

NOTICE OF FINAL PASSAGE
FILE NO. 90-70-13 ORD. NO. 160-70
DESIGNATING THE ORIGINAL UNITED STATES MINT AND SUBTREASURY ON COMMERCIAL STREET AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.
I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was read for the second time and finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco at its meeting of MAY 11, 1970.
ROBERT J. DOLAN, Clerk
Approved: MAJ 24, 1970.
JOSEPH L. ALIOTO, Mayor
MAY 21, 1970—1t

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DESIGNATING THE ORIGINAL UNITED STATES MINT AND SUBTREASURY ON COMMERCIAL STREET AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.

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

Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Original United States Mint and Subtreasury at 608 Commercial Street has a special character and special historical interest and value; and that its designation as a Landmark will be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and the standards set forth therein.

(a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the Original United States Mint and Subtreasury on Commercial Street is hereby designated as a Landmark, this designation having been duly approved by resolution of the City Planning Commission.

(b) Location and Boundaries. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, a landmark site is hereby designated for the said Landmark, located and bounded as follows: Beginning on the north line of Commercial Street at a point distant thereon 57 feet 6 inches westerly from the westerly line of Montgomery Street; running thence northerly 59 feet 9 inches; thence at a right angle westerly 60 feet; thence at a right angle southerly 59 feet 9 inches to the said line of Commercial Street; thence at a right angle easterly along the said line of Commercial Street 50 feet to the point of beginning; being Lot 29 in Assessor's Block 227.

(c) Justification. The special character and special historical interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are as follows: Site of the first United States Branch Mint in California, opened in 1854; the original storage vaults of this early building remain to the present day. Among those involved in the early operations of the Mint were Agoston Haraszthy, later to be known as "the father of the modern California wine industry," Bret Harte, and J. Ross Browne, author and confidential agent. The building served in a dual capacity, as mint and subtreasury, until 1874. It also served as an unofficial reserve bank, most notably in 1868 when a secret transfer of gold was made to stem a "run" on Ralston's Bank of California. After removal of the Mint to a new site at Fifth and Mission Streets in 1874, the present building was erected in 1875 on the basement and storage vaults of the old, and housed the United States Subtreasury until 1915. The building and its storage vaults were the place of deposit for millions in coined and bar gold and silver, and the site of Federal financial authority in the west, for over half a century.

(d) Features. The said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior 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 in Docket No. 1470.1; the summary description being as follows: Having one story and basement, with brick exterior walls, the building contains interior iron columns and has a unique construction involving the use of corrugated metal structural vaults; it also contains the original storage vaults. The asymmetrical facade is chiefly composed of six large rectangular openings, all windows but one, with separation by wide square brick columns at the extreme right and left of the two wings; central part of facade and center of each wing has cast-iron columns. Decorative bands of foliate moulding are continuous across facade and columns. A wide projecting sill is also continuous across facade and all columns. A continuous architrave across entire facade is surmounted by a double classical cornice. Main entrance at center is reached by a small flight of stairs; main floor, raised above street level, leaves a high basement with windows at sidewalk and wide beam at floor level.

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was passed for second reading by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco at its meeting of May 4, 1970.
ROBERT J. DOLAN, Clerk
May 9, 1970—1t

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CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 3515

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Original United States Mint and Subtreasury on Commercial Street as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on February 18, 1970, and said Advisory Board, after due consideration, has recommended approval of this proposal;

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a public hearing on April 9, 1970, to consider the proposed designation and the report of said Advisory Board; and

WHEREAS, The Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has a special character and special historical 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;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, That the proposal to designate the Original United States Mint and Subtreasury on Commercial Street as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the location and boundaries of the landmark site being as follows:

Beginning on the north line of Commercial Street at a point distant thereon 57 feet 6 inches westerly from the westerly line of Montgomery Street; running thence northerly 59 feet 9 inches; thence at a right angle westerly 60 feet; thence at a right angle southerly 59 feet 9 inches to the said line of Commercial Street; thence at a right angle easterly along the said line of Commercial Street 60 feet to the point of beginning; being Lot 29 in Assessor's Block 227.

Second, That the special character and special historical interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are as follows:

Site of the first United States Branch Mint in California, opened in 1854; the original storage vaults of this early building remain to the present day. Among those involved in the early operations of the Mint were Agoston Haraszthy, later to be known as "the father of the modern California wine industry", Bret Harte, and J. Ross Browne, author and confidential agent. The building served in a dual capacity, as mint and subtreasury, until 1874. It also served as an unofficial reserve bank, most notably in 1868 when a secret transfer of gold was made to stem a "run" on Ralston's Bank of California.

After removal of the Mint to a new site at Fifth and Mission Streets in 1874, the present building was erected in 1875 on the basement and storage vaults of the old, and housed the United States Subtreasury until 1915. The building and its storage vaults were the place of deposit for millions in coined and bar gold and silver, and the site of Federal financial authority in the west, for over half a century.

Third, That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior 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 in Docket No. LM70.1; the summary description being as follows:

Having one story and basement, with brick exterior walls, the building contains interior iron columns and has a unique construction involving the use of corrugated metal structural vaults; it also contains the original storage vaults. The asymmetrical facade is chiefly composed of six large rectangular openings, all windows but one, with separation by wide square brick columns at the extreme right and left of the two wings; central part of facade and center of each wing has cast-iron columns. Decorative bands of foliate moulding are continued across facade and columns. A wide projecting sill is also continued across facade and all columns. A continuous architrave across entire facade is surmounted by a double classical cornice. Main entrance at center is reached by a small flight of stairs; main floor, raised above street level, leaves a high basement with windows at sidewalk and wide beam at floor level.

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 April 9, 1970.

Lynn E. Pio
Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Fleishhacker, Kearney, Miller, Ritchie
NOES: None
ABSENT: Commissioners Carr, Newman, Porter
PASSED: April 9, 1970

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LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
Final Case Report for January 7, 1970

ORIGINAL UNITED STATES
MINT AND SUBTREASURY
608 COMMERCIAL STREET

OWNER: Determined Productions, Inc.

LOCATION: 608 Commercial Street, near Montgomery Street, Lot is 60 feet wide, 59 feet 9 inches deep, being Lot 29 in Assessor's Block 227.

HISTORY: In 1852, this lot was purchased by the United States Government from private assayers Curtis, Ferry, and Ward, who operated the U.S. Assay Office which, while not a government operation, had assayed, melted and minted gold from the mines and thus became an unofficial mint. Due to the gold-mining activity in California, the Government finally determined to open a Branch Mint in San Francisco; for convenience, they chose the operating private mint. However, although it was purchased in 1852 and altered in 1853, the new Branch Mint did not open for business until April 3, 1854.

President Pierce appointed John C. Hewston, Melter and Refiner at the Philadelphia Mint, to establish San Francisco's new Mint. When the Mint opened, Lewis A. Birdsall, M.D. was its first Superintendent. They were assisted by Colonel Agoston Haraszthy who served as Assayer. In 1850, Haraszthy had been elected Sheriff of San Diego County and then City Marshal of San Diego, holding both positions until late 1851 when he was elected State Assemblyman. In the same year, Haraszthy introduced commercial European wine grapes to California, and for this reason, he later became known as "the father of the modern California wine industry". In March 1852, while serving in the Legislature, Haraszthy purchased 210 acres near Mission Dolores; he completed his term and then remained in San Francisco. Here, he planted grapes and became a private assayer and refiner in 1854 as well as being assayer of the new United States Mint.

In 1854, well-known author J. Ross Browne was appointed confidential agent by the Secretary of the Treasury and was dispatched to investigate various irregularities in Federal agencies on the Pacific Coast.

Browne, on arrival in San Francisco, found complaints of inefficiency concerning the Mint. On investigation it developed that the staff was working in cramped quarters and that there was a shortage of materials needed for the minting. This resulted in the Mint not meeting the coinage demand of the City. More serious was the revelation that there was a lack of security and a conflict of interest of the officers. This resulted in the resignation of Hewston in 1855 and Birdsall in 1856. Haraszthy replaced Hewston, but in 1857, he in turn resigned due to criticism and returned to his private melting and refining business. In 1860 and 1861, however, Haraszthy was acquitted of any fraud in both Civil and Criminal suits.

Another famous person connected with the Mint was Bret Harte who served as clerk and later secretary to the Superintendent of the Mint from 1863-1869.

In the early days, the Mint served two purposes: the first was to coin or mint money; the second was to store coined gold and silver as a subtreasury of the United States while unofficially serving as an early kind of reserve bank. As a subtreasury, the building contained money used by government paymasters and disbursing officers to pay all bills incurred by the government. An example of the Mint's function as an unofficial reserve bank was the 1868 transfer of gold to stem a "run" or panic on Ralston's Bank of California. As related in Asbury Harpending's "Great Diamond Hoax", he, together with bank officials, "borrowed" coined gold from the mint at midnight and placed it in the teller's cages to allay depositors' fears concerning the soundness of the bank. Having served its purpose, the gold was returned to the subtreasury the next night.

By the later 1860's, it was clear that the building could not house both functions, and the inadequacy of the quarters was commented on in the press. In 1867, provisions for a new site at Fifth and Mission were made and after the Mint was moved to the new location in 1874, this building housed the subtreasury and other government offices.

In 1875, the Commercial Street building was demolished and a new one erected on the basement and the old vaults. The replacement building was again occupied by the same government offices. In the late 1870's, however, as the resumption of specie payment, authorized by Congress to take place in 1870, approached, the subtreasury required more space for increased staff and other departments moved out. The treasury then continued at this location until 1915, when it moved to a new building at Sansome and Pine Streets, now the Pacific Coast (San Francisco) Stock Exchange.

The Old Mint and Subtreasury was subsequently (1922) sold to private interests. In 1928, the McCoy Label and Printing Company moved in and remained until 1965. The building has most recently been used by Determined Productions Inc. as a manufacturer's warehouse, although it is now vacant.

ARCHITECTURE: Originally four stories and a basement, the building was reduced after 1906 to the present one story and basement building with brick exterior walls, and interior iron columns. The basement interior is formed by brick foundation walls. The basement ceiling is composed of corrugated metal vaults. Above this, the main floor, of wood rests upon iron beams. The construction is unique, in that the vaults are short sections of corrugated metal, stretching between the beams above which the interstices are filled with rubble and then surmounted with a slab floor.

The facade gives the appearance of an irregular classical colonnade with all six high wide rectangular openings being closed in the glass panes; one of these contains the entrance.

The central portion of the facade is slightly recessed from the street line, with somewhat projecting wings on either side. The wing on the westerly side is one bay; that on the east is composed of two bays. This irregularity is accounted for by the statement that after the Earthquake and Fire of 1906, a previous cartway on the side of the building was closed, and the building was extended ten feet to cover the entire width of the lot, thus destroying the previous regularity of the facade.

The wings or side portions of the facade are composed of wide square brick columns, rising from the main floor (above street level), and supporting a heavy architrave, which is continued on the central portion of the facade. Sections of a classical foliate moulding simulating capitals surmount the columns. The bays, closed with multipaned windows, contain wide, sloping and projecting sills, which are continued on all columns as well; window sills are formed of the upper parts of the cast iron lower walls beneath the windows while those of the columns are of stone, inserted in the brick columns.

The central portion of the facade is divided into three bays by two narrow cast iron columns, and the easterly wing is likewise divided in two bays by a similar column. The motifs of the facade, foliate moulding and projecting sills, are continued on these cast iron columns as they are on the brick ones.

The architrave is surmounted by a double cornice, in turn surmounted by a brick parapet wall at one time covered with cement or mastic which is now peeling off. Wide horizontal openings in the parapet wall are closed with short round vertical iron bars.

The main floor is raised above sidewalk and grade level, and is reached by a short flight of steps to a doorway in the middle bay of the central facade.

Under the thick main floor, the basement foundation walls are visible from the street; embedded in the main floor are a row of iron spikes along the street front, facing the sidewalk.

ZONING: C-3-0, the downtown central business office district. Nearby land uses include the Bank of Canton to the east, shops and small manufacturing to south and west, and offices to the south and east across Montgomery Street.

RECOGNITION: A plaque, affixed in 1949 by the California Centennial Commission in cooperation with the Society of California Pioneers, proclaims this State Registered Historical Landmark Number 87 and recognizes the site as that of the First United States Branch Mint.