

[Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan Street]

**Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, as a Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1.**

NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncoded text** are in plain Arial font.  
**Additions to Codes** are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.  
**Deletions to Codes** are in ~~*strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*~~.  
**Board amendment additions** are in double-underlined Arial font.  
**Board amendment deletions** are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.  
**Asterisks (\* \* \* \*)** indicate the omission of unchanged Code subsections or parts of tables.

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

Section 1. Findings.

(a) CEQA and Land Use Findings.

(1) The Planning Department has determined that the Planning Code amendment proposed in this ordinance is subject to a Categorical Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq., "CEQA") pursuant to Section 15308 of California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15000 et seq., the Guidelines for implementation of the statute for actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (in this case, landmark designation). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 201286 and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board of Supervisors affirms this determination.

1                   (2) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that  
2 the proposed landmark designation of Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan Street, Assessor's  
3 Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036 ("Lyon-Martin House"), will serve the public necessity,  
4 convenience, and welfare for the reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission  
5 Resolution No. 1170, recommending approval of the proposed designation, which is  
6 incorporated herein by reference.

7                   (3) The Board of Supervisors finds that the proposed landmark designation of  
8 Lyon-Martin House is consistent with the General Plan and with Planning Code Section  
9 101.1(b) for the reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 1170.

10               (b) General Findings.

11                   (1) Pursuant to Charter Section 4.135, the Historic Preservation Commission  
12 has authority "to recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of landmark designations  
13 and historic district designations under the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors."

14                   (2) The Landmark Designation Fact Sheet was prepared by Planning  
15 Department Preservation staff. All preparers meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional  
16 Qualification Standards for historic preservation program staff, as set forth in Code of Federal  
17 Regulations Title 36, Part 61, Appendix A. The report was reviewed for accuracy and  
18 conformance with the purposes and standards of Article 10 of the Planning Code.

19                   (3) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of February  
20 17, 2021, reviewed Planning Department staff's analysis of the historical significance of Lyon-  
21 Martin House set forth in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet dated February 17, 2021.

22                   (4) On October 20, 2020, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No.  
23 507-20, initiating landmark designation of the Lyon-Martin House, identified in that resolution  
24 as 649-651 Duncan Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot Nos. 036 and 037, as a  
25 San Francisco Landmark pursuant to Section 1004.1 of the Planning Code. On October 30,

1 2020, the Mayor approved the resolution. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board  
2 of Supervisors in File No. 201138.

3 (5) On February 17, 2021, after holding a public hearing on the proposed  
4 designation and having considered the specialized analyses prepared by Planning  
5 Department staff and the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation  
6 Commission recommended designation of Lyon-Martin House, including 651 Duncan Street,  
7 Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, but excluding 649 Duncan Street, Assessor's  
8 Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 037, as a landmark consistent with the standards set forth in  
9 Section 1004 of the Planning Code by Resolution No. 1170. Said resolution is on file with the  
10 Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 201386.

11 (6) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Lyon-Martin House, 651  
12 Duncan Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, has a special character and  
13 special historical interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will further the  
14 purposes of and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code. In  
15 doing so, the Board hereby incorporates by reference the findings of the Landmark  
16 Designation Fact Sheet, as revised per the Historic Preservation Commission's  
17 recommendation.

## 18 19 Section 2. Designation.

20 Pursuant to Section 1004 of the Planning Code, Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan  
21 Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, is hereby designated as a San  
22 Francisco Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Section 1004. Appendix A to  
23 Article 10 of the Planning Code is hereby amended to include this property.

## 24 25 Section 3. Required Data.

1 (a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the parcel  
2 located at 651 Duncan Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, in San  
3 Francisco's Noe Valley neighborhood.

4 (b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and  
5 shown in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, as revised by the Historic Preservation  
6 Commission at its February 17, 2021 hearing, and other supporting materials contained in  
7 Planning Department Record Docket No. 2020-011305DES. In brief, the Lyon-Martin House  
8 is eligible for local designation as it is associated with events that have made a significant  
9 contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco history and with persons significant to San  
10 Francisco history. Specifically, designation of Lyon-Martin House is proper given association  
11 with the history of development of homophile organizations in San Francisco, specifically the  
12 Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian-rights organization in the United States, and as the  
13 longtime home of pioneering lesbian-rights activists, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. The period  
14 of significance is 1955 to 2020.

15 (c) The particular features that should be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined  
16 necessary, are those generally shown in photographs and described in the Landmark  
17 Designation Fact Sheet, as revised by the Historic Preservation Commission at its February  
18 17, 2021 hearing, which can be found in Planning Department Record Docket No. 2020-  
19 011305DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set  
20 forth. Specifically, the following features at the Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan Street,  
21 Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, should be preserved or replaced in-kind:

22 (1) Location of the house on the property, which is set back and up from the  
23 street with the house at the high point of a hillside sloping downward to the street;

24 (2) Physical and visual connection between front façade of the house and street;

25 (3) Massing and roof form at front half of building, which consists of a one-story-

over-basement expression, flat roofs with overhanging boxed eaves that extend along front (north) and side (west) elevations, and clerestory-like expression of front façade where the building steps up with the topography;

(4) Cladding at elevations visible from street, which consists of natural, wood shingles, painted wood corner boards, and painted cement stucco;

(5) Oversize picture window at front (north) façade, which opens into living room, and which consists of single-light, fixed, wood sash flanked by single-light, casement wood sash;

(6) Window openings at upper portion of front (north) façade that open into dining room/office;

(7) Location of primary entry at side (west) elevation;

(8) Living room configuration, specifically the volume of the room, its location at front of house, and its spatial relationship with the rest of the interior; and,

(9) Dining room/office configuration, specifically the volume of the room and its location within the floorplan relative to the living room.

#### Section 4. Effective Date.

This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not

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1 sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the  
2 Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

3  
4 APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
5 DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

6 By: /s/ Victoria Wong

7 VICTORIA WONG  
8 Deputy City Attorney

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**City and County of San Francisco**  
**Tails**  
**Ordinance**

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

**File Number:** 210286

**Date Passed:** May 11, 2021

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate Lyon-Martin House, 651 Duncan Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 6604, Lot No. 036, as a Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1.

April 26, 2021 Land Use and Transportation Committee - RECOMMENDED

May 04, 2021 Board of Supervisors - PASSED ON FIRST READING

Ayes: 11 - Chan, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Melgar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani and Walton

May 11, 2021 Board of Supervisors - FINALLY PASSED

Ayes: 11 - Chan, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Melgar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani and Walton

File No. 210286

**I hereby certify that the foregoing  
Ordinance was FINALLY PASSED on  
5/11/2021 by the Board of Supervisors of  
the City and County of San Francisco.**

Angela Calvillo  
Clerk of the Board

London N. Breed  
Mayor

5/21/21

Date Approved



## ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION FACT SHEET



Phyllis Lyon (front) and Del Martin (back) standing on walkway in front of their home at 651 Duncan Street  
Source: Eric Luse, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1989<sup>1</sup>

<b>Historic Name:</b>	Lyon-Martin House
<b>Address:</b>	651 Duncan Street
<b>Block/ Lot(s):</b>	6604/036
<b>Parcel Area:</b>	Lot 036: 2,848 sq. ft
<b>Zoning:</b>	RH-1 (Residential-House, One Family) 40-X Height and Bulk District
<b>Year Built:</b>	Unknown. A building permit was issued in 1907 for construction of a small dwelling (20 feet by 20 feet) at rear of 651 Duncan Street. The current building

<sup>1</sup> Bill Van Niekerken, "A history of gay rights in San Francisco," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 22, 2018. Accessed January 30, 2021 via <https://projects.sfchronicle.com/2018/sf-pride-timeline/>.



	footprint and location on the parcel appears to have been constructed sometime between 1914 and 1938, based on information from historic maps and aerial photographs.
Architect:	Unknown
Prior Historic Studies/Other Designations:	<p>Donna J. Graves &amp; Shayne E. Watson. <i>Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco</i>. Prepared for the City &amp; County of San Francisco (March 2016)</p> <p>Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson. <i>LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History</i>, "Chapter 25: Placing LGBTQ Histories in the City by the Bay." Prepared for National Park Foundation and National Park Service (2016)</p> <p>Megan E. Springate. <i>LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History</i>, "Chapter 18: LGBTQ Civil Rights in America." Prepared for National Park Foundation and National Park Service (2016)</p>
Prior HPC Actions:	None

Significance Criteria:	<p><u>Events</u>: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.</p> <p><u>Persons</u>: Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.</p>
Period of Significance:	The period of significance for Lyon-Martin House is 1955-2020. These dates reflect the date that Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin purchased the property and extends through their 65-year residence at same.
Statement of Significance:	<p>The Lyon-Martin House, located at 651 Duncan Street, is eligible for designation as a San Francisco Landmark for association with significant historic events in the homophile movement in San Francisco, specifically with the founding of Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the nation's first lesbian-rights organization, and for association with Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, both internationally known lesbian-rights activists and feminists. As outlined in <i>Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco</i>, the Lyon-Martin House is associated with significant events and persons under Theme 4: Homophile Movements (1950s to 1960s) as one of the genesis points and meeting places during establishment of homophile organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), founded in San Francisco in 1955.<sup>2</sup> The Daughters of Bilitis was the first national lesbian rights organization in the United States. The property is also significant as the longtime home of pioneering lesbian-rights and feminist activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were both internationally known lesbian-rights and feminist activists who were also the first same-sex couple to be married in San Francisco (twice). This was their residence and the place that is most representative of their productive lives as activists, organizers, writers, educators, and icons.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, March 2016, 341.

Assessment of Integrity:	<p>The seven aspects of integrity as defined by the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>The Lyon-Martin House, owned and occupied by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin between 1955 and 2020, retains a high degree of integrity to convey its cultural significance. The property retains a high degree of integrity of location, association, setting, materials, and feeling. The property also retains integrity of design and workmanship, however, these physical aspects of integrity are less important to conveying cultural significance.</p> <p>Overall, the Department has determined that the Lyon-Martin House retains integrity to convey historical and cultural significance as the former residence of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, where they worked to organize Daughters of Bilitis and other lesbian-rights organizations.</p>
Character-Defining Features:	<p>The character-defining features of the Lyon-Martin House property are those tangible physical elements that convey its cultural significance, as follows:</p> <p><i>Exterior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Location of the house on the property, which is set back and up from the street with the house at the high point of a hillside sloping downward to the street;</li><li>• Physical and visual connection between front façade of the house and street;</li><li>• Massing and roof form at front half of building, which consists of a one-story-over-basement expression, flat roofs with overhanging boxed eaves that extend along front (north) and side (west) elevations, and clerestory-like expression of front façade where the building steps up with the topography;</li><li>• Cladding at elevations visible from street, which consists of natural, wood shingles, painted wood corner boards, and painted cement stucco;</li><li>• Oversize picture window at front (north) façade, which opens into living room, and which consists of single-light, fixed, wood sash flanked by single-light, casement wood sash;</li><li>• Window openings at upper portion of front (north) façade that open into dining room/office;</li><li>• Location of primary entry at side (west) elevation;</li></ul> <p><i>Interior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Living room configuration, specifically the volume of the room, its location at front of house, and its spatial relationship with the rest of the interior; and,</li><li>• Dining room/office configuration, specifically the volume of the room and its location within the floorplan relative to the living room.</li></ul>

<sup>3</sup> “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” National Register Bulletin, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995, 44.

## Statement of Significance Summary

The Lyon-Martin House, located at 651 Duncan Street, is eligible for designation as a San Francisco Landmark for association with significant historic events, specifically with the development of the homophile movement in San Francisco through the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the nation's first lesbian-rights organization, and for association with Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, both internationally known pioneering lesbian-rights activists. As outlined in *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, the Lyon-Martin House is associated with significant events and persons under Theme 4: Homophile Movements (1950s to 1960s) as one of the genesis points and meeting places during establishment of early homophile organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), founded in San Francisco in 1955.<sup>4</sup> The Daughters of Bilitis was the first lesbian-rights organization in the United States. The property is also significant as the longtime home of pioneering lesbian-rights and feminist activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were both internationally known lesbian-rights activists with deep roots in the LGBTQ civil rights movement and were also the first same-sex couple to be married in San Francisco (twice). 651 Duncan Street<sup>5</sup> was their residence and the place that is most representative of their productive lives as activists, organizers, writers, educators, and icons. The Daughters of Bilitis, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, and "...their home in San Francisco's Noe Valley neighborhood" are also discussed in the National Park Service's *LGBT America, A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*.<sup>6</sup> The period of significance is 1955 to 2020.

## **Persons: Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.**

The Lyon-Martin House is significant as the longtime home of pioneering lesbian-rights and feminist activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. While both women are internationally-known lesbian icons for their historic symbolic (2004) and legal (2008) marriages, their "...lives are even more profound, having both resisted the Lavender Scare and forged a new definition of equality in defiance of inculcated gender and societal stereotypes...They were pioneers of self-acceptance."<sup>7</sup> From initially meeting at work in 1950 to becoming a couple when they moved into a rental apartment in 1953 to purchasing 649 and 651 Duncan Street together in 1955, and on through their decades of activism and political organizing they were "...pioneers, tireless activists and together a symbol of what it means to fight for equality and love in the LGBTQ community."<sup>8</sup> Individually and together they were determined organizers, co-founders, and chairs of local, state, and national lesbian-rights organizations, commissions, and institutions that defied conservative norms, that expanded education and awareness about the lives and issues important to lesbians and gay men, and that were among – or were the precursors for – the most influential and enduring homophile organizations in the United States.

They were co-founders and active members of the following organizations:

- Daughters of Bilitis (1955) – nation's first lesbian-rights organization.
- Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) (1964) – first religious organization with "homosexual" in

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<sup>4</sup> Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, March 2016, 341.

<sup>5</sup> Martin and Lyon also purchased the adjacent parcel at 649 Duncan Street in 1955 and owned both parcels until 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Megan E. Springate, "Chapter 18: LGBTQ Civil Rights in America," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, 2016, Sec 18, 21-22 and 22, footnote 68.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Ocamb, "Phyllis Lyon gives a happy middle finger to the Lavender Scare," *Los Angeles Blade*, April 20, 2020. Accessed January 23, 2021 via <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2020/04/20/phyllis-lyon-gives-a-happy-middle-finger-to-the-lavender-scare/>.

<sup>8</sup> Alex Madison, "LGBT History Month: Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin Paved way for lesbians," *Windy City Times*, October 11, 2017. Accessed January 23, 2021 via <https://www.windycitytimes.com/lgbt/LGBT-HISTORY-MONTH-Phyllis-Lyon-Del-Martin-paved-way-for-lesbians/60664.html>.

the title; the organization lobbied city government to end police harassment of gay men and lesbians and change discriminatory laws.

- Citizen's Alert (1965) – a citizen/civil rights group dealing with police brutality complaints that formed following the public outrage at intimidation tactics of the police at the CRH New Year's fundraiser.
- San Francisco Women's Centers (1970) – now The Women's Building, a women-led community space that advocates for self-determination, gender equality, and social justice.
- Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club (1972) – first gay political club in the United States.
- Lesbian Lobby (1978)
- San Francisco Feminist Democrats (1978)
- Lesbian Caucus (1978)
- Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) (1987) – national network of Old Lesbian feminist activists from many backgrounds working for justice and the well-being of all Old Lesbians.<sup>9</sup>

The couple's dedication to lesbian rights has been recognized and celebrated. Martin and Lyon received a Certificate of Honor from supervisors Harvey Milk, Carol Ruth Silver, and Ella Hill Hutch (1978). Lyon-Martin Health Services, founded in 1979 as a clinic for lesbians who lacked access to non-judgmental, affordable, health care was named in honor of the couple, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California awarded the couple its highest honor, the Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award (1990).<sup>10</sup> Both women also were appointed as delegates to the White House Council on Aging (1995). Lyon and Martin were inducted into the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association's LGBT Journalists Hall of Fame (2005).<sup>11</sup> They were Grand Marshalls of the San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Freedom Day Parade (1989) and for many Gay Pride parades and festivals around the US.

A veritable lesbian-rights powerhouse together, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon are no less accomplished or historically significant individually. Del Martin was an activist, journalist, lecturer, and author, and the first "out of the closet" lesbian elected to the national board of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1973 and the first to be appointed to the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women in 1977. Martin, who authored *Battered Wives* (1976, updated 1981) and numerous other articles and book chapters on the subject, was also a nationally known advocate for battered women, and was a co-founder of the Coalition for Justice for Battered Women (1975), La Casa de las Madres (a shelter for battered women) founded in 1976, and the California Coalition against Domestic Violence (1977).<sup>12</sup> In June 2019, Del Martin was honored as one of the inaugural fifty American "pioneers, trailblazers, and heroes" inducted on the National LGBTQ Wall of Honor within the Stonewall National Monument (SNM) in New York City's Stonewall Inn.

Phyllis Lyon received this same honor in 2020 when she was inducted on the National LGBTQ Wall of Honor. Phyllis Lyon was an activist, journalist, lecturer, sex educator, and author who "...lectured and wrote extensively on human sexuality, censorship, and the Lesbian and Feminist Movements."<sup>13</sup> Lyon was appointed in 1976 to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC) by San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, and she served as Chair in 1982-1983. She also was chair of the HRC's Lesbian/Gay Advisory Committee. Other appointments

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<sup>9</sup> OLOC Vision Statement, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change website, accessed March 3, 2021 at <https://oloc.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Lyon-Martin Health Services website, accessed January 23, 2021 via <https://www.healthright360.org/agency/lyon-martin-health-services>.

<sup>11</sup> Alex Madison, "LGBT History Month: Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin Paved way for lesbians," *Windy City Times*, October 11, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

included the California State Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention from 1980-1983, where she chaired the Commission's Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee from 1982-1983 and serving on board of advisors for Senior Action in a Gay Environment in 1983.

Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were both internationally known lesbian-rights activists and intellectuals who were the first same-sex couple to be married in San Francisco (twice). Although marriage equality was not initially a focus of their activism, the couple seized the opportunity, both personally and as activists, when given the chance to marry. Kate Kendall, personal friend of the couple and former executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, called the couple in 2004 and asked them if they would be willing to do one more thing for the LGBTQ-rights movement. After agreeing over the phone, Martin and Lyon were married by (former) Mayor Gavin Newsom in a small ceremony in City Hall on February 12, 2004. Martin recalled that after the low-key ceremony with a few friends and staffers, the couple drove themselves home to no fanfare and went about their day as usual. After the California Supreme Court voided theirs and all other marriages performed in San Francisco during this period, the couple became plaintiffs in *In re Marriage Cases* (2004-2008) for marriage equality. When this lawsuit eventually succeeded in 2008, Martin and Lyon, with much fanfare and international press attention, were again the first couple to be married in San Francisco. Following Martin's death several months later in 2008, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, "We would never have marriage equality in California if it weren't for Del and Phyllis."<sup>14</sup>

## Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon

Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin met in Seattle, Washington in 1950, while they were both working for building trades publications. Lyon recalls that she was particularly excited about Martin coming to *Pacific Builder and Engineer* in Seattle because she was also from San Francisco and remembers how assured and confident Del seemed on her first day in the office.<sup>15</sup> Lyon wrote that she remembered seeing Del on her first day at work in Seattle and that Del was "...an attractive, short, stocky woman with dark hair wearing a gabardine suit, heels and carrying a briefcase. It was the latter that caught my attention—I had never seen a woman carry a briefcase before."<sup>16</sup> The first weekend after Martin arrived in Seattle

...Phyllis had a party to welcome her to town. Phyllis had an apartment that was very close to the office. It was a small place with a living room, kitchen and bathroom and a Murphy bed that pulled down into the living room. Phyllis invited many of the people she and Del worked with as a "Welcome to Pacific Builder and Engineer" party.<sup>17</sup>

The pair quickly became friends and would often meet for martinis after work. They were platonic friends for two years before becoming romantically involved, although both would later recall hints of flirtation. Until Martin came out as a lesbian to Lyon and another co-worker one night during after work drinks, Lyon says that she "...didn't know a lesbian from a hole in the ground. I had never heard the word. I didn't find out about lesbians

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<sup>14</sup> Alex Madison, "Lyon, Martin paved the way for lesbians," *Erie Gay News*, no date. Accessed February 1, 2021 via <https://www.eriegaynews.com/news/article.php?recordid=201711phyllisanddel>.

<sup>15</sup> David Mixner and Dennis Bailey, "Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon: Wanting More" in Mixner & Bailey, *Brave Journeys: Profiles in Gay and Lesbian Courage* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000). Quoted in Dianna Lee Johnson, *A Narrative Life Story of Activist Phyllis Lyon and Her Reflections on a Life with Del Martin* (Masters Theses. 22), 61. Accessed at <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=theses>

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Lyon, "Del Martin (1921- )" in Vern L. Bullough, ed. *Before Stonewall* (Binghamton, New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002). Quoted in Johnson, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, 60-61. Also, in Ocamb, "Phyllis Lyon gives a happy middle finger to the Lavender Scare," April 20, 2020.

until I found out about Del..."<sup>18</sup> At around the same time as this revelation, Lyon was planning to quit her job and return to San Francisco. Lyon relates that "knowing that [she] was leaving Seattle, 'Del came on a little stronger than she had before.'"<sup>19</sup> Martin remarked in a Terry Gross interview, "I made a pass and she completed it. I had to, she was going to leave for good."<sup>20</sup> The pair became lovers shortly before Lyon left Seattle. To spend more time together, Martin elected to join Lyon on the first leg of the trip to San Francisco.

After visiting San Francisco together, Martin returned to Seattle and Lyon left on her long-planned road trip with her sister, Tricia/Trisha. Though the road trip did not go as planned, and Lyon and her sister were forced to spend a month in New Orleans while Trisha was hospitalized after contracting polio, Lyon did find herself missing and wanting to talk with Martin. Soon after Lyon returned to San Francisco, Martin began coming for visits and the two of them went out on dates before returning to sleep at their respective parental homes.<sup>21</sup> Lyon began looking for an apartment and found one that was big enough for two people on the ground floor of a four-unit building at 685 Castro Street in the Castro.<sup>22</sup> Although she was uncertain about moving in together and becoming a couple, which is what Martin wanted, Lyon determined that she would like to give it a try, and Martin moved into the Castro apartment on Valentine's Day 1953.

They lived in the Castro apartment for several years before deciding that they needed something bigger and quieter and that would allow them to bring their two cats. The couple assumed that they would have to find another rental apartment; it didn't occur to them that they could buy a house because they didn't have much savings and mortgage companies in the 1950s favored married heterosexual couples and men.<sup>23</sup> Fair housing laws that outlawed restrictive covenants and the refusal to rent or sell property on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, marital status or physical disability were not passed in California until 1963. The federal Fair Housing Act was not passed until 1968. Although they had not expected, for financial as well as political reasons, to be able to buy a home together, neither woman appears to have made much of the achievement of two single women, let alone a lesbian couple, buying a home together in the mid-1950s. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi noted in remarks published in Del Martin's 2008 obituary that Phyllis and Del "...fought and triumphed in many battles, beginning when they first bought a home together in San Francisco in 1955."<sup>24</sup> Many years later, Lyon, in the documentary film, *No Secret Anymore: The Life and Times of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin*, said that she and Martin would never have been able to achieve the political activism and organizing in San Francisco that they had if not for purchasing their home years earlier.<sup>25</sup>

Lyon recalls that for the new apartment "Del wanted a VIEW, she was born here [San Francisco], and she wanted a VIEW."<sup>26</sup> Finding no apartments in their price range with a view, they were stymied until

one day they were driving through the Noe Valley neighborhood, the area south of the Castro District.

They saw a modest house perched up in a hill with a "for sale" sign in front. The sign said to contact the

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<sup>18</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Quoted in Johnson, 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Graves and Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Gordon, "Lesbian rights pioneer Del Martin dies at 87," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 2008. Accessed on January 25, 2021 via <https://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Lesbian-rights-pioneer-Del-Martin-dies-at-87-3198048.php>

<sup>25</sup> Biren, Joan E. (JEB), *No Secret Anymore: The Life and Times of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin [Motion Picture]* (United States: Frameline, Inc., 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010, quoted in Johnson, 68; Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Shayne Watson, August 25, 2011, quoted in Graves and Watson, 140.



realtor and not to bother the occupants. “Well, we didn’t pay any attention to that. We wanted to see what the view was like,” Phyllis remarked. So they parked in front of the house and walked up the stairs and knocked on the door. The owners let the couple inside to take a look. “We walked over and looked out the window and there was nothing we could do. Look at this VIEW!” Phyllis exclaimed about the view through the picture window overlooking downtown San Francisco, its hills and valleys, the Twin Peaks area and Telegraph Hill. The owners wanted to sell the house for \$11,000. There was no garage or carport, so Del and Phyllis tried to negotiate a deal for \$10,000. Phyllis had some war bonds stashed away and they managed to get enough money together for a down payment. The house became theirs and Del got more than she bargained for with the view...The real estate guy was really respectful and understood Del and Phyllis’ relationship. At the tail end of the deal, he commented to the female couple, “If you have any more friends like you who want to buy a house, give them my name.”<sup>27</sup>

When they moved into their new home, they had been a lesbian couple living together in San Francisco for two years, but they didn’t have any other lesbian friends that they could refer to the realtor who had sold them their new house. Lyon and her lover Del Martin had spent two years “desperately seeking” other lesbians, looking for friends.<sup>28</sup> They

...missed not having any gay friends. Our only tie with the gay world was our sense of “belonging” to each other. We needed to relate to gay people who would understand the subtle differences between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. We needed to know more about the gay life and how to manage in a straight society. Above all, we needed a sense of community with others like ourselves—the feeling of security and respect that a homogenous group affords its members.<sup>29</sup>

Through all her years of activism and organizing, Lyon always maintained that the impetus for getting involved in what became the Daughters of Bilitis was simply that she and Martin wanted to meet some lesbians and make friends. When asked in a 2010 interview about the beginnings of Daughters of Bilitis, Lyon excitedly explained

September of 1955, I was vacuuming *this* [house at 651 Duncan Street] living room and the phone rang. It was that woman that we had met at the party and she said would we be interested in joining her and her partner and three or four other couples in starting an organization for lesbians. I said, “OF COURSE.” “We just wanted to meet some lesbians.”<sup>30</sup>

As a secret social group and organization, initial meetings of DOB were generally held at the homes of the core group of co-founders. Like the others in this core group, Lyon and Martin opened their home at 651 Duncan Street for DOB meetings and for DOB and private parties. “Oh, gosh, we used to have dance parties here all the time,” Lyon recalled, smiling, in a 2011 interview with the Bay Area Reporter.<sup>31</sup> According to the SF LGBTQ citywide context statement,

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<sup>27</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 68-69.

<sup>28</sup> Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Alex Madison, “Lyon, Martin paved the way for lesbians.”

perhaps one of the most important social activities hosted by DOB, and in line with the organization's original mission, was the private parties held at the home of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon on Duncan Street, including many holiday parties. Lyon said the Daughters socialized in her home's living room and on the grass in the backyard, and women danced together in the dining room. The main façade of the Lyon/Martin house was punctuated by an enormous picture window overlooking the city, which prompted some women to fear that neighbors would see them dancing together in the house.<sup>32</sup>

Activists and mentors long before there was an LGBTQ movement or community, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon made their home a welcoming and safe-haven for lesbians from around the world.

Kendra Mon, Martin's only child from her first marriage, remembers spending summers at the couple's home when she was a student at UC Berkeley... "Lesbians would call the house from all over the world," said Mon... "A lot of their friends were scared at that time. Mom gave them a place where they could feel safe."<sup>33</sup>

Kate Kendell, a friend of the couple and former executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, recalled that

Before cellphones, they always had their phone number listed in the phone book in case any young or terrified LGBTQ person needed help or support. And they fielded dozens of calls over the years.<sup>34</sup>

Whether the site of DOB editorial meetings for *The Ladder* or "gab 'n' java" discussion groups or casual gatherings, friends of the couple remember visiting the house and the "many hours that they sat and spoke about current events."<sup>35</sup> The couple also opened their home to other lesbians who needed a cheap and safe place to stay when visiting from out of town or attending homophile events. The house at 651 Duncan Street was also the site of celebrations, including parties for Lyon and Martin's 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>36</sup> and for Lyon's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. During the open house portion of the surprise 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Phyllis, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with several staffers joined the party where Pelosi spoke in tribute to Lyon.<sup>37</sup>

The house also served as workspace. Although they both maintained day jobs – Martin as a bookkeeper for a moving company and Lyon as administrative assistant at Glide Urban Center – the couple found time for their organizing, activism, and commission appointments, in addition to co-authoring and publishing several books. Their first book was *Lesbian/Woman*, published in 1972, about what it means to be a lesbian. In her review of the *Lesbian/Woman*, reviewer Julie Smith said that the book is "crammed with" a "...rich depth of human experience..." that drives home the "...simple point...that lesbians are really not much different from anyone else."<sup>38</sup> In the book, which was ground-breaking and is still a foundational text on lesbian feminism, Martin and Lyon wrote that they wanted to provide lesbians and the general public with more information and to encourage a greater understanding of what it means to be a lesbian in order to encourage self-acceptance and liberation.

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<sup>32</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Shayne Watson, August 25, 2011. Quoted in Graves and Watson, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Alex Madison.

<sup>34</sup> "Gay Rights Pioneer Phyllis Lyon Dies at 95; Fought for Same-Sex Marriage," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2020. Access on January 25, 2021 via <https://www.latimes.com/obituaries/story/2020-04-10/gay-rights-pioneer-phyllis-lyon-same-sex-marriages-dies>.

<sup>35</sup> Kate Ullman, personal email communication with Pilar LaValley, January 12, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kendra Mon, personal email communication with Pilar LaValley, January 25, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Julie Smith, "Book Review: *Lesbian/Woman* by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1972.



One of Lyon and Martin's landmark accomplishments, the volume was originally produced by the publications arm of Glide Memorial Church.

*Lesbian/Woman* was unique and influential for describing lesbian lives in a confident, comprehensive, and knowledgeable way. It was quickly picked up by a national publisher, Bantam Books, and went through two more editions before the end of the year.<sup>39</sup>

Martin and Lyon also co-authored, *Lesbian Love and Liberation*, a pamphlet intended to provide realistic and accurate sex information for the general public as well as for professional counselors, published in 1973.

Their home represents the place most closely associated with Del Martin's and Phyllis Lyon's productive lives as lesbian-rights activists, advocates, educators, and authors. The couple's "...accomplishments as activists and the love they shared have become a symbol of perseverance, strength and hope for the LGBTQ community."<sup>40</sup>

### Del Martin (1921-2008)

In every social movement, political movement, there's someone who transcends their time. For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, Del Martin was one of those people.<sup>41</sup>

Kate Kendell, a friend of Martin and Lyon and former executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, on Del Martin, in *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2008.

Del Martin was born in San Francisco on May 5, 1921 as Dorothy Louise Taliaferro.<sup>42</sup> She was raised by her mother, Mary, and stepfather, Jones Taliaferro, and had one younger sister, Gertrude. According to City Directories and US Census Records, Jones Taliaferro worked as a clerk, bookkeeper, or auditor at St. Francis Hotel and Mary worked as saleswoman or at home as a homemaker.<sup>43</sup> City Directories suggest that the Taliaferro family, who were renters, lived in various neighborhoods of San Francisco during Martin's childhood. She attended Presidio Junior High School and was salutatorian of the first graduating class of George Washington High School in 1937. According to Dianna Johnson in her 2010 Master's Thesis,

Martin took her first class in journalism in high school and wrote for the student page in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She edited the yearbook and the school newspaper. After high school graduation, like Phyllis, she attended the University of California, Berkeley, studied journalism and wrote for the *Daily Californian*.<sup>44</sup>

Following graduation, Martin studied journalism at the University of California, Berkeley for one year before transferring to San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) where she was managing editor

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<sup>39</sup> Graves and Watson, 198-199.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Madison, "LGBT History Month: Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin Paved way for lesbians," *Windy City Times*, October, 11, 2017. accessed January 23, 2021 via <https://www.windycitytimes.com/lgbt/LGBT-HISTORY-MONTH-Phyllis-Lyon-Del-Martin-paved-way-for-lesbians/60664.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Rachel Gordon, "Lesbian rights pioneer Del Martin dies at 87."

<sup>42</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>; Johnson, 56.

<sup>43</sup> 1940 United States Census Record for California, San Francisco County, San Francisco, Blocks 19-20, recorded April 25, 1940, records: Jones Taliaferro (50), renter, auditor, hotel; Mary A. Taliaferro (44), saleswoman, retail food; Dorothy L. Taliaferro (19), at school; Gertrude Taliaferro (12), at school.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, 56.

of the student newspaper the *Golden Gator*.<sup>45</sup> While working on the *Golden Gator*, she met and married James Martin, who was the newspaper's business manager, and during her third year in college, Del became pregnant and dropped out of school. After leaving school and having her daughter, Kendra, the Martins moved to San Mateo, California. With James Martin often away due to his civilian job with the Army at Fort Mason in San Francisco, Del found herself becoming increasingly lonely and depressed in her role as a full-time mother and suburban housewife. After a few years, she fell in love with a female neighbor and filed for divorce.<sup>46</sup> Though she won custody of her daughter in the divorce, Del later agreed to relinquish custody to her ex-husband and his new wife "because she bought into the concept that the traditional family would be best for her child."<sup>47</sup>

Following her divorce, Martin got a job as a reporter for a construction daily in San Francisco, *The Pacific Builder*.<sup>48</sup> When a job at a similar paper in Seattle became available, she applied and was hired as an editor at *Daily Construction Reports*. In 1950, Martin moved to Seattle for this new job and soon after met Phyllis Lyon when they were working in the same building and for the same publishing company. After several years of platonic friendship, Martin and Lyon became lovers shortly before Lyon left Seattle to return to San Francisco. Martin followed Lyon back to San Francisco and the two women became a couple when Martin moved into the apartment that Lyon had recently rented in the Castro in 1953. Upon returning to San Francisco, Martin got a job as a bookkeeper that she retained through the 1980s.<sup>49</sup>

Del Martin's lesbian-rights activism was deeply rooted in feminism as evidenced in her very first piece – her letter from the President; she was the Daughter of Bilitis' first president – in the first issue of *The Ladder*, the publication that the DOB began issuing in 1956. Martin encouraged

...women to join DOB not just as homosexuals, but primarily "on the basis of gender identification," writing "Women have taken a beating through the centuries. While women may not have as much difficulty [as gay men] with law enforcement, their problems are none the less real—family, sometimes children, employment and social acceptance. It took women with foresight and determination to attain this heritage which is now ours... Nothing has ever been accomplished by hiding in a dark corner."<sup>50</sup>

Although there were attempts at unity and shared activism amongst the three early homophile organizations – Mattachine Society, ONE, Inc., and Daughters of Bilitis – many lesbians felt like they were an afterthought to the focus on gay male issues. Like many other lesbians who began to see the gay liberation movement as reproducing oppressive patterns that privileged men's voices and issues, Martin chafed at the lack of respect and influence in the homophile movement then afforded to lesbians due to their sex. Del Martin voiced the objections of lesbians who had felt sidelined or condescended to by gay activists in an influential manifesto titled "If That's All There Is" that appeared in the October 1970 issue of *Vector*.<sup>51</sup> As discussed in the SF LGBTQ citywide context statement, Martin expressed the long-time activist's new perspective bluntly: "I've been forced

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<sup>45</sup> Johnson, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, 57; Graves and Watson, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, 58.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, 60.

<sup>49</sup> City Directory entries for Dorothy L. Martin from 1958 through 1982 note her occupation as "bookkeeper" for Merrill's Transfer & Storage.

<sup>50</sup> Gallo, 27. Quoted in Johnson, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, "Chapter 25: Placing LGBTQ Histories in the City by the Bay," in Megan E. Springate, ed. *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, 2016, 25-32.

to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement ... Fifteen years of masochism is enough.”<sup>52</sup>

After breaking with the homophile movement in 1967, Martin sought fellowship with the newly organized National Organization for Women (NOW). She and Lyon joined the Northern California chapter of NOW, utilizing a short-lived reduced membership fee for couples, hoping to find a safe place to confront sexual discrimination. They quickly learned that NOW was rife with discriminatory beliefs and practices, writing later that in the National Organization for Women, they realized that discrimination is “doubly so: first, because she is a woman, and second, because she is a Lesbian.”<sup>53</sup> In the face of the discrimination evidenced by NOW leadership that sought to purge lesbians and lesbian issues from the organization to avoid what NOW President, Betty Friedan, called “The Lavender Menace,” Martin, along with Lyon, “continued their lesbian activism and challenged the organization about its perceived homophobia...they educated the feminists about the connection of sexism, homophobia and heterosexism and lobbied the organization to believe that lesbian issues were feminist issues.”<sup>54</sup> In 1971, NOW expanded its policies to include lesbian rights and in 1973, lesbian activists formed a caucus at the national convention. At this national convention, Martin ran for and was elected as the first “out of the closet” lesbian member of the NOW national board of directors.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the many organizations and commissions that Martin was involved with alongside Phyllis Lyon, Martin also lectured and taught at universities around the country as a nationally known advocate for battered women.

She was a co-founder of the Coalition for Justice for Battered Women (1975), La Casa de las Madres (a shelter for battered women) founded in 1976, and the California Coalition against Domestic Violence (1977). She is the author of *Battered Wives* (1976, updated 1981) and numerous other articles and book chapters on the subject. ... Martin was also a founding member of the Lesbian Mother's Union [1977], the San Francisco Women's Centers, and the Bay Area Women's Coalition, and has served on many boards. She was appointed Chair of the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women in 1976 and served on the committee until 1979. She also served on the Women's Advisory Council to the San Francisco Police Department, the California Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention, and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.<sup>56</sup>

Del Martin married Phyllis Lyon, her partner of over 50 years, in 2004 at San Francisco City Hall. The couple repeated the wedding, even wearing the same outfits from their previous ceremony, in 2008. Del Martin died several months later in 2008 from complications from a broken arm. Prior to her injury, Martin lived and worked in the same small house on a hill in Noe Valley that she and Phyllis had purchased together in 1955.

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<sup>52</sup> Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco*, 114. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 199.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, 91-92.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, 92. Martin and Lyon both ended their memberships in NOW in 1979 due to continued examples of homophobia but rejoined in 1988 and participated in that year's NOW Lesbian Rights Conference.

<sup>56</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>.

## Phyllis A. Lyon (1924-2020)

Phyllis Lyon is not afraid of the L-word, whether it be lesbian or liberal – or even lipstick. In fact, L-words best describe her life. She has the largess, pride, and roar of a lion. She is distinguished by her laughter. She loves light and bare windows. She is loquacious, but she also listens. She is loving, loyal, learned, logical. She loves literature and she is an avid reader. She is a lover, a leader, a liaison. She lives up to her ideals. She also likes to live it up. Her concerns are limitless, as are her talents. She hopes to win the lottery so she can support all her causes more lavishly.

Del Martin, on Phyllis Lyon, her partner of 58 years, for their friend Vern L. Bullough's 2002 book, *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*.<sup>57</sup>

Phyllis Ann Lyon was born November 10, 1924, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the first child of William and Lorena Lyon. Though she was born in the southeast US, Phyllis Lyon was raised primarily in Northern California. Due in part to the Depression and in part to her father's job as a travelling salesman, who "worked for the United States Gypsum Company it seems like all his life,"<sup>58</sup> the family left Oklahoma and moved around the West Coast – living in Seattle,<sup>59</sup> Los Angeles,<sup>60</sup> Oakland,<sup>61</sup> Berkeley, and the Sacramento area – during Phyllis' childhood. A second child, Patricia "Tricia" or "Trisha," joined the family in 1931 while they were living in Seattle, Washington.

Phyllis Lyon described her parents as an unusual pairing, saying "it was an odd couple."<sup>62</sup> Her father, William, who was born and grew up in Brooklyn, New York, was a college educated Republican that was raised as a strict Presbyterian. Her mother, Lorena, was born in Kentucky, the daughter of a Southern Methodist minister, and grew up in the South where she went to finishing school and was a Democrat.<sup>63</sup>

Phyllis displayed an adventurous and independent spirit from childhood, such as when she and her sister, Tricia/Trisha, rode their bikes to the stables near their home and learned to ride horses. Phyllis, who became a "...proficient equestrian and collected many ribbons for horsemanship and jumping,"<sup>64</sup> later noted "it's a wonder they [her parents] let me learn how to ride horses. Girls were precious, they couldn't do things and they had to be protected."<sup>65</sup>

Phyllis Lyon graduated from Sacramento Senior High School in 1943 and went on to the University of California, Berkeley, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism in 1946.<sup>66</sup> While in school, she was a reporter and

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<sup>57</sup> O'camp, "Phyllis Lyon gives a happy middle finger to the Lavender Scare"; "Pioneering Lesbian and Civil Rights Activist Phyllis Lyon Celebrates 95<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *San Francisco Bay Times*, November 14, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 53.

<sup>59</sup> 1930 United States Census Record for Washington, King County, Seattle, Block 3061, recorded April 21, 1930: William R. Lyon (33), renter, salesman in building materials; Lorena Lyon (29), stay-at-home mother; and, Phyllis A. Lyon (5). Accessed via Ancestry.com.

<sup>60</sup> Phyllis notes that she and her mother (and maybe sister) lived in LA briefly in an interview.

<sup>61</sup> 1940 United States Census Record for California, Alameda County, Oakland, Ward 2, recorded April 4, 1940: William R. Lyon (43), renter, salesman in building materials; Lorena Lyon (42); Phyllis Lyon (15); and, Patricia Lyon (9). This Census also asked respondents where they lived on April 1, 1935 and the Lyon's response is recorded as Berkeley, California. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

<sup>62</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Del Martin, "Phyllis Lyon (1924-)", in Vern L. Bullough, ed., *Before Stonewall* (Binghamton, New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002). Quoted in Johnson, 53.

<sup>65</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 53.

<sup>66</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>.

editor for the student newspaper, the *Daily Californian*.<sup>67</sup> The young journalist graduated into a US job market focused on returning workplaces to their male-dominated and male-focused pre-war composition by either ousting woman from wartime jobs or returning women – the former Rosie the Riveter’s – to the ranks of what were considered appropriate jobs - secretaries, teachers, nurses, and reporters for society pages. Lyon had no interest in being that type of reporter, saying,

I was determined I was not going to be a society writer,” Lyon told David Mixner and Dennis Bailey for *Brave Journeys: Profile in Gay and Lesbian Courage*. She relented after a corporate job led to abject boredom. Fortuitously, that position was taken at *The Chico Enterprise* and she gladly accepted the position of general reporter [Lyon also served as police-beat reporter in Fresno]. She covered the police beat and city hall, competitively trying to out-scoop her rivals at *The Chico-Record*. She also covered stories “on rural Chico’s underbelly” – bar brawls and domestic quarrels.<sup>68</sup>

One of Lyon’s most memorable reporting assignments – and one that served as an oft-shared anecdote – was covering a visit by former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at a train “whistle stop” in the nearby town of Durham, California. Eleanor Roosevelt was “the most wonderful woman I had ever heard of,” Lyon said, in part because “women didn’t do a lot of things like she did in those days.”<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, as Lyon laughingly remembered years after the encounter, she froze when faced with her heroine, leaving her with remarks from a one-sided interview conducted by Roosevelt herself and a photo of the back of Lyon’s head from the staff photographer that had accompanied her on the assignment.

In 1949, Lyon left newspaper reporting and moved to Seattle, Washington where she served on the editorial staff at two building trades magazines, *Construction News Bulletin* and *Pacific Builder and Engineer*.<sup>70</sup> Lyon met Del Martin when they were working for the same publishing company in the same building in Seattle where Martin served as editor of *Daily Construction Reports*.<sup>71</sup> Lyon and Martin quickly became friends and then, later, they became lovers just before Lyon left Seattle to embark with her sister, Tricia/Trisha, on a long-planned, cross-country road trip. Wishing to spend more time together after Lyon quit her job in Seattle, Martin joined her for the drive to San Francisco where Lyon planned to pick up her sister.<sup>72</sup> During the Lyon sister’s trip, which ended with a month-long layover in New Orleans where Lyon’s sister, Tricia, was hospitalized with polio, Lyon realized that she missed Martin, so, as Lyon reminisced in a 2010 interview, “every now and then I would find a phone and give her a call. Of course, I called collect because there was no other way.”<sup>73</sup>

Upon returning to San Francisco, Lyon moved into a small bedroom/sewing room of her parent’s apartment and sought employment, noting that “in those days it was pretty easy to get a part time job as a typist or a secretary. I was an excellent typist...”<sup>74</sup> Lyon got a job at Glide Urban Center, where she worked for over 30 years. She started

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<sup>67</sup> Johnson, 53.

<sup>68</sup> Ocamb, “Phyllis Lyon gives a happy middle finger to the Lavender Scare.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>; Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Ocamb.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 63.

<sup>74</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 64.

as a switchboard operator before becoming assistant to Reverend Dr. Ted McIlvenna,<sup>75</sup> when he joined Glide in 1963 to staff the Young Adult Project where he developed programs to reach out and meet the needs of young urban adults.<sup>76</sup> Though McIlvenna was only at Glide for a brief period, he and Lyon continued to work together in other roles.

In 1968, Lyon began a career as a sex educator with the National Sex and Drug Forum (NSDF). NSDF, later the National Sex Forum (NSF) and ultimately the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality (IASHS), was founded in 1968 at the Glide Urban Center under the direction of Lewis Durham and Ted McIlvenna, with the support of Phyllis Lyon, Reverend Laird Sutton, Dr. Joel Fort, and others. The NSDF was initially developed to train clergy in understanding the drug cultures and non-heteronormative sexuality that were core issues in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood in the late 1960s. Lyon explained about NSDF that

Ted McIlvenna and I decided that people needed sex information and Ted got some porn films. Well, he was a guy, despite being a minister, and he knew how to get them.<sup>77</sup>

The NSDF later became the National Sex Forum (NSF) and Lyon served as associate director and then co-director of this organization for 19 years.<sup>78</sup>

Another offshoot from NSDF and the NSF was the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality (IASHS),<sup>79</sup> a pioneering institution in sex education and of demythologizing human sexuality. This institute opened in 1976 after being organized by McIlvenna and Lyon along with Reverend Laird Sutton, Herbert Vandervoort, Marguerite Rubenstein, and Loretta Haroian. McIlvenna served as the institute's first president and taught classes in forensic sexology at the institute for many years. In the Institute's first matriculating class, Lyon earned a Doctor of Education in Human Sexuality and then became a founding faculty member. Lyon noted that she and McIlvenna "started a class on Human Sexuality...[she] taught lesbian and gay sexuality and Ted taught heterosexual sexuality. They held lectures, mediated discussion and answered questions that people had about sexuality."<sup>80</sup> Lyon served as a professor at IASHS from 1976-1987.<sup>81</sup> Lyon also lectured and wrote about sex education, lesbian-rights, and feminism.

Lyon was appointed in 1976 to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC) by San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, and she served as Chair in 1982-1983. She also was chair of the HRC's Lesbian/Gay Advisory Committee. Other appointments included the California State Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention from 1980-1983, where she chaired the Commission's Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee from 1982-1983 and serving on board of advisors for Senior Action in a Gay Environment in 1983. She was also part of the National Lesbian Feminist Organization (1978), a grassroots organization founded to "act on a feminist

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<sup>75</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. Quoted in Johnson, 97.

<sup>76</sup> Dr. Ted McIlvenna, Profile at <https://lgbtreligiousarchives.org/profiles/ted-mcilvenna> accessed on January 23, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Phyllis Lyon, personal communication with Dianna Johnson, November 5, 2010. page 97.

<sup>78</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>.

<sup>79</sup> The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality was an unaccredited, degree-granting institution that operated from 1976 through 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, 97.

<sup>81</sup> Online Archives of California, background summary on Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000, 1993-13, collection held by GLBT Historical Society. Accessed January 14, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9w100781/>.



platform which deals with the oppression of lesbians in all its manifestations...to achieve equal rights and legal protections for all lesbians...”<sup>82</sup>

Phyllis Lyon married Del Martin, her partner of over 50 years, in 2004 at San Francisco City Hall. The couple repeated the wedding, even wearing the same outfits from their previous ceremony, in 2008. Del Martin died several months later in 2008. Following the death of Del Martin in 2008, Lyon continued her life and work at the small home she had shared with Martin on a hill in Noe Valley since 1955. Lyon remained active in a variety of organizations and welcomed a stream of reporters, politicians, activists, friends, and family into her home for interviews, strategy sessions, electioneering, and casual gatherings where she shared stories and experiences from her years as a lesbian-rights, homophile organizer, and feminist pioneer. In her last years, Lyon suffered from dementia and was cared for in her home by a dedicated group of caregivers until her death on April 9, 2020.<sup>83</sup>

**Events: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.**

The first national lesbian-rights organization in the United States, Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was initially organized as a social group where lesbians could meet and socialize. The organization soon added a newsletter, *The Ladder*, which became an internationally known magazine, and then to develop a network of local chapters and public biennial conventions on issues of importance to lesbians and gay men. DOB “...slowly lifted the veil of secrecy that surrounded lesbians’ daily lives in mid-twentieth-century America.”<sup>84</sup>

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were one of the four couples that founded the Daughters of Bilitis in San Francisco in 1955. Martin was elected DOB’s first president in 1955, served as national president from 1957-1960, and editor of *The Ladder* from 1960-1962. Lyon was first secretary of DOB in 1955 and editor of *The Ladder* from 1956-1960. During the early years of the organization, member’s homes were used for meetings and social gatherings for what was initially a secret group. Martin and Lyon often hosted DOB parties and fundraising events in their home. Although Lyon and Martin became inactive members in DOB in the mid-1960s, they never severed ties or disavowed the organization. Instead, they expanded their web of social and political activism from the foundational underpinnings that they had formed at DOB.

Even as their pioneering and long-standing activism in lesbian-rights was receiving accolades, Lyon and Martin always maintained that their initial interest in being part of what became the Daughters of Bilitis was the desire to connect with other lesbians, to develop a community with other lesbians. They also appreciated the safety such a group afforded when faced with police raids and harassment in bars and potential reprisals from employers, landlords, and friends and family in one was “outed.”

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<sup>82</sup> Online Archive of California, Finding Aid for the National Lesbian Feminist Organization Records 1978-1979 LSC. 1944. Accessed on February 8, 2021 via <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8g44r19/>.

<sup>83</sup> An article and podcast about the caregivers and their methods includes reference to Phyllis Lyon’s and Del Martin’s cremated remains having been scattered on the property (location(s) unknown). Evan Roberts, “Caring for Lesbian Icon Phyllis Lyon, With Love and Deceit,” *CrossCurrents* (KALW Public Radio), June 24, 2020. Accessed February 1, 2021 via <https://www.kalw.org/post/caring-lesbian-icon-phyllis-lyon-love-and-deceit#stream/0>.

<sup>84</sup> Gallo, xxi.

As Graves and Watson document in the San Francisco LGBTQ citywide context statement, Lyon and Martin tried meeting other lesbians at bars, including Mona's Candle Light, the Black Cat, and Tommy's Place, but they were both shy when out at the bars and felt uncomfortable going to the gay bars and "...looking at them [gays and lesbians], just like all the other tourists on the Broadway bar circuit."<sup>85</sup> During this period, LGBTQ bars were proliferating on Broadway in San Francisco, where the Beat culture and the developing queer subculture were separate, but intertwined. Bars were increasingly important spaces where lesbians could find and interact with each other in ways that were impossible in the deeply conservative 'straight' world of the 1950s. However, these bars were also dangerous places if one got caught up in a police raid. While it was not illegal to own or patronize a gay bar or to be homosexual, it was illegal to have physical or sexual contact between same sex couples and to be dressed in the clothing of the opposite sex. During police raids, customers were often arrested for sexual impropriety, disorderly conduct, or vagrancy. Even when charges were dropped, police would release names to the press or notify employers, family members, and landlords and gays and lesbians would lose jobs and homes. "We were lucky we never got arrested. We escaped that experience—once by a night and another time by a week,"<sup>86</sup> noted Martin.

Eventually, Lyon and Martin became friendly with a gay male bartender at Tommy's Place and his partner.<sup>87</sup> It was through these gay male friends that Lyon and Martin were introduced to Rose Bamberger, a young Filipina, who had the idea for starting a lesbian social group. As detailed in *Different Daughters* by Marcia Gallo,

Phyllis Lyon vividly remembers the phone call from Rose in September 1955, "when she said, 'Would you like to be a part of the group of six of us that are putting together a secret society for lesbians?'" Lyon raises her voice as she tells the story. We said, 'YES!!' Because we would immediately know five more lesbians...AMAZING."<sup>88</sup>

Regarding the impetus behind creating the group, Lyon also recalls that

... Rose wanted the group to meet in people's homes and she wanted it to be so we'd be able to dance...so that we wouldn't get caught up in police raids and we wouldn't be stared at by tourists and so on. You couldn't dance in bars in those days. And she loved to dance. That was the whole idea behind it.<sup>89</sup>

The following excerpt regarding the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis is taken from the San Francisco LGBTQ Citywide context statement:

On September 21, 1955, four female couples gathered in San Francisco to lay the framework for founding the nation's first lesbian-rights organization. The women were Rose Bamberger and her partner, Rosemary Sliepan; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon; Noni Frey and her Latina partner, Mary (last name unknown); and Marcia Foster and her partner, June (last name unknown). The founders decided to call the organization the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a coded reference to lesbianism from a poem by Pierre Louÿs. At a follow-up meeting on October 5, Bamberger and Sliepan hosted the Daughters at their

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<sup>85</sup> Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 219. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142.

<sup>86</sup> Johnson, 72.

<sup>87</sup> Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 140.

<sup>88</sup> Gallo, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Gallo, 1-2.



home in the Bayview.<sup>90</sup> At that gathering, the group elected the organization's first leaders: Del Martin as president, Noni Frey as vice president, Phyllis Lyon as secretary, Rosemary Sliepen as treasurer, and Marcia Foster as trustee.<sup>91</sup>

DOB was initially conceived as a social group for lesbians. . . . The founders also wanted to use the organization as a forum for educating lesbians about homosexuality and promoting social acceptance. The eight women met at Marcia Foster and June's home on October 19, 1955, and discussed goals for the organization, establishing four primary objectives:

- 1.) Education of the variant [DOB's preferred term for homosexual];
- 2.) Education of the public;
- 3.) Participation in research projects; and
- 4.) Investigation of the California Penal Code.<sup>92</sup>

Historian Marcia Gallo credits Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon for shaping the DOB's objectives from the outset, especially the group's focus on reaching and educating the individual lesbian. The founders "knew instinctively that, without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one's rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians," writes Gallo.<sup>93</sup> The DOB was equally emphatic about educating the public about homosexuality, and felt that contributing to medical and sociological research projects would produce data that could change public perceptions about lesbians and gay men. This approach "reflected the members' beliefs that a conscious, carefully constructed program of discussion, information, and outreach to sympathetic professionals would best advance the nascent movement for gay and lesbian rights."<sup>94</sup>

Similar to the Mattachine Society, the DOB thought they could change public perceptions by conforming to gender-normative self-presentation, encouraging members to adopt a "mode of dress and behavior acceptable to society"—a position that prompted heated debates about crossdressing and butch styles.<sup>95</sup> As for the DOB's fourth objective to investigate the California Penal Code, Phyllis Lyon said, "We wanted to change the sex laws that made people felons. We thought that there would come a time, hopefully, when there wouldn't be any laws against our sexuality and we'd be accepted as people by the outside community."<sup>96</sup>

While the original eight women were united in their business-like approach to the new club, there were already conflicts over the group's purpose and structure in these early meetings.

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<sup>90</sup> Personal communication between Marcia Gallo and Shayne Watson, September-October 2014. Dr. Gallo said, "[I]t is not clear exactly where the very first gathering of the founders of DOB took place on September 21, 1955," but the follow-up meeting occurred at 53 Venus Street. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 144.

<sup>91</sup> Gallo, 5. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Gallo, 11. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 17. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 13. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 24. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 16. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 142-143.

When the DOB's mission changed from a purely social group to an organization more focused on advocacy, it created a rift among the founding members. Rose Bamberger and Rosemary Sliepan left the DOB in January 1956 to form a lesbian social sorority. Marcia Foster, Noni Frey, and June left a while later. Two other women joined the DOB early on, including Barbara Deming, one of the five cosigners of the Articles of Incorporation, and Helen "Sandy" Sandoz, who became a longtime and very active DOB member. The remaining members of DOB, especially Lyon and Martin, began collaborating with the Mattachine Society and the Los Angeles homophile group ONE Inc. In January 1956, Lyon, Martin, and a few other DOB women attended ONE's Midwinter Institute in Los Angeles, one of the largest homophile conferences held to that time. In April 1956, DOB held its first public event, a forum at the California Hall at 625 Polk Street (extant, S.F. Landmark No. 174) on problems faced by gay men and lesbians, co-sponsored by the Mattachine Society.<sup>97</sup>

Although many original members slipped away from the fledgling organization during the first year, in July 1956, DOB held its first independent public event. The speaker, invited by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, was "...Ernest Besig...the executive director of the SF branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)..."<sup>98</sup> and by inviting him to speak to their group, DOB established a connection with the leading civil liberties group in the City and helped start a dialogue with those who could advocate on their behalf.<sup>99</sup> It was an early example of what would become Martin and Lyon's organizing role. By the end of the summer, the re-organized Daughters were

focused on creating something that would appeal to lesbians who wanted more than a nice place to go on Saturday nights. DOB had lost most of its original members, regrouped, and recruited new women, and, perhaps most important, come to a consensus on a mission for the group. They would provide both social and political opportunities to their members, and sponsor parties and discussions, picnics and business meetings. The secret lesbian social club was now an organization that prioritized integration into society.<sup>100</sup>

As part of their regrouping, DOB decided to "embark on an 'all-out publicity campaign' as well as to publish a newsletter."<sup>101</sup> When publication of *The Ladder* began in June 1956, Phyllis Lyon, under the pseudonym Ann Ferguson, was its first editor. Lyon remained as editor until 1960 when she passed the responsibility to Martin, who served as editor from 1960 to 1962. In her good-bye letter published in the June 1960 issue of *The Ladder*, Lyon described the new editor – Del Martin – as "...a woman with the combined attributes of creativeness, business sense, warmth of feeling toward human problems and frailties, humor and just all-round competence."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 143.

<sup>98</sup> Gallo, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Gallo, 15.

<sup>100</sup> Gallo, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Gallo, 10. The Ladder was not the first lesbian publication in US. *Vice Versa*, "America's Gayest Magazine," which was "dedicated in all seriousness to those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of convention," was published and distributed privately in Los Angeles from June, 1947, through February, 1948...by one woman, Lisa Ben. ... Further, *ONE* had put out a special "Feminine Viewpoint" issue (February, 1954) which was written, compiled and edited entirely by women, from Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 225.

<sup>102</sup> Gallo, 66.

Although the newsletter was initially mimeographed at the Mattachine Society office<sup>103</sup> where DOB had also established its national headquarters, Lyon and Martin probably produced much of the typed newsletter that was produced monthly at their kitchen table or similar.<sup>104</sup>

The following summary about publishing *The Ladder* is taken from the San Francisco LGBTQ Citywide context statement:

DOB leaders and members used *The Ladder* to reach and educate individual lesbians. They “consciously aimed the magazine at ‘the lonely isolated lesbians away from the big cities,’” according to John D’Emilio.<sup>105</sup> They wanted *The Ladder* to help “end the perceived isolation among lesbians like themselves,” adds historian Martin Meeker.<sup>106</sup>

Over 200 copies of the first edition of *The Ladder* were distributed. The next three issues were printed after hours by Helen Sandoz on the printing machine at Macy’s Union Square where she worked. Later, the DOB had *The Ladder* printed at other presses, including Pan-Graphic Press.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to editorials by DOB leaders and members, *The Ladder* featured organizational reports, schedules of upcoming events, fiction and poetry, nonfiction essays, and international news. Martin Meeker argues that “[e]ven without a physical space for lesbians to meet and exchange information, the DOB and *The Ladder* provided a conceptual space for lesbians” throughout the world to find information and camaraderie.<sup>108</sup> *The Ladder* also enticed lesbians living elsewhere to move to San Francisco after reading descriptions of activities in the city. Meeker cites an example of a woman from Southern California who learned about San Francisco as a lesbian mecca by reading about it in *The Ladder* and expressed a desire to move north. “Learning that something was happening in San Francisco quite apart from her own experience led this lesbian to yearn for more, for an experience she had up to that point only imagined.”<sup>109</sup>

The first issue of the *The Ladder* included ‘A Calendar of Events’ with notice of a “Halloween Party at 651 Duncan St.” on October 27 for “\$1.50 per person. Refreshments provided. Phone your reservation (Valencia 4-2790) by Friday night, Oct. 26.”<sup>110</sup> The telephone number provided for RSVP’s to the Halloween Party is Lyon and Martin’s home number at 651 Duncan Street.<sup>111</sup> Another issue from December 1956 included a Schedule of Events that included the “Daughters’ annual New Year’s Eve Party” at 651 Duncan Street.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> At the time, this small office was on third floor of the Williams Building at 693 Mission Street.

<sup>104</sup> Sam Whiting, “Phyllis Lyon, pioneering lesbian activist, dies at 95,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 10, 2020. Access on January 25, 2021 via <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Phyllis-Lyon-pioneering-lesbian-activist-dies-15191029.php>.

<sup>105</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 104. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 86. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 144.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 89. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 145.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 90. Quoted in Graves and Watson, SF LGBTQ context statement, 145.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *The Ladder*, October, 1956, quoted in Gallo, 26-27.

<sup>111</sup> The telephone number provided in the quote from *The Ladder* appears to have been Lyon and Martin’s home line. The 1957 *Polk’s Directory* listing for 651 Duncan Street records residents at property as Lyon, Phyllis A. and Martin, Dorothy L. both at VA 42790. Accessed on January 30, 2021 via <https://archive.org/details/polks-sanfranciscoc1957rlo/page/1796/mode/2up>

<sup>112</sup> *The Ladder*, October, 1956, quoted in Gallo, 31.

The Daughters of Bilitis was never a large organization particularly in comparison to other homophile groups of the period, such as Mattachine Society or Los Angeles' One, Inc. But, from the start they had a clear focus to educate other women about lesbians and to improve the self-worth of lesbians. By 1959 there were DOB chapters in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Rhode Island. In 1960, DOB held its first convention in San Francisco and over 200 women attended with a focus on the legal rights of lesbians and gay men. National conventions were held every two years until 1968. On the first night of the Daughters first national convention, attendees were invited to a cocktail party at Martin and Lyon's home. For a

...registration fee of \$12.50 included a Friday night cocktail party at Martin and Lyon's home, panels of speakers, a luncheon, and a cocktail reception and banquet on Saturday at the hotel. On Sunday there was a business meeting during the day and a Dutch-treat dinner for members and guests ("women only") a Charlotte Coleman's gay bar, The Front.<sup>113</sup>

Around 1964, Martin and Lyon began to move away from the organization, saying that they "felt that if the organization had any validity at all it couldn't be based on two people, it had to be able to stand and grown on its own. And it was never going to do that if we didn't move out."<sup>114</sup> As they moved away from DOB, Lyon and Martin became more involved in their work with the newly founded Council on Religion and the Homosexual. The national organization of the DOB ended in 1970, although some local chapters remained in operation into the 1990s.

During the early homophile movement there were efforts to bring gay males and lesbians under a single organizational umbrella. Organizations like Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc., which were both initially based in Los Angeles, accepted male and female members and several lesbians were on the Mattachine Society board in non-voting positions. Of these two, gay male focused homophile organizations, ONE, Inc. tended to have the more active lesbian membership at that time, principally due to the involvement of Stella Rush, who later became co-founder of the DOB, Los Angeles chapter. As DOB began to take shape, the group agreed to reach out to the two other homophile organizations then in existence, Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc. As part of this outreach, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon attended several national conventions held by these organizations. DOB extended similar invitations to the members of Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc. when DOB held its first national convention in San Francisco in 1960 at the Hotel Whitcomb on Market Street. While there was some cross-over and coordination of events between these organizations in the early days of DOB, the relationships between the organizations were fraught from the beginning. For a variety of reasons, including a desire to ensure focus on issues important to lesbians, DOB limited membership to lesbian women only.

The Daughters of Bilitis were different from the mostly male homophile groups of the period in their

emphasis on reaching the individual lesbian—"the variant"—first and foremost. They recognized that many women felt shame about their sexual desires and were afraid to admit them. They knew instinctively that, without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one's rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians. It is the emphasis that distinguishes them from the other gay groups at the time and it is a difference they would continually assert. Educating women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in Cold War America was challenging enough;

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<sup>113</sup> Gallo, 62.

<sup>114</sup> Kay Tobin, *The Gay Crusaders* (Arno Press, 1975), 53.

to do so openly, as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the cultural climate of the 1950s, was unheard of.”<sup>115</sup>

Although the DOB was never very large and often plagued by tensions that reflected a politically challenging social climate, DOB is credited with many achievements. Socially, DOB facilitated one of the first opportunities for lesbians to meet and share their everyday struggles. Politically, DOB began the long quest to achieve visibility and acceptance for lesbians and to place lesbian rights on the civil rights agenda.<sup>116</sup>

## Property Description

651 Duncan Street is located on the south side of Duncan Street between Castro and Diamond streets in the Noe Valley neighborhood. The parcel is 25 feet by 114 feet and steeply upsloping from Duncan Street. A painted concrete retaining wall at the sidewalk extends across a portion of 651 Duncan Street frontage and across the entire frontage of 649 Duncan Street, the adjacent undeveloped parcel that was also owned by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. This retaining wall at 651 Duncan Street returns into the property where it is capped with a simple wood railing with horizontal rails and where it shares a sidewall for an inset parking pad. The rear wall of the parking pad is covered in ivy (or similar climbing vine) and there are overgrown bushes, shrubs and small trees around the house (and on the adjacent undeveloped parcel).

The paved parking pad is set into the northwest corner of the lot adjacent to the side property line of the adjacent parcel at 653 Duncan Street. Board-formed concrete retaining walls outline the parking pad on two sides. An open riser wood stair with simple square rails and handrail is affixed to the east wall of the parking area. A metal track for mechanized chair is located along one side of the stair but there is no chair attached. This stair rises from sidewalk to the rear edge of the parking pad where there is a short concrete walkway with wood handrail that runs east-west toward the adjacent undeveloped parcel at 649 Duncan Street. The concrete walkway then turns and runs north-south upslope toward the rear of the property. This section of the walkway, which is roughly aligned with the side property line 651 Duncan Street and 649 Duncan Street, has widely spaced concrete steps, is edged with bricks along one side and a wood railing with metal handrail and the metal track for a mechanized chair lift along the other side. The chair for the lift is attached to track at base of walkway.

This walkway continues as a run of concrete steps with wood handrails and metal track for the mechanized chair along the east side of the house to a concrete landing at the main entry. Beyond this landing is another short run of concrete stairs that leads to the rear yard behind the house. The rear yard slopes up from the back wall of the building and is overgrown with ivy and various shrubs.

The small house (approximately 800 square feet) is one-story with exposed basement level at front façade. It has flat and low-sloped shed roofs; at the center portion of the building, the flat roof pops up several feet. The front section of the building has an overhanging boxed eave that extends along the front (north) façade and around the side (east) elevation. Exterior cladding is weathered natural wood shingles and painted concrete smooth stucco. There are simple painted wood corner boards at corner junctions of walls clad with shingles and a stringcourse formed by a narrow, slightly projecting painted wood trim that forms a horizontal division between

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<sup>115</sup> Gallo, 16-17. Quoted in Johnson, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Rebecca Barnes 2007 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Daughters-of-Bilitis>

the stucco and shingled cladding. Similar painted wood trim that is flush with surrounding wall cladding surrounds the door and window openings on front and side elevations; most window openings have simple projecting wood sills. Corner boards and trim are painted dark blue while windows and doors are painted light blue.

The primary feature of the front (north) façade – and of the building - is a slightly off-center, large picture window that stretches nearly floor-to-ceiling. The window is single-light fixed sash flanked by single-light casement sash. Below the window, a painted plank supported by painted 2x4 brackets projects from the stringcourse line. At the stucco-clad exposed basement level there is a door and small punched aluminum-framed window that provides access to utility panel. Where the roof pops up, the front façade is clad in wood shingles matching the other elevations. Fenestration of this portion of the wall, above the roof of the lower, front section of the house, is centered in the façade and consists of an aluminum, single-light, slider-sash window, a wood, six-light, fixed sash window, and an aluminum, single-light, fixed sash horizontal window.

At side (east) elevation, the primary entry, which consists of a single panel wood door, is set within a narrow inset. The walls of entry inset are clad with same shingles as surrounding elevations. The projecting boxed eave ends at the entry. There is a wide, horizontally-oriented, single-light, fixed sash window in front section of the building and a vertically-oriented, single-light, fixed sash window above and to the left of the entry in the second/middle section of the building. There is a wood and wire-glass door at this elevation at the rear section of the building.

The rear elevation, which is clad in painted concrete stucco, features a band of windows just below the roof eave. The windows are four individual openings of different widths resting on a continuous projecting sill. All the windows are single-light, aluminum-framed, fixed sash except for one narrow slider-sash. A metal pipe extends up and around the window opening.

The side (west) elevation abuts the neighboring building and its rearyard. It is not fenestrated except for two aluminum, slider-sash windows that light the bedroom and kitchen. Finishes on this elevation are unknown.

The interior consists of five rooms – living room, study/dining room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom. The living room, which occupies the entire front section of the building, is the only room at same level as the main entry. All other rooms in the home are at a slightly higher level, accessed via a short run of carpeted stairs directly across from the main entry. All floors except the kitchen are covered with off-white carpet. Walls and ceilings are white plaster except where noted.

The main entry opens into the living room, which is a rectangular-shaped room that extends the full width of the front section of the building. The primary feature of the room is the large picture window that occupies much of the north wall. This window has stained wood window sash and trim, the other window opening in the room has no trim. The floor is covered in off-white carpeting and has simple painted baseboard at walls that are white plaster except for a section near the main entry clad with faux wood paneling. A tall wall-mounted gas or electric heater is attached to the paneled section of the wall. Adjacent to the paneling are wall-mounted shelves that extend from floor-to-ceiling across a high window opening on east wall. The south wall of the room contains a built-in bookshelf adjacent to the open stair. The curved stair risers and treads are carpeted while the side exposed to the living room is stained plywood; there is a wood handrail with square rails and handrail. On south wall adjacent to the stairs is a wood-framed opening at floor-level with the adjacent study/dining room.

The stair rises to a small landing and short hallway. A doorway at top of the stair leads to the bathroom. Adjacent to the stair landing is a built-in cabinet below the wood, six-light window on upper section of front façade. The opposite end of the short hallway has a door leading to bedroom. An opening from the hallway also leads to the study/dining room. The bedroom has a built-in closet with wood stained walls and sliding doors with an open shelf along the top of the closet.

The study/dining room is lit by a long, fixed window facing north and a smaller window with fixed lower sash and slider upper sash on the east wall. This room has small beams that extend across the ceiling on an angle with the walls. An opening in the south wall of the room leads to the kitchen.

From the opening to the study/dining room, is a small framed opening occupied by kitchen stove on one side and countertop with lower and upper cabinets opposite. The rear (south) wall of the kitchen is occupied by sink and lower cabinets with windows above. The southwest corner of the kitchen has stained knotty-pine wainscot that extends behind the cabinets opposite the stove and wraps along the walls until it reaches the sink cabinetry. A framed opening adjacent to the sink leads to a small room that contains the refrigerator and wire-glass door that leads outside to the walkway that extends north-south along east side of the house. Floors in kitchen and side room are covered in gray carpeting.

## Property History

Neither of the two parcels (649 Duncan Street and 651 Duncan Street) that comprised the property historically owned by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon had been subdivided from the larger block at the time of publication of the 1907 San Francisco Block Book. According to the 1907 Block Book, 649 and 651 Duncan Street were both part of a large irregularly shaped undivided property owned by Raymond Realty Company. However, subdivision and sale of 651 Duncan Street must have coincided with this publication as a Building Permit was issued to construct a small dwelling at 651 Duncan Street in 1907.

### 651 Duncan Street

The earliest sales records for the 651 Duncan Street parcel have not been located, although it appears it was sold by Raymond Realty Company to Charles Duning (Deming) around 1907. The first building on the 651 Duncan Street parcel was constructed in 1907-1908. The building permit was issued to owner, Charles L. Duning (or Dening or Deming), to construct a "one-story cottage" at the cost of \$300. The permit records that the small cottage measured 20 feet by 20 feet and was clad with rustic siding. Sanborn maps of the subject block published between 1899 and 1914 support this construction date. The first Sanborn map depicting the subject block, published in 1899, shows the entire block undivided and undeveloped. By publication of the 1914 Sanborn map, the subject property contains a small "dwelling" at the very rear of the parcel. This structure does not resemble the current building in either footprint or location on parcel.

The first sales record for this property is from 1918 when it was sold by [Paul] George to Bertha Dalkey. City Directory records from 1919 list a Mrs. Bertha Dalkey residing at 651 Duncan Street although this name does not appear in the directories for the years before or after 1919. In 1922, Bertha Dalkey sold the property to DK and CW Lillian. City Directories from 1928 through at least 1940 list Charles W. (painter) and Dora Kate Lillian as residents of 651 Duncan Street (the Lillian's purchased 649 Duncan Street several months after purchasing the subject property and owned both properties until selling them together in 1944).



The current building, or something similar to it, first appears in a 1938 aerial photograph of San Francisco. There are no building permits to document this change in location on the parcel or larger size in comparison to the building footprint shown in the earlier Sanborn map. The original building at the rear of the property may have been moved and incorporated into the existing structure. Given the ownership and occupancy history, it appears that Charles and Dora Lillian were likely responsible for the construction of the existing house at 651 Duncan Street.

#### 649 Duncan Street

The first sales record that has been located for 649 Duncan Street is from 1914 when it was sold to John H. Grady, a real estate investor. Although Grady owned the property for several years, he does not appear to have made any improvements during his ownership. Grady sold the undeveloped parcel to CW and DK Lillian in 1922, the same year that the Lillian's purchased the adjacent parcel at 651 Duncan Street. No permit records or historic photographs or maps have been located to indicate that the Lillian's made any improvements to 649 Duncan Street during their ownership.

#### 649 and 651 Duncan Street

In 1944, the Lillian's sold both properties to David and Lida Kuhach who then quickly sold the same to Alvine Kreckis. The subject properties were then both sold several times in 1950 and again in 1952. It is not clear whether any of the owners occupied the property from 1944 through 1955 when both parcels were sold to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. Both Phyllis Lyon and Dorothy L. Martin are listed in the properties' sale record maintained by the San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder. There are no permit or other records documenting physical changes to either parcel or the house from the 1940s to 1980s.

The 1950 and 1998 Sanborn maps depict the building at 651 Duncan Street with the current footprint and location.

There are very few historic records to document changes that have occurred at 651 Duncan Street. A Building Permit was issued to owner, D. Martin, in 1989 for "fire repair to repair fire damage to the side of the building – fire exposure from next door – replace side rustic & shingles."<sup>117</sup> Another Building Permit was issued to owner, Phyllis Lyon, to "build new concrete retaining wall at front of property to replace existing" in 1998.<sup>118</sup> And, another Building Permit was issued to a contractor to construct concrete stairs and a chair lift in 2007.

There are no building permit records associated with 649 Duncan Street. In the 1938 aerial photograph of the subject properties and surrounding block, Duncan Street remains unimproved. The retaining wall at street for 649 and 651 Duncan Street was probably constructed when the street was graded and paved circa 1940. There does not appear to have been any other development of 649 Duncan Street at any point in its history.

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<sup>117</sup> Building Permit No. 624331, \$20,000 cost

<sup>118</sup> Building Permit No. 845732, \$2,000 cost



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## Photos



649-651 Duncan Street, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, front façade, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, front façade, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, façade and picture window, view west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, entry, view west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, stairs down from entry, view  
north, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, entry and east elevation, view southwest, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, east elevation and rear door, view north, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, rear elevation and overgrown yard, view west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio

651 Duncan Street, rear elevation from rearyard, view north, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, interior stair and living room from entry, view west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, living room, view west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, living room, view east, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, living room and stair, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, living room picture window, views north and northeast, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, dining room/office, views east and north, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, dining room/office, views northeast and south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





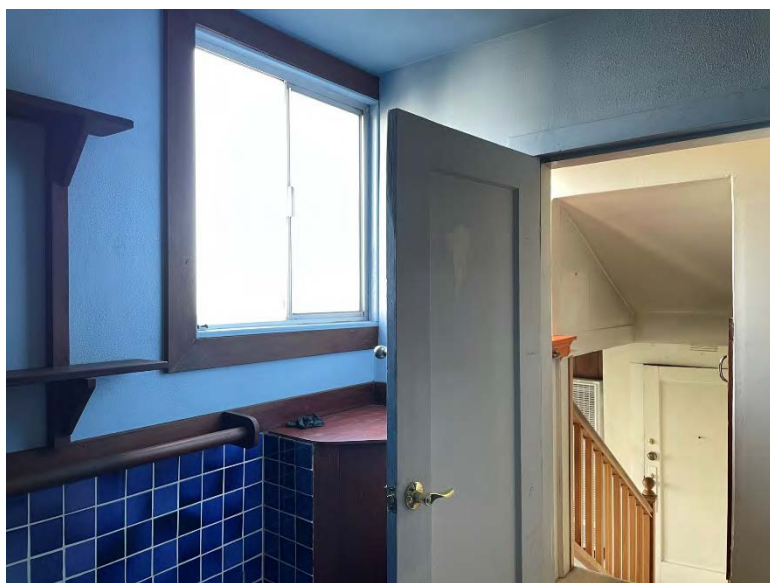


651 Duncan Street, kitchen and breakfast nook, views east and west, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





651 Duncan Street, bedroom, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



651 Duncan Street, bathroom with stairs visible through door, view northeast, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





649 Duncan Street, front section of parcel, view east, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



649 Duncan Street, middle section of parcel, view southeast, 2020  
Source: YA Studio





649 Duncan Street, middle section of parcel, view south, 2020  
Source: YA Studio



649 and 651 Duncan Street, view east with 647 Duncan  
in background, 2020  
Source: YA Studio

## Historic Photos



Phyllis Lyon, standing in living room at 651 Duncan Street, 1989.  
Photo by: Robert Giard Source: The Estate of Robert Giard, Beinecke Library



Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin at their San Francisco home in 1972. (Clem Albers/San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images)





Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, in living room at 651 Duncan Street, 1984.  
Photo by: JEB (Joan E. Biren)



Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were the first same-sex couple to wed in San Francisco. (MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ / AP)



Phyllis Lyon, in living room at 651 Duncan Street, 2010  
Photo by: Brant Ward / San Francisco Chronicle  
Published with Sam Whiting, "Phyllis Lyon, pioneering lesbian activist, dies at 95," San Francisco Chronicle, April 10, 2020.



Phyllis Lyon, in living room at 651 Duncan Street, 2019.  
Photo by: Deb Svoboda





651 Duncan Street, dining room/office, 2019  
Photo by: Deb Svoboda



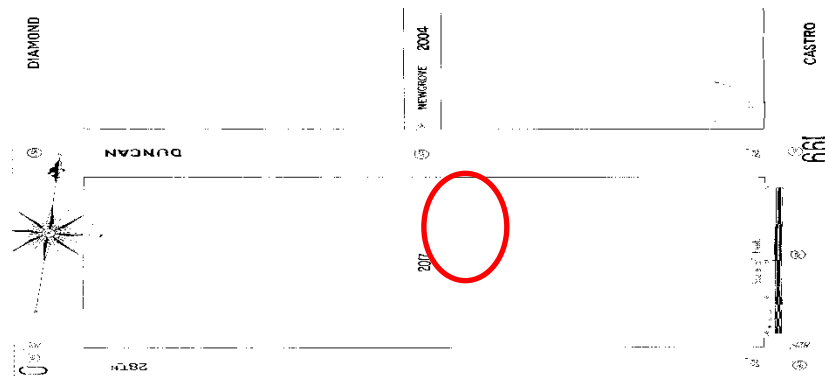
651 Duncan Street, breakfast nook, 2019  
Photo by: Deb Svoboda



**1938 Aerial Photograph – Image 67: San Francisco Aerial Views**

(Image Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection)

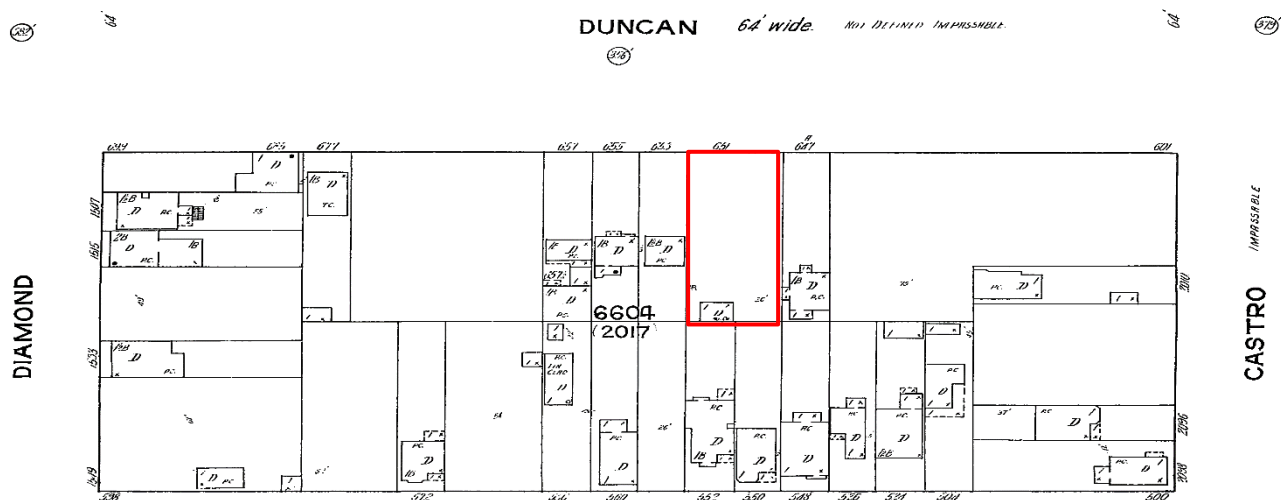
Excerpt showing 649-651 Duncan Street. Location and footprint of house similar to current configuration and fence surrounds the properties. Walkway to house in approximately same location as current walkway. There may have been a small structure in approximate location of current parking pad. Duncan Street had not yet been improved at time of photo.



**1899 Sanborn Map, Volume 8, Sheet 742**

(Image Source: Planning Department)

Excerpt from Sheet 742. Block 6604 undivided. Approximate location of 649-651 Duncan Street shown.

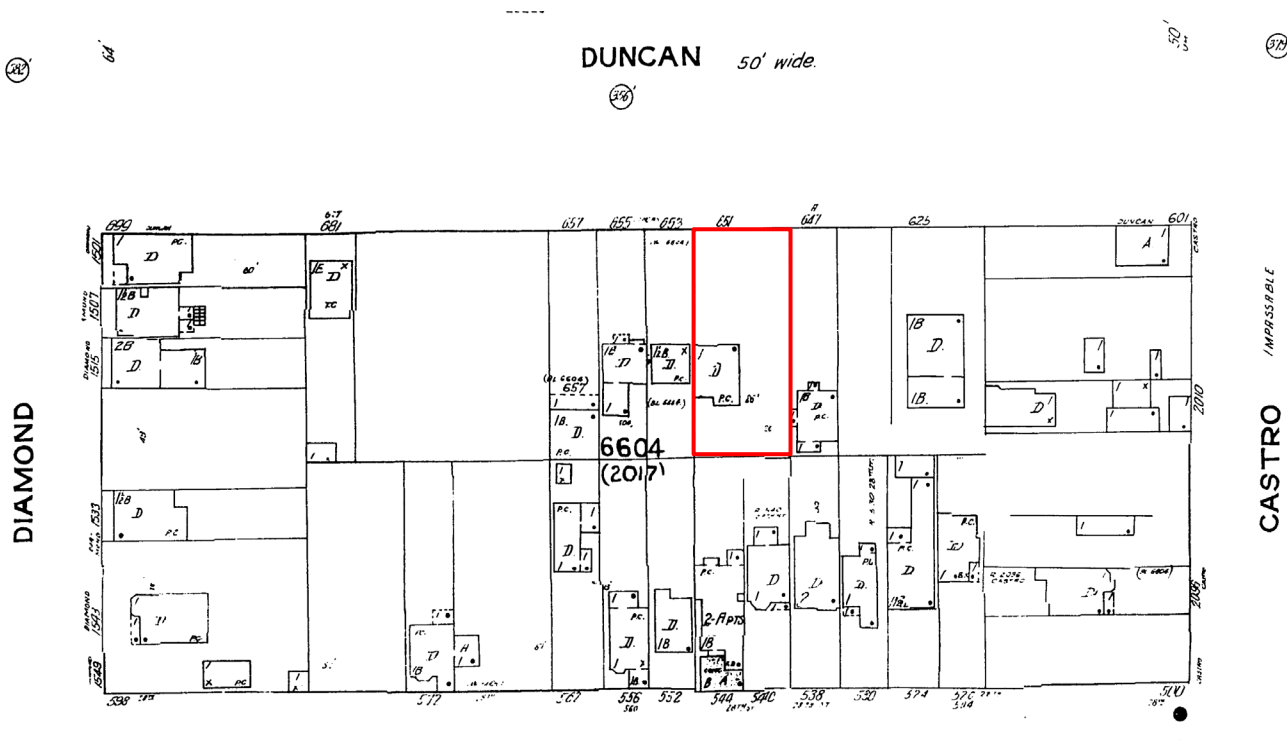


**1914 Sanborn Map, Volume 8, Sheet 742**

(Image Source: Planning Department)

Excerpt from Sheet 742. 649-651 Duncan Street shown.





**1950 Sanborn Map, Volume 8, Sheet 742**

(Image Source: Planning Department)

Excerpt from Sheet 742. 649-651 Duncan Street highlighted. Building footprint and location similar to current configuration.