

FILE NO. 90-75-5

ORDINANCE NO. 425-75

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DESIGNATING the California Historical Society (Whittier Mansion) 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 California  
Historical Society (Whittier Mansion) located at 2090 Jackson Street, being Lot 7  
in Assessor's Block 591, has a special character and special historical, archi-  
tectural and aesthetic 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 California Historical  
Society (Whittier Mansion) is hereby designated as a Landmark, this designation  
having been duly approved by Resolution No. 7343 of the City Planning Commission,  
which Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File  
No. 90-75-5.

(b) Required Data. The descriptions of the location and boundaries of the  
landmark site; of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designa-  
tion; and of the particular features that should be preserved; as included in the  
said Resolution, are hereby incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though  
fully set forth.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
THOMAS M. O'CONNOR  
CITY ATTORNEY

RECOMMENDED:  
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

By Thomas M. O'Connor  
Deputy City Attorney

By Dean L. Macris  
Dean L. Macris  
Director of Planning

LM # 75

Passed for Second Reading  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco  
SEP 20 1975

Ayes: Supervisors Barbagelata, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, Kopp, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors ~~DEWEILSON~~

*[Signature]* Clerk

90-75-5  
File No.

1312 OCT -1 11 01 AM '75  
OCT -9 1975  
Approved

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

OCT -6 1975

Ayes: Supervisors Barbagelata, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, Kopp, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors BARBAGELATA PELOSI

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

*Joseph L. Alioto*  
Mayor

*File Copy*

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 7343

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the California Historical Society (Whittier Mansion) at 2090 Jackson 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 May 7, 1975, 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 June 26, 1975, 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, 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;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, that the proposal to designate the California Historical Society (Whittier Mansion) at 2090 Jackson 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 at a point at the intersection of the northerly line of Jackson Street and the easterly line of Laguna Street; thence along the easterly line of Laguna Street for a distance of 140 feet 4.5 inches; thence at a right angle easterly for a distance of 87.5 feet; thence at a right angle southerly for a distance of 12 feet 3.25 inches; thence at a right angle westerly for a distance of 7.5 feet; thence at a right angle southerly for a distance of 127 feet 3.25 inches; thence at a right angle westerly, along the northerly line of Jackson Street for a distance of 80 feet to the point of beginning; Being Lot 7 in Assessor's Block 591.

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. 125 as adopted on May 7, 1975, which resolution is incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though fully set forth;

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 Docket LM75.5;

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.

Lynn E. Pio  
Secretary

Ayes: Commissioners Finn, Fleishhacker, Mellon, Newman, Porter, Ritchie, Rueda

Noes: None

Absent: None

Passed: June 26, 1975

*File Copy*

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD  
Final Case Report -- Approved May 7, 1975

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BUILDING (Whittier Mansion)  
2090 Jackson Street

OWNERS: California Historical Society

LOCATION: 2090 Jackson Street, northeast corner of Jackson and Laguna Streets. The lot has a frontage of 80 feet on Jackson Street and a depth of 140.375 feet on Laguna Street; being Lot 7 in Assessor's Block 591.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION: Virtually all of the material contained in this report first appeared in an article titled "The Mansion of the California Historical Society, 2090 Jackson Street, San Francisco", by Joseph Armstrong Baird, Jr., which was published in the California Historical Society Quarterly, December, 1969. The Article appears almost in its entirety and as written by Dr. Baird except for necessary editing resulting from condensation and minor reorganization to serve the purposes of this case report.

HISTORY: The mansion, headquarters of the California Historical Society, was originally designed in 1894 by Edward R. Swain as a private residence for widower William Franklin (W. Frank) Whittier and his children. Frank Whittier was born on January 17, 1832, in Vienna, Maine. He came over the Isthmus of Panama to California in 1854; his first major employment was with Sawyer, Johnson and Company, a paint, oil and glass firm in San Francisco: three years later he purchased, with Caleb Cameron, the proprietor's interest in the firm. The name was changed to Cameron, Whittier and Company; Cameron accidentally drowned at Benicia in 1862, but the firm continued under the joint name until its dissolution in 1867.

In the meantime, Whittier's partner-to-be, William Parmer Fuller, was organizing a successful firm in Sacramento. When he bought out his early associate, Seton Heather, the time was ripe for a merger of Whittier and Fuller -- both in the paint business. A partnership was formed in 1867 and continued until Fuller's death in 1890. Weathering panics, business competition, and legal problems, the firm emerged as the major West Coast paint and white lead manufacturer, with extremely profitable sidelines in imported glass, mirrors, oils, etc. The partners also operated a fleet of sailing vessels and railway tank-cars. After Fuller's death in 1890, the Fuller family bought out Whittier with a promissory note for \$400,000 to be paid in thirty-two monthly installments and full control of the firm passed to what became known as W. P. Fuller and Company.

Prior to this time, the Whittiers lived in a handsome two-story wood-frame house of Italianate design at 2400 Howard Street (southwest corner of Twentieth). In 1891, the house was sold and the family moved to the corner of Van Ness Avenue and Jackson Street.

Choosing an entirely new site, Frank Whittier decided to build a superb new residence. A large lot at the northeast corner of Jackson and Laguna Streets was purchased in 1894. In 1894 and in 1901 two additional lots of property were acquired downhill, to the north, on the south side of Pacific Avenue. (When Whittier sold them to J. D. Spreckels, Sr., in the early Twentieth Century, he placed height restrictions on buildings there.)

HISTORY:  
(continued)

Plans for 2090 Jackson Street were drawn by Edward Swain. Swain was born in 1852 and died on April 10, 1902. He was trained in David Farquharson's office in San Francisco, and began practice for himself in 1877. During the 1890's he assisted A. Page Brown on the "new" Ferry Building. (On the building's cornerstone he is called "Supervising Architect.") He was connected with various buildings for the Midwinter Fair of 1894 and was on its organizing committee. Aside from the Whittier Mansion he did a residence and office for Dr. Dudley Tait and the handsome McLaren Lodge in Golden Gate Park, during 1896. He moved to Hawaii in his later years and continued practicing in Honolulu.

Excavations for the mansion began in September of 1894 and contracts were signed through the remainder of that year for various materials and construction work: Stone work - \$8,670; Spanish tiles - \$4,200; Plumbing - \$2,750; Hydraulic Otis elevator (one of the earliest residential elevators in the City) - \$1,225; Heating and ventilating - \$2,665; etc.

The tile work for five bathrooms was done by Montagne and Company at a cost of \$1,013. This last entry in the informative California Architect and Building News for November 1895, signalled the effective completion of the house, although it was not occupied until August of 1896 after interior finishing was accomplished.

Whittier undoubtedly arranged for the purchase of many of the rare marbles and imported woods through some of his earlier business contacts in distant parts of the world. Belgian glass had been a staple in Whittier, Fuller and Company's merchandise. Native woods were used wherever feasible; it has been said that the granite front steps were imported from Whittier's native Maine, although Folsom or Raymond granite would have seemed more logical in California. The final cost of the house with its various interior fittings was estimated from \$90,000 to about \$152,000; the latter figure is closer to the true overall costs.

Mrs. Whittier died before the house was started. She had been killed in a runaway horse and carriage accident in 1885. Frank Whittier eventually left San Francisco for Hemet, in Riverside County -- a town he founded and developed. For a time the house was occupied by his younger daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. William Boyd Weir. (Their own home was in Menlo Park.)

William Franklin Whittier died on January 20, 1917; his estate was distributed on September 13, 1918. Mrs. Weir inherited the 2090 Jackson Street property. During the 1920's and 1930's the house was, according to one later source, rented to various occupants. From its earliest history in the family, 2090 Jackson Street seems to have been considered a town house, especially used during the fall and winter "season" in San Francisco. W. F. Whittier had residences in other parts of California; and Mrs. Weir used 2090 as her city residence.

On April 12, 1941, Mrs. Weir conveyed the property to a title insurance company, from whom it was conveyed to Harman Loeper on April 28, 1941. On the following day it was conveyed again -- this time to Das Deutsches Reich who purchased it for use as a consulate for the then-governing Nazi regime. After occupying it on April 30, 1941, Fritz Wiedemann, Consul, entertained

**HISTORY:**  
(Continued)

elegantly and conducted his government's business in the mansion. Nevertheless, the Nazi stay at 2090 Jackson was very brief for in June of 1941 the Federal Government ordered the closure of all German and Italian consulates in the United States and all propaganda agents out of the country by July 10, 1941. Thus, on June 30, 1941, after only two months of occupancy, the Nazi consulate closed its door at 2090 Jackson for good. Subsequently, the property was held in trust by the Alien Property Custodian. It was later turned over to the United States Attorney General's office and on March 10, 1950, was auctioned, along with most of its contents, to Mrs. F. G. Leonettie. (In order to purchase the Jackson Street property, she sold the former Marin Golf and Country to Waddell F. Smith, who converted it to a residence and center of Pony Express history.)

Mrs. Leonetti remarried and it was as Mrs. Hill that she sold 2090 Jackson Street to George F. and Mary Barton on June 8, 1951. Title to the property passed from the Bartons to Robert T. Wilhelm, resident in Southern California, and to Paul and Isabelle Dessez -- one half interests held each by Wilhelm and the Dessezes -- on August 26, 1955. On March 29, 1956, the California Historical Society obtained a thirty day option, at a purchase of \$75,000. A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Society was called by President Joseph R. Knowland for April 2 and purchase of the property was authorized.

It was during the Bartons' period of ownership that Mortimer Adler's Institute of Philosophical Research occupied the first two floors. The lease to Adler was dated July 11, 1952, and extended to September 10, 1956. This lease was assigned to the California Historical Society and Adler continued occupancy for the balance of the lease period. Dessezes occupied the top floor as an apartment during this time.

Since purchasing 2090 Jackson Street in 1956, the California Historical Society has added the properties to the north which Whittier sold to J. D. Spreckels, Sr. On these sites, Spreckels, Sr., had the two dwellings which still stand at 2099 Pacific and 2083 Pacific erected for his son and daughter. The house and property at 2099 Pacific Avenue was acquired in 1962; this building now serves as the Society's Library, named "Schubert Hall" in honor of Miss Ottilie Schubert, from whose estate her brother Walter provided a substantial part of the money required for its acquisition. The house and property at 2083 Pacific was acquired in 1963. Both purchases were additionally financed by a request from the late Edith Allyne's estate.

**ARCHITECTURE:** (The following architectural description of the former Whittier house is the "preview account" in the San Francisco Chronicle for December 24, 1894. The parenthetical remarks indicate later changes, or revisions as the house was built.)

Edward R. Swain, the architect, has just completed the drawings and plans for the residence of W. F. Whittier, which is to be erected at the northeast corner of Jackson and Laguna Streets on a site commanding a magnificent view of the bay and the Golden Gate. The house, which will be completed at a cost of about \$90,000, will be ready for occupancy in November, 1895. It will be the first residence in town built entirely of stone. (Apparently this refers only to the exterior shell for steel beams were used on the interior. Furthermore, the Flood brownstone mansion at 1000 California Street was built in 1884 to 1886.)

ARCHITECTURE: The lot is 80 x 127:8½ feet, fronting on Jackson Street. The main portion of the house will be 55 x 75 feet, with a wing on the east side, the full width of the lot. The first story up to the water table will be of Sespe stone, and all above that line, including the chimney and pediment will be in red Arizona stone. The roof will be covered with red Spanish tiles.

(Continued)

The architecture of the house, which will be a two-story structure with basement and attic (actually three stories with attic), is Renaissance in feeling. A handsome portico, seventeen feet wide, projects nine feet from the face of the building. It will be very handsomely carved and highly ornamented. The base stone on which the porch rests, including the steps and platforms leading to it, are of red beach granite. The treads of the steps will be of the same stone, polished. The vestibule, finished in handsome foreign marbles, will be ten feet wide and six feet deep. The floor will be in mosaic.

Passing the doors, one will step into an entrance hall twelve feet square, which leads through an arch into the main hall, 22 x 30. The main staircase will be on the right of the main hall. Both halls will be finished in natural-colored Eastern oak, with beamed ceiling. The design, which will be in keeping with the general design of the building, will consist of a pilaster and arch finish. From the main hall access will be had to the dining room by means of a lobby 8 x 12 feet. The dining room door is opposite the front door. On the right of the entrance hall is the reception-room, entered through doorways, which will be handsomely draped with portieres. Arches for statuary are on either side of the entrances. (Only one door, and no arches, was constructed.) The room is octagonal in form and sixteen feet in diameter. The round corner window will project somewhat beyond the octagon, and the space between will be upholstered for seats. The reception-room will be finished in 'vernis martin', a light wood veneered and spangled with gold.

The living-room, 20 x 48, will be on the left of the entrance hall. At a distance of fifteen feet from the front it will be divided by an arch, the side openings of which will be hung with portieres. The room will be finished in east coast Mexican mahogany. The handsome mantel will be eight feet wide. There will be a large open fireplace with facings in 'jaune antique claire' Numidian marble. (A reddish striated marble was used.) The hearth will be in Florentine mosaic. This room will also have a beamed ceiling.

To the rear of the living-room in the northwest corner of the house, the visitor will be ushered into the smoking or lounging room, a circular apartment commanding a magnificent view of the bay and the surrounding landscape. The lounging room will be finished in oriental style in vermillion wood. Through this room access may be had to the dining room. This will be a very handsome apartment, 18 x 25, exclusive of a bay window thirteen feet long and four feet deep. It will be finished in natural white oak. (Oak was not used; the wood is thought to be Philippine tamaro or Guatemala prima vera.) There will be a wainscoting nine feet high, finished with buffets and backed with plate-glass mirrors. The mantel will be finished with oak and faced with "Rose Carnagione" Numidian marble. The ceiling will be domed and paneled in plaster. Just above the wainscoting a

ARCHITECTURE: frieze, in oils, will add greatly to the appearance of the dining-hall. Adjoining the dining-room will be the butler's pantry, 13 x 16, in ash, with china cases, silver safe, filters and other paraphernalia. The kitchen, 16 x 24, will be in the northeast corner of the building. It will be finished in oak, and instead of the usual pantries, the necessary shelves and bins will extend along the side of the room to a depth of six feet. (The oak finish has been painted over.)

(Continued)

Next to the kitchen, on the Jackson Street side, is a servants' dining-room, 12 x 14, which will be entered from a passage off the rear hall. The side entrance to the house also communicates with this passage.

Just off the main hall is the rear hall with the rear stairs. Near these stairs is a passenger elevator, five feet square, which will run from the basement to the attic. In the front part of the basement will be rooms for coal, furniture and general storage. In the central portion of the basement, under the main hall and part of the living-room will be an apartment in oak (prima vera was used), 30 x 50, which may be used for suppers and dances. It may be reached from the main stairs. The rear of the basement will be taken up with the servants' rooms, cold storage, laundry, servants' bathroom and other departments of the household.

On the second floor will be six handsome bedrooms (or sitting rooms), to three (two in actuality) of which private bathrooms will be attached. The recesses for the fixtures in the bathrooms will be lined with various fancy marbles, and the floors will be of hard wood. The various chambers will be finished in primavera, birch, cherry and bird's-eye maple. (This wood trim has been painted over.) W. F. Whittier's suite will be in the northwest corner of the second story. It will consist of a large bedroom, a sitting room, dressing room and bathroom. W. R. will revel in luxury in the third or attic story. The whole width of the building on that floor will be taken up by his apartments, including a chamber, bathroom, dressing room and sitting room, 18 x 40, in waxed redwood of natural colors (actually mahogany). There will be a large open fireplace and a (partially) hardwood floor. On this floor, also, are a guest chamber, a truck room, servant's room, servant's bathroom, a big linen closet and the "sporting-room." The latter is 8 x 13, and in it will be stored the guns, rods and other implements of the chase which the Messrs. Whittier may require in their sport. (A "billiard room" not mentioned in the "preview", was ultimately placed in a large space, with a superb view to the north, on this floor.)

A handsome stable will adjoin the residence in the rear. (It is believed that a stable was never erected.)

Returning to Baird's commentary:

This account, with its editorial comments and notes, stands as a substantial indication of the character of the house during the period from 1896 to 1941. The Nazi Consulate was generally content to leave the building as they found it. Interior changes which occurred at this time, or latter, replaced the shell-headed niches and buffets in the dining room's south walls with glass exhibition cases, and added new lighting fixtures in the main living room and in the dining room or removed altogether certain

of the original fixtures on this floor. The ceiling of the smoking room was lowered. In the living room, awkwardly placed bookcases on either side of the principal fireplace were carefully removed. The door between the dining room and pantry has been closed since 1956.

On the second floor, original woodwork was painted white, and the walls have been repainted several times and similar work has occurred in rooms on other floors.

Stylistically, the Whittier house was built at a time when the fashions of the later Nineteenth Century were beginning to give way to a resurgence of more correct Period styling. Thus, the general massing of the structure with its strongly emphasized circular corner towers is Richardsonian and Queen Anne. The color of the stone (red Arizona sandstone) is also suggestive of the mid-western and western derivations from Richardson's richly textured and colored stone effects. However, the rigid symmetry of the facade suggests a new interest in formality alien to the late Nineteenth Century's fascination with asymmetry and "picturesque" effects. A Classical portico, using the Ionic order, is part of a return to Period sources in antiquity and the classicizing Baroque, which swept the United States by 1895-1900.

There are hints here, too, of the pedantry of architecture at the turn of the century. The curious temple-front enrichment of the facade's second story center, as if an Ionic temple front had been squashed against the massive stone facade, immediately brings to mind certain late Roman, near-Eastern buildings -- notably Petra, as does the color of the stone. This is obviously not so forcefully Baroque as Petra's buildings, but it has the same rock-cut effect, sculptural rather than tectonic. The exterior reveals consistently the influence of carefully studied details from books of photographs and engravings after older European buildings. Edward Swain went to the same lavishly bound folios which inspired so many architects of his time, and which now languish in libraries of the history of architecture rather than on the shelves of practicing architects. Some of the details are ancient Roman, some are Renaissance, some Mannerist, and some Baroque. All are executed with finesse and thoughtful attention to their place in the ensemble.

The final exterior effect of the building, which has begun to suffer the usual fate of sandstone in dissolution of sharp corners and crisp details, is unfortunately not entirely felicitous. Arresting of physical dissolution has been attempted with surface coatings of preservatives which have slightly changed the color values of the facade, where they have been used. The building looked aggressively massive in early photographs, when the softening effects of ground foliage were absent. It has never been surrounded by trees, although there were at one time two large palms in front. Even now it presents a rather formidably "architectural" appearance. There is perhaps, a too studied arrangement in certain parts; and the proportions of the windows in the top central pediment of the facade are dispiritedly squat.

The building has suffered few radical renovations in its checkered history of ownership. It represents a remarkable continuation into our era of the architectural grandeur of the very late Nineteenth Century. Its excellent materials, in many in-

stances verging on the magnificent, provide a notable indication of craftsmanship at the time. The bizarre mixture of interior furnishings which characterized these houses has almost entirely disappeared. The present combinations of mid-Nineteenth Century and even earlier furniture with later pieces seems more agreeable today than the equally eclectic but somewhat less felicitous combinations assembled when the house was built.

Not mentioned in the Chronicle "preview" is the charming house of stone, just north of the basement. Its south facade has Ionic columns, giving it an agreeable Classical pavilion quality. The house consists of a large room, with closet and small kitchen and bath; it is presently occupied by the caretaker of the premises.

ZONING AND  
SURROUNDING  
LAND USE:

The property is zoned R-2 (Two-family Residential District) and has a 40-foot height limit. Adjacent and nearby zoning districts range from R-1 to R-4 and the land use reflects these districts.