

(Landmarks)

DESIGNATING THE BROWN'S OPERA HOUSE (VICTORIA THEATER) AS LANDMARK
NO. 215 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 Brown's
Opera House (Victoria Theater) located at 2961 16th Street, Lot 31A
in Assessor's Block 3570 has a special character and special
historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and
that its designation as a Landmark will further the purposes of,
and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the City
Planning Code.

(a) Designation: Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City
Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal
Code, Brown's Opera House (Victoria Theater) is hereby designated
as Landmark No. 215. This designation having been fully approved
by Resolution No. 13979 of the City Planning Commission, which
Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
under File No. 90-95-1 and is incorporated herein and made a part of
hereof as though fully set forth.

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SUPERVISORS BIERMAN, MILDEN, TENG, LEAL

(b) Required Data:

- (1) The description of the location and boundaries of the
Landmark site is Brown's Opera House (Victoria Theater)
located at 2961 16th Street, being Lot 31A within
Assessor's Block 3570.
- (2) The characteristics of the Landmark which justify its
designation are described and shown in the photographs
and other materials on file in the Planning Department
Docket No. 95.290L and the Landmarks Preservation
Advisory Board's Case Report contained in Docket No.
95.290L.
- (3) The particular features that should be preserved are
those shown in the photographs on file in Planning
Department Docket No. 95.290L and described in the
Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board's Case Report, in
Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 4,
"Design" and in Section D, "Integrity," Subsection No.
13, "Alterations," said photographs and Case Report are
incorporated in this designating ordinance as though
fully set forth.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

LOUISE H. RENNE

CITY ATTORNEY

By

Deputy City Attorney

RECOMMENDED:

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

By

Lu Blazej

Director of Planning

Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

Passed for Second Reading

January 16, 1996

§ Finally Passed

§ January 22, 1996

Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano
 Bierman Heish Kennedy Leal Migden
 Shelley Teng

§ Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano
 § Bierman Heish Kaufman Kennedy
 § Leal Migden Shelley

Absent: Supervisor Kaufman

§ Absent: Supervisor Teng

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

File No.
 90-95-1

FEB 2 1996
 Date Approved

Clerk

Mayor

File No. 95.290L
Brown's Opera House
(Victoria Theater)
2961 16th Street
Lot 31A in Assessor's Block 3570

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 13979

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate Brown's Opera House (Victoria Theater) located at 2961 16th Street, being Lot 31A in Assessor's Block 3570, as Landmark No. 215 pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code; and

WHEREAS, The Landmarks Board prepared a final Case Report on the subject property, considered public testimony on the Case Report and recommended an intent to initiate Brown's Opera House (Victoria Theater) as Landmark No. 215 at its Regular Meeting of May 17, 1995; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a Public Hearing on September 21, and October 19, 1995, to consider the proposed designation and the Final Case Report of said Landmarks Board; and

WHEREAS, This City Planning Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value and that the proposed designation would be in furtherance of an in conformance with the purposes and standards of the said Article 10;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, That this City Planning Commission does hereby recommend APPROVAL of the designation of the Brown's Opera House (Victoria Theater) located at 2961 16th Street, Lot 31A within Assessor's Block 3570;

Second, That the special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value of the Landmark is set forth in the photographs and other materials on file in Planning Docket No. 95.290L which is incorporated herein and made a part thereof as though fully set forth;

Third, That the particular features that should be preserved are those shown in the photographs on file in Planning Department Docket No. 95.290L and described in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board's Case Report, in Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 5, "Design" and in Section D "Integrity," Subsection No. 13 "Alterations," said photographs and Case Report are incorporated in this designating ordinance as though fully set forth.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

File No. 95.290L
Brown's Opera House
(Victoria Theater)
2961 16th Street
Lot 31A in Assessor's Block 3570
Resolution No. 13979
Page 2

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City Planning 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 Motion was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission on October 19, 1995.

Linda Avery
Commission Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Boomer, Fung, Levine, Lowenberg, Prowler, and Unobskey
NOES: None
ABSENT: Commissioner Martin
ADOPTED: October 19, 1995

VFM:mj:CPC29611.Res



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

1660 MISSION STREET, 5TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

TEL. (415) 558-6345 • FAX. (415) 558-6426



FINAL CASE REPORT

DATE: May 17, 1995

HISTORIC NAME: Brown's Opera House

OWNER: Robert and Anita Correa

ADDRESS: 2961 16th Street

BLOCK & LOT: 3570/31A

POPULAR NAME: Victoria Theater

ZONING: NC-3, 50-X

ORIGINAL USE: Theater

ARCHITECT: Carl Werner and Matthew O'Brien

CURRENT USE: Theater

NO. OF STORIES: 3

STYLE: Mission Revival

LANDMARK NO: 215

DATE: 1908

EXTERIOR MATERIALS: Reinforced Concrete and Steel Frame, Brick, Stucco

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Among the city's few remaining live theaters, Brown's Opera House as built by Edmund Joseph Brown, father and grandfather respectively of former Governors Pat and Jerry Brown is representative of a grouping of family theaters built post-1906 in the Mission District. The great earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed many nickelodeons in the downtown, which in turn lead to the development of a number of variety and vaudeville theaters in the Mission District. Brown's Opera House was a popular showcase for variety acts and vaudeville during the teens and twenties. Renamed the 16th Street Theater during the Depression, it showed second run movies at half-price (5 cents). As Teatro Victoria in the 1940s and 50s, it specialized in Spanish language films. In the 1960s it was renamed Follies Burlesque, and features such artists as Blaze Starr, Tempest Storm and Virginia "Ding Dong" Bell, until "the city's last refuge of the strippers art" closed on March 30, 1970. Today, once again named the Victoria Theater, this is the only Mission District live theater structure still functioning in the use for which it was originally designed.

EVALUATION CRITERIA**A. ARCHITECTURE****1. STYLE:**

Significance as an Example of a Particular Architectural Style or Convention.

Mission Revival. Initially used by the California Railroads for stations to promote the romantic image of the California Missions, it became popular for all types of buildings. The stylistic elements derived from Mission sources include red tile roofs, smooth stucco wall surfaces and simple, small windows and door openings which are usually flat arched. Shaped gables, called espadanas, can be found at the roof level. Its high point of popularity was the ten year period between 1905 - 1915. This building is an excellent example of the style in an urban setting. (E).

**2. CONSTRUCTION TYPE
USE CATEGORY:**

Significance as an Example of a Particular Occupancy Type or Use, Method of Construction or Material

Very few examples remain of the City's live theater buildings. (E)

3. DATE BUILT:

Significance as an Example of a Particular Period in San Francisco History

Completed in 1908, this building reflects a pre-movie theater cultural consciousness. Film was beginning to expand out of the storefront nickelodeons, but full-fledged theaters and music halls carried an admission price of up to a dollar. The advent of labor unions generated shorter work-weeks which in turn generated demand for new recreational opportunities, including theatrical entertainment, which took place in structures such as this. (VG)

4. ARCHITECT:

Designed or Built by an Architect or Builder Who Has Made A Significant Contribution to the Community, State or Nation

Carl Werner (1873-1945) and Mathew O'Brien (1871-1926) were well-known San Francisco architectural partners after the 1906 earthquake who specialized in public assembly spaces, most notably Masonic and Scottish Rite temples and neighborhood theaters, which were often called Opera Houses. Brown's Opera House was such a theater. Carl Werner was a Philadelphia native, who studied architecture at M.I.T. and subsequently relocated to San Francisco. Prior to the events of 1906, he was known for his designs of educational buildings, and Nob Hill mansions, most of which were destroyed during the events of 1906. Less is known about Matthew O'Brien (see obit A&E May, 1926). These architects are known, but of relatively minor significance. (G)

5. DESIGN:

Quality of Composition, Detailing and Ornament Measured in Part in Originality, Urban Design, Craftsmanship or Uniqueness

Although somewhat obscured by a coat of dark paint, the principal facade of the building features two truncated corner "towers" with elaborate parapets. These in turn frame a solid mass of wall with a taller parapet. A tile roof projection bridges the two towers. Both arched and quatrefoil windows are found on the front elevation, along with an elaborate marquee, which dates from a later period. Somewhat constricted by its urban site, the building is a competent, but unexciting design. (G)

6. INTERIOR:

Interior Arrangement, Finish, Craftsmanship, and/or Use Detail is/are Particularly Attractive or Unique

Refurbished often through the years, Brown's Opera House still retains the fundamental elements of its interior design, including its raked floor, proscenium, and balcony and has a total seating capacity of 475. This largely structurally unaltered although interior spaces were painted out in the most recent rehabilitation. This theater serves as a testimonial of the design skill of its architects. (E)

B. HISTORIC CONTEXT**7. PERSONS:**

Associated with the Life or Activities of a Person, Group or Institution that

Built by Edmond Joseph Brown who was a prominent businessman and in the early part of the century who owned and operated theaters. Brown had a successful career in business, but is better known through the lives of his progeny. His son, Edmond G. "Pat" Brown was Governor of California, as was his grandson

But as television consumed theater as a major cultural resource, the Mission Theaters closed. The El Capitan Theater located on Mission Street was the hardest hit and was the first to close in 1957. Dwindling crowds did not equate with the giant film temple which held almost 3000 people. By 1965, El Capitan Theater became a residential hotel and a parking lot with an elaborate facade remaining. Shortly thereafter the Grand Theater, also located on Mission Street, closed down as well. Over the years, both the Victoria and the York Theaters struggled to keep their doors open but only the Victoria Theaters succeeded and currently operates as a live theater.

The closing of these once thriving theaters constitutes a disintegration of several major historical and cultural resources in the City. From the early times of the City the Mission was a place in which culture and entertainment thrived. Today, the Victoria Theater, among a few others remains a testament to the thriving entertainment district which once was. (VG)

C. PHYSICAL CONTEXT

10. CONTINUITY:
Contributes to the Continuity or Character of the Street Neighborhood or Area

The 16th Street facade of the building, with its deep Viennese red color, mirrors the painted red brick of the back portion of the Victoria which now contains two murals on the west wall. (VG)

11. SETTING:
Setting and/or Landscape Contributes to the Continuity or Character of the Street, Neighborhood or Area

The Victoria Theater occupies the corner of a block on 16th Street and is located in close proximity to the lively Mission Street Neighborhood Commercial District. Similar scaled buildings flank the theater structure. (G)

12. VISUAL SIGNIFICANCE:
Significant as a Visual Landmark to the Neighborhood, City, Region or Nation as a Whole

The deep Viennese red color of the building separates itself from the surrounding brick and stucco commercial and residential buildings. The aged murals on the side of the theater attract the eye of viewer, attesting to the fact that the theater is of vintage quality. (E)

D. INTEGRITY

13. ALTERATIONS:
The Degree to Which the Property Has Retained Original Materials From Which its Significance is Derived or Which Characterize its Period

Restoration occurred to the entire theater structure in 1979 under the direction of Robert and Anita Correa, the managing and artistic directors of the theater. Through this process the owners found that the building was indeed structurally sound. The contractors were "amazed" at the strength and thickness of the foundation, the excellence of the brickwork and the strength of the overhead I-beams.² As a result, most of the repairs consisted of surface renovation. The 16th Street facade was painted a deep Viennese red. Restoration of the original ticket office occurred in order to be placed back into use. The owners cleaned and restored the tiles surrounding this ticket office. On the Capp Street side of the theater, the owners cleaned and restored the original artwork which revealed itself as an advertisement for Albers Flapjack Flour. In 1986, another renovation took place, this time adding new roofing, insulation to the auditorium, stage flooring, plumbing, wheelchair access and new carpeting. Overall, this building maintains a high degree of integrity. (VG)

has Made a Significant Contribution to the Community, State or Nation

8. EVENTS:

Associated with Events that Have Made a Significant Contribution to the Community, State or Nation

Jerry. It is not known if either governor had any direct connection with the theater, but Edmund Brown senior was a prominent San Franciscan who was intimately connected with the structure. (E)

At the outset, the Victoria showed variety and vaudeville programs. By the 1920's, silent films augmented the bill with full orchestras providing the accompanying music. With the advent of sound in motion pictures during the 1930s and 1940s the Victoria became a full-time movie theater. In these days, the theater gave away dishware as an enticement to attend the motion pictures. On one occasion the management gave away a 1939 Ford as a door prize. Sometime during the 1950s the theater was renamed the "Teatro de Victoria" and Spanish films were screened here. The name changed again in the 1950s to the "New Follies Theater" which specialized in "live burlesque" productions.¹ Eventually ownership of the structure changed hands so often that the structure began to suffer neglect. Finally the building was abandoned in 1975. However, Robert and Anita Correa bought the facility in 1979 and restored it to original condition. (VG)

9. PATTERNS:

Associated with or Illustrative of Broad Patterns of City's Cultural, Social, Political or Economic History or Development

The Mission District encompasses one of the largest areas in San Francisco and has two distinct sections. Historically a mixture of industrial and residential structures characterized the eastern portion of the area. In contrast the Inner or Western Mission, which is the area pertinent to this landmark nomination, developed in a more urban, commercial and residential manner as a streetcar suburb of the Downtown area. The origins of the entire District, however, trace back to the founding of a Mission in 1776 by Father Francisco Palou on the banks of the Laguna de Manatí. Originally this Mission was named the "Saint Francis of Assisi" for the founder of the Franciscan order and was the sixth Mission later known as "Mission Dolores" established in California by the Franciscans.

Around 1850 an independent financier named Charles L. Wilson built a plank toll road which extended 2 1/4 miles along the current Mission Street from 4th to 16th Street. This road provided a faster land-based route to and from the mercantile settlement on Yerba Buena Cove. By 1867 there were horse-drawn car lines through the Mission and a steam railroad line operated along Harrison Street. These modes of transportation further encouraged development and recreation in the Mission District. Such establishments as roadhouses and elaborate amusement parks, first at the Willows (between 12th and 13th Streets), and later at Woodward Garden (at Northwest 14th and Mission Streets) met the demand for entertainment. Between 1870 and 1900 the area made itself home to California, Irish and German families who built middle class housing over the hills in the southwest portion of the area. It remained a safe place to raise children due to its moderate flow of commercial activity and adequate cultural resources. Then came the earthquake of 1906.

The earthquake and subsequent fires destroyed most of the City of San Francisco. The Mission beyond 20th Street escaped relatively unscathed and two-thirds of its mixed-development remained intact. However many downtown nickelodeons were destroyed and in the entire City of San Francisco only one playhouse remained in operation. As a result of the utter destruction several movie houses were built along Mission Street in order to replace the nickelodeons. These Mission Theaters were of such grandeur that according to the San Francisco Chronicle at the time the theaters constituted one of the greatest cinema rows in all of San Francisco, with five movie houses in just four blocks and over twenty theaters in the entire Mission District. These theaters supported the culturally diverse strips of commerce which catered to the multicultural working class residents and as a result remained a center for cultural activities through the 1930s and well into World War II.

E: THREATS TO SITE: NONE () PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT (X) ZONING () VANDALISM ()
PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT () OTHER ()

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS:

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK: No

NATIONAL REGISTER: No

CALIFORNIA STATE REGISTER: No

HERE TODAY: No

HERITAGE SURVEYS: No

DCP 1976 SURVEY: "Rated 2"

UMB SURVEY: Yes

OTHER:

BIBLIOGRAPHY: See Attachment A

PREPARED BY: Sam Scott, Intern under Supervision of
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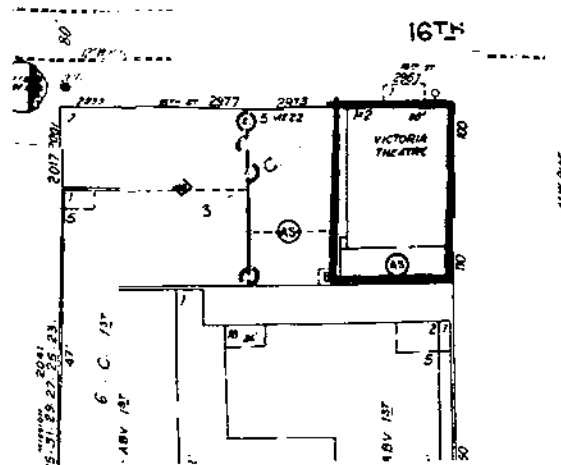
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DATE: May 17, 1995

ENDNOTES:

1. Victoria Promotional Bill, 23 February 1985.

2. Noe Valley Voice, December 1987/January 1988, p. 5.



ATTACHMENT A

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VFM:mj:Grandthe.Cas