

BUILDING NAME: Phelan Building OWNER: Equitable Life Assurance
BUILDING ADDRESS: 760-784 Market Street BLOCK & LOT: 328/1 ZONING: C-3-0
ORIGINAL USE: Office building with retail NO. OF STORIES: 10 LPAB VOTE: 7-0
CURRENT USE: Office building with retail EXTERIOR MATERIALS: Cream terra cotta

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

(Describe special CHARACTER, or special HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL or AESTHETIC interest or value:)

The second of two Phelan Buildings on the same site, the current building bears the name of one of San Francisco's most prominent early families. The first Phelan building was a 6-story, bay-windowed, mansard-roofed flatiron constructed by the elder James Phelan. Destroyed in the fire of 1906, it was quickly replaced by the present flatiron which, in size alone, justified the 1907 Call headline "Huge Phelan Building Already A Landmark." It was instantly one of the most prominent and preeminent office structures in San Francisco and, in keeping with Phelan's strident advocacy of the City Beautiful Movement and the Burnham Plan, it greatly dignified both Market Street and the retail district with its two monumental facades. Its prominence was further heightened by the choice of glazed cream terra cotta; it is probably the largest structure in the city clad with this favorite reconstruction material and an outstanding example of the desire to make

(may be continued on back)^(over)

EVALUATION CRITERIA**A. ARCHITECTURE**

1. **Style:** Commercial building with Renaissance/Baroque ornament
2. **Construction Type:** Steel frame with reinforced concrete
3. **Construction Date:** 1908
4. **Design Quality:** (LPAB ONLY)
5. **Architect:** William Curlett (see reverse)
6. **Interior Quality:** (LPAB ONLY)

B. HISTORY

(as building is significantly associated with specific)

7. **Persons:** James Duval Phelan (see reverse)

8. **Events:**

9. **Patterns of History:**

(cultural, social, political, military, economic or industrial)

An outstanding example of commercial Renaissance architecture commissioned by one of the leading City Beautiful proponents and one of S.F.'s greatest mayors and civic leaders.

C. ENVIRONMENT

(relation to surroundings, specifically in terms of:)

10. **Continuity:** One of an outstanding group of post-fire monumental buildings. Creates impressive walls on Market and O'Farrell Streets.
11. **Setting:** With an adjacent pair of granite bank temples, it forms a splendid gateway to Grant Avenue. Will be a chief feature in the gateway to Y.B.C. south of Market.
12. **Importance as a Visual Landmark:** Extremely important to Market Street, to the ends of O'Farrell, and as the future entrance to Yerba Buena Center.

D. INTEGRITY

(cite alterations and physical condition)

Ground floor has been remodeled. Terra cotta veneer remains in fine condition.

RATINGS

DCP: 4-5
HERE TODAY: mentioned on p. 280
SPLENDID SURV.: "A"
NAT'L REGISTER: No
NAT'L LANDMARK: No
STATE LANDMARK: No

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

(list sources on back)

PREPARED BY: Gray Brechin
ADDRESS: 630 Lake Street
San Francisco, CA 941
PHONE: 752-4881
DATE: October 20, 1981



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

of the downtown a "Great White City" like the Chicago world's fair of 1893.

Handsomely detailed and spectacularly sited, the building remains one of the most prominent on Market Street and a superb example of the dwindling number of flatirons which were once a feature of Market Street.

(1846-1914)
A.5 Architect: William Curlett was one of San Francisco's foremost Victorian-era architects and one who successfully made the transition to the classically-inspired styles at the turn of the century, as evidenced in the Phelan Building. Born in Ireland, Curlett came to San Francisco in 1871. With Augustus Laver, he designed the James Flood house (now Pacific Union Club) and with Walter Cuthbertson, the Charles Crocker and William H. Crocker houses on the present site of Grace Cathedral. (The Charles Crocker home was regarded by Willis Polk as the ugliest building in the city; he offered to burn it down as a civic gesture.) Curlett's prestige at the turn of the century is indicated by the fact that he designed the Mutual Savings Bank (now Citizens Savings) in 1902, the Shreve (1905) and Head (1909) Buildings (the latter with his son) at Post and Grant, as well as the Phelan Building. He spent the later years of his life in Los Angeles and was elected President of the State Board of Architects.

B.7 People: James Duval Phelan (1861-1930)

Phelan was the remarkable son of pioneer banker and capitalist James Phelan. Well-educated and traveled in youth, he was one of San Francisco's outstanding public servants and benefactors. As mayor from 1897 to 1902, he was responsible for many municipal reforms. He served as U.S. Senator from 1913 to 1919. With Rudolph Spreckels, he bankrolled the post-fire graft prosecution which dethroned Mayor Schmidt and Boss Ruef.

Classically educated, Phelan saw himself as a Medicean prince and lavishly entertained and supported local artists at his Renaissance villas at Los Gatos and Pacific Heights (the former was designed by William Curlett). He paid for public sculpture such as the Admissions Monument and sponsored the Daniel Burnham Plan for San Francisco of 1905. While the Plan was swept aside in the haste to rebuild the city after 1906 (much to Phelan's consternation), the Phelan Building is a superb example of the buildings which Burnham and Phelan would have had the city's principal boulevards lined with.

Bibliography:

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