

017D

FILE NO. 90-79-9

ORDINANCE NO. 10-80

1 DESIGNATING THE RINCON ANNEX POST OFFICE AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO
2 ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.

3 Be it Ordained by the People of the City and County of San
4 Francisco:

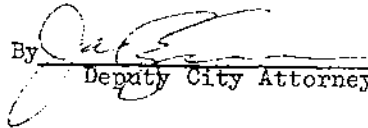
5 Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that
6 portion of the Rincon Annex Post Office designed by Gilbert S.
7 Underwood and its interior public lobby containing murals painted
8 by Anton Refregier located on the south line of Mission
9 Street between Steuart and Spear Streets, being Lot 1 in Assessor's
10 Block 3716, have a special character and special historical,
11 architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and that its
12 designation of this structure, including the interior lobby, as a
13 Landmark will be in furtherance of and in conformance with the
14 purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and the standards
15 set forth therein.

16 (a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning
17 Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code,
18 that portion of the Rincon Annex Post Office designed by Gilbert
19 S. Underwood and its interior public lobby containing murals painted
20 by Anton Refregier is hereby designated as a Landmark, this
21 designation having been duly approved by Resolution No. 8375 of
22 the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is on file with the
23 Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No. 90-79-9.

24 (b) Required Data. The descriptions of the location and
25 boundaries of the Landmark site; of the characteristics of the
26 Landmark which justify its designation; and of the particular
27 features that should be preserved; as included in the said Resolution,
28 are hereby incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though
29 fully set forth.
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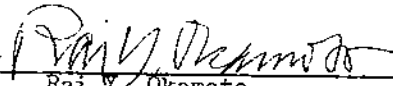
1 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

2 GEORGE AGNOST
3 CITY ATTORNEY

4 By  _____
5 Deputy City Attorney

RECOMMENDED:

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

By  _____
Rai Y. Okamoto
Director of Planning

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Passed for Second Reading
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

DEC 26 1979

Ayes: Supervisors Britt, Dolson, ~~Gonzales~~, Horanzy, ~~Hutch~~, Kopp, Lau, Molinari, Pelosi, Renne, ~~Silver~~

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors GONZALES HUTCH

SILVER

[Signature] Clerk

90-77-9
File No.

JAN 11 1980
Approved

Read Second Time and Finally Passed
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

JAN 2 1980

Ayes: Supervisors Britt, Dolson, ~~Gonzales~~, Horanzy, Hutch, ~~Kopp~~, ~~Lau~~, Molinari, Pelosi, Renne, Silver.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors GONZALES KOPP LAU

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

[Signature] Clerk

[Signature]
Mayor

This is a copy of the City Planning Commission's Resolution which is on file at the Department of City Planning.

SAN FRANCISCO
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
RESOLUTION NO. 8375

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the 1939 structure designed by Gilbert S. Underwood for the Rincon Annex Post Office on the south side of Mission Street between Steuart and Spear Streets as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on November 1, 1978, and said Advisory Board, after due consideration, has recommended approval of this proposal; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a public hearing on September 20, 1979 to consider the proposed designation and the report of said Advisory Board; and

WHEREAS, The Commission believes that the 1939 building designed by Gilbert S. Underwood has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value; and that the proposed designation would be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes and standards of the said Article 10, but believes further that other structures on the entire block site initiated by the Advisory Board do not have such interest or value; and

WHEREAS, The Commission recognizes the social and artistic importance of the lobby murals painted by Anton Refregier, and would desire that those murals be preserved in place:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, the proposal to designate the interior lobby and exterior of the aforementioned structure of the Rincon Annex Post Office on the south side of Mission Street between Steuart and Spear Streets as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the precise location and boundaries of the Landmark site being those of the 1939 structure designed by Gilbert S. Underwood, said structure being situated on a portion of Lot 1 in Assessor's Block 3716;

Second, That the special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are set forth in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board Resolution No. 183 as adopted on November 1, 1978, which Resolution is incorporated herein and made a part thereof as though fully set forth;

Third, That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in both of its exterior and interior lobby features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning Docket LM78.14;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commission hereby directs its Secretary to transmit the proposal for designation, with a copy of this Resolution, to the Board of Supervisors for appropriate action.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission at its regular meeting of September 20, 1979.

Lee Woods, Jr.
Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Bierman, Christensen, Dearman, Mignola, Nakashima, Rosenblatt, Starbuck

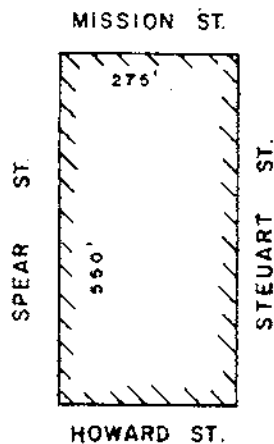
NOES: None

ABSENT: None

PASSED: September 20, 1979

Final Case Report
September 5, 1979

Rincon Annex Post
Office Spear and
Mission Streets



OWNER: The United States
Postal Service

LOCATION: Lot 1, Assessor's
Block 3716, bet-
ween Mission &
Howard, Steuart
& Spear

HISTORY:

The land on which Rincon Annex is located was previously owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad, and was a proposed site for the location of a train station. With the construction of the Bay Bridge, and the increased automobile and public transit commuting on the bridge, the need for a new depot was obviated. The Federal Government obtained the site for its new mail handling facility.

Ground-breaking for Rincon Annex began June 1, 1939. Construction was finished on October 15, 1940, and the facility officially opened on October 26, 1940. Rincon Annex was primarily built to handle mail and parcel post, but when the United States entered World War II, the Postal Department had to move its bulk mail facility to Oakland because of the abundance of military mail. Between 1959-60, the Postal Department expanded its facility at the rear portion of Rincon Annex, which primarily consists of loading areas and a conveyor belt system to handle incoming and outgoing mail. In 1966, automated letter sorting equipment was installed to speed up service, and during the period 1968-78, electronic equipment was installed.

Because of the inefficiency of multi-story vertical movement, new mail handling techniques and high land values, Rincon Annex in the near future will move its facility to a more efficient one story facility which is more centrally located for San Francisco and the Peninsula.

**STATEMENT OF
SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Rincon Annex to the United States Post Office was designed by Gilbert S. Underwood and built in 1939 by the George A. Fuller Construction Company. It is one of the finest examples of a large public building designed in the Streamline Moderne style of architecture in San Francisco. One of the similarly sponsored W.P.A. buildings built throughout the nation in the 1930's, Rincon Annex shares an approach to building design in which classically derived architectural principles

STATEMENT OF
SIGNIFICANCE:

- a large compact mass, regularly treated, symmetrical at least in the main facade, with expression of pilasters or piers, and an emphasis on mass rather than volume in the overall building envelope - are merged with the then-modernist design principles that required smooth, clean machine-like surfaces and detailing and the use of "modern" materials - aluminum, glass block, special concealed or reflective lighting. The building is a superb specimen of its type, a period piece in mint condition. The murals inside serve to complete the total package, and are inseparable from it. The closest representative public building in San Francisco of that style is the Maritime Museum, also built in 1939. These Streamline Modern buildings in the 1930's spirit are important to San Francisco today primarily because so few of them were built during those years, and few of them still stand.

ARCHITECTURE:

Rincon Annex is monumental in its scale and massing, as is appropriate to a public building, but it is accessible in its approaches. Rather than being raised on an imposing podium, it is only three shallow steps from street level to the entry. The building envelope is essentially flat. A base is suggested by painting a horizontal strip of dark grey at the ground level. Along the top of the building, the attic windows are untrimmed punched-out holes. The roof line is without cornice or string course to mark its termination. In the end bays, the recessed windows are fitted with a pierced Art Deco aluminum grille, almost flush with the surface of the building. One bay from each end, a projecting seven bay unit, defined by a darker grey-beige color and by the colossal piers which bracket and subdivide it, breaks out from this smooth recessed frame. The piers, which are abstracted pilasters, have no true capitals, but their vertical thrust is restrained by a simple shallow cornice just below the attic windows, which emphasizes the modernity of smooth flowing continuous horizontal lines.

The windows between the piers are recessed, and rise two stories in height to spandrels decorated with leaping dolphins. Nautical devices (portholes, railings, flagpoles) are frequent and decorative features of Streamline Moderne buildings, and this reference seems appropriate as well as delightful. The doors are framed in black marble, which bows forward in a shallow curve. They are of an unpretentious aluminum and glass design. The aluminum Art Deco grillework of the end windows is repeated in the door transoms. The piers on either side of the doors have niches lined with stars and stripes in which a stubbed-winged eagle sits.

Rincon Annex is constructed of reinforced concrete and trimmed with marble. The main building measures 310 feet by 269 feet, and has three floors with a half basement which contains heating and air circulation equipment. The first floor comprises

ARCHITECTURE:

mail sorting and customer service areas in the shape of an L. The main lobby is 208 feet long, with a ceiling height of 25 feet. The architecture of the interior includes tables, doors and transition hall spaces decorated with aluminum in modernistic panels; even clocks, signs and lettering are designed in typical Streamline Moderne fashion.

The third floor is mainly employee lounge areas, dressing rooms, maintenance departments and administrative office space situated in "U" shape. Rincon Annex was originally designed for future vertical expansion of the 4th and 5th floors, but that was never implemented.

DESCRIPTION OF
ART:

The murals covering the 400 foot wall space of the L-shaped lobby were painted over an eight year period between 1940-48 by Anton Refregier, a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and a member of the National Society of Mural Painters. They are painted in casein tempera on white gesso over plaster walls. The commission for the murals was awarded on the basis of a national competition, and was the largest single program awarded by the Section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department. The commission prize of twenty six thousand dollars was also the largest awarded by the government.

The murals are important in the history of American mural painting, not only for their size, but for the sweep of their narrative power and for the controversy caused by their treatment of the subject matter. Although they were not completed until 1948, they represent the finest of W.P.A. art, and are an integral part of the building and of their era.

Brain N. Wallis, in an essay for the catalog on Anton Refregier published by the University of Virginia Art Museum in 1977, says:

"Although the history of California was specified as the subject matter of the murals, Refregier created a series which encompasses not only California, but stands, in a larger sense, for the evolution of civilization. The founding of the United Nations, depicted in the final panel, becomes in this context not just an historical event, but the hope for a new level of civilization which might transcend the struggles illustrated in the previous panels. It is for this broader vision as well as the technical excellence of his murals that Refregier's Rincon Post Office murals deserve to be ranked among the handful of WPA mural commissions which qualify as major artistic achievements.... Refregier's murals embody implications beyond the level of California history and thus constitute a significant cultural and intellectual statement.

"In selecting his program for the twenty seven panels, Refregier had recourse to two interpretations of California history, these being the

DESCRIPTION OF
ART:
(cond't)

glorious, romantic vision of folk tales, or the realistic depiction of the hardships and struggles of the early settlers. Refregier selected the realistic representation as being more accurate, more interesting and more dramatic. This deviation from the accepted, or preferred, view of history was the source of much of the dispute over the murals, but one California historian noted that in addition to his adherence to documentary records, Refregier was remarkably sensitive to early American types. The series consists of the following twenty seven panels.

"1. A California Indian Creates. 2. Indians by the Golden Gate. 3. Sir Francis Drake. 4. Conquistadores Discover the Pacific. 5. Monks Building the Missions. 6. Preaching and Farming at Mission Dolores. 7. Fort Ross-Russian Trading Post. 8. Hardships of the Emigrant Trail. 9. An Early Newspaper Office. 10. Raising the Bear Flag. 11. Finding Gold at Sutter's Mill. 12. Miners Panning Gold. 13. Arrival by Ship. 14. Torchlight Parade. 15. Pioneers Receiving Mail. 16. Building the Railroad. 17. Vigilante Days. 18. Civil War Issues. 19. The Sand Lot Riots of 1870. 20. San Francisco as a Cultural Center. 21. Earthquake and Fire of 1906. 22. Reconstruction After the Fire. 23. The Mooney Case. 24. The Waterfront - 1934. 25. Building the Golden Gate Bridge. 26. Shipyards During the War. 27. War and Peace.

"Clearly the selection of scenes in this program can be interpreted on several levels. While ostensibly relating to the history of California, these paintings also reflect a microcosmic view of the history of California, and in the largest sense, the development of human civilization. Thematically, Refregier traces the progress of mankind from the natural paradise of the primitive Indian to the technological paradise of modern man. Civilization becomes in this content man's increasing ability to adapt to a hostile world and to create order and function from chaos and disaster. This, then, makes history a human, social drama in which progress is only achieved through social unity and individual perseverance.

"...But the greatest national recognition was afforded these murals after their completion, when the threat of destruction aroused the interest and the defense of the art world."

By 1943, the section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department, which had lent its support to the project, had been phased out, and the Public Buildings Administration became responsible for overseeing the job. Refregier was inundated with inspections and requests for changes designed to satisfy the government and local interests groups (mostly politically conservative). Ninety one such revisions were necessary, some small and scarcely affecting the overall meaning; others, such as the removal of a monumental head of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the last panel subtly altering the tone of the program.

DESCRIPTION OF
ART:
(cond't)

Mural painting in America has tended to reflect the specific social mood of its time. It is also a very public kind of art, and gives the artist and patron an opportunity to convey their own attitudes on a monumental scale. When the social mood changes, or the artist's view does not conform to a preconcieved style or ideals, pressure of various kinds is brought to bear.

The idealism of the New Deal which the artist had conveyed in the series, and which had been acceptable to the public at the time these murals were first planned, was now suspect, and the national mood of suspicion of things "Communist" focused on the political significance of the murals. In 1948, a coalition of warehousemen and artists successfully organized to prevent the removal of a panel depicting the waterfront strike of 1934. However, as the Cold War heated up, protests about the general tone of the murals by newspapers and citizens gathered momentum. In 1953, at the height of "McCarthyism", a conservative California congressman named Hubert B. Scudder made the removal of the murals his crusade. He introduced House Bill 211 into Congress on March 5, 1953, claiming that the murals were "artistically and historically inaccurate" and that they illustrated "cadaverous, soulless pioneers" and involved "sadistic scenes of riots, earthquakes and strikes." In addition, he charged, inaccurately, that Refregier was not a citizen of the U.S.A., and that he was affiliated with "Red" organizations.

In defense of the murals, artists, the labor movement, museum directors and collectors from all over the country rallied. Support came from as far away as the London Times. At a hearing on May 1, 1953, to determine the historic and artistic validity of the murals, a fellow Republican California congressman, William S. Mailliard likened the proposed destruction of the murals to the Communist suppression of all art which was not politically conforming. He recognized that Congress, in responding to the pressures of special interest groups, was not qualified to judge the artistic merits of such works. Congressman Scudder's resolution was shelved. Although the murals were saved for the time being, the experience reminds one of the precarious position of public art in America.

SURROUNDING LAND
USE AND
ZONING:

The property is zoned C-3G-P (Downtown General Commercial-Public Use) and is in a 240-G height bulk district. The area to the northwest of Rincon Annex, Mission Street, is zoned C3-0, which is mainly comprised of high rise, downtown offices; to the southeast and along the Embarcadero lies light and heavy industry and downtown support areas zoned M1, M2 and C3-S respectively.

RECOGNITION IN
OTHER SURVEYS:

A building profile kept by the San Francisco Department of City Planning done in July of 1976 gives the Rincon Annex an average to above average rating on such architectural features as facade proportions, detailing and decoration, rare or unusual style and overall architectural quality. The study emphasizes that the building is notable for its interior; in addition, the Planning Department categorizes this building as a "classical (WPA) Streamline Moderne monument adorned with sculpture and murals."

The State Historic Preservation Officer has recommended that Rincon Annex be placed in the National Register of Historic Places at the National Level of significance. The matter is pending in Washington, D.C. (9/12/79).

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This report was prepared by Mrs. Marjorie Gordon from material prepared for and submitted by Emmie Lou Packard.