Potrero Point and the Ghosts of Industrial Past

The mothballed Potrero Power Station is the last major piece of Potrero Point — the city’s most significant early industrial complex — to be targeted for radical transformation, following the ongoing redevelopment of the Union Iron Works Historic District at Pier 70 immediately to the north. STORY ON PAGE 6
I begin my tenure as Chair of Heritage’s board with tremendous gratitude for the many accomplishments and the continued dedication of outgoing board chair Nancy Gille. On behalf of the entire Heritage community, thank you, Nancy!

The fall season brings that “return to school” feeling — refreshed from summer and ready for the work ahead. With the capital campaign successfully concluded, the Haas-Lilienthal House restored and in great demand, and the gift of the Doolan-Larson Residence at Haight and Ashbury in hand, Heritage has a strong foundation from which to pursue our mission to preserve and enhance San Francisco’s unique architectural and cultural identity.

San Francisco Heritage is a legacy of the national preservation movement. The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act launched the current system of agencies, organizations, laws, and policies that govern the treatment of historic and cultural resources nationwide. Following the initial federal legislation that formalized a preservation process, state and local governments established municipal preservation programs that were complemented by the formation of state and local private, nonprofit advocacy groups. Heritage’s founding in 1971 is relatively early in the trajectory of similar local advocacy organizations across the country. San Francisco residents, including those highlighted in this newsletter, witnessed the neighborhood-wide demolition of cultural sites and historic buildings in the name of urban renewal. They knew the character of the city was at risk. San Francisco needed an advocacy organization whose members could fight for preservation while also making a case for balanced planning policy. That early preservation ethic continues to this day.

Over the last year, members of our Projects & Policies Committee have met with representatives of the 450 O’Farrell project to investigate methods for retaining the National Register-eligible Fifth Church of Christ Scientist, which is proposed for replacement by new housing and new church facilities. As you will read, that project originally proposed demolition of the church and retention of a handful of columns — a treatment referred to as “façadism.” Retention of building elements removed from their context is seriously discouraged by the guiding principles of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. Heritage’s position has been to advocate for reuse of the historic church and explain the drawbacks of façadism.

The Fifth Church of Christ Scientist case is just one of many preservation issues we grapple with on a daily basis. Our success depends on your support and involvement. Share Heritage’s history and determination to protect our city’s complex character with your colleagues and neighbors. Join us in our efforts.
50th-Anniversary Heritage Documentary Project

In anticipation of the organization’s 50th anniversary, in 2021, Heritage is partnering with Bread & Butter Films to produce a 22-minute documentary on the events and people who galvanized San Francisco’s historic-preservation community, from its inception in the 1960s as a reaction to urban-renewal policies, to the founding of Heritage (1971), early triumphs and losses, and the evolution and expansion of its mission in subsequent decades. The finished product could become a permanent part of the Haas-Lilienthal House visitor experience and will be shown at events celebrating the Golden Anniversary in 2021.

The initial phase has focused on filmed interviews with people instrumental to the establishment of the “Foundation for San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage” in 1971, especially early Heritage board and staff members. Between May and September 2018, ten interviews were recorded over three filming days at the Haas-Lilienthal House, Doolan-Larson Residence, and the Tenderloin Museum at the Cadillac Hotel. Heritage luminaries filmed to date include Don Andreini, Bob Berner, Linda Jo Fitz, Arnie Lerner, Katherine Looper, Harry Miller, Stewart Morton, Gee Gee Platt, Desiree Smith, and Jay Turnbull, with more to come.

Heritage is collaborating with the award-winning production team of Jackie Krentzman and Camille Servan-Schreiber. Well known for the acclaimed documentary “American Jerusalem: Jews and the Making of San Francisco” (2013), among many other projects, Bread & Butter Films also produced the new visitor-orientation video for the Haas-Lilienthal House (2018). Special thanks to Katie Conry, Executive Director of the Tenderloin Museum for hosting us and to Chris VerPlanck for sharing his research and interview questions for this project.

Clockwise from top-left: Gee Gee Platt, Donald Andreini, Desiree Smith, and Linda Jo Fitz, filmed at the Haas-Lilienthal House on September 12, 2018
Two Projects Receive Preservation-Fund Grants

Heritage is excited to announce the August 2018 round of Alice Ross Carey Preservation-Grant Fund awardees. Both the Golden Gate Institute, Inc. (Kinmon Gakuen) and Shaping San Francisco were awarded grants of $5,000 each.

Golden Gate Institute, Inc. (Kinmon Gakuen)

Established in 1911, Kinmon Gakuen became an educational institution for children of Japanese ancestry who were not allowed to attend school in the U.S. Today, it is the country’s oldest Japanese-language school and once served as the San Francisco processing center for the incarceration of Japanese Americans at the onset of World War II. The building is slated for historical designation in 2019 as part of the Historic Preservation Commission’s Landmark Designation Work Program.

The ARCPF grant award will help fund the development of preliminary plans by Treanor HL to update the building to current codes and add infrastructure for computers, projectors, and internet resources. The preliminary drawings and cost estimate will provide the basis for future fundraising efforts. This project will enable Kinmon Gakuen to expand its cultural programs including ikebana, martial arts, taiko drumming, and cultural dance. In addition, the classrooms will be available for use by the community and other organizations when school is not in session.

Neighborhood Newspapers of San Francisco

Founded in the 1990s, Shaping San Francisco is a participatory community-history project documenting and archiving overlooked stories and memories of San Francisco. From October 2018 to September 2019, Shaping San Francisco and Internet Archive — as part of the citywide Community History Collaborative, organized in 2013 with a mission to share resources, influence the discourse of local history, and amplify work done by local historians — will scan more than 500 issues from at least six San Francisco neighborhood newspapers. This grassroots project, known as “Neighborhood Newspapers of San Francisco,” will preserve long out-of-print issues — pulled from filing cabinets and rescued from disposal — and make them available electronically. A series of public events will draw attention to and enliven the public use of the digital archive. The online collection now includes 1,530 issues, and the topics found in the papers reflect a changing landscape of civic life in San Francisco from the 1960s to the present.

The $5,000 ARCPF grant will help expand the collection beyond neighborhood newspapers to other community newsletters that date back to the 19th century, including: Noe Valley Voice, Sunnyside News, The Semaphore, Richmond ReView, Richmond Banner, and Street Art News. After conservation, scanning, and contextual data are added, digital files of each issue will be posted online at archive.org/details/sanfrancisconewspapers.

Heritage is now accepting applications for the next round of grants, which are due on or before February 1, 2019. To learn more about the Alice Ross Carey Preservation-Grant Fund, visit sfheritage.org/aliceross-carey-preservation-fund/.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KINMON GAKUEN

Kinnon Gakuen 17th Anniversary Celebration, 1927

1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake newspaper subcollection
450 O’Farrell Update: Taking A Stand Against Façadism

“I believe there is no greater threat to the architectural preservation movement in this country than the ‘plastic flower’ or ‘Disneyland’ philosophy of saving only fragments of older buildings as decoration in the name of historic preservation. Either save and reuse the entire building or let contemporary architecture take its place.”
— Grant DeHart, Executive Director, San Francisco Heritage, 1983

Over the past year and a half, Heritage has been promoting alternatives to the proposed demolition of Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist, at 450 O’Farrell Street. Built in 1923, the church is both a contributor to the Upper Tenderloin National Register Historic District and individually eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources. In testimony before the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and the Planning Commission, and in EIR comments, Heritage has consistently and unequivocally opposed demolishing the church for market-rate housing and new church facilities. Moreover, the original project design would have artificially pasted the 1923 colonnade and portico onto the new building.

Saving a small piece of the façade, in Heritage’s view, would have exacerbated impacts on the surrounding Upper Tenderloin Historic District – standing as an absurd monument to the ineffectiveness of the city’s preservation protections. It would also likely encourage façadism as a legitimate preservation strategy amongst the broader development community. Members of the HPC were similarly offended by the pastiche of old and new: “At any level of preservation, this kind of design, to me, is the height of facadism,” admonished Commissioner Jonathan Pearlman in March 2017. “It really does not preserve anything of the building other than this little wall that wraps around.”

At every turn, Heritage’s goal has been simultaneously to promote options and incentives that would help save the church while resisting the normalization of façadism in San Francisco. When it became clear that the Planning Commission was poised to approve the proposed project, the Heritage board was forced to debate whether to take a principled stand against façadism — even if it meant accepting complete demolition of the historic building.

Heritage ultimately recommended (1) removal of the colonnade from the new design, and (2) reallocation of the resulting cost savings to worthy preservation projects in the Upper Tenderloin Historic District. At its September 13 meeting, the Planning Commission unanimously endorsed Heritage’s framework by approving the revised design (sans colonnade) and encouraging the project sponsor to reach agreement with Heritage on their funding commitment for off-site preservation projects.

The Normalization of Façadism

Thirty-five years after Grant DeHart condemned the “Disneyland” philosophy of saving only fragments of older buildings, San Francisco is witnessing a disturbing resurgence of this practice as façade-retention projects (e.g., 1500 Mission Street project, 1634-1690 Pine Street project / The Rockwell) are increasingly approved amid the ongoing development boom. The practice of “façadism” is inconsistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and widely rejected by the national and international preservation community.

In her thought-provoking article “What Price Façadism? Authenticity and Integrity in Historic Preservation,” Historic Seattle’s Eugenia Woo explains: “Stripped of everything but its façade, a building loses its integrity and significance, rendering it an architectural ornament with no relation to its history, function, use, construction method, or cultural heritage.” (ARCADE 33.2, Fall 2015)

The proliferation of façade-retention projects in San Francisco has prompted the Planning Department and the HPC to develop a façade-retention policy that discourages its practice, defines minimum preservation standards, and offers alternative, more meaningful mitigation strategies. The draft HPC policy states that “character-defining features need to be retained to avoid an end-product that looks more like a hollow vestige than a public benefit.” The updated policy was presented to the HPC on October 17th.

One might argue that façade “preservation” is better than nothing. In the case of 450 O’Farrell, at least, Heritage concluded that a new building that is well designed and cohesively knitted into the streetscape would be preferable to a confusing pastiche of the old unsuccessfully jumbled with the new. To this end, the Planning Commission directed the sponsor to work with the Planning Department to replace the colonnade with a contemporary but compatible design that maintains the project’s references to the character-defining features of the historic district, including the ground-floor storefront height, tripartite façade composition, organization of the building into vertical masses, punched window openings, and material uses.

Heritage’s position on the 450 O’Farrell project is explicitly contingent on the project sponsor’s commitment to reallocate the net cost savings to historic preservation, façade improvement, and affordable housing improvements in the Upper Tenderloin Historic District. Heritage is insisting on a firm and substantial funding commitment. Negotiations continue as this issue of Heritage News goes to print.
The mothballed Potrero Power Station is the last major piece of Potrero Point — collectively, the city’s most significant early industrial complex — to be targeted for radical transformation, following the ongoing redevelopment of the Union Iron Works Historic District at Pier 70 immediately to the north (Heritage News, Spring 2018).

The power station shut down in 2011 and was purchased by Associate Capital in October 2016, beating out nine other bidders. As part of “The Power Station” project, Associate Capital is proposing to build more than 1,800 residential units and a mix of commercial, parking, open space, and community facilities on 21 acres, including 19 buildings ranging in height from 65 feet to a single 300-foot residential tower. The iconic 300-foot Boiler Stack and adjacent Power Building Unit 3 Block, both erected in 1965, would be reused as a hotel and public amenity.

Released in early October, the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) finds that the preferred project will result in significant and unavoidable adverse impacts to the Third Street Industrial District, including demolition of the Meter House (1902), Compressor House (1924), and Station A (1901-1902, 1930-1931). These unreinforced brick buildings are the last remnants of the site’s crucial early period of industrial growth (1870-1920), which included power, gunpowder, barrel-making, yeast, and sugar industries. They are also in various states of disrepair and partial demolition, with the massive Station A Turbine Hall missing its roof and exposed to the elements. Nonetheless, the EIR concludes that the brick buildings have sufficient physical integrity to remain eligible as historic resources; it also identifies Unit 3 and the Boiler Stack as important latter-day contributors to the Third Street Industrial District.

The EIR analyzes a panoply of preservation alternatives, including a full-preservation option and four partial preservation variants. In dialogue with the HPC, Heritage, and others, the project team is continuing to investigate other creative approaches for incorporating the early brick buildings into the development.

Potrero Point and the Ghosts of Industrial Past

The open-air Unit 3 Block and adjacent Boiler Stack, built in 1965, contribute to the significance of the Third Street Industrial District and are slated for conversion into a hotel and public amenity.
History of Potrero Point

Industrial complexes such as Potrero Point tended to be messy and complicated. Most factories are not “built” in any one year, but, rather, they are “begun.” Additions and remodeling can be much more significant than the original structures, as can be seen in haphazard accretions throughout Potrero Point. The area was originally developed in the late 19th century by a small coterie of California capitalists. In 1866, James Fair established the Pacific Rolling Mills steel mill on the middle third of Potrero Point; in 1881, sugar magnate Claus Spreckels built his San Francisco refinery on the southern third, where the power-station site is located today. In 1883 the owners of the Union Iron Works moved their entire operation to Pier 70.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the entire peninsula was transformed into a large single-use industrial area for heavy and polluting industry, decades before the advent of legal zoning. Because blue-collar workers wanted to live within walking distance of their places of employment, Potrero Point’s labor history is closely related to the neighborhoods of Irish Hill, Dogpatch, and Potrero Hill.

In 1901 Spreckels built his Station A power plant, which he quickly sold to San Francisco Gas & Electric (merging with California Gas & Electric in 1905 to form Pacific Gas & Electric). Station A was part of the largest steam electric plant west of the Rockies, and was instrumental in rebuilding the city after the 1906 earthquake and fire.

When the sugar refinery was shut down, in 1950, PG&E purchased the site for expansion of their steam electric operations, including construction of Unit 3 and the Boiler Stack to the east. Built in 1965, the natural gas-powered boiler produced superheated high-pressure steam using water from San Francisco Bay, enabling the plant to dramatically increase its capacity. The Unit 3 Block’s open-air frame, proximity to the water, and panoramic views suggested its potential for adaptive reuse as a hotel. “I liked the challenge of reusing a mid-century power station,” says Landa, “as no one has done this before and it poses new challenges for architects, historians, and developers.”

The project team made informational presentations to the Architectural Review Committee of the Historic Preservation Commission, in March 2018, and to the full HPC in August 2018. Recognizing the challenges posed by the project site and its historic structures, commissioners suggested their openness to “creative solutions that are out of the typical preservation lexicon,” in the words of HPC president Andrew Wolfram. Specific features highlighted by the HPC included the small neoclassical façade of the Station A Machine Shop Office and the exposed, artfully besotted interior brick wall of Station A.

As part of Heritage’s ongoing review of the proposed project, members of the Projects + Policy Committee toured the site in August 2018. We are currently reviewing the Draft EIR and will be submitting written comments before the November 19, 2018 deadline.

Portions of this article are drawn from the Historic-Resource Evaluation by Page & Turnbull, January 8, 2018, and testimony by Dr. Paul Groth to the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, July 2002.
Join us for the final installment of the 2018 Lecture Series at the Old U.S. Mint on November 8 at 6:00 PM, with doors opening at 5:30 PM. Professor Stephen Tobriner will discuss the unique architectural and engineering history of the design and construction of the 1874 Old U.S. Mint at a time when federal, state, and city authorities were seeking to build seismic-resistant structures in the aftermath of the 1868 earthquake. Individual lecture tickets are $10 for members/students and $15 for the public. To purchase tickets, visit sfheritage.org/lecture-series or contact Terri Le at tle@sfheritage.org or call 415.441.3000, ext. 22. In partnership with the California Historical Society.
Docent of the Year: Charles Klein

For the past 11 years, Charles Klein has been one of Heritage’s most valued volunteer docents as he inspires young visitors to learn and appreciate the beauty of historic places. Prior to Heritage, Charles worked at the Zion Lutheran School in the Richmond District as a primary-school teacher for nearly 40 years. Every year he would bring his third-grade class to the Heritage Hikes education program at the Haas-Lilienthal House, calling it “the highlight of the year.” On his last visit before retirement, in 2007, the docent leading the tour asked if Charles would be interested in becoming a docent, to which he enthusiastically answered, “Definitely!”

“It has been a joy ever since,” said Charles as he continues to work with children by leading the popular Heritage Hikes tours. “Taking children through the house is always such an enjoyable experience [because of] their endearing questions like, ‘Do you live in this big house?’ and ‘Are you the butler?’”

Outside of Heritage, Charles remains a beloved member of the Zion Lutheran School community. With over 50 years of service, he continues to volunteer at the after-school care program every weekday. Charles also volunteers at a local nursing home and works as a private tutor in his spare time.

Thank you, Charles, for your dedication as a volunteer docent and as a pillar of the San Francisco community!

Volunteer at the Haas-Lilienthal House!

Volunteers are an essential part of the operation at San Francisco Heritage and the Haas-Lilienthal House. Whether your interests are history, architecture, antiques, or historic preservation, there is a place for you in the Haas-Lilienthal House volunteer corps with many rewarding activities and benefits. Heritage accepts new volunteers to help with a variety of different projects and tasks. These might include: House Tours, Walking Tours, School Tours, Admissions/Bookstore, and Special Events. For more information please contact Volunteer Coordinator Pam Larson at 415-441-3000, ext. 14 or email: plarson@sfheritage.org
Legacy Circle Member Profile: Nyla Moore

Nyla Moore has always been drawn to “old world San Francisco” — growing up in West Portal and visiting her father’s childhood haunts in North Beach made a strong impression on the native San Franciscan. “The new buildings and constant construction cannot compare to the old buildings’ personality, culture, and design.” Nyla has fond memories of the city as a young girl: visiting family-owned Italian delis, seeing the impressive interiors of churches like Grace Cathedral and St. Dominic’s when her family would go to mass on Sundays, and peeking into the stately Julia Morgan Ballroom on California Street — her favorite. Alarmed by the changes made to familiar neighborhoods and buildings, Nyla was inspired to become a Legacy Circle member at San Francisco Heritage. “Preservation is a way to continue our legacy after we’re gone,” she observes, much like the establishments that pass down their traditions from family member to family member. By leaving Heritage’s Landmark Fund a contribution in her will, Nyla is helping to protect the diversity of the city’s cultural and architectural inheritance.

Heritage’s Newest Supporter: Doing it with Gusto!

“There’s tremendous power in learning and maintaining a connection to history. It’s the combination of old and new that is special,” according to Josh Reeves, CEO and co-founder of Gusto. This exploding new company offers small businesses a “People Platform,” that brings together payroll, benefits, and human resources all in one experience. A San Francisco native, Josh co-founded Gusto in 2011 with fellow electrical engineers from Stanford University. They now serve over 60,000 businesses, representing more than 1% of all employers in the United States. Josh was introduced to San Francisco Heritage when Soirée 2018 launched the grand opening of Historic Pier 70 — Gusto’s new headquarters. “I love seeing old buildings brought back to life; the mix of the old and new gives urban environments character. There’s so much history in this area from when Mission Bay was still a bay, Irish Hill still existed, factories were being created, and more. We like Pier 70 as our new home because of its history and openness – everything that San Francisco Heritage represents and works for.”

As Heritage looks to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2021, we are grateful to Legacy Circle members who have pledged and provided for the future of our mission to preserve and enhance San Francisco’s unique architectural and cultural identity, including advocacy for historic resources and education programs. All of this is possible because of thoughtful, passionate individuals who give support, voice, and financial resources, now and for the future.

After taking care of yourself and loved ones, it’s a good time to consider what else really matters to you. Providing for Heritage in your will or trust provides the satisfaction of knowing your legacy will help future generations enjoy the city you love. These gifts may also provide valuable tax benefits to you and your heirs. Legacy gifts to Heritage foster our ideals and goals after we’re gone. There are a number of ways to include San Francisco Heritage as part of your estate plan. If you have made plans already, please let us know so that we can include you in future Legacy Circle events.
MULTIVISTA Provides 360° View of the Doolan-Larson Building!

Multivista, a global leader in digital construction documentation, donated services to comprehensively document the Doolan-Larson Building — the newest Heritage property. The result is a state-of-the-art 360° view of the entire property, top to bottom, including laser-scanning data that will enable Heritage to recreate floorplans and models for maintenance and future improvements.

Multivista’s core service is “reality capture” via photography, 3D-immersive, and laser-scanning documentation. They focus on comprehensive photo-documentation of construction projects and existing structures to create a perfect memory. Multivista services span the spectrum from 2D still photographs to drone imagery and mapping, webcam services, 3D-immersive laser-scanning documentation, and videography.

Andrew Duffell, principal, and lead for the Doolan-Larson project, has been with Multivista for eight-and-a-half years. Andrew has always been intrigued by the sheer scale and complexity of the city’s skyline: “San Francisco in particular has struck a nice balance between historic and contemporary buildings, resulting in an eclectic collection of commercial and residential spaces. I find it fascinating that you can turn any corner and find examples of centuries-old craftsmanship that have stood the test of time alongside some of the most technologically advanced and forward-thinking engineering marvels. I respect the stories these structures tell of the past and present, and feel grateful to both help preserve the old and construct the new.”

“The Doolan-Larson Building is such an iconic piece of San Francisco history and is the quintessential emblem of Haight-Ashbury. We also heard a rumor that the attic is haunted, which added to the allure. Our team was intrigued and excited to capture the entire space. This is a very stimulating partnership. Multivista’s technology platform and Heritage’s mission are a match made in heaven! Our team memorializes buildings and Heritage preserves historical milestones,” said Duffell.

“It’s unfortunate that many who are responsible for historic structures don’t have the information they needed for proper maintenance. Many of these buildings don’t have accurate, or sometimes any, floorplans. Our technology can help bridge that gap. This project will ultimately assist Heritage in maintaining these structures today and providing institutional knowledge for tomorrow.”

Mike Buhler, President and CEO of Heritage, gratefully explains: “This donation from Multivista enables us to maximize the Doolan-Larson gift, as we move forward in preserving and sharing this important piece of history, the essential expression of the counter-culture era, to its fullest potential for everyone—locals and visitors alike.”

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Historic Buildings of San Francisco Playing Cards

Under the direction of former Board Chair Nancy Gille, Heritage created the second edition of Historic Buildings of San Francisco Playing Cards — a celebration of the city’s distinguished historic architecture. Each card features a San Francisco architectural gem — spanning from the Old Mint (1874) to the Mermaid Fountain at Ghirardelli Square (1968).

Each deck of 52 cards is only $10 (includes shipping)!

To order, please complete purchase form on sheritage.org and email cflanegin@sheritage.org. For questions or concerns about shipping costs, please call 415.441.3000, ext. 25.
Thursday, November 8, 6:00 PM

Bracing for Disaster: Earthquake-Resistant Design in San Francisco 1868-1933
Old U.S. Mint
88 5th Street

For more information, contact Claire Flanegin at cflanegin@sfheritage.org or call 415.441.3000, ext. 25