

1 [Ordinance to Designate 2550 Mission Street, the New Mission Theater, as a Landmark.]

2
3 **Ordinance designating 2550 Mission Street, the New Mission Theater, as Landmark No.**
4 **245.**

5 Note: Additions are single-underline italics Times New Roman;
6 deletions are ~~strikethrough italics Times New Roman~~.
7 Board amendment additions are double underlined.
8 Board amendment deletions are ~~strikethrough normal~~.

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

9 Section 1. Findings

10 The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that 2550 Mission Street, the New Mission
11 Theater, Lot 007 in Assessor's Block 3616, has a special character and special historical,
12 architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will
13 further the purposes of, and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning
14 Code, and will provide for the preservation of the New Mission Theater's significant interior
15 features.

16 (a) Designation: 2550 Mission Street, the New Mission Theater, is hereby designated
17 as Landmark No. 245. This designation has been fully approved by Resolution No. 589 of the
18 Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board and Resolution No. 16736 of the Planning
19 Commission, which Resolutions are on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under
20 File No. 040443 and which Resolutions are incorporated herein and made part hereof as
21 though fully set forth.

22 (b) General Welfare, General Plan, and Priority Policy Findings

23 (1) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, this Board of Supervisors finds that this
24 ordinance will serve the public necessity, convenience and welfare for the reasons set forth in
25 Planning Commission Resolution No. 16736 recommending approval of this Planning Code

1 Amendment, and incorporates such reasons by this reference thereto. A copy of said
2 resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 040443.

3 (2) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 101.1, this Board of Supervisors finds that this
4 ordinance is in consistent with the Priority Policies of Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code
5 and, when effective, with the General Plan as proposed to be amended and hereby adopts
6 the findings of the Planning Commission, as set forth in Planning Commission Resolution No.
7 16736, and incorporates said findings by this reference thereto.

8 (c) Landmark Data:

9 (1) The description, location and boundary of the Landmark site encompass the only
10 the portion of Lot 007 in Assessors Block 3616 which contains the New Mission Theater. The
11 boundaries of the landmark are coterminous with the footprint of the New Mission Theater and
12 do not include any other buildings on the lot.

13 (2) The characteristics of the Landmark which justify its designation are described and
14 shown in the Landmark Designation Report adopted by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory
15 Board on March 3, 2004 and other supporting materials contained in Planning Department
16 Docket No. 2004.0005L.

17 The characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation are summarized as
18 follows:

19 Its association with the establishment and evolution of the Mission District's vaudeville
20 and movie house district during the first half of the 20th Century.

21 Its status as an excellent and intact example of an early 20th Century movie palace with
22 a façade and auditorium representing two distinct eras and two distinct designs from two of
23 San Francisco's most significant architectural firms, the Reid Brothers and Miller and Pflueger,
24 Architects.

1 (3) The particular features that should be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined
2 necessary, are those generally shown in the photographs and described in the Landmark
3 Designation Report, both of which can be found in the case docket 2004.0005L which is
4 incorporated in this designation ordinance as though fully set forth.

5 This Board of Supervisors directs that the particular interior and exterior features of the
6 property listed below shall be preserved and, where any construction, alteration, removal or
7 demolition of such interior or exterior features requires a City permit, the Board directs that a
8 Certificate of Appropriateness, pursuant to Planning Code section 1006, must be issued prior
9 to the issuance of the City permit.

10 The description of the particular interior features that should be preserved is as follows:

11 The Promenade Lobby's double-height promenade lobby ceiling with mezzanine at
12 rear, the Art Deco-style ornamental metalwork at balustrades, the stylized decorative plaster
13 detailing throughout lobby, the plaster moldings imprinted with Greek key motif, the stacked
14 lozenge-shaped mirrors, the cast plaster cornice moldings in a series of patterns including
15 stylized floral motifs and the faces of Greek muses, the ceiling ornament of stylized floral
16 motifs including tulips, pineapples and daisies, plaster zigzag-patterned ceiling moldings
17 recalling Mayan temple detailing, the recessed "light coves" below lobby ceiling, the ceiling
18 medallions, and the etched glass panel doors to auditorium inscribed with Art Deco-style
19 motifs; the Auditorium's over-scaled Neoclassical and Renaissance architectural elements,
20 the monumental proscenium arch flanked by a pair of gilded and fluted Corinthian columns
21 and Composite pilasters, the projection booth shallow niches containing urn-shaped
22 floodlights, the cast plaster medallions, ornamental plaster moldings and raised panels on the
23 side walls, the decorative frieze of urns and garlands, the denticulated cornice, and the
24 coffered ceiling with deep reveals; the Patrons' Lounge's ornate Corinthian pilasters with
25 decorative classical frieze and cornice, the coffered ceiling and Venetian Renaissance Revival


1 arcade along north wall; and the Balcony's parapet adorned with frieze of garlands and urns,
2 the suspended plaster domed ceiling with heavily decorated ribs and decorative cast metal
3 grilles, and the scalloped parapet along the southern edge of balcony.

4 The description of the particular exterior features that should be preserved is as
5 follows:

6 The Art Deco façade, freestanding sheetmetal 70-foot pylon blade sign with neon tubes
7 spelling out "New Mission", the cantilevered marquee, and the streamlined parapet.

8
9 Section 2. The property shall be subject to all of the controls and procedures
10 applicable to landmarks as set forth in Planning Code Article 10 and those controls set forth in
11 this ordinance.

12
13
14 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

15 By: 
16 Sarah Ellen Owsowitz
17 Deputy City Attorney



City and County of San Francisco

Tails

Ordinance

City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

File Number: 040443

Date Passed:

Ordinance designating 2550 Mission Street, the New Mission Theater, as Landmark No. 245.

May 11, 2004 Board of Supervisors — PASSED ON FIRST READING

Ayes: 10 - Alioto-Pier, Daly, Dufty, Gonzalez, Hall, Ma, Maxwell, McGoldrick,
Peskin, Sandoval

Excused: 1 - Ammiano

May 18, 2004 Board of Supervisors — FINALLY PASSED

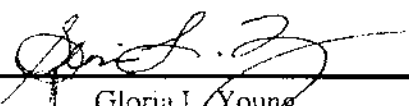
Ayes: 9 - Daly, Dufty, Gonzalez, Hall, Ma, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin,
Sandoval

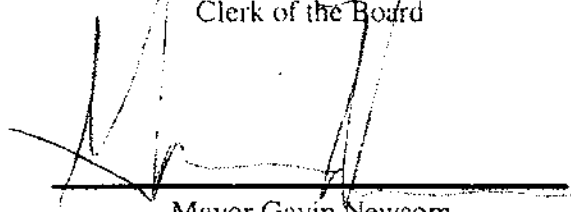
Absent: 2 - Alioto-Pier, Ammiano

File No. 040443

I hereby certify that the foregoing Ordinance
was FINALLY PASSED on May 18, 2004 by
the Board of Supervisors of the City and
County of San Francisco.

MAY 27 2004
Date Approved


Gloria L. Young
Clerk of the Board


Mayor Gavin Newsom

SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING COMMISSION
RESOLUTION NO. 16736

ADOPTING FINDINGS RELATED TO THE APPROVAL OF THE LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF 2550-2574 MISSION STREET, THE NEW MISSION THEATER, ASSESSOR'S BLOCK 3616, LOT 7, AS LANDMARK NO. 245.

1. **WHEREAS**, on December 9, 2003, the Board of Supervisors passed Resolution No. 796-03, a resolution to initiate the designation of the New Mission Theater as a local Landmark; and
2. San Francisco Architectural Heritage submitted a draft Landmark Designation Report for New Mission Theater, for the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (Landmarks Board) to consider the landmark designation of the property; and
3. The draft Landmark Designation Report for the New Mission Theater was reviewed by the Landmarks Board at its regular meeting of March 3, 2004, and such documentation was considered a final Landmark Designation Report by the Landmarks Board; and
4. The Landmarks Board found that the New Mission Theater Designation Report describes the location and boundaries of the landmark site, describes the characteristics of the landmark which justifies its designation, and describes the particular features that should be preserved and therefore meets the requirements of Planning Code Section 1004(b) and 1004(c)(1). That Landmark Designation Report is fully incorporated by reference into this resolution; and
5. The Planning Commission reviewed and endorsed the description, location, and boundary of the landmark site, which is the footprint of the New Mission Theater building only (a portion of lot 7 of Assessor's Block 3616) and not the entire lot; and
6. The Planning Commission, in considering the proposed landmark designation employed the National Register of Historic Places rating criteria and found that the New Mission Theater is significant at the local level under National Register of Historic Places Criterion "A" (association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history) because of its association with the establishment and evolution of the Mission District's vaudeville and movie house district during the first half of the 20th Century, and under Criterion "C" (embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction) as an excellent and intact example of an early 20th Century movie palace with a façade and auditorium representing two distinct eras and two distinct designs from two of San Francisco's most significant architectural firms, the Reid Brothers and Miller and Pflueger, Architects; and

PLANNING COMMISSION

Resolution for hearing on March 4, 2004

Case No. 2004.0005L

2550-2574 Mission Street, the New
Mission Theater
Assessor's Block 3616, Lot 7
Resolution No. 16736
Page 2

7. The Planning Commission reviewed and endorsed the following description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation:
 - a. Association with the establishment and evolution of the Mission District's vaudeville and movie house district during the first half of the 20th Century.
 - b. An excellent and intact example of an early 20th Century movie palace with a façade and auditorium representing two distinct eras and two distinct designs from two of San Francisco's most significant architectural firms, the Reid Brothers and Miller and Pflueger, Architects.

8. The Planning Commission reviewed and endorsed the following particular features that should be preserved:
 - a. Exterior:
 - Art Deco façade, freestanding sheetmetal 70-foot pylon blade sign with neon tubes spelling out "New Mission", the cantilevered marquee, and the streamlined parapet

The Board of Supervisors directs that the particular interior features of the property, as listed below, shall be preserved and, where any construction, alteration, removal or demolition of such interior features requires a City permit, the Board directs that a Certificate of Appropriateness, pursuant to Planning Code section 1006, must be issued prior to the issuance of the City permit. The Planning Commission fully supports this provision.

- b. Interior:
 - Promenade Lobby:
 - double-height promenade lobby ceiling with mezzanine at rear
 - Art Deco-style ornamental metalwork at balustrades
 - stylized decorative plaster detailing throughout lobby
 - plaster moldings imprinted with Greek key motif
 - stacked lozenge-shaped mirrors
 - cast plaster cornice moldings in a series of patterns including stylized floral motifs and the faces of Greek muses
 - ceiling ornament of stylized floral motifs including tulips, pineapples and daisies
 - plaster zigzag-patterned ceiling moldings recalling Mayan temple detailing
 - recessed "light coves" below lobby ceiling
 - ceiling medallions
 - etched glass panel doors to auditorium inscribed with Art Deco-style motifs

 - Auditorium:
 - auditorium with over-scaled Neoclassical and Renaissance architectural elements

PLANNING COMMISSION

Resolution for hearing on March 4, 2004

Case No. 2004.0005L

2550-2574 Mission Street, the New
Mission Theater
Assessor's Block 3616, Lot 7
Resolution No. 16736
Page 3

- monumental proscenium arch flanked by a pair of gilded and fluted Corinthian columns and Composite pilasters
- projection booth
- shallow niches containing urn-shaped floodlights
- cast plaster medallions
- ornamental plaster moldings and raised panels on the side walls
- decorative frieze of urns and garlands
- denticulated cornice
- coffered ceiling with deep reveals

Patrons' Lounge:

- ornate Corinthian pilasters with decorative classical frieze and cornice
- coffered ceiling
- Venetian Renaissance Revival arcade along north wall

Balcony:

- parapet adorned with frieze of garlands and urns
- suspended plaster domed ceiling with heavily decorated ribs and decorative cast metal grilles
- scalloped parapet along the southern edge of balcony

9. The landmark designation of the New Mission Theater meets the required findings of Planning Code Section 101.1 in the following manner:

- The proposed Project will further Priority Policy No. 7, that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved, such as the designation of the New Mission Theater as City Landmark No. 245. Landmark designation will help to preserve a significant historic resource associated with patterns of architectural, social and cultural history in San Francisco.
- That the proposed project will have no significant effect on the other seven Priority Policies: the City's supply of affordable housing, existing housing or neighborhood character, public transit or neighborhood parking, preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake, commercial activity, business or employment, or public parks and open space.

10. The landmark designation of the New Mission Theater is consistent with the following portions of the Urban Design Element of the General Plan:

OBJECTIVE 2: CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE A SENSE OF NATURE, CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST, AND FREEDOM FROM OVERCROWDING.

Policy 4 Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

PLANNING COMMISSION

Resolution for hearing on March 4, 2004

Case No. 2004.0005L

2550-2574 Mission Street, the New
Mission Theater
Assessor's Block 3616, Lot 7
Resolution No. 16736
Page 4

Designating this significant historic resource as a local landmark will further a continuity with the past because the building will be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Landmark designation will require that the Planning Department and the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board would review any proposed work that may have an impact on character-defining features. Both entities will utilize the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation in their review to ensure that only appropriate, compatible alterations are made. The proposed landmark designation will not have a significant impact on any of the other elements of the General Plan.

11. The Planning Commission has reviewed documents, correspondence and oral testimony on matters relevant to the proposed landmark designation, at a duly noticed Public Hearing held on March 4, 2004.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Planning Commission hereby approves the landmark designation of 2550-2574 Mission Street, the New Mission Theater, Assessor's Block 3616, Lot 7 as Landmark No. 245, pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission hereby directs its Recording Secretary to transmit this Resolution, the New Mission Theater Landmark Designation Report and other pertinent materials in the Case File 2004.0005L to the Board of Supervisor's.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Planning Commission on March 4, 2004.

Linda Avery
Planning Commission Secretary

AYES: Antonini, Boyd, Feldstein, Hughes, Lee, Lee

NOES:

ABSENT: Bradford-Bell

ADOPTED: March 4, 2004

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT	LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE
DATE: 23 October 2003	APPROVED:
CASE NO.:	PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:
APPROVED:	
PAGE 1 of 23	PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

HISTORIC NAME New Mission Theater
POPULAR NAME New Mission Theater
ADDRESS 2550 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94110
BLOCK & LOT Block 3616 / Lot 007
OWNER San Francisco Community College
ORIGINAL USE theater
CURRENT USE presently vacant
ZONING NC-3

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- (A) Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- (B) Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- (C) Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- (D) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Period of Significance

The period of significance of the New Mission Theater is 1916-1950. The period of significance begins with the date of construction and closes with the approximate date at which the Mission theater district began to decline and lose its important role in the life of the neighborhood.

Integrity

Evaluation of Integrity

The *National Register of Historic Places Bulletin 15* standards and criteria were used to evaluate the building's integrity. *Bulletin 15* defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey its significance. Integrity is the authenticity of a historic resource's physical identity evidenced by the survival of characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. Integrity involves several aspects, including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Overall, the New Mission Theater retains a high degree of integrity. The New Mission Theater retained its original use as a single screen theater from 1916 until 1993. Consequently, the

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 2 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

changes that occurred have been minimal and are well documented. Generally, the theater has suffered from years of deferred maintenance and some unsympathetic, but mostly reversible alterations. With regard to the exterior, which exhibits peeling paint, limited graffiti, and broken neon tubes at the blade sign, the façade marquee and sign are intact. An analysis of historic photographs reveals that the 1916-17 auditorium remains almost entirely intact.

Location

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. The New Mission Theater remains in its original footprint in a mid-block site in the 2500 block of Mission Street between 21st and 22nd Streets. The two street-facing elevations of the building on Bartlett and Mission Streets remain intact and convey their original expression.

Design

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. The original design as conceived by the Reid Brothers for a lavish movie palace coupled with Timothy Pflueger's Art Deco modifications represent an interesting juxtaposition of two building campaigns. The varying design approaches two architectural campaigns illustrates popular styles for movie palaces separated by two decades. The theater retains all the key elements of the original design, such as the structure's expression, proportions, massing, and circulation through the building. The architectural elements and vocabulary that were altered in 1932 remain intact as well. The building design has not been affected by any later additions to the exterior envelope.

Setting

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property, constituting topographic features, vegetation, manmade features, and relationships between buildings or open space. The New Mission Theater remains in a very dense and busy urban setting. Located on the Mission District's main thoroughfare and principal commercial street, the setting is defined by the presence of one-and two-story commercial buildings constructed at the beginning of the 20th century with other movie houses (all altered) in the immediate vicinity.

Materials

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. It was the intent of the original architect to construct the most lavish movie palace in the neighborhood. A sampling of original interior finishes and materials include stylized decorative plaster detailing, cast plaster cornice moldings, cast plaster ceiling ornament depicting stylized floral and vegetal motifs including tulips, pineapples and daisies, chrome-plated steel balusters at the stair and mezzanine, auditorium doors with frosted glass panels inscribed with Art Deco-style motifs, and two gilded and fluted Corinthian Order columns flanking the proscenium. The auditorium ceiling is articulated by a bold series of coffers with deep reveals. Exterior building materials are original and include the sheetmetal blade sign and metal marquee. The building retains a high degree of original materials.

Workmanship

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture, people, or artisan during any given period in history or pre-history. The original 1916 construction epitomizes early 20th century design and building technologies, construction techniques, and noteworthy craftsmanship, as do the elements of the 1930s Art Deco modifications. Further, the use plaster

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 3 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

ornament, painted murals, and decorative sheet metal at the façade, contributes to the building's high degree of workmanship.

Feeling

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historical sense of a particular period of time. Due to an intact setting and few modifications outside of the period of significance, the building retains its original feeling.

Association

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. Locally significant, not only for its architecture, but also for its role in the economic development of the Mission District, the theater played a pivotal role as a beacon in the neighborhood from 1916 until 1950. In addition, it is associated with the influential San Francisco architects, the Reid Brothers and Timothy Pflueger. Because changes to the building have been minimal, the theater's intact historic fabric continues to convey its links to these important associations.

ARTICLE 10 REQUIREMENTS SECTION 1004 (b)**Boundaries of the Landmark Site**

The New Mission Theater and the adjacent Giant Value Department Store are both located on Block 3616, Lot 7 in San Francisco's Mission District. The block is bounded by Mission Street to the east, 22nd Street to the south, Bartlett Street to the west and 21st Street to the north. Lot 7 is bounded by Mission Street to the east, Bartlett Street to the west and adjacent parcels to the north and south. The New Mission Theater building is the only portion of the lot to be included in this landmark nomination. It occupies approximately 19,500 gross square feet of the northern part of Lot 7, which in total occupies 44,000 square feet.

Characteristics of the Landmark that Justify Designation

The boundaries are coterminous with the exterior walls of the New Mission Theater and do not include any other buildings or sites. The New Mission Theater achieved its architectural and historical significance between 1916-17 and 1950 on the present site within the existing building envelope.

Description of the Particular Features that Should be Preserved

Character-Defining Features:

Exterior:

Art Deco façade

freestanding 70' pylon sign with neon tubes spelling out "New Mission"

cantilevered marquee

streamlined parapet

Interior:

Promenade Lobby:

- double height promenade lobby ceiling with mezzanine at rear
- Art Deco-style ornamental metalwork at balustrades
- stylized decorative plaster detailing throughout lobby
- plaster moldings imprinted with a Greek Key motif

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORTDATE: *24 October 2003*

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 4 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

- stacked lozenge-shaped mirrors
- cast plaster cornice moldings in a series of patterns including stylized floral motifs and the faces of Greek muses
- ceiling ornament of stylized floral motifs including tulips, pineapples and daisies
- plaster Zigzag-patterned ceiling moldings recall Mayan temple detailing
- recessed "light coves" below lobby ceiling
- ceiling medallions
- etched glass panel doors to auditorium inscribed with Art Deco-style motifs

Auditorium:

- auditorium with over-scaled Neoclassical and Renaissance architectural elements
- monumental proscenium arch flanked by a pair of gilded and fluted Corinthian columns and Composite pilasters
- projection booth
- shallow niches containing urn-shaped floodlights
- cast plaster medallions
- ornamental plaster moldings and raised panels on the side walls
- decorative frieze of urns and garlands
- denticulated cornice
- coffered ceiling with deep reveals

Patrons' Lounge:

- ornate Corinthian pilasters with decorative classical frieze and cornice
- coffered ceiling
- Venetian Renaissance Revival arcade along the north wall

Balcony:

- parapet is adorned with a frieze consisting of garlands and urns
- suspended plaster domed ceiling with heavily decorated ribs and decorative cast metal grilles
- scalloped parapet along the southern edge of the balcony

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 5 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

DESCRIPTION**Introduction**

The New Mission Theater is a 2,800-seat motion picture house located at 2550 Mission Street in the heart of San Francisco's Mission District. The 2500 block of Mission Street, where the New Mission Theater is located, is dominated by a mixture of one-and two-story commercial buildings constructed during the first quarter of the 20th Century. The New Mission Theater is an interesting juxtaposition of two building campaigns. It is composed of an Art Deco façade and promenade lobby, both designed in 1932 by architect Timothy Pflueger, and a large Renaissance/Neoclassical Revival auditorium, designed in 1916-17 by the Reid Brothers. The theater has an "L" shaped plan; the promenade lobby is 30' wide and it extends 142' to the middle of the block, where it meets the 102' x 108' auditorium. The auditorium is the foot of the "L" and extends over 100' along Bartlett Street. Today the theater's prominent pylon sign is one of the most recognizable architectural landmarks in the Mission District. Pflueger's façade and promenade lobby embody the architect's own imaginative use of Art Deco and Mesoamerican imagery as rendered in plaster wall relief, murals, etched glass and ornamental metalwork. Meanwhile, the 1917 auditorium is one of the largest surviving movie palace interiors in San Francisco. Designed by San Francisco's famed Reid Brothers, the auditorium is less heavily altered than the promenade lobby and retains most of its original architectural detailing. The interior of the auditorium is characterized by an abundance of imaginative, over-scaled Neoclassical and Renaissance architectural elements, such as the tremendous gilded Corinthian Order columns and pilasters, flood lights hidden within plaster urns, elaborate Neoclassical Revival cornice moldings and fanciful murals.

The theater is located on a large, irregularly-shaped parcel which also includes the historic but heavily altered and non-contributing Giant Value Store. The Giant Value was once a neighborhood branch of Hales Brother Department Store, a major downtown San Francisco institution during much of the 20th Century. Originally a three-story, Renaissance Revival commercial block, the existing structure displays none of its original character-defining features; the cornice and storefront have been removed and the rest of the façade has been covered with fiberglass paneling.

Context

The towering sheetmetal blade sign of the New Mission Theater can be seen from several blocks in all directions and it stands out from its humbler commercial context. It is located on one of the busiest blocks of Mission Street, a commercial district with a middle to lower socio-economic character in the heart of San Francisco's Mission District. The theater is one of the best-preserved structures on this particular block. Many of its neighbors are heavily modernized commercial structures dating from the first quarter of the 20th Century. To the north is a heavily altered, two-story brick commercial building. To the south is the aforementioned Giant Value department store and directly across the street from the theater is the decaying and abandoned Wigwam/Rialto Theater, a historic Vaudeville house. The New Mission Theater is one of the lynchpins of what was once one of the city's most important theater districts, rivaled only by the Market Street theater district. Formerly known as the "Mission Miracle Mile," this district comprised roughly eight blocks of Mission Street between 16th and 24th Streets and in addition to a selection of downtown department stores, it included at least a dozen nickelodeons, Vaudeville houses and movie palaces.

Mission Street Elevation

The manner in which the New Mission Theater's facade explicitly combines architecture and signage was largely unprecedented in San Francisco when the building was renovated by the

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 6 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

firm of Miller & Pflueger in 1932. Perhaps more than any surviving historic theater façade in San Francisco, the sign of the New Mission is the façade, sharing much in common with Pflueger's contemporary Paramount Theater in Oakland. Since 1932, the 70'-tall sign has served as one of the most prominent architectural features of the Mission District. The facade is a tripartite arrangement consisting of a large opening and ticket booth at street-level; a cantilevered marquee and streamlined parapet at the roofline, and a large freestanding pylon sign above. Designed during the early years of the Automobile Age, Pflueger's New Mission Theater facade was scaled to arrest the attention of passing motorists, pedestrians and streetcar passengers. The sign is fabricated of ten stacked sheet metal sections and is painted International Orange, the same color as the contemporary Golden Gate Bridge. Originally the sign was illuminated at night by neon tubes spelling out "NEW MISSION." Currently the neon tubing is in need of repair.

The Mission Street elevation was designed by Timothy Pflueger in 1932 to replace the smaller 1917 façade designed by the Reid Brothers. The existing facade is an interesting composition that reflects the advanced design sensibilities of its creator. As one of the Bay Area's most prominent self-trained masters, Pflueger designed several movie palaces throughout Northern California in a variety of styles, ranging from Churrigueresque to Streamline/Moderne. Pflueger's New Mission Theater facade is the only surviving example of a Art Deco theater façade designed by Pflueger in San Francisco. The vertical tripartite composition and exterior details recall Pflueger's better-known contemporary Paramount Theater in Oakland. Pflueger's façade for the New Mission reveals the architect's interest in Mayan and Aztec sculpture and architecture. The New Mission Theater's façade, with its pylon-shaped sign and heavy projecting parapet were both inspired by Mayan architectural motifs. The sign and marquee also displays more typical European-derived Art Deco detailing such as low-relief ornament, volutes and flowing lines suggesting upward motion and speed.

Pflueger's 1932 renovation of the New Mission Theater replaced the original Reid Brothers' 1916-17 façade. The Reid Brothers were one of the most prominent architectural firms to work in San Francisco around the turn-of-the-century. Their work, which was largely Neoclassical in inspiration, included office buildings, movie theaters, private residences and hotels, including the famed Fairmont Hotel. Their façade for the New Mission Theater was one-story high and designed in a fanciful blend of Mission Revival and Neoclassical elements. The Mission Street elevation featured details indicative of the Mission Revival style, including a scalloped parapet with lobed arches and quatrefoil niches. The façade was made of brick and stucco and also incorporated some Neoclassical details such as urns, Corinthian pilasters and acanthus leaf brackets. The Reid Brothers' façade was dominated by a large ornamental metal and glass canopy which sheltered the vestibule and ticket booths from bad weather and provided a venue for signage.

Vestibule

The vestibule is today the most heavily altered section of the New Mission Theater. The original Reid Brothers' Neoclassical Revival design for the vestibule featured recessed panels, pilasters, pedimented niches (which doubled as movie poster display cases) and a coffered ceiling. The Reid Brothers vestibule walls were hidden beneath modern ceramic panels in 1961. The coffered ceiling was also hidden behind a dropped acoustic tile ceiling and a new terrazzo floor was installed at the same time. In addition, Pflueger's ticket booth was removed. Nevertheless, most of the other historic fabric survives behind the modern materials and could be removed relatively easily.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 7 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

Promenade Lobby

Located immediately beyond the vestibule is the promenade lobby. While Pflueger did not alter the vestibule, he completely redesigned the 142' long promenade lobby in the Art Deco style to match the façade. The carpeted floor of the promenade lobby inclines gently upward toward the auditorium. The promenade lobby ceiling is two stories in height except for the rear portion where the mezzanine is located. A photograph taken in 1943 conveys the original function of the space. The mezzanine, which is accessed by a staircase with an elaborate Art Deco-style balustrade, occupies the rear portion of the lobby. The rest of the promenade lobby is decorated with stylized decorative plaster detailing. The north and south walls are divided into five bays. Plaster moldings imprinted with a Greek Key motif frame the outer bays and stacked lozenge-shaped mirrors bracket the inner bays. The panels contain murals which have been covered with whitewash within the past few years. The murals depicted dancing female figures. The promenade lobby ceiling is illuminated by three recessed "light coves". These contain ambient lighting fixtures which produced a diffused lighting that contrasted with the dramatic spot lighting provided by sconces and torchieres. The cornice moldings, also made of cast plaster, are designed in a series of patterns including stylized floral motifs and the faces of Greek muses. This ceiling ornament depicts stylized floral and vegetal motifs including tulips, pineapples and daisies. At the west side of the lobby a staircase rises to the mezzanine level. The stair and mezzanine balustrade features chrome-plated steel balusters shaped into sinuously curved patterns and a handrail made of extruded aluminum. The primary decorative feature of the ceiling above the mezzanine is a rectangular medallion which once provided a backdrop for a missing lighting fixture. Zigzag patterned ceiling moldings recalling Mayan temple detailing surrounds the medallion.

Auditorium

Six glass-panel doors in the west wall of the promenade lobby originally provided access to the 2,800-seat auditorium. Two doors remain in place and four others have been discovered elsewhere in the building. The doors each feature frosted glass panels inscribed with Art Deco-style motifs. Upon entering the auditorium, one sees the monumental proscenium arch and movie screen to the left and the patrons' lounge and projection booth to the right. The floor-plate of the entire auditorium measures 102' (from west to east) x 108' (north to south) and 50' from orchestra floor to ceiling. A review of historic photographs and the Reid Brothers' plans, reveal that the auditorium retains a very high degree of integrity. When Pflueger was hired to remodel the theater in 1932 he did not make substantial changes to the Reid Brothers' auditorium aside from installing new bathrooms, ventilation ducts, seats and carpeting. The proscenium is the centerpiece of the auditorium. Two gilded and fluted Corinthian Order columns flank the proscenium on either side. Similarly proportioned Composite Order pilasters with elaborately ornamented shafts flank the columns. The pilasters are followed in turn by shallow niches containing urn-shaped floodlights and cast plaster medallions depicting trumpet-playing nymphs. The side walls of the auditorium are composed of raised panels demarcated by ornamental plaster moldings and the uppermost section of the walls carries an elaborate frieze and a denticulate cornice. The panels contain pastoral murals which have been painted over. The decorative program of the frieze consists of an alternating pattern of urns and garlands. The auditorium ceiling is articulated by a bold series of coffers with deep reveals. The floor of the auditorium retains its 1932 seating and sections of 1932 carpeting.

Patrons' Lounge

The patrons' lounge is located on the north side of the auditorium beneath the balcony. In addition to the patrons' lounge there is the projection room, smoking lounges, bathrooms, the ushers' lounge and stairs to the balcony. The patrons' lounge was the most important space in

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 8 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

this section of the auditorium. Located between the projection room and the stairs to the balcony, the patrons' lounge accommodated crowds of guests before and after the feature presentation, as well as during intermission. Public restrooms, smoking lounges, stairs to the balcony and other ancillary spaces opened off the patrons' lounge on three sides. The walls of the patrons' lounge are divided into bays by ornate Corinthian pilasters which carry an elaborate classical frieze and cornice. A historic photograph shows the patrons' lounge during the New Mission Theater's heyday in 1943. Similar to the auditorium, the patrons' lounge features a coffered ceiling. One of the notable features of the patrons' lounge is a Venetian Renaissance Revival arcade along the north wall. The arcade serves the dual purpose of articulating the northeast and northwest walls of the patrons' lounge, as well as illuminating the stairs that lead up to the balcony. Continuing in the Venetian Renaissance theme, the Reid Brothers framed two of the doors in the patrons' lounge with "Seriana" or "Palladian" openings. The bathrooms and the projection room retain their 1932 appearance with porcelain tile wainscot, marble partitions and 1932-era fixtures.

Balcony

The 1,000-seat balcony, reached by stairs along the north wall of the patrons' lounge, continues the Neoclassical/Renaissance themes established downstairs but is more restrained. An undulating parapet frames the southern edge of the balcony. The parapet is adorned with a frieze consisting of garlands and urns. The other three walls of the balcony are divided into panels by plaster moldings. The Reid Brothers' murals in the center of each panel have been covered by a layer of whitewash. The most impressive feature of the balcony is the oblong dome suspended over this immense space. The dome is divided into three sections by heavily decorated ribs and the center of the dome contains decorative grilles. These grilles are made of cast metal and conceal the theater's state-of-the-art mechanical ventilation system.

Bartlett Street Elevation

The west, or rear, elevation of the New Mission Theater faces an alley called Bartlett Street. This elevation is quite modest and utilitarian in comparison with the Mission Street elevation. Being located on a service alley, the Reid Brothers did not add ornament to a side of the building that would not be seen by the public. The Bartlett Street elevation is 110' wide and is divided into seven bays by simple concrete pilasters and into horizontal sections by three concrete belt courses. This elevation does not depart significantly from its 1917 appearance.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT
DATE: 24 October 2003
CASE NO.:
APPROVED:
PAGE 9 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE
APPROVED:
PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:
PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The New Mission Theater is significant at the local level under *National Register* Criteria A and C. The period of significance is 1916 to 1950; the former date is the building's construction and the latter date is the approximate date at which the Mission theater district began to decline and lose its important role in the life of the neighborhood. The New Mission Theater is significant under Criterion A by virtue of its ground-breaking role in the establishment and evolution of the Mission District's Vaudeville and movie house district during the first half of the 20th Century. Between the 1906 Earthquake and 1940 almost a dozen motion picture houses opened along Mission Street in an eight-block section known locally as the "Mission Miracle Mile." Initially designed in 1916-17 by the Reid Brothers, the resulting 2,800-seat theater was the first "downtown" movie palace constructed in an outlying neighborhood and incidentally the largest movie palace in California for a brief period. The construction of such a large and grand theater in an outlying, predominantly blue-collar neighborhood was a brave gesture by its owners, the partnership of Greenfield and Kahn. Although many predicted that such a movie palace would never survive, the theater opened to much fanfare. The opening festivities including a speech by Mission-born mayor James "Sunny Jim" Rolph, who extolled the opening of the theater as signifying the arrival of the Mission District on the stage of civic affairs. From 1917 onward the original New Mission Theater was the largest and most architecturally lavish movie palace in the Mission District until the El Capitan Theater opened in 1928. After several years of decline, the new owner Abraham Nasser retained Timothy Pflueger to redesign sections of the building in a more up-to-date style. Pflueger's modish Art Deco façade and promenade lobby put the theater back on the map and it resumed its position of popularity until well after the Second World War.

The New Mission Theater is also significant under Criterion C as an excellent example of an early 20th Century movie palace with a façade and auditorium representing two distinct eras and the work of two of San Francisco's most significant architectural firms: the Reid Brothers and Miller & Pflueger, Architects. The theater represents two eras in the grand traditional era of movie palace design, with the Reid Brothers' 1916-17 Neoclassical Revival auditorium and Miller & Pflueger's 1932 Art Deco facade and promenade lobby. The New Mission was the first theater designed by the Reid Brothers, who went on to design a dozen or more theaters in San Francisco and surrounding communities and despite its age it remains the firm's best-preserved theater interior. Miller & Pflueger's 1932 alterations were commissioned by its new owner Abraham Nasser as a means to give the most visible components of the theater a more up-to-date appearance. Pflueger's sheet-metal pylon sign and marquee and redesigned lobby have gained significance in their own right and work well together with the Reid Brothers' design. The façade and many of the interior elements share much in common with Pflueger's contemporary Paramount Theater in Oakland and represent a rare surviving example of a theater designed by the architect in the Art Deco style.

Criterion A

Mission District

The Mission District has traditionally been San Francisco's largest and most self-contained blue-collar neighborhood. The origins of the neighborhood trace back to the founding of Mission Dolores (originally San Francisco de Assisi) in 1776, by Father Francisco Palou. In 1850 a financier and speculator named Charles L. Wilson built a plank toll road, which followed the route of present-day Mission Street, from 4th to 16th Street. By 1867, horse-drawn car lines and a steam railroad line operating along Harrison Street made the district even more accessible. Between 1870 and 1900, the Mission District developed as a middle-class residential neighborhood attracting thousands of native-born American and some Irish and German residents. After the 1906 Earthquake and Fire destroyed the largely Irish, blue-collar South of

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 10 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

Market district, the mostly undestroyed Mission attracted many of the refugees. Within a few years, the Mission had been transformed by this migration, which was accompanied by an influx of industry, into San Francisco's largest and most concentrated blue-collar neighborhood. "The Mission," as it became known, developed as a city within a city, with its own industrial base and workers' housing districts. The Mission also had its own "downtown" along Mission Street, between 16th and 24th Streets, where "downtown" department stores and banks opened neighborhood branches. This eight-block stretch of Mission Street also played host to the neighborhood's entertainment district, which was composed of taverns, Vaudeville houses and nickelodeons.

Development of the Mission Street Miracle Mile

The large-scale development of theaters in San Francisco's Mission District began after the 1906 Catastrophe leveled San Francisco's Market Street district, including all of the early nickelodeons and Vaudeville houses.¹ Responding to the destruction downtown, some entrepreneurs moved their businesses to the relatively undamaged sections of the Mission and Fillmore Districts, where business could resume quickly. Initially nickelodeon operators and Vaudeville directors converted existing commercial buildings into venues but by the 1910s they increasingly constructing custom-designed theater buildings which could be used for both live performances and "photo plays." The Wigwam/Rialto, located directly across the street from the New Mission, is a good example of this early phase of theater construction in the Mission. The Wigwam was originally constructed as a wood-frame Vaudeville hall in 1907 but in 1913 it was demolished and replaced by a larger and more ornate theater designed in the Renaissance Revival style by the firm of Crim & Scott.² When it reopened, both Vaudeville productions and silent films were featured there.

Theater construction in the Mission District accelerated during the 1910s and 1920s, mirroring national trends. By 1925, at least twenty motion picture theaters were operating on or adjacent to Mission Street. The 1927 City Directory listed the following Mission District theaters: El Capitan, the Excelsior, the Gem, the Majestic, the New Lyceum, the New Mission, the Roosevelt, the Shamrock, the State, The Victoria, the Wigwam and the York. The majority of these were located in the neighborhood's busy commercial heart, on Mission Street between 16th and 24th Streets. Although the Market Street theater district eventually rebounded, the Mission's neighborhood theater district continued to thrive and prosper, especially after the firm of Greenfield and Kahn converted their small Premium Theater into the massive New Mission "movie palace" in 1946-17. The construction of the New Mission, and later the El Capitan confirmed the position of the Mission Street Miracle Mile as a major neighborhood rival to the Market Street theater district. Mission Street's popularity as an entertainment district was amplified by its proximity to multiple streetcar lines and the residential areas "South of the Slot," and most important, its cheaper ticket prices. From the First World War until well after the end of the Second World War, the Mission District theaters provided an avenue of escape from monotonous factory jobs, cramped apartments and poverty.

Site History

Sanborn maps indicate that before 1910, several wood-frame dwellings occupied the site of the New Mission Theater. The first non-residential structure on the site was a theater named the Premium Theater. Not much is known about the appearance of this theater building beyond the fact that it was designed by an architect named E.B. Johnston and commissioned by a local

¹ San Francisco Directory, 1905.

² San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, "Draft Case Report, Wigwam (Cine Latino) Theater," February 24, 1993.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 11 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

businessman named Franklin B. Ross, who paid \$7,000 to erect the small brick building at 2550 Mission Street. The Premium opened for business June 1910 and it remained under the ownership of Franklin Ross for three years. In 1913, he sold the Premium and two other theaters in other parts of town to a partnership consisting of two immigrant movie house entrepreneurs: Louis R. Greenfield and Leon I. Kahn. Greenfield and Kahn renamed the theater the Idle Hour and operated it until 1916 when they converted the small theater into the lobby of their first movie palace, the New Mission Theater.

Greenfield & Kahn

Over the next twenty years, Louis Greenfield built a theater empire that extended as far as Hawaii.³ By the time he took his own life in 1931 at the age of 42, Greenfield had attained a similar level of success in the theater business as San Francisco's two other major movie theater dynasties: the Nasser and the Levin families. By 1922 Greenfield owned at least nine theaters. Seven of these were in San Francisco: the Quality, the Progress, two Premium Theaters, the New Mission, the New Fillmore and Realart Cinemas. Outside of San Francisco he owned the Santa Cruz, in Santa Cruz, California and the Princess in Honolulu, Hawaii. Louis Greenfield was born in Russia in 1889 to Russian Jewish parents who immigrated to New York City soon after his birth. With little formal education, Greenfield worked as a peddler in New York before getting a job in a nickelodeon. Immediately realizing the potential of this new entertainment medium, Greenfield began to seek of a more congenial climate and a new market for his newfound avocation and in 1907 he moved to San Francisco. Within a year he joined forces with fellow Russian Jewish immigrant Leon Kahn and launched his first theater, the Quality, at the corner of Eddy and Fillmore Streets in the Western Addition. After the resounding success of the Quality, Greenfield and Kahn purchased the Premium Theater chain from Franklin Ross in 1913, which included the small theater at 2550 Mission Street. Greenfield and Kahn made a conscious choice to concentrate upon the emerging neighborhood trade and studiously avoided competing with the rebuilt Market Street theater district.⁴

Design of the New Mission Theater

Facing increased competition from newer Mission District theaters such as the Poppy on 16th Street, Greenfield and Kahn decided in 1915 to redesign and expand the small Idle Hour at 2550 Mission Street. A shrewd entrepreneur, Greenfield believed that the theater business was like any other in terms of marketing strategy. Greenfield knew that an impressive theater building was just as critical an element in attracting audiences as the movie itself. In a 1922 interview with the *Chronicle* he stated: "I am not a showman...I am a business man merchandising his wares."⁵ Nonetheless until 1916, Greenfield had not had the opportunity to build his own movie palace. Greenfield later told the *Chronicle* reporter in 1922, that when he decided to redevelop the Idle Hour in 1915 he wanted "to do something big." The original New Mission Theater was the result of Greenfield's vision and in every detail it reflected his ideas of what a first-class theater should be. In 1915 Greenfield hired the Reid Brothers, Architects, one of San Francisco's most prominent architectural firms, to design his magnum opus. Greenfield had grown to admire the firm through their work on San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel, where he had had his wedding reception. According to Greenfield, he also chose the Reid Brothers because they had never designed a movie theater before. Greenfield believed that it was preferable to hire a competent

³ San Francisco Department of City Planning document.

⁴ "Good-Luck Fairy's Magic Wand, Nothing but Hard Work, San Francisco-Honolulu Theater Builder Proves This," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 10, 1922), p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 12 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

firm inexperienced in the realm of movie theater design because he would be in a better position to control the outcome. In 1922 he said:

I had ideas about the sort of house I wanted. And I knew the screen perfectly. It was my business.⁶

Construction

The Reid Brothers' design for the New Mission Theater, as the new theater was to be called, was a drastic reconstruction of the humble Idle Hour. The permit and plans were filed with the San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection in November 1915. For the parcel of land to the rear of the Idle Hour on Bartlett Street, the Reid Brothers designed a colossal new auditorium with a floorplate measuring 102' x 108'. The actual Idle Hour Theater was to be gutted and incorporated in its entirety into the New Mission Theater. With only the outer walls left intact, the interior of the Idle Hour was converted into the promenade lobby and concession area for the new theater. The Mission Street façade of the former Idle Hour would receive a new elaborate façade which was designed to compete with the increasingly ornate façades and signage of newer Mission District theaters. According to Greenfield, for quite some time the construction of the tremendous auditorium escaped the notice of Mission residents. When the concrete walls of the massive auditorium began to emerge above the surrounding buildings in early 1916 there was a fair amount of skepticism that a movie theater this large would succeed in the Mission District, or anywhere for that matter. According to Greenfield, theater experts believed that the distance between the projectors and the screen was too great.⁷ Others felt that it was not wise to construct a major "downtown theater" in the Mission. At almost 3,000 seats, the New Mission would be much larger than any of the downtown theaters until the construction of the Fox Theater in 1928.

New Mission Theater Opens

None of the dire predictions of failure dissuaded Greenfield and Kahn and the New Mission Theater opened with great fanfare six months later, in May 1916. Mayor "Sunny Jim" Rolph, the Mission Merchants Association and "several thousand residents of the Mission" attended the opening of the New Mission. Progressive Mayor Rolph, a native son of the Mission and a continual booster of his home district, spoke at the opening and congratulated Greenfield & Kahn "on their enterprise" and the people of the Mission "on having such a splendid photoplay theater."⁸

Balcony Added

A year later in 1917, Greenfield and Kahn hired the Reid Brothers again to design a 1,000-seat balcony for the New Mission Theater, bringing the seating capacity up to 2,800 and making it "San Francisco's largest uptown theater."⁹ When the New Mission Theater reopened on November 15, 1917, Greenfield and Kahn and the Mission Merchants Association staged another gala celebration. Christened with a showing of "Poor Little Peppina," a silent film starring Mary Pickford, the program also featured speeches by Samuel Rosenkrantz, president of the Mission Merchants Association, A. W. Allen of Paramount Pictures Corporation and Mayor Rolph. The

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Good-Luck Fairy's Magic Wand, Nothing but Hard Work, San Francisco-Honolulu Theater Builder Proves This," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 10, 1922), p. 1.

⁸ "Mission Theater Formally Opened," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (May 5, 1916), p. 4.

⁹ "New Mission Theatre Has Big Capacity," *San Francisco Examiner*, (November 18, 1917), p. 56.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 13 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

celebration ended on a patriotic note with a flag-raising ceremony performed by a Boy Scout troop and the Second Field Artillery from the Presidio.¹⁰ Aside from the patriotic revelry (the theater reopened during the height of American involvement in the First World War), the speeches and celebratory activities held in honor of the re-opening of the New Mission Theater attested to the growing influence of the Mission District and confidence of its residents. Twenty years earlier, the thought of the Mission District hosting the West's largest and most elegant movie house and having a Mayor born in the neighborhood give the opening speech, would have been unthinkable.

The local press gave extensive coverage to the re-opening of San Francisco's grandest movie palace and a reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote: "The theatre, one of the finest film houses in the West, has a seating capacity of 2,800 and represents an investment of \$300,000."¹¹ The Press was clearly impressed with the amenities and architecture of the New Mission Theater. Much emphasis was placed on the theater's efficient circulation, the large number of "well-placed restrooms" and the elaborate architectural detail. The dome over the balcony provided the biggest thrill to observers. The reporter for the *Examiner* wrote: "Elaborately grilled, the vaulted dome over the balcony, with its intricate design, is an architectural feature that adds grace and beauty to the huge auditorium."¹² The new theater featured many sophisticated technological advances, such as a heating and cooling system and amenities such as a 12-piece orchestra, a pipe organ, several smoking rooms and lounges, as well as "a free child care area in the adjoining garden playground."

Louis Greenfield (the partnership with Kahn ended in the late 1910s) operated The New Mission Theater successfully throughout much of the Roaring Twenties as the largest and most popular Mission District theater. Greenfield was so pleased with the success of the New Mission that he hired the Reid Brothers the next year to design an identical theater (the New Fillmore) in the Western Addition. However by the late 1920s Greenfield's run of prosperity began to erode as larger and more lavish theaters were opened both downtown and along the Mission Miracle Mile. By the mid-1920s the Market Street theater district had recovered its pre-quake grandeur with the Fox Warfield Theater (1921) and the Golden Gate Theater (1922), both of which were designed by G. Albert Lansburgh. Nonetheless, the New Mission continued to be the dominant theater in the Mission until 1928 when Ackerman, Harris and Oppenheim built the El Capitan Theater, two blocks north of the New Mission. The El Capitan, a huge 3,000-seat Spanish Colonial/Churrigueresque theater designed by Arthur Crim, began to draw audiences away from the older Mission District theaters like the New Mission. To make matters worse, the Stock Market Crash occurred the next year. The combination of increased competition and growing indebtedness took their toll on Greenfield's movie palace empire and his peace of mind and in October 1931 he killed himself. Over \$400,000 in debt, Greenfield was on the verge of losing the New Mission Theater and the rest of his empire to bankruptcy.¹³

The Nasser Family

Compelled by the need to pay off Greenfield's substantial debts, his estate sold off his theaters. In 1932, Abraham Nasser, the founder of what was to become the most famous and the longest-lived theater dynasty in San Francisco, purchased the New Mission Theater. Nasser was a

¹⁰ "New Mission Opened with Eclat," *San Francisco Examiner*, (November 16, 1917), p. 8.

¹¹ "New Mission Theatre has Big Capacity," *San Francisco Examiner*, (November 18, 1917), p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Theater Owner Found Hanged in S.F. Office," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (October 26, 1931).

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 14 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

native of what is now Lebanon and he immigrated to San Francisco in 1900. Nasser's first taste of the theater business occurred in 1908 when he opened a nickelodeon in his confectioner's shop at 18th and Collingwood Streets in Eureka Valley, as a means to increase candy sales. In 1910 Nasser realized that his nickelodeon was earning more money than the candy and in that year he constructed a new 600-seat theater at 485 Castro. In 1922 the Nassers hired the then relatively unknown architect Timothy Pflueger, of Miller & Pflueger, to design a new theater for the site. The 1,550-seat, Spanish Colonial style Castro Theater was Pflueger's first major movie palace.¹⁴ As Nasser continued to expand his theater empire he repeatedly hired Pflueger to design new theaters and to renovate others. In 1926 Nasser commissioned Pflueger to design the Moorish Revival Alhambra Theater on Polk Street and in 1931 to design the Art Deco masterpiece Paramount Theater in Oakland. In 1932 and 1935 Nasser hired Pflueger to renovate the New Mission and the Royal Theaters, respectively.¹⁵ By the late 1940s, the Nasser family had built up a chain of twelve movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. In 1949 they branched out into television production after purchasing General Service Studios in Hollywood, where they eventually produced television programs such as "I Love Lucy," "The Lone Ranger," "Mr. Ed" and "The Beverly Hillbillies."¹⁶

Pflueger Renovates the New Mission

In order to compete in the cutthroat atmosphere of the Depression, the Nassers embarked upon a campaign to update the appearance of their older theaters, especially the stylistically obsolete New Mission Theater. In early 1932, the Nassers hired Miller & Pflueger of San Francisco to redesign the façade and promenade lobby in a more modern style. Due to the Depression new construction was usually not a viable option. With materials being expensive but labor cheap, theater entrepreneurs frequently decided to renovate their older theaters rather than replace them. In San Francisco only four new movie theaters opened during the 1930s: the Bridge (1939), Timothy Pflueger's El Rey (1931), the Noe (1937), and the Presidio (1937). All four of these theaters were designed in the Art Deco style.¹⁷ Also a result of the Depression, San Francisco's movie house owners had the luxury of hiring prominent architects at bargain-rate prices to remodel their older theaters. The Art Deco style was frequently chosen by owners and architects as a fashionable, yet relatively inexpensive way to update the image of an older theater. Much of the relief ornament could be executed in stucco and did not require as much skilled labor. Often the renovation work would be limited to the most visible components of the theater, such as the sign, marquee and the entrance lobby.¹⁸ There were several other older theaters in San Francisco, such as the Midway Theater on Haight Street, that received inexpensive face-lifts. Pflueger's partial remodel of the New Mission Theater was certainly one of the most expensive and competent movie palace renovations in San Francisco, equaled only by Pflueger's later remodel of the Metro Theater.

Timothy Pflueger, one of the foremost West Coast architects to work in the Art Deco style, was the primary designer in the firm of Miller & Pflueger and he did much of the work on the New Mission Theater project.¹⁹ Pflueger left much of the original Reid Brothers' work untouched,

¹⁴ "Obituary, Emily Nasser," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 15, 1952), p. 23.

¹⁵ Building files: San Francisco Architectural Heritage.

¹⁶ Tim Kelley, "The Nasser Brothers," *Castro Star*, (July 1997).

¹⁷ Information derived from Heritage building files.

¹⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Information Series, No. 72, Curtain Up: New Life for Historic Theaters," (Washington, D.C.: 1993), p. 2.

¹⁹ San Francisco Department of Building Inspection, "Application of Mission Fillmore Theatre Co. to Make Alterations to New Mission Theatre," filed July 1, 1932.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 15 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

especially the auditorium but he radically redesigned the 1916-17 façade and promenade lobby. The auditorium, although relatively old, was still very impressive in terms of scale and ornamental effect and would have been too expensive to radically alter. Instead, Pflueger concentrated his efforts on the parts of the theater that were most easily visible from outside. He removed the Reid Brothers' elaborate 1916 façade and marquee and replaced it with the Art Deco marquee and pylon sign that exist today. Pflueger hired Alexander Aimwell Cantin to design and install the neon for the New Mission façade and sign, as he had done with the Paramount and the Castro Theaters. Pflueger retained the Reid Brothers' Neoclassical style vestibule, with its pedimented niches but he replaced the 1916 promenade lobby interior with Art Deco plaster ornament, mirrors, sinewy metal balustrades, sconces and other light fixtures and carpets. Pflueger believed in the alliance of architecture and art and he hired Hollywood set painters to paint interior murals for his theater commissions, such as the Metro Theater. The murals in the New Mission promenade lobby were probably painted by these artisans. When the New Mission Theater reopened in late 1932, its appearance from Mission Street had been radically transformed and it became the most modern looking theater in the Mission District until Albert Lansburgh's Grand Theater opened in 1940. The theater again regained its popularity and continued, in the words of local residents, to be the most popular destination for neighborhood moviegoers during the war and for several years afterward. On this basis, the year of 1950 has been selected as the end of the period of significance.

Post War Decline

Despite the gradual post-war decline of the Mission Miracle Mile and the closing of most of the Mission District theaters, the New Mission Theater continued to operate as a neighborhood movie theater until 1993. The Mission District underwent a gradual demographic and socio-economic transformation during the post-war period, as the predominantly Irish-American residents moved onward to the rapidly growing Sunset District and the suburbs of San Mateo and Marin Counties. The vacant flats and apartments of the Mission filled up with immigrants from Mexico and Central America, transforming the area into San Francisco's largest Latino neighborhood. The Nasser family continued to operate the New Mission Theater throughout the 1950s and 1960s but they did not see fit to perform any significant improvements to an aging theater in an increasingly poor neighborhood. The only changes of any significance occurred in 1961, when they furred out the vestibule walls and added a layer of white ceramic tiles.²⁰

The post-war era was an especially tough time for older urban single-screen theaters in America. A 1948 anti-trust suit heard by the United States Supreme Court forced the major movie studios to divest themselves of their theater houses. Frequently, the movie studios that sold their older inner-city theaters could not find buyers who could maintain them properly.²¹ Concurrently, the suburbanization that afflicted American cities during the post-war period lured potential audiences away from the older residential neighborhoods. Urban theaters found themselves confronted with deteriorating neighborhoods and dwindling audiences. Finally, the increasing popularity of television diverted even more people away from the act of theater going. While many theaters survived the 1950s and 1960s, few escaped without some degree of modernization or removal of deteriorating ornament. Others closed or deteriorated beyond repair.

²⁰ San Francisco Department of Building Inspection, "Application of The Keil Company to Make Alterations to 2550 Mission Street," application filed June 28, 1961

²¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, Information Series, No. 72: "Curtain Up: New Life for Historic Theaters," (Washington, D.C., 1993), p. 2.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 16 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

The New Mission Theater survived as a movie theater much longer than many of its contemporaries. The New Fillmore, the New Mission's twin, was demolished as were many other San Francisco theaters, including some of the most spectacular downtown theaters, such as the Neo-Baroque Fox Theater on Market Street. The New Mission Theater remained in business until the early 1990s, showing second-run horror movies. As an independent movie theater, the New Mission Theater did not have access to the expensive, first-run productions available to the larger multiplex chains. In May 1993, Cinema Cal, the last operator of the New Mission, decided to close the theater. In late 1998, City College of San Francisco purchased the theater, with a view to demolition to make way for a new campus building. The New Mission was then leased to a furniture retailer and used as commercial retail space until January, 2003. At present City College seeks a new buyer for the property.

Criterion C

The New Mission Theater is significant under Criterion C as an excellent example of an early 20th Century movie palace embodying "the distinctive characteristics of a type, (and) period," as well as representing "the work of a master" and "high artistic values." The New Mission Theater is the best surviving example of an early 20th Century movie palace in the Mission District and one of only a handful surviving in San Francisco with any degree of integrity. Furthermore, the building is an important work of two regionally significant architectural firms: the Reid Brothers and Miller & Pflueger.²² Both firms were recognized as being "masters" within the architectural profession when hired to work on the New Mission Theater. The New Mission auditorium was the first movie theater interior designed by the Reid Brothers and today it remains the most intact theater interior designed by the firm anywhere.²³ Timothy Pflueger, the designer of several movie theaters in San Francisco and elsewhere in Northern California, designed movie houses in a variety of styles. As a remodel, Pflueger's contribution to the New Mission is not the most important example of his work. Nonetheless, his work on the New Mission Theater is the earliest and most intact and only surviving example of the architect's work in theater design, in the Art Deco style, in San Francisco. Finally, with its soaring Art Deco façade and lobby, as well as its excellently preserved Renaissance/Neoclassical Revival auditorium, the New Mission Theater displays a very high level of artistic value and craftsmanship that is unrealizable today.

Early American Theater Design

The first motion picture in the United States was registered with the copyright office in 1893. By the end of the 19th Century most American cities began to witness the proliferation of small nickelodeons, where short silent "photo-plays" would be shown. Nickelodeons were usually housed in existing commercial buildings with flat floors and few architectural features to distinguish them as new building types. The movie craze intensified during the 1910s and by 1915 there were almost 25,000 "picture theaters" operating throughout the United States. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, the modest nickelodeons were being replaced by extravagant movie palaces displaying the "Baroque-roguey" of professional theater designers such as John Eberson, W. W. Ahlschlager and the Rapp Brothers.²⁴ Initially, inspiration for movie theater design came from traditional live-performance theaters. By the early 1920s, the movie palace construction boom was in full swing. Movie studios such as Paramount began to open larger and

²² San Francisco Architectural Heritage has evaluated and rated the significance of San Francisco's architecture firms as a part of our 1978 Downtown Survey. Firms were given ratings of A, B or C.

²³ "Good-Luck Fairy's Magic Wand Nothing But Hard Work San Francisco-Honolulu Theater Builder Proves This," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 10, 1922), p. D1.

²⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation, Information Sheet Number 16: "Preservation of Concert Halls, Opera Houses and Movies Palaces," (Washington, D.C.: 1981), p. 16.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 17 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

more ornate movie theaters that would exclusively show pictures produced in their studios. Architecture was deliberately used by big studios and individual theater owners as a means to attract audiences in a cutthroat business characterized by intense competition. Prominent signs and marquees and elaborately decorated façades were designed to attract movie-goers inside, where they would be confronted with even more ornate lobbies and auditoriums. During the 1920s, Neoclassical, Renaissance and Baroque motifs gave way to more exotic styles such as Moorish, Spanish, Mayan, Egyptian, Chinese and even more strange hybrid styles.

San Francisco's New Mission Theater is a rare and excellent example of an early 20th Century movie palace in San Francisco, and more important, the Mission District. Until after the Second World War Mission Street was lined with several large movie palaces such as the New Mission, the El Capitan, the Granada and smaller theaters like the Grand and the Tower. Early pictures of Mission Street depict a busy commercial streetscape punctuated by the sleek blade signs of movie theaters, where tired factory workers and shoppers could escape their daily routines. With its 2,800-seat auditorium and ornate and sophisticated plaster ornament, the New Mission Theater was the first movie palace in the Mission and today it is the only surviving example. The El Capitan had its auditorium demolished and replaced with a parking lot. Other theaters have been extensively remodeled as discount stores or churches. The New Mission survived as a neighborhood theater until 1993 and aside from some unfortunate painting schemes, very few changes have been made to accommodate a furniture store; even the seats remain in place.

Reid Brothers

Brothers James and Merritt Reid constituted one of the best-known and most well respected architecture firms in San Francisco around the turn of the last century. James Reid, the principal designer in the partnership, was born November 25, 1851 in St. John, New Brunswick. He studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. James Reid first came to California in 1888 after being commissioned to design the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. The following year, James moved to San Francisco where he joined his brother Merritt who was already there. The brothers formed a tremendously important firm that would last half a century, until Merritt's death in 1932.²⁵ Much of their work took place during the reconstruction of San Francisco after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. An extremely capable and versatile firm, the Reid Brothers designed hotels, office buildings, churches, single-family residences and theaters. Some of their most important works include the Fairmont Hotel of 1906, the Call Office Building of 1914, the First Congregational Church of 1914, the Cliff House of 1908 and many other prominent San Francisco landmarks.

The New Mission Theater was the first of many Reid Brothers'-designed movie houses. A year after the New Mission was completed, Greenfield and Kahn hired the Reid Brothers to design a second major theater for them: the New Fillmore Theater in the Western Addition. During the 1920s, when the theater construction boom reached its climax in San Francisco, the Reid Brothers designed and supervised the construction of at least five other major movie houses in the city, including the Coliseum, at 745 Clement Street (1918); the Alexandria, at 18th Avenue and Geary (1923); the Balboa, at 3626 Balboa Street (1925); the York, at 2795 24th Street (1926) and the Metropolitan (now the Metro), at 2047-65 Union Street (1923). Of the remaining Reid Brothers' theater interiors, the New Mission retains the greatest degree of integrity, with its 1917 auditorium remaining almost entirely intact. The auditorium of the New Mission embodies the earliest phase of the Reid Brothers' work in theater design. Their earliest theater designs, such

²⁵ Henry F. Withey, AIA, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970), p. 500.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 18 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

as the New Mission and the New Fillmore, were designed in a more traditional mode reminiscent of earlier live-performance theaters. As their career progressed throughout the 1910s and 1920s the Reid Brothers designed theaters in a variety of exotic styles, such as Egyptian for the Alexandria and Secessionist for the Coliseum. Most of the Reid Brothers theaters have either been demolished or heavily altered. The New Fillmore was demolished in the 1950s and the Coliseum was gutted in the 1960s. Other Reid Brothers theaters such as the Alexandria, the Balboa and the York have undergone interior alterations that have affected their integrity. The Metropolitan was heavily altered by Timothy Pflueger in 1942. Of the Reid Brothers' other theaters, only the New Fillmore was comparable to the New Mission in terms of style and scale.

The interior of the New Mission Theater was designed by the Reid Brothers in the Neoclassical/Renaissance Revival style, with many classical architectural details, such as the pedimented poster display cases, an arcaded staircase enclosure and the colossal gilded Corinthian columns flanking the proscenium. The interior ornament, like many theaters of its era, was purposefully designed in an overwrought manner, with gilded, over-scaled architectural elements, murals depicting classical mythological subjects and imaginative sculptural relief. Unlike most other Reid Brothers' theaters, the interior of the New Mission's auditorium is amazingly intact, requiring very little beside paint removal and patching to bring it back to its original luster. The interior of the New Mission Theater brought myth and luxury to the lives of working people for the price of a movie ticket and its current appearance completely reflects its original role in the life of the Mission District during the first half of the 20th Century.

Timothy Pflueger

The Art Deco Mission Street facade and promenade lobby together form another architecturally significant component of the New Mission Theater. Designed in 1932, by Timothy Pflueger, a partner in the firm of Miller & Pflueger, these elements of the theater represent the distinctive work of one of the most widely acclaimed architects to work in San Francisco and Northern California from the 1920s to the 1940s. Pflueger was born in 1892 in Stockton, California. He studied architecture at San Francisco's Beaux Arts Institute of Design and worked in several offices until the conclusion of the First World War, when he formed a partnership with his mentor, J. R. Miller. Pflueger, the primary designer of the partnership, was responsible for the design of many important San Francisco landmarks. Some of the most important examples include: the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building of 1925, the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange of 1930, The Medico-Dental Building at 450 Sutter Street of 1929; the Oakland-Bay Bridge of 1936 (in collaboration with Arthur Brown, Jr.) and San Francisco City College's Phelan Campus in 1942. Pflueger was also responsible for the design and remodeling of nine motion picture theaters throughout the Bay Area and Northern California during his short career (he died at the age of 54 in 1946). Several of these theaters have attained national significance, including the Castro Theater of 1922 (San Francisco Landmark #100), the Alhambra Theater of 1928 (San Francisco Landmark #217) and the Paramount Theater in Oakland, a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor that can be bestowed on a structure.

The movie palaces designed or renovated by Timothy Pflueger were part of a larger body of important movie palaces being erected throughout California during the 1920s and 1930s, which included such prominent theaters as the Wilton in Los Angeles and the El Capitan in Hollywood, by Pflueger's contemporary, G. Albert Lansburgh. Pflueger was one of the most prolific and innovative theater architects in Northern California during the 1920s and 1930s. Pflueger's imaginative and exuberant design sensibilities were perfect for this building. Kevin Starr, California's State Historian writes:

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 19 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

Pflueger's architecture was at once romantic, rational, high-tech and festive. He had a genius for communicating well-being to the people who used his buildings or sat over drinks on a magic evening in one of his lounges. Pflueger designed buildings for people who liked cities and who liked themselves.²⁶

As a remodeling of an older theater Pflueger's contribution to the New Mission Theater is not the most important or unadulterated example of his work. With that said, Pflueger's work on the New Mission went above and beyond the scope of most theater remodels of the 1930s. With the Depression in full-swing owners of older theaters found it more economical to hire prominent architects at bargain-basement rates to update the appearance of their stylistically dated movie houses. Often this work did not depart beyond replacing the carpeting or the seats and possibly covering an ornate but expensive-to-maintain façade with stucco. To his credit, Abraham Nasser gave Pflueger a significant amount of leeway when they hired Miller & Pflueger to renovate the New Mission Theater. Pflueger wisely left the Reid Brothers' jaw-dropping auditorium alone aside from updating the carpet and bathrooms. Instead the architect concentrated on radically redesigning the façade and promenade lobby. Pflueger used elements employed in the design of his contemporary masterpiece, the Paramount, in the reconstruction of the New Mission, including the towering sheet metal Art Deco sign/façade, the aluminum balustrades and fixtures, the Mayan and Aztec-inspired plaster treatments and the imaginative murals painted by Pflueger's artist collaborators.

As a surviving movie palace that embodies "high artistic values" and craftsmanship, the New Mission Theater is unmatched in the Mission District and matched by few other theaters in the City, with the possible exception of the Metro Theater (another theater originally designed by the Reid Brothers and remodeled by Pflueger). The Reid Brothers' auditorium displays an incredible level of design sensibility, detailing and craftsmanship. Trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, James Reid had an able grasp on how to handle classical ornament, creating a fantasy world of 50' high gilded columns and pilasters, coffered ceilings and latticework domes. The interior detailing of the New Mission's auditorium is largely unmatched in San Francisco in terms of scale, quality and integrity. Its only major competitors aside from the Metro include live-performance theaters such as the San Francisco Opera House, designed by Arthur Brown, Jr. and G. Albert Lansburgh in 1931, the Fox Warfield Theater, designed by G. Albert Lansburgh in 1921 and the Geary Theater, designed in 1909 by the firm of Bliss & Faville. Most important, aside from inappropriate paint treatments, the auditorium of the New Mission Theater survives completely intact, having been spared the almost inevitable periodic remodeling undergone by most other theaters in San Francisco. Although more restrained and less costly than the original Reid Brothers' interior, Pflueger's promenade lobby and façade are important examples of artistry and craftsmanship. The murals on the walls of the lobby painted by experienced set painters have been painted over with a thin layer of whitewash but they survive intact beneath. Pflueger's imaginative Mesoamerican and Greek-inspired plasterwork in this space is very unusual in its mixture of themes and high level of execution. Finally, Pflueger's façade, a collaboration with sign fabricator Alexander Aimwell Cantin (who also worked on the Paramount) displays the architect's signature Aztec and Mayan-inspired variant of the Art Deco.

²⁶ Butterfield & Butterfield, *The John Pflueger Collection*, (San Francisco: 1989).

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORTDATE: *24 October 2003*

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 20 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

Conclusion

Since the early years of this century, movie-going has continually been one of America's favorite pastimes. Movies have long been entrenched in American culture as a vehicle for disseminating information. They have played a critical role in determining trends in style, recreation, language and even thoughts and social mores. The history of this medium is inextricably linked to the history of the United States during the 20th Century. The association of going to the movies with notions of fantasy and escape from the mundane realities of everyday life greatly influenced the design of early movie palace architecture. Like the movies themselves, the fanciful and opulent architecture of early movie palaces transported the audience to exotic realms before the movie even started. The New Mission Theater is especially interesting, embodying as it does the work of two important architectural firms. The New Mission Theater briefly enjoyed the limelight as the West's largest and grandest theater. Although that title was quickly eclipsed, the theater continued to serve as a cornerstone in the Mission District's Miracle Mile until the movie houses began to go silent, one after another, in the Post war period. After Mission Dolores, the New Mission Theater is probably the best known visual landmark in the neighborhood with its 70' sign spelling out the name of the theater and the neighborhood simultaneously. In a similar fashion as the Castro Theater, the New Mission Theater has become an icon of the neighborhood.

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 21 of 23

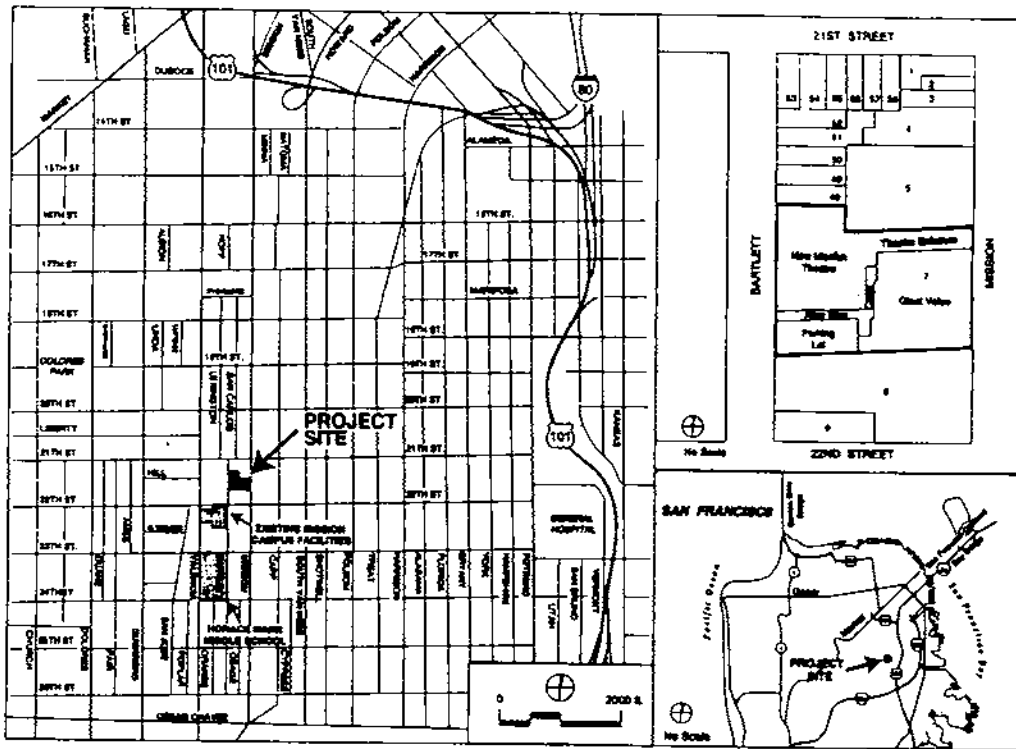
LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

CROSS STREET REFERENCE MAP



LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 22 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

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"New Mission Opens with Eclat," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 16, 1917.

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LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

DATE: 24 October 2003

CASE NO.:

APPROVED:

PAGE 23 of 23

LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:

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Architectural and Building Record Repositories:

California Historical Society, San Francisco, California: files on motion picture houses

Pflueger Archives, Glen Ellen, California: drawings and correspondence files for New Mission Theater

San Francisco Architectural Heritage: building and architect files

San Francisco Archives, San Francisco Public Library: historic photographs

San Francisco Assessor's Office: ownership records

San Francisco Department of Building Inspection: building permits and drawings

San Francisco Water Department: water service application

RATINGS

The New Mission Theater is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PREPARED BY

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ADDRESS

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ATTACHMENTS

Check all that apply.

523A , 523B , 523L (continuation sheets)

Context Statement

Other

3 x 5 original black and white archival quality photos (11) – one original set only

8 ½ x 11 color images (19) – color for original set only, all others b&w copies

copies of floor plans, sections and façade elevation by Timothy Pflueger, dated 1932 (4)

historic images (2)

State of California — The Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
 HRI # _____
 Trinomial _____
 NRHP Status Code _____

Other Listings _____
 Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

Page 1 of 2 Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder)

P1. Other Identifier: *New Mission Theater*

P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted a. County *San Francisco*

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

b. USGS 7.5' Quad _____ Date _____ T _____ ; R _____ ; 1/4 of _____ 1/4 of Sec _____ ; B.M. _____

c. Address *2550 Mission Street* City *San Francisco* Zip *94110*

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone _____ ; _____ mE/ _____ mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

Parcel No. *3616/007*

P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The New Mission Theater, a 2,800-seat single screen movie theater, is located on a large, irregularly-shaped parcel in the heart of San Francisco's Mission District. The immediate setting is dominated by a mixture of early 20th century one-and two-story commercial buildings. The New Mission Theater is an interesting juxtaposition of two building campaigns. It is composed of an Art Deco façade and promenade lobby, both designed in 1932 by architect Timothy Pflueger, and a large Renaissance/Neoclassical Revival auditorium, designed in 1916-17 by the Reid Brothers. The facade is a tripartite arrangement consisting of a large opening and ticket booth at street-level; a cantilevered marquee and streamlined parapet at the roofline, and a large freestanding pylon sign, a 70'-tall sheet metal sign is one of the most recognizable architectural landmarks in the Mission District. Pflueger's façade and promenade lobby embody the architect's unique use of Art Deco and Mesoamerican imagery as rendered in plaster wall relief, murals, etched glass and ornamental metalwork. The 1917 auditorium is one of the largest surviving movie palace interiors in San Francisco and is less heavily altered than the promenade lobby, retaining most of its original architectural detailing. The interior of the auditorium is characterized by ornate, over-scaled Neoclassical and Renaissance architectural elements, such as the gilded Corinthian Order columns and pilasters, flood lights hidden within plaster urns, elaborate Neoclassical Revival cornice moldings and fanciful murals. The theater has an "L" shaped plan; the promenade lobby is 30' wide and it extends 142' to the middle of the block, where it meets the 102' x 108' auditorium.

P3b. Resource Attributes: *HP10 - Theater*

P4. Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5a. Photo or Drawing (Photo required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



P5b. Description of Photo:
 (View, date, accession #)

View is looking south along Mission Street, dated 2003.

P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:

Historic Prehistoric Both

P7. Owner and Address:

*San Francisco Community College
 33 Gough Street
 San Francisco, CA 94103*

P8. Recorded by:

*Katherine T. Petrin
 Architectural Resources Group
 Pier 9, The Embarcadero
 San Francisco, CA 94111*

P9. Date Recorded: *24 October 2003*

P10. Survey Type (Describe)

Intensive.

P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

National Register Nomination, submitted February, 2001

Attachments:

None Continuation Sheet District Record Rock Art Record Other (List)
 Location Map Building, Structure, and Object Record Linear Feature Record Artifact Record
 Sketch Map Archaeological Record Milling Station Record Photograph Record

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Page 2 of 2

NRHP Status Code _____

Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) _____

B1. Historic Name: *New Mission Theater*

B2. Common Name: *New Mission Theater*

B3. Original Use: *single-screen movie theater*

B4. Present Use: *vacant*

B5. Architectural Style: *Art Deco (façade and promenade lobby) Renaissance/Neoclassical Revival (auditorium)*

B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

Originally designed in 1916-17 in the Neoclassical style by the Reid Brothers, the building was altered in 1932 by architect Timothy Pflueger who updated the façade and lobby in the Art Deco style. Modifications occurred in the 1960s included suspended acoustic tile ceiling and ceramic wall panels which cover historic fabric in the vestibule.

B7. Moved? No Yes Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

B8. Related Features:

B9a. Architect: *Reid Brothers (1916); Timothy Pflueger (1932)*

b. Builder: *unknown*

B10. Significance: **Theme** *Theater Architecture*

Area *Mission District, San Francisco*

Period of Significance *1916-1950*

Property Type *theater*

Applicable Criteria *A, C*

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

The New Mission Theater is significant at the local level under National Register Criteria A and C. The period of significance begins with the date of construction and closes with the approximate date at which the Mission theater district began to decline and lose its important role in the life of the neighborhood. The New Mission Theater is significant under Criterion A for its role in the establishment and evolution of the Mission District's Vaudeville and movie house district at the beginning of the 20th century. As the first "downtown" movie palace constructed in an outlying neighborhood (the largest movie palace in California at the time of construction), it opened to much fanfare. From 1917 onward the original New Mission Theater was the largest and most architecturally lavish movie palace in the Mission District until the El Capitan Theater opened in 1928. In 1932 Timothy Pflueger was commissioned to redesign sections of the building in a more up-to-date style. Due to Pflueger's modish Art Deco façade and promenade lobby, the theater resumed its position of popularity until after the Second World War. The New Mission Theater is also significant under Criterion C as an excellent example of an early 20th century movie palace with a façade and auditorium representing two distinct eras and the work of two of San Francisco's most significant architectural firms: the Reid Brothers and Miller & Pflueger, Architects. The New Mission was the first theater designed by the Reid Brothers, who later designed more than a dozen theaters in San Francisco area. The New Mission remains the firm's best-preserved theater interior. Miller & Pflueger's 1932 alterations, including the sheet-metal pylon sign and marquee and redesigned lobby have gained significance in their own right and complement the Reid Brothers' design. Overall, the New Mission Theater retains a high degree of integrity. The theater retained its original use as a single screen theater from 1916 until 1993. On the exterior, which exhibits peeling paint, limited graffiti, and broken neon tubes, the marquee, blade sign and façade are intact. The 1917 auditorium remains almost entirely intact. The theater has suffered from years of deferred maintenance and some unsympathetic, but mostly reversible alterations.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: *HP10 - Theater*

B12. References:

See complete bibliography attached to both National Register Nomination submitted February, 2001 and to Local Landmark Application submitted November, 2003.

B13. Remarks:

Katherine T. Petrin

B14. Evaluator: *Architectural Resources Group*

Date of Evaluation: *24 October 2003*

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch Map with north arrow required.)

