Lilienthal House. Dean Davis, Sofar San Francisco director said, “The Haas-Lilienthal House impressed guests as they walked in and admired all the history that the beautiful house expresses.”

The goal of this experimental partnership is to enhance San Francisco’s local music, fostered by a community of young people, as a way to emphasize the lively social character of the historic Haas-Lilienthal House. The evening brought new interest and support from Sofar’s network to Heritage’s preservation mission. Heritage hopes the October 14 experience will become the first in a series of Sofar Concerts at the Haas-Lilienthal House in 2017.

Welcome, Claire!

Heritage is pleased to announce that Claire Flanegin has joined our staff as the new full-time Administrative Assistant. Claire holds a B.A. in History from San Francisco State University, with a focus on California history and The West. She is currently working on a Master’s degree in History from San Jose State University. Claire previously worked with the California Historical Society and gained experience in development, events, and nonprofit administration.

Hailing from the suburbs of San Jose, Claire’s interest in architecture was sparked by her childhood home; an Eichler left virtually untouched by the original owners. She enjoys walking around San Francisco to examine buildings, ranging from the classic Victorians to the newer mid-century modern homes.

As the Administrative Assistant Claire will be responsible for day-to-day operations around the office, in addition to development and membership tasks. She looks forward to working with an organization that is committed to preserving and protecting San Francisco’s unique cultural assets.
Coalition forms to protect historic character of Van Ness Corridor

In conjunction with the recently approved Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) plans to replace 224 historic streetlamps within the Civic Center National Historic Landmark District and throughout the Van Ness Avenue corridor with a contemporary, off-the-shelf design. The streetlamps and graceful ironwork brackets that have lined Van Ness Avenue since the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge are a “Ribbon of Light” that defines the two miles of Highway 101 from Market Street to Bay Street.

In June Heritage joined a group of civic leaders, neighborhood associations, and preservationists to form the Coalition to Save the Historic Streetlamps of Van Ness Avenue. The Coalition includes San Francisco Beautiful, the Victorian Alliance of San Francisco, Middle Polk Neighborhood Association, and Pacific Heights Residents Association, among others. In September the Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Supervisor Aaron Peskin calling on SFMTA to “make all efforts to preserve the historic character of the Van Ness Avenue through reuse as well as replication of the Van Ness Avenue historic streetlamps.”

The Van Ness Avenue streetlamps are the third and last of the classic streetlight designs in San Francisco, after the Path of Gold Light Standards and the Golden Triangle Light Standards (both protected as San Francisco City Landmarks). Although degraded over time by neglect and insensitive retrofits, the Final EIR for the BRT Project notes that the streetlamps are “the only visually notable infrastructural element occurring consistently along Van Ness Avenue that displays design with aesthetic intent.” To mitigate the significant visual/aesthetic impacts of their proposed removal, the Final EIR reassured the public that the replacement poles will “retain the architectural style of the original...support pole/streetlight network.” Despite this mitigation requirement, SFMTA ultimately approved an anonymous industrial design.

SFMTA is currently developing a treatment plan for retention as well as replication of four of the historic trolley poles, lamps, and brackets situated within the Civic Center National Historic Landmark District. In response to the Board of Supervisors’ resolution, the agency is evaluating the feasibility of options that are inspired by the architectural design of the existing “Ribbon of Light.” The Historic Preservation Commission and Arts Commission are expected to reconsider the Van Ness Avenue streetlight-design options in February 2017.
The Legacy Continues: Sam’s Grill and Britex Fabrics

This season, the Small Business Commission will induct Sam’s Grill & Seafood Restaurant and Britex Fabrics into the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry. Both applications were prepared by San Francisco Heritage in collaboration with the business owners. By the end of 2016, the Office of Small Business expects to list 64 businesses and nonprofits in the Legacy Business Registry (Legacy). They represent a diverse cross-section of San Francisco in terms of neighborhood, longevity, size, and the trade, craft, or services offered.

Sam’s Grill, the fifth-oldest continuously operating restaurant in the country, opened in 1867 as an oyster saloon in San Francisco’s Old California Market, an open-air food emporium that stood on the site of today’s Bank of America building (on Kearny between California and Pine). It has been a downtown fixture for almost 150 years, with deep ties to the Financial District, the legal community, and city politics. Sam’s continues to serve its loyal community in San Francisco — the “regulars” and newcomers who either have been eating at Sam’s for decades or have heard of the legendary establishment and its classic cuisine. Priding itself on not being a “kiss and tell” institution, Sam’s has found favor with both famous and infamous residents and guests of the city. The regular customers of the financial, political, and entertainment world find privacy in the curtained booths or visibility in the main dining room. Sam’s is currently renegotiating its lease with the building owner and sought Legacy designation and the incentives that come with it (including annual grants) to help facilitate an agreement.

Britex Fabrics officially opened its doors in San Francisco’s Union Square in 1952 under Martin and Lucy Spector. The store has been continually owned and operated by the Spector family for over 60 years. Britex Fabrics is known for providing the active ingredients for style in San Francisco, featuring the latest textile designs from all over the globe (including a curated collection of European designers) along with one-of-a-kind pieces that have always set creative wheels in motion. This past October, Britex customers were shocked to learn that the store could be evicted after the new property-owners, City Center Realty Partners, filed a change-of-use application to convert the top three floors from retail to office use. Amid the ensuing uproar, City Center Realty Partners principal Mark Stefan told the Chronicle that “our preference is to have Britex remain in the building” and that “we are negotiating with Britex to remain in the building.” The Legacy designation qualifies the property owner to receive an annual grant (equal to $4.50 per square foot per year) in exchange for a minimum ten-year lease extension; Britex Fabrics also qualifies for an annual grant equal to $500 per full-time employee.

On November 28, the Small Business Commission designated San Francisco Heritage into the registry as a nonprofit applicant. As co-author of the Legacy Business Registry legislation and Proposition J (Legacy Business Historic Preservation Fund), Heritage is committed to expanding the registry and using it to promote and sustain the city’s longstanding neighborhood businesses and nonprofits that contribute to the stories and rituals that define the city.
On October 5, 2016, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named San Francisco’s Embarcadero Historic District to its 2016 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Heritage nominated the Embarcadero to highlight two major physical threats facing the district: earthquakes and sea-level rise that present enormous challenges to the future of the historic waterfront. In addition to dangerous threats posed by sea-level rise of up to 66 inches by 2100, a recent earthquake vulnerability study revealed a greater-than-expected risk to the three-mile-long seawall. The dual seismic and climate-change threats require a coordinated local, regional, state, and federal response that embraces creative strategies that assure long-term resilience for the Embarcadero’s rich heritage.

The National Trust’s annual list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places spotlights important examples of the nation’s architectural and cultural heritage that are at risk of destruction or irreparable damage. Last year, Heritage successfully nominated the Old U.S. Mint to the 2015 list, leading the city to allocate $20 million for its rehabilitation in the proposed Central SoMa Plan.

The 11 Most Endangered nomination of the Embarcadero Historic District is the latest example of Heritage’s longstanding advocacy for the city’s historic waterfront. In the late 1990s, Heritage joined Port staff and a Port committee of waterfront stakeholders to explore the possibility of a National Register nomination. Port leadership eventually embraced historic designation—and the tax incentives that can flow from it—as essential to waterfront revitalization efforts. Funded by the Port, the 500-page nomination qualified a three-mile area for designation as a National Register historic district in 2006. In 2011, Heritage published the definitive volume on the history of the waterfront, Port City: The History and Transformation of the Port of San Francisco 1848-2010, by Michael Corbett.

The Embarcadero Historic District is a major economic engine for the Bay Area, hosting a variety of maritime, commercial and recreational uses while also serving as the Bay Area’s ferry hub. The Embarcadero offers popular recreational opportunities for residents and millions of annual visitors, including a continuous three-mile promenade with a network of public open spaces. The Embarcadero’s historic character, enhanced by the 1991 removal of
the elevated Embarcadero Freeway and the subsequent completion of catalytic rehabilitation projects such as the Ferry Building, has contributed to the city’s remarkable waterfront renaissance.

“San Francisco’s Embarcadero captures the city’s rise from Gold Rush port city to cultural and recreational mecca and technology hub, beloved by tourists and residents alike,” said Stephanie Meeks, president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “An all-hands-on-deck approach will be necessary to assure that the historic Embarcadero not only survives the dual threats but continues to serve as the historic gateway and cultural, recreational, and economic hub for the City by the Bay into the next century.”

Engineering options are being identified to minimize the impact of both earthquakes and sea-level rise, but they will be costly. The preliminary cost estimate for seismic repairs to the seawall is at least $2 billion, but when sea-level rise is factored in, the cost is likely to double. Doing nothing, however, is not an option. Not only is the Embarcadero Historic District a cornerstone of San Francisco’s cultural heritage, but at-risk assets also generate $2.1 billion in rents, business income, and wages annually, and are a major contributor to a tourism industry valued at over $11 billion a year.

Fortunately, local and regional planning efforts are well underway, including the Mayor’s Sea-Level Rise Coordinating Committee and the Bay Area Resilient by Design challenge, which joins government, community leaders, and stakeholders from around the region to address challenges posed by climate and seismic uncertainty. The Port of San Francisco is also leading a major public process to update the Waterfront Land-Use Plan for the first time in twenty years. The Waterfront Plan Working Group, which includes Heritage president Mike Buhler, is developing recommendations for the Waterfront Plan and the future needs, challenges, and opportunities. The 11 Most Endangered listing seeks to highlight the importance of the Port’s historic resources within the context of these discussions.

On November 7, in response to the natural and manmade hazards, the California Preservation Foundation, in partnership with the Port of San Francisco, the National Trust, Heritage, and others, presented the Earth, Wind, Water, Fire: Strategies for Resiliency of Historic Resources Workshop. The six-hour workshop provided an overview of the core concepts of resiliency—the ability to withstand, adapt, and recover from shocks and stresses—and discussed the development of public policy and practical design recommendations to mitigate these risks. The workshop also delved deeper into the practical challenges of historic-resource resiliency by using the Port of San Francisco as a case study.
As 2016 draws to a close, the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House is stretching to reach the $4.3 million goal as the end-date nears. The campaign has now surpassed $3.96 million in gifts and pledges and has achieved 92% of the goal!

Although fundraising progress has remained steady since the campaign was announced last November, we are finding that the remaining amount is the hardest to raise, as is the case with many capital campaigns. After more than three years of effort, $340,000 is still needed to complete all of the projects in the campaign plan.

Defying the Odds

The campaign’s success to date is unprecedented for Heritage and has defied early expectations, including a 2011 campaign feasibility study that concluded we could expect to raise only a small fraction of the proposed campaign goal. Confronted with this sobering finding and mounting repair costs, the board commissioned a series of studies analyzing the house and its financial sustainability. In 2012, Heritage successfully urged the National Trust to declare the house one of 34 inaugural National Treasures in America and enlisted its expertise in historic-sites stewardship to develop a long-term business plan for the house.

Having secured a $1 million lead gift from family members as well as their commitment to helping solicit others, the board made the daunting decision to undertake the first comprehensive capital campaign in Heritage’s history.

Permanence and Stability for Heritage

The campaign plan is premised on a holistic vision for the future of Heritage and the Haas-Lilienthal House, grounded in the fundamental belief that one cannot thrive without the other. At a time when so many nonprofits are being priced out of San Francisco, the campaign will provide permanence and stability for Heritage by securing and improving its landmark headquarters, while fortifying its advocacy and education initiatives throughout the city.

We are already witnessing the dramatic impacts of the first campaign-funded improvements to the House. Once viewed as a liability, the House is starting to realize its potential to attract new audiences and generate revenue in support of Heritage’s core mission-related activities.

Since the completion of exterior restoration and repainting earlier this year, there has been a surge in event bookings, with a 300% increase in 2016 event-rental revenue compared to 2015. (In 2010, the house brought in about $10,000 from event rentals; this year, it will surpass $100,000 in event-rental revenue for the first time ever.)

The house will generate over $250,000 in total gross income this year from event and apartment-rental income, tour-ticket sales, and special programs such as Mayhem Mansion.

On December 7, the Historic Preservation Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for accessibility, seismic, and fire-life safety improvements to the house, with major construction scheduled to begin in spring 2017. The push to close out the campaign becomes increasingly urgent as groundbreaking nears, the scope of work is finalized, and Heritage prepares to sign contracts, write checks, and temporarily close the house for some months for restoration work.

If we are unable to raise the last dollars, the board will be forced to cancel certain projects in the campaign plan.

Please help avoid that unfortunate decision by making a meaningful contribution before the end of 2016, either as a one-time contribution or as a three-year pledge. To download the pledge form or make a donation online, visit sfheritage.org/campaign. Call Mike Buhler at (415) 441-3000, ext. 15, for questions.
Docent of the Year: Nicolette Heaphy

Nicolette Heaphy was born and raised in San Francisco, a city she endearingly calls “her only home.” She loves the city and its history. She had driven by the Haas-Lilienthal House many times over the years and has admired it from afar before seeing an ad for volunteers in the Chronicle in 2007. Throughout her career, Nicolette has been a devoted volunteer for many other causes and organizations, such as the San Francisco Zoo, the Wildlife Center in San Rafael, and spent two months in Alaska at the Exxon Valdez oil-spill response for birds.

For the last 13 years, she has worked at Hidden Villa in Los Altos, a 1600-acre wilderness preserve and organic farm, home of early progressive philanthropists and educators, the Duveneck family. Working at Hidden Villa combined her love for environmental conservation and preserving history.

Today Nicolette is one of Heritage’s most valued volunteer docents as she inspires visitors to learn and appreciate the beauty of historic sites. “I volunteer at the Haas-Lilienthal House to share a small part of San Francisco’s fascinating history,” said Nicolette, “[because] I believe that we need to preserve the unique characters of our neighborhoods and cities to celebrate creativity and diversity across time.” In her spare time Nicolette enjoys hiking, traveling, and wandering around San Francisco to visit museums and to discover historic sites.

Spooky Highlights from Mayhem Mansion SF 2016!

Mayhem Mansion SF 2016 marked four years of success, welcoming over 1300 guests through the doors of The Haas-Lilienthal House in October!
Annual Sponsor Profile: Architectural Resources Group

Last year Architectural Resources Group (ARG) named several new principals in the firm’s three offices. One of those principals, Debbie Cooper, is on the board of directors of San Francisco Heritage. We sat down with her and the two other new principals of the San Francisco office, Kitty Vieth and Lisa Yergovich, to talk about the changing nature of preservation.

Q: What are some of the challenges of preserving Midcentury Modern buildings?

Vieth: Midcentury Modernism has a lot. Architects from that era were often exploring new materials and experimenting with using existing materials in new ways. Preserving these buildings can be a challenge when the experiment failed. Do you put it back and have it fail again, or do you replace it with something else? Conservators are going to be dealing with that a lot in the next decade—identifying a whole range of materials that we’ve never dealt with before, and learning how they fail.

Yergovich: Also, much of midcentury modernist architecture involved clean, shiny surfaces. As they aged, they developed a patina, which as preservationists we generally want to keep—but it may not be appropriate in those buildings, because they weren’t designed to have that sort of appearance. The other major challenge with Midcentury Modern buildings is that they tend to have huge windows that don’t function the way we want our building enclosures to function these days, in terms of saving energy. In addition, the glazing from that era often has PCBs, which adds costs because we have to deal with a hazardous material. For so long preservationists had to deal with asbestos, and now it’s PCBs. Experts are still figuring out the best approach for dealing with these PCBs.

Q: It’s one thing to argue for saving a modernist treasure. But what about buildings that are less notable—“modest moderns?” How do we decide whether to keep them?

Vieth: That issue definitely has come up. Right now, we’re evaluating several structures at Yosemite National Park for National Register eligibility and if they’re found eligible, we will be writing historic-structure reports to guide their upcoming rehabilitations. The structures were built as part of Mission 66, the National Park Service’s program to expand visitor services in the parks by 1966. The first one we tackled was Degnan’s Deli, and that has quite a distinct form. It’s definitely worth saving as part of the Mission 66 era. The next building, the Village Store, is largely utilitarian in style and has been modified many times. We’re trying to decide right now if it’s eligible for the National Register under Mission 66 or not.

Q: What about preserving buildings that may not be architecturally remarkable, but that are cultural landmarks, important to the history of a city?

Cooper: The city is changing so fast. Preserving small businesses and bars helps stabilize the architectural character of neighborhoods. The National Park Service is focusing on identifying and preserving historic buildings significant to underrepresented groups, such as minorities and marginalized communities. The California Preservation Foundation is also following that route. A team of historians put together a historic-context statement, underway, listing places and structures related to the evolution of San Francisco’s LGBT community. And San Francisco Heritage has been working on the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District to preserve the heritage of the Latino community along 14 blocks of 24th Street.

Yergovich: There may not be many individual architectural gems on 24th Street—there are nice buildings and great murals, but little that is likely to be considered a landmark. But the culture of that area is very strong. That’s why San Francisco is so special: it has character, it’s not just chain stores everywhere. It’s important to preserve the character of the neighborhoods, but there’s also an argument against stopping the city in time. We need to find a balance.

Q: When you’re adding new buildings to historic campuses, how do you decide how the new structures should relate to the old ones?

Cooper: It’s a case-by-case situation. In some places, you should make a big gesture with a new building. In others, a small gesture is more appropriate, so the historic buildings can remain dominant. Then there’s the question about whether you should stay within the building typology and language and massing of the existing buildings, or whether you should do something different. It all depends on the context.

Sites like the Presidio and Fort Baker, where the historic context is strong, want a response in keeping with the existing vocabulary. Whereas sites like the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, which already have a mix of building types from different eras, offer more of an opening for a contemporary response that still responds to the site and the landscape.

ARG is a Keystone Sponsor of San Francisco Heritage. For information on annual sponsorship levels and benefits, visit sfheritage.org/annual-sponsorship.

Three LEED/AP Principals at ARG, San Francisco
L-R: Debbie Cooper, Lisa Yergovich, Kitty Vieth

Photo courtesy of ARG
At Heritage’s 2017 Semi-Annual Meeting, on January 25, we are pleased to welcome Stephen “Woody” LaBounty and David Gallagher of the Western Neighborhoods Project (WNP) to talk about WNP’s plans for a collection of more than twenty-five cabinets of privately owned historical images. Accepting stewardship of the collection in 2013, WNP’s OpenSFHistory project has begun to catalog, digitize, preserve, and make thousands of images available to the public, both physically and online. They will share excerpts from the trove of over 100,000 rarely seen images of San Francisco, with a particular focus on downtown landmarks and Legacy businesses.

Formed in 1999 with a mission to preserve and share the history and cultures of the neighborhoods of western San Francisco, WNP launched the OpenSFHistory program in 2015. The donated collection consists of approximately 400 linear feet of mixed photographic formats, including photographs, tintypes, nitrate and safety-film negatives, photographic slides, glass negatives, lantern slides, copy negatives, and copy prints. These images include many views that are valuable to planners, preservationists, and architectural historians, including streetscapes, unique photos from various city agency infrastructure projects, and a complete set of aerial photographs of the city from 1948. To date, over 10,000 images have been digitized and catalogued online at opensfhistory.org. In November, WNP received a $50,000 grant from the San Francisco Historic Preservation Fund Committee to accelerate its efforts to make the collection fully available to the public.

In addition, President and CEO Mike Buhler will provide an update on Heritage’s latest activities, including the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House and campaign-funded restoration, accessibility, and seismic improvements scheduled to begin in Spring 2017.

On Wednesday, January 25, please gather in the Variety Club Preview Room at the Hobart Building, 582 Market Street (west of Second), from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., for the meeting and presentation. Free admission for Heritage members; $10 for non-members. Rsvp to Terri Le: tile@sfheritage.org or call (415) 441-3000, ext. 22. The Semi-Annual Meeting is made possible through the generous support of the Hobart Preservation Foundation.
May 13, 2017
Soirée 2017
Save the date! Join us on Saturday, May 13, 2017 for Heritage’s annual Soirée, at the Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco.